

St Clare's Newsletter



No 7

May 2000

Incorporating the Academy



Richard Walton and staff at the Academy site on Bardwell Road

In January St Clare's English as a foreign language and some Liberal Arts classes moved to two buildings in Bardwell Road. Just a ten minutes walk from the International College site on Banbury Road, these two fine Victorian buildings with gardens were formerly part of the Oxford Academy. St Clare's acquired this well-respected language school when it came on the market last year. The new site offers more teaching and relaxation space tailored to the needs of students aged 18 and older, who are now based there. Students and staff on both sites seem enthusiastic about the change. For more pictures and stories, turn to the centre pages.

Graduation: new style

Last year's leaving IB students, class of 1999, were the first to enjoy a Graduation Day. After drinks in the Hall and lunch in a marquee behind 137 Banbury Road, the actual ceremony took place in another marquee in the garden of Springfield. Here the assembled audience of parents, staff and guests—including former principals Anne Dreydel and Margaret Skarland—watched each student receive a leaving certificate from course director Nick Lee and current principal Boyd Roberts.

There were speeches from parent Alessio Altichieri, student Jessica Lamb—sister of alumna Lisa—and Dr Helen Drennen from the IB Organisation. In his parting words Boyd Roberts emphasised the value of education beyond a paper diploma.



Prize-winning Marius Ley and parents from Switzerland

Letter from the Principal

January 2000 was the start of a new St Clare's, as we fully incorporated the Oxford Academy. The Academy site, a few minutes' walk from 139 Banbury Road, has now become our centre for English language courses for adults, all year round, as well as providing teaching bases for Liberal Arts philosophy and religious studies. This has released more space at the International College site on Banbury Road for IB, pre-IB and Liberal Arts, and for central facilities.

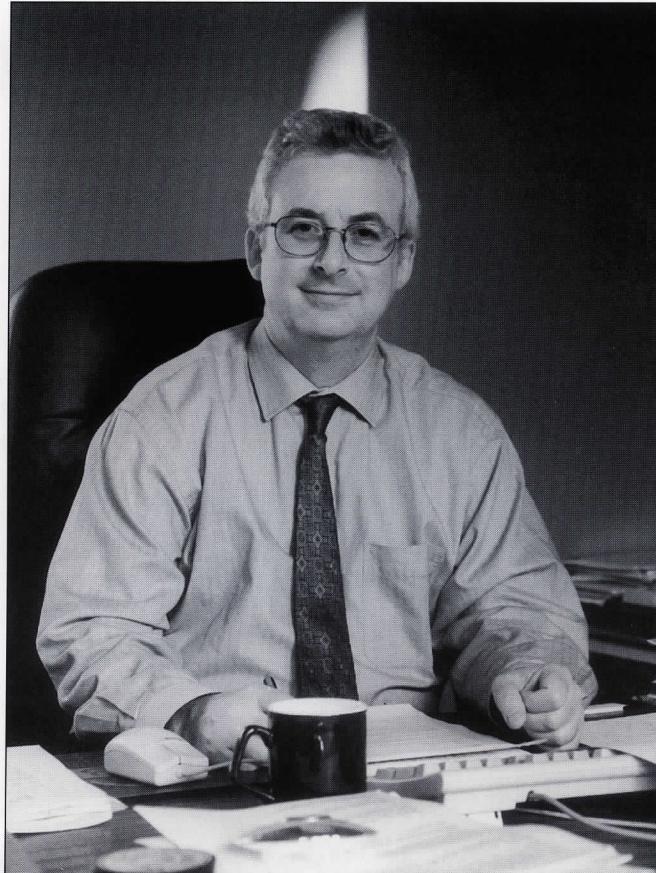
More importantly, the planning for these changes has focused our minds more generally on the different needs and interests of students on our various programmes and how these can best be addressed. This enables us to improve the quality of each of our separate courses. An example is the continuing development of personal, social and health education for IB and pre-IB students. At the same time we are looking more closely at how each course benefits by being part of St Clare's overall. There are very many productive interactions between courses—for instance Liberal Arts students from US universities sharing certain classes with some people also studying English language; or the new senior seminars.

Complementing our detailed focus on individual programmes and their interactions, we shall also be developing further the unifying elements which apply to all programmes.

A major thread here is internationalism, which depends in part upon knowledge of other cultures—encountering ways of thought different from our own. It also depends upon

promoting and embodying certain values and attitudes.

We work on this consistently through the day to day teaching programme and through living together in the international community that is St Clare's. All this is very important. But I'm particularly interested in encouraging the development of activities and events designed to have significant one-off impact—activities and events which produce an indelible and irreversible shift in how we see things.



will not view the world in quite the same way again.

Writing this in Ghana during the IB Heads' Conference, I cannot and will not be able to get out of my own mind the dungeons in a coastal castle we visited where slaves were incarcerated before being shipped to the Caribbean.

The directions our lives take and the sort of people we become are often influenced, sometimes significantly, by single experiences. I hope we can work to provide students on all our programmes with more opportunities to have such experiences—and that by making things happen for students, we may be making a difference in the world.

Boyd Roberts
Principal

• College medical surgery

In February St Clare's appointed two part-time College nurses, Marion Swerdlow and Janet Tollemache, in a job-share arrangement. A nurse is now available every morning for students to consult in the surgery and to visit students in their houses. This requires no appointment and nurses are able to authorise absence for IB and pre-IB students.

• New from the Student Activities Office

Under Jo Swannell and Martha Hewison the Activities programme has expanded to include tennis coaching every Sunday on the convenient courts of St John's College at the end of Lathbury Road and morning running, led by Martha, three times a week. Shown below is another popular new class, staff aerobics.



• Is conflict inevitable?

This was the theme of the new Senior Seminars organised by Dr Brian Clack at the Academy site. These were a series of weekly lectures, film showings and discussions on this theme, highly appropriate for an international college. Besides outside speakers, warden Keith Hopper gave an analysis of the film *The Crying Game* and Susan Mayhew spoke about Quaker attitudes to peace.

• The future of the human brain

Oxford professor Susan Greenfield, one of the best known scientists in Britain and the first woman to be Director of the Royal Institution, spoke at St Clare's about implications of neuroscientific advances for the coming century

• Visiting criminal psychologist



Dr Gabriella Salfati, IB alumna from 1987, came back to give her annual lecture on criminal profiling to an appreciative audience of Theory of Knowledge students. Gabriella is lecturer in criminal psychology at Liverpool University and is shown above having lunch with Nick Lee.

• Top musician

Cordelia Weil, a German IB student who lives in Kenya, passed her grade eight cello exam with distinction. With 135 points, she was one of the 40 top players in the country invited to audition for a concert in the Royal Opera House. She gave an outstanding performance of the Shostakovich sonata for cello.



THE OXFORD ACADEMY



I moved to the Academy, as a one-man advance party, in September 1999, with a brief to keep the show on the road and to make sure all the necessary changes were in place by January, when full integration would take place.

My first concern was with the teachers, who found themselves in a bizarrely dysfunctional staff workroom—arranged so that everyone sat facing the wall while crouching in a cubicle—with no space at all to relax in. This was rectified by displacing the academic management team and giving the teachers two workrooms with large tables to sit round, so that they could actually look at and talk to each other. We also created a downstairs staff common room with comfortable sofas, armchairs and potted plants.

My next concern was to create better self-access facilities for the students. There was a neglected library and small computer room. We now have a video/listening centre, a modernised, functional self-access library, and a large computer room with 12 new PCs, as well as the smaller computer room.

Other significant changes are with the courses we offer. We now have a long-stay and a short-stay track for General English students. This means that students can stay for as little as two weeks (though four weeks is the recommended minimum) to . . . as long as they like! We have reorganised the specialised courses for professionals 23 and older. English for Business, English for Medicine and General English run throughout the year and last two weeks. Programmes of 1:1 lessons are also offered.

In other ways the former Academy has been brought in line with St Clare's established patterns and timetable, with break times and a wide range of afternoon options such as In the News, Grammar Clinic, Art & Design, Business English. As you can imagine, some of these changes have been accepted more readily by teachers (half term breaks) than others (report writing). But, all in all, things seem to be going well, and that's not just my opinion. We were spot checked by the British Council inspectors in January and given a clean bill of health—indeed a rather glowing report.

Richard Walton, Director of Studies, EFL

"I like the two computer rooms, especially the one with the new PCs—great for checking your e-mail, and it doesn't get as crowded as the Cyberspace. I live at Logan House and it's further to come, but I don't mind. Sometimes I go by bus and sometimes I walk." Allard van Tienhoven from Holland, Liberal Arts.



"The dining room is very nice and is divided into smoking and non-smoking areas, which is a real advantage for people who smoke." Floricel Flores from Mexico & Sophie de Oteyza from Venezuela, English Course.

"The atmosphere is more adult at the Academy, less like a school and it's easier to get to know the international students." Kristianity La Mattery, an American LA student from the University of San Diego.

→ St. Clare's, Oxford



"It's quieter and easier to think at the Academy site. The atmosphere is less rushed. Sometimes in a free hour we walk down to the river." Coryn Mayerson, LA student from University of San Diego.

"There are more older, serious EFL students here. There are more afternoon options such as preparatory classes for TOEFL and IELTS exams." Juan Pablo Figueiroa, EC student from Mexico.



Being taken over has proved to be a very good experience. It was reassuring to know that we were joining a well-established Oxford institution with an excellent reputation. St Clare's is known as both a fair employer and one with a strong academic record.



The most obvious changes were seen in the level of investment. The Bardwell Road site itself is superb—near the centre and the river, quiet, elegant and residential. Both buildings have large gardens. St Clare's has added a large new computer centre (with e-mail and Internet access) and has brought the listening and video centres together, so that we now have a whole suite of up-to-date self-access facilities. More improvements are planned in the near future.

As teachers, I think we are also feeling less stress, as our timetables are now less frantic with breaks during the day and some later starts and variable finishing times. This means that we can get on with **more** work! With a greater number of computers available at more times of the day, we can prepare new materials for our classes. We now also have much more space, and also a long-awaited and very comfortable staff common room, with plenty of tea and biscuits to help us through the day.

There is also greater emphasis on personal development, with regular teaching workshops and teachers being encouraged to go to conferences more than before. All this means that as permanent teachers we feel that St Clare's cares about investing in its employees and really wants to have the best English teaching staff in Oxford.

St Clare's is also keen for us to spend more time with the students out of class, to improve their experience while they are here in Oxford. Visits to the theatre, evenings out in restaurants, quizzes and the senior seminar evenings are just some of the activities that teachers have been involved with.

So far, the takeover has seemed more of a merger—taking the best of two well-established and respected institutions. I'm sure I speak for my colleagues too when I say that I hope that this is how things will continue.

Julie Dyson

Staff News

Cathy Colcutt, warden for over twenty years, moved into a house of her own in December.

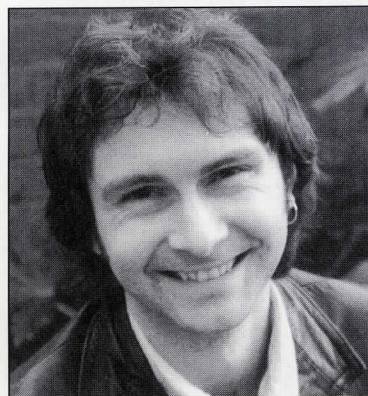
Robert Osborn, theatre studies teacher, has been developing his own career as an actor. He took a leading part in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, a play about three hostages put on by a local semi-professional drama group, Pressgang.

Marta Emmitt has been appointed resident dramatist at the Soho Theatre in London.

Publications

Richard Walton, Director of Studies, EFL, has had an advanced level coursebook published called *Initiative* (CUP) which he wrote with Mark Bartram.

Rawdon Wyatt has published his second book, *English Workbook for Students* (Peter Collin Publishing) and is working on his third.



Brian Clack, teacher of LA Philosophy and IB Theory of Knowledge, has produced his third book, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion* (Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

Jan Kelly has had an article published in English Teaching Professional about amusing ways to teach pronunciation. **Erminia Passannanti**, Italian teacher, has published translations of letters by the Brontë sisters and poems by R.S. Thomas. **Felicity Stevens** published an article in the ARELS magazine about her experience as summer course director at Rye St Antony, the St Clare's juniors summer site.

Continuing to learn

Rebecca Creber, Academic Administrative Assistant at the Academy site, is taking a degree in linguistics from Reading university.

Roni Hamieri returned from leave of absence in New Zealand where, as well as gaining experience as a lecturer in business at the University of Auckland, she finished her masters in business administration at the Open University.

Martha Hewison, Activities Administrator, warden and a mainstay of girls' basketball, is developing her interests by studying refugee law.

Imogen Rigden is trying to stay on an even keel while she completes the Yacht Master course in marine navigation.

Geoff Taylor, resident IT expert at the Academy site, is studying for a masters in Education Technology and ELT at Manchester University.

Ex-staff

Margaret Skarland is enjoying her retirement. She has joined a health club where she regularly uses the weights room, pool and Jacuzzi.

Alan Glanville, former head of economics and now an art student, has cleverly arranged for his planned transatlantic trip to count as an art project.

Tim Fish, who left to become deputy head at Buckswood Grange International School in Sussex, quickly found himself head when the school went under new management. He is enjoying the challenge.

Leaves of absence

John Rolfe is to spend two years at the International School in Moshi, Tanzania, running the art department. **Kelvin Moon** is now IB coordinator there.

David Ripley is enjoying his sabbatical year. Still an examiner and teacher trainer for the IB, he has spent time swimming, getting fit and doing a lot of painting. He had a successful exhibition of his work at Green College in March.



Do computers promote learning?

Keith Allen, biology teacher & Academic Vice-Principal and Vicky Bullard, English teacher, discuss the value of computers in education.

Vicky: So, Keith, I hear we're going to get another room of computers to use for teaching?

Keith: That's right. It will have a suite of networked PCs, all with web access. Teachers can bring classes in there and in the evening it'll be open for students.

Vicky: It's going to be expensive.

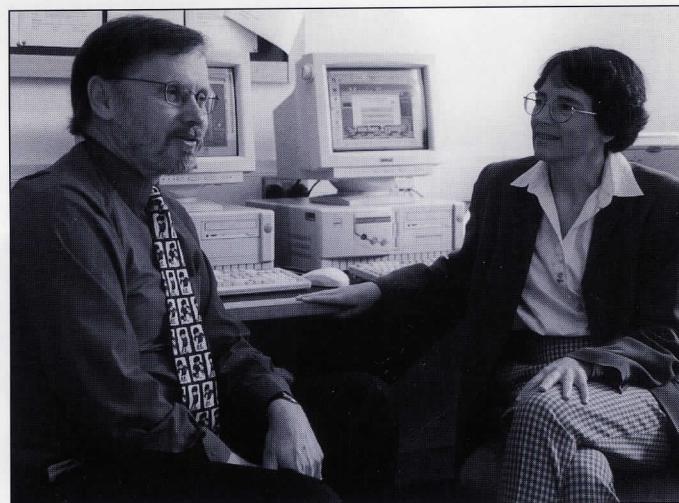
Keith: Yes, not just the hardware, but the technical support and running costs of being on-line. But we need to do it. We risk lagging behind. Students expect it. So do parents.

Vicky: But some of the claims for the learning value of computers are pretty dubious. It's certainly useful for students to have access to PCs to write essays. It encourages them to take more trouble and do second drafts. But what about students downloading unattributed material from the web into essays? They get lazy about using books, and a lot of the material is low quality. Search *Catcher in the Rye* on the web and up come lots of essays by 14 year-olds.

Keith: Yes, and we need to educate them to distinguish good from bad. Victoria Watson is training students in filtering skills, such as how to evaluate sites and verify data. The point is that the web gives students access to a much wider range of material than any college library could provide. But we need to manage access. There are three ways of doing this. You can use CD-ROMs. You can download selected material onto an intranet. And you can use the Internet for specific sites. Catherine Gospel did

a course on this and says the best procedure is for the teacher to identify key websites such as www.goethe.de and to check them regularly so that you can direct students to specific material.

Vicky: Yes, selection is really important. A lot of the sites and CD-ROMs I've seen for literature are useless. We tried out the complete Shakespeare CD-ROM but it doesn't give you anything you can't have in a good old style book edition. And the problem with the computer assisted learning (CAL) model is that it assumes that there is only one right answer which isn't true for literature.



Keith: One thing computers are not very good at is sequential text. But there is enormous value for other subjects. It allows students to explore links. You come across a reference to something you want to find out more about and you can do it right then, you don't have to search in a library using the bibliography. Then you can get multimedia sources, so you don't just get the words but the sounds, whether it's a speech by Bill Clinton, a clip of video or some music. I see computers being used as a resource bank in a classroom. For example, in biology you can access the IB's On-Line Curriculum Centre which shows the full syllabus and you can click on

sections to find resources linked to them. And in geography computers are invaluable because they allow access to up-to-date data.

Vicky: But education is not the same as having the latest data. That sort of knowledge is quickly out of date. School is a place where one has time to read and reflect on what great thinkers have thought. Don't you think computers might go the way of the language lab? In the 70s and 80s they were considered essential, now they are hardly used. Pure CAL software is on the decline from a high point a few years ago.

Keith: But computers are inevitably going to transform the way we learn. And for students they are appealing. We need to harness their power. PowerPoint presentation software, for example, allows you to use colour, photos, moving graphics and hypertext.

Vicky: But it's only suited to lecture format. It seems to me that there is too much hype about the medium rather than the message. Surely what's really important in education is that it effects a change in values, an engagement with ideas.

Keith: Absolutely. Computers are only ways of delivering and processing information and of allowing communication. We, the teachers, must build in the two final stages: cognition to transform information into knowledge, values to change knowledge into wisdom. Technology gives us the power and possibilities. It doesn't guarantee success. The responsibility still rests on us to do the final and most important stage.

Vicky: I'm right with you there!

Hard-working students

On top of keeping up with their academic work, for many students "working" also means doing a part-time job in a restaurant or café. With the current labour shortages in Oxford such work is not hard to find, and it provides a useful source of pocket money as well as contact with local people. St Clare's offers scholarships to enable students from a wider



range of backgrounds to come to the College. But with the strong pound, living expenses in Britain are high.

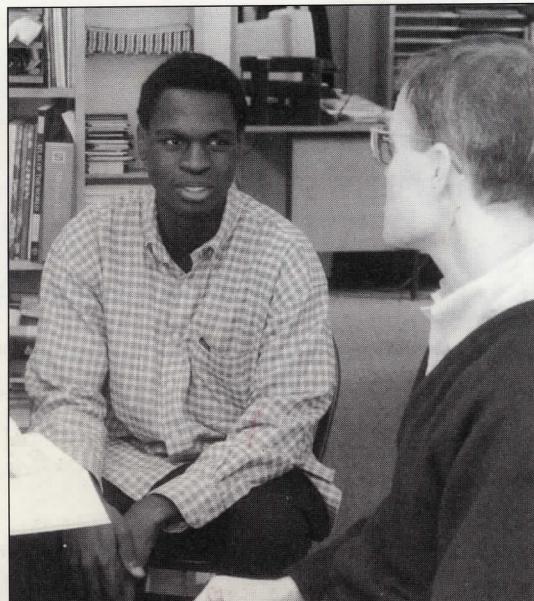
Coryn Mayerson, shown below, a Liberal Arts student from the University of San Diego, works two evenings a week at the Six Bells inn opposite Hampden Manor, a St Clare's residence in Kidlington. "It's great. I've got to know all the regulars, and I've learned a lot about Britain. Last month I had to do a paper on the monarchy and I asked people at the bar what they thought. It was really interesting." When she arrived in Britain, like most students, she complained about pubs' early closing times. After starting work she saw the good side: "The owner

lives upstairs, and the pub is in a residential area, so now I can see why last orders are at eleven."



Gustavo Andriani, above, from Brazil, is one of four IB students who have worked as waiters at the Saffron restaurant. This new Indian/French restaurant is only a few yards from the College. Students also work at MacDonalds, other restaurants and an ice cream parlour.

Omar Kiggundu, a second year IB student from Uganda, gets advice on university applications from US College Counsellor Jay Bosworth.



In April Omar learned he had been accepted at his first choice, Yale. He is the fourth in his family to go from St Clare's to an Ivy League university in the States. His brother Baker (IB 1997) is in his third year at the University of Pennsylvania. Sister Milbert (IB 1992) went on to study at Cornell, and brother Sula (IB 1991) attended Yale.

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