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Abingdon News



Northern lights

Eric, one of our Austin House boarders, took this spectacular photo of the Northern Lights in October from Waste Court.



Message from the Head

What are the memories of school that stay with us throughout our lives? I reflected on this question as I sat down to write this introduction and my mind took me back to my own school days. The first memories that came to mind were some of the adventures that I enjoyed on various school trips. The feeling of exhilaration - or rather sheer fear - as I leant out over the top of a cliff in north Wales before my first attempt at abseiling. The sense of wonder I felt when I saw Brunelleschi's dome in Florence for the first time on a choir tour. The camaraderie and fellowship of a rugby tour.



These are precious moments and I'm delighted that Abingdonians are able to benefit from so many opportunities to participate in stimulating educational trips and visits. During half-term in October alone, two year groups took part in rugby tours, while the CCF ran their annual Adventure Training trip to Yorkshire. Further afield, there were departmental visits to France, Germany, Spain and India.

I'm grateful to my colleagues who put so much time and effort into ensuring that our students can benefit from these valuable experiences. I hope you will enjoy reading about our recent trips in these pages and that you will get a strong sense of the value that they bring to the personal development of our students, providing opportunities for them to build their independence, confidence and social skills - as well as memories for life.

Geography trip to Iceland



Towards the end of the summer, 54 students across the Sixth Form, Third, Fourth and Fifth Years visited Iceland to learn more about its geography. From relaxing in the Secret Lagoon and walking through the mists of Seljalandsfoss Waterfall, to hiking on the Sólheimajökull Glacier or enjoying the enormity of the Raufarhólshellir Lava Tunnels, there was plenty to see. Highlights included visiting the island of Heimaey to ascend Eldfell Volcano and witness the stunning view of Iceland's southern coast and seeing the Sundhnúksgrígar volcano on the Reykjanes peninsula actually erupt!



Welcome to Abingdon

After their first week of settling into life at secondary school, and enjoying exploring the Lower School house room, some of our 64 new First Years share their thoughts...

"I have come from a really, really small school and so it has been quite exciting to make some new friends."

"It was great to have a variety of lessons some of which I have never had before, such as Chemistry, Art and Latin."

"I've really loved trying new things in the Other Half. I had never, before this week, tried either yoga or chess."

"Lunchtimes have been exceptional, and I always find myself pressing the smiley face on the feedback machine!"

"I have felt so encouraged to do my best and the Lower School Assistants have been very friendly, supportive and helpful."

Abingdon Heritage Weekend

A group of students, who took part in the Third Year Citizenship programme, created a series of displays on the theme of transport, routes and connections for Abingdon Heritage Weekend in September. These were exhibited in the historic Roysse Room, where the school was located before moving to Park Road.



True advocates

Deputy Head (Pastoral), Mrs Keevil, enjoyed lunch this term with a number of our Lower School pupils. True ambassadors of the school, they spoke with pride, ambition and excitement about all the opportunities there are at Abingdon to lead. Mrs Keevil was also impressed by their humility and gratitude for being at Abingdon.



Green fingered

The Third Year gardening group got to work in the school garden this autumn, managing to harvest some cucumbers."



Supporting anti-racism

On 18 October, staff and students came together and wore red to show their support for anti-racism.



Harvesting success

Third Year Mandarin students enjoyed a culturally immersive mooncake-making session in celebration of the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival. This 3,000 year old harvest festival is a popular occasion where family and friends gather together. During the session, students combined practical skills with creativity, crafting beautifully coloured and delicious snow skin mooncakes, while hoping to "harvest" success in their Mandarin studies.



Bowled over

Bowling proved to be a big hit for our Fourth Year boarders who enjoyed two games of bowling on 22 September at Hollywood Bowl in Oxford. Spirits were high and all enjoyed hitting at least some of their pins. Congratulations to Daryl who scored the highest score of the day with 120 points.



Be more Griffen

First years attended a series of lessons on 27 September designed to help them understand the key concepts of the *Be More Griffen* initiative. In the afternoon, they were joined by Second Years for a session with former BMX halfpipe World Champion, Mike Mullen. Mike talked about how he has gone about achieving his goals and the importance of learning from failure. Then he gave a display of impressive tricks on the stage of the Amey Theatre.



Getting to know you

One weekend in September, the First Years enjoyed a morning of teambuilding activities designed to help them get to know each other a bit better and develop their listening, communication and teamwork skills.



Lower School assistants

The new Lower School assistants made a great start to their roles this term. Not only by organising indoor and outdoor activities for Lower School pupils, but also being available to talk to during tutor periods.



Bubble football

Under a cloudy September sky, a group of boarders enjoyed a competitive game of bubble football at Tilsley Park. This was a great team-building activity across all year groups and all three houses.



Silver Duke of Edinburgh

Fifty Fifth Year students completed their Silver Duke of Edinburgh Award practice expedition in September, circumnavigating the Edale skyline. Highlights included Brown Knoll, Mam Tor and Crowden Tower, plus Stanage Edge. The weather was unseasonably cold and, on the final day, very wet. All eight groups showed determination, perseverance and a sense of humour in completing their expedition. The challenges presented provided excellent training for the qualifying expedition which will take place in the Brecon Beacons in June.



What a scream!

Crescent House boarders celebrated the end of a very successful half term with a Halloween party.

They carved Jack O' Lanterns, played a range of games including blind man's bluff and enjoyed some apple bobbing. What a great way to end the half term.



CCF recruit training weekend

During the first half of term, our new CCF recruits went on a training weekend. There was a mix of practical and theoretical work within the lessons including how things are seen or how to manoeuvre in the forest without being spotted. The cadets also had to stay focused on their organisational skills by keeping their accommodation clean and tidy. One cadet said: "My experience at the recruit training weekend was amazing. Getting woken up at 6am by music being blasted in the corridor was a new experience, to say the least. Overall, all the staff and NCOs made the trip extremely fun."

Working outside one's comfort zone

When Ben was given the opportunity to do three weeks work experience with an Old Abingdonian in Taipei, he jumped at the chance...



Asked what his view on work experience is, Abingdon Sixth Former Ben replies: "Definitely worth it, but try to do something out of your comfort zone." That is something Ben knows all about having just returned from three weeks doing a work placement at Mark Lintott Design (MLD) - a leading design company in Taipei. It was an experience he openly admits was 'daunting at first'.

"It felt like I was flying full pelt into the unknown. I'd never been to Asia before. I knew no one and I really didn't know what to expect or what the work would entail. I was also a little anxious about language - whilst I speak a little Mandarin" (he did it at GCSE and is currently studying for the international HSK4 qualification) "I'm not fluent and I didn't know how good I was going to be at communicating effectively."

As it happened, the work placement turned out to be the opportunity of a lifetime for Ben who is hoping to go on to a career in engineering. Shadowing a former Abingdon student - one who has spent the past twenty years building up a highly successful interior design firm - Ben was able to upskill in a number of areas. "I learned so much about the business and the industry - from the different roles people have, to the processes involved in a project right from inception through to completion, and beyond to marketing. I was able to begin learning some new software skills including AutoCAD, sketchup and EnScape, as well as how to draw for building design.

Possibly, the most important 'take away' in the business sense, was learning the immense value of good client interactions and building up positive relationships with other organisations and stakeholders. Valuably, I also witnessed first-hand how powerful it is to have humility about one's own success. One of the highlights was visiting Frank - a very cool 10th floor bar designed by MLD. Themed around a man with a lampshade on his head, the lighting is extraordinary and the views over Taipei, breathtaking.

"At weekends and after work, family and friends of the colleagues I worked with took me under their wing and gave me the opportunity to see other parts of the City, experience the culture, befriend some amazing people and, of course, utilise and improve my own language skills. Some of my favourite things were the night markets which are just so busy and vibrant; the Shifen waterfall and Juifen - an old mountain town known for its narrow alleyways, bustling markets, tea houses and gold mining. I feel like I wouldn't have seen some of these things if I was simply visiting as a tourist.

"The entire trip was an absolutely exhilarating once in a lifetime experience and I am so grateful to MLD and to Mr Triff, Head of Career Guidance, for arranging it as part of the School's summer work experience scheme for Lower Sixth students."





Warhammer

Lower School pupils in Warhammer club have been painting new armies - the Tyranids and Space Marines will be ready to do battle soon!



This year's Modern Foreign Languages Christmas card competition saw a range of styles in different languages, showing the linguistic (and artistic) talent of our pupils.



Dreams of India

A group of Philosophy and Theology students visited Delhi, Jaipur and Agra over half-term to experience the many religions of India, its culture and its history. Amongst the highlights were visits to the Jama Masjid, the Qutab Minar, the Akshardham Temple, the Bangla Sahib, the Taj Mahal, the Agra Fort and seeing an Hindu ceremony. They also visited the Qutab Minar, the tallest minaret in the world at 234 feet, the site of Gandhi's assassination and one of the centres of the Hari Krishna movement, as well as his mausoleum. All in all, an unforgettable trip.



Work exhibition

Lower School discussed a piece of work they were particularly proud of in the first work exhibition of the year. It's clear that pupils have been very busy in the classroom with some impressive pieces of work.

Joint thinking

Second Year academic award holders discussed whether the Olympic Games should continue in the first joint thinking supper of the year. After studying a selection of articles about the economic and environmental impact and the values that the Olympics promote, the findings were presented, and then a pizza supper enjoyed.



A thrilling day out

Fifty of our boarding students enjoyed our annual trip to Thorpe Park in October. There were thrilling rides and some of our boarders even won some prizes!



Classically French

Thirty four Classics students, accompanied by staff, enjoyed the bright sunshine of Lyon and Provence during the second week of half-term to experience the amazing remains of the Roman empire. We visited a grand total of four theatres, two amphitheatres, two triumphal arches, a perfectly-preserved Roman temple and aqueduct, as well as many excellent museums. Students gained great insight into the importance of the area in Roman times, listening attentively to the local guides and asking intelligent questions. The opportunity to use their knowledge of the French language was an added bonus. There were many memorable moments: The Pont du Gard in the early morning and the Orange triumphal arch at dusk; the emotional rollercoaster of the trip quiz; all, however, surpassed perhaps by ice-cream in the sunshine in front of the Maison Carrée to the accompaniment of a jazz trumpet: *o dulce otium!*



It's all in the water

On 5 November, over 100 Fourth Year students undertook the rivers fieldwork as part of the Geography GCSE course. The hands-on experience helped to deepen their understanding of how river characteristics change as they go from source to mouth. Students collected data on the width, depth and velocity of the River Ock in order to calculate the discharge.



Guten appetit!

After half-term, Sixth Form students studying German put their culinary skills to the test by making a range of delectable traditional German specialties. These included Currywurst, Maultaschen, Spätzle and Kaiserschmarrn.



Cadet adventure training

Over half-term, 13 Army and RAF cadets visited the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District for adventure training. There were a number of exciting activities to take part in including abseiling, climbing, caving and canyoning. This was a fantastic way to hone essential skills, including team building, resilience and leadership skills.



In November, Felix and Anthony launched their children's book *The Magic Tooth*. This beautiful little book will raise funds for Arch, the charity which supports young children who struggle with reading.

Thank you SUS

Over the course of the year, the money raised from sales in the second hand uniform shop has exceeded £21,000! Used to enhance the Abingdon experience for students, it has funded projects across the academic and Other Half. These include, but are not limited to, running taster music sessions for the Lower School pupils; purchasing Hydroponic plants; money towards the Volleyball, Silversmithing and Lego clubs; a £1,000 donation to each House; as well as a sizeable donation towards last year's Giving Day, helping to finance our Bursary programme.



Annual Classics dinner

Current Sixth Form classicists were joined in November by staff and a number of OA classicists currently at university for this year's Classics dinner. A series of short lectures were given, first by Luke, on the importance of drama for Athenian democracy, then from two OAs currently at New College, Oxford: Ethan Walker (2022) questioned the paradigm of the 'Thucydides Trap' in assessing the relationship between the US and China, while Jakob Hobbs (2021) looked at the imperialist oppression of Greece under Alexander the Greek. All three talks took on an extra dimension coinciding with the political events in America. After a fiercely contested quiz, won on a tie-break question, everyone enjoyed an excellent dinner and conversation.

21st AFU screening

This year's annual screening on 6 November saw 13 newly created student films. Subjects included the terrifying realities of life in Israel and the Middle East, plastic-eating enzymes and the need for cultivating gardens. Congratulations to Justin, Arth and Josh who were presented with awards in honour of Michael Grigsby for their films *Nation Unperceivable* and *Still*.



Abingdon News



Swing low, sweet chariot

Two coaches of Abingdon rugby players and their parents travelled to Twickenham on 23 November to watch England versus Japan. Everyone enjoyed the dominant display from England who won 59-14. Many thanks to the Touchliners for organising the trip.



Parliamentary debate

In November, three Lower Sixth students attended the All-Party Parliamentary Engineering Group debate on 'driverless vehicles' at the House of Lords. Chaired by Professor The Lord Mair, they heard from the Chief Scientific Adviser for the Department for Transport and the founder of Oxa Autonomous Vehicles. Topics including safety and accessibility, public perception and ethics were discussed.

A different language



At the end of November, twelve Sixth Formers took part in a language debating competition at Cheltenham College. The students put their rhetorical skills to the test, tackling topics including gender equality and whether pineapple on pizza should be strictly forbidden! All teams impressed the adjudicators and it was inspiring to see them engage at such a high level whilst also having a lot of fun. One group suffered a one point defeat in the French semi-final, while one of the Spanish teams went on to win.



UK Space Design

On 16 November, twelve students from Fourth Year to Upper Sixth competed in the Oxford regional heat of the UK Space Design Competition. Alongside a team of students from other schools, their challenge was to design a space settlement and manufacturing plant on Mars in 2074. Students worked in groups according to their skills and experience, everything from structural engineering and computer-aided design, to medicine and human resources, to business and finance. The challenge was incredibly tough, and the pupils worked tirelessly to prepare for their presentation at the end of the day. Their proposal was strong, although they did not win, and we look forward to returning again next year.



Biscuit making (in German)

In November, First Year members of the MFL baking club attended the Oxford German Network *Weihnachtsplätzchenbackwettbewerb* (biscuit making competition). They took a range of German Plätzchen, took part in Christmas crafts and a quiz and met other pupils learning German across Oxfordshire. The pupils were proud winners of the "Most Beautiful Biscuits" category- fantastisch!



Noel

On the final day of term, the entire school gathered at St Helen's Church for a beautiful service. Featuring readings and carols, it was a fitting way to celebrate the festive season.



Christmas tea party

A festive party was held for Abingdon residents in the last week of term. There was a tasty afternoon tea, carols played by our fantastic musicians in the community ensemble, a quiz and raffle with lots of lovely prizes. Everybody had fun and enjoyed the seasonal atmosphere.

Scholars visit Oxford

In November, Fifth Year academic scholars visited the Natural History Museum in Oxford, where the highlight was the opportunity to handle some hissing cockroaches! The group were then given a guided tour of the Bodleian Library. Founded in 1602, it is one of the oldest libraries in Europe and houses over 13 million printed items, making it the second largest library in the UK. Lunch was followed by a tour of New College, Oxford which was hosted by some recent OAs. The trip culminated in a visit to the Ashmolean Museum where the students had the opportunity to complete some project work.



Gliding high

Six cadets attended RAF Little Rissington and 612 Volunteer Gliding Squadron in December for their first experience of gliding. A break in the weather meant all six cadets got to experience two winch launches before taking control of the aircraft. They also practised attaching the winch cable and steadying the wings. It was an excellent experience.



Beautiful bells

Bellringers from Abingdon and Abingdon Prep School joined forces with young ringers from St Helen's Church to tackle some Christmas carols on handbells during the last bellringing club session of 2024. *Good King Wenceslas*, *God Rest Ye*, *Merry Gentlemen* and *Jingle Bells* were all successfully attempted.



Other Half

In this term's Other Half exhibition, Lower School pupils enjoyed showing each other, and talking about, the activities they have enjoyed outside the classroom.

Saturday morning cookery club

As part of the Third Year service and citizenship scheme, a group of students have been baking tasty treats to take to residences for older people in Abingdon. In December, they made festively decorated gingerbread for residents at Millstream Court and Fleur de Lys. Everyone agreed the treats were delicious.



Advent

In the run up to Christmas, Second Year pupils designed advent posters for the Royal Society of Chemistry Christmas competition. They produced an astonishing range on everything from the chemistry of holly to the science behind the perfect hot chocolate! Several of their posters were picked as winning entries and were used by the Royal Society of Chemistry Thames Valley on their social media platforms.



Toy drive

Thank you to Lower School pupils and their families for their very generous donations to the Lower School toy drive to support the work of the Salvation Army. The massive pile of presents went on to be delivered to children in need around the county.



Puzzles galore

Lower School pupils from Abingdon and St Helen and St Katharine gathered in early November for a social evening of puzzle solving. Dingbats, sudoku, logic puzzles and word polygons were all tackled, with sustenance being provided by a pizza and cookie dinner. Congratulations to Andrey, Christopher and William who were part of the highest scoring team.



Thirty one students of Ancient History visited the British Museum to see some of the artefacts they have been studying. Fourth Year visited galleries on ancient Iran, Mesopotamia and Assyria. Meanwhile students from the Upper Sixth explored the ideology of Greek identity in opposition to the Other through the Parthenon sculptures, Bassae frieze and other artefacts relevant to the Culture of Athens course.



Chinese cultural experience

Lower School pupils were immersed in Chinese arts and crafts in November, participating in a captivating shadow puppetry workshop. They learned both about the history of Chinese shadow puppetry and also gained hands-on experience in manipulating the shadow puppets themselves. Their storytelling abilities were showcased impressively through this medium. The pupils also enjoyed some Chinese ink painting and had the pleasure of creating traditional flower lanterns.

Jolly enterprising

In the run up to the Christmas holidays, our Young Enterprise teams attended a number of local School Christmas fairs in order to sell their wares. This year, these included coffee coasters and serving boards made from upcycled materials. The team saw good sales success, completely selling their stock. They will be on the look for new opportunities in the new year.

A busy end of term

It was a busy end of term for Lower School pupils with the conclusion of the charity pool doubles tournament (well done Indy and Toby), which together with the collection from the carols raised £300 for Agape. The grand final Lower School Challenge took place on the final day of term with 2G (Fergus, Seb and William) winning the coveted trophy, despite valiant attempts from other groups.

Abingdon Music



On 16 October, the annual House Singing competition took place, adjudicated by former member of staff, Adam Treadaway. There was a wide variety of popular music including songs by Bon Jovi, Coldplay, Keane, Adele, Katy Perry and John Newman. In the end though, it was O'Doherty's, with *Valerie* which proved to be the winner. Second place went to Lower School for *school song* from *Matilda* and Third to Borders who were busy *California Dreaming*.



Composer David John Roche visited Abingdon on 13 November to work with our student composers in a workshop and masterclass. David's music draws influence from orchestral, heavy metal and brass band and he in turn was presented with many genres. Our young composers gained insight and confidence, learning to be bolder and make more use of percussion.



The Joint Choral Society performed Handel's *Messiah* on Sunday 1 December. Along with the orchestra, a wonderful chorus of one hundred individuals delivered this story of Christ in a fitting celebration of advent. Special mention must go to the soloists who grappled valiantly with the immense vocal challenges of this work.



On 10 October, Paul Harris came into school to host a woodwind masterclass. He shared invaluable advice with six students on effective practising and how to enhance overall performance. Each student took on board Paul's guidance and had significantly improved by the end of each lesson.



BBC Proms

At the beginning of term, the Music Department whisked a group of scholars and A Level musicians away to a BBC Proms Concert at the Royal Albert Hall in London. The programme featured an engaging mix of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* alongside some bold innovative pieces of the 20th century. The students had a wonderful evening.

Abingdon Music



There were a myriad of Christmas concerts towards the end of term showcasing the sheer delight in music making enjoyed by the full range of our school ensembles. Each one displayed a varied repertoire and a very high level of musicianship. Students should be rightly proud of their accomplishments which are a testament to their dedication and hard work.

Evensong in Salisbury

On 1 October, the chapel choir travelled to Salisbury to sing evensong in the city's magnificent Cathedral. The service was conducted by Mr Stafford, and included choral music by Clucas, Noble and Howells, and organ music by Langlais and Vierne. The Cathedral staff praised the musicality and conduct of our students, who were also fortunate enough to have a guided tour of the historic building in the afternoon.



On 3 October, our musicians performed a solo and chamber music concert in the Holywell Music Room. This provided a wonderful evening of music with pupils performing with style and nuance.



A jazzy masterclass

On 25 September, the award winning Jazz group, Tom Green Septet, visited Abingdon to work with our Big Band. The Septet have garnered numerous awards during their time working together. The masterclasses were full of valuable insights which our Big Band students were able to put into practice playing alongside the Septet during the evening concert.

Violin masterclass

On 27 September, Austrian violinist Sebastian Mueller, returned to Abingdon to give another inspiring violin and viola masterclass. He opened the evening with *Fratres* by Pärt and the first movement of Glinka's *viola sonata*. The individual lessons after the recital focussed on the importance of a proper bow-hold and the significance of technique to produce a beautiful sound on each instrument.

Abingdon School in Partnership



Humanities topic morning

75 primary school pupils enjoyed a carousel of workshops in October when they came into school for a humanities topic morning. They learned about the evolution of life, created their own towns, investigated a Victorian crime scene and discovered how theatrical productions were staged in Shakespeare's time. Plus, they learned how to meditate to enhance their wellbeing.

STEM Each week, over the course of the term, students visited Rushcommon Primary School to run a STEM club. Working with pupils on STEM activities such as Play-Doh towers, paper bridges and Lego mazes. These fun sessions were enjoyed by the primary school children and gave our own students a valuable opportunity to develop their own leadership skills.



Peer support lead training

Over 40 students from four schools within the OX14 Learning Partnership undertook a comprehensive Peer Support Lead training session at Abingdon in October. Participants engaged in interactive sessions aimed at recognising signs of anxiety, understanding its impact and exploring various strategies to assist those struggling with it. The students worked through real-life scenarios to establish best practices in peer support and how to foster a supportive school environment. The training underscores the Partnership's commitment to student wellbeing across the community.



Business challenge

In November, over 70 students across OX14 came together to work on a business challenge in their chosen foreign language. In its third year, this exciting, interactive day involved team tasks revolving around a sweet treat. The students used their design and creativity skills to come up with an idea, create promotional material and then pitch it to a judging panel. The students were focused, engaged and had great fun working together.



Rocks, soil and fossils

Year 3 pupils from Carswell School enjoyed a Rocks, Soil and Fossils workshop in November, covering the KS2 curriculum. They certainly enjoyed some hands on experience!

Abingdon School in Partnership



Anyone for elevenses?

In November, five primary schools took part in an exciting marketing challenge to design a Christmas snack. With the help of Sixth Form business students, the pupils created a selection of colourful and innovative products including marshmallow buns and cake pops containing courgette! They considered both the health benefits of their snacks, as well as the impact on the environment. The panel of judges were very impressed by their posters, teamwork and presentations.



Good sports

Monday 7 October saw a new sports partnership develop between Abingdon School, Abingdon Prep and Hagbourne Primary School. The collaboration saw 50 pupils receive a rugby skills session delivered at Cox's Fields by Abingdon School Sixth Form rugby players, under the guidance of Mr Gold, Director of Rugby at Abingdon Senior School and Mr Birkbeck, Director of Sport at Abingdon Prep. The session explored dynamic movement through a warm up and then looked at handling, passing and positional play before ending with a game of tag rugby. The Sixth Form students developed skills associated with coaching including leadership, communication and planning, while the younger pupils enjoyed an active afternoon in the sun playing sport and learning new skills with peers from a different school. All in all, it was a great success and we look forward to building on this event in future.



Climate impact

Aimed at mirroring COP29, 12 students from the OX14 Learning Partnership attended the Oxfordshire Schools Climate Conference in November. Students were able to discuss climate impact and mitigation on cities, energy, forest, food and oceans and also heard from climate scientist and activist Matthew Shribman.



AbingMUN

On 23 November, 75 students from across the OX14 partnership came into School to participate in a model United Nations day which focused, for the first time, on running the International Court of Justice. Briefing papers, procedure documents, witness statements and testimonials were all at the ready, alongside the more usual committee debates. The Chairs ranged from Fourth Year to Upper Sixth students and there was phenomenal energy in the room as all bravely contributed.

Abingdon Sport

Message from Mark Hanslip, Director of Sport

This Michaelmas term has seen extraordinary levels of participation and performance in sport. Over 575 pupils have represented Abingdon School across 44 teams and 15 sports.

The wide variety of sport offered at Abingdon ensures there is something for everyone. Whether competing in matches or enjoying activities like swimming, cross country, or working out in the gym, pupils are embracing opportunities to challenge themselves and grow. Participation in sport doesn't have to involve competition - it's just as valuable for improving social, mental and physical wellbeing.

A significant number of pupils engage with sport at a participation level, focusing on discovering lifelong activities and enjoying the intrinsic benefits of staying active. This approach ensures inclusivity, giving all pupils equal access to coaching, facilities and equipment. Below are some of the highlights from this term, including our Team of the Week initiative, which celebrates pupils of all ages and abilities. This inclusive programme will continue to recognise and celebrate our teams throughout the year.

As we continue our move to co-education, our plans for sport remain a priority, as this is so important to our pupils' experience and a key reason why many families choose Abingdon. Our intention is that all sports currently on offer will continue to be available and will be extended so they are also offered to girls. In addition to hockey, football, cricket, rugby, rowing and all the other sports we currently enjoy, we are also planning to add netball and dance to our sporting programme.



In November, the U16 tennis team travelled to Nottingham Tennis Centre for the regional finals of the National Championships. Drawn against the favourites for the competition in the semi-finals, the Abingdon team succumbed to the power hitting of Repton School. In the third and fourth place play off, the team secured a draw against Ellesmere College, a school with an attached tennis academy. Well done to Cyrus, Dan, Mikey, Ollie and Bosco for their efforts in the competition.



Fin wins gold

Over the summer holiday, Sixth Former Fin flew to New Zealand to represent England in Fencing at the U20 and U17 Commonwealth Games. Competing in four events, Fin won gold in three - both the U17 individual and team; and in the U20 team. Fantastic news!



In December, the Boat Club ventured north for a weekend racing in the Rutherford Head. The mild weather meant conditions were glorious with great performances by the rowers. We took on crews from across the north east including Newcastle, Durham and Edinburgh universities as well as taking home wins in the J18 eight, quad and coxed four events. A thoroughly enjoyable trip was had by all.



In November, six rowers and one cox made the trip to Boston for the first instalment of GB Rowing assessments of the season. To be eligible, rowers needed to meet ergo standards, something which current Captain of Boats, Eddie did comfortably, posting the top score in the entire country. The weekend's racing then involved all rowers racing over 5000m in a single scull, the first single sculling race of the season for a number of them. Congratulations to all and especially to Eddie who finished 11th overall out of 201 racers.



On 16 November, nine swimmers competed in the English School's National Swimming Relays, Birmingham. The U15 team finished 21st in the freestyle relay, moving up 13 places from their qualification rank of 34th, and came 13th in the medley relay, narrowly missing out on a spot in the national final. The U18s came 12th in the medley relay and, having qualified for the final in the freestyle relay, finished 8th in the country.



Scaling new heights

On 4 December, ten students from Fourth Year to Upper Sixth, travelled to Rockstar Climbing Centre in Swindon, to train with, and compete against, Cokethorpe School. The students thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to experience a commercial climbing wall with the competition made up of ten boulder routes at V1-6 level. Congratulations to all who participated and especially to Fourth Year, Daniel on coming joint 1st with another Cokethorpe student.

Abingdon Sport



Facing Eton

In November, our Rugby Club faced Eton College in a scheduled block fixture. The block featured 15 fixtures and over 280 pupils representing Abingdon School. The fixtures showcased numerous competitive matches played in great spirit, exemplifying the merits of rugby union as an exceptional sport.



Longworth run

The Longworth 10km is the traditional season opener for the club, run through stunning Oxfordshire countryside. Both Mr Taylor (2nd place) and Ollie ran very respectable times behind overall winner, Harry.



Eagle relays

The Cross Country Club got its season underway on 21 September at the Eagle Relays in London. Attacking their 3km leg in glorious sunshine, the team performed consistently well with the results of Juniors 4th; Inters 4th; Seniors 1st.

Five school challenge cup

On 10 October, Abingdon's 1st VII water polo team competed in the Five School Challenge Cup at Harrow. The first match, against the hosts, was disappointing with a loss of 0-6. A re-think in strategy and positioning saw successive wins against Marlborough, Charterhouse and Eton. Much of this was down to near perfect teamwork, perseverance and strong defence. The team just missed out on 1st place, coming 2nd overall.

English Schools Cup

In October, the Cross Country Club hosted schools from Oxfordshire in the first round of the English Schools Cup. Races were run on a stunningly sunny day at Cox's Fields on a fast, flat course. Our Junior team secured 3rd place, progressing to the regional round. The Inters secured an impressive 1st and 3rd place. There was even greater dominance from the Seniors, with all six runners placed in the top seven.



Team spirit

The first block fixture of the rugby season took place against Solihull School in September marking the start of what promised to be an exciting and competitive season. Across the school, 11 fixtures were played, with plenty of trial and training matches occurring among the different age groups. The atmosphere was electric, with a real sense of excitement and optimism in the air. On the field, the matches were played in great spirit, with teams demonstrating the hard work they've put into their training. The real takeaway was the valuable match experience gained, the progress made by all teams and the attitude shown by our pupils.



Rugby round up

It has been a fantastic season for rugby, standing as the seventh best over the past twenty seven years. Over 350 students represented the School across 20 teams, from U12 to U18. We fielded five senior XV's (one of only three schools to do so) and the 1st XV reached the last 16 of the U18 National Cup, setting a new record. The U14s had a memorable half-term tour to Surrey and Kent, while the U15s travelled to the Langley School National Festival, where they finished 3rd - Abingdon's best-ever result in the competition.



Commitment and courage

On 23 November, our Rugby Club played against RGS Guildford in a club block fixture. Across the day, there were 18 matches, with over 260 pupils representing the School, including our U12 and U13 sides, which combined with our Prep School to form Foundation sides against RGS. The weather did not disappoint, and neither did the teams' performances, with plenty of passion, commitment, courage and creativity on display from all teams.



Badminton

In September, the badminton 1st VIII opened the season with a hard fought win of 10-6 against Wellington College. All eight players stepped up to play above their usual level, boding well for the months ahead.



Canoe polo

On 23 November, the Canoe Polo team went to Bedford to play the first tournament of the Paddle UK Southern Youth Canoe Polo League. The first time at the tournament, we were excited to see how we compared to others and were pleased with four wins and our draw. The final was a difficult match against Meridian Canoe Club, whose team included two U21 GB players. Although we displayed a strong defence, we ultimately lost by three goals - which we were not unhappy with.



English Schools Cup Regionals

On 8 November, the Cross Country Club competed in the regional round of the English Schools Cup at Stowe. At stake was a place in the national final. An inexperienced Junior team ran with confidence to finish 8th. There were excellent performances from the Inters with Daragh coming 6th; and Edward, Noah and Xavier bringing the team home in 3rd. Two runners down, the Seniors faced a challenge but Oli ran a brave race finishing 8th, backed up by Hugh and Ralph, with Sam securing 3rd place.

Abingdon Prep



Expedition to space

Years 5 and 6 were inspired by local laboratory, Rutherford Appleton, on a space expedition experience. The children considered what life on the moon would feel like and investigated which materials would best work for an astronaut's suit to reduce UV exposure, which is much higher within the moon's atmosphere. Pupils also took part in an escape room and visited a pop up planetarium, where we were dazzled by the constellations.



Down on the farm

On a beautiful, sunny and crisp autumn day, the girls and boys from our Reception class went on an adventure to Cogges Farm. They followed the story of the Little Red Hen, finding out how to grind wheat into flour and make delicious bread rolls in the Victorian kitchen. With a countryside walk, picnic in the barn, time for play and meeting the friendly animals, Reception certainly made the most of every moment.



Charitable thinking

The first House event of the new school year took place in October. The pupils were asked to pitch for a charity for their House to support over the course of the year, with the theme being local environmental charities. It was great to see so many pupils put forward their suggestions and make some strong cases for their proposed charities and there was a lot of fun voting for the different causes. Following some convincing propositions, the chosen charities are: Oceana; The Woodland Trust; Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust; and the Marine Conservation Society. Our pupils are looking forward to raising as much money as possible for these worthwhile causes.



Creating their own colours

Year 3 artists have been studying colour and texture this term. They have been exploring where colour comes from, and how natural paints can be made using natural pigments. The pupils used a pestle and mortar to prepare beetroot, spinach, turmeric, paprika, tea and coffee to create a variety of colours, and pigments and were pleasantly surprised by just how vibrant the results were.

Cross Country success



In November, the Cross Country Club competed in regional round of the English Schools Athletic Association (ESAA) Cross Country Cup. There were some fantastic performances from pupils in all age groups, from Year 3 to Year 8. Special mention to the Year 7 and 8 teams who secured a place at the National Final. In March, the team will go on to compete against the best young runners in England at Leeds Grammar School. Well done to all involved.



Weather watchers

On an appropriately cloudy day in September, Year 7 went outdoors to measure the weather. Using various instruments, they were able to accurately gauge air pressure, temperature, windspeed and direction, rainfall and the amount of light intensity and cloud cover. It was a really fun and hands-on lesson.



Music matters

In November, the Prep orchestra welcomed musicians from the Senior School for a side-by-side orchestral session. This was a fantastic opportunity for younger pupils to benefit from performing with older, more experienced musicians. After a rehearsal together, they performed to parents in an informal concert. Pieces included *It Don't Mean a Thing if you Ain't got that Swing* and *We Wish you a Merry Christmas*.



Forest school

In October, Year 4 joined our forest school teacher, Elizabeth, for a fun-filled session. The children were encouraged to become independent learners for the session, and they really embraced the challenge. Fairy fires were lit, friendship bracelets were made, mud was dug, trees were climbed and the session was rounded off with a game of "commandos" which everyone enjoyed.

What are the benefits of co-ed schools?

by Ronnie Reading, Deputy Head (Educational Development) at Abingdon School

In an era increasingly characterised by the pursuit of equity and equality, education systems worldwide are continuously evolving to better serve diverse student populations. One of the most significant and beneficial changes in this regard is the transition from single gender to co-ed settings. Co-ed fosters respect and collaboration, brings out the best in young people and prepares students for the complexities of the real world.

The trend away from single sex education towards co-ed has been criticised by some educational commentators, who claim that single-sex education benefits young people, particularly girls. Such claims, however, are not substantiated by robust research. A recent study of educational research by Halpern et al (2011) concluded that "There is no well-designed research showing that single-sex education improves students' academic performance." The authors counsel, in particular, against the pseudoscientific claims made about different ways of learning and neuropsychology of 'male' and 'female' brains, arguing that the few differences that do exist appear to have no impact upon learning.

So, if the gender composition of a school makes no difference to learning outcomes, why choose co-ed? What benefits does it produce?

As research consistently demonstrates, the major benefit of co-ed is that it prepares young people for the world beyond school. For example, studies have found that all students in co-ed schools tend to exhibit higher levels of self-confidence and improved socialisation skills. In an environment where both male and female perspectives are valued, students learn to appreciate and respect diversity in thought and approach. Conversely, as the authors quoted earlier put it, "sex segregation increases gender stereotyping and legitimises institutional sexism." The presence of diverse peer groups encourages students to challenge stereotypes and develop a more holistic understanding of themselves and others. In an increasingly interconnected world where collaboration and mutual respect are crucial for success, helping students develop this broader perspective should be a fundamental part of the education process.

The findings of such studies are no surprise to me, thanks to many years leading and teaching in single sex contexts (for girls and for boys), as well as co-ed schools. I have lost count of how often I have observed students spontaneously developing camaraderie and

mutual respect, irrespective of gender. During group projects, for example, students harness different strengths and viewpoints to achieve common goals. They learn from each other's unique approaches to problem-solving and contribute to a more dynamic learning process. These interactions do not only cater to academic excellence but also lay the groundwork for developing life skills such as empathy, effective communication and appreciation of the value of bringing diverse experiences and viewpoints together.

Some commentators have suggested that gender segregation benefits girls in terms of academic choice and performance. Here the evidence still supports the case for co-ed. Studies which argue that girls in single sex environments are more likely to choose STEM subjects and realise their potential are based on very small samples from studies conducted in countries very different to the UK, which casts significant doubt on the robustness of their findings. The most rigorous studies demonstrate that girls in co-ed environments are equally as likely to choose STEM subjects and do well in them. The critical difference is school culture, not whether an educational environment is single sex or co-ed.

Gender stereotyping is a challenge - one that schools solve by being truly inclusive, not by keeping boys and girls apart. In this way, co-ed can thus help break down barriers that might otherwise inhibit academic growth.

None of this means co-ed in itself is evidence of an outstanding school or a school that is necessarily right for your child. Many factors should be considered, from the powerful but often implicit philosophy of education underpinning teaching and learning to the extent to which the school seeks to either mould young people into a particular shape or helps them identify and realise their distinct strengths and interests. Prospective families must look for the right fit for them; a place where being part of the essential life of the school is key.



Celebrating a decade of Tilsley Park

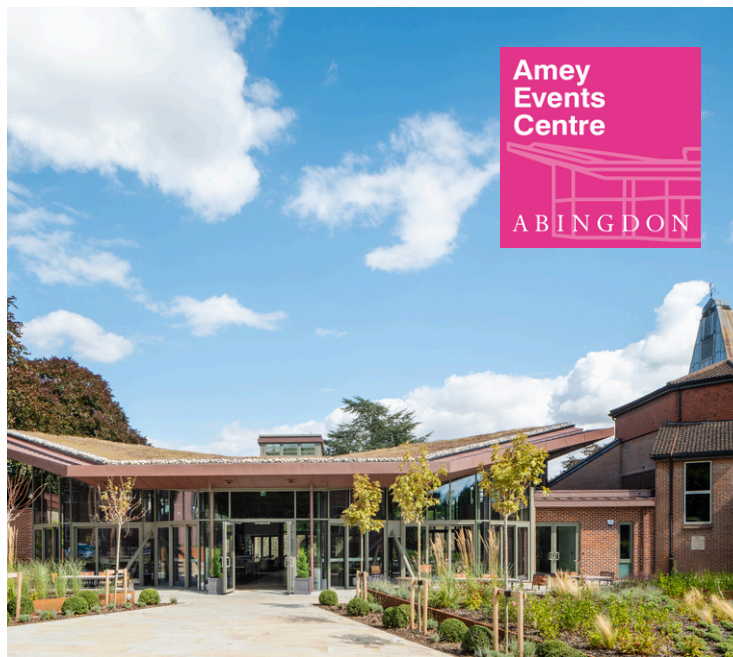
September 2024 marked 10 years since Abingdon School took over the lease of Tilsley Park. In that time, more than £2 million has been invested in building and improving its facilities and today, it boasts some of the best in the region.



These include an athletics track, a throws area and all-weather pitches. These upgrades have enhanced physical education for students at Abingdon School and other local schools, while providing a focal point for local community activity. Community sports teams, fitness enthusiasts, and families have found a welcoming space, with the venue regularly hosting events such as athletics meets, charity runs, and the Abingdon Marathon. Tilsley Park also serves as the home ground for sporting clubs, including the Oxford Saints American Football team.

Amey Theatre celebrates its 150th live screening

In the autumn, the Amey Theatre proudly celebrated its 150th live screening with a captivating broadcast of *The Marriage of Figaro* live from the Royal Opera House. The very first screening on 11 January 2017, was *The Tempest* live from the Royal Shakespeare Company, which welcomed 114 patrons. Since then, the Amey Theatre has hosted 14,460 patrons for live screenings, and we eagerly anticipate welcoming many more!



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Charity events raise over £20,000 for local causes



Tilsley Park hosted two prestigious charity events in the autumn which collectively raised over £20,000 for local causes. Helen and Douglas House, which supports Oxfordshire families caring for terminally ill babies and children, organised a Firewalk on 19 October. This was followed on 20 October, by the Abingdon Marathon, which began and ended at Tilsley Park. Congratulations to the 1,200 runners who participated, helping to raise money for several worthwhile local charities.

Abingdon Development



The Mercers' Company and Abingdon philanthropy in OX14 - four years on

The Mercers' Company is arguably the most significant of the twelve ancient City Livery companies. Since 2020, a Mercers' Company grant has supported two key posts at Abingdon, our Mental Health and Wellbeing Coordinator, Natalie Hunt, and our Partnership Coordinator, Jess Burns. These roles are now embedded as critical cornerstones of the OX14 Learning Partnership, which benefits so many students both at Abingdon and in our wider community. The Mercers' Company has been so impressed with the positive impact of Natalie and Jess's work, they have granted a further three years of funding. Grants Programme Manager, Jane Samuels, said: "I am delighted to see the great progress being made and the huge amount of work carried out."

Making the impossible possible - your role in changing lives



Our *Seven years to change a life* bursary campaign was launched in October 2021, encouraging critical donations to support and extend the bursary provision Abingdon is able to offer future and current students. On Friday 14 March 2025, we will be hosting Abingdon's first bursary dinner, celebrating all those who make bursaries possible and encouraging more committed donors to join them. We want more young people to have the opportunity to attend Abingdon and now more than ever, philanthropic support is critical to achieve this. If you are keen to know more about how you can be part of this amazing community of supporters at Abingdon, we'd love you to be part of the evening. To find out more, please contact development@abingdon.org.uk.

David Allen (OA 1966) Harp legacy



David always maintained a great affection for Abingdon School, and as an able musician decided that he wanted to endow a harp scholarship. Funds were made available over five years to enable a teacher to be recruited; five practice harps and a concert harp to be purchased; and interested pupils to be found. He was so pleased to be able to see it flourish and now even young Abingdon Prep School pupils are learning the harp thanks to David. Sadly, he developed Alzheimer's in 2019 and died suddenly in August 2024. Thank you to both David and Shelagh Allen for their support.

ESTATE PLANNING WEBINAR

Hosted by Paul Batchelor (OA 2000) and Erica Burt-Moore - Partners at Knights

Tuesday 14 January 2025 6 pm until 6.45 pm

- The webinar will cover:
- The importance of leaving a will and when should you write a will
 - How to use your will to protect your home and assets
 - Impact of the recent Budget on business owners, agricultural & landed estates and holders of private pensions
 - Understand what Inheritance Tax might mean for you
 - The importance of Lasting Powers of Attorney
 - Common mistakes and how to avoid them - examples
 - Leaving gifts to charity - terminology explained

“The greatest and best social blessing is for anyone over the age of 21 to die without making a will”

James Cautley, Headmaster of Abingdon School (1847-1850)



Estate planning webinar - 6pm on 14 January 2025

The 1563 Society is delighted to be hosting an Estate Planning Webinar in January which is being delivered by Paul Batchelor (OA 2000), partner at Knights. The link to sign up has been sent out in the weekly mailing. Please contact development@abingdon.org.uk if you have any questions.



Military drinks

On 13 September, OAs and parents working in military, defence, security and government, were once again welcomed to a drinks reception generously hosted by Tony Edwards (OA 1962). Held at the RAF Club, guests networked across sectors, and heard from Tony along with serving officers, amongst them Brigadier Peter Baines, Army Special Operations Brigade. Tony also visited the School on 15 October to deliver his renowned talk on R J Mitchell, the engineering genius behind the Spitfire.

London drinks, the Club's flagship event



On 10 December, the OA Club hosted another spectacular drinks reception at the Royal Over-Seas League. Club President, Henry Scarlett (OA 2007), gave his swansong speech to over 160 OAs at this ever popular event.



Sixth Form careers evening

On 22 November, over 50 OA and parent volunteers gave up their Friday evening to share their expertise with students, through panel presentations and small group discussions, followed by a supper hosted by the Club. This wouldn't be possible without OAs and parents happy to give their time and expertise through this and other talks, workshops and internship opportunities.



OA WhatsApp pilot group

Our growing Hong Kong OA community met on 8 November, instigated by our pilot WhatsApp OA group, aiming to foster connections between OAs working in or connected to Hong Kong. Attendees are pictured here with Jane Jørgensen, at the Conrad, Hong Kong.

Evening Salon, LGBT+ and allies



The Club was proud to support this inaugural event celebrating the OA LGBT+ community on 2 October. Led by alumni, in collaboration with the OA Club, this lively evening of spoken word, music and comedy performances was enjoyed by all in attendance at the Parakeet, Kentish Town. With special thanks to organisers Will McDowell (OA 2011), Matt Hawsworth (OA 2000) and Jeremy Taylor, Director of Arts Partnerships & AFU.

Abingdon Out of the Past

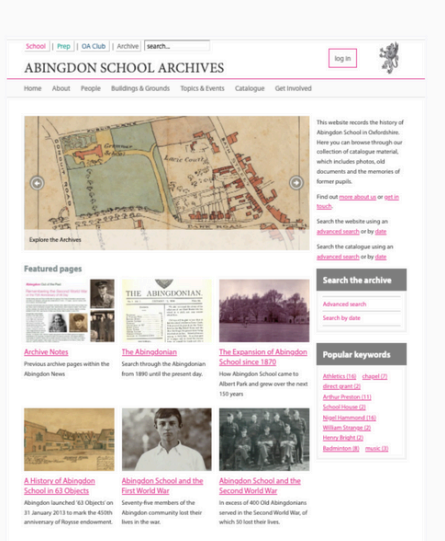
Archive site now live - what would you like to know?

Abingdon School Archive Website and Catalogue

Pupils, Staff, Heads, Governors, Old Abingdonians, Buildings, Grounds, Clubs, Societies, Sports, Events, First World War, Second World War, Catalogue



archives.abingdon.org.uk



Why is the School's emblem a griffin?

You see them everywhere about the School, from the elegant stone carving of a *griffen* on the wall of Park Lodge to the buttons on the uniform blazers. Why a *griffen*? It is to honour John Roysse, the sixteenth-century benefactor of the School, whose coat of arms features a *griffen* on its shield. Why do the School spell it *griffen* with an e instead of an i? Because that is how it was spelt in the original 1563 grant of arms.

What was the School like 100 years ago?

In 1924 tuition fees were £10 a term and boarding £22 13 s 4d making the total annual fee for boarders £98. All this, and much more, can be gathered from the 1924-5 prospectus which outlines subjects taught, scholarships offered and facilities available along with fifteen images of the School at this time.

From the December 1924 Abingdonian we learn that there were 155 boys on the roll, 76 day boys and 79 boarders. Perhaps the most exciting news was that the School had acquired a wireless, one with three valves and a loud speaker! It's not obvious how the wireless was powered because the School didn't install electric lighting until the following year.



Where was the old School?

If the School is more than 750 years old and has been at Albert Park for 155 of those years, where was it before that? Until it moved in 1870 it was in a number of different locations in Stert Street. Scan the QR code to see the photograph which shows from left to right, the site of a 1372 school boarding house and of the headmaster's house next door, St Nicolas Church, where lessons are thought to have taken place in c1100, and the entrance to the new 1563 school.



To easily access historic issues of The Abingdonian and the prospectus, please scan the QR codes.



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