

GAUDY 2010

Thank you, Chairman. I have written to Mr Stephen Jones and congratulated him. I have assured him that he will have my full support and the handover will be very smooth indeed. He and I have schools to run and we will do that without any loss of focus or commitment. Two weeks ago, I was shadowed by a sixth former from a school in Leicestershire on work experience. We encourage and help our pupils to seek placements, so why not host someone who wants to be a Headmaster? He attended all of my meetings, sat in on a Shells English class and met three prospective pupils and parents for 2012 and 2013. Now, I know our policemen are getting younger, but I was amused when one of my colleagues asked if he was one of the prospective Wardens also visiting at that time!

In September, when I spoke to this year's new Shells and their parents on their first evening in School, I told them about the

book that I had just read by William Fiennes. His novel, “The Snow Geese”, is about his trip to America and Canada to follow the northern migration of the snow goose. It is a deeply personal book which is as much about the author’s recovery from illness on as it is a celebration of the scientific mystery of migration.

William Fiennes came to St Edward’s to meet me and my colleagues in the English Department and will return soon to talk to pupils. I said that the Shells had landed in a new place that evening in September and that they would soon establish themselves and grow. They will then fly as a flock to new lands and new grounds. As the school year ends, I am conscious that today we will say goodbye to some 140 pupils and staff who embark on the next stage in their career. They will have mixed emotions, I am sure, as they remember the years that they have spent here. Of course, I cannot recall every moment for them – my stories are but a selection – but I would like to reflect for a time on the year that has passed and tell you also of some changes ahead for this dynamic and ever-improving school community.

The year began with a celebration of the School's A level results – the best on record and the highest number of A/B grades awarded. Following on from that success, eight of our current Upper Sixth, together with a few recent leavers, were awarded places at Oxford and Cambridge. Such places are incredibly hard to come by and it was good to see the number of offers up this year. Comparison with schools like ours (large boarding schools of the Rugby Group) shows this to be very positive. All university places are becoming harder to achieve. This is the inevitable consequence of the significant cuts to the Higher Education budget and there will be increasing pressure in the years to come.

Our IB results this week say something about the opportunity and excellence of IB. It keeps a positive focus and takes pupils into new ways of thinking in a broad range of subjects. Our first set of results issued on Tuesday were very good indeed with over a quarter of the pupils achieving 38 points (equivalent to 4 A

grades at A level). Head girl, Lily French and Edward Coats were placed in the top 1% worldwide, scoring 43 and 44 points out of a possible 45. Congratulations also to Andrew Davis and Garrett Nagle from the Biology and Geography Departments who have written a textbook for the IB course, Environmental Systems and Societies.

One former parent made a most generous offer this year having heard me stress the need to improve academic performance. He has put up a significant sum of money to pay the tuition fees for two years at university for the hardest working pupil in the Upper Sixth who achieves a place at a top university. The award will be made after A level and IB results next summer so that the incentive will be there to motivate pupils. This will be called the “Port Meadow Prize”. The Lower Sixth have had the prize explained to them and they also understand how important it is to keep their studies going during the long summer holiday.

In September, I said that I wanted to investigate ways to improve performance at GCSE. My colleagues studied the exam results of other schools with the same A level profile as ours. There is no quick fix, but in addition to trying to raise everyone's awareness of the need to work harder and to praise achievement, some of my colleagues went to visit those other schools. Was it their timetable? Was it the time spent in prep? Was it the possible advantage of having their own junior school with a truly integrated curriculum from 8-16 when we recruit from some 70 different schools?

It has been a most stimulating and challenging exercise and I am grateful to my colleagues and Governors who have been involved. I am particularly indebted to the Director of Studies who was keen to reflect carefully before initiating change:

“Time spent in reconnaissance is never wasted” friends of mine in the Army say. The new programme will be sent to all parents for implementation in September

Key to the success of the School is our teachers. I would like to thank them for their effort and commitment over this year. I also urge all of them to rise to the challenge ahead and continue to be the very best in their profession. St Edward's has been gaining a strong reputation for training and developing teachers over recent years. This year, five teachers have been involved in an initial training programme, and tutors from the university body monitoring them visited St Edward's and were full of praise. We were commended as the "best school" in their programme, recognising our inclusive, innovative approach to teaching and learning. We have also been the regional centre for training new teachers from schools in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Gloucestershire and Buckinghamshire. We have held training days here for staff from some of the prep and senior schools in the region and I can tell you that I have been impressed to see the quality of those joining the profession. An education journalist who visited recently was struck by the lively atmosphere in School on a Saturday morning. She was also quick to suggest that we patent the system that we are using to

record performance in lessons which allows us to encourage, praise and cajole where necessary.

Our international school exchanges with the Doon School in India, Roland Park Country School and Gilman School in Baltimore, USA, are well established. Some of our pupils spend time overseas and the exchange pupils join us for much of the summer term. For the first time this year, the exchange expanded to include Welham Girls' School near New Delhi, India. Although only a few pupils from St Edward's take part in the exchange, the influence in the host school is significant. I hope that we can gently expand our exchange programme and I know that Mr Askew is looking for more partner schools abroad.

The IB programme alongside A level has also continued to attract new Sixth formers to the School. Pupils have joined St Edward's from schools all over Britain and the world. In line with our strategic plan, it is good to see the diversity of

recruitment that will enhance the School's international reputation.

In September last year, I set the School another challenge: to improve the commitment and performance in sport. Richard Howitt embraced the opportunity as Head of Sport to help lead colleagues and pupils to raise their game. We have some impressive facilities to which, last September, we added the Martyrs Pavilion with the Lord Sandberg Long Room. I am so grateful to Lord Sandberg and David Parnwell who have given so generously and encouraged other former pupils to do so in support.

My one regret this summer is that two very special people were not able to see the new pavilion in use. Our cricket professional, Bob Jones, died this term. In his memory, Hugh Coles organised a 20/20 match in June. David Drake-Brockman retired from St Edward's two years ago. He was formerly master in charge of Cricket, Director of Sport, Housemaster of Corfe

and teacher of Classics. His funeral in School on a bleak, cold day just before Christmas was followed by a memorial service and cricket match on a bright sunny day in the June half term with friends and former pupils returning to the School in droves. David and Bob were there in spirit.

I shall not try to summarise the sporting year but special praise goes to the girls' rowing senior IV, Nicola Mason, Imogen Mansfield, Sigourney Waibel, Emma Cadoux-Hudson and Lottie Mitchell, who won a Silver Medal at the National Schools Regatta. Nicola and Emma also won Silver in the ladies' pair. I wish them luck as they row for Great Britain against France tomorrow in Nantes. It was pleasing to see the vast improvement in the First VIII, J16 IV and J15 over the season. The boys' First XI Hockey team was unbeaten. They played with immense skill and pace. In a number of games, the opening session saw them dominating and scoring quickly followed by long spells of dogged defence. They were great to watch. The

Shell girls played some genuinely exciting hockey, too, and it is clear that we have strength in depth for future years.

The First XI Cricket team is a marvellous mixture of senior and younger players. They played some good cricket all term with aggressive batting and accurate and determined bowling. Not only did a Shell pupil, Miles Hammond, command a regular place in the team but he was selected to play, alongside professionals, for Gloucester second men's XI against Kent. The Yearlings were simply outstanding and richly deserved their success, so too did the Junior Colts – both teams winning seven fixtures this term. There were great performances from our squash and tennis teams and some real success for our football and netball teams in the spring term.

As I watched sport this year, I was aware of a growing confidence and a greater pride in appearance and this all contributed to better performances from our teams and crews. I am convinced that we can do even better. We have some

excellent coaches in so many sports who have encouraged and enhanced the skills of your children with heartening results.

May I thank on your behalf all those who have coached and trained our pupils over the year and given their time selflessly.

One of the challenges for Richard Howitt and Sarah Gee, Head of Girls' Games, was to visit our prep schools to find possible sports scholars for the future. They have been particularly successful and I am so glad that our former pupils have agreed to fund a Martyrs' Sports Scholar each year – our first scholar arrives in September.

I said earlier that there are increasing pressures on pupils to achieve their highest possible grades. Interestingly, the evidence coming from those studying graduate recruitment has repeated the claim that the Duke of Edinburgh Award is one of the strongest indicators to measure the potential of a candidate. I was pleased, therefore, to be invited to St James Palace in the autumn to join some 400 Gold award winners (including six

from St Edward's) and to present the young people to the Earl of Wessex. I was pleased to see our Bronze group in action on their expedition in June: 40 or so Shells took part. I had a letter from a teacher, Miss Boast, praising the Silver DofE group for their determined attitude and courtesy after their expedition on the river Wye last week. I also enjoyed the presentation by this year's Gold group who put together a most lively evening for parents and guests, sharing with us the highs and lows of their mountain trek in the Lake District and their canoe expedition on the Tay in arctic conditions over Easter.

The CCF Inspection brought great credit to the School this term. I am so pleased to see the steady progress of our Contingent under the leadership of Keith Shindler and I am proud of their achievement. The visiting officer concluded his report, "I found St Edward's CCF in excellent heart, well led and with training of a high standard. It plays a significant part in developing youngsters with leadership skills, self-confidence and resilience".

Last summer, I remember telephoning our new Director of Music when he was still at Uppingham School. I wanted to give him the news that within a few weeks of his arrival here, he was to take the School Choir to the Albert Hall as the guest choir for the British Legion Festival of Remembrance. The service was to be broadcast live on TV and radio worldwide to an estimated audience of 80 million, “no pressure then, Warden”. The experience for our pupils and staff was amazing. Rehearsing and performing with military and professional musicians of the highest order was an experience that they will not forget and they received the warmest praise from the musical director and organizers. Among the choir were number of Shell boys and girls in their sixth week at St Edward’s. Mr Tester has been a revelation and inspiration as Director of Music. Together with his very capable team in the Music Department, they have produced the Gaudy Concert, the Choral concert with the St Edward’s Singers, the soloists concert and spring orchestral concert, the Bands Concert and countless musical soirées. Music

at St Edward's continues to be a major strength. In addition, the pupils in the congregation are beginning to sing with energy, and increasing skill in Chapel Services as they have shown already that they can do in Itinerarium and the House Singing competition. Please come and hear the Band when they play in the marquee before lunch. I sincerely hope that the prospect of a new music school in addition to some refurbishment of the New Hall will give further encouragement to our musicians.

The Art Gallery in the North Wall has certainly continued to inspire our artists. Please do go and see their work (and the work of our Design pupils) in the Gallery and in the Art and Design building. Special congratulations go to George Spencer whose portrait, "The Old German", has been selected for the online exhibition by the Royal Academy.

Last night, before the Gaudy concert, there was a Dance Showcase. Dance continues to be so popular and, like the larger Dance Show in the spring term, this was a highly professional

event. The dancing was stunning, so, too, was the lighting and stage craft. I know that the team of pupils and staff would want me to say a special thank you and farewell to a Sixth form leaver, James Adkins, who has been both dedicated and inspirational as a stage manager and leader of fellow technicians.

The Shell plays gave a platform for the entire year group to take part. The quality of writing, direction and performance was even better this year and is a great collaboration between the Shells and the Lower Sixth. There was a major play each term. “Little Shop of Horrors” ran this term under the musical direction of Edward Bell. He is a graduate assistant – what a talented man. I have offered him a permanent job but he is determined to do a Doctorate in composition. Remember his name – he will go far. Together with Bethany Steer and Katrina Eden, they put on a most lively production with pupils of all ages. “Touched” was directed by Katrina Eden in the spring term. It was a tense play, laced with humour, reflecting on the changing social canvas of a post-war Britain. It was good to see

so many pupils involved in a school play for the first time. Henry V had a large cast and Ms Maycock cleverly used a number of inexperienced actors as the raw recruits in Henry's army. It was a powerful and original production. I remember particularly Miranda Stewart and Maxine Mackintosh bringing to life the scene in French preparing the princess to meet Henry, her future husband. It was good to see pupils on stage with two of our senior members of staff: Mr Quartley and Mr Snell. Sebastian de Souza's mercurial performance as the troubled, energetic and decisive king was just magnificent. You will be pleased to hear that Sebastian has a part in a major Channel 4TV drama to be filmed later this year. Congratulations.

One of the best initiatives over the past two years has been the creation of the peer listening programme in the School. Under the guidance of Phoebe Brookes, the group has gone from strength to strength. They have counselled individuals with troubles and worked to find a route to help them. They have also recently met with prospective parents at our twice weekly

mini Open Mornings and have shown themselves to be great ambassadors of the School. There have been a number of particularly impressive pupil-led initiatives over the year but I cannot mention them all. I have said that Hugh Coles arranged the Celebrity 20/20; Carlos Posada sat in a bath which was steadily filled with waste food in an impassioned plea to conserve our resources; Jack Wade and the Heads of School worked with the charity, 'Help for Heroes' and ran a fancy dress day to raise funds. Two representatives of the Services Charity came to St Edward's following an invitation from pupils. A young female university cadet who was recovering from severe head injuries told us of the care she had received. An officer from our affiliated regiment, the Rifles, struggled on to the stage in Assembly and told us of his experiences in Afghanistan and his rehabilitation since his return. One weekend, Sing's House cycled, ran and swam throughout the day and night for charity raising nearly £7,000. The sight of the pupils, staff, Housemaster, Housemaster's wife and children completing the

final lap of the Quad after 23 hours and 59 minutes was most memorable.

It does not stop there. Last week a lower Sixth former, George Parris, saw me to ask support for an initiative in the autumn term. Over the weekend of 14th-16th October, the School will host an Elgar Festival. George has arranged for guest lecturers, including the composer Anthony Payne, planned three concerts and booked a North Wall screening of the Ken Russell film, Elgar. Please put the dates in your diary.

Last month, the Headmistress of a most successful school said that she was leaving Britain and said to the newspaper that she was made to feel ashamed of running an independent school. Well, I am not. Working with young people full of energy, innovation and independence, how could I be? With a dedicated and skilled staff – how could I think that?

Returning to my staff. May I say farewell and thank you on your behalf to the following colleagues:

To our Language Assistants and Graduate Assistants who have given loyal support over the year. Our Assistant Chaplains, Rev Buishyager who moves to London and Rev Simpson to the USA. To Dr Burkitt who moves to Chesham High School. To Mr Playfair who returns to Marlborough College. To Mr Mitchell who becomes Director of Teaching and Learning at Forest School. To Miss Jones who becomes Head of Art at Clayesmore School. To Miss Hillier who takes over the Modern Languages Department at St Helen and St Katharine's, Abingdon. To Mr Copeland who will be Head of Maths at Leysin School in Switzerland. To Mr Arnold who will be Head of Design Technology at Sedbergh School. Mr Jolley is not leaving but he steps down from Tilly's after 11 years of dedicated leadership for which I offer sincere thanks.

Mrs Greaves retires. She has built the most robust and caring Learning Support Department, the envy of our competitors and

admired by our prep schools. I am grateful to you, not only for guiding so many young people to levels of achievement they may have thought beyond them but for advising and directing my teachers to help these individuals.

Robert Hughes joined St Edward's in 1978 and has been a most influential colleague. A skilled musician with an amazing ability to demand the highest standards and the most fun from music and the musicians in his care. Housemaster of Cowell's from 1987-1999 and the most accomplished organiser of overseas trips. As a token of my appreciation on behalf of the School, I shall invite Mr Hughes in a moment, to present our prizes.

For all those leaving, there is plenty of hot air in the tent today to give you lift as you begin your uncharted journey. I hope that you are not grounded by further ash clouds from the Icelandic volcano, Eyjafjallajokull, nor by persistent action from British Airways cabin crews. I wish you every success and happiness.

God bless you all.

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