A WORD OF WELCOME
From the Headteacher

In the largest ever edition of The Veseyan, we hope you will be inspired by the stories of excellence from Vesey students: present and past. Wishing you and your family a lovely Christmas. See you in 2020!

A WELCOME TO OV READERS
From Paul Wallis, Chair of the OVA.
Dear Readers – I am pleased to report a very successful 2019 for Old Veseyans, certainly in terms of attendance and enjoyment of our 4 main events. Read more about them, and the continuation of my welcome, on page 15.
BRINGING LEARNING TO LIFE

Sapere Aude  Dominic Robson

I love the phrase, ‘Sapere aude.’ It was first used by the Roman author Horace in his ‘First Book of Letters’ in 20 BC. This Latin phrase means ‘Dare to know’ and also loosely translated as ‘Dare to be wise.’ It is a phrase that beautifully captures what we at Bishop Vesey’s Grammar School, and want all our amazingly talented young people to both value and to become.

Our mission for our curriculum is inspiration and excellence. We want all our learners, irrespective of background, to be scholars, well equipped for life beyond school, with a deep knowledge, understanding and life-long enthusiasm for the subjects they are studying. Through our curricular and extra-curricular provision, we want to develop students of excellent character, responsible global citizens, who will make the world a better place through their kindness, thoughtfulness, confidence and resilience.

To that end, we offer a challenging and rigorous three year KS3 programme of study. All students study two modern foreign languages at KS3 (since 2019 Year 8 have the choice of French, Mandarin and Spanish). From Year 10, every student studies GCSE English Language, English Literature, Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Biology (GCSE Science courses all start in Year 9), plus at least one Modern Foreign Language and at least one ‘Humanities’ subject of either Geography or History. In total, students study 10 GCSEs. At Sixth Form, we offer 17 different A level courses as well as the Extended Project Qualification, HSK2 Mandarin, as well as an exciting array of Enrichment opportunities such as Primary School Outreach, Development Internships, volunteering in local care homes, hospitals or charity shops and mentoring. For each subject area and key stage, you can read more on our school website about our curriculum intent (mission): https://bvgs.co.uk/curriculum-overview/.

What excites me most about our School is the day to day implementation of this curriculum. When I drop into lessons, as I do on a daily basis, I am keen to see for myself how the curriculum is being delivered. How is the curriculum being sequenced? How well is student knowledge being developed over time? Can students, for example, remember the knowledge from previous work done last half term as well as the work they are studying now? How well are students using subject specific vocabulary?

The depth of student knowledge is typically a real strength. When I meet with the Merit Winners each week, I often say, “Tell me something you learnt this week which you find really interesting and why.” The answers are fascinating and the conversation might range from antigens to quadratic graphs, from the imperfect tense in Spanish to micro-plastics.

As parents and carers, we can help foster a culture of ‘daring to know’ in our own families. To that end, there is a brilliant resource on the school website, I can commend to you and your families. Have a look: https://bvgs.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Open-Your-Mind-Final.pdf.

Have fun this Christmas! And don’t forget. Sapere aude.
On 12th November a group of ‘A’ Level Mathematicians and I went to the Maths Inspiration Lectures in Birmingham, where we spent the day listening to three amazing lecturers talk about the parts of maths which they find to be interesting.

The first of the three was called Zoe Griffiths and she gave an insight into how numbers are used and manipulated in the news with some very sinister connotations. An example is when the results of polls are incorrectly represented in bar charts to make it appear as if one party has a much greater lead than they do in reality.

For me, the highlight of the day was the final speaker Ben Sparks with a lecture titled “Windmills of Your Mind”. He touched on some very interesting concepts such as the natures of different square numbers and imaginary numbers as well as performing the song “Windmills of Your Mind” after which the lecture was named.

As well as this, I found myself looking forward to whenever the host, Matt Parker, would come on stage in between lectures as he provided a brief comic relief between the lectures as well as introducing the audience to the next lecturer.

Speaking of the audience, there was a good amount of audience participation throughout the day with students being chosen at random by the speakers to come down on stage so that they could help in visualising what they were explaining. This added a fun atmosphere to the day and made it feel like we were involved and not just listening to someone talk for an hour at a time.

Overall, I enjoyed the day and would recommend future year 12 Mathematicians to go, not only to enrich their UCAS application, but also just to have a good time.

**Vesey in numbers**

- Approximately 800 meals are served in our canteen daily
- 49 extra-curricular activities take place on a weekly basis
- 160 Old Veseyans attended the sell-out OVA Dinner on Saturday 9th November
- Every Tuesday in FF9 60 students attend Chess Club
- 1,173 lessons per week are taught here at BVGS, that’s 1,173 hours of teaching time per week!

Mr Robson sees, on average, 16 students a week for his Merit Winner’s Cookies celebration of student success.
On Monday 18th November 2019, Mrs Rowlands organised a trip for Years 12 and 13 to visit London galleries. Students visited three galleries: The British Museum, the Tate Britain followed by the Tate Modern and saw a vast array of traditional and contemporary artwork, as well as cultural artefacts. This learning experience will help them to develop contextual development in their projects.

_Tate Britain_
‘I particularly enjoyed viewing William Blake’s illustrated poetry- some of which I also need for A Level English.’
_Elliot Brown U6III_

_Tate Modern_
‘towering sculpture made up of hundreds of analogue radios, speakers and CD players dating back to 1920, addressing the idea of information overload and failed communication.’
_Heather Walmsley U6II_

_The British Museum_
‘The drawing room also demonstrated how subject matter of artwork has changed over time – depending on culture, religion and the nature found around civilisations.’
_James Whitehouse L6VIII_

**Year 7 and 8 Writing Competition**

We are proud of student led projects here at BVGS. _Aditya Muthukumar 9G_ took the initiative, with the support of Mrs Haywood, to run a half-termly writing competition for Years 7 and 8.

The winner of the Autumn Half Term was _Amos Messam 7P_. Well done.
On 3rd December 2019, Year 7 boys who attend CENTRESTAGE@BVGS performed a recital in Big School showcasing the poems they have been working on this school term.

The boys were fantastic and it was a wonderful beginning to their CENTRESTAGE@BVGS experience.

Six classes of students performed a broad range of poems based on the theme of “Animals”, from Roald Dahl’s hilarious ‘Dirty Beasts’ collection including “The Porcupine” to T.S. Eliot’s darker poem ”Macavity the Mystery Cat”.

All of the boys who participated should be very proud of themselves. They performed a wonderful recital and we look forward to another term teaching them in the lead up to their LAMDA examinations.


Yusuf attended the Regional heats on the 9th December, where judges complimented him on his pronunciation and fluency.

He is the first BVGS student to make the final, in what is an incredibly hard-fought competition. Congratulations Yusef and good luck for the Final, held in February.
BVGS held its own campaign trail, hustings and elections, over the course of the week commencing the 9th December. 5 of the major parties were represented by impassioned speakers, who defended their parties and handled questions from the floor with composure and skill.

Our five candidates were:
- Brexit Party - Joshua Russell
- Conservatives - Jaden Lo-Watson
- Green Party - Ben Kirman
- Labour - Anais Brindley
- Liberal Democrats - Alys Mortimer

As with the rest of the country, election day at BVGS was held on Thursday 12th December. Ballot papers were distributed to all forms and voting was carried out in silence, with each Form Room acting as a Polling Station.

The Sixth Form Officer Team helped to count the votes at break time, with Big School acting as the BVGS counting hall.

Students were educated about the policies of each major party, had the chance to participate in democratic process and learnt about the system of running an election. An interesting and educational experience for all involved.

The results are in!

- 23.06% of the votes go to the Conservatives
- 22.02% of the votes go to Labour
- 17.93% of the votes go to the Liberal Democrats
- 15.45% of the votes go to the Green Party
- 5.28% of the votes go to the Brexit Party

*The other ballots were spoiled, blank or otherwise illegible*
Our rugby XVs have enjoyed great success, winning 74% of the matches they played. During the half term break, the U13A and U13B teams travelled to Ireland. They had a great time and won all three of their matches. Congratulations to both teams and the coaches involved. Other highlights of the half term include the 9th November against Adams’ Grammar School and 23rd November against King’s School Worcester when all our teams returned home victorious.

However, the team of the half term must be the 2nd XV who remained unbeaten! Captained by Finlay Port the team have played superbly. Stand out games include their 33-0 win over Bloxham School and their 55-14 defeat of Queen Mary’s Grammar School with tries from Fraser Bell, Will Davies, Matty Keating, Charlie Giblin and a hat trick for the captain.

Rugby for girls continues to grow as we work towards a second appearance in the National Schools Sevens Tournament to be held at Rosslyn Park RFC in March 2020. Training has been very well attended and enjoyable, and recent fixtures held at Burton and Coventry gave the girls a great opportunity to showcase their skills. The Lent term sees more training and numerous fixtures in preparation for Rosslyn Park and the girls will doubtless rise to the challenge.

For our hockey teams it has been much the same story. The 1st XI played especially well, recording huge wins. They beat Princethorpe College 5-1 and thanks to a hat trick from Daniel Porter and goals from Matthew Freer, captain Ben Ellis, George Hounslow and Jeevan Degun, they won 9-0 against Newcastle-Under-Lyme School.

Lower down the school, teams struggled with form, but all finished the half term strongly. In particular, the U14B who came back from a loss to Bablake to beat Queen Mary’s Grammar School 7-0 and the U13 sevens teams who recorded convincing wins over Warwick School.

Over on the netball court the girls have not disappointed. At a tournament in early November the 1st team secured their place at the regional finals in January.

The BVGS Swimming Gala was held on Wednesday the 18th December, with White House being crowned champions for the third successive year.

Overall it has been a very successful term for Vesey’s sport. Congratulations to all our teams, their captains, the coaches and all parents that have supported their children throughout the term.
Here at Vesey we have seen a dramatic change in the officer system this year. We have transitioned from three House Captains to two, and introduced several new roles, such as Environmental Officers and Community Outreach Officers. 2019 has also seen the induction of Emerald house, meaning Vesey is now six form entry in Year 7.

As School Captains our roles and responsibilities vary from week to week. From giving speeches at the recent Old Veseyan Association Dinner to organising which officers give tours to prospective parents, there’s always something to be getting on with. We have been lucky enough to meet some incredible people on various occasions, including many Old Veseyans. A highlight for many of the officer team was the Shaggy Dogs Tea Party whereby we heard many an interesting story and learnt about Vesey in years gone by. Networking is also a major part of our job. We work closely with the school’s Development Office meeting the Corporate Partners and making links beneficial to both out future aspirations and to Bishop Vesey. We have attended barbeques with local businesses as well as the thoroughly enjoyable ‘Speed Networking’ event, whereby we had 1 minute to sell ourselves to several corporate partners and all involved gained valuable skills and contacts.

In the last couple of years as a school, one of our main focuses has been on changing the perception of grammar schools in the wider community. A number of us regularly act as a mentor for younger students, preparing them for GCSEs, A-levels and helping younger students at the school in more of a pastoral role.

The entire officer team at Vesey has concentrated on making Vesey not only a better place for the current generation of Veseyans, but for the future of the whole community. Our primary focus has been environmental awareness, with a week of assemblies and the phasing out of single use plastics in the canteen. Another responsibility of ours is the organisation of the Leavers’ Ball at Villa Park. We hope it will be an enjoyable evening for all Upper Sixth Leavers, many of whom will undoubtedly become members of the Association in the years to come.

We are heading rapidly into the Christmas season, meaning a well-earned break for all students and staff. However, there are those in our community who will not be surrounded by friends and family this holiday season. Therefore we have planned to have a group of students visit Gracechurch care home to sing carols and talk with residents, hoping to spread the seasonal cheer to those less fortunate. Elijah Nix in Lower Sixth has set up a ‘Giving Tree’ in Gracechurch Shopping Centre, hoping to donate items to those in need.

On behalf of the student body and Officer team at Vesey, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.
Aims of the Student Council
The Student Council at Bishop Vesey’s Grammar School exists to represent the voice of the students, promote their ideas and advocate their views and interests. Its role includes helping the school to serve its students as effectively as possible and making students aware of wider issues, in addition to playing an important role in establishing links with the community. We hold regular meetings with the Student Councillors and, once or twice a half term, the Student Council hold an Open Meeting, which all students and staff are welcome to attend and raise their suggestions.

Update from the Lower School Council President
My aim for the School Councillors in Years 7-10 was to inspire a sense of excitement towards the practical side of school life and for them to realise the collective weight of their voices. We have achieved this through high attendance at important school meetings; for example, we were invited to consult Aspens, our school caterers, about ways in which they could improve. As a result of our consultation, Aspens ended the sale of single-use plastics.

I have been encouraging the Lower School councillors to talk more with their peers in order to gauge the most important issues for them. We worked alongside Mr Swindells, School Business Manager, to invest in three new picnic tables in the Quad. Furthermore, Mr Robson asked me to discuss the school curriculum and if the councillors thought there could be any improvements. In fact, they were content with what they were learning and felt no pressing changes should be made! Finally, I have been asked by Ms Orlandini, Head of PSHE, to put forward ideas regarding LGBT education within our school, and how to integrate it into every aspect of the curriculum.

Ruby Cooper, Lower School President of the Student Council

Update from the Senior School Council President
The Senior Council have been raising awareness among students of prevalent issues in society, including health, financial and environmental issues; in particular, working towards the international Eco-Schools Green Flag award. We will soon promote a ‘Site Facilities Survey’ where students will have the opportunity to raise any suggestions to school facilities.

Moreover, School Councillors had the exciting opportunity to mark ‘UK Parliament Week’ from 2-8 November 2019 and engaged with activities designed to encourage young people and the public to engage with the UK’s democratic system. Two issues with particular relevance to BVGS were environmental concerns and the UK’s education provision. As discussed with the Senior Leadership Team, the School Council can provide a consultative platform to continuously improve both areas.

In addition, the Sixth Form are incredibly passionate about establishing links with the local community and raising money for charities; hence, the Senior Council have been working closely with the Charities Committee to achieve ambitious fundraising targets. The School Council offers students the chance to play our part in leading our school through decisions for a brighter future.
Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Jaden Lo-Watson, Senior School President of the Student Council
When I first joined the school in September, I had never heard of a Development Office, but I applied because I was intrigued. The process involved filling out an application form and writing a CV before having an interview with Mr Davies. From there we were asked to write a report (based on a topic of interest that had come up in our interview) and then we were invited back for a review meeting to go over our application. Luckily, I was accepted.

Now, I understand that the role of the Development Office within school is to work in conjunction with Corporate Partners, Alumni, Staff and Students to build enduring relationships that will be invaluable to everyone. As an Intern I am involved in ensuring this can happen by networking, attending and organising various aspects of events so that they can run smoothly.

There are two different Intern roles within our Development Office, so whilst I am a Business Intern, 3 out of the 16 are Charity Interns. Over the past half term, my main role has been to work with the other Business Interns to write articles and find photographs for the Alumni Network and to connect with Old Veseyans. However it isn’t all glamorous, as my average week may involve a couple of hours in school doing admin work in the Office, before going home where I write the weekly sports report, research other opportunities for the Development Office and complete any other tasks that I have been set.

For our first event, earlier in the year, all the Interns attended a Speed Networking evening in Old Big School. Although this was extremely nerve wracking and often discursive on my part, it was an interesting evening and it highlighted the many different pathways to particular careers as well as helping me to refine my interview technique. I hope to use their advice to further my own individual research into journalism, which I am hoping will be my future career.

Looking back on my time of being a Vesey Intern I can say that although I have been challenged, I have learnt a lot and luckily made some new friends along the way meaning I am ready to try new approaches and learn more in the next few months. Interning is something that I would thoroughly recommend to the new Lower Sixth students next year and hope the project will grow from strength to strength in the years to come.
Each week a handful of students give up a few hours after school to assist in running Primary school sports events for Primary Schools in the Sutton Coldfield area. Year 12 students Charlie Giblin, Jai Singh and William Davies and I help with these activities as their weekly enrichment activity as it further develops leadership, communication and allows local children to get active. These four students are also helped by at least two of the Officer Team as part of their way to help the school. A few students from Key stage 3 often assist Mr.Greenwood and the other leaders too, who generously give their time.

So far this term the sports leaders have ran a number of events, normally at least one event per week, which include: A Tag rugby tournament, multi-skills, indoor athletics, cross-country and many others. More recently Bishop Vesey’s held a Change4Life event which involved the group of sports leaders running a variety of games and activities for primary school students that don’t normally take part in the other events. Over 50 children had a great time.

By running these events we support the local primary schools in creating a fun, competitive way to enhance various sporting skills. The standings from each event get added up at the end of the year with the overall winner getting the chance to represent Sutton Coldfield at the Birmingham school games.

As a Sports leader I have to make sure that the activities run smoothly and that everyone is engaging and having fun with each sport or game. Through doing this I have developed many useful skills. Giving clear instructions and constantly giving constructive comments to the children has improved my leadership skills. Now, I am more confident when leading groups of people or having to communicate with people that I’ve never met before.
My name is Alexander Tripp and I’ve been at Bishop Vesey’s Grammar School for three years. I’m currently in Year 12 studying Maths, Physics and History with a passion for mechanical engineering and design. I recently won a prestigious Arkwright Engineering Scholarship, which aims to “identify, inspire and nurture future leaders in engineering, computing and technical design” as stated on their website. Last year, a spokesperson for Arkwright came to the school offering the chance to apply for a scholarship. In 2019, I believe roughly 390 scholarships were won out of about 2,000 applicants. If won, you receive a £600 financial reward (to spend on a project or for other educational purposes), a personal mentor in your preferred industry, invaluable work experience and access to endless and exclusive enrichment opportunities. It was explained there were there three stages of rigorous stages of selection, each stage was progressively difficult and sought to narrow the candidates down,

until the final most rigorous element to Arkwright’s selection process: the Interview.

My interview was held at Loughborough University and I was extremely nervous as it was the final hurdle, it lasted 20 minutes and was carried out by a DT teacher and a former RAF engineer. I talked about my DT GCSE project then they asked some very challenging engineering questions and leadership scenarios. Upon leaving, I felt it had gone alright, but with the competition so fierce my expectations were low.

However, two months later I received an email inviting me to the Arkwright 2019 Awards Ceremony at the Institute of Engineering and Technology in London. I was overjoyed. The day of the Awards Ceremony was a great day, I got to meet my fellow 2019 scholars, listen to three highly inspirational talks on engineering and get up on stage to collect my certificate.

I feel so lucky to have earned a scholarship and am very grateful to everyone at Arkwright who is involved. I look forward to my future career in engineering and can’t wait to get stuck into everything Arkwright has to offer.
Two remembrance services were held across the school, and all 1,250 of our students and 130 of our staff fell silent for 2 minutes at 11am, as a mark of our respect for those who have lost their lives to defend British values. Our trumpeters Ben Thorn L6V and Matthew Monaghan 11P played the Last Post excellently. Thanks to their skills, we were enabled to perform the services with the traditional gravitas they deserve.

It was wonderful to welcome the Class of 2019, as well as outstanding GCSE students, back for our annual Speech Day, held this year on Friday the 29th November. Thank you to Lt. Tom Wallis (OV), who gave a thought provoking speech, in which he wrote a letter to his 18-year-old self. The question he posed to the attentive listeners: what would you want your letter to say?

Mr. Robson and the Chair of Governors Jo Davis, thought the speech was so inspiring that they wanted all members of the Vesey community to have access to it. Please follow the link here to read Tom’s letter to his younger self. For those reading a physical copy of The Veseyan, the speech has been uploaded to the Alumni Network too.

Thank you Tom for inspiring our Class of 2019, good luck to them as they embark on their post-Vesey lives. Remember, once a Veseyan, always a Veseyan.
Bishop Vesey’s Grammar School, with the kind donation of a tree from Wm Wheats and Sons, and the support of the Gracechurch centre have installed and decorated a ‘Giving Tree’ in the Gracechurch centre, next to the Grotto. This idea was initiated by Elijah Nix of L6 II of BVGS Sixth Form. Staff and students here at BVGS are supporting this project.

The intention of the tree is to bring people together at Christmas, and for those who can afford to spare a little to help out with members of the community who go without this Christmas time. Those in need attach a card to the tree detailing what they need this Christmas. Those able to help simply take a card, purchase the item and return it to the tree. Our team of Sixth Form volunteers then wrapped and distributed the gifts.

At publication, over 1,000 items had been donated via the Giving Tree.

Birmingham City Mission, a charity who ‘help the needy and marginalised’ wrote: *Please convey our warm thanks to Elijah Nix and especially all the children, parents, staff for the lovely donation of toiletries plus hats/gloves/scarf sets, can openers & milk received from Bishop Vesey’s Giving Tree. Your kind contributions will enable our team to continue their vital work of providing support to the homeless and needy people in our city. We know the recipients will be very grateful for the help received. Your support has made this possible so a very big THANK YOU.*

**BVGS Christmas Concerts**

On two sell-out evenings, Monday and Tuesday 16th and 17th December, guests were treated to some spectacular music with a festive theme. Thank you to the Music Department for working tirelessly to ensure the success of this event, and to our Student Led Tech and Lighting Team (pictured right) for enabling another fabulous night of music here at BVGS.

**BVGS Staff Christmas Lunch**

The Governors at BVGS, led by Chair Jo Davis, treated staff to the first ever governor funded staff Christmas lunch held here in Big School. Christmas cheer aplenty and delicious food was enjoyed by all staff.
Continuation of Welcome from Paul Wallis

In June the Old Veseyan Sports Day and in the evening of the same day, the Old V Music Evening took place. The music evening was a new venture involving current and alumni musicians and singers. It was truly inspiring – book early for next year. The Shaggy Dogs tea party in July went ahead despite the very sad death of Peter Randon the week before. A poignant afternoon indeed. The Annual Dinner in November was the biggest ever attended at 160, with a superb 45 from the year of 2009 – well done to Tom Greenwood for pulling them together. Please consider getting a group together if you have an anniversary year. A very big thank you to everyone who made the events work and be so enjoyable – you know who you are!

The Veseyan magazine is a new and developing project, overall well received. There will be 3 editions for OVA members annually, sent out -approximately- at the end of each main school term. If you have any articles, news or ideas please let our editor Stephen Roberts know or of course the school. If you would like to receive it electronically please let us know, that is easy to arrange.

We recently had reason to examine our data base. We have gaps in addresses both postal and email and for a variety of reasons some have missed their subscription payments.

Please, please keep us updated with contact details, we don't know when they change!

Since the change in Editorship, distribution of The Veseyan has been undertaken at the School. In order to facilitate the distribution of The Veseyan to Old Veseyan Association Members, the labels for postage have been printed off at the School from a memory stick in the sole possession of the former Editor.

The labels have been stuck on by BVGS Interns as opposed to volunteer Old Veseyans.

As further progress in the transition, it is intended that the Old Veseyan Association database be transferred entirely to the School to be held under their data protection rules.

Old Veseyan Association Members who do not wish their data to be transferred should advise either the School or the OVA (oldveseyannews@gmail.com). Whilst every endeavour will be made to accommodate those who opt out of the transfer, such advice may mean non-receipt of future issues of The Veseyan.
Contributions to Stephen Roberts (OV 1970-77): roberts384@btinternet.com

The 9th November saw the annual OVA dinner, which was a great success. Read more about it on the following page.

The Shaggy Dogs’ Tea Party will take place on 8 July 2020, with further information in the New Year.

Big Big Train, the rock band led by OV Greg Spawton (1976-83), sold out Birmingham Town Hall on 30 October 2019. The venue holds 1,100 people. The band drew heavily on their recent album ‘Grand Tour’ (voted the best album of 2019 by readers of one music magazine), but also included a selection of old favourites. ‘It was a wonderful experience to return to my home city to a full house in Birmingham Town Hall and great to meet so many Old Veseyans afterwards’, Greg told The Veseyan. Big Big Train will be headlining a major festival in the United States next year.

Photo credit: Martin Reijeman

Welcome back Class of 2019!

The Class of 2019 were invited back to BVGS for Christmas drinks in the Common Room. It was wonderful to reconnect with them and hear about their first few months away from Vesey. Many are throwing themselves into university life and others are enjoying the challenges and rewards of full time employment. We wish them all the best for the future and look forward to seeing them at OV events.
160 alumni spanning all ages came together to once again reconnect with old friends and hear about the school’s recent successes. The oldest alumni attending was 94 years old with the youngest at 22 and still studying at university.

A wonderful champagne reception in the historic Big School was kindly funded by Clive Richards OBE KSG DL and Old Veseyan (1950-1954).

Speeches were given by the new school captains Alice Tinsley and Josh Russell who updated the community on the latest successes of BVGS: sports, drama, music and of course academia. Good food, good wine and even better company was enjoyed by all who attended the sell-out dinner.

Thank you to Tom Greenwood OV (2002-2009) and a current Geography teacher here at Vesey for co-ordinating 45 of his year group to attend the dinner, for their 10-year reunion after leaving the school in 2009.

The chair of the OVA Paul Wallis once again organised a splendid event. His efforts do not go unnoticed and we thank him for being a pillar in our Vesey community. We look forward to the next OVA Dinner!
Mount Kilimanjaro and Grand Cayman have more than 8,000 miles in distance and 19,000 feet in elevation separating them. But climber Martyn Bould was able to draw similarities between the Tanzanian mountain peak and his home back in the Caribbean. Cayman may not have the tropical rainforests, alpine moorlands, desert islands or icy glaciers of Mount Kilimanjaro, but the low lying islands also serve as a reminder to respect the limits of Mother Nature. During an 8-day climb to Africa’s highest summit, as a fundraiser for the Cayman Islands Red Cross, Bould reflected on the impact of excess tourism to natural environments.

‘This is their Stingray City, if you like. This is the beauty of where they live. It is one of the wonders of the world. There is something like 35,000 people every year who climb the mountain. In my mind there are just too many people.’

It is a problem that has affected many iconic destinations from queues leading to Mount Everest and shoulder-to-shoulder crowds at the Great Wall of China. ‘The lesson for me is we have such beauty in Cayman that we need to be careful that we don’t overdo it.’ The key is finding balance and paying attention to the warning signs sent by nature. The call to awareness taps into Bould’s greater mission on the trip: to promote hurricane preparedness and the efforts of the Red Cross. ‘In light of the wonderful work that the Red Cross performs in traumatic conditions following the passage of a hurricane, climbing for CIRC appealed to me as a natural way to give back’, Bould said in a Red Cross press release. While he does not know how much money his preparedness campaign raised, he hopes it brought attention to the Red Cross mission.

It is hard to believe now, but in the BVGS canteen in the 1970s the spam fritter was a regular visitor. Hardly a week passed without a thick slice of spam coated in batter being served up … and in large numbers being consigned to the waste bins untouched. It was on the days when a year group was last in to the lunch and everything else was gone that we faced this unappetising concoction – that or the toughest liver ever put on a plate. Most Veseyans declined to tuck into their spam fritters. But still they came, week after week. Were you a connoisseur of the BVGS spam fritter? If you were, we’d love to hear from you!

Image: @Cook’d and Bomb’d
We are sorry to record the death of a long-serving member of the BVGS staff Mary Matthews. Mary was the head teacher’s secretary for many years. Bill Potter writes: ‘She was a person who understood what a grammar school experience meant to local families and their sons and daughters. Mary took part in all the main Vesey events: Founder’s Day, Speech Day, Remembrance Services and all the operas and music concerts. She took the time to talk to the students who came to the office and she had the perception to know when a change of direction was needed from management. Mary was bright, busy and engaging. It was good to be in her company and she welcomed the introduction of girls to the school, particularly for those who embodied the Vesey spirit and made a considerable contribution to the West Midlands community.

Her knowledge of Sutton Coldfield was remarkable, I think she knew every street and post code. In earlier years she had been the Secretary to Geoffrey Cross, HM, and she was fiercely loyal to the Vesey community. She was a great help to me in my early years at Vesey and she continued to support the school well into her retirement.’

We are also sorry to record the death of Robin Daniel (c. 1955-61) on 3 August 2019. Jane Daniel tells us that her husband always spoke fondly of his time at BVGS, particularly of Ron Terry and the music department and also of cross-country running. Nick Hammond adds: Robin was in the same class as I was up to 4A. He entered the sixth form straight from the fourth form and went on to Oxford University. He was awarded the Eddowes Prize and was a Leaving Exhibitioner in 1962. He was the son of ‘Bebe’ Daniels, a maths teacher at BVGS in those days. He and I, with others, were in the chorus of Trial by Jury. His mother used to make a lot of the costumes for the ‘girls’ for the operas.

We are also sorry to record the death of Peter Boraston (1967-1974) on 18 October 2019. Stephen Benson (1967-1974) writes … Peter started at BVGS in 1 Blue in 1967 and we first got to know each other in Harold Ellison’s form 2:4 when we were paired together to feed locusts in the Biology lab. Already Peter was demonstrating his methodical and organisational skills, with me very much his assistant. Peter directed his considerable energy and enthusiasm in the Photographic Society and Rucsac Club, both of which were run by Mr Ellison. In the early days we would pile into his Peugeot 404 Familiale, with its three rows of seats, and careen down the A5 towards Betws-y-Coed, frequently hitting 90mph (happy days) on our way to Vesey House, later making these trips in an orange Ford Transit christened the Clockwork Orange.

Vesey House was formative for Peter and in our later years we frequently reflected on the life skills, the love of the outdoors, resilience and confidence in ourselves and camaraderie which we developed and for which we had much to thank Harold Ellison, Nick Malden and the sixth formers who looked out for us as junior boys and whose example we tried to follow in later years and when Peter was appointed Deputy Head Boy.
In particular Peter would spend holiday time working on the fabric, as well as facing the challenges of Bristly Ridge and Crib Goch in snow and ice with just a woolly hat and a Millet’s anorak. We were nearer to the tweed jacket and hob nail boot generation of Alpinists than the Ellis Brigham £1000s of kit which is apparently now essential. All this speaks of Peter’s lack of pretension and his ‘can do’ approach to life.

After school we went in different directions, with Peter joining the Royal Navy, who despatched him to Leeds University to study electrical and electronic engineering, retiring from the navy as Lieutenant Commander Boraston in 2008. Gary Hudson, who also once aspired to a naval career, tells me how they found themselves at the Royal Naval College in Dartmouth for assessment when Peter demonstrated his lifelong, positive attitude and confidence by volunteering to crew the admiral’s yacht – never having sailed before! Once in the navy he ended up as weapons officer on a nuclear submarine by virtue of one slow day when he expressed an interest in a quick trip round the harbour to see what it was like on a sub. I once asked him what tests he underwent for suitability to spend months under the sea. None! The navy did not just send him to the bottom of the sea. Some of his happiest times were spent in the Falklands and with NATO in Washington DC and Europe, which enabled family holidays with his daughters in each of these locations.

Then in 1999 Peter was diagnosed with a rare form of lymphoma for which he was treated with considerable care and skill at Guys in London, but it looked like this might be Peter’s final voyage when he unexpectedly went into remission – for the next ten years. During this time we rekindled our earlier friendship, meeting regularly at the Lamb in Lambs Conduit Street, walking in the Lake District and sharing our thoughts about the meaning of life and Peter regaling me with stories of helping his friend to catalogue thousands of photos, several trips to Bermuda to build fibre optics for a cable television station, rebuilding a friend’s house in France and the coffee shop at St Barnabas in Swanmore.

During this time Peter’s life was not without more challenge which he addressed, as he did everything, with no self-indulgence and with complete resilience and commitment, right up until a few weeks before remission had run its course. Peter was a firm friend to me and to many others and he exemplified all the hopes and ambitions which Arthur Johnson and the staff of 1967 had for their Old Veseyans.

Sounds like the essay title given by a despairing English teacher to a new Year 7 class, doesn’t it? Of course, we didn’t have Year 7 – in those days, boys entered into what was then known as Year 2 at the age of 12 rather than 11.
Wednesday January 4th 1989 was a rather gloomy and grey day – I made my way across the quadrangle to open the door of the Head’s office for the first time with my new and unfamiliar bunch of keys clutched in my hand. As I opened the office door a white envelope glinted up at me in the gloom – it turned out to be a card from the School Captain – what a nice and kind gesture, one of many I received that day.

The six months which had passed since my appointment in July had not been without adverse incident. Peter Randon, whose wonderful contribution we celebrated in his memorial service just a few weeks ago, and who, as Chairman of the Governors, had been responsible for my appointment had encountered not a little degree of hostility from some Old Veseyans when they learned that a woman was to be the new Head. (I am pleased to say that in the days, months and years to come, I encountered nothing but civility and indeed a great deal of approval and friendship from OVA members – even when the Geography department chose pink as the new wall colour for their rooms!)

However, that day, that first day, was to be a day for working with the staff – first a whole staff meeting and then drop-in sessions as staff met in departments. Visiting department classrooms and offices confirmed that there was much to be done with respect to the urgent work required to make the learning and teaching environment more appropriate to the new curriculum requirements. The Education Reform Act, which had received Royal Assent in May 1988, was the most significant piece of educational legislation since the Butler Act of 1944. Provision in the 1988 Act for a national curriculum divided into key stages meant that it would make sense for boys to start at Bishop Vesey’s at the age of 11 rather than 12 as they did. Another provision in that Act was the delegation of budgetary responsibilities to Governors and Heads. The chance to take over and run our own finances was an exciting prospect as there was much to be done in the school. The buildings were in a woeful state, library provision was meagre, computer access only just beginning and office equipment limited and outdated. It is difficult now – thirty years on – when we are fully immersed in the information age to appreciate the changes we have all taken on. After all, in January 1989, we were still a year away from Tim Berners-Lee putting up the first browser, which would lead to the world wide web and the explosion of access to information. So changes and challenges to the whole field of education and our lives were on the way.

The abiding strength of a school like Bishop Vesey’s is the wealth of tradition it carries; the challenge I recognised on that first day would be to maintain the best elements of the tradition whilst embracing and implementing those exciting changes ahead of us. As Winston Churchill might have said (but probably didn’t) “Success is the ability to move from one failure to another without loss of enthusiasm” – I think I managed that.
Roger Carl Whitworth has provided us with an obituary of his father, who died in June 2019.

John Leslie Whitworth was born on 9 January 1921, the seventh of eight children, in Sutton Coldfield. The family had long associations with the cycle, motorbike and car industries. At Bishop Vesey’s Grammar School, he developed his lifelong passion for sport and a fierce competitive spirit. He played for both the rugby and cricket teams, and subsequently played rugby for the Old Veseyans. In particular he excelled at golf, joining the Walmley club. In 1939 he won five club trophies, including the club championship, and also the youth prize in the Warwickshire County Championship. In the following year he also set a new Walmley course record.

In 1940 John Whitworth volunteered for RAF air crew, but was not called up until the following year. He was pilot trained in Britain, gaining his wings in early 1942 and, after operational training on Wellington bombers, flew as Sgt/Captain via Gibraltar and Malta (landing and taking off at night between Axis air raids) to join 37 Squadron at Abu Sueir, Egypt, in July 1942.

The six Wellington squadrons were then very active at the time of the Alamein retreat and then offensive. Commissioned in December 1942, he completed 37 operations, many to Tobruk, and survived two very hazardous incidents. The first was when an engine failure (the Wellington could not maintain height on one engine) on the way back from Tobruk led to an emergency landing in the desert. Fortunately none of the crew suffered more than cuts and bruises and, after walking 15 miles, they were spotted by an allied truck out searching for wrecked vehicles and aircraft.
A week later he was one of only three survivors of the same six-man crew when a South African Boston, in trouble, landed down-wind and crashed into the dispersal area at Abu-Sueir where two squadrons of bomb-laden Wellingtons were preparing for take-off. John Whitworth’s plane, with several crew on board, was the first to be hit. He was about to climb into the cockpit, but saw the Boston approaching and managed to sprint for his life moments before the collision. He could do nothing to alert his crew mates whose plane was blown to pieces. In total five planes were destroyed and another five damaged, and RAF records show that more damage was done in that incident to an allied airfield and aircraft on the ground than by any Axis air raid of the North African campaign. Tour expired, he returned home in early 1943 and became an instructor, flying and ground, on Wellingtons at No 26 Operational Training Unit at Wing, Buckinghamshire. But, following the death of a close friend at the battle of Arnhem, he volunteered for a second tour of ‘ops’ and joined 8 Group (Path Finder Force) on bomber de Havilland Mosquitoes in September 1944. Flying out of Cambridgeshire with 142 and then 162 Squadron, he was part of the Light Night Striking Force used both for bombing and for diversionary raids to draw German fighters away from the main force. Partnered by the same Canadian navigator, Bill Tulloch he completed fifty sorties to Europe, including twenty one to Berlin. Both were awarded D.F.C.’s

On completion of his tour, he joined Transport Command as a Ferry Pilot and was posted to India and Burma for the build-up of ‘Tiger Force’ and the proposed invasion of Malaya and Singapore. But the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan in August 1945 changed everything. After a few months in administrative roles, including supervising the disbanding of the Ferry Flight at Hmawbi airbase near Rangoon, and then the Group Communication Flight at Mingaloden, he returned home and was demobbed in May 1946.
John Whitworth first met Audrey Girling at the BVGS Sports Day in 1938. He returned to Sutton Coldfield after the war and they married in 1950 and became the parents of two sons. His wife pre-deceased him. He joined his brother-in-law in building up a substantial manufacturing works in steel fabrications in Birmingham. His golf continued to thrive and he played for Warwickshire nearly one hundred times over the next twenty years, winning the county championship and was twice county matchplay champion. When a Senior, his golf took on a further lease of life. He was English Senior Open amateur champion in 1982 and three years later, at the age of 64, he won the Midland Senior title by six shots.

John Whitworth felt uneasy that there was a reluctance after the war to give Bomber Command the credit it deserved. So he was a strong supporter of both the Bomber Command Memorial eventually opened in Green Park by the Queen in 2012 and the International Bomber Command Centre opened in Lincoln three years later. And, linking back to his old school, and the purchase of a sports ground in memory of Old Veseyans lost in the war, he was honoured to be invited to unveil a commemorative plaque, pictured above.

We hope you have enjoyed reading the stories of the BVGS Community, students and staff, present and past. For OVs, we hope that you enjoyed the extensive OVA section.

Thank you to the student contributors, who brought their ‘Vesey Experience’ to life for you.

On behalf of all staff at BVGS, may we wish you an inspiring Christmas, and an excellent New Year.

Dominic Robson, Headteacher.