

# OLNEWSLETTER - ADVENT 2023



# A MESSAGE from the Headmaster

I am sure we have all talked about value for money in recent times, and I am always acutely aware of the sacrifices our parents make in their desire to invest in a Leicester Grammar School education for their child.

We began this academic year celebrating academic results which reflected the joint endeavour of pupils and staff over a very disrupted period of education. It is hard to measure the value of that education (as much of the impact is intangible), but the Daily Telegraph league table of independent schools last August had LGS surpassed by only one school nationally at GCSE, with lower fees, and only two at A-level. And then our current Year 13 went on to win more Oxbridge offers than at any other time in the school's history.

This success stems from the positive culture of the school rather than any regimented production process, and that culture is based on our school values of respect, trust, courage, curiosity and community. We were encouraged in our last inspection to give pupils a greater voice in the life of the school, and there are now so many ways in which they can contribute courageously to the happy progress of our community. The school council's biggest win this year has perhaps been a reasoned request for the licence to grow smartly trimmed facial hair in the Sixth Form!

Our pupils' curiosity and desire to make a difference are manifest in many areas: in the recent runners-up accolade in the Earth Prize, where an innovative idea to improve farming in developing countries caught the attention of judges among the 1,150 school entries from 116 nations; in their community service and outreach, with pupils visiting local primary schools, care homes and charities; in their willingness to step out of their comfort zone, in sport, music, drama and civilised debate; and in the ways in which they serve others in school, as prefects, student supporters and anti-bullying ambassadors.

Ultimately, it is the relationships between pupils themselves and between pupils and staff which enable us to live out our values and to foster development in pupils' academic and personal lives. Happy memories and



“ Strong sense of community will persist and will continue to grow ”

friendships have been made this year through the many opportunities offered outside the classroom, including the re-introduction of numerous educational trips, both at home and abroad. I am enormously grateful to our staff for their enthusiasm and their commitment to our pupils' progress and well-being. We have said a fond farewell to several long-serving retirees this year, who have given most generously of their talents to inspire, guide and support our pupils, and fitting tribute is paid to all of them in this newsletter.

I hope you cherish happy memories of the value and values which your LGS education conferred upon you, and I very much look forward to seeing you at future reunions.

**JOHN WATSON**

**Cover photo: Mike Hood, Head Groundsman**

# In Memoriam

## JOHN DOBSON

Tribute to the late **John Dobson**

John Dobson very sadly passed away in LOROS Hospice at the beginning of February, after the sudden onset of illness.



John dedicated much of his working life to the Trust. He knew and cared for his pupils as individuals and always sought to do his best for them, making a very positive difference to their lives. He also worked hard with colleagues in his leadership roles, contributing energetically to the development of our schools. His children, Tom and Alice, attended both LGS Junior and Senior Schools, leaving us as talented and generous young adults. John will be remembered by those of us who knew him with great affection, and our thoughts and prayers remain with Tom and Alice, as well as with John's wider family and close friends.

### Reflections from David Fulton on John's LGJS years:

John, fondly referred to as JD, Dobbo, or Mr D, joined LGJS in 2004 as Deputy Head, when the school was still at Evington Hall. At the same time, Tom started in Kinders, and we therefore always saw John as a doting father as well as a school leader. He was instrumental in planning the move to Great Glen, managing both the expanding numbers and new technology on our larger, modern site.

JD had boundless energy and enthusiasm, and this led to ever more elaborate ideas for assemblies and productions. He would attempt full scale historical re-enactments of the Battle of Agincourt created with gym equipment, and retellings of Russian folktales in a Cathedral. These did not always go completely to plan and could leave him frustrated but not undeterred! He had real passion for English literature and history, and pupils would hang on his words as he brought these to life.

He had such a firm grip on all areas of school life, launching initiatives such as the Review Magazine, working alongside the Friends, writing the timetable

(by hand), umpiring cricket as well as being an inspiring teacher to all those pupils lucky enough to be in his classes. When the Trust acquired Stoneygate School in 2016, John, with his positivity and clear leadership, was a natural choice to be appointed Headmaster. However, he remained part of the fabric of LGJS, and even seven years after he moved to Stoneygate, barely a week goes by without his name being mentioned in a conversation.

### Reflections from David Palmer on the Stoneygate years:

John inspired us all to give our very best to LGS Stoneygate. His natural enthusiasm and positivity always gave us a lift and his caring and thoughtful manner made us all feel supported. His sense of humour shone through in his assemblies, our staff gatherings, the Quiz and especially in his superb Christmas videos! The children universally respected and admired him and he always had their best interests at heart.

His tenure saw a transformation in the fortunes of the school, from modest numbers and much insecurity to flourishing numbers, a sound financial base and a 'happy ship'. He was responsible for many positive initiatives which improved our offering to the children. His love of cricket was a big drive towards the installation of our new cricket square and outdoor nets, which have looked splendid in the recent summer sunshine. He was open to change and receptive to new ideas and proposals. You always felt optimistic going to see him with a suggestion, but he was also firm in his vision for the school.

The many moving comments made after his death, and the number of people from the schools (staff, pupils and parents) who attended his funeral, were another indication of the high esteem and affection in which he was held. His loss has affected us all deeply and we miss his company and his presence at both schools. Tom, Alice and the wider family have lost JD far too soon; however, stories will always be told and the memories will linger. Whilst we look forward to the future at LGSS with great optimism, we will be 'Team Dobbo' forever!

# Farewell

## to leaving staff

### SALLY HAYWOOD

Sally Haywood has made a superb impact on the Art & Design team over her 24 years here at LGS. In our department, we call Sally our very own 'walking encyclopaedia of Art' as she knows, quite simply, everything that there is to know about the History of Art, terminology of Art and the theories of colour. Sally also fills the role of 'Mother Hen' (pardon the chicken pun, I had to fit it in somewhere!) to her students who simply adore her. Many a student has recited their fondest memories of early LGS days and their thrill of having Miss Haywood as their art teacher because, "she is the kindest and most fun teacher to have". Students share fond memories of how much they had learnt with her at the head of the classroom, but also how she nurtured their passion and enjoyment for Art. A testament to her teaching; her students leave her classes with not only a more insightful and sophisticated art knowledge but more importantly, a big smile on their face, buzzing with enthusiasm from their great lesson with Miss Haywood and eager to return.

Over her years at LGS Sally has taught every year group from prospective Year 6 pupils up to our Upper Sixth students at A Level in Fine Art, Ceramics and History of Art. She has also been a fondly remembered form tutor and has run numerous clubs for students over lunchtimes and after school.

She is one of the most dedicated and thorough teachers I have had the pleasure of working with. We will miss Sally tremendously, not only in our department, but around the entire school. She is friends with everyone, chatty and happy every day and truly lights up the room with her beaming smile. Sally may be retiring, to join her partner Martyn in joyful retirement in their beautiful cottage with their cat and chickens (we aren't jealous at all!), but the happiness and laughter that she creates will continue for many years more.

**KATIE DRIVER, HEAD OF ART AND DESIGN**



### CHARLOTTE CALLAND

It is with a mix of sadness and gratitude that we bid farewell to our esteemed colleague, who has served as the Head of Netball at LGS. Throughout her tenure, Charlotte has displayed exceptional organizational skills, demonstrated a remarkable ability to develop the netball programme, and built strong and lasting relationships with our students.

Under her guidance, netball has flourished, showcasing remarkable growth and success. Her impeccable organizational skills ensured that practices, matches, and tournaments ran smoothly, providing our students with a structured and enriching experience, particularly the South Leicestershire tournaments. Her commitment to excellence extended beyond the logistical aspects, as she consistently worked towards enhancing the overall quality of the programme and developing a love of netball for girls here at LGS.

Moreover, Charlotte's exceptional interpersonal skills allowed her to build deep and meaningful relationships with our students, staff and parents. She fostered an environment of trust, respect, and camaraderie, where students felt supported, inspired and challenged. Her mentorship and guidance extended beyond the sport itself, nurturing the personal growth and well-being of our students and delivering outstanding academic PE results throughout her time here.

Charlotte embarks on a new chapter in her professional journey, as she heads off to Stowe. We express our heartfelt gratitude for her outstanding contributions to the department and wish her the best of luck in her future endeavours.

**JAMES MCCANN,  
DIRECTOR OF SPORT**



## ELEANOR GRAFF-BAKER

I first met Eleanor when I arrived at LGS in 1986 as Director of Music. She had been at the school for a couple of years straight from university and her considerable influence had already been felt in the embryonic music department. She continued to teach the violin for a while and then went off on other ventures, including rôles at Leicester High and Leicester University. When we moved to Great Glen Eleanor took on a part-time post at LGJS, and when a little later we needed someone for two days a week at LGS I told Chris King that the answer was staring us in the face. I was very pleased when he sidled up to me after a concert at the end of Eleanor's first term and said 'I can see why you were so keen to get her in!'

There were all sorts of reasons for that comment. One is that Eleanor is a first-class musician, both academically and practically. Whether taking classes, coaching ensembles and/or singing or playing in them, her high standards and commitment to the task in hand have always been evident. Another is that she has been a source of encouragement and advice to youngsters at every stage, and many of them have benefitted from her wise words. And it was not only youngsters; as a colleague I also appreciated her support and sensible advice. I always knew that if I asked her opinion on something I would receive a considered reply. Eleanor is that



ideal member of a department; someone who just gets on with the job reliably, with no fuss and a wry sense of humour.

Eleanor's contribution to music at LGS is far in excess of her allegedly part-time status (there was definitely something missing on the one day a week when she wasn't in either LGJS or LGS), and it is no cliché to say that she will be much missed.

PS The only occasions on which I learnt to tread carefully were when Eleanor appeared with a pile of paper or pieces of equipment and asked in a rather menacing way: 'Where should these go?' This has since become a byword between us.

**DR DAVID WHITTLE,  
RETIRED DIRECTOR OF MUSIC**

## WILL BURNS

Will joined the Design and Technology team in 2015 from Robert Smyth Academy and quickly became the go-to materials expert. He could turn his hand to anything, and his passion for the subject enthused many to study it further at university.

Over the years, he led the organisation of the Arkwright Scholarship, supported many Greenpower racing residentials, and was lucky enough to attend the Tanzania trip. The Music staff were occasional visitors to the department, particularly looking for Will, who would help them repair broken instruments.

He made it look easy to go from teaching the Prep how to use a ruler correctly to 6th formers who wanted to make incredibly complex products. The Prep adored him. On more than one occasion, they would say to each other under their breath, "Mr Burns is so cool," only for him to reply comically with, "I won't be cool if you don't put your apron on properly."

In his retirement, he plans on renovating his campervan and getting out for walks across the county. He will be missed hugely, but we expect him to pop his head in when he needs to cheekily borrow our TIG welder to fix a part for his van. The answer will always be yes - providing you can fix a violin in return...

**KATIE CAMPBELL  
HEAD OF DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**



# Farewell to leaving staff

## MRS KATIE TUTT

Katie's connection to Leicester Grammar School is long-standing, and 2023 marks her retirement from the Grammar School Trust, concluding more than three decades of dedicated service.

In 1991 LGS expanded to provide junior education and Evington Hall on Spencefield Lane was purchased to provide a home for the junior pupils. Katie, a former pupil at Evington Hall Convent School, was one of the first teachers to be appointed. The headteacher at the newly formed Leicester Grammar Junior School had previously worked alongside Katie at a local primary school. Katie heard of the plans for the new school, and expressed an interest in returning to the school buildings wherein existed many happy childhood memories. Her successful appointment marked the beginning of 31 years of service. Since its inception in 1991, Katie has worked alongside all seven junior school headteachers, as a class teacher and as a member of the LGJS management team.

Despite having a natural affinity for people, particularly for children, when Katie began her university education, she embarked on an accountancy course. It was during the second year of this training that Katie recognised her calling to education. Those who have worked alongside her and those who have been fortunate enough to call Katie their teacher are relieved that events conspired to guide her into teaching, a career where she has been able to use her kindness to positively influence numerous young lives.

In her early career Katie juggled full-time teaching with being mother to a growing family. In turn, her three children, Matthew, Alex, and Lizzie, joined Kinders and progressed through the Junior School before successfully transitioning to the Senior School. The children were notable sports stars, each excelling in different sports and the Tutt legacy continues with a sports award named for



the family being presented each year at LGJS prizegiving.

Katie has worked tirelessly to support the school community as it has evolved to become the outstanding education provider we recognise today. Katie will be fondly remembered for her original and meticulous planning of school events. From street parties with the Lord Mayor of Leicester, to flash mob dances at jubilee celebrations, culminating in choreographing a coronation ceremony complete with homemade royal robes and crown jewels - Katie has overseen them all.

And so, we turn our thoughts to the next chapter for Katie. She has plans to refine and enhance her handicraft skills and is considering a return to the tennis courts. However, of one thing we are certain, that friends and family will play a pivotal role in her future.

**RACHEL STRONG, DEPUTY HEAD (PASTORAL), LGJS**

**The following staff have moved on to pastures new. We wish them every success.**



**EMMA MASON**



**BARNABY DILLOW**



**LAURA COX**



**CAROLINE HODGSON**

# LONDON DRINKS AT THE BETJEMAN ARMS



Jacob Phillips, Frazer Nisbet, Alex Laurenti



Rohan Patel, Elizabeth Whitby, Sophie Imlach, Harry Burrows



Jasper Tordoff, Alistair Finlay



Tolu Osinubi, Peter Cox



Harman Kharkar, Richard Sekhon



Robert Budenberg, Finlay Quaid, Tom Sellicks, Troy Thacker, Paul Wake



Maisie Regan, Nick Ebbesen, Harry Burrows, Rohan Patel



Elizabeth Whitby, Eleanor Graff-Baker, David Whittle, Dominic Veall, Frazer Nisbet



Ed Barker, Alex Laurenti

# A Career in Motocross

**PAUL MALIN (OL '89)**

When he left school Paul went on to pursue a career in Motocross, which is a form of motorcycle racing which takes place off-road, around closed circuits with hills, jumps and enthusiastic crowds of supporters. It's a high-speed sport which is also thrilling to watch. Paul competed at both British and World championship level as a professional for twelve years, and even though he no longer competes, he still rides occasionally and continues to work within the industry in television media.



Riding technique also plays a major part, with circuits being built on varying types of terrain. In Belgium and The Netherlands for instance, the circuits are mostly deep sand. In the rest of Europe however, the circuits are what we call hard-pack where the sun has dried the dirt to an almost concrete-like texture, so being able to master the different terrains is essential if you are to succeed at the highest level.

## **STARTING OUT**

It all started on Christmas Day 1975, when I received a 50cc automatic motorcycle as a gift. Keen to get out and ride, there was nowhere to go except for the very small patch of grass at the rear of the family home. The following day, Boxing Day, my father threw me in at the deep end for my first race on a real circuit. I was three years old.

By the time I was eight, I'd won three consecutive British Championship titles, which caught the eye of a relatively new Japanese brand of motorcycle called Kawasaki. With its UK headquarters based in Slough, Berkshire, the aim was to create a professional race team which would contest the Motocross World Championship, with an amateur youth programme which ran alongside, made up of five young hopefuls aged between eight and seventeen. It was the first such scheme in Europe which supported talented, up and coming riders in this way. I was one of the five, and the youngest rider on the team. Because the bikes were lime green, this new team concept was known as Team Green and as time went on, it became the proving ground for future star racers. My amateur career was successful, winning a championship in almost every season, and by the time I was preparing

It's been thirty years since I last graced the pages of the OL Magazine in 1993. I'd left LGS in the summer of 1989, but unlike my peers who went on to further educational studies in various colleges and universities, I followed the dreams I'd harboured as a child, which was to become a professional motocross racer. I remember vividly my 'careers' meeting with Mr. Longson at LGS. Where everyone else stated they wanted to be a lawyer, a doctor, brain surgeon, dentist, musician (Dom Glover), join the police etc, etc, when I sat down in the chair, Richard said 'there's not much point in you being here is there? Motocross, isn't it?' To which I replied, 'yes, sir!' My careers meeting over with, I trundled back to class with a huge grin on my face.

Motocross is one of the most physically demanding sports to compete in. So physical fitness is a major part of the overall programme. You can have the fastest bike in the world, but without fitness, you can get left behind very quickly indeed.



to leave LGS in the summer of '89, I was already competing in the pro-ranks as a fully paid professional racer with Kawasaki..

#### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- 1990 11th in 500cc World Championship
- 1991 4th in 500cc World Championship
- 1994 1st in Motocross of Nations - Team Great Britain.
- 1995 11th in 125cc World Championship
- 1996 2nd in 125cc World Championship / 125cc British Champion
- 1997 British 125cc Champion
- 1999 British Open Class Champion

At the end of each season is an event called The Motocross of Nations, where the top three riders from each country compete to become world champions, the best team in the world so to speak. In 1994, I competed for Team Great Britain for the fourth time - I'd previously won the Under-19 version of this event a few weeks after leaving school, but to win at senior level is huge. I managed to win both of my races, and my two teammates did enough to make sure we came away as world champions. It had been 27 years since Team GB had won it last, and the victory was even more special because we had beaten the defending champions Team USA, who were hoping to make it 14 wins in-a-row.

Winning the British Grand Prix in 1995 was another career highlight. In racing terms, it's the equivalent of Lewis Hamilton winning at Silverstone. Hearing the national anthem in front of 45,000 fans is pretty special, especially when it's you on the top step of the podium.

#### MXGP-TV

I retired from racing in 2000, but always had an interest in the television side of things. I began presenting the British Championship in 2002 for a production company which aired the events on Sky Sports. Alongside that, from 2002-2007 I was frequently asked to join the broadcast team on Eurosport to offer expert analysis during the world championship events, but when the lead commentator left in 2008, I put myself forward to take over that role, knowing that my wealth of racing knowledge would be a valuable asset to the production team.

Since 2009 I have continued to travel to the FIM Motocross World Championship where my main role is to commentate on the World and European Championship via our online platform [www.mxgp-tv.com](http://www.mxgp-tv.com) where we produce the live feed for the rest of the worldwide audience. As well as our pay-per-view service, this live feed will be shown worldwide with my commentary, so if you're in the USA for instance, our broadcast with my commentary will air on the CBS Sports Network.

When I get in the booth in Sweden at Round 15 on August 13th, it will be my 300th consecutive LIVE broadcast.

We also produce a 26 minute video magazine called 'Behind The Gate'. These generally air first on our pay-per-view platform, but after two weeks we add them to our MXGP YouTube Channel, where you will find the first six episodes from this season so far. If you like 'Drive to Survive' which follows Formula 1, then you will love this. And yes, I feature on screen in interview sessions, and you will hear my commentary when any of the action is shown during the episode.

# Putting body and mind to the test

**MICHAEL POTTER (OL '08)**

It may be no surprise that running five marathons in five days in the 40-degree heat of the Wadi Rum desert in Jordan is the hardest thing I have ever done. However, it may come as a surprise to know that it is without doubt one of the best and most profound experiences of my life.

I had always been interested in endurance ever since being inspired by the documentary *Touching the Void*, which describes the harrowing descent of two climbers from one of South America's largest mountains. The descent goes wrong and one of the climbers, who has a badly broken leg, crawls down the mountain over three days without food and virtually no water to survival. While having no desire to go to these depths of mental and physical endurance, I was curious to know how far, in controlled conditions, the body and mind could push itself.

As is often the case with something like this, it was over a few beers that I signed up for the Wadi Rum Ultra. The

goal was simple: 250km in 5 days and get to the end in one piece. I was filled with excitement at what lay ahead but this feeling was not universally shared by all my friends and family who, while they admired my ambition, thought that what I had signed up for lurched on the side of madness.

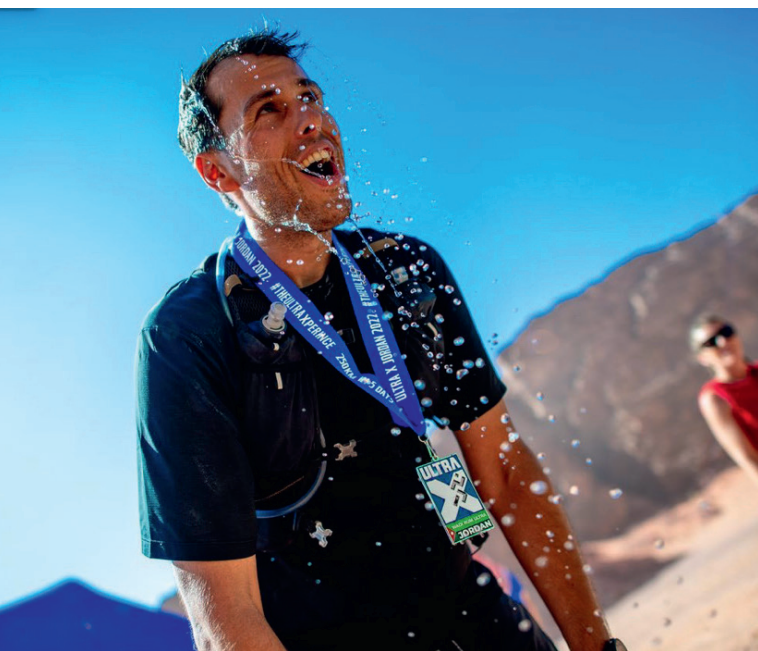
Friends and family sentiments were understandable though. My running CV wasn't glowing; I spent my LGS life playing cricket & rugby, and while I had completed the Barcelona Marathon in 2016, and maintained a running routine, I was not exactly in peak condition.

The training spread over a 7-month period. It started gently and gradually built up to allow for the body to progressively adapt and build fitness levels and reduce the risk of injury. It wasn't without its challenges: running over 100km in one long week; weekends filled with back-to-back runs and a fairly strong bout of Covid three months before the event which meant I was effectively resting for 4-5 weeks.

Whether I was ready or not the event was happening. On Friday 30th September 2022, I flew out to Jordan. The words 'nervous excitement' are the only ones to describe my arrival in the desert. We left the main highway and were taken into this almost other-worldly place with red sands and huge sandstone rocks the size of buildings. It is without doubt one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen. It is no surprise that it is a common location for Hollywood films such as *Star Wars*.

Sleeping arrangements in our camp consisted of large 15-person open tents. It wasn't comfy, but in my head, I would be so exhausted that I'd fall asleep quickly anyway.

Day 1 began with a 4 a.m. wake up, and the prospect of 48km. It was hotter than expected, with temperatures at the 40-degree mark. We started at 6 a.m. after consuming porridge (there was only hot water for food; no electricity or meals provided). The first 15km passed by well, just trying to feel myself into this new environment and situation. As the day wore on the



fatigue kicked in, and we needed to control hydration and nutrition. To give context, I drank over 13 litres of water on this first day and was still heavily dehydrated. Day 1 was ticked off and I felt in good condition, with a couple of blisters and a new tan.

Every day it was one ultra-marathon after another. The scenery was always beautiful, but it was totally relentless. When doing approximately 250,000 steps over five days the soft beachy sand makes a big difference to your leg muscles. The mental challenge of feeling like you've hit a wall, mixed in with the knowledge that you must do it all again the next day is brutal, and it led me to conclude that without doubt this was a far greater mental than physical challenge.

However, 5 days and 5 ultra-marathons later I crossed the finish line exhausted, but deeply proud of the achievement. After crossing the line and getting your medal, the overarching feeling is a sort of confusion, and you don't really know what to do with yourself, apart from try to take it all in. Once that feeling settled, I can honestly say that it was one of the greatest and most profound experiences of my life. It has changed my whole outlook on what we are capable of when we put our minds to it. There is so much more left in the tank than we can imagine.



The next challenge is soon though. With one of my closest friends, I'll be running from Brighton to London on August 26th which is approx. 60 miles. This is all to raise money for neonatal intensive care units. Sadly, the circumstances of this event came through one of our good friends losing his little boy earlier this year. It would be amazing to raise as much money as possible. If you would like to donate, you can follow on the link below: <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/remyspath>

## ANNUAL CRICKET MATCH

LGS 1st XI hosted the OLs in the highly anticipated annual fixture in early July. The OLs decided to bat first with LGS starting well, clean bowling Will Hunt in the third over. Strong partnerships throughout the innings allowed the OLs to reach a competitive 184-7 off their 25 overs. Highlights included Theo Rashid running himself out for the second time in three years, Tom Smith being scared of the short ball and Robbie Spencer hitting the ball into Great Glen on the way to top scoring with 49\*. There were notable performances from OL debutants Rohan Kelkar and Dhruv Chudasama with 20 and 17 respectively.

The LGS batting innings started well. However, tight bowling from the OL spinners pushed the required run rate up allowing the OLs to make some unorthodox bowling changes. The OLs made it three wins in three years with LGS finishing on 142-7, 42 runs short. James Hunt and Sachin Abeysondera were the pick of the bowlers with two wickets apiece.

Tea was enjoyed by players and spectators. Thanks to everyone involved in making the fixture a success and we look forward to returning in 2024. If you are reading this and would like to be involved, please reach out to



**Top Row (L-R) - Robbie Spencer, Zain Rizvi, James Scudamore, Theo Rashid, Robert Scudamore**

**Bottom Row (L-R) - Rohan Kelkar, Sachin Abeysondera, James Hunt, Will Hunt, Tom Smith, Dhruv Chudasama**

Will Hunt ([huntwilliam00@gmail.com](mailto:huntwilliam00@gmail.com)).

Kind regards,

Will Hunt

# Science Communicator

**SUSAN KOHLHAAS (OL '00)**

I moved to the UK in 1996 at the age of 14 from the USA and started school at LGS. My family wasn't planning on staying in the UK for very long so after my A-levels I went back to the US to get my undergraduate degree in Genetics at Iowa State University. Genetics was a fledgling field at the time. We hadn't even discovered the human genetic code and I really liked working in an area that was cutting-edge.

I worked part-time throughout University in a biotech start up and this helped me to land a PhD place at the Medical Research Council Toxicology Unit at Leicester University when I finished my degree. My PhD was in the field of blood cancer and I spent the three and a half years researching how to make cancer cells die. After my PhD I went to the Babraham Institute at Cambridge University to study the role of a newly discovered type of molecule called microRNAs in the immune system.

A couple of years into my postdoc I had a nagging feeling that I would be better suited to broader study of science and I decided to start exploring other career options and settled on the field of science communication.

I was lucky enough to find a role at the Multiple Sclerosis Society. MS is an autoimmune disease that affects around 130,000 people in the UK. I was the sole person in the charity with responsibility for science communication and



consequently it was demanding. But it was a transformative role in my career because I very quickly had to move from mastery of the scientific detail to communication to a wider audience.

The breadth of the role meant I was able to work with every other department in the charity as well as some amazing scientists and, most importantly, people living with MS who had a real hunger for clear information about the latest research.

The MS Society also gave me my first opportunity of national media engagement. Since then

I have been on the BBC Breakfast sofa several times, was interviewed by Evan Davies and Amol Rajan on Radio 4, and Nick Ferrai on LBC. Media interviews are always intense but, like all public speaking, seizing every opportunity, however daunting, builds confidence.

Over time, I moved roles and eventually became Director of Research at the MS Society. It was a much more strategic role that demanded close links with senior stakeholders. I developed the research plans that would form the basis of our £100M 'Stop MS' fundraising appeal. I'm incredibly proud to have played a small part in research developments for people with MS.

In August 2020 I joined Alzheimer's Research UK as their Director of Research. It was a strange time to join an organisation right in the middle of a pandemic. We're the largest charity in the UK dedicated to dementia research

and we rely solely on donations from the public. My first six months was spent working out how we were going to maintain momentum in our growing research programme with so much uncertainty around funding. I'm glad we've come through the other side unscathed!

We fund upwards of £25M of research every year and I'm responsible for maximising our impact for that spend, whether that be through partnership with other organisations, working with donors to make sure their donation goes to the best projects or working directly with the research community on some of the biggest challenges in the field. I'm lucky to have a great team to work with and a supportive set of advisors.

My job varies day-to-day. One day I could be at a conference or doing site visits at labs, another I could be doing media work or meeting with donors and supporters.

It can be surreal at times. Last October I joined a fundraising trip to Singapore and Malaysia with David Cameron who serves as Alzheimer's Research UK's President. This is something I never imagined I'd do!

Dementia is a difficult disease to work on. For many years there was underinvestment because people thought it was just an inevitable result of aging. That's not the case. If we do nothing about dementia, one in two of us born today will be affected by it. It's the number one cause of death. Yet we have no treatments that can slow, stop or reverse dementia much less a cure. That's why Alzheimer's Research UK exists.

We're finally starting to see some progress in the field. Last year we got the news we'd been waiting for. Results of a phase 3 trial showed that a drug called Lecanemab could slow cognitive decline in people with early signs of Alzheimer's Disease (one of the major causes of dementia). I received the news at 6:30 in the morning and we had our statement out to the media within the hour. I spent most of that day doing radio and tv interviews in between Board meetings which also happened to fall on that day. I was on Breakfast, Radio 4, Al Jazeera TV and countless others. It was an exciting day and it's important to be able to share good news with people affected by dementia.

There's been more good news. In May, a drug called Donanemab showed a similar effect in people with Alzheimer's Disease. There's a way to go before these treatments will be available on the NHS but I'm excited to be on the cusp of a first generation of treatments because it will unlock the door to more investment, understanding and progress.

I fell into the charity sector. It wasn't something I thought about as a career path. But I wouldn't change it for the world. It's opened doors to some amazing experiences. I've met Prime Ministers, Nobel Prize winners, senior figures in business and even a few celebrities. But most importantly, I get to work with people affected by diseases that I hope to be able to say will one day be cured and I can see that the work I'm contributing to will make a positive difference to society.

# Returning to the alma mater

**NIKKI LAYBOURNE (née WARD) OL '05**



I was a student at LGS from 2001-2005.

My university course was in Sports and Exercise Science (BSc) Exercise Physiology (MSc) at Loughborough University. After graduating I spent some time as a Sports Graduate at Oundle School before returning to LGS in 2011 as a Teacher of PE and Games.

It was slightly strange returning to the School having been a pupil here myself, especially as there were a lot of familiar faces in the PE Department. However, having been a pupil at the old site it did feel very different, with fewer places in which to hide away and a lack of choices of coffee shops and places to visit for lunch. What I have discovered is that Mr Thacker is actually not scary at all, Mr Berry still tells exactly the same jokes and that Mr Potter can still fill any gap that needs filling with a story about Cricket or Australia...!

Significant among my achievements at the School has been the establishment of the Girls' Cricket Programme, a highlight of which was taking two teams to the National Indoor Finals at Lords. I was particularly pleased with the U13s who finished 2nd in the country, with over 850 Schools having entered.

I have also enjoyed running numerous sports tours, including to Singapore & Malaysia, Glasgow, Holland and sunny Great Yarmouth.

My most recent achievement is being appointed joint Head of Year 9.

# Freelance Actor

**RUBY ABLETT (OL '14)**

A few months after finishing Amy A-Levels, I made the big move to North London to study acting at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. My course was almost entirely practical. However, what the course lacked in written work, it made up for in tuition time: classes were from 8am to 7pm, five days a week. We studied everything from Shakespeare to Sondheim, phonetics to clowning, and there was even a module on Leicester's famous playwright, Joe Orton.

After three gruelling years, I graduated with a first class honours degree and, more crucially, an agent. With the vast majority of castings happening behind closed doors, having an agent with excellent connections is essential, especially in the early stages of your career.

What I didn't expect was that my profession would take me all over the country, and in my six years working in the Arts industry I have relocated almost a dozen times. My work in theatre has taken me to the Bolton Octagon (Threepenny Opera and A Christmas Carol), to Derby Theatre (Wind in the Willows), to the Mercury Theatre, Colchester (Alice in Wonderland), and, most recently, to the Cambridge Arts Theatre for pantomime. Filming work has had me spending a freezing cold January on Dartmoor, being strapped to a moving vehicle racing through a tunnel in Ramsgate, and even hanging out in Hamburg with Liverpool FC manager Jurgen Klopp. I have learnt to expect the unexpected, and whilst uprooting my life every few months is an exhausting process, it has also allowed me to explore, and to live in places I previously knew little about.

Last year, I spent nine months performing in the West End, in a National Theatre production, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (based on the novel by Neil Gaiman). My role involved physical theatre, illusions, and even operating a 4 legged, 4-metre-tall puppet! As an understudy, I was also expected to step into



other roles when cast members were absent, and with Covid still forcing actors into isolation, I ended up performing six different 'show tracks'. I was even asked to play the lead role - a role I wasn't expected to cover - with just 48 hours notice. After commenting on my experience of understudying on social media, I was approached by the Evening Standard, and commissioned to write an article on the growing importance of understudies, and the need for them to be respected and better supported within the industry. You can find that article on the Evening Standard online by searching my name.

Many of my jobs within theatre have involved playing instruments on stage as part of the action. Little did I know that my two short years spent hovering around LGS's music department, under Dr Whittle's watchful eye, would provide me with a wealth of employable skills. I will forever be grateful to Dr Whittle for

inspiring my musicianship and providing me with an invaluable musical toolbox. As a result I have even had the confidence to learn the saxophone and accordion 'on the job', and hope to pick up new instruments in the future!

Working as a freelancer in the Arts industry is not without its challenges. Jobs are short-term, which means I am constantly searching for the next job, and when jobs don't line up, I have to find an alternative source of income. Our Union, Equity, is currently fighting for better rates of pay, and for a five-day working week.

One of my biggest surprises as a professional actor is the strength of the relationships I make with colleagues along the way. Performing three shows a day over Christmas, when you're exhausted, full of cold, and missing home, requires a special kind of workplace camaraderie, and actors, creatives and crew alike have to work together closely from the start. Despite the finite nature of my contracts, I continue to make enduring friendships which makes all the difference.

# Chief Executive of Universities UK

**VIVIENNE STERN (OL '95)**

Guest speaker this year at our Celebration of Achievement evening

I studied English Literature at Cambridge and found myself, having completed my final exams, with no idea at all what to do next. One afternoon, while returning a book to the library, I saw a leaflet advertising an Italian language course in Bologna. I figured I might as well not-know-what-to-do-next in Italy as in Leicester and so, a few weeks later I turned up at the train station in Bologna – speaking Italian entirely based on my reading of Dante’s Divine Comedy. It was quite a shock being so entirely unable to communicate and completely alone, but it was also one of the best things I have ever done.

I never had a plan – but as Steve Jobs put it “You can’t connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. You have to trust the dots will somehow connect in your future.” And so, nearly thirty years later, I found myself leading a national campaign to ensure UK students had opportunities to study abroad. This led to the creation of the Turing Scheme which funds students in schools, colleges and universities to spend time studying around the world. Without intending to, or planning it, most of my professional life has focussed on international exchange in education and research. Having started my career back in the UK working in Parliament, and then as a lobbyist, I became Universities UK’s International Director in 2014. In that role I worked to ensure the UK was attractive to international students and to grow the UK’s international research networks. I became involved in trade policy and (inevitably) a lot of Brexit. More recently I helped to co-ordinate the response by the UK university sector to the war in Ukraine. I am also proud to be a trustee of the Council for At Risk Academics, which supports academics fleeing persecution.

I am now the Chief Executive of Universities UK, the major representative body for our university system. This is perhaps the only audience which will appreciate just how neat it is that, having been a member of Vice Chancellor’s House at LGS, I now work with actual Vice Chancellors every day.

Our job is to support our universities to thrive – through



influencing government policy and by bringing them together to work to improve things that could be better. To give you a couple of examples, we have done a huge amount of work to help universities support students facing mental health challenges and to reduce the attainment gaps between students of different ethnicities; but we’re also out there stuck into the big politics, like increasing economic growth; health, innovation, skills and even foreign policy.

I regard it a huge privilege and a responsibility to occupy my current role. The UK’s universities

are a fundamental national asset, educating about 2.7 million students at any one time, employing just over 1% of the entire UK workforce. They contribute to the economy in many ways, not just through teaching students and conducting research, but by supporting companies and public services to innovate and by attracting inward investment.

Although I didn’t plan anything, I love the field I work in. I worked my way up through Universities UK over a 20 year period, learning about everything from how universities work with business, to their extraordinary international reach. I have seen many things change for the better over that time – including the proportion of students who come from the least advantaged backgrounds who go to university. I am still learning every day.

Looking backwards, I can see what led me here, and what school and university contributed to it. I was mostly quite happy at school, though never particularly cool, or particularly popular. I was spectacularly badly dressed- I once went to a school disco in a nightshirt by mistake –and I was very, very pretentious. But somehow that was all ok. I had a few teachers who just opened up this world of possibilities: like Mr Pollard and Mr Kidd who taught English, and Julie Freestone who taught Drama.

I am glad I followed the advice of those who encouraged me to do what I loved. I am grateful for the opportunities I had at LGS to learn to argue and to listen to others’ arguments; to perform; to be curious; and the strange rewards that come from taking responsibility.

# Reflections

## TREVOR ALLEN RETIRES AFTER 35 YEARS AT LGS

Thirty-five years is a long time to commit to anything and so, as I approach my last few weeks at the school, I thought it a good idea to reflect back and offer some thoughts on my time here, the school more generally and how things have changed.

When I arrived here in 1988, I'd already done 9 years in a state school in east London. That was an amazing place to cut one's teeth as a new teacher.

The school was a girl's grammar, merging with a mixed secondary in order to produce a 'new' comprehensive; on top of the chaos that this transition created we were a split site school divided by one of the busiest roads in London and the renowned (well, at least to East Enders (cor blimey mate!)) Gants Hill roundabout. Staff had to jump in a mini bus at break and lunch times in order to get from one site to another - and people think life at LGS is tough!

Anyway after 9 years and with young children about to start school I felt it was time for a change and so I applied for the job of History teacher at LGS. The interview was interesting - meeting Tim Cawston and Chris Morgan - both wonderful colleagues, sherry with the Head (who was doing a valiant impression of Ron Berry) and a strange session with the bulldog that was Colonel Sharpe. Here was a man whose name says it all really. I vividly remember him telling me, in no uncertain terms, that if he told me to 'shift chairs' then this is what I would do. Little did I know that 'chair shifting' was so central to school life at the old site that it was almost part of the curriculum. Anyway, on that day I also met Richard Longson - a lifelong friend and a man to whom I owe a great deal. Richard just seemed so very enthusiastic about the school, History and me (well I hope so!). I got the job and that's where it all began.

Little did I know that my first classroom would be just metres away from where Richard III was discovered. When I take my grandchildren to the Richard III centre this summer I will be proud to tell them that my classroom is now a key room in the exhibition centre. There will also be stories about the other facilities we had in that building. I used to particularly enjoy break time tea in the Library. I think we had tea served to us. There, colleagues such as Joyce Rose, Rosemary Hall and I would just chat about life, school, families



- good times! For a historian these were exciting times too! The Cold War ended! - and some of you older types might well remember the lesson in October 1989 when I predicted, with some confidence that the Berlin Wall would never fall in my life time - only to go home that very evening to see, on the news, people hacking down the Berlin Wall - there is a lesson to be learnt here but I'm not sure what it is.

As Head of History, I was fortunate to work with an amazingly talented, dedicated bunch of History enthusiasts

who were all devoted to the subject and who saw the subject as not just one that exists inside a classroom. That is what I have always believed. Not only is History the most important subject in the curriculum but it is a part of what we all are - it is, as Lord John Russell said, 'the house in which all other subjects dwell'. So, for me, it was really exciting to start the idea of History Conferences; our first was on a really cold night in autumn, held in the Guildhall, with a roaring open fire and academic guests, one of whom was Henry Cohn from Warwick University. I remember he spoke about Charles V and sported a pair of trousers that can only be described as gravity defying (I'll let you ponder this one!). Then there were the Battlefields trips, 31 in total, probably my favourite events overall. Taking students to places that mattered to them and should matter to us all, like the Thiepval Memorial and Tyne Cot, was a moving and important part of what I have tried to give to the school. On top of the actual history ('this trip is not a fashion parade') there was also the camaraderie with colleagues, Belgian cuisine, Belgian beer (sadly no longer accessible on any school trip), the end of trip quiz and so much more. I have seen things on this trip that few have ever witnessed - Peter Handford in his swim shorts coming down a water flume and on the disco dance floor (not in his swim shorts!); David Crawford convincing students that Belgium's economy was centred on frog farms and a mini hurricane that seemed to blow one of Nieuwport's cat population out to sea. There was also the infamous eastern European coach driver who insisted on calling me 'Meester Trevor' and used the most circuitous routes to get from A to B. He must surely have been working secretly for one of the major oil companies. One of the most rewarding things for me has been the number of students who have said over the years that their favourite trip ever was the Battlefields trip. I hope it was always for the



right reasons. It's great that Andy Picknell, our current Head of History, is reviving the trip this autumn after the 'Covid break'.

**Outside of the classroom there were plenty of weird and wonderful escapades that I recall fondly - here are a few:**

- Tried to impersonate John Cleese in the Dead Parrot sketch at the Blue Parrot Show
- Chased two thieves stealing a video player out of St Martin's, down Peacock Lane and across the Cathedral Forecourt into Guildhall Lane. They dropped the machine and, wonderfully, it still worked!
- Had my beard shaved off for charity.
- Shared a bedroom with Tony Duffield (details will be given in my future book - let's just say it was noisy)
- Attended a Greek disco with Phil de May called something like Hot Stuff (that's the disco not Mr de May), I seem to recall - we were searching for a missing student!
- Appeared in the staff footy team on multiple occasions (we usually lost when playing the students)

On one occasion the Headmaster, John Sugden, came on as a second half substitute wearing a pair of shorts so voluminous, they could only have been purchased from the gift shop at the Sir Stanley Matthews Memorial Museum. A slight gust of wind would have revealed more about the Headmaster than any of us would have ever wanted to know.

Then came 21 years as Head of Sixth, combining this with the History teaching. This gave me even more

opportunities to do what I had been doing in History but on a bigger scale. So, another aspect of my work that I look back on with huge pride has been the programme of guest speakers I've invited into school. The opportunity to sit and listen to experts, people with a passion about something was denied me when I was at school, so my 'mission' was to give all 6th formers the chance I never had. I could not possibly go through all of the guests we have had, not all have been as entertaining as others, but I feel passionately that LGS should be about 'education' in the round, and anything we can do to get our students to understand the world better and be active participants in that world, has to be a good thing and must continue. That was also the guiding principle behind my assemblies, Question Time and debating. What the job of Head of Sixth gave me, above all, was the chance to work with individual students, offer some advice and see how their careers developed. It is always a massive joy to hear from or meet OL's just to see what they are doing with their lives.

Debating has also been central to my time here. Why don't more people get angry about things? Is it just me? Why do so many people believe politicians? - so, getting students to have the confidence to argue and present a case, defend their views and think about issues that should matter to us all, seems to me to be a pretty important part of what school should be about. When I look at the Senior Debating shield it is crammed with the names of many of the 'great and good' of the school - thanks to you all for entertaining me!

Then we moved to Great Glen - an even longer ride on the trustworthy bike but still, on most days, a pleasure to come to work. The new site gave us the chance to carry on with many of the things I had enjoyed so much from the old site, such as playing footy with colleagues on a Friday after school and some new ones too. Staff karaoke (Ra Ra Rasputin anyone?); House 'Just a Minute' (apologies for breaking one of the golden rules of that game here - namely deviation) and, above all, our two History Festivals. These were big events which took hours and hours and hours to organise but were well worth it - all of the people who attended did, I think, learn something and see History as something exciting, relevant and engaging. I hope the Festivals continue too. There was another foreign trip to add to the calendar, this time to Madrid and Toledo so no Belgian beer on this one but plenty of great food, good company and wonderful sites such as Toledo Cathedral and El Escorial. The first couple of times on this one were very much, 'let's give it a try,' but once we were in the groove it became a splendid event, Eleanor Pottinger and I even managed to run this one without either of us speaking a word of Spanish. The trip this February was my last overseas LGS trip ever, what a difference it made to have a fluent Spanish speaker, Ms Julian, with us; what was similar to pretty much all of my trips was my excessive spending of the 'school' budget. (apologies Stephen!)

So, what's changed about the school and the students in it? It is sadly the collapse in book-based learning and book culture and the rise of technology that has been the biggest change - and has that been for the better? Apparently over half of the UK adult population has not read a book in the last year. Parents tell me that their son/ daughter has 'given up on reading' - that's just crazy and it's having a massive impact on our students. They know less, are culturally less aware, cannot concentrate for long periods and are just missing out on one of the great joys in life. Somehow the school has to reverse this. The school is bigger, we offer more, we are busier and the whole routine just seems more hectic. Things like the Blue Parrot Charity show just would not happen now because staff are too tired to put in the hours of extra work and in any case would students, reared on a diet of Tik Tok (whatever that is) and Netflix really support such a thing? - I'm not convinced.

The best guide without doubt to the way the school has changed is the old detention book. This is the best exhibit in the school archive and if ever I am asked to curate an exhibition on the history of the school, this would get pride of place. I have a claim to fame in that I am the last member of staff to have supervised the detention under the old regime - there is my scrawled signature (in hieroglyphics obviously) on the last page of this tremendous insight into student behaviour. A kaleidoscope of various misbehaviours litters the pages, such as -

'upsetting Mr Berry'

'climbing up the basket ball post'

'using a device emitting foul language'

'Obscene gestures in the back of the mini bus'

'Ignorant comments on an exam paper'

And my personal favourite

'great rudeness - thinly disguised as Art'

Such things just do not happen now, much misbehaviour that staff face today is phone based, disguised as 'banter' or just plain cruel.

The school is bigger, busier and more demanding than ever. So, time for me to move on. As mentioned earlier, I have worked with so many lovely people and some truly great History teachers, That has most certainly not changed. My colleagues give 100%+ day in day out to try to get the students to be what we are - knowledgeable enthusiasts. It would be churlish to single out any individuals from my time here because so many staff have helped and supported me so much, but Richard Longson was my go to support person for so long that I owe him a tremendous set of thanks; Andy Picknell has baled me out (not balled me out!) on so many occasions that he deserves some sort of medal (the rescue mission from the Isle of Man is a long story) and the friend and colleague whom I miss so much to this very day is the late Barbara Harper - if only she was still with us!

My very deepest thanks to all staff who have taught with me in the History Department, who have helped me staff trips, who have supported events I have run, who have been 6th form tutors and Personal Tutors (still the best system I feel!); to Duncan Willis for concerts and the Friday football (and so much more), to Peer Moor Friis for the craziest assemblies ever, to James Hunt and Zoe Village for being so supportive, to anyone who has ever given me a lift (because I still don't drive), to Andy Picknell, Amanda McHugh, Vicky Hird and Jen Young for their help and support this year above all and to all of the students who have ever crossed the threshold into my History room - I wish you all well.

The epitaph can only come from one of my heroes in History - Emperor Charles V

'I have done what I could and am sorry that I could not do it better'

**TREVOR ALLEN - MAY 2023**

## AN INVITATION FROM OUR CAREERS LEADER

In the past year, students in Year 10 and 12 have been fortunate to hear from a number of OLs returning to speak about their career journeys, post-LGS. Dulcie Barre, James Bentley and George Regan all extolled the virtues of the higher or degree apprenticeship route: Dulcie at L'Oreal; James at JLR and TFL and George at Barclays. Nick Njopa-Kaba spoke about his experiences of Engineering at Durham, whilst Matthew Ainge talked about his Economics and Finance course at Bristol. Envisaging their own lives after LGS vicariously through the stories of those



returning to speak to them is my most powerful tool as Careers Leader. In the students' words, the OLs are so 'relatable!' Therefore my plea to you is to contact me and see how you can get involved in one of the careers activities and events we offer. Your contribution will be the cherry on top of the support we give students to understand and decide upon the career direction that suits them best. We invite you to take up this opportunity to return to LGS and give something tangible back. Please contact [scottc@leicestergrammar.org.uk](mailto:scottc@leicestergrammar.org.uk) if interested.

**CLARE SCOTT - CAREERS LEADER**

# Teacher of Vocal Technique to Rock Stars, Professional Singers and Beginners

## EDWARD STAUNTON (OL '95)

It is certain that teaching singing was never the plan. It was not even close to being on Mr. Longson's list of recommended careers. Only a stint in the school band showed me or anyone else that I had any musical ability. Luckily, a career U-turn in my late twenties (and the fine education of LGS!) meant that I am now teaching rock stars and Grammy winning singers.

My original plan was to study medicine, but my parents' divorce in the middle of Sixth Form threw my grades off course. Instead, I opted for Psychology & Physiology, with no clue as to what career it might provide but simply because it interested me. In retrospect, it was one of the best decisions I ever made: to study what I was interested in, rather than what might be 'useful'. Without knowing it, my degree would give my future career a unique selling point.

After university I fell into a job with an I.T./internet company at the start of the dot-com bubble. I moved company once and got asked to project- manage the worst project they had. To give my life balance, I started a band in London with long-time schoolfriend and fellow OL, Dom Cook. I'd played guitar for a few years and could sing ok, but my 'Kurt Cobain' style of singing gave me increasingly bad vocal tension. I needed a singing teacher, and was lucky enough to find one who didn't own cats or wear pashminas.

After a few years of lessons, various bands, and the aforementioned terrible I.T. project, I read a life-changing careers book, 'How to Get a Job You Love'. I shortlisted either secondary science teacher or musician. I told my singing teacher about my career change and he came back the following week and offered me a job as a trainee teacher. He also suggested a training programme run in the U.S. by Michael Jackson's vocal coach. What really piqued my interest was that MJ's coach charged \$500 an hour!

Training took place over a number of years between London and L.A., and alongside it I went back to university to do a music degree, and also began teaching evenings and weekends. Life was hard work but finally fun. The difference was I now had a future to look forward to. I've now spent the last twenty years teaching degree-level vocals at the best contemporary music colleges in London, and I have my own private studio in Soho, Central London. I work with professional singers through to absolute beginners, and across all contemporary genres. Professionals are often preparing for tours or auditions; beginners are generally learning how to sing



with control and in pitch.

I'm lucky enough to have been trained by some of the best teachers in the world, and I've taught some truly world-class singers. Highlights include: working with Roland Orzabal from Tears For Fears on 'Head Over Heels' and 'Sowing The Seeds of Love' before the start of his world tour; having Birdy play me an only-just-written song during a lesson; being given front-row tickets for 'Chicago The Musical' by my student, Sarah Soetart, who was playing the lead, Roxie Hart. I specialise in vocal technique - that is, fixing and fine-tuning voices; reducing tension and cracks, increasing control, range and power. After that, all the cool stuff, like emotion and dynamics (i.e. tone and volume changes), comes much more easily. Some people do have more extreme mental or medical conditions - anxiety or vocal nodules (blisters for the voice); and a small part of my work is allied with speech therapists or ENT doctors. I love the variation - the mixture of voices and people. Piecing together the puzzle, unravelling the mess.

Obviously I need to know a lot about music and singing (e.g. what a C#dorian scale is, how and when to add vibrato). The unexpected part is the amount of A-level physics and biology I employ behind the scenes: sound waves, vocal harmonics, structure of the larynx, resonance of the vocal tract. Mr Christie and Mr Duffield would both be very pleased! The best part of my job is seeing the joy singing brings to people, especially the singer. Helping them loosen a tight voice or strengthen a breathy one; allowing them to convey their emotions; to paint in technicolour instead of monochrome. My change of tack took me years of hard graft - and set me back several years - but it finally feels like I'm being rewarded.

# A mission to serve

**MARIA KING (née MATHEW) OL '95**

Three decades have passed since reading the book whilst at LGS that provided direction for my life. The Cross and the Switchblade showed me at 13 years old the power of choices and the effects of taking drugs. Over the years I have seen the real and devastating impact on individuals, families and communities. I have also seen that hope is real and complete freedom from addiction is possible.

I serve in the executive office at Betel UK, a Christian residential community helping people recover from addiction and substance misuse. As a charity Betel International started in Spain almost 40 years ago with missionaries seeking to help one man struggling with addiction in Madrid. That first "Betelito", Raul Casto, turned his life around and wanted to help others. Betel International is now in over 100 cities in 22 nations around the world, led predominantly by men and women written off by society who came to Betel seeking help. It is a life-changing, alternative peer-led caring community.

Starting with a small team who came to the UK from Spain in 1996, Betel UK now has six centres across the country. It can help around 400 people at any one time, free of charge. Our men and women, often coming from extremely chaotic broken lifestyles, with many ex-offenders, are trained and mentored through a number of our charitable businesses which provides a constructive supportive work and community environment. As a charity, Betel is free of charge to enter and receives no government support. Generally our businesses generate 85% of what is required to operate.

The greatest joy is seeing people make good but sometimes hard choices to step into their future and find hope again. People come to us often having lived lives of selfishness, no longer knowing who they are. Seeing people transformed into caring for others, finding purpose as well as re-building healthy relationships, is a real blessing. People work through deep hurts here whilst building genuine friendships and having great banter.

After leaving LGS I studied Economics and then Law, serving in the US (in Washington DC and Michigan) and qualifying as a lawyer in London before moving to Birmingham with a job. The Cross and the Switchblade envisioned me to want to be involved in a community helping people with addictions. My plan had been to work as a lawyer to financially support



that kind of ministry but, as a Christian, I believe the Lord had other ideas. I stumbled upon Betel in Birmingham and having had friends die from addiction, I eventually felt led to serve full-time.

Whilst no longer practising as a commercial real estate lawyer, I regularly use the skills I obtained to assist the national directors and trustees with an increasingly varied mandate. Having served at Betel for over 13 years now, life is rarely dull. My work can range from helping with property matters across our UK centres, applying for funds, reporting on projects, reviewing legal documentation, drafting newsletters, instructing lawyers as well as liaising with professionals to

improve their understanding of the help we offer.

Many of our residents have children who are affected by their parent's struggles. Seeing relationships rebuilt is one of the highlights of serving here. Using my skills to help people navigate the legal system to re-establish contact with their children is a real honour. This often takes time but this support is proving increasingly helpful to those who have often had bad experiences (sometimes self-inflicted) of engaging with courts.

Whilst not the most lucrative of roles, it has been life-changing and is eternally rewarding. Seeing how much addiction affects all areas of society mattered to me at 13 and matters to me now. My husband, son and I live on-site, available 24-7 if required and are very much part of the community. I have also been involved in assemblies and at a mentoring scheme at a local inner city school in Birmingham which has led to a youth drugs initiative started up by the headmaster to help counteract the issues of substance abuse, gang violence and county lines issues affecting the futures of his students.

Should you like to find out more, Betel's website is [www.betel.uk](http://www.betel.uk). The sense of community, care and the opportunity to find real meaning here is only really understandable through the stories of our men and women. The recent book "Escaping Addiction," sharing powerful testimonies, is available from Betel's website. I look forward to hearing from any OLs who would like to discuss our work. Our new community hub Anchor Point ([www.anchorpoint.uk](http://www.anchorpoint.uk)) with a number of social enterprises in Aston is also well worth a visit.

# OL Award Conservation in Costa Rica

## LUCA McKINNON (OL '22) VOLUNTEERED ON TWO PROJECTS

I spent 9 weeks in the Central American country, 6 of which were volunteering at 2 different projects. My first week in the country was spent in a homestay in the capital city of San Jose which was beneficial as I went to the Costa Rican Language Academy. The small school of no more than 30 students specialised in teaching Spanish in a quick and efficient way and I saw an immediate increase in my ability to speak the language. I also visited the sprawling central market and a Division 2 football match with students from the school; there were so many of us that we made up almost half of the crowd at the match!

After my stay in San Jose, I moved on to my first and favourite project, the Natuwa Animal Rescue Sanctuary. The mission at Natuwa is to care for and rehabilitate injured animals as well as give a better life to animals rejected by owners or confiscated from the illegal pet trade. Natuwa offers tours to visitors to raise some funds but focuses more on bettering the lives of the animals. Also, the volunteers at Natuwa take precedence as they aim to give volunteers a great and lasting experience. Life at Natuwa was testing at times but also extremely rewarding. Days at the sanctuary started at 6am with manual work up until 3pm. Various jobs were included in the days' work, the main one of which was prepping and feeding the animals in the sanctuary. Food prep in the mornings and afternoons was the best job, as it was a social event in which all the volunteers were together, talking, working and listening to music. It was also a fantastic opportunity to get up close to the animals, of which there were over a 100 species, such as little marmosets, macaws, tapirs and the pride of the sanctuary, 4 jaguars. Although the work was tough, especially in the hot and humid climate, Natuwa taught me to work with other people in ways I had not done before, as well as giving me new skills such as leadership. The Wi-Fi was so atrocious that we were always socializing to keep busy, especially after work finished. The constant turn-around of volunteers also meant there were new faces and new conversations to be had. We had special day trips every Sunday to the national parks. My personal favourite was our trip to Monteverde, otherwise known as the Cloud



Forest. The wet season in Costa Rica runs from May to November, with the worst month being October, which was exactly when I was there. My visit to Monteverde lived up to the reputation October has, and my £15 Decathlon waterproof did not survive.

My second project was in Ostional, a small quiet fishing village on the Pacific coast. The reason I went to Ostional is because it has one of the few beaches which gets to experience the Arribada; a monthly event in which Oliver Ridley turtles come on to the beach in their tens of thousands to lay their eggs. Work in Ostional focused on Arribadas. However when there was not a major nesting of turtles, work was much slower. Night patrols, lasting 4 to 5 hours, made up the bulk of the volunteer's work. Patrols included finding nesting turtles and counting the number of eggs they laid, as well as measuring the turtle itself and recording data. The purpose of this was to

gain a general understanding of the health and nesting rate of the Oliver Ridley population in the area. Days were less busy than in Natuwa and we had more time to ourselves. This meant we could explore the local areas, rainforests and waterfalls. At the weekends we could go to the nearby town of Tamarindo to surf and go out for drinks.

After my volunteering, I was lucky enough to travel widely in the country with my brother Matt. I was able to see first-hand how the local people live by the saying 'Pura Vita' (Pure Life) by respecting the natural world.

I would like to thank the OL Association for their support and contribution to the funding of my trip, it was a brilliant experience.

## OL Award

# The challenges of delivering medical care in the Himalayas

## ARJAN JAIYEOLA (OL '14)

I never thought my 4-week medical elective in the Himalayas would involve me hallucinating, gasping for air, and stumbling around like I had one too many drinks. But that's exactly how I found myself during the expedition in August 2022. Luckily, I was part of a 30-person medical team that provided much-needed aid to locals in the North Indo-Tibetan regions. For two decades, Himalayan Health Exchange (HHE) has been sending healthcare professionals from around the world to these remote areas, funding surgeries, maintaining local health centres, and training local holistic healthcare providers. Our team consisted of 20 medical professionals, including doctors, students, a dentist, and an ultrasound technician, as well as 10 sherpas and a family of mules who helped transport medicines, cooking equipment, and other gear deep into the Kargiakh region.

Our journey began in the bustling city of Leh, Ladakh - a haven for adventure enthusiasts and spiritual seekers alike. After driving across the northern Indian plains, we arrived at our first clinic location and campsite. Little did we know, it was also the last time we would set foot in a vehicle for the rest of our expedition. From that point it was all on foot!

Adjusting to the altitude of the Himalayas was far more challenging than I could have imagined. Despite arriving early in Leh to acclimatize and to rest, some of us, including myself, found ourselves struggling. Our symptoms started with headaches, but quickly progressed to shortness of breath, a wobbly gait and, for me, even visual hallucinations. However, I refused to give up and managed to clear the 18,200 ft peak, despite the flashbacks of my childhood and impending sense of death. Later, I found out that I had COVID and an ear infection too! Altitude sickness was something we all tried to prepare for, but the Himalayas took its toll on us regardless.

One of the highlights of our trip was sleeping under the Milky Way with virtually zero light pollution. It reminded us of all the world's sheer beauty and to be grateful for life's simpler things. The mountain terrain changed frequently, and the weather was just as unpredictable. One moment we'd be hiking in warm 20-degree temperatures and the next we'd be scrambling for our jackets and rainproofs due to passing showers. Our longest hike was a gruelling 9 hours with a 3000ft elevation gain that tested our minds and bodies. Despite the struggles, Lama Ji, the monk leading our expedition, always kept us smiling with his



jokes and pranks during our rest breaks. It was a much-needed reminder to have fun and laugh, especially after the challenging routes we faced.

During the clinics, medical students like me had the opportunity to put our clinical knowledge into practice, taking on more responsibility than we might on a ward. After breakfast, we set up to see and treat locals, taking on different roles from basic observations to preparing treatment. The clinics were led by doctors and a medical student, and were overseen by a consultant. Translators, usually Sherpas or top students from a local school, helped us communicate with patients due to the language barriers and various Indian dialects. As a medical student with doctor-level responsibilities, the experience boosted my confidence and helped me battle imposter syndrome, a common challenge faced by medics and professionals throughout their careers.

The Himalayan landscape and Buddhist heritage shaped the locals' perspectives, leaving me in awe of their contentment despite their simple living conditions. Many of them lived in houses made of cow manure and relied on farming to feed their families. Access to healthcare was limited, with some villagers having to walk for days to reach a hospital. Despite this, the locals welcomed us with gratitude and warmth. Life was slow-paced and people were friendly, even while working in the fields under the

hot sun. Exposure to the high altitudes and sun had aged many, but they still had a deep spiritual connection to their land and showed great respect for it.

We had free time after clinics and hikes, and each evening a team member gave a 15-minute presentation. Topics ranged from local health conditions like TB and diabetes to broader topics such as altitude sickness and loneliness. On more demanding hike days, we relaxed with card games, journaling, meditation, reading, and occasionally a dip in a nearby river or stream if the weather permitted.

Surviving a close call and immersing myself in a vibrant culture filled me with profound gratitude. I appreciated simply being alive and having basic necessities like a home, clean water, and loving relationships. Learning to



accept help and recognize my limits taught me humility and the value of giving and receiving. Living among locals showed me that less is often more and that community and taking time for oneself and others can alleviate feelings of disconnection. A road sign in the Himalayas summed it up perfectly: "Time is money, but life is precious."

## THE VARIED LIFE OF A PROFESSIONAL SINGER STEPHANIE DIXON (née EDWARDS) OL' 02

**I have enjoyed music, especially singing, from a very young age, but never envisaged myself having the opportunity to do it as a profession. Now, 21 years since leaving LGS, I have had some of the most amazing experiences on and off the stage.**



Commencing singing lessons at the age of 14 with a local private tutor in my village, I was adamant that I only wanted to sing musical theatre songs because I had performed a lot of classical music as a violinist with both Leicestershire Arts and LGS. Jean was incredibly patient, yet frustrated at my refusal to accept her suggestions of classical pieces and it was only when I started competing in the Leicester Music Festival and taking ABRSM exams that I begrudgingly agreed to different repertoire. Fast forwarding five years, I won a scholarship to attend the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama to study Voice, homing in on the operatic/classical sound. Graduating with a first class BMus (Hons) degree after four years of intense study, I then continued training at the Royal College of Music in London as a Postgraduate student. Although professional performance opportunities arose after leaving RCM, I decided to attend the Wales International Academy of Voice in Cardiff to study for a Masters with Dennis O'Neill and Nuccia Focile and graduated with a distinction.

I have had a varied career to date, from performing on major operatic stages around the world, notably the Royal Opera House in London and also the Royal Opera House in Muscat, Oman, being a concert soloist at the Royal Festival Hall with the English Chamber Orchestra and Philharmonia Chorus, singing in the throne room at Buckingham Palace for the Royal Family, performing at the Thursford

Christmas Spectacular, working as a guest entertainer on cruises, to much smaller, more intimate performances in care homes, specialising in care for residents with dementia.

A contract that I regularly return to annually, since 2015, is the Thursford Christmas Spectacular. Thursford is a tiny village nestled between Holt and Fakenham in Norfolk and the Christmas Spectacular is the largest show of its kind in the country. Performed twice daily to an audience of 1400 people from November to the end of December, the

three hour fast-moving show has a cast of 120 singers, dancers, musicians, variety acts and a comedian compère. It has a mixture of seasonal favourites, well known songs from the charts, MT (why I love it!) and traditional Christmas carols along with continuous costume changes! After competitive singing and movement auditions in May, we usually start with music rehearsals in London at the end of September before heading to Norfolk at the beginning of October, where we commence rigorous 10-12 hour rehearsal days. We have four dress rehearsals before opening around the 9th November and the excitement is palpable when the audiences start arriving. One of my favourite parts of the show is when we break the 'fourth wall' on stage as we perform in the aisles, up close to the audience. It's a perfect way to musically and emotionally touch them and we sometimes shed a tear too. The final day is always a sad one but everyone is desperate to head home for Christmas even though one would happily never hear another Christmas song again...

Another intimate performing opportunity is on cruise ships. I have had the pleasure of being one half of a classical duo, myself and a pianist, since 2017. Travelling with close friends is always a bonus as we often share tiny cabins with

bunk beds in the crew quarters. Anyone would think it was a glamorous lifestyle but reality begs to differ. The number of 45-minute recitals we perform depends on the length of the cruise and the number of sea days. Often in smaller venues, we don't just sing and play to the audience. Instead it allows us to chat to them and break the barrier between performer and cruiser, allowing them an insight into our lives, our friendship and why we chose the music we are performing. Also, as we are working on board the vessel, we have the opportunity to be tour escorts on port days, allowing us to see the sights and experience the world as though we are guests too.

As you can tell, I'm leading an extremely varied life performing around the world and experiencing things I never deemed possible. I shall never tire of having the opportunity to do what I love and to be paid for it and for that I will be eternally grateful!



Stephanie at Thursford Christmas Spectacular



## ST NICHOLAS HALL

The School has close associations with the Leicester Music Hub, LGS Choral Society, Leicester's renowned Bardi Orchestra and the Leicester Philharmonic Choir and are eager to do more to support their vital work in developing for all a deep and lifelong connection with music. We are also committed to providing charity fundraising events at the school and to inviting pupils from the local area to LGS to experience the joy of live music. Our current financial situation means that we can already commit to some physical improvements to St Nicholas Hall, which also serves as our chapel or spiritual centre. However, without a fundraising effort to improve the acoustics, the hall will remain a rather dispiriting venue that fails to do justice to the ambitions, abilities and aspirations of the many people who use the space.

We are determined to turn St Nicholas Hall into an inspirational space that is acoustically and aesthetically alive, one that truly lifts our spirits and brings people of all ages together through music, song and spoken word. To do this, we need to raise £200,000 for an electro-acoustic system from Yamaha.

Some technical detail: Following a lengthy research, consultation and testing process, we are confident that the only way to achieve something truly transformational is to invest in an electro-acoustic system created by Yamaha. Such a system of discreet microphones and speakers would be designed specifically for our space and, moreover, would have settings to suit exactly our uses of the hall. This means that choral festivals, orchestra showpieces, big band concerts, solo and chamber recitals, dramatic performances and keynote speeches would each have their own acoustic setting that provides



**All registered donors are welcome free of charge at our annual Big Band Charity Concert on Wednesday 20th March at 7.30pm here at the Grammar School by way of thanks for your support.**

exactly the right balance of clarity and reverberation.

**We warmly encourage donations so please consider supporting us in this way. To donate, please visit: <https://www.lgs-senior.org.uk/page/?title=Donate&pid=240>**

## CONTACT US

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## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**Thursday 21st December at 6.00 pm**

Reunion and collection of certificates for Leavers of 2023  
All OLs are invited to join us for drinks, mince pies and a Christmas catch-up

**Thursday 11th April from 6.30 pm**

London Drinks at Betjeman Arms on St Pancras Station