



The Old Coventrian

The newsletter of the King Henry VIII School former pupils association

WINTER 2016 Issue 14

Message from your Chairman

Welcome to another Edition of the Old Coventrians' Newsletter. This has been a really busy term as I hope the number of articles reflects – full of highs and some lows. Of the latter I would like to pay my own tribute to Wal “Nick” Prescott, a member of the Committee, who sadly passed away – see page 6 for his obituary.

In terms of successes, the articles on the OCs versus the school teams, the Dean Close Hockey Sixes and the 94th Annual Dinner demonstrate, I hope, some of the strengths of the Association. As you may expect, more are planned – so do come and join us if you can. For me personally, winning the bowls tournament (only due to the handicapping) and the

Dedication of the Memorial to Philip Larkin in Westminster Abbey stand out.

I must, as always, express my thanks to the Committee – without whose energy and efforts we would not be able to run the events that we do. If you would like to help, please get in touch: alumni@khviii.net and let us all continue to make the OCA a really worthwhile organization and build a real “community for life”. Finally, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a happy and healthy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Paul Fernandez -Montes

Message from Jason Slack, Headmaster and OCA President

At the time of writing the school is gripped by the excitement of going ‘Into the Woods’, our annual Senior School production. The reviews of this popular and modern musical have been excellent and the pupils are enjoying every minute of the opportunity. I hope that many Old Coventrians were able to join the audience. Other successes have come thick and fast in recent weeks, notably with a win at the prestigious Tour de Trigs hiking race, further honours in the Vex Robotics competition, and our under 15 rugby team progressing to the last 16 of the NatWest Bowl national rugby competition (to be played after Christmas).

The Christmas spirit is as strong as ever and the Parents’ Association Christmas Fair always signals the start of the festive season. The Christmas Carol Concert will send us into the school holidays feeling uplifted, accompanied by our now traditional final half day when we support various charities by wearing Christmas jumpers! May I wish all Old Coventrians a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Old Coventrians’ Events 2016 - 17

2016

17th December Thames Hare & Hounds Run, Wimbledon *(and we have donated a trophy for this)*

24th December Crackley Run, Kenilworth

2017

5th January Class of 2009 Re-union

2nd April Hock-Net Fest

To be confirmed London Drinks

20th May Class of 2000 Reunion Dinner

1st September Bowls Tournament

9th September Heritage Open Day

18th November 95th Annual Dinner

Diary Dates

The Dedication of a Memorial to Philip Larkin in Poets' Corner

On Friday 2nd December, the 31st anniversary of Larkin's death, Paul Fernandez- Montes (Chair of OCs) and Sheila Woolf (former Head of English) represented the school at the unveiling of a memorial stone to Larkin in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey.



The occasion was all the more special since the invitation included Evensong prior to the Dedication ceremony, which was followed by a Reception in the Nave. As we queued to enter the abbey we were delighted to spot the actor Edward Fox and sculptor Grayson Perry ahead of us, and when we were – to our surprise – ushered into front row seats in the Quire, we were thrilled to discover that Lord Melvyn Bragg and Alan Bennett were sitting directly behind us! The beautiful Evensong service included a Bible reading given by the High Commissioner for Barbados to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of that country's independence.

Afterwards we moved to Poets' Corner and again were placed in excellent seats where we had a good view of the speakers. A welcome was given by Dr John Hall, the Dean of Westminster Abbey, who spoke about the appropriateness of Larkin being "given a spot" in Poets' Corner. In a moving ceremony there were readings from Larkin given by Grayson Perry, Virginia Bottomley (Vice Chancellor of Hull University, where Larkin was Librarian), Anthony Thwaite (a major editor of Larkin,) and Tom Courtenay, and the address was given by poet Blake Morrison. Poignantly, one of the chosen poems was *The Trees*, which was chosen for the opening of the school's Philip Larkin Room in 2002.

The memorial, of striking russet Purbeck stone, with the final lines from *An Arundel Tomb* :

*Our almost instinct almost true
What will survive of us is love*

was unveiled by Anthony Thwaite, the President of the Larkin Society, and Professor Edwin Dawes, the Chair, and a wreath of yellow roses and freesias was laid by Larkin's niece Rosemary Parry.

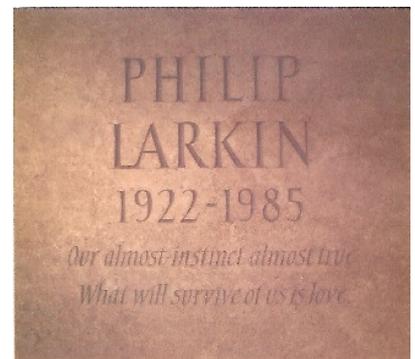
Before the closing prayers, the strains of Riverside Blues by King Oliver rang out.

Many prominent writers and politicians were present including the aforementioned Alan Bennett and Lord Bragg, notable among them being A.N.Wilson and Alan Johnson. It

was also good to meet up again with members of the Larkin Society who attended our own Larkin Symposium in 2015, on the 30th anniversary of the poet's death. During the Reception which followed the ceremony, journalist and broadcaster Rosie Millard, who chairs the Hull City of Culture 2017 organisation, spoke about "another city bidding for City of Culture status in 2021" and suggested that Hull was the more appropriate city to commemorate Larkin. I could not resist tackling her afterwards and putting the case for Coventry: would one champion London over Stratford as the "home" of Shakespeare, after all?

My particular thanks to Jan Butler who arranged our tickets. It was a huge privilege and pleasure to be able to fly the flag for KHVIII at this occasion, particularly as there were no other guests present from Coventry.

Sheila Woolf



OCA Committee Meetings

(all are welcome):

Wednesday 25th January 2017

Tuesday 9th May 2017

AGM: Wednesday 14th June 2017

Sports Review

Due to some technical issues and also due to the sheer volume, the Sports items we would normally have included in this edition are being held over to a special Sports Edition of the Newsletter which will be circulated in January. It will have a write up of the Dean Close Sixes, the Old Coventrians' games against the School 1st XV, the Girls Hockey XI and the Netball Team, as well as write ups for the Cross Country events and something about the forthcoming Hock-Net Fest – a reprise of last year's event when Old Girls came together to play netball and hockey – amongst each other and also against the School Teams.

Heritage

Open Day 2016

You are probably aware that as part of Heritage England's Open Days, our School was featured as a site of historical interest in the recent Coventry Heritage Open Days; 10th September 2016.

We were delighted to have over 50 people joining the tours of the School, which had a blitz theme. There were actually 8 Old Coventrians amongst these who took the opportunity to tour their old school, they thoroughly enjoyed the nostalgic experience! They commented on how they learned many things about the history of King Henry VIII that they had not known in their days



here! They also marvelled at the new developments, especially the long promised swimming pool!

One Old Coventrian Dave Musson kind sent us a link showing the images he took of his visit and made into a blog!

<http://davemusson.com/blog/2016/9/17/back-to-school>

Water Good Idea

Alan Raftery (class of 2002) has set up <https://crowdfundcampus.com/campaigns/nix-mix-flavoured-hydration-on-the-go> It is a project he has been working on for a number of years. The main aim is to get people drinking more water by making water more flavoursome and appealing.

This is achieved through a bottle cap he has invented, which adds flavour and vitamins to your water after refilling your bottle. The page offers gifts in return of monetary pledges in support of the concept. The funding will be used to set-up to the business and start distribution and marketing within Coventry's two campuses, and then to local schools, gyms, offices and sports clubs.

Obituaries

We must regretfully advise that we have been notified of the following who have passed away since our last edition: Bill Adams '34; John Cox '48; Jeff Harris '46; Wal "Nick" Prescott '55; Libby Preston '91; Graham White '44; and Peter Miles '68.

There are detailed obituaries of both Bill and Wal in this edition, and we hope to have more on some of the others in our Spring number. We will remember them.

Old Coventrians

Cross-Country

Two opportunities arise this month for any runners out there, male or female. The first is the national Alumni Race on Wimbledon Common, 2.30 pm start, Saturday 17th. We are hoping to field 20+ runners in this race where we have a wonderful record. 8k on the Thames Hare and Hounds Course. KHVIII have provided two of the trophies for this prestigious event.

The second possibility for you all is the following Saturday, Christmas Eve itself, running less seriously for some over our beloved school course through Crackley Woods, near Kenilworth. The start time for this is 11.30 am, and there is a buffet lunch for socialising afterwards round the corner at Kenilworth Sports Club.

If you can be persuaded to take part in either event, contact past head of Cross-Country, Dave Butler, on ButlerD@khviii.net asap.

Old Coventrians' Association –

94th Annual Dinner held on 19th November 2016

A total of 91 attended the OCA's 94th Annual Dinner, held in the King Henry VIII School Hall on the evening of November 19th, 2016. This included 5 guests and 9 former members of staff, which was slightly down on last year and we were disappointed there were not more girls or younger Old Coventrians: we would love to see more recent former pupils at future Dinners. The Master of Ceremonies was Paul Fernandez-Montes, in his second year as Chair of the Association. There was a very friendly and convivial atmosphere as the



attesting to the ongoing success of the School, both academically (as reflected in the recent Inspection: Outstanding in all categories) and in extra-curricular events, as teams and as individuals, both at home and abroad.

The Guest Speaker was Nigel Lee (Class of '70) who is current Vice Chair of Governors, an Old Coventrian, son of an Old Coventrian, grandson of an Old Wheatleyan and former parent. He recalled some of the staff who had taught him and regaled us with some amusing anecdotes, before asking all Old Coventrians to consider making bequests to the



assembled reminisced and swapped tales of old school days!

The meal was, once again, agreeable and excellent value for money (including table wine). This was followed by the MC proposing Toasts to Her Majesty, The Queen and to the Fallen, particularly sad due to the tragic loss of Libby Preston (Class of '91). Jack Parylo, Head Boy, proposed the Toast to the School in a very amusing and well judged manner. The Headmaster, Jason Slack, responded,



School: we do not, like many other schools, have a huge raft of endowments to use to further develop and enhance the School, and every bequest could help future generations.



(Continued on page 5)



(Continued from page 4)

After thanking the caterers for the food and service, the OCA Social Sub-Committee for arranging the Dinner and members of the OCA Committee for their support on the day, the MC made presentations to Jan Butler and Amanda Garman for their exceptional efforts in making the evening such a huge success. The formal programme of the evening concluded with a rousing rendition of the School Song, although conversations and sharing of memories continued for some time afterwards.

Ted Norrish - In His Own Words

Ted Norrish (the legendary former member of staff) is writing a book! *Cursus Honorum* - an account of his mountaineering and travels, his time as master of almost 30 years at KHVIII School, his enjoyment of athletics, fell running and orienteering; his love of music (chorus singer and cello player), and classical history and literature, and more will be published in the Spring. It will be hard back and will cost around £25; containing about 50 chapters and over 100 illustrations, mostly from his colour transparencies (slides) through the years.

Ted says: 'Readers can find some of my climbing here: I ascended in Artic Norway unclimbed peaks, and was organiser of the Oxford Chitral expedition to Saraghrar (1958); with American friends, I climbed Mt Robson and 2 other peaks in the Rockies (1961). In 1963 I visited Persepolis and climbed Mt Demavend; in 1967 I travelled to Egypt, the Sudan and Ethiopia, and reached Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile. In 1979 two of us crossed the Afghan Hindu Kush by the Anjuman Pass. Early in 1988 I ascended Mounts Anne and Cradle in Tasmania. In 1988 /1989 for 18 months I crossed Chitral again alone; I spent 6 months in China and served as a Ranger at four USA (National) Parks. In Maine I climbed Mt Kithardin in Baxter forest Park. I climbed in the Alps (1954, 56, 57) from Val D' Isere, La Berard and Chamonix. I crossed the Ala Dag Taurus in Anatolia (1960) on my own, and Mt Dicte in Crete. I ascended many Norwegian Peaks, the Carpathian Mountains of Romania (1973), and good part of the Balkans (Bosnia, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania). In 3 years (1964, 78, and 81) I climbed every mountain in Greece except Mt Kolykas ! As a guide to



friends from 1996 to 2006 I climbed in NW Bulgaria Mt Midjur, and beautiful Mt Kom about 40 times! '

However, he needs your support: pledges of £25 will help secure publication – please Email: emilianorrish@yahoo.co.uk. Whether all those anecdotes that you remember about him will be included, you will have to subscribe to find out.



Photo of Ted from May 1964 from the Laurie Wrench collection

OBITUARIES

Walter George Thomas Prescott aka “Nick” Prescott (class of 55) sadly died on 29th June 2016, following a tragic accident a few weeks earlier. He was married and had three daughters.

Wal (*photographed, right*) attended KHVIII from 1955 to 1961 and was in Sherwyn’s House. After qualifying as an accountant he worked for several local companies before moving to Peugeot Motor Company where he spent most of his working life as General Manager of their Fleet and Leasing Operation.

He was a Committee Member of Old Coventrians Association and at the time of his death had been Treasurer of Old Coventrians RFC for almost 10 years and will be sorely missed and fondly remembered by both organisations. He played rugby well into his 60’s and became well known throughout the Midlands as an entertaining after-dinner speaker.

He lived life to the full until the end in his own meticulous and witty way, as was amply illustrated by the epitaph he penned for his own funeral.



With the passing of **Bill Adams** at the age of 92 we have truly reached the end of an era. Bill had a close association with the George Eliot Fellowship for fifty years and only two days before his death on 21st June he had laid a wreath, as the Fellowship’s guest of honour.

Bill was born in November 1923. He was very proud of his Coventry roots, which were deep, an ancestor being a printer and publisher historian who knew and exchanged polite insults with Charles Bray. He attended King Henry VIII, there overlapping with Philip Larkin, a year older, but of whom Bill disapproved – Bill thought Philip a bit of an unsavoury character! He saw service in Europe during the war before taking up the profession of tax officer, where he met, and in 1949 married, Kathleen, six years his junior.

Bill was in his forties when he drove from Coventry one evening to a meeting of the George Eliot Fellowship in Nuneaton Library. In 1967 there were fewer than 30 members. The meeting Bill attended was the AGM and he ended the evening as a committee member. Within a year Kathleen had joined Bill, taking over as secretary in 1968, and everything changed.

Bill was an assiduous researcher into local history, a keen archaeologist, known and respected by staff in Coventry library and museum services. He was a guide at Coventry cathedral for many years, though he had no pronounced religious views. His initial interest was in the historical aspects of George Eliot’s Coventry years, whilst Kathleen was fascinated by

George Eliot’s unconventional life long before she came to love her novels; it has been said by a leading academic that Bill and Kathleen “have done more than anyone else to promote and foster the reputation of George Eliot in the last half century”. They were both modest, completely unshowy, but they achieved wonders. It occurred to them after 1969 that there ought to be an umbrella group for literary societies. Bill wrote a letter to The Times and by 1973 they were setting up and running The Alliance of Literary Societies which now has 125 member societies.

After a century it was Bill and Kathleen who put in motion the scheme to have a memorial to George Eliot in Westminster Abbey. Similarly, their enthusiasm led to local sculptor John Letts producing a statue in Nuneaton in 1986.

In conversation with Bill in later years, he would say, as would Kathleen, that George Eliot had changed their lives. What they didn’t say, and probably didn’t realize, was that the two of them changed others’ lives too. Their love for each other, their love for their family and their love for George Eliot sustained them throughout a long marriage. It was somehow entirely appropriate that Bill’s last public act was to have laid the wreath to George Eliot on behalf of the Fellowship, surrounded by members and friends who loved and respected him.

Article adapted, with permission, by Sheila Woolf (former Head of English) from an obituary by John Burton, Chair of the George Eliot Fellowship.