



WYCHWOOD ASSOCIATION

News

No. 2 TRINITY TERM 2021



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Above: Aerial view of the Banbury Road frontage and main garden.

Front cover: Avenue, Ardington, woodcut and pochoir print by Catriona Brodribb (Shell 1973; www.catrionabrodribb.co.uk).

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WELCOME

Welcome

Welcome to the Trinity term edition of WA News – and thank you for all the positive feedback!

This edition is all about perspectives. A traditional highlight of Trinity term is the annual School Picnic – so we look back into the archives with memories of this event over the decades. Former and Current Headmistresses Lesley Duffill and Andrea Johnson compare notes and share anecdotes. We're brought up to date in conversation with Simon and Abigail Tyrrell, who explain why they decided to invest in Wychwood and reveal their plans for the future, including an exciting building project and the addition of rowing to the curriculum. We also hear from one of Wychwood's inspirational teachers: Christine Crossley explores questions of education and humanity.

Former Wychwood pupils are known for their wide range of careers, and in our regular "Where are they now?" pages we discover the joys of skydiving and fashion events management.

With the gradual lifting of Covid restrictions we're able to start planning events again: the list for the next few months includes the Careers Fair and the Christmas Fair organised by the Friends of Wychwood.

Finally, if you have any ideas about articles for future editions of the WA News or would like to be involved, please get in touch.

Claire Harvey (Shell 1979)

Head to Head

Two Wychwood Heads compare notes



“The Upper Transits introduced me to drugs” was the startling revelation of former Wychwood Headmistress Lesley Duffill in a recent conversation with current head teacher Andrea Johnson. The two were interviewed via Zoom for the 1980s Reunion last November, with Mrs Duffill at home in Sydney, Australia, and Mrs Johnson in her office at school. In the wide-ranging discussion they talked of the challenges a head teacher faces, the legacy of the changes undertaken - and the heart-warming story of Happy the Hamster...

When Mrs Duffill took over as Headmistress in 1981 she oversaw a major building programme and changes to the curriculum. Similarly, Mrs Johnson is overseeing important changes at the school following the major investment by Albion Schools. In the 1980s new bedrooms were built in the corridor between Sir John's and The House, a dining room was created in the basement, the laundry room in No. 4 was converted into a computer room and plans were set out for the new Hut (Hall) and the science laboratories. The latter were particularly important. As a biology teacher, Mrs Duffill was keen to develop the science curriculum “to keep up with the times”. Mrs Johnson, herself a chemistry teacher, agreed, saying they've continued to reap the benefits of this investment, with many Wychwood girls going on to study science at university.

Both heads spoke fondly of Wychwood's distinctive traditions, such as Form Plays, the school Council and



the annual School Picnic, which, in Mrs Duffill's words, “brought the whole school together for one day”. One tradition, the annual Staff Holiday, sadly ended during Mrs Duffill's headship but could return, according to Mrs Johnson. On this special day, Study girls would teach all the lessons while a few members of staff remained on site but in the background. Mrs Duffill reluctantly ended this tradition after some parents complained that they were paying for their girls to be taught by qualified teachers. Mrs Johnson said the Staff Holiday was a “brilliant idea” and one that she would like to consider resurrecting as it would give Study girls a good experience of the challenges of teaching. It is unclear if she will also reintroduce the tradition of staff having a glass of sherry before lunch, which many Old Girls will remember.

Every generation faces challenges that schools have to find ways of dealing with. As Mrs Johnson explained, these now include the addictive nature of mobile phones, the problems of cyber bullying and also drugs. These issues all require the school to have clear policies, as they did in Mrs Duffill's day. Under her headship a group of Upper Transits girls (aged 15/16) were found smoking cannabis in the basement. As Mrs Duffill recounted, the girls told a “pile of confused stories about where they bought it and how much they paid”. They even argued that “since the transaction took place outside the school gates, it was nothing to do with me and they would keep it secret!” She called a school meeting of parents and governors, at which

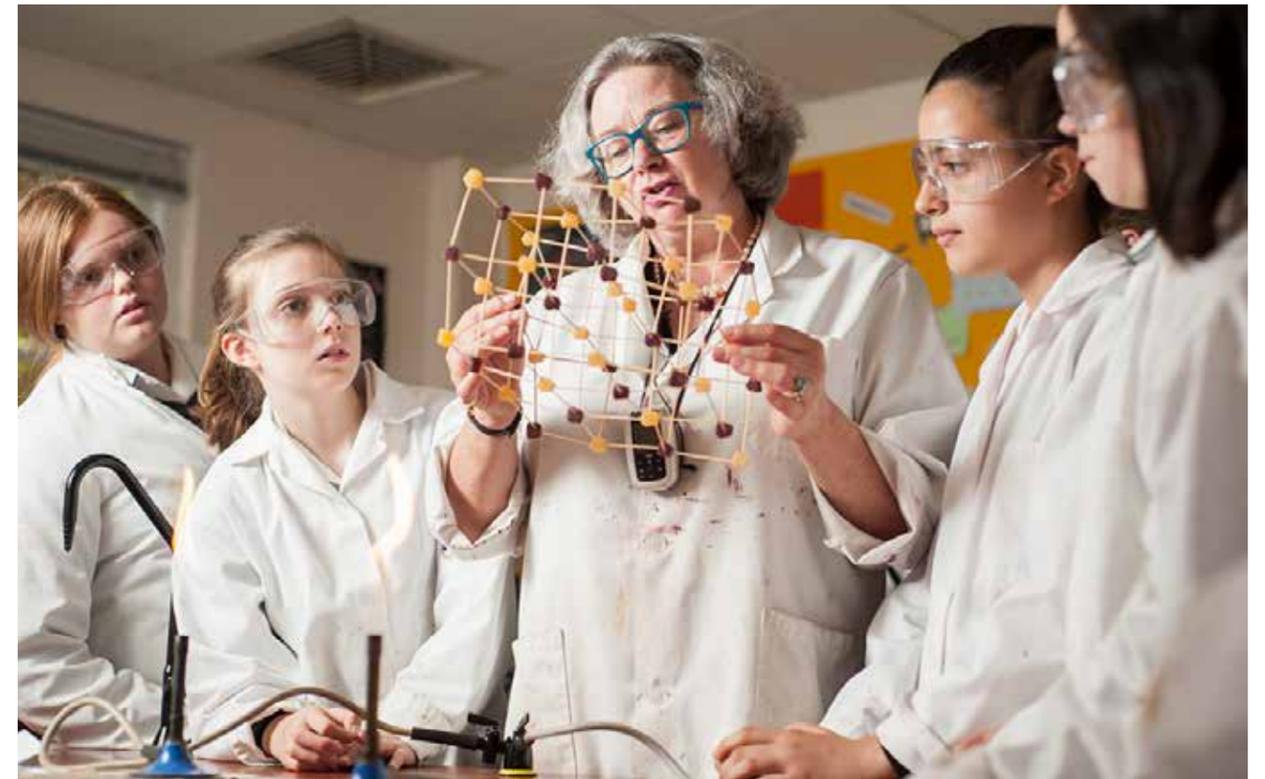
“We are very proud of our girls for their successes

some wanted the offenders to be expelled; however, as Mrs Duffill told the meeting, “We are very proud of our girls for their successes and we should look after them when they make mistakes.” She went on: “I wasn't very popular but the girls stayed and they all turned out perfectly OK.” Mrs Johnson reflected that as Head it is necessary to have “selective vision”: “there are things that one does see and there are things that one absolutely does not see.”

Among Mrs Duffill's amusing anecdotes was the story of Happy the Hamster from the days when

pupils were allowed to keep pets at school. One day a very tearful Remove girl came in to the biology lab carrying a brown paper bag, saying “my hamster died in the night in the cold. Would you help me bury him? His name is Happy.” Mrs Duffill recalled: “I looked at the hamster and it was stiff and cold”. So Happy was left in the bag on the front bench of the lab to await burial during breaktime. She continued: “As I started teaching, I thought I noticed the bag moving across the front bench. Then I saw it definitely was moving.” The lesson was stopped, the bag opened and Happy the Hamster had come back to life. Mrs Duffill concluded: “I'm not sure if it was a prank... But for ages afterwards the girl called me her life saver.”

For the full Head to Head interview go to <https://wychwoodschool.org/wa> login and follow the links to **80s Reunion**.



The School Picnic

A great Wychwood tradition

The School Picnics first started in the 1920s and were held for many years in Wychwood Forest, 20 miles west of Oxford. Louie Nelson recalls the picnic of 1928:

We all started out in char-a-bancs after lunch, carrying boxes and tins in which any wild flowers could be put. At the forest we spent most of the time botanizing, which, though it sounds like work, is not dull when you are looking for rare specimens in order to puzzle Miss King.

Soon we came upon the lake and immediately shoes and stockings were cast off and feet were dangling in the cool water.

Then came tea – a mixture of buns, people and lemonade! After tea came more botanizing and dangling of feet in the water and then at the appointed time we all came to the trysting place and when it was discovered that no one was missing we trudged up to the char-a-bancs again and packed ourselves in. Soon school was sighted and we all knew that the end of a perfect day had come.

“The weather didn’t matter, it was freedom and fun

From the Archives

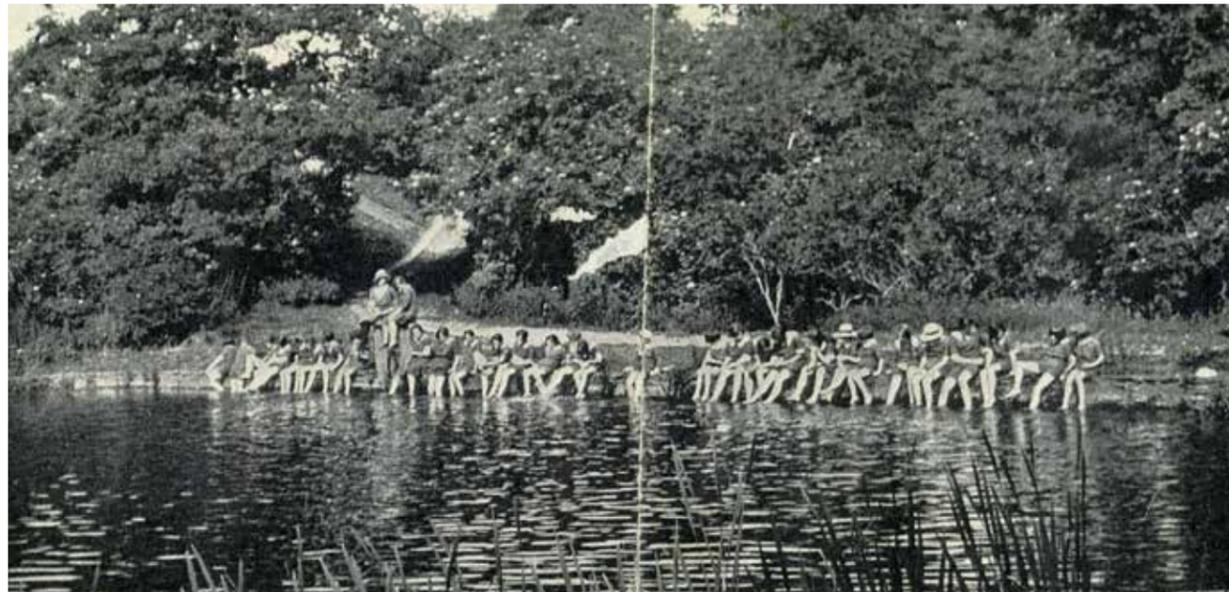
“One of the highlights of Trinity term is the School Picnic whereby the whole school comes together for a day away from the classroom. Unlike larger schools where such an event would resemble a military operation the joy of Wychwood’s modest size is that everyone can simply pile onto a few coaches and enjoy a day out together.”

The School Picnic was still being held in Wychwood Forest during the 1960s. A number of former students have posted their recollections of the picnic on the Wychwood School Association Facebook page:

What freedom we had! I seem to remember there was a wishing well we had to find as we always forgot where it was from one year to another. [Stephanie Carter]

I remember looking for antlers and finding two to take back to school. [Jane Hughes]

A School Picnic in Wychwood Forest



I remember drinking from the mint-filled stream, which gave the water a lovely flavour. You wouldn’t do that now perhaps? [Judi Whymark]

Simple pleasure of walking around in this private forest knowing that it was just us there. Looking on with amusement and wondering at the staff sitting together while they enjoyed their picnic. Then managing to find a lake to wash our hair in, a luxury given that hair washing at school then (1962) only happened once a fortnight, at the hairdressers in North Parade. [Hannah Strange]

Miss Snodgrass (Headmistress) relaxes at a School Picnic in the 1960s.



School Picnics through the decades.

In the 1970s the School Picnic was held at Christmas Common, south-east of Oxford, for a number of years. But sometimes the weather caused alternative plans to be made:

Always such a great day! I remember the brown paper bags our picnics came in. Also the year the weather was so bad and we were all sent off to the cinema instead to see Gone with the Wind. [Doulla Croft]

I remember playing hide and seek in the scrub / ferns – loved it. [Sarah Dolan]

I remember it as a day off, a coach ride ... exciting and special food ... crisps. The weather didn’t matter, it was freedom and fun. [Kate Hutson]

Nowadays the destination of the School Picnic is chosen by the longest-serving member of staff and is kept secret, which adds to the excitement of the day. In recent years it has been held at Shirburn Castle and Kew Gardens. The WA will be supporting this year’s picnic by paying for an ice cream van to turn up at the mystery venue.

“We all knew that the end of a perfect day had come

Mouthpiece

Helping students become more human



Christine Crossley is Head of Religious Studies at Wychwood.

On my first day as a new teacher at Gosford Hill School back in the early 1980s, I was handed the following to read:

Dear Teacher: I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates. So, I am suspicious of education. My request is: Help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.

The letter convinced me of the importance of teaching, why I was doing it and that I had chosen the right career.

Several decades on, with experience of working in different educational settings in Oxfordshire, these words have stayed with me

and have continued to inspire what I do. While schools set out to help their pupils gain academic results which undoubtedly are “passports” on to the next stages of study and the workplace, many of the most significant lessons of school are not measurable in that way. These are the lessons both implicitly and explicitly that prepare a child for life. The philosopher Aristotle saw the prime reason of education as being the development of the ethical character, which enables an individual to become a responsible citizen. A person can know a great deal but it may not mean they are good or wise, as the letter excerpt reminds us all too clearly.

With that in mind, it is imperative that schools help pupils to reflect on the qualities that are needed to live a good life and to develop those skills that will enable them to take their place as valuable members of society. However, this can only happen in an environment that reflects those values, enabling both individuals and the community as a whole to flourish. A school in which good relationships are evident among all its members is always a good sign and this may particularly be fostered within a smaller school.

Offering opportunities for pupils to take responsibility is also important. At Wychwood, pupils participate in the school Council through election as Councillors and Citizens. Then there are pastoral responsibilities, in which older girls are paired with younger ones to whom they act as mentors. Additionally pupils are given opportunities to serve

beyond the school through acts of community service and charitable fundraising. Such activities can help to develop “habits” of both mind and character. In fact Aristotle compared the acquisition of certain virtues of character to the learning of a musical instrument requiring intention, practice and discipline. In the same way, to enable our students to become more human as we are entreated by the letter writer, we need to offer opportunities to practise the best characteristics of human virtue, so they become second nature and are carried out into the wider world.

However, for this to happen we all need the fuel of “inspiration” and this is why I have always been an advocate for school assemblies or “collective worship” (call it what you will). These are unique times in the busy school day set aside to give more explicit consideration to the values and beliefs concerning what it means to be good, wise and more fully human.

At Wychwood we have a chosen “Thought for the week”, usually drawn from a well-known figure past or present and from a range of secular and religious traditions (we seek to be inclusive in our approach). The quotation then provides a stimulus and basis for the assemblies that week and tutor group reflection time. Often discussions spill over into other lessons too, and act as an introduction to thinking about deeper issues, and pupils are also asked to consider in what way the quotation might ask them to respond practically. Families and friends can also link in to our discussions through the weekly blog on the school website.

Helping my students become human has been the driving inspiration of my teaching career, as it is of the many teachers with whom I have been privileged to work.

School report

Notes from the Head's desk

Headmistress Andrea Johnson reflects on another busy term at Wychwood.

It has been an exciting few months at Wychwood: school has returned to something like normal and plans have been unveiled for an ambitious three-year building programme.

We reopened on 8 March for the final two weeks of the Hilary Term. It was so good to hear the tramp of feet, listen to the squeal of voices and see girls bustling everywhere and giving the swing a real workout. Most of them were slightly taken aback by the realities of returning to school but they rallied well and the noise levels rose.

Form Plays were slightly different this year, having been prepared before school fully returned. Renamed “Not the Form Plays”, each form developed a story based on the Hans Christian Andersen quotation “Just living is not enough. One must have sunshine, freedom, and a little flower”, and put together an IT-based presentation. These were entirely in the tradition of the Form Plays – some wonderful and inspiring, some not quite so much, and the whole time watching was a joy.

Now in Trinity Term lots of exciting things are happening. LAMDA examinations are taking place, we've relaunched the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, plans are afoot for a Geography field trip to Iceland in 2022 and our rowing holiday courses are proving very popular with the students. Sadly, due to

Covid, all public examinations for GCSE and A levels have been cancelled this summer. Instead all pupils are being assessed by their teachers in accordance with guidelines issued by the Department of Education. Despite the change, I am confident that all the Shell and Study II students are properly prepared for what comes next, whether that be A levels or university.

Towards the end of term the Study girls will have their annual ball, we are all looking forward to the drama department's summer performance and on the final weekend of term we are holding a school barbecue for pupils and parents. This will be a major event as it marks the first time this year that parents have been allowed on site.

Our new investor, Albion Schools, has very exciting plans for Wychwood. Work has just finished on the installation of a state-of-the-art WiFi network throughout the school. This is much to the relief of staff and students, who've been battling with dodgy connections for some time. I can also reveal the plans for the reorganisation of Banbury Road ground floor and part of the first floor. This will include a Head's office, interactive performance and classroom space, upgraded staff room facilities and an enhanced entrance experience for parents and guests, complete with an integrated coffee shop for parents to enjoy while waiting for their daughters and for the girls to use at other times. In spite of all the challenges of the past year, we're looking forward to a very positive future.

Head Girls raise over £1,000

Thanks to the amazing support of the whole school community, the three Head Girls raised more than £1,000 in memory of Sarah Everard, who was murdered in London earlier this year. Head girl Sophie Solovieva and her two deputies, Ano Sofoluwa and Alice McMahon, each walked 11km around University Parks, making a total of 33km. They chose this distance as Sarah Everard was aged just 33 when she was killed.

The girls wrote on their

fundraising page: “As head girls we are representatives of Wychwood School and we wish to use our platform to raise awareness of the dangers we and our peers face on a daily basis.”

Members of the School, the Friends of Wychwood and the Wychwood Association all contributed and helped them raise £1,062. The money will be given to the Jo Cox Foundation, which works to create a kinder and more

compassionate society.

Speaking afterwards, Head Girl Sophie said that they all felt tired but proud of their achievement.



In conversation

Claire Harvey and Jo Holmes meet Simon and Abigail Tyrrell

A chance sighting of Wychwood two years ago has transformed the School's fortunes at a time when small schools are facing enormous challenges due to the pandemic. Claire Harvey and Jo Holmes met the new investors, Simon and Abigail Tyrrell, over Zoom. Here, in the first of a two-part interview, the couple explain their vision for Wychwood

"I love Wychwood and everything it stands for," says Simon Tyrrell, who together with his wife Abigail are behind the joint venture between the school and their company, Albion Schools Partnership. Wychwood is the founding school in the Albion Schools Partnership and the investment has helped secure the future of the school for the next generation of pupils.

Over the next few years there will be a number of changes at Wychwood, including a major building programme, introduction of rowing to the curriculum and the launch of a theatre outreach programme into the local community in partnership with The Oxford School of Drama.

Simon and Abigail and their four children moved to Oxfordshire from Hong Kong in September 2020. Abigail was born and raised in Hong Kong and ran 14 schools in the territory whilst Simon had spent 20 years in Asia working in property investment. The couple discovered Wychwood whilst visiting their son at school in Oxford. Simon recalls: "We drove past and thought 'that looks really interesting', so we popped



in and had a look around and were immediately enamoured by the school. There was a lovely feeling as you walked through the door, a homely feeling."

So why did they decide to invest in Wychwood? Abigail Tyrrell explains: "We were trying to marry two careers. Simon had worked for a long time in investment and property and I'd worked for 20 years in education. We were trying to find a way we could do something together in the UK. It seemed like a great opportunity to use my years of experience running schools in Hong Kong and Simon's experience on the property side. It made a lot of sense."

The Tyrrells appreciate the long history of Wychwood and see that it fills a special niche in the market. As Simon explains, "To have a school in Oxford that is so small and pastoral, offers an environment that is welcoming and warm and yet still provides academic excellence and allows pupils to move at their own pace and gets the best out of them – I think this is one of the most fundamental elements of Wychwood. We don't need 100 acres or a Steinway piano or Olympic-style sports pitches to be excellent in what we do. Parents come to us to educate their children and academic excellence is something we've always had. We are as good as everyone else in the market but we do it in a far more family-orientated way."

They have lots of plans for the future of Wychwood and are working on a number of areas. Already the IT infrastructure has been updated to a high speed system: in Simon's words, "I feel if you're setting up Wychwood for the next generation it all starts with the technology side of things as this is integral to the future of education".

Major building works are being proposed: "Working with the architect Zoe Berman, a Wychwood Old Girl, we're looking at redesigning the functionality and layout of the school, for example refurbishing boarding accommodation and reorganising classrooms by 'faculties', grouping subjects together into zoned areas so they can establish individual identities."

"We're looking at how the basement area could be more functional, so we want to open up the dining room area to increase the capacity, integrating with amphitheatre steps out into the garden. Another key change will be the ground floor, which will include



Mrs Johnson's office, a coffee shop and space for ad hoc meetings, lectures, concerts or simply for pupils to congregate. This reconfiguration will enhance the welcoming experience for pupils and current and future parents, as they enter the hub at the heart of the school."

Plans are also under way to extend the curriculum to include rowing. Rowing was first introduced to Wychwood over 100 years ago under the watchful eye of Ms Geraldine Coster, having at the time a school boat and an intricate award system of oarsmen, mates, half captains and captains: "but it fell by the wayside", says Simon, "so now we're reintroducing a rowing programme in partnership with Hinksey Sculling School. A lot of girls' schools row as an extracurricular sport/club but we want to run it as a curriculum sport to reflect how seriously we're taking it. We'll run a dual system of "participation" – just having fun mucking about in boats, which will run for all ages in the school. We'll also have the "elite" programme (complete with specific scholarships) so that we can compete at that level. We're a small school but that doesn't mean we can't be fierce competition, so we're playing to our strengths and identifying Olympic sports where talent prevails over numbers!"

In September there will be another change in the life of Wychwood as it becomes the first independent school in the country to join the network of the National Saturday Club. This charitable organisation gives teenagers from less privileged backgrounds the opportunity to study one of four different subjects free of charge on a Saturday morning at a local

institution. Wychwood will offer drama and will co-run the programme with The Oxford School of Drama. Simon says: "Performing arts has always been a core strength of Wychwood. We will be leveraging this into an outreach within the greater Oxford area to help Wychwood be accessible to the local community, supported by our own theatre scholars who will gain experience helping to manage the programme. The National Saturday Club organisation is tremendously excited about this and wants to take us on a road show to other independent schools to encourage them to follow in our footsteps!"

“I love Wychwood and everything it stands for”

These changes are just part of the master plan to help Wychwood get back on the map and forge its own unique offering amongst the many girls schools in Oxford. But fundamental to Wychwood's success is increasing the number of pupils joining the school and this is where the alumnae can help. Simon explains: "We have ambitious plans, but to achieve all we want to for the school we need to grow our numbers. I'd appeal to WA members to help us spread the word that Wychwood will be the force of change in Oxford for many years to come! We need to shout out about the school and everything it is great for."

Happy Birthday Joy!

Fond memories of Wychwood in the 1930s



Joy Pentney (née Craker) has recently celebrated her 99th birthday. Wychwood's Archivist, former English teacher Michèle Crawford, looks back at Joy's time at Wychwood in the 1930s.

Joy arrived at Wychwood aged nine and, with her sister Tony aged six, was among the youngest boarders in the summer of 1932. The Wychwood that welcomed them had been settled in 74 Banbury Road for thirteen years, its eventual home after twenty years of moving round various North Oxford houses. Progress was in the air: the wooden school hall known as the Hut had been built and the hayloft over the stables had just been transformed into a Craft Room in 1930. Drama productions included both school and Form Plays and made good use of the new Hut.

Many aspects of school life familiar to us all were by then established: Council met weekly and Joy was often Form Rep or Dep as she moved up through the school and became a Councillor. Academic achievement was valued and the Honours list published termly with Joy often named; she gained her School Certificate in 1937. It is clear, however, that there were other areas of importance: the climbing tree was much enjoyed, the



Above: Joy, her sister, Tony, and their mother, Alice, on the ship from India to England in 1930.

Right: Tennis on Sir John's lawn.

type and size of the buns at Break occupied a central place in daily concerns and routines, and the Picnic was the highlight of the year.

Wychwood already had a long tradition of debating and looking out to the wider world. When Joy was in the most junior forms the League of Nations Junior Branch was thriving and the Wychwood House of Commons was inaugurated. By 1933 a 13-year-old was writing an article for the school magazine: "Why one should learn Civics at school" and explaining the importance of understanding local government and how Bills passed through Parliament. This is where Joy found her voice: in 1933 she was the youngest recipient of the Oxford Mail Peace Essay competition and received a cash prize of ten shillings.

She became an active member of the House of Commons, serving as Speaker and in the Cabinet, and she was elected President of the International Group. She must have been in the House on the occasion of the meeting nearest 5 November when the traditional search uncovered gunpowder, the "fatal firework bought in North Parade", which was courageously extinguished by the Prime Minister and remembered by many generations. More serious topics debated in



1938 included military conscription, and the situation in Czechoslovakia, Germany, Italy and Palestine. When a Model Assembly Conference for several schools was held at the Town Hall in March 1938, Joy took the Chair, welcomed the delegates and presided over elections. It is worth mentioning that, just four years younger at Wychwood, was Ann Spokes, who died aged 94 in December 2019 after a lifetime of service in Oxford, a former Lord Mayor and Honorary Alderman.

Both Joy and her sister Tony were keen sportswomen, Tony winning the junior Greyhound several times. Wychwood at that time played netball, hockey and tennis, with a Boat Club for sculling, punting and canoeing. Joy played in the first teams for netball and tennis and was awarded Colours. It was, however, at swimming that they excelled, with both sisters winning many races in different strokes. It must be noted that the School's daily swimming sessions in summer were held at the Rhea, a rather muddy bathing pool on the Cherwell, remembered by some with fond nostalgia and by others with shivers and shudders!

We congratulate Joy on her 99 years and send her and her family our very best wishes.



Joy in her nurse's uniform, having just left school, in 1939.

Where are they now?

The sky's the limit



Rosi Sigmon (née Griffiths, Shell 1980) talks about her many adventures that led to an exciting career in the world of skydiving and a life in the US.

Like many young people leaving school, I didn't have a clear idea about what I wanted to do next. I had enjoyed school, especially throwing myself into sport and captaining the netball and hockey teams for our year. But I wasn't interested in going into further education. So after I left Wychwood in 1982, I ventured on what was meant to be a six-month trip to Australia with Witty Awdry and Sarah Thorn, both ex-Wychwooders. Following the realisation that £550 wouldn't last me the duration of my travels (and also that home economics might have been a better lesson choice for me than Latin, had it been offered then!), I ventured into the workforce performing all kinds of diverse jobs – from working at a fairground and a tuna processing factory to managing a music retail outlet.

Deciding that I wanted to stay in Australia, I found a job working on prawn fishing trawlers in the Gulf of Carpentaria as a cook – the only problem was that I couldn't cook! After a couple of weeks of serving

some pretty imaginative but unpalatable meals, it was decided I would swap jobs with a deckhand who could cook. So for the next few years I happily floated around the coast of Australia, learning how to mend nets and navigate a vessel and not get seasick. I can only imagine now, as the parent of a teenage daughter, the horror my parents must have felt when I told them I would be working on a boat with a five-man crew for 4 months at a time...! But I had a great crew, and everything was fine.

I was truly bitten by the travel bug and spent the majority of my 20s travelling Australia and Europe – with plenty of time in between working as a secretarial temp in London through my great Wychwood friend Floss Homer (née Blakeley), who had a very successful career in recruitment. My last temp job in London developed into a permanent role, where I became Marketing Manager for Europe for an American architectural company.

In 1994 two major events happened which were a turning point in my life – one devastating, one amazing. The devastation was the loss of my wonderful mother to cancer. This was incredibly hard to handle. The

amazing thing – which I desperately needed at this time – was my introduction to skydiving. My cousin was in the British 4-way team and after a crazy night out I agreed to do the AFF (accelerated freefall training). I started jumping during my mother's illness. It helped me so much and became a huge passion, so much so that in 1998 I left my job in London and travelled to the US to spend six-months skydiving. The US was cheaper and had better weather... I had spent too many weekends in England sitting on dropzones watching the rain!

“To be able to work within your passion is a gift”



Rosi and Beccy Davies c. 1979/80.

That six months turned into a whole new life and career. I had the most wonderful time travelling the US, doing multiple jumps and getting involved in the skydiving community. I finally settled in a small city called Deland in Florida, a major international skydiving hub. Once I'd got my green card, I started working at a company that manufactures skydiving equipment as Marketing and Customer Service Manager. I've been working there now for 20 years – and it has been the most incredible experience. To be able to work within your passion is a gift, and working with skydivers in such a fun industry is just wonderful: I have been fortunate enough to travel to skydiving events all over the world and have met the most amazing people. Another major life experience was the adoption of my wonderful and wildly different daughter Olivia in 2006 – which has been the most amazing adventure in itself.

My career has been varied, to say the least. I might not have been Wychwood's top student, but I do have the most amazing school memories and made some lifelong friends who I will forever consider sisters.

Where are they now?

A day in the life of an Events and Partnership Manager



Leila Godfrey-Janni was in Shell 2010. If you'd like to keep up with Leila on Instagram, her page is @leilagodfreyjanni and her stylist page is @byleilagodfrey

My alarm goes off at 6:45am (I thought waking up for school was early...). I have a cup of tea as I check my emails, marking the ones that are important for the day so I can then have some "me" time before 9am (something I did a lot less of before Covid-19).

I look after Events and Partnerships for fashion brand RIXO and am a freelance stylist. I am usually in the office in Shepherd's Bush for 9am, which is very luckily a 20-minute walk from my house. I block out 30 minutes first thing every morning to catch up with people at work, check which celebs have worn RIXO and plan the day ahead with my team.

My days usually consist of a lot of meetings with the wider team to discuss upcoming launches and how we are going to make these successful. A lot goes into making what we call a "gold" moment in the marketing calendar. The office is made up of 30 very talented

individuals across Marketing, E-com, Wholesale, Merchandising, Buying, Design and Finance, so I'm always racking their brains for their thoughts and visions to ensure a wow-moment launch. Even though RIXO is five years old now, there is still very much a start-up mentality – no idea is ever too ridiculous!

Depending on how busy it is, work finishes between 6 and 8pm. A few evenings a week are spent doing freelance work at home. This consists of replying to emails, prepping mood boards for shoots and organising prop hire for upcoming table-scaping shoots. I love what I do, and I urge anyone reading this to GO FOR IT when you find what you're passionate about!

I moved to Wychwood in LTs. I definitely wasn't an A* student... but what stands out to me most is that I was treated as an individual and allowed to do the things I enjoyed and was good at. I am forever thankful for the care and attention the teachers put into my schooling and letting me grow as a person. My last memory – of running into the staff room to tell Ms Sherlock that I HAD MADE IT INTO LEEDS UNIVERSITY – is one that will stay with me forever. This was an achievement that I genuinely don't think would have been possible without the support (and patience) of those around me, and one that shaped the beginning of my career... and, well, my life!

I studied History of Art at Leeds and graduated with a 2.1. My first job in London was on the Marketing Team for Vita Coco, then moving agency side, where I spent my next 4 years on the Experiential Marketing team at rewardStyle. The benefits of working agency side is that I worked on a wide range on events from Net-A-Porter to Vogue, to Topshop and Nike. I wouldn't have moved for much, but when the job at RIXO came up, it was as if it was made for me. A year on I'm very settled and hope to go on to head up my department... fingers crossed...

My advice for anyone wanting to get into the fashion/events industry is to get lots of experience! Message people you'd like to work for on Instagram or email and offer some of your time to them. Always try and get a direct contact rather than a generic email address.

I'm always looking for a spare pair of hands, whether that's at RIXO or for freelance work. Please feel free to drop me a line at leilagodfrey@rixo.co.uk

Committee notes

New members and initiatives

WA Committee

President: Andrea Johnson (Headmistress)

Chair: Jo Holmes (Shell 1984)

Secretary: Johanna Stephenson (former FoW, Shell 1975)

Treasurer: Rachel Page (Shell 1983)

Alumnae Relations Officer: Emma Davidson (Shell 1980)

Events Officers: Lizzie Peach (Shell 2011) and Emma Davidson (Shell 1980)

Committee:

Sue Clear (former staff)

Michèle Crawford (former staff)

Claire Harvey (Shell 1979)

Steph Jankovic (Shell 2004)

Deborah Pluck (Shell 1973)

Camilla Stephenson (Shell 1977)

Emeritus members:

Heather Simpson (Shell 1974)

Judi Whymark (Shell 1964)

Ex officio:

Susan Boardman (Director of Marketing & Admissions)



New WA Committee members Steph Jankovic (left) and Susan Boardman.

We were delighted to welcome two new members to the WA Committee at our May meeting. Steph Jankovic (née Henman, Shell 2004) lives in Oxford with her young family and works as Cutteslowe Community Association Manager. Susan Boardman is the Head of Marketing and Admissions at Wychwood and joins as an ex-officio member of the committee.

It was interesting to hear how Covid has impacted Susan's work: open events had to be cancelled, for example, but the one-to-one family meetings successfully replaced them. At the beginning of the academic year the school roll had increased by 10% but since then a number of students have left due to financial pressures or international travel risks. There has been some local pupil growth coming into Remove, Inters and Lower Transits, which is good to hear. Wychwood is also working at developing relationships with prep and primary schools in the region.

Supporting growth of pupil numbers is an area where the WA can really assist the school by promoting the benefits of a Wychwood education through word of mouth and recommendation. Prospective parents should be referred to Wychwood Admissions: admissions@wychwoodschool.org

Improved communications are key to the success of the WA in building up and maintaining our network of members. The WA News is part of this initiative. Future editions will have features on former pupils and their careers as well as advertising future events organised by the WA, the School and the Friends of Wychwood. Our Facebook group is continuing to grow and we're looking to expand our social media presence via Instagram (for more information on social media see p. 23).

New WA committee members are warmly welcomed from all areas of our membership base. Please join us to develop strategy, initiatives and events that really make a difference to school while developing our own friendly and dynamic network.

If you would like to know more about joining the Committee, contact Jo Holmes, WA Chair, or email wa@wychwoodschool.org

Joining the WA Committee

Lizzie Peach (Shell 2011) looks back on four years as a WA Committee member.

When I look back at my time at Wychwood, it is full of fond memories, huge laughs and rewarding moments. I made some beautiful friends at Wychwood and am still really close to some of them, which means that our friendships were hugely shaped by our time together at the school. Wychwood is a very special school, which is why I continue to be involved in its development and enjoy being a part of a committee that supports it.

I joined Wychwood in UTs in 2009 and left at the end of Study II in 2013. Living on the other side of Oxford, I flexi-boarded on Tuesdays and Thursdays during exam periods so that I had more time to do work in the evenings. Even though I wasn't a full boarder, boarding at Wychwood will always be one of the highlights of my time there. I kept in contact with the school after I left, and even went back and worked as an Exam Invigilator in 2018, as I was living in Oxford while doing my Masters at University College London.



At one of Wychwood's alumnae events I met Johanna Stephenson, who was Chair of the WA at the time. She invited me to join the WA Committee and, having retained a close relationship with the school, I was delighted. I've been on the Committee for four years now, and two years ago I became the Events Officer, a role that I share with Emma Davidson (Shell 1980). Working alongside Emma has been such an inspiring time: her wealth of

experience has taught me so much about organising reunion events and given me a great insight into contributing to the managing and development of alumnae relations.

Being a part of the WA Committee has introduced me to so many inspiring women, who have gone on to do great things after leaving Wychwood. What I find so interesting is that, despite being taught by different teachers and having different peers in our various decades at Wychwood, we've all been shaped by the school's strong sense of community, support and culture, which embodies the Wychwood experience. That is a connection that all members of the Wychwood community will share forever. I love hearing about what the School is up to now, and how it continues to provide the same direction and guidance to current pupils.

One of our current projects looks to develop the involvement of WA Form Reps and their relationships with those in their year groups. I look forward to seeing how, when fully developed and utilised, the role of Form Reps will help the WA network to flourish further.

WA Form Reps

WA Form Reps _ 1949 to today: Championing continuing friendships, supporting a new generation.

In 2017 Johanna Stephenson reached out to classes across the decades from Shell 1949 to the present to invite volunteers to become Form Reps for their year. This represents an amazing 70 years

of Wychwood old girls. The plan? To create a cohort of Old Girls who might give a bit of time to keep their class connected and to enable them to remain connected to the school.

With the 125th anniversary on the horizon it certainly feels time to celebrate, and advice and feedback from our Form Reps will be invited and warmly welcomed in the coming months.

A few classes don't have a Form Rep. To chat about what could be involved, or to volunteer, please contact Emma Davidson (Shell 1980): elmwoods@btinternet.com

Whatever time you can give will be much appreciated and we hope you will find it as fun as we do!

Find your Form Rep here: <https://wychwoodschool.org/wa/>

Leavers' Social 2021

A blended experience!

The Study II social is a popular date in the WA calendar when we celebrate the success of our leavers with Andrea Johnson and staff, toast the girls with a glass of fizz and meet our newest WA members over canapés. Of course no one was going to be prevented from partying by ongoing Covid safety measures. The Study II leavers were hosted in Andrea's office while seven of the Committee members joined remotely, via Teams. Although we were sorry not to be there in person, there was a lovely party atmosphere and general spirit of celebration.

It was very good to meet Fatemeh Hozhabri, Clara Kelly, Isabella White, Owen White and Peony Ye and hear about their

future plans. All are heading off to the universities of their choice, including Leeds, Oxford and Sussex, in the knowledge that they have the tremendous achievements of a Wychwood career to their credit.

In true Wychwood tradition, Study II 2021 are dynamic, confident and independent – the Committee would like to say how proud we are of them all and everything they have accomplished in their time at Wychwood, as well as wishing them all the very best for the future.

We're delighted that Fatemeh and Owen have stepped forward as WA Form Reps for their year (Shell 2019).

Welcome to the Wychwood Association network – and we look forward to connecting with you all again soon.



AROPS Conference

The WA has been a long-standing member of AROPS, the Association of Representatives of Pupils Society. Despite the rather dry name, AROPS arranges really interesting and useful events to help alumnae organisations share ideas and best practices.



In April Claire Harvey and Jo Holmes attended an AROPS event via Zoom to discuss how alumnae associations can use social media.

It was fascinating to hear how schools have really embraced the many different platforms. Some schools operate on all the major social media outlets to reach their alumnae: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and even LinkedIn. Others are more selective about which channels they use.

Working together with the schools, the alumnae associations post regular bulletins on events

and work hard to develop strong alumnae networks. One school uses LinkedIn to enable its students to seek career advice from the alumnae (all carefully monitored for child protection reasons). For those people who want to use social media, another school has developed its own app so that alumnae can stay up to date with what's happening.

Inspired by this event, the WA has resolved to develop its use of Facebook and start an Instagram account to help engage with more of our younger members.

Dates for your diary...



WA members at Oxford and London drinks pre-Covid.

Careers Fair

Saturday 18 September 2021

The Wychwood Careers Fair is a great opportunity for WA members to meet current pupils of all ages. If you would be willing to come in to school and talk about your career, give advice and share insights, we would love to hear from you. For more information please email johanna.stephenson@btopenworld.com



WA Committee Meeting

Saturday 25 September 2021

All members of the Wychwood Association – former pupils, their parents, staff and governors– are eligible to join the WA Committee. We meet termly and welcome new members. To help people attend from anywhere in the country or overseas, our meetings will be both in person and via Zoom. For more information please contact WA Chair, Jo Holmes: josephineholmes@hotmail.com

FoW Christmas Fair

Friday 26 November 2021

The Friends of Wychwood are already busy planning the Wychwood Christmas Fair. This event represents a great opportunity for the whole school community to come together. To volunteer, book a retail stall or recommend an external seller, please contact treasurerFOW@wychwoodschool.org



Celebration!

Next year Wychwood will be celebrating the 125th anniversary of its foundation in 1897. In true Wychwood style, we are looking forward to marking the occasion with appropriate festivities. More information will be given in the next issue of WA News...

STAYING IN TOUCH

The WA and social media

Change is afoot...

The Wychwood School Association Facebook group is here to help you. Our FB group has over 400 members in the UK and abroad. Wychwood alumnae represent a range of careers and one of the core aims of the WA is to provide opportunities for its members to benefit from this amazing network, both social and professional.

You can now promote your business or event on our FB page. We've had a range of posts: Debbie Payne (Shell 1987) of The Two Jolly Cooks advertised the Enstone Food Market, which she organised in May. A number of members advertised their art exhibitions as part of the Oxfordshire Artweeks festival, and comedian Iszi Lawrence (Shell 2000) promoted her podcast and recent appearance in a Netflix documentary.

All business notices are posted by our site administrator, Claire Harvey. Please either direct message her on FB or email her at theoldbellpub@rocketmail.com

In order to improve our reach to all members, we're now looking to set up an Instagram account, a great platform to post photos and videos. Watch this space!

Find friends

The WA network

If you want to find old friends, you can search for them on the WA network database via the school website: <https://wychwoodschool.org/wa/>

Do encourage your classmates to sign up. It is straightforward and there are some guidelines and more information in case you get stuck.

Contact: wa@wychwoodschool.org



Your news

If you have any news you would like to share or ideas or comments for the WA News please let us know by emailing wa@wychwoodschool.org

Events are advertised here:

wychwoodschool.org/wa

Connect with Wychwood online:



Photo credits

We are grateful to those who have provided photographs for this issue of WA News: Catriona Brodribb (front cover); Wychwood School (pp. 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 top and right, 10, 15 above, 22 centre and bottom left, 24); Val Collinson (p. 9 left); Emma Bale (p. 9 centre); Mary Hochstrasser (p. 9 centre below); Sophie Solovieva (p. 11); Simon and Abigail Tyrrell (pp. 12, 13); Christine Munday (pp. 14, 15 below); Rosi Sigmon (pp. 16, 17); Leila Godfrey-Janni (p. 18); Steph Jankovic (p. 19, left); Susan Boardman (p. 19, right); Lizzie Peach (pp. 20, 21); Emma Davidson (p. 22 top row); Siobhan Foley (p. 22 bottom right).

Editorial team: Emma Davidson, Jo Holmes, Claire Harvey, Lizzie Peach and Johanna Stephenson

Design originated by Gorm Ashurst – www.bulletcreative.com

