

WESTONBIRT *Life*



Termly News from Westonbirt School - Boarding & Day School for Girls Aged 11-18

AUTUMN 2011

Inspiring young minds



Steve Davies

From High Grades to High Peaks...

The World Challenge Expedition in July proved to be the experience of a lifetime for nine Westonbirt girls from Year 11 and the 6th Form.

Following a tireless fundraising programme, the first stage of the World Challenge adventure finally began, with a three week trip from Lima to Cusco (which sits at an altitude of 3100m). After final preparations the girls set off on their trek to Lares; this included many snowy peaks, fantastic views, hail storms and freezing nights and ended with bathing in Lares' stunning thermal springs! From here the team travelled to the world famous Inca city of Machu Picchu.

The team then travelled to the town of Puno, by Lake Titicaca (situated over 3800 metres above sea level) for the project phase of the expedition. Here the girls spent time with local children renovating the school's classroom, as well as doing all of their own cooking and washing with just one well for water! In the words of Assistant Housemistress Maija Calvert, who accompanied the trip, the girls 'felt incredibly privileged to be part of such an amazing journey.'



Steve Davies

Main picture: Westonbirt's World Challenge Team, from left to right (back row): Fiona Vincent, Annabel Jardine-Blake, Alice Marsh, Georgina McCulloch, Laura Green, Hannah Lawrence. Front row: Natasha Williams, Sophie Falkenburg, Zoë Garling. Above: The team climb aboard PeruRail.

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Welcoming
Reverend Caroline

OPEN MORNING:

Saturday 12th May 2012
9:30am - 12:30pm



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Celebrating exam
success



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Italian Girl at
Westonbirt





Mary Henderson (right) with the Bishop of Gloucester and Reverend Caroline O'Neill.

From the Headmistress

Now nearing the end of the autumn term, the girls and their teachers are well into their work for this academic year, spurred on greatly by the success of the summer's public examination candidates. I am receiving wonderful reports from girls and their parents about the first weeks at university and the girls, whilst keeping very closely in touch with their friends through the Westonbirt grapevine, are clearly throwing themselves into every aspect of university life, as indeed they should!

The end of last academic year saw a poignant and heartfelt farewell for Philip Dixon, our school chaplain for the past 25 years. He was the first full time teacher *and* resident chaplain in Westonbirt's history and the decision to appoint him by Mr Nichols, my predecessor but one, was an enlightened one. Reverend Dixon brought his own blend of humanity, charisma and humour to the role of chaplain and under the light but profound touch of his spiritual guidance my aim that "no girl should leave Westonbirt without a sense of something greater than herself" was fulfilled. Reverend Dixon engaged all of the girls from Years 7 – 13, in the pulpit and in the classroom, and as a colleague he was a true mentor, priest and friend. His talents lay far beyond his excellent preaching and we all enjoyed many a musical evening, with Reverend Dixon at the centre, singing, playing, composing or as MC. He will be long remembered for his star turn as quizmaster at the annual Friends of Westonbirt quiz night and for his glove puppets, Grenouille and Lily, at the school Christmas party on the last night of the autumn term. Reverend Dixon has 'retired' to Bristol where he is enjoying the very wide variety of culture on offer and we are all pleased that he returns to Westonbirt on a Friday to coach some of those who find Mathematics more difficult than he does.

At the beginning of this term we welcomed Reverend Caroline O'Neill as our new school chaplain. Reverend Caroline has taken up Reverend Dixon's reins with real enthusiasm and we are enjoying getting to know her as she leads our worship and confirmation classes and finds time to talk to as many of us as she can. Her licensing by the Bishop of Gloucester on 28th September was an uplifting occasion which confirmed Reverend Caroline as the spiritual leader of this vibrant and multi-faceted as well as multi-faith community.

Mary Henderson.



The girls try their hand at surfing, with impressive results!

Daring Deeds in Deepest Devon

There was plenty of summer fun, adventure and excitement for 24 Year 7 – 10 pupils who enjoyed an activity-filled trip at Westward Ho!'s PGL Campus last term. The girls, accompanied by Mrs Heathorne, Mrs Barr and Miss Pollitt, found themselves bodyboarding, mountain biking and surfing, but the 'highlight' of the day was definitely the trapeze jump!



Drama therapy at Hop, Skip and Jump!

Hop, Skip and Jump!

On a more reflective note, 12 pupils, accompanied by Mrs Crosbee (Head of Drama) spent a day at *Hop, Skip and Jump!* – a local day care centre for children with special needs. The girls spent a rewarding few hours playing drama games with a group of 45 children as part of a drama therapy initiative. Isabel Amison, in Year 10, was inspired to learn sign language following her experience with a little girl called Ellie who communicates in this way.

Lessons from Auschwitz

As part of 6th Form Enrichment this year, Isobel Holley and Natasha Coakley took part in the *Lessons from Auschwitz* project, run by the *Holocaust Educational Trust*. Established in 1988, the Trust's aim is to educate young people from every background about the Holocaust and the important lessons to be learnt from it. Through *Lessons from Auschwitz* 6th Form students and their teachers take part in two afternoon seminars and a one day visit to the former extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The students then act as ambassadors and pass on the 'lessons' when they return to their schools and communities.

SUMMER TERM HIGHLIGHTS

Outstanding Results for an Outstanding School

The most recent Independent Schools Inspectorate report described Westonbirt School as 'outstanding', and this is the adjective which best describes 2011's examination results.

A Level results topped the charts with 42% of girls achieving A* - A grades and 87% of girls achieving A* - C grades. The results were impressive across all areas of the curriculum, including the core subjects of English, Maths and Science, with 100% A* - B grades in English Literature and 80% in Chemistry. 100% A* - B grades were also achieved in Economics and Latin.

Superb results were achieved across the board, with girls going on to study an impressive range of subjects at a variety of top universities. Former Head Girl Ashley White, of Old Sodbury, South Gloucestershire, gained 4 A* grades, which secured her place at St. John's College, Oxford, to read Philosophy, Politics and Economics.

GCSE examination results were the best ever, with 97% of candidates gaining A* - C grades and 61% achieving A* - A grades. Isabel Yerburgh was the top performer with 10 A*s and 2 As!



Former 6th Formers celebrating A Level results with Mary Henderson.

MAJIC New Award

At Speech Day this year we were delighted to announce the launch of a new award at Westonbirt. The MAJIC award is to be given annually to a student with the potential to contribute significantly to the world of performing arts, and was won this year by Year 11 student Annabel Kimber, an accomplished saxophonist and drama enthusiast. The award has been most generously given by Mrs Barbara Johnson-Browne, whose daughter, Wendy Browne, is an alumnus of Westonbirt, and is currently working towards a PhD in Psychology at Cambridge University. The award is given in memory of Mrs Johnson-Browne's parents, Maxine and Archie Johnson, the acronym standing for *Maxine* and *Archie Johnson International Champions* (of music, drama or the arts.) Based on the principle of supporting talent in the arts combined with financial need, the pupil will receive not only the prestige of winning the award, but also £500 to support her performing arts' education and training.

In the Footsteps of Lawrence of Arabia

The summer term lecture, given this year by Charles Blackmore, author of *In the Footsteps of Lawrence of Arabia*, provided a fascinating account of an amazing expedition. Based on the diary kept during his journey, Charles's compelling narrative described how he, and three others of the Royal Green Jackets Regiment, set out to retrace Lawrence's exploits in the Arab Revolt during the First World War.



Charles Blackmore with 6th Formers Lily Lucas, Honor Bleeker, Miranda Hickman and Xenia Rollason.

Summer Sports

The action-packed term was filled with rounders, swimming and athletics matches. There were some excellent results, with 100% effort from all girls. Unfortunately the poor weather meant that the highly subscribed *Race for Life* had to be run in situ around the arboretum and school grounds, but enthusiasm was not diminished. The term ended with a highly successful Sports Day, where Teddie Mardon and Alice Caulfield won *Victrix Ludorum* for the best junior and intermediate performers. Badminton House won the overall cup.



Suzanna Battishill for Badminton House.

Senior Choir is the Best in the Country – it's Official!

Westonbirt School's senior choristers became the School Choir of the Year at Bournemouth's Music Festival this summer, confirming the dynamic musical lifeblood of the school. The girls' singing took them to a range of fantastic venues, including St. John's Church, and between performances the girls were able to enjoy the sea whilst the sun shone. To mark the perfect end to the trip the choir were able to return to Westonbirt as, officially, the best School Choir of the Year!



Senior Choir with Dr Exon, singing on the seafront!

An Enriching Summer

Westonbirt's school year drew to an inspiring conclusion with a Speech Day address by Dame Sue Street DCB. Having brought up a family and worked at a high level within government, including being instrumental in bringing the 2012 Olympic Games to Britain, Dame Sue was the perfect role model for the young women leaving Westonbirt to embark on the first stages of what we are sure will be very successful careers.

NEWS FROM THE ASSOCIATION

Remembering Pamela, Lady Vestey

The paternal Grandmother of Pamela Armstrong of Section 5 (leavers of 1935) was the Australian operatic soprano Dame Nellie Melba. Pamela's mother was also a singer (from Brisbane) but when Pamela travelled from Australia to go to Westonbirt, Adelaide's Advertiser carried the headline "MELBA'S HEIRESS GOING TO LONDON — Has No Voice, Mother Says". (It was, however, not as bad as that of a Westonbirt contemporary, who was told not to sing at all at school, even in Church services, rather than put off those next to her!)

Pamela married Captain William Vestey in September 1939, and was widowed in 1944. She sent their sons to Eton, and spent time in England, returning to Australia in 1973, around which period she and the Association sadly lost touch. She died on September 2nd 2011, aged 92, having cared for the Melba legacy, writing a family memoir and generously contributing information, objects and money to institutions that had the same interest.

News from The Friends

The Friends of Westonbirt School Committee started the term with *A Tasting Menu* with food and wines from the Alsace region. This excellent evening was held in the Library where top Chef, Andrew Walker, kept us well entertained and guests enjoyed delicious wines to accompany the traditional Alsace food.

On Sunday 6th November the Bonfire and Fireworks Party took place. This event was organised with Rose Hill Westonbirt Parents' Association and over 300 guests enjoyed delicious hot dogs and mulled wine, a wonderful bonfire and, for the first time, music accompanied the spectacular firework display.

The Festive Fayre and Wine Tasting Evening with Thomas Panton Wine Merchants took place on Friday 18th November in the Great Hall and Library. Guests were able to purchase Christmas gifts as well as taste the wonderful selection of wines.

St Andrew's Night was celebrated on Friday 25th November with dancing to Scottish Country Dance Band, *Oddpiece*. This evening is proving a popular event for those keen to practise their reeling in time for Burns Night.

The last event of the term, the Christmas Drinks Party, took place on Friday 2nd December. This evening was organised with Rose Hill Westonbirt Parents' Association and is always a highlight of the social calendar. As guests enjoyed their drinks and canapés the choirs of both Rose Hill Westonbirt and Westonbirt School provided us all with a wonderful selection of Christmas music.

Event details are emailed on a regular basis and flyers are on display in reception. If you would like to join us and are not on the mailing list, please contact Laura Reid on 01666 880333 or email lreid@westonbirt.org.

The Friends of Westonbirt School Committee wish you all a very Happy Christmas.

Italian Flair at Westonbirt

The ever popular Bampton Classical Opera returned to Westonbirt as part of its summer season. This time they brought Domenico Cimarosa's *Italian Girl in London* to new audiences. A high standard of singing and acting brought this comic opera to life in Westonbirt's Orangery – a new departure from the usual outdoor performance.

New Faces at Westonbirt

This year, we welcome Helen Siwek as Director of Sport at Westonbirt and Arabella Parr as Development Officer.

Helen has relocated to the area from London, where she was previously Head of Sport at Notting Hill & Ealing High School (GDST). Helen read Sport Science, Music and Education (St Mary's, London) and has taught in and around the capital throughout her career.



Helen is a passionate team player and coach. Since playing several sports including lacrosse at University, she has been involved at regional level in hockey and netball and is also an ex-international rugby union player, having represented Wasps and Richmond in the national premiership.



Arabella Parr joins us as the new Development Officer for the Holfords of Westonbirt Trust, the School Foundation and the Old Girls' Association, raising awareness of the identity of each and providing co-ordination within the school for all.

Arabella read Hispanic Studies at University and spent some years living and working in Spain. She has since worked in sales and development for her own children's clothes company and most recently for local cartoonist, Oliver Preston.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

SPRING 2012

Saturday 14th January (11am)

Confirmation Service with the Bishop of Tewkesbury

Saturday 21st January (7:30pm)

FOW Burns Night Dinner and Dance

With Harvie Sharp's *Reel Tyme* Band.

Friday 27th January (7:30pm)

Life on a TV Rostrum

Spring Term Lecture with James Braxton, celebrity antique auctioneer

Free lecture with optional post-lecture supper.

Friday 3rd February (7pm)

FOW Quiz Night

Friday 24th February (3:30pm-6pm)

International Day

Celebrating the cultures of all the countries represented at Westonbirt School.

Friday 2nd March (7pm)

FOW Fashion Show and Dinner

Tuesday 13th March (Time TBC)

Westonbirt School's Musical Extravaganza! for Prep Schools

Friday 16th & Saturday 17th March (7:30pm)

Oliver Twist Performance

Saturday 24th March

Spanish and Art Trip to Barcelona departs

Saturday 24th March

Westonbirt and Rose Hill Westonbirt Junior Ski Trip departs

Sunday 1st April – Wednesday 31st October

Westonbirt House and Gardens are open to the public on selected dates between 1st April and 31st October 2012. Please see school website for details.

For more information, please contact us at:

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