

The Clocktower



Keeping alumni in touch with Ripon Grammar School and each other

Summer 2013
Issue 4

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by pupils 100 years ago

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A letter from the headmaster

Dear Alumni

I hope you will enjoy reading the Clocktower; I am deeply grateful to Ruth Savage and her editorial team for all their hard work in putting this edition together.

When I ask current students what they most value about Ripon Grammar School, you may expect some reference to facilities or teaching. Important though these undoubtedly are, the most valued aspect mentioned is the strong sense of community, which I must admit is what I most value and sensed when I came for interview nine years ago. There is a genuine sense of ownership by the students of the school; they care about it and the people associated with it. I am therefore delighted to see the same warmth and affection for the school manifest in its former students. The ability to get on with people, to communicate clearly and to be enthusiastic, which is so evident in our current students, is clearly a characteristic of former students too.

It is wonderful to see such success in a wide variety of careers such as TV news reporting, fashion design, writing and the food industry in this edition. I am not surprised of course - the students of Ripon Grammar School are extremely talented, modest and possess a strong sense of community. To hear of students being so successful in their careers leads me to believe the school is preparing its students well for the future. Please do let us know how you are getting on by emailing us at rgsconnect@ripongrammar.co.uk and I hope to see you at the events in July or December.

With best wishes

Martin Pearman

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Cover: Team GB Olympic diver and RGS student Jack Laugher in the school pool. Picture by DAVID LAUGHER

They shared an education and all grew up together in North Yorkshire. These former pupils made life-long connections at Ripon Grammar School

Together again after 27 years - the class of 1985



Look how we've grown: there were just 64 students in Upper Sixth then, numbers have since doubled. Lesley Jennings (Smith) bottom row, 3rd from right. Stuart Borchard, 3rd row, 2nd from right. Laura Bell, 4th row, 5th from left. Mark Flowers, back row, 4th from right.

Can you link any other pupils to the adults pictured?

OLD school friends who were last together at Ripon Grammar School more than 25 years ago have enjoyed an emotional reunion in the city.

Around 50 former students, some of whom travelled from as far as America and Spain for the event, revisited a number of old haunts in Ripon during a memorable evening out together which finished at about 3am.

They found their lives had taken many different paths with those attending including BBC nature and documentary programme maker Mark Flowers, London stockbroker Becky Stones, National Geographic and Time photographer Mark Read and art teacher Joanna Billingham.

Kuno Van der Post travelled from Florida, Rob Marchant from Spain, Denise Prentice (Anderson) from Ireland and Ian Coupland from Jersey. Many former boarders stayed at the Old Deanery and visited school for a short tour the following day.

The reunion was organised by Leicester-based games teacher Lesley Jennings (Smith) and Stuart Borchard following the funeral of schoolfriend Susy Daish, a former RGS boarder, who sadly died suddenly in November 2011.

Those past pupils who attended the funeral decided to get more people together the following summer: "We wanted to do it partly in memory of Susy but also because it was so great to see everyone," said Lesley. They had last all been together at school to sit A levels in 1985. Some left school after O levels in 1983.

The event was organised through Facebook. "There are several people still living in the Ripon area, but the rest are spread far and wide. Word very quickly spread. It was that simple," said Lesley. "People dug out old photos from school days and posted them on the group page beforehand or brought them to the reunion and passed them round. It was a great night - very informal, talking to people we hadn't seen in over 25 years."



All together now: still going strong at 2am in the Black Swan, from left, Lisa Craig, Stuart Borchard, Denise Prentice (Anderson) and Kuno Van der Post



They came from far and wide: from left, Kuno Van der Post and Wes Dawson, who both travelled from the States for the event, and Simon Watt, who flew in from Spain



Happy memories: Laura Bell, left, Nicola Scott and Alastair Cameron catch up on old times in the Unicorn

Mr and Mrs: former classmates Phil and Lynn Mortimer (Allardyce), who went on to marry many years after leaving school



Just some of the RGS students who left school in 1983. Can you identify any of them?

Calling the class of 1983

ARE you interested in getting together for a reunion next summer? Past pupil Jackie Smith is organising a get-together for the Class of 1983. Contact her on Jackie. smith01@btinternet.com or through Facebook.

Are you planning or have you had a reunion? We would love to hear about it.

Contact rgsconnect@ripongrammar.co.uk or write care of RGS, Clothholme Road, Ripon.



A drink to old friends: George Mullen and Nicola Woolfenden (Richardson)



Travelling back in time: from left, Hilary Pegrum (Wade), Jo Billingham and Becky Stones arrive at York Station



Catching up with old friends in the One Eyed Rat: Left to right, Hazel Robinson, Becky Stones and Laura Bell



Old mates: Phil Mortimer, left, and Adrian Lofthouse

The boarders are back in town: descending, Guy Spencer, Hilary Wade, Ian Coupland, Becky Stones, Katherine Priest and mum-to-be Jo Billingham - who has since given birth to her first child, a boy - all stayed at the Old Deanery



All grown up now: Guy Spencer, left, and Mark Read



Exclusive Swinton Park RGS alumni reunion offer

The luxurious Swinton Park castle hotel, set in a 20,000 acre sporting estate, is offering a complimentary function room for any RGS alumni reunion booked for groups of 20 or more, or a 10pc discount on private dining alumni bookings for groups of ten or more in its award-winning Samuel's restaurant. In both cases, alumni accommodation discounts are also available on application. All offers valid until 31 December, 2013. Please quote 'RGS Alumni' offer.

Contact: Swinton Park, Masham, Ripon, HG4 4JH, T: 01765 680971 W: swintonpark.com E: events@swintonpark.com

CAREER CASE STUDY

Olivia Richwald

BBC Look North video journalist

Age: 32
Left RGS 1998
A levels: Eng Lit, Geography, Biology, General studies. AS French
Newcastle University: BA Combined Studies
City University: Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism
Job description: reports, films and edits news stories throughout Yorkshire.

Olivia Richwald's job as a journalist has taken her all over the world, reporting on stories in China, Iraq and Belize as well as throughout England. In Yorkshire, she has interviewed a wide range of people on camera, from members of a community living in the shadow of a serial murderer and those who lost their homes in flooding to a group of scuba divers attempting to cross the Channel on underwater motorbikes and a Dr Who fan who holds the world record for the largest collection of Daleks.

Olivia knew she wanted to be a journalist from the age of 14, while still, she confesses, a 'shy student' at Ripon Grammar School. She wrote articles for the Ripon Gazette, reporting on events like school charity week. "I was always interested in finding out about stuff, always asking questions," she says.

She worked for the student paper and a local paper, The Morning News, while studying in Newcastle: "I was a student with fluorescent pink hair and The Morning News paid me £50 for 400



'I am really lucky to be here in Yorkshire doing the job I love': Olivia Richwald with her camera

Picture by Stephen Metcalf

Travels with my camera

words, I was really chuffed." Olivia went on to study magazine journalism at City University in London and enjoyed a three month placement on the English speaking China Daily paper in Beijing. "I was working as a sub editor. I loved it."

When she returned to London, she did shifts on The Sun newspaper, editing and uploading stories onto the website. "It was a really good experience," she says.

Olivia's first job as a junior reporter was with the Evening News in Norwich. She moved to The Northern Echo, ending up as chief reporter after two-and-a-half years. She was trained to make video reports for the paper's website and found she enjoyed it, going on to work as a broadcast journalist with ITV Border, Tyne Tees and, three years ago, with Look North in Leeds.

Her work now involves filming, reporting and editing news stories throughout Yorkshire for Look North. Her day starts with a call from the newsdesk, asking her to cover a particular story. She will find people to speak to, do the interviews and film her shots before heading back to edit the piece in the office. Her finished report, around two minutes long, usually goes out on the 6.30pm news. "I can't believe I work ten hour days for two minutes' worth of TV. But when you consider

around half a million people view it, that makes it worth it."

Olivia does a lot of live reporting too: "It's the scariest part of the job but really rewarding. "If it goes well you get a real buzz afterwards. There is a moment of terror before the presenter comes to you live when you think about how many people are watching.

"Being in Yorkshire usually means I'm out in the cold with chapped hands, frozen feet and toes I last felt about two hours ago.

"There is no autocue so you do your best to remember bullet points. It's all over in a couple of minutes. It's great for the audience and definitely adds something. It's live TV, you never know what's going to happen."

Sometimes, such as the day Olivia did a live report from a moving Ferris Wheel, and couldn't hear a thing, it can go badly wrong. "I had no idea when to speak. Watching it back was toe-curling."

Olivia has worked on lots of big, sometimes harrowing stories, including hard-hitting criminal trials. She interviewed prostitutes and members of the local community in Bradford before the self-styled 'Crossbow Cannibal' killer, Stephen Griffiths, was caught in 2010, examining the impact of the murders on people living there.

at 2am to get there. I'll remember it all my life."

The highlight of her career was when she travelled to Iraq with The Northern Echo to report on soldiers from the region. "I also went to Belize with the Army to report on their training out there and I've done reports from inside submarines in Scotland."

Every day is different, says Olivia: "That's what I like most about the job. When I wake up in the morning I have no idea who I am going to meet. It could be sheep farmers in the hills one day and people in Bradford affected by flooding the next. It doesn't feel like work because I go out and chat to people and film them and then write and talk about it. I love meeting people.

"Those at school will remember me

pestering teachers with questions and I am still doing that now. But I have never been a performer, I am shy and I have had to learn that side of it."

Her advice to RGS students who want to become reporters is not to be put off by people telling them it is competitive and difficult.

"All you have to do is be dedicated and you will get there. Too many people are complacent and lazy, you have to push a bit. Hard work is what matters most. You can learn pretty much everything."

She stresses the pay isn't great: "It really isn't, unless you're one of the top people. But I would rather have a good life and enjoy my work."

Her one regret is that she didn't have a gap year before starting on her career path: "Once you start to work it is hard to get time off, other than a few weeks here or there. I really wish I had done more travelling."

But she loves being in Yorkshire now: "I am really lucky to be here doing the job I love."

Do you have an interesting career story you would like to tell us about? Contact us on: rgsconnect@ripongrammar.co.uk

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Have you ever wondered what happened to those old friends you lost touch with?

1970s

IAN PRINGLE (left RGS 1970) Since RGS life has been varied or, should one say, variable and mostly Ripon centric. A little learning (Aston and Leeds Met), rather more work (motor trade and property), playing happy families (with Sybil, two children Rosemary and Alastair - both RGS alumni), some good works (RGS governors etc). Would be delighted to hear from other Old Rips mertoun@ripon.org

1980s

MARK READ (left 1983) I left Ripon in 1983 and spent some time travelling the world trying to "find" myself, this turned into a passion for photography which in turn became a career. Having studied film and Photography at Art College in London, I now travel the world as a photojournalist, shooting stories for publications like National Geographic and the Sunday Times Magazine amongst others. When at home I relax in North London with my wife Liberty and our two daughters. (www.markreadphotography.co.uk)

SIMON ARMSTRONG (left 1985): Having scraped through my biochemistry degree at Birmingham University in 1988, I embarked on a career in academic book publishing. After four years I moved to Bath to retrain as an architectural stonemason and started working at Wells Cathedral Stonemasons in 1994, gaining a post-graduate qualification in architectural conservation and being made a Director in 2000. Two years later, with wife Jo and sons Wilfrid and Edmund, I left the UK to work as a stonemason in France. I returned to Wells Cathedral Stonemasons in 2005.

1990s

JAMES ATKINSON (left 1993) I am currently working in London for Deutsche Bank in their Finance division. I am married to Becky and we have 2 young sons and an energetic Springer Spaniel and we live in Horsham, West Sussex. I can be contacted either through LinkedIn or at james.atkinson@mac.com

2000s

DAN TOPPING (left RGS 2002) I graduated from the University of Durham in 2005, then moved to London where I am a Director at B. P. Marsh & Partners Plc, a Venture Capital firm which specialises in financial services investment, in particular with Lloyd's of London, where I am also a director of 3 Lloyd's Insurance Brokers. Currently living in Fulham, and try to make it back to Ripon as much as possible.

GEORGE OWRAM (left 2008) Having graduated with a first class honours degree in law from Durham University in 2011, I am now in the process of training to be a barrister. In between the Bar Professional Training Course at BPP Law School in Leeds and starting my pupillage, I have been working for the international law firm Eversheds. Most of my free time has been spent playing, coaching or organising cricket. Most importantly, I have managed to stay in touch with quite a few friends from school.

2010s

POLLY SANDS (left 2010) I'm working as an Account Coordinator in the Melbourne studio of the global branding consultancy, Elmwood, after starting in reception as part of my gap year travels. I now work with global and local Australian clients on their brand identities across corporate, retail, packaging and digital. In between games of table tennis, I have worked on some great projects, including the creation of a wine brand (which I can't wait to taste!)

LET us, and all your old friends, know what you're up to: send us your news. Contact: rgsconnect@ripongrammar.co.uk



Highlight: Olivia reporting in Iraq for the Northern Echo



Thanks to all our generous supporters: sports loving students enjoying their new sports hall
Photographs by Philip Vaughan of Muse Photography, Ripon

Fundraising sports boost

TALENTED sports students at Ripon Grammar School are reaping the benefits of a £1m fundraising campaign, excelling on the track and field thanks to much improved facilities.

Many past pupils will remember a basic, cramped gymnasium, poor quality winter training grounds and a hockey pitch that regularly flooded. As a result, matches were often called off in bad weather.

Thanks to more than 250 generous donors, today’s students are enjoying use of a state-of-the-arts sports hall and fitness suite, opened in 2010, and a new, all weather AstroTurf pitch and running track, completed in 2011.

Those making the most of the top class sports facilities at Ripon Grammar School include Dominic Butler and James McDaniel, who have both been selected for the North of England rugby squads.

Dominic, captain of the school’s 1st XV, plays at senior level in the under-18 age group and managed to supplant the current England hooker from Lancashire to win his place. James has developed impressively as a scrum half, and has been selected at the under-16 age level.

“It is a considerable achievement,” said Headmaster Mr Martin Pearman.

Rugby performances have been particularly strong at RGS, with the U12 team winning the 2013 Yorkshire Cup and both the U12s and U13s winning their local league Grand Finals. RGS also won the recent Sevens rugby tournament at St Ethelburga’s. Netball, too, has seen a marked improvement, with RGS’s unbeaten under-12 team emerging as area champions: “Having such a superb indoor facility has been instrumental to their success,” said school sports co-ordinator Helen MacKenzie.

In badminton, Matt Clare has been selected to play for England in the European championships in Holland and both the under-14 girls and under-16 boys remain undefeated after winning the Harrogate and Craven area rounds of the Center Parcs National Badminton Competition. In hockey, four students have been selected to play for North Yorkshire.



“Being able to train whatever the weather has made a big difference. It’s thanks to everyone who contributed that we are enjoying such great sport at school”

James McDaniel

RGS has also been chosen as the hub for seated volleyball, an exciting new sport which took off in the recent Paralympics, although you don’t have to have a disability to play. Team GB Paralympic coach, Steve Jones, and Olympic referee, Steve Matthews are hopeful it could lead to school hosting specialist courses as well as international festivals.

Dominic Butler and James McDaniel, who have been selected for the North of England rugby squads, left.

Old Riponians hosting summer celebration to mark centenary of swimming pool

Still making a splash after 100 years

A group of students dug out the original RGS swimming pool 100 years ago – then plunged into its icy waters.

SCHOOLCHILDREN have been enjoying swimming in Ripon Grammar School’s pool for 100 years this year, an anniversary that will be marked by a Swimming Baths Celebration day in July.

The original hole was dug out by the pupils themselves, mainly boarders, back in 1913. This involved several months of backbreaking work after school hours.

When it was first opened in 1913, the 64x26ft pool, known as the ‘Swimming Bath’, was unheated, untiled and in the open air, but still popular with pupils.

An account in the Riponian magazine of December 1913 paints a vivid picture: “In the early part of the term the Swimming Bath was in use daily by many and there are still four or five hardy spirits who take a plunge every morn before breakfast, and have been known to break a goodly coating of ice before getting in. Ugh.”

It wasn’t until 1960, when building works began in preparation for the arrival of female pupils, that a pool roof and tiles were added and swimmers began to enjoy more comfortable conditions.

Since then, the pool has been used by pupils on a daily basis, for everything from coaching in competitive techniques, survival, life-saving and water fitness to competitions and water polo events. Students can also gain lifeguarding qualifications.



Smile that says it all: Lucinda Sanderson is just one of hundreds of students making the most of the pool 100 years on. Photo by Philip Vaughan, Muse, Ripon

In recent years, there has been some concern over the future of the pool following the withdrawal of funding by the local education authority at the same time as the air conditioning system needed updating.

But more than £50,000 has now been committed to installing the essential air handling units necessary to heat the pool and keep condensation down to a minimum.

“It is a very expensive investment in what is a very valuable facility,” said

headmaster Mr Martin Pearman. School sports co-ordinator and advanced swimming teacher Helen MacKenzie added:

“Swimming is a life skill and vitally important, not least because Ripon is surrounded by rivers.” The pool is also hired out to local swimming groups and more than 40 primary school children enjoy swimming lessons at the RGS Swimming Academy each week.

Mrs Jenny Bellamy, president of the Old Riponians’ Association, warmly invites past pupils and friends of the school to a summer reunion, marking the 100th anniversary of the swimming baths at RGS, on Saturday July 13, starting at 2pm. Money raised from the event will go towards pool improvements. There will also be a dinner at the Old Deanery on the Friday night.

To book tickets for the dinner on July 12 (£20/£25 for 2/3 courses) please contact George Owrarn on George.owram@virgin.net .Further details about the 100th anniversary reunion event on oldriponians.org.uk

FROM THE ARCHIVES

26 July 1912 Governors’ minutes: motion agreed to build a swimming pool. Subscription of £15 by two governors to start the fund.

Dec 1912: The Swimming Bath is the subject of the hour. Early in October a start was made, and many tons of earth and stones have been excavated, but much yet remains to be done,

July 1913 Speech Day: Bath declared open by Marchioness of Ripon. Scratch inter-house Swimming races followed,

Dec 1913: We are having two plays, the object being to raise funds to pay off part of the debt on the swimming bath.

July 1914: The Swimming Bath has proved the boon we hoped; and except for the short periods required for filling and emptying, has been in constant use. Many of the younger boys have learned to swim, and the diving has made great strides.. The hot weather has been all in favour of making bathing most pleasurable. Very few boys seem to attempt much in the nature of a lengthy swim, the crowded state of the bath no doubt militating against efforts of this nature.

1919, F. D. NELSON writes “With the beginning of the Summer Term, swimmers and non-swimmers have always welcomed the advent of a bathe; some of the hardy and brave, waking from gentle slumbers at 6 o’clock or thereabouts to have their morning dip, although no breaking of ice has been reported this year before entering. The introduction of a new diving stand has afforded great pleasure for the divers, whose numbers are somewhat meagre. The younger boys have shown great but ill-maintained enthusiasm in emulating the more finished attempts of the professional swimmers of the School. In this quarter a “coach” would have been very welcome, as the teaching was left to the boys themselves, who were all, for the most part, beginners. We are all looking forward to improvements in this direction, and hope for winter bathing in the Utopian days when the bath shall be roofed in and an

adequate provision, other than that provided by the animal energy of the bathers made for the heating of the water. One might add that proficiency in the art of natation can never be secured by the operation of merely sitting on the side. The first necessity for a bathe is immersion.”

1933: The back wall has been moved to give free space at the side of the bath, much concreting has been done and a lawn is expected in place of the present stony desolation

1954: Delayed repairs made it impossible to hold the Swimming Sports, abandoned for the first time in many years

1960: The bath had to be emptied early in the summer term when the excavation of the site of the new gymnasium threatened its safety. As a result there were no swimming sports this year.

1961: The school baths have been covered, tiled, and heated.

1962: The new changing rooms are provided with unwanted lockers, and an impressive, but utterly useless piece of modern art which looks like a bomb-rack. (Some consider it must be some fiendish plan by the girls; others, even more misguided, use it as a towel compartment.) The bath has been miraculously transformed, and is now in use by day boys and boarders. The latter swim most evenings, and these gatherings are very different from the Spartan days of the old open-air pool.

1962: First RGS girls’ swimming sports. The first event was an open freestyle over two lengths of the bath, and was won for Allanson by Gail Keyworth in 30.1 seconds.

1973 Owing to the power crisis, the pool was emptied to economise on fuel, only after the highly entertaining swimming sports where, as seems to be the case year after year, new records were achieved.

1978 157 boys and girls gained Life Saving Awards

Research: Old Riponians, all from Riponian school magazine unless stated



Home comforts: girls share twin rooms

Former pupils recall red hot radiators and rigid bath times

Hilary Pegrum (Wade), a boarder in the early 1980s who went on to work in publishing and marketing and is now based in York, recalls:

“Back then, we had no real expectations or experience of luxury (our parents could still recall food rationing) so the basic bedding, uncomfortable chairs, lack of showers, wash-behind-your-ears matron in a white coat, rigid bath timetable involving once-a-week bathing in 15 minute time slots, and truly appalling but probably nutritious food (including limp fish fingers for breakfast) was, to us, perfectly normal. What wasn’t was the stultifyingly high temperatures with the radiators pumping out constant heat and the windows defiantly closed. The coin-clot telephone room was universally dreaded for its heady combination of intense heat and the pungent smell of old fat dog, the much-loved resident pet of Mrs Simpson.”

Simon Atkins boarder from 1976-1983 - now based in Singapore working for a German shipping bank - also remembers the extremely hot Victorian radiators and trying to climb out of the old sash windows:

“The Masters screwed the windows shut with 6inch screws. We just undid the screws, cut the heads off then glued them back in the holes so they thought they were still screwed shut. They never did suss it.”

Boarders enjoy a home from home

Boarding at Ripon Grammar School has never been more popular. A recent £162,000 make-over is just part of the attraction

Boarding at Ripon Grammar School has never been more popular, with staff currently dealing with about 20 enquiries a week about places in the girls’ boarding house alone. There is also increasing interest from students from independent schools and from prospective sixth formers.

Many past pupils would barely recognise some of the homely bedrooms and comfortable living spaces today, following a £162,000 investment in new furniture, carpets and curtains, as well as extensive redecoration, over the past three years.

Alongside the school’s excellent academic record, improved conditions and a more attractive, welcoming environment are no doubt contributing to the increased demand for boarding places.

Ripon Grammar is one of only 36 state boarding schools in the country and the only one in Yorkshire. Of the 30 boys and 32 girls currently boarding, about 15 students are from outside Yorkshire, including a number from Nigeria, Hong Kong and Dubai.

“We aim to provide our boarders with a real home, where they feel safe and secure” says headmaster Martin Pearman.

Boarders today enjoy a wide range

RGS is one of ‘top twenty’ UK schools

RIPON Grammar School has won seven prestigious national awards for teaching excellence and results this year, putting it in the top twenty out of 4,500 schools surveyed for the Good Schools Guide.

The school, rated ‘Outstanding’ in its latest Ofsted inspection, beat all but three of the country’s leading independent schools winning top awards at both GCSE and A level in subjects including chemistry, physics, French, astronomy, art and design. Janette Wallis, senior editor of the Good Schools Guide, one of Britain’s most respected independent guides, said the school had performed exceptionally well and



My space: pupils in the boarding houses like to personalise their own areas

‘Comfortable, homely and bright’

“The refurbishment has significantly improved the comfort and day to day lives of boarders over the past few years with both houses now much more homely.” Jess Butterell (Sixth Form)

“It is easy to get to know the other sixth formers. Being on site after school, I have been able to keep in touch with my family abroad through the internet facilities in the library.” (Sixth former, School House)

“Each dorm has more personal space and new furniture such as desks, bookcases and bedside tables. The communal areas have been improved with new flat-screen televisions and sofas and all the rooms and corridors and have been painted which has made them seem much brighter. It has made a huge difference.” Miles Butterell (Fourth Year)

“The food is great. We get snacks when we come back from school and are able to have free time before tea. There are always enough people for a game of football” (First year, School House)

of activities, including swimming, table tennis, badminton, crafts, football and yoga. At weekends, there are trips to the theatre, cinema, shopping and bowling.

Students can also relax in a well-equipped lounge with all the trappings of home.

The boarding houses cater for up to 70 pupils, aged 11 to 18, on a weekly or termly basis, with annual fees ranging from £8,100 to £10,875.

Boys stay in School House, the younger boarders in traditional four-bed dormitories and sixth formers in single rooms with a study area.

In Johnson House, younger girls are in dormitories and sixth form girls share twin study-bedrooms, with a washbasin in each room. Showers and bathrooms are all nearby. All boarders have access to the school library and computer suite.

W eem Whitaker left RGS in 1984. After a PhD and research fellowship in Classics at Cambridge, he began writing children’s books and, more recently, as Will Whitaker, historical novels for adults. His latest book is set in the time of Henry VIII

When I was at school I already had a dim idea that I wanted to be a writer. I wrote a lot as a teenager - sagas, stories and even a tragedy in blank verse. But when I was 16 I stopped. I wasn’t satisfied with what I was writing, and felt I had a lot more to learn before I could pick it up again and be pleased with it.

I very nearly became an academic: in fact, I started out on that career before realising it wasn’t for me. That is probably how I would have ended up if I hadn’t made the break and turned to writing. But I would have been a lot less happy. If I had to give up writing now, maybe I would try to market the board games I’ve invented - but I think that would probably be harder than writing.

The most important lesson I learnt at RGS was, to quote Homer, ‘always to strive to excel’.

I had an excellent English teacher, Chris Horton, who has sadly died. And my two Classics teachers, Chris Richardson and Tom Rowland, both really made me think about how to use language.

The most difficult thing about writing has to be developing the ideas. This can turn into a fiendish intellectual puzzle - tying up loose ends, deciding which of a dozen possibilities will lead to satisfying plot and character developments, when each of those possibilities leads to a dozen further choices down the line. Once the story has fallen into place, the actual writing is a lot of fun.

I was lucky in how I first got published. OUP children’s books gets 3000 submissions a year and only takes a handful. The editor there returned my first submission



‘Keep at it’: author Will Whitaker says aspiring writers must learn to accept criticism

A novel life

with advice on how to improve it. I rewrote it, and while they were thinking about it I wrote and sent in a second book as well. Months later, the editor rang up and said she would publish them both.

There is a big stack of John LeCarré books on my bedside table. I’m attempting to write a spy story at the moment. And the Odyssey in Greek, which I’ve been rereading. There’s so much to get out of it, especially in the original. It would be impossible to pick out one book which changed my life. Every good book opens up new horizons, and makes life that bit broader and more interesting.

There’s always some dark chocolate in my desk drawer, in case of emergencies.

I always work in the room I share with my wife Katie, who also writes books. We have all our books round us, and if either of us gets stuck on something or needs to talk over an idea, we have the other one to call on for help.

Your characters and story follow you everywhere. Being a writer also means that almost any kind of thoughts or observations can feed into your work. It means that work and life become very much intertwined.

“Your characters and story follow you everywhere. Work and life become very much intertwined”

The King’s Diamond by Will Whitaker (Harper Press £12.99) willwhitakerbooks.com



The King’s Diamond is part of a trilogy set in the time of Henry VIII, with the murderous politics of the time serving as a backdrop to a compelling story of love and obsession. Whitaker vividly brings the Tudor period to life but, rather refreshingly, it isn’t the old, familiar story of Henry VIII and his divorces and beheadings that we all remember from our school history lessons that takes centre stage. Whitaker’s unexpected angle focuses instead on the glittering diamond and gem trade of Renaissance Europe. As the chaos of war spreads, we follow the tale of Richard Dansey, a young and ambitious jewel merchant in search of the sort of stunning stones worthy of Henry VIII’s wooing of Anne Boleyn. It is hard to believe Whitaker didn’t study history at O level and knew little about the Tudor period before he started the book.

I take as much trouble as I possibly can to research my books. If it’s a historical book, I look for eyewitness accounts, diaries and letters, and read them in the original language if I can. I avoid modern secondary literature, and make my own interpretations. Visiting locations is important: to write about Venice you should go there. On the other hand, some places have just changed too much. To write about Tudor London, I would visit somewhere like the Shambles in York.

Shakespeare was an amazing discovery in my teens: I was very inspired by being in a production of The Tempest - a rare and successful coproduction with the City School (as it then was). It got me to read most of Shakespeare’s plays. Then at university I was hugely struck by ancient literature. The imagery, language and drama are just amazing. I would pick out Homer, Aeschylus, Virgil and Horace as authors I keep coming back to.

My perfect reader is someone who can accept an idea and go along with it, someone who is prepared to be taken somewhere new. Not the sort of reader who says ‘I don’t get it’ after thirty seconds

My advice to an RGS student today who wants to be a writer is to keep at it, and don’t be discouraged. Also, be flexible and accept criticism: there’s an awful lot to learn. It’s extremely valuable if you can get an agent early on, someone who is on your side and will give you frank advice on how to attract publishers. And it’s a great help if you’ve got an alternative source of income. Marry a millionaire! *Are you in print? Please tell us about it: rgsconnect@ripongrammar.co.uk

JOB MARKET

We seek out those companies which have connections with RGS and wish to advertise directly to our alumni



ELMWOOD DESIGN

An international brand design business which has offices in Leeds, London, New York, Singapore, Hong Kong and Melbourne. Elmwood is chaired by Jonathan Sands, whose daughter was a student at RGS in 2010.

Middleweight Designer

We are searching for a talented Middleweight Designer with 3 to 5 years' experience to join our successful, award winning team in Leeds. You must have experience in a reputable Brand Design Consultancy and possess an enviable portfolio. You will be passionate about design because it's more than just a job, it's a way of life. If this sounds right up your street, we'd love to meet and discuss the role in detail. Please send your CV and examples of your work (titling the pdf attachment with your name) to: middleweightdesigners@elmwood.com

Writing Director

We are looking for a brand savvy Writing Director for our Leeds studio. With a love of and talent for writing and language, strong experience of defining tone of voice and thinking strategically for major brands, you will thrive on running workshops with clients, be an excellent presenter and be able to successfully engage with people at all levels, with the gravitas to lead senior clients on creative and strategic projects. Please send your CV and examples of your work to recruitment@elmwood.com

Senior Designer, Singapore

We are looking for a Senior Designer to join our fast-growing team in Singapore. You will have experience in a reputable Brand Design Consultancy and a portfolio of FMCG packaging and brand identity projects that demonstrate creativity and effectiveness. You're a conceptual thinker with strong graphic design skills and able to communicate effectively. You enjoy working as part of an expanding team, relish mentoring others and excel in a fast paced environment. If this sounds like you, please send your CV and examples of your work (titling the pdf attachment with your name) to: recruitment@elmwood.com

Freelance Designers - Leeds and London

If you have bags of experience in reputable Brand Design Consultancies and a portfolio of FMCG packaging, corporate or brand identity projects that demonstrate creativity and effectiveness we would like to hear from you! Please send your CV and examples of work (titling the pdf attachment with your name and stating which studio is of interest) to: recruitment@elmwood.com.

(Vacancies available at time of going to print. Please check Elmwood Design website: www.elmwood.com/home/jobs/ for latest information)

If you have connections with RGS and have a post you wish to advertise here for FREE please contact us on rgsconnect@ripongrammar.co.uk



Looking to the future: Ripon Grammar School students are preparing for the wider world

Come back and inspire our students

Planning is already underway for our next large scale careers evening which will be held at school on Thursday 6 March 2014 from 6.30 - 8.30pm.

This is always a hugely popular event with the aim of raising current students' awareness of a wide range of career and educational opportunities in preparation for life beyond

Can you help?

Work experience wanted:

I am a student in the lower sixth at Ripon Grammar school and I would like to study a nutrition based course at university. Some work experience in dietetics or in psychology would be greatly appreciated. If you can help, please contact me on olliehinchcliffe@hotmail.co.uk

I am in the lower sixth at RGS and would greatly appreciate any work experience opportunities relating to game development and programming. If you can help or have any advice on getting into the game development industry please contact me on adamlinscott@aol.com.

RGS, and it is not intended as a recruitment fair. Last year we hosted 95 organisations from across the employment sectors and it was extremely well attended by students together with their parents.

At the 2014 event we are particularly keen to invite former students who are currently in employment to participate as exhibitors as we feel you would provide a brilliant source of ideas and inspiration which current students could relate to.

There will also be an opportunity for participants to network and perhaps catch up with former classmates during refreshments which will be served prior to the event.

If you and/or a colleague from your organisation would be interested in attending this event please contact Frances Wilson or Jill Locke in the Careers Department by email: wilsonf@ripongrammar.co.uk, telephone 01765 602647 extn 229 or through 'LinkedIn'.

We would be delighted to hear from you.

Oxbridge successes

A record number of ten RGS students have received offers from Oxford and Cambridge this year. Six won offers from Oxford and four from Cambridge in a range of subjects including chemistry, English, PPE, medicine, engineering, veterinary science, classics and archaeology. Headmaster Mr Martin Pearman said: "I am delighted for the students who have worked very hard to achieve this success, they deserve much praise. I am also grateful to staff for the support and encouragement they gave. Competition at all the top universities is fierce so this is a significant achievement." There are a total of 123 students in the Upper Sixth form. Mr Pearman added: "I am also delighted students seeking places at other universities are being extremely successful with offers for courses. These include medicine, optometry, psychology, chemistry, computer science and mathematics."

Have you had a career in art or design after leaving RGS? We would love to hear about it. Please contact: rgsconnect@ripongrammar.co.uk

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

We focus on former Ripon Grammar School students who have set up their own companies. A top quality pie maker explains how he got started

Anthony Sterne

Age: 36

Degree: BSc Hons Food Marketing, Newcastle University

Company: Independent Foods (I's Pies)

Left RGS: 1996

Set up business: 2003 (In addition, bought Appleton's butcher's in Ripon 2010)

Annual turnover: £400,000

Employs: 8 people

Q: What does Independent Foods do?

A: We make delicious pies from the best local and natural ingredients.

Q: How many pies do you make each week and who are your main clients?

A: Between 7,000 and 10,000 pies a week. Our main customers are mostly London based chains of restaurants and pubs. Locally we supply some great pubs, delis and farm-shops.

Q: Where did you get the idea for the business from?

A: While working as a development chef in Australia I fell in love with the pies being offered by smaller independent bakeries; imaginative fillings and flaky butter pastry.

Q: How did you get started?

A: I worked (for free) for a pie maker in Brighouse to learn how pies are made commercially, developed the recipes in the kitchen at home and borrowed from family to buy some of the equipment.

Q: What was your biggest challenge?

A: Managing and motivating staff; I'm not naturally a team player.

Q: What was your biggest mistake?

A: Being initially naive about the costs.

Q: Your greatest triumph?

A: Winning Waitrose's Small Producer of the Year Award in 2005.

Q: Why did you decide to buy Appleton's?

A: It's an iconic Ripon business with a great reputation for pies.

Q: How has the horse meat scandal affected your business?

A: Generally it's been good as customers know we buy meat from Yorkshire farms and not processors, however it's also meant even more paperwork.

Q: Have you always been interested in food?

A: Growing up in a large family, meal times have always been a big thing. I've always been really interested in food and the whole experience of eating.

‘Meal times were always a big thing in my family’



Life of pie: Anthony Sterne of Appleton's enjoys cooking in the kitchen with stepsons William and Luke.

Q: What is your favourite pie?

A: Our Roast Butternut Squash and Goats' Cheese is great although sometimes I just want our plain Steak Pie.

Q: What do you remember about RGS school dinners?

A: I haven't got the best memory of school dinners at RGS. It was pre Jamie Oliver and there were a lot of fried things in funny shapes. I'm sure it's much better now

Q: If you hadn't gone into the food industry what would you have done?

A: I love music and play the cello and trumpet. When I was at school I wanted to write music for film scores.

Q: What was the most important lesson you learnt during your time at RGS?

A: That girls aren't very different to boys (I'd been at an all-boys school before RGS).

Q: If you could meet your 18-year-old self now, what advice would you give?

A: Have more belief in yourself.

Q: Ambition or talent - what do you think matters more to success?

A: Recognising your own shortcomings and making allowances for them.

Q: What is the one piece of advice you would give to anyone wanting to set up their own business?

A: Profit is not a dirty word and worship the customer. (Ok that's two)

Q: What are your future ambitions?

A: To open more Appleton's.

HAVE you set up or are you running your own business? Please get in touch and tell us all about it on: rgsconnect@ripongrammar.co.uk



Appleton's: a Ripon institution

SEARCH FOR A FRIEND

If anyone is in touch with the former pupils listed below, please ask them to contact us as old friends would like to get in touch:

Matthew Robshaw (left RGS 1984)

Mark McIntyre (left RGS 1984)

*If you want to reach an old friend, contact us on: rgsconnect@ripongrammar.co.uk

Preserving the past for future generations

Members of the Old Riponians' Association have spent months electronically cataloguing thousands of delicate old paper documents and photographs from the RGS archives, dating back as far as 1540.

Many of the originals are currently kept in the Borthwick Institute at York University.

The aims are that everything from the school's original 1555 Royal Charter to old exam papers and school magazines will soon be easily accessed at the click of a button by students and staff with some of the documents also available to Old Riponians & parents through a link on the school website.

The Old Riponian researchers, with help from key staff, are about half way through digitising a total of 15,000 documents up to the year 2005.

They have found governors' meeting minutes dating back to 1629 particularly fascinating. Some have commented on the sadness of seeing the school careers of the 'boys' who fell in the First World War. It has also been noted that the exams the boys took in the 1870s seemed particularly difficult.

DON'T miss the next edition of the Clocktower when local historian and author Chris Lloyd, of The Northern Echo, will be delving into the RGS archives.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

July 12: Old Riponians' dinner at the Old Deanery, Ripon, 7pm. (email George.owram@virgin.net to book)

July 13: Come and celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Swimming Baths, starting at 2pm. More details on oldriponians.org.uk

Nov 8: Speech Day. Mark Damazer, former Controller of BBC Radio 4 and current Master of St. Peter's College, Oxford, is this year's speaker.

Dec 14: Old Riponians' Day, sports and afternoon tea, 2-5pm. Further details on oldriponians.org.uk

Dec 17: Carol service, Ripon Cathedral, 7.30pm

The appliance of science through the decades: 1910, 1949 and today. Does anyone know the identity of any of the pupils in the older photographs?



Then & now: Stephen Laws, Teresa Thornton and Katie Lees pictured in one of Ripon Grammar School's new, purpose-built laboratories, opened in 2009

DON'T MISS



**Designer
Bruce Oldfield's
exclusive
interview with
the Clocktower**

Bruce Oldfield, OBE, was at Ripon Grammar School from 1964 until 1969. The former Barnardo's boy has long been renowned for dressing everyone from royalty to Hollywood A-listers and has recently created stunning couture gowns for singers Rihanna and Taylor Swift and model Kelly Brook. In the next edition of the Clocktower, he tells us about:

***The most important thing he learnt during his time at Ripon Grammar School**

***The teacher who inspired him**

***His advice to RGS students who want a career in fashion**

***Why he thinks grammar schools are a good idea**

***What he would say to his 18-year-old self now**

***And why he got so many after school detentions...**

DO you know of any past pupils you think would like to receive the Clocktower? Please ask them to write c/o RGS or contact us on: rgsconnect@ripongrammar.co.uk

WOULD you like to write an article for The Clocktower or do you know of anyone who would make an interesting feature for a future issue? Contact us on: rgsconnect@ripongrammar.co.uk