



Welcome all to the first edition of 'The Veseyan'! Veseyologists will be interested to know that The Veseyan was the title of the school magazine for many decades in the middle of the twentieth century. Though some will find it sad that the 'Old Veseyan News' will no longer be published in its previous format, we do hope everyone will find this combined publication of Current and Old Veseyan news a positive step for our School community.



Dominic Robson
President of the OVA

Greater use will also be made of our online alumni platform, especially for larger articles.

What we, as President of the OVA and Headteacher and OVA Chairman both want is content from Veseyans of all vintages for this magazine and the online alumni platform. Stephen Roberts OV (70-77) has graciously offered his services as the contact editor for Old Veseyan articles. Please note that we have not been able to include everything we wanted to in this sixteen page edition. There is so much going on that it is hard to cover everything. Don't hesitate to get in touch and enjoy reading! Our next edition will be in April.



Paul Wallis
Chairman of the OVA

In this Edition:



"A well-balanced, all-round education"
Lord Peter Ricketts (OV)



Encounters with employers



**Remembering
Tom Wilson (OV)**



Student Leadership



Social Mobility and BVGS



**Interview with
Greg Spawton (OV)**



Community

Vesey Curriculum : "A well-balanced, all-round education Speech Day



Please follow the [link](#) to read the full Programme.

We were delighted to welcome back the Class of 2018 to our annual Speech Day at Sutton Coldfield Town Hall. These students excelled in the summer examinations of 2018:

- Achieving record GCSE results of 70%+ grades 7-9 and a strong well above Progress 8 score of +0.53. 43rd best state school for GCSE attainment nationally. Of the West Midlands grammar schools for boys, only Camp Hill did better.
- At 'A' level, the best performing co-educational Sixth Form in the Midlands and the 23rd best performing state school for attainment in England.
- Our highest ever Sunday Times Parent Power league table position of 33rd nationally. (Former Headteacher of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, Mr David Iddon, generously emailed me when he heard the news and wrote, "So very impressive indeed, as is being on a par with 91st Independent School in the country! Wow! Tell the parents that! BVGS is excellent Value for Money.") If you want to read more visit

<https://www.greaterbirminghamchambers.com/latest-news/news/2018/11/30/grammar-school-celebrates-top-ranking/>

- A record 15 winning places at Oxford and Cambridge Universities (the highest of any grammar school in the West Midlands)

Our guest speaker was Old Veseyan, Baron Peter Ricketts, GCMG, GCVO of Shortlands. Peter has had an extraordinarily distinguished career as a Civil Servant. He was National Security Advisor from 2010 to 2012 serving under David Cameron and prior to this appointment he was the Permanent Secretary in the Foreign and Commonwealth office. He has been the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence committee and from 2012 to 2016 was Her Majesty's Ambassador to France. In his speech he lauded the BVGS curriculum as offering "a well-balanced, all-round education".

Department for Education School Performance Data

The link to Bishop Vesey's Grammar school published data for 2017-18 is below :

<https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/school/137988/bishop-vesey-s-grammar-school>

The highlights are well-above average progress GCSE as measured by Progress 8 and above-average progress at A Level as measured by L3VA. You can compare how BVGS performs with other schools using the link above.

Art

Pitt Rivers Museum

As some of you may know, the Curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, is **Professor Dan Hicks (OV)**. Dan is Professor of Anthropology at Oxford University. Our Art students enjoyed visiting the Pitt Rivers in the Autumn. Professor Hicks discussed with our students whether artefacts in the British Museum, garnered during our Imperial history, should be returned to their country of origin. A very interesting debate.

Articulation



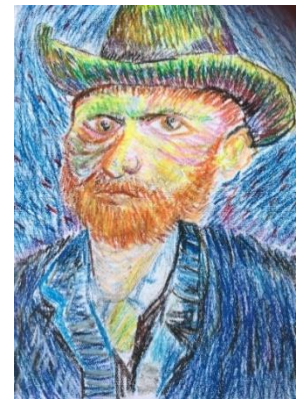
Elliott Brown (L6) was selected to represent Bishop Vesey Grammar School at the regional final of ARTiculation Prize 2019 at The Barber Institute of Fine Arts at The University of Birmingham, on Wednesday 16 January 2019. Elliott researched the work of Rene Magritte and explored ideas related to imagery and existence. His philosophical approach had the audience questioning their reality and in doing so, understanding some potentials of classification. Elliott was praised for his knowledge, personal approach and thought-provoking presentation of Magritte's work and was awarded third place

London Art Trips

Sixth Form Art students had the opportunity to visit the National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery in February.



Works of Art produced recently by our students



Computing



Tech Comm enjoyed their trip to the BETT Show in London. This is an annual trade show marketing information technology in education. Thank you to **Mr Lintern**, Head of Computing and **Mr Lavelle** for organising this trip



23-26 JANUARY 2019
LONDON EXCEL

Bletchley Park



Recently the BBC Twentieth Century Icon was Alan Turing. Turing worked to crack the Nazi Enigma Code during World War II, shortening the war and lessening the number of lives lost. Sadly,



Turing was persecuted during his lifetime because of his

sexuality, and eventually died by suicide. A tragic story. Our A Level Computer Science students were lucky enough in December to visit Bletchley Park, the home of the code-breakers like Alan Turing. It was a fascinating visit.

English

A select few of our Year 7 students took part in the Aston Literacy Project (with Aston University) which has been working with students since their entry into primary school. The project examines how reading influences vocabulary learning and looks to inform future research into ways in which we can support vocabulary learning.

Earth Speaks

Students in 8W completed a Big Write English task called 'Earth Speaks' – writing as the Earth, addressing humankind. Here are some excerpts from four of our young writers:

I was once young, precious, loved all of my body, Pangea, and the tiny blobs of bacteria started crawling over me. Humans. Humans were a mistakes, a bacterium, a single cell, turning into billions. I pass my days counting the population and trying to avoid death, evading nuclear weapons and the pollution, which gives me terrible asthma and for which there is no therapy or cure.

I feel a twitch of pain when every animal is hunted, as if a sense of guilt crawls up my body; as if to say, 'why did I invent humans?' I would have one request, and one request only: live with nature in peace. And if you ever disobey that, I will bellow an earthquake. Understand?

Amar Nahal

At first it was okay: something for me to care for. I didn't mind it when they cut down some of my trees for shelter and fire, but then they began to encase me in my own rocks and stones, stopping my natural beauty. After that came the constant noise and disrespect of all that I am. Disgusted, that's how I feel, and yet it is still becoming worse. The last stand was the pollution which is killing me, causing my life force to ebb. I am naught but a mere part of what I used to be.

Stop now before it's too late. Stop all the war, famine and nuclear bombs – I am dying: your carer, the one who gave you bushes bountiful with fruits, and deer to hunt, and yet you worry more over your petty squabbles. Bah! They will matter no longer when you don't have a world to live upon.

Luke Douglas

The fleas that bite into me are nothing more than puny bugs that torment my body. They are all harming my skin and causing me to heat up, but what makes me hotter in the head is that the ones who bite into me sell off my parts. I try to shake them off – sweat them out – but they hold on as there is nowhere else to go.

There is no compromise: first it was the giant lizards and now them, but the smaller ones cling on tight. If they damage me like this, why should I be the host of these ignorant animals?

On the other hand, some people love me – but only my best seven features, which are constantly being visited. No one cares to respect me. I'm fed up. It's been 62-and-a-half days and I've been hurt too much. Mars isn't being attacked, so why me?

Yousuf Alam

Coughing up smoke is what I do. My skin – the ozone layer – is cracking into pieces and gradually killing me. All this because of humans' nuclear power stations – cigarettes destroying my lungs. The tiny petrol and diesel cars, punching me in the stomach, are making me bleed inside.

However, my medicine, the trees that humans and God have planted, help to fix my wounds.

William Hume



Very well done to all boys who attended the GCSE English Literature trip to see Macbeth at the Barbican Theatre in London: you were an absolute credit to BVGS throughout the day. Many thanks to **Mr Byrne**, **Mr Williams** and **Miss Langham** for kind help in organising the trip.



Geography



The Geography Department are always keen to bring their curriculum alive through practical illustration of knowledge. Here we have some very tasty cake coastal case studies.

Mandarin

We are delighted that 31 students from Year 7 have embarked on the intensive Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP) under the leadership of Mrs K Wang (from QMGs) and Miss M Wang (from BVGS). This will take them all the way to a KS3 trip to Shanghai and prepare them for both Chinese language qualifications (HSK) and GCSE Mandarin in Year 11.

One of the features of the MEP is a half termly Saturday study day. These have included so far a day Celebrating Christmas in the Chinese Style (including singing, martial arts and calligraphy) and a day Celebrating Chinese New Year (including lion dancing and traditional paper cutting as well as some very nice food!!).



Mathematics

As usual, the work of the Mathematics department has been supplemented by a range of national and regional and BVGS competitions.

Senior Maths Challenge

Out of 49 students who entered, 6 achieved a Gold certificate, 16 achieved a Silver certificate and 18 received a Bronze certificate. The winners of Gold certificates were **Harry Ayto** (Best in School), **Joseph Edwards**, **Robin Maes-Prior**, **Leo Karski**, **Angus Carter** and **Matthew Richardson** (Best in year 12). **Harry Ayto**, who has recently won a place at Princeton University to study Mathematics, qualified for the prestigious British Mathematical Olympiad putting him amongst the top 1000 entries in the whole country. The other students who achieved Gold certificates have all qualified for the Senior Kangaroo.

The Senior Maths Team (pictured right) finished 8th in the UKMT Senior Maths Team Challenge regional final on Wednesday. The team was: **Harry Ayto** (Y13), **Nina Adriano** (Y13), **James Ward** (Y12) and **Sebastian Smith** (Y12).

National Young Mathematicians' Awards: BVGS qualified for round two of the National Young Mathematicians' Awards on 6 December. The students involved were **Michael Owen** (Y7), **Joshua Robinson** (Y7), **Aditya Muthukumar** (Y8) and **Stephan Bowman** (Y8).

Additionally, **Mr Beasley** (Second in Mathematics) has been running his ever-popular keenly fought House Mathematics competitions for KS3 and Year 9 and 10 were all entered for the UK Mathematical Trust Intermediate competition. We await the results with interest.



Music



In October we said goodbye to outgoing Chair of Governors, Dr Craggs with a Junior House Competition in his honour. The Funky Bishops performed and here we can see Dr Craggs with the winners and all our House Music finalists and overleaf all our House Music finalists.



Congratulations to all our House Music Finalists. The worthy winners were: Third: **Alex Dixon**, Second: **Ethan Miller**, First: **Jeevan Braich**. A big thank you to **Mr Buxton**, Director of Music for organising with the support of the fabulous peri team, **Mrs Overton**, **Mr Wamsley**, **Mr Boyle** and our adjudicator **Mr Stuart Birnie**, Head of the Birmingham Music Service.

Lest we forget



We were honoured to take part in the 'Lest we Forget' National Children's Concert of Remembrance at the Genting Arena on Saturday evening. Thank you to all the students from the choir and brass group participating (seen below preparing for their rehearsal) and to **Mr Buxton** for masterminding the Vesey contribution to this huge national concert with an audience of 2,500 people. It sounded great.



Christmas Concerts



As usual Remembrance Day was marked with reverence across the school in three simultaneous assemblies.



Student participation and commitment levels were absolutely superb at our Christmas Concerts. The Head of the Music Service, Mr Birnie, put it well, "If only every school had a Year 7 choir like that". Congratulations to all our performers - so nice to see such progress being made and thanks to all our parent supporters and friends. Of course, a big thank you to Team Buxton and all our peripatetic teachers. Above all, well done to all the students involved! It is all on dvd too - many parents have bought copies

Vesey in the Community

Our Sixth Formers sang carols at the local care home leading up to Christmas. Thank you to **Mr Davis** for supporting this



Young Jazz Musician of the Year



A huge congratulations to **Xhosa Cole (OV)** on winning National Young Jazz Musician of the Year. He played his way to victory beating four other finalists with a 16-minute set. You too can hear Xhosa play here at BVGS at our Alumni Concert on 30 March.

Skoove



One of the curriculum innovations in Music is the use of 'Skoove' software which supports students in the development of their keyboard skills. school activities.

Year 7 at the Symphony Hall

One of the key experiences which every BVGS student enjoys is a trip to Symphony Hall in Year 7. To see one of the world's best orchestras, the CBO, in one of the world's best concert halls is a brilliant experience to put in the memory bank. Thank you to **Mr Buxton** and the staff for enabling this to happen.



Senior Soloists'

We had an excellent Senior Soloists' Concert in February with a varied programme. It was a concert full of bravery and soul.

- Ben Thompson - Voice - Arias 2 and 3 - Messiah (Comfort Ye and Every Valley): Handel
- Tom Shephard - Percussion - Rain Dance : Gomez and Rife
- Nathan McKenna-Patel - Clarinet - Allegro ma non troppo : Lefèvre
- Freddie Coleman - Voice and Piano - Valjean's Soliloquy: Les Miserables
- James Rogers - Saxophone - Canteloupe Island : Hancock
- Stephen Middlemass - Piano - Life on Mars: Bowie
- Sam Gill - Saxophone - Pink Panther : Henry Mancini
- Ned Walklett - Piano - Presto: Haydn
- James Whitehouse - Flute - Nobody Knows: Nobody Knows
- Luke Barrios - Drums - Mohair Mountain: Bennett and Kung Fu Drummer
- Lucy Windsor - Voice - As long as he needs me: Bart
- Sam McDowall - Piano - Summertime: Schönberg/Boublil/Natel
- Jaan Johal - Piano and Ben Thompson - Voice - Fly On: Coldplay
- Liam Wragg - Voice and Piano - 6/10: Clark
- Adrian Lowe - Clarinet - Fantasiestücke - Movements 2 and 3: Schumann
- Alison Hewitt - Voice - Say The Word (from the unauthorised autobiography of Samantha Brown: Lowdermilk & Kerrigan)
- Thomas Yoong - Piano - Valse Lente: Merikanto
- Joseph Hughes - Clarinet - Clarinet Concerto - 2nd Movement: Mozart
- Lawrence Li - Piano - Spring Day: BTS
- Ali Lakhanpal - Cello - Hallelujah: Cohen
- John Kamel - Piano - Bad/Smooth Criminal: Jackson (arranged Bence)
- Angus Carter - Trumpet - Slavonic Fantasy: Höhne
- Nick Ward - Drums - Geek: Rockschoo
- Stephanie Deathridge - Violin - Danse Espagnol: De Falla





Opening Minds

At Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, we aspire to foster in our students a love of learning. We also aim at to provide appropriate support and challenge for our students in order for them to fulfil their potential. Super-Curriculum encapsulates all those activities that nurture academic enquiry beyond the measurable outcomes of examination results. We also know that potential future universities and employers will be interested and impressed by the initiative taken by students who have engaged with super-curricular activities. Engaging in super curricular activities will help students develop a love for their favourite subject or subjects.

The Opening Minds booklet on our website consists of 'subject pages', which have been designed by academic departments at BVGS, which include a variety of prompts and ideas, which will enable you to explore your favourite subjects beyond the confines of the taught syllabus. These 'subject pages' are by no means exhaustive lists but should offer students a source of inspiration to explore their favourite subjects.

These activities can take many forms including wider reading, watching online materials, downloading podcasts, attending University lectures/masterclasses, arranging Summer School placements, engaging with H.E 'super- curricular' initiatives or visiting museums/places of academic interest. You might also like to join a regional or national club or society related to your academic interests, or enter

competitions. We hope you enjoy exploring as a family our Opening Minds resources.

Encounters with Employers



Our annual Careers and Jobs Fair was held on Friday 8 February. Thank you to all who supported it.

Seminars were held in:

Law

Iain Shoolbred (Irwin Mitchell)

Aimee Herbert (Bell Lax)

France Pigott (Barrister - Atkin Chambers)

Medicine and Healthcare

Amit Chudasama (Dentist)

Timothy Martin (Maxillofacial/Head and Neck Reconstructive Surgeon)

Michelle Ryland (BCU Radiography)

Construction and Engineering

Nick Clewer (Align Architecture)

David Halpin (Rolls Royce Aerospace)

David Hemming (Burley Browne - Chartered Surveyors)

Michael Knight (HS2 – Senior Project Manager)

Business

Phil Arkinstall (Ark Media Video Productions)

Jess Thompson-Huckerby (Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce)

Naeem Arif (NA Consulting – Business Consultancy)

Banking and Finance

Peter Dines (Mercia Technologies)

Martin Crook (Adams Moore)

Penny Hodges/Lucy Parize (KPMG)

IT & Tech

Alex Perrins (The Mailbox)

Matt Ellis – (Jetbrains)

Matt Wilkes (John Lewis IT)

Jo Hodson (IT Manager – Birmingham Airport)

Companies exhibiting at the Careers Fair included:

- Access Creative College
- ADI Limited
- Align Architecture
- Ansons
- Aston University
- Birmingham City University
- Bell Lax Solicitors
- BMet
- Burley Browne
- Crowe Clark Whitehill
- Deutsche Bank
- De Montford University
- ENGIE
- Gowling WLC
- Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce
- Jessups Brothers
- Keele University
- KPMG
- University of Leicester
- Loughborough University
- LMJV
- Medical Mavericks
- Moor Hall Hotel
- Newman University
- Nottingham Trent University
- NCS Challenge
- ProVQ
- PwC
- Pickford Solicitors
- Rolls Royce
- SERTEC
- St James' Place Wealth Management
- MoD
- Royal Navy
- UCFB
- University of Cardiff
- University Hospital Birmingham
- University of Bath
- University of Aberystwyth
- WSP

Medsoc

We have a thriving Medical Society which meets in The Hive on Thursdays for students aspiring to health related careers. We have been so lucky to have so many brilliant speakers from the parent body and our alumni. Thanks to **Dr Rohan Ahmed OV**. We are also able to provide our many medical school applicants with bespoke MMIs (mini medical interviews)

Mayor and MP grilled by Vesey Sixth-formers in Question Time-style event



Andy Street @andy4wm
Really enjoyed getting a grilling on the roles, responsibilities and achievements of the Mayoralty at @BVGS1527. A fantastic opportunity to talk to the next generation of citizens and voters



7:38 AM - 21 Jan 2019

3 Retweets 9 Likes

Oxbridge and Ivy League Success



Oxford:

Joel Smith: Engineering (College not yet allocated)

Cambridge:

Nina Adriano: Engineering (Selwyn)

Joseph Edwards: Maths (Emmanuel) **Zachary Farmer:** Spanish & Arabic Studies (Pembroke)

Emily Hyde: History (Kings)

Leo Karski: Economics (Kings)

Josh Martin: English (Homerton)

Oliver Nash: Maths (Downing)

Neddy Tsoi: Maths (Robinson)

Harry West: History (Selwyn)

Ivy League:

Harry Ayto: Maths (Princeton)

I am delighted to announce that of the 31 students interviewed for Oxbridge this year, we have **10** students who have received offers. Well done to them. This is no mean feat to receive an offer from a world class Oxbridge college when you are competing with an international field. The selection process for Oxbridge continues to be fiendishly difficult. Well done also to **Harry Ayto**, who has set a new standard and benchmark for the school in gaining a place at the prestigious Ivy League University of Princeton (whilst at the same time being turned down by Oxford).

Student Leadership



Well done to our students (pictured left) who have delivered staff training on Sixth Form teaching and learning. They did a great job of highlighting what works well for them in their learning and how else the school can support them in their education. Thank you all.

Children with Cancer non-uniform day

Well done to one of our Upper Sixth students, **Hamzah Mahmood**, who led the fund-raising for a non-uniform day for Children with Cancer. In preparation, Hamzah led very moving assemblies all week about his little sister, Laraib, and her fight against a very rare form of cancer (acute lymphoblastic leukaemia with ABL2 translocation). The whole School family came together and we raised £2,000.



Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme

Founded in 1956, this scheme, now under the leadership of **Miss Langham** (English Department) goes from strength to strength. Here are pictured the latest body of young men to receive Bronze Awards. Well done gents!



World Challenge Leadership

World Challenge is an annual event for Year 9 students. Typically, a large group of students will go to a country such as Norway, Morocco or Croatia and undertake a tough physical challenge, whether that be kayaking or mountaineering. All Challengers are encouraged to be independent and resilient. That includes doing their own fund-raising for their trip. I have been so impressed by recent efforts from Year 8 and 9 in their approach to this. Often this includes an entrepreneurial approach to selling sweets and cake to their colleagues. I was really struck by a recent Year 8 initiative before Christmas.

Adam Hurley, Ben White, Harry Howes, Jamie Coley, Oscar Lugg, Alex Heirbaut Kitteridge, Charlie Ward, James Whittaker, Jay Kennedy and Viraj Gupta hosted a Christmas Concert on 9 December at Erdington URC in order to raise funds for their Norway World Challenge. In all they raised a fantastic £415. Outstanding leadership from all.

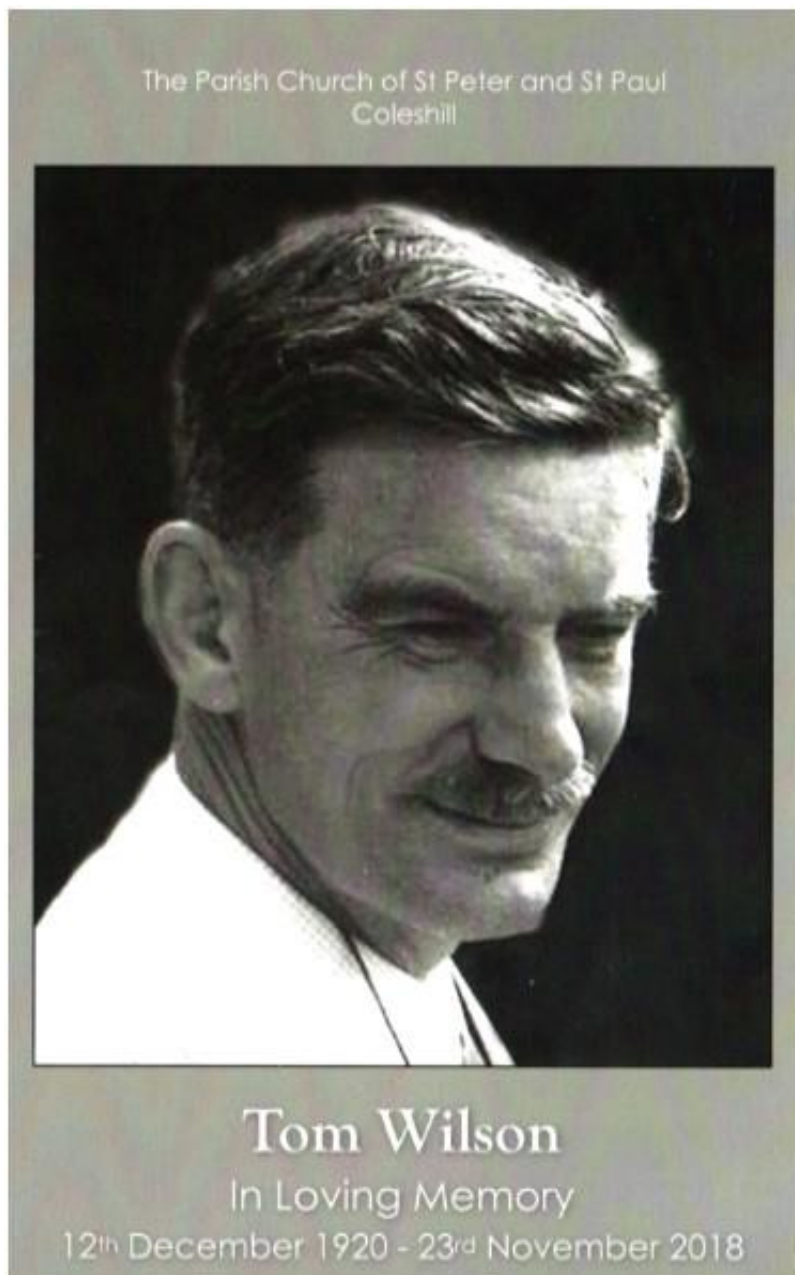


Social Mobility and BVGS

Over the last few weeks I have enjoyed meeting a number of primary Headteachers locally. All the primary Headteachers had one thing in common: each one of their local schools had very high levels of students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. We are very keen to find ways to inspire and encourage students from disadvantaged backgrounds to apply to Bishop Vesey's Grammar School. We have an exciting plan emerging for the summer term. On this theme, look out for BVGS on the tv on Monday 25 February. Generation Gifted charts the story of a student hoping to attend Bishop Vesey's Grammar School.



Remembering Tom Wilson (OV) 1920 - 2018



It is fitting to pay tribute to Old Veseyan Tom Wilson who has died at the age of 97. Tom was born in Birmingham in 1920 and attended Bishop Vesey's Grammar School from 1929 until 1939. He won a scholarship to Birmingham University and gained a degree in Electrical Engineering before joining the RAF in 1941. He had rejected pacifism because he already knew of the persecution of the German Jews from playing as a child with the sons of several refugees being sheltered by family friends, the Kahns.

He became a navigator and flew Beaufighters before joining 192 (Special Duties) Squadron equipped with modified Wellington bombers gathering electronic intelligence. Tom was a radar operator responsible for collecting intelligence on the German extensive air-defence radar and communications systems.

In May 1943 his Wellington was shot down over The Hague and he was captured having parachuted and landed beside a ditch and being rendered unconscious. He was taken to Stalag Luft 111 in Silesia, now part of Poland. Tom joined the prisoners' orchestra and played a violin he bought and restored, crushing almonds for oil to clean it.

Stalag 111 was the site of the famous Wooden Horse tunnelling escape and Tom Wilson played a notable part in diverting attention from the tunnelling and spoil disposal activities through his renditions of Handel sonatas from memory. It was on October 29th 1943 that Williams, Conder and Philpot escaped through the airless tunnel and melted into the surrounding woodland. All three eventually arrived safely in neutral Sweden. Tom later wrote how proud he was of the ingenuity shown making lamps from cooking oil with pyjama cord wicks and using bed-boards as shoring timbers in the tunnel.

As German opposition began to crumble Wilson and his fellow officers were taken to Nuremberg and then on to Stalag V11-A at Moosburg in Bavaria. On April 29th 1945 the prison camp was liberated by General Patton but food was in short supply. Tom and his fellow officers herded the Kommandant's herd of swine back inside and light work was made of the nutritional benefits of the pork.

In 1950 Tom Wilson married a young German lady Gabriele Claessens who he had met two years previously at an international student seminar. He took up teaching and took a Cambridge degree in Russian and German and first taught at the Royal Liberty School, Romford before becoming headmaster of Coleshill Grammar School east of Birmingham. Tom retired in 1983 and became a Church of England Reader taking services at Maxstoke and Coleshill and remained a keen violinist.

Tom often attended the Shaggy Dogs Tea Party and lately was brought by his son. He last attended in 2017.



OLD VESEYAN ASSOCIATION

This section of the *Veseyan* is edited by Stephen Roberts (1970-77). Please send news and reminiscences to Stephen. Due to limitations of space, contributions may need to be edited; we will, however, endeavour to place longer pieces on the OVA website. Stephen's email address is: roberts384@btinternet.com

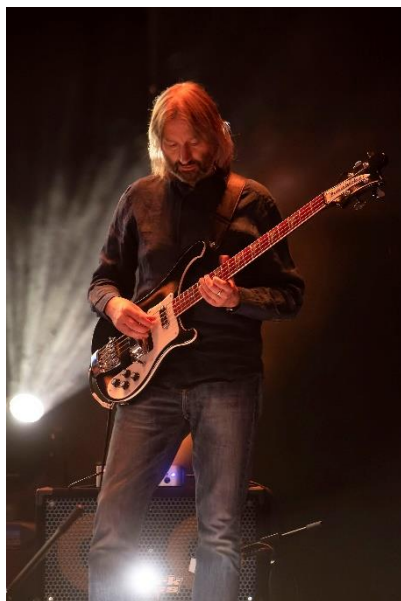
News

Jerry Fenwick (Chemistry master 1975-8) writes that **Mike Sadler**, who taught French, German and Spanish at the school between 1974 and 2001, now resides at Beech Hill Nursing Home in Sutton Coldfield, having suffered a serious stroke four years ago. He adds: Mike and I first met in the spring of 1975 when I did a twelve week teaching practice at Vesey. He became a very close and loyal friend to my family. On our many holidays together I was greatly impressed by how fluently he was able to converse in French and German and how quickly he assimilated Spanish. During our visits to local hostels a chance encounter with a former pupil always elicited expressions of fondness and appreciation of Mike's unstinting efforts in the classroom and his obvious passion for languages. **Alex Walmsley** (1968-75) writes that **Philip Walmsley**, who taught History and Government & Politics at the school between 1955 and 1984, has moved to a residential home in Leonard Stanley, near Stroud. He adds: After retiring from BVGS my father moved to Gloucestershire. He continued with his great passion for history, gaining an MLitt from Bristol University and founding the Stroud Local History Society. He wrote several books on Stroud, the last of which was published two years ago. A keen Methodist, he also continued to take church services in the area as a local preacher until well into his ninth decade. **Hamish Simpson** (1952-6) writes to say that his environmental pamphlet *Beginning or End of the Brave New World* can be ordered from Amazon, priced at £2.56. We regret to record the death of **John Hamilton** (1939-45) on 16 December 2018.

Michael Fallows (1961-9) remembers ...

My life began in Britwell Road, Boldmere, where I attended the Vestry Primary School, part of the church on the corner of Highbridge Road. Anyone born in the post-war era – in my case in 1950 – will know how fortunate we have been to live in that narrow corridor of time, and relative safety and prosperity. Our house was opposite a large playing field, where we played football and cricket. My subsequent career in sport would never have happened without this opportunity to make friends and enjoy a healthy lifestyle. Our neighbour in Britwell Road was none other than David Arkell, who contributed to the final edition of the *Old Veseyan News*. And his neighbour? I will return to him later as an important part of my story. At the bottom of Britwell Road, close to the junction with Jockey Road, a celebrated maths teacher and rugby referee lived. His name was Norman Jackson, better known as 'Bean'. He was never my favourite and one to be feared. He withheld my sports colours for missing a tennis match in favour of going to Villa Park in 1966 to watch West Germany play Spain. He was right, of course, and I never forgot the example it set, but I don't regret going to a not-to-be repeated experience. The year is 1961 and I am enjoying my annual two weeks summer holiday in Abersoch. I am about to start my first term at BVGS, having somehow passed my 11+. There were two very enthusiastic sports guys assembling youngsters on the beach for the daily 'test match'. One of them was Ted Hewitt, a sports master from Keyes School, and the other was Rex Wallbank, soon to be revealed to me as the legendary King of Sport at BVGS. And to cap it all, he lived in Britwell Road, next door to

David Arkell! So I enter BVGS in my new uniform, cap firmly on my head and understandably nervous. I eventually found my way to the wooden 'terrapien' classroom, which had two things in its favour. Firstly, it was situated beneath the steps leading to the tuck shop and, secondly, it was adjacent to what affectionately became known as 'midfield', which meant we got first shout at the best pitch for lunchtime football. The 'terrapien' was the home of 1B and our house master was the legendary Rex Wallbank. I was introduced to Micky Webb, who became, and remains, my firmest friend, a proper athlete. We still joust on the tennis court and golf course, where I come second. It was Michael who reunited me with Martin Smith and Paul Holly. I was so pleased to meet up with them again, true sportsmen. Martin was a super footballer, very quick and his swerve was easily transferable to the rugby field. So what happened next? I served my apprenticeship as an articled clerk at an accountancy firm, Peat Marwick & Mitchell, where my principal was J D (David) Leake, mentioned sadly in the last *Old Veseyan News*, as having passed away in August 2018. He was one of a few who made a big impact on my life, as with Rex and Micky Webb: I was fortunate to know them. Hard work and not a little good fortune, coupled with excellent role models, resulted in me enjoying a very happy and successful career way ahead of my expectations, the icing on the cake, given my tennis background, being my recent election as a full member of the AELTC, Wimbledon. And to complete the coincidences in my story, elected at the same time was Richard Baker, ten years my junior at BVGS, and taught by my tennis partner of twenty five odd years, G C W. Jackson, better known as 'Skippy' or, in tennis circles, 'Elbow' ... both nicknames carrying affection.



Big Big Train are an award-winning rock band. Old Veseyan Greg Spawton is the mainstay of the band. Below he remembers his days at BVGS and reflects on his work as a songwriter.

1. How would the eighteen-year old lad who left BVGS in 1983 have felt if he'd have known he'd become a professional rock musician? At that stage, when I was younger and full of hope and expectation, I probably wouldn't have been that surprised to find out that my life would be centred around music. It would have been in my twenties and thirties that the realities of making a living as a musician would have made it seem an unrealistic prospect! I wasn't able to turn fully professional until I was 50, so it has been a long, hard slog.

2. What band names were daubed on your ruck sack at BVGS? I don't know if it is still true for today's Veseyans, but the school ruck sack back in the late 70s was an important part of an individual's identity and we spent ages trying to perfect the logos of our bands so we could display our 'tribe'. I had the Genesis logo from 'Seconds Out' on mine (it was all straight lines, so it was easy to draw). Later I added the Van Der Graaf Generator logo. It's become a cliché now, but one kid had 'Don't Follow Me, I'm Lost Too' written on his bag which made me laugh as, for the first few weeks of our secondary school life, we were all horribly lost in this massive building.

3. You followed your older brother Nigel to BVGS. Is it true that he came up with the name Big Big Train? Nigel was five years older than me so there was very much an expectation I would follow in his footsteps and

A Chat with Greg Spawton of Big Big Train

attend Vesey. That caused even greater pressure at entrance exam time! Nigel was a drummer in a new wave band in the late 1970s and it was actually me that suggested the name of my train set as the band name for them. When they disbanded, I kept the name at the back of my mind and it was thrown in the hat along with other names when we formed BBT in 1990.

4. When did you start to play an instrument and write songs? Were you in any bands at BVGS? Aside from spells in the school choir at Town (my junior school) and in the local church choir, I was terribly unmusical as a child. I remember one of the kids at Vesey could play classical guitar and he performed in front of the school. That inspired me to pick up the guitar at the very late age of 17. I had some folk guitar lessons and then later on studied classical guitar for two or three years. Rock music was my first musical love, though.

5. Your songs are infused with a deep love for the English past. Was history a favourite subject at BVGS? Yes, absolutely, all the way through my schooldays, history was my favourite subject. Even in science, I was more interested in the history of science and exploration than in the subjects themselves.

6. What rules did you break at BVGS? Honestly, I wasn't exactly a model pupil at Vesey. In the first year or so, I found the transition of being an older pupil at junior school to a really small kid in a massive grammar school very difficult so I struggled a bit and bunked off a few times. Later on, when I began to enjoy school life, it was little things like finding short cuts in the cross-country runs in Sutton Park. I was caught a couple of times and had to run further. The weather could be very cold back then and those cross-country runs could be brutal. In the fifth and sixth forms, it was always my long-hair length that got me into trouble. I ran off from a school trip in Ludlow with my best mate Richard Williamson because the other kids were threatening to 'modernise' my hair style!

7. Do you remember what teachers used to write about you on your reports? I still have my reports and the teachers back then could be spectacularly brutal! The thing that was often remarked on was the difference between my exam results

and my classroom effort. My course work was often lacking in quality and effort, but I was always good at exams and the teachers struggled to connect the exam successes to the rather useless child they were confronted with in the classroom.

8. Which teachers made a particular impression on you? We had a great French teacher. My memory may be falling, but I remember him as Smokey Joe Sadler. I wasn't very good at languages, but Mr Sadler had belief in me and that made me believe in myself. I also remember a Geography teacher called 'Freaky Dave': he was the 'cool' teacher. Our English teacher was Ma Evans: she was a good teacher. The headmaster, Mr Harvey, was rather intimidating.

9. At university you read archaeology. How has that influenced how you think about things and how you write your songs?

I carried that love of history into university and had three good years at Reading, learning how to dig holes and 'read' the landscape. It allowed me to get a deeper appreciation of our history and the interaction between humankind and the land we live on. Many years later that came out in a piece like 'Grimspound' where we composed a song about a piece of ground which has been occupied for hundreds of years, then abandoned, before passing into folklore.

10. How does a song come into being? You get an idea and then what?

I have a lyric book which is full of ideas or half-ideas, sometimes just titles or words. For the music most of that starts off as something I 'hear' in my head. If I am out and about when that happens, I sing the idea into my iPhone and then start to develop the idea into a chord sequence with melodies. That is when the lyric book starts to come into use as I will connect a musical sketch with a title or lyric idea. After that the song may evolve in different ways, depending on where the music leads me. Eventually, when everything feels in place, I will create a demo of the song and then the rest of the band will work up their parts and we'll start recording things properly.

11. The songs you wrote on the 'English Electric' album deal with things lost and the dignity of working people. What prompted this sequence of songs?

I was wandering around near my Mum's house in Wilnecote, near Tamworth, and stumbled upon one of the capped pits in the area. I started doing some research and realised the pit had been a huge undertaking and had been the centre of the local community. And then it was gone. This is a pattern that has been repeated across Britain and in many parts of the world, great industries, which sustained local communities, failing. You see many examples of this in the coal mining areas, in the shipbuilding communities and in the tin mines in Cornwall. We didn't want to romanticize this in any way; these were very tough industries, but nevertheless communities formed around them and the sense of loss when the industries closed must have been extraordinary. So, for the most part, the album is an epitaph for those communities.

12. What did you do before Big Big Train became successful?

I worked in local government for many years, mainly on homelessness issues. I am proud of some of the work I did, but mostly I was part of the machine.

13. Do you ever wish it had all worked out differently and that you were now an archaeologist excavating a Roman villa in the rain?

I'd rather be excavating a Roman villa in Italy in the sunshine! These are three songs about ancient Rome on the next album, so I get to scratch my history itch through the songs these days. But, yes, I do have regrets that I didn't seek a career in archaeology. Would I have continued with music, though, if I had done that? I am not sure. I suspect that my continuing to make music was something to do with a lack of fulfilment in local government work. And, after many years, things took off enough to make a proper go of it.

14. What does your brother Nigel make of it all? Is he a listener to your albums?

He got me into Genesis in the first place, so he indirectly steered me into a life in progressive rock. He is very supportive, as are all my family and friends. What has been great is that the band has helped to bring a lot of people together who used to be friends, but drifted apart. I had a band in Sutton Coldfield in the early eighties called Equus, and we played the YMCA in Sutton not far from the school. In fact two of the band members, Richard (who ran away with me in Ludlow) and Simon Kirby were fellow BVGS pupils. We kind of formed the band at the bus stop outside the school. Anyway Equus split up and we drifted apart. But we are all back in touch again and the guys and other local friends are coming to see Big Big Train at Birmingham Town Hall in autumn 2019.



Photographs: Michael Heller

Breaking News: In February 2019 Big Big Train were voted top of the best band category by readers of the UK music magazine Prog.

Sport

It has been a great hockey season so far. A lot of fun has been had and so far a 62.9% win ratio. Our top performing teams include the U16A, the U14C and the U13C. In this edition we have a spotlight on the U13A Hockey team from **Mr Roberts**.

Back in late September 2018 the U13As played their first competitive 11-a-side fixture against local rivals King Edwards School (Birmingham). The boys found the size of pitch and the space available pretty difficult to manage as they have been used to playing half pitch 7-a-side fixtures. As a squad you could sense there was a general cohesion and they battled hard throughout the game only to lose 1-0, conceding the goal in the last five minutes. Up next was Warwick School who have a steep history in Hockey both on regional and National level, the game was extremely competitive and a number of boys really stepped up their game, in particular Rohit Jakhu, Luke Douglas and Thomas Hanlon who all play regular hockey for Sutton Coldfield Hockey Club. With the game tied at 1-1 it could have swung either way. Unfortunately on this occasion Warwick School secured the win. With half term arriving the boys next fixture was in early November in the league and a road trip to Leicestershire to take on Loughborough Grammar. At this point things really started to click and the boys found their rhythm, with fast flowing, aggressive Hockey the boys surprised the opposition. It was no surprise the boys came away with a well-earned 2-0 victory and three valuable points. With a solid 1-1 draw against King Edwards School (Birmingham) the following week, the boys were in good spirits when they encountered Solihull School in a friendly fixture. Unfortunately, Solihull took BVGS by surprise and ran out 2-0 winners. The boys reflected on this loss and worked incredibly hard during training and you could sense the loss had hit them hard. This was the turning point of the season and the U13s went on an unbeaten run of six games, amassing a total of 18 goals and only conceding 4. Along the way they reversed the scores against King Edwards School (Birmingham) 3-1, Warwick School 3-0 and Solihull School 2-1. With a solid performance against Princethorpe 4-2 this meant the U13As secured the Warwickshire League. The whole squad have been superb and I must mention Connor Brennan who had the most difficult role playing in goal, at times he has kept the side in the game with superb saves and really good footwork. The defensive unit of **Stephen Bowman, Daniel O'Neill, Alex Heirbaut Kitteridge, Sam Holt and James Whittaker** at times very very nervous but have grown in confidence and are starting to understand the importance of marking and outletting. I have mentioned the three in midfield who have been the heart-beat of the side, Rohit without doubt scored the most audacious goal I have seen for someone so young. Taking a self-pass very quickly he beat five Solihull players, before rounding the goal-keeping and slotted the ball home to secure a brilliant victory against Solihull School. Without hard running forwards you are never going to secure possession without putting the oppositions defence under the greatest of pressure, **Daniel White, William Hume, Josh Singh, Umar Mahmood and Joseph Josh** have been superb in the importance of closing down and channeling. But also understanding how important it is to rotate forwards in order to keep the intensity at the highest level.

February half-term is nearly here and the boys can have a well-earned rest before resuming their hockey in early March. Well done on securing the Warwickshire League, but plenty more Hockey to come.

Rugby

We are now at the end of the XV fixture list. So it is a good time to look back and reflect on another excellent season.

Outside of cup fixtures, 13 teams have played 150 games, winning 64.7% of the fixtures. Our star team is the Under 12 Ds, who have won all of their fixtures. A big well done to: **Hugo KELLY, Ibraheem AYUB, Mandeep SAGOO, Zakiy HUSSAIN, Charlie STROUD, Fahd ALI, Joseph BIBBY, Kian DAS, Woody MURPHY, Harveer RANDHAWA, Rayyan SAJEEL, Ileri ADEWOLE, Khayre ABDULLAHI and Oyedeji SONUGA**

This superb photo below was taken of the U16s (2018-2019: played 14, won 8, lost 6) who have been together for five excellent years of rugby. They have acquitted themselves with great pride and professionalism. Well done gentlemen!



Our Seniors are looking forward to the tour to Japan this summer. A huge thank you to an anonymous donor, who has given £1,000 to support the rugby tour.

It is also brilliant to see our Sixth Form girls making great progress in the field of rugby. They may not have won every fixture but they are representing the School with pride and skill. They are even playing at the prestigious Rosslyn Park tournament this March. I am delighted to say that they have been sponsored by The Old Veseyan Association so that female rugby becomes a sustainable feature of life at BVGS.

This is also the first year that the female team have had their first official photo. As my predecessor, David Iddon used to say.... History in the Making!



Netball success at the Regionals in Telford

Despite the bitter cold our netball girls performed brilliantly. They beat Shrewsbury School (11-12), Hereford Cathedral School (6-4), Wolverhampton Grammar (13-6) and St Joseph's Stoke (12-2). They drew 6-6 with Higham and lost to Bromsgrove (11-12) and in the semis to RGS Worcester (7-6). A valiant team effort.

KS3 Badminton success at Birmingham School Games



Community

We continue to be thoughtful as a school about the way we support young people with their mental health. One initiative this year is the Thrive Programme which is led by **Miss Hearn, Deputy Head**. Through this programme, Year 7 boys tackle a variety of challenges together from Morse code to shelter building. We believe building a warm and supporting community is essential to help all our students thrive.

