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Old Ashbeians' Association **January 2008**

In 2007, Ashby School was applauded by an independent assessor for refusing to 'rest on its laurels and driving towards increasingly ambitious levels of achievement'.

The assessor – who renewed Ashby's Investors in People Standard 'without hesitation' – was one of many people in the last 12 months to recognise the school as an educational trailblazer.

In November, Ashby's new, flagship **English building** was officially opened by acclaimed Leicestershire author Sue Townsend, best known as the creator of Adrian Mole.

The building, which cost £787,000 to complete, boasts the very latest classroom technology and provides students and staff with their own dedicated workspace, tailored specifically to the teaching of English.

The design of the building was carefully crafted to enhance the surrounding architecture, some of which dates from the Edwardian and Elizabethan periods.

As well as Ms Townsend, Ashby welcomed several other prestigious visitors during 2007.

These included a delegation of **VIPs from China** who came to see the school's outstanding teaching facilities. The party included the Head teacher and Chairman of Ashby's partnership school in Sechuan Province, along with four representatives of the Chinese Foreign Affairs Office.

Bishop of Leicester The Right Reverend Tim Stevens also called in to discuss current affairs with Sixth Formers.

He was followed by East Midlands **MEP Glenis Wilmott** who was at Ashby School to congratulate five girls on winning joint first place in a county-wide debating competition. Their prize was a trip to visit the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Most recently, the **Chairman of Leicestershire County Council**, Mike Jones, and his wife were given a tour of the school.

Prince Edward also took time out of his busy schedule to meet nine Ashby School students who had all completed their bronze Duke of Edinburgh Awards. The meeting took place at Ivanhoe Community College.

The school was even mentioned in **Parliament** when MP David Taylor spoke of Ashby School's outstanding achievements in the state sector and urged Education Secretary Ed Balls to come and see for himself.

Mr Balls said he would gladly accept the invitation – although his visit has so far failed to materialise!

This year, the school also celebrated its best ever set of **Oxbridge** offers. Six students have accepted conditional places with two more still in the pool for consideration.

This follows another set of excellent **exam results**. Ashby School notched up its best A level results ever – with a record six A grade passes for Head Boy Ben Gregory.

The school's overall pass rate was 98 percent – up on 97 per cent from 2006. In all, there was a total of 137 A grade passes.

Meanwhile, the GCSE pass rate rose to 99 per cent (at grades A* to G). Seventy one per cent of passes were at the top grades of A* to C.

On the sports field, there was success for Ashby's under 16 **rugby** players who won the County Cup Plate in their last match together. The boys beat Longslade Community College by 35 – 21 to lift the shield.

The school also introduced the sport of **Ultimate Frisbee** both as a PE option and as an after-school activity, to encourage more students to keep active.

Two girls from Year 11 are doing their bit to coax more girls into their PE kits – by signing up to a special project headed by Olympic champion **Dame Kelly Holmes**. Megan Danvers and Jade Garami got the chance to meet Dame Kelly and are now working on ways to make PE more attractive to girls at Ashby. Ideas include improvements to changing rooms and a more flattering PE kit.

Ashby's dramatists made their mark at the **Edinburgh Fringe Festival** with their own adaptation of 'A Little Shop of Horrors'. It was the third consecutive year that the school's drama group, Exadus – made up of present and former students – had appeared at the Fringe.

Back at Ashby, the school's production of '**Godspell**' earned rave reviews.

In 2007, the school also organised its first trip to **Japan**. A group of Sixth Formers spent an unforgettable week touring the country's historical and cultural landmarks, including the bright lights of Tokyo and the site of the Hiroshima bomb.

The visit was part of the school's ongoing bid to extend its overseas links, in its role as a Specialist Languages College.

There are currently 1653 students on role.

Autumn Reunion
(courtesy of Peter Dalton)

Years have rolled by since I first passed these gates and each succeeding year brings back new memories.

Our 24th reunion this year was held at School House and was a splendid, indeed an historic, occasion. To begin, the Head, Mrs Viv Keller-Garnett, and the Chairman of Governors, Clive Jones, gave us a tour of the school.

The classrooms we remembered as pupils are still recognisable, though diverted to various different areas of study. We were all most impressed by everything we saw, which shows how much the school is flourishing.

After this most interesting tour, our group photograph was taken in lovely sunshine against the attractive background of School House. We then entered the well-arranged bar for pre-prandials and surveyed the comfortable accommodation which used to be T. A. Woodcock's living quarters.

We sat down to what proved to be a splendid lunch with charming service by Lynne Williams and her team. Most of us had never seen the dining room before but, for those who had been boarders in their school days, many vivid memories were revived.

In my days there, this area of the school was forbidden territory to day-boys and I felt a sense of legitimate trespassing on this occasion.

Before the meal, John Wroughton – who as usual so efficiently organised the reunion – unveiled a portrait of T. A. Woodcock, which we had not previously seen. We then stood in silence in memory of Eric Redfern who died recently and was for so long such an important influence in the school as Head of Science and later as Deputy Headmaster.

Following the meal, Viv Keller-Garnett spoke of the school's progress and recalled some of the previous Heads. She also talked about the ways in which the school adapts itself to the challenges of the 21st century and of her pleasure at presiding over a gathering of so many former pupils in such a setting.

Maurice Harvey recalled his days as a teacher at the school, having been appointed by Tom Woodcock during an Old Boys' cricket match. He told a highly amusing anecdote of Tom Woodcock in his later years.

This whole occasion was a fascinating journey along the winding lanes of memory. To me, it emphasised the fact the school lives on as a continuous, though inevitably changing, entity in a world where new skills are needed alongside the old ones.

Many thanks are due to Viv and to John Wroughton, John Williams and to John's wife, Lynne, and all the catering staff. We much appreciated all the organisation which made this occasion so special and so memorable.

Stet fortuna domus

Dr Michael J. Muncaster (1958-65)

Together with Bob Greig, Michael spent a day visiting the school and the Boarding House early in the autumn term. He commented that it evoked many memories for them both – not all unpleasant. Michael's disclosure that he still had the diaries from his school years and might consider publishing an edited edition at a future date may be of interest to members.

Donald Swindell

Donald sent a short note with his subscription. He is fit and well and meets with Ken Chapman on a weekly basis as a former fellow traveller on the train from Gresley Station.

A popular and much-loved head teacher at Ashby Hill top Primary has retired. **Diana Saunders** attended Ashby Girl's Grammar School and qualified as a teacher in 1969. During her career Diana has taught in schools in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, South Humberside, Warwickshire and Leicestershire. Diana also works for Leicestershire Education Authority as a Consultant and is a school inspector for the Diocese of Leicester. Diana is continuing with both these jobs in her retirement.

Many Old Girls will remember Miss Helen Hunter. She has now moved from her home in Churchill close and lives in a residential home in Moira.

Fiftieth Anniversary

Report by Brenda Robinson (nee Simpkins)
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To mark the 50th anniversary of starting at the school, 20 former pupils and two teachers were given a guided tour of the original part of Ashby Girls' Grammar School in September 2007.

The former pupils, who started at the school in 1957, were brought together by Margaret Winfield (nee Boulton). All had been in the same class from their second year at the school (Latin stream).

In 1957, the school had about 400 pupils and was run by head teacher Miss Lockton and her deputy, Miss Wasserman.

Anita Allsop gave the Old Girls a guided tour of the old school building, pointing out the many changes to the school. Despite all the alterations that have taken place, many people recognised familiar classrooms.

Some had not visited the school since leaving in 1964. Others had visited the school during the Centenary celebrations in 1999.

Everyone was impressed by the appearance, display work and the availability of information technology. The number of offices caused particular comment.

Wanda Czyzewski travelled from Alabama to join the celebrations. She was especially interested in the new dining room as her mother had been the cook for many years.

Other Old Girls travelled from Paris, North Yorkshire, Southern England, East Anglia and local counties to attend. The group last met 11 years ago and everyone was thrilled to renew old acquaintances.

After the tour, the Old Girls met with other former pupils at The Beeches in Burton Road where they enjoyed a buffet lunch and shared further memories of their time at Ashby School.

Obituaries

Sadly, the following deaths have been reported during 2007.

Eric Redfern, 1912 – 2007

Affectionately known as 'Boris' to countless boys, he was Head of Science and later Deputy Head of the school for many years. I am particularly grateful for his untiring support of the Association, as he was Secretary for a number of years.

David Redfern, 1940 – 2007

After a short illness, David died suddenly two months before his father. He and his father had been regular attendees at the Wroughton Lunch for many years.

Michael John Pass, 1928 – 2007

Michael gained a Double First at Oxford and spent his life in education, becoming Director of Education for Doncaster at an early age. Following his retirement, Michael moved back to live in Packington, where he and his wife Peggy both took an active part in village life. When he joined the school governing body, Michael's expertise was much appreciated by all his fellow governors.

Oswald Hull 1919 – 2007 Chris Hull, his son, published the following Obituary in The Guardian on 2 January 2008.

Education dominated the life of my Father Oswald Hull who has died aged 88. In an impressive feat of social mobility, he progressed from humble beginnings in the South Derbyshire potteries, via an Oxford education, and on to a career as a teacher and writer.

Born the youngest of three in Church Gresley, his father was a third generation potter and worked with sanitary ware. With the encouragement of his parents he excelled, like his older brother Richard (later killed climbing Mont Blanc) to win a county scholarship to Ashby Boys Grammar School. The school's progressive headmaster T A Woodcock entered promising pupils for Oxbridge, when few other grammar schools were so bold.

Studying Geography at Hertford College, he was not immune to the political ferment of the late 1930's. Drawn to the Left at Oxford, he developed a life-long friendship with Dom Mintoff, later to become Prime Minister of Malta. Ossie claimed to have nurtured Mintoff's interest in politics.

His studies were interrupted in 1940 by the second World War when he was called up to the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry. With the Ordnance corps, he landed at Torbruk in 1941, enjoying the bonhomie of its Australian garrison between German raids. In 1942 he was evacuated first to Cairo and, after Rommel's invasion of Egypt, to Halfa in Palestine. From that time he retained a particular interest in the politics of the region.

Ossie began his teaching career at Dover Grammar School for Boys. Then, in the early 1960's, he taught History and Geography at the Jewish Free School in north London, a challenging setting for an anti-Zionist. While there, he wrote *Frontiers of Geography* (1964). A reviewer noted the authors "curious predilection for frontiers and boundaries", a legacy perhaps of his daily school journey from Derbyshire to Leicestershire and the re-drawing of borders in post-war Palestine. As Head of Geography at Southgate School, he wrote three textbooks: *Geography of Production* (1969); *London* (1970); and *Transport* (1971).

In retirement, his enthusiasm was undimmed. His last book, *South Derbyshire and its people: A History* (2004) paid homage to his roots. Information technology passed him by, but even in his last weeks he was dictating the copy of his final project about the frontier lands of Eurasia.

He is survived by his wife Anne, a nurse whom he married in 1959, and his three sons.

Duncan Roland Drake 1933-2007

A former District Commissioner of South Derbyshire Scouts, Governor of Newton Solney Primary School and Old Ashbeian died during the year. Our sympathy goes to his wife and family.

Anthony Charles Dicks 1950-2007

A former teacher at the school passed away suddenly on April 2nd 2007.

David Moore 1936 – 2007

David's sister Dianna Manning (néé Moore) informed me of the death of her brother in July 2007.

Ian Mason 1914 - 2007

Livestock geneticist and author Ian Mason was born with agriculture in his blood. As a young boy in the 1920's and 30's Mr Mason would help on his dad's farms in Ashby de la Zouch. He was to become respected around the world for his knowledge of animal breeds. He is most famous for his World Dictionary of Livestock Breeds, Types and Varieties first published in 1950. He has been credited as recognising some breeds for the first time and saving others from extinction. In 1933, as an outstanding sixth former at Ashby Boy's Grammar School, he attended his first botany class at University College Leicester, which sowed seeds for his successful career in livestock research. After gaining a science scholarship to Pembroke College, Cambridge, he became lecturer of zoology and botany in London. In 1942, he was appointed as a scientific assistant for the Commonwealth Bureau's Institute of animal Breeding and Genetics in Edinburgh, which was to become his UK base. He later worked in Rome for the UN in 1972. Mr Mason was still editing his dictionary at 90. His wife predeceased him and he is survived by three children.

Mollie Hood (néé Addison) ? – 2007

Mollie had been ill for some time. I have been made aware that Mollie died at some time since our last newsletter but unfortunately have no more details. Our condolences go to her husband Gerald.

Ann Stacey (néé Clay) ? – 2007. Her daughter Judith writes:

Sadly my Mother, Ann Stacey (Clay) who attended the AGGS in the 1940's, passed away unexpected on 1st March 2007 in the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital. Ann was the youngest of three sisters who all attended AGGS. Ruth (deceased) and Sybil, who lives in London with her husband. She was brought up in Coalville and married Simeon Stacey, a local photographer, in 1950. They initially lived in Coalville and then in Ravenstone where they raised their two children. Susan, who also attended AGGS moved to live in the USA where she still resides with her husband and myself, who lives in Cambridgeshire with my husband and two teenage sons. In her younger days Ann was a very accomplished needlewoman and was an expert at cake making and intricate decoration, but sadly during her forties she was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, which, as time progressed, limited her mobility and accomplishments. In 1978 Ann and her husband left the Midlands to start an Antique shop in Sheringham, Norfolk, which they ran successfully for many years until Ann needed more support at home. I know my Mother enjoyed her membership of the Old Girls Association and missed this and many aspects of her life in the Midlands.

Mary Hill 1914 – 2007

Mary was a Measham resident throughout her life joining the family business and latterly a member of the Parish Council. Some years ago Mary Hill wrote a brief guide to Measham and in her memory a plaque has been mounted on Mary's corner to acknowledge her lifetimes contribution to the village.

Pam Fairbrother (néé Waterfield) ? – 2007

No further details available.