

SENNOCKIAN

NEWS AND REVIEWS FROM THE SCHOOL AND ALUMNI 2009-2010



SEVENOAKS SCHOOL



CONTENTS

Introduction from the Head	1
Leavers	2
FEATURES	
Science Week 2010	10
James Roche OS	14
Digital Imaging Studio	16
Seed Cathedral	17
An interview with Oliver Beer OS	18
Sevenoaks Scientists	20
Lower Sixth science trip, AAAS Conference 2010	23
Chris Yelf	24
Looking forward	25
SPOTLIGHTS	
Inaugural concert of The Space	32
A year in Lambardes	34
Founder's Day	36
Gulliver travels to Germany	37
Eighteenth Century Week	39
OS artistic highlights	40
Verve	42
Ski trip, Les Menuires, February 2010	43
Iceland trip	44
Normandy study trip	47
A director's notes	48
Cadet 150	50
REVIEWS	
Academic Review including prizewinners	52
Music Review	68
Drama Review	76
Sport Review	88
Trips and Activities Review	104
Alumni Review	114
Valete	138
Dates for your diary	144

*Opposite: Detail of
IB artwork by Daisy Charles*

SPOTLIGHTS





How do you officially open a new building, specifically one dedicated to the performing arts?

Do you cut a ribbon? Far too boring. Smash a bottle of champagne on a gleaming new concert grand piano? A terrible abuse of both Bollinger and Steinway. Following his brief introductory speech, Professor Barry Ife, the Principal of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, opted for a musical gesture. Christopher Ying, one of Sevenoaks' highly talented team of percussionists, stepped forward and obliged with a single stroke on the tam-tam, and with that always evocative, conjuror-of-mysteries kind of sound resonating through the hall, there began a truly wonderful evening of celebratory music-making.



items. In Constant Lambert's *The Rio Grande*, given in the composer's own version for two pianos, percussion, and chorus, we were treated to a display of dazzling keyboard virtuosity from Alex Ying, playing the role of concerto-like soloist, impressively aided by Jacob Rainbow supplying the scarcely less demanding transcription of the original orchestral part on a second piano. Razor-sharp rhythms and sensitive shadings of dynamic characterised the percussion playing. The performance benefited hugely from Chris Dyer's direction, by turns taut and expansive.

After Daniela Kriegbaum's vocally and visually colourful performance of the 'Aria' and 'Danza' from Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras No 5*, we were off to Europe. Here we were treated to the magic that a worldwide fan club has come to associate with the clarinet playing of Sevenoaks alumna Emma Johnson. With her renowned technical mastery totally at the service of the expressive needs of the music, we were treated to a spell-binding performance of two movements of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto. What remains above all in the memory of this listener was the exquisite pianissimo dynamic at certain moments in the Adagio movement. The hall's acoustics certainly passed this test with flying colours, as they did at the opposite end of the range when faced with the big guns of Tchaikovsky's *Marche Slave*. This received a spine-tingling and exhilarating performance which represented the Symphony Orchestra at its thrilling best. Never was a new home more richly deserved by this ensemble, nor by the school's Big Band which relished being able to play at a decibel level that in the Aisher Hall would have been life-threatening, but which the Pamoja Hall took in its stride. To conclude the evening the Choral Society, under Sam Gladstone's dynamic and expert conducting, gave us excerpts from Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*. Old chestnut this work may be, but on such an occasion the vitality of this performance made one listener at least mindful that tall oaks can still spring from little acorns.



The international dimension of the many generous donors to this magnificent building had already been alluded to by Katy Ricks in her own speech of welcome, and the programme that followed, if unable to embrace music from quite all five continents, certainly came close to giving us a something of a Cook's musical tour of the nations. Exoticism was especially to the fore in the first two

Peter Young

A YEAR IN LAMBARDES



The aim of Lambardes is to create a homely environment where pupils in Years 7 and 8 can thrive academically, socially and in co-curricular activities. The quote on the left illustrates the energy that there is in the house. Lambardes is the only junior and mixed boarding house in the school. This year we had 19 pupils, with half from overseas and the remainder from the UK. Before their arrival in September, the existing Year 8 boarders write to introduce themselves to each new Lambardian for whom they will act as a big brother/sister. As you can imagine, Sevenoaks School is a large place for 11-year-olds and the Year 8s look after the newcomers for the first term. The matrons, Ronnie and Lydia, are vital components in helping the new boarders to settle in, and they are ably assisted by Rollo, the house chocolate Labrador.

The first weekend trip was to Thorpe Park to enable everyone to get to know one another. Each weekend there are trips and activities such as the cinema, waterslides, mountain biking and the London Dungeon. Highlights this year were the camping out on Lambardes lawn and the paintballing trip. As a Housemaster I naturally had a big target painted on my front and was constantly surprised by the accuracy of the Lambardians. Tristan Flint and Sam Yeates were fearless and Issy Baldwin just giggled when she shot somebody.

In the Michaelmas term there was a Mexican cooking evening where we cooked our own meal and then tried to eat the fajitas without making too much mess. Christmas excitement rose to fever pitch as the decorations went up and it was amazing to see the tree so quickly festooned with baubles. Ben Throsby and Emily Gray enthusiastically organised presents for the charity shoebox appeal which went to children in Africa.

The key social event in the Easter term was the Lambardes Fancy dress disco, with the theme 'Black and White'. The girls, as ever, had their outfits planned months in advance, whereas the boys managed to find jeans and t-shirts a few moments before. One of the prizewinners was

'Lambardes was amazing. I enjoyed my time there so much and miss it a lot. I loved the way it was so homely and how they treated you like their own children. We all had so much fun and there was never a quiet moment. I had two fantastic years which I will never forget.'

A recent ex-Lambardian



dressed as The Stig and Yasmin Whiteford won the dance competition. Lambardes performed admirably in the Boarders' Quiz Night, surprising everyone with their senior intellect. The term finished off with the Treasure Hunt and it was amazing to see how chocolate can be so motivating, as Alice Grishkov demonstrated in winning the Easter egg.

It was good to see Olivia Brandon, Zoe Brandon and Liam Rock perform well in the Lower School play *Brick by Brick*. Special mention goes to Tabitha Gibb who was one of the leads and was extremely confident in delivering her role as narrator.

The Summer term started with revision for the end-of-year exams. After a lot of hard work the exam week was quickly over and thankfully everyone did well. The Boarders' Olympics started after half term and gave us a chance to compete against the senior boarding houses. We beat GIH in softball, Park Grange at volleyball and were the outright winners for the swimming, which resulted in the Housemaster being thrown in the pool.

The term finished with Year 8 parents attending a BBQ on the last night with home-grown strawberries from our raised beds. Lambardes is a house full of energy and we are always guaranteed to have a chortle when on duty. It has been an excellent year and although it is always sad to say goodbye to the Year 8s, we shall enjoy seeing them progress through the school.

Cameron Kiggell

FOUNDER'S DAY



The theme of the 2010 Founder's Day and prize-giving was creativity. The guest speaker was Old Sennockian Geoffrey Streatfeild. Now a distinguished actor, Geoffrey has graced the stage and screen. High points of his career to date include starring as Henry V in the recent RSC production in Stratford and being cast by Woody Allen in the movie *Match Point*.

His key message to students was to 'foster a lifelong commitment to creativity', and to enjoy and recognise the importance of creativity in others. As a result, he said, their lives would be 'enriched immeasurably'.

This was exemplified by the showcase of student work on offer, from the original piece of music written by Joanna Sy and performed by six cellos and solo marimba, to the exceptional presentation of his IB artwork by Joshua Henshaw, and the outstanding and moving monologues delivered by Katharine Stocker and Freya Mead from their piece *Unspoken*, conceived as part of their GCSE coursework.

While these pieces were tremendously successful and the prize-winners all deserved their plaudits, Geoffrey Streatfeild also counselled that school should be 'a safe place for students to fail'. 'Never be afraid of failure,' he recalled Harold Pinter once telling him at the Royal Court Theatre.

He concluded by hoping that students will remember that they have 'learned how to learn and...how to live'. He encouraged them to explore everything the school has to offer and to 'work as hard as you can for yourselves and for each other'.

The video presentations that followed, firstly Harrison Hodgkins' film documenting the tour of *Gulliver's Travels* to Germany and then footage of the inaugural concert in the Performing Arts Centre, both demonstrated the value of these words, and it was left for the Head, Katy Ricks, to thank students, parents and teachers for another memorable year, to thank Geoffrey for his wise and stirring speech, and to wish everyone a wonderful summer.

Chris Greenhalgh

'Foster a lifelong commitment to creativity.'

Above: Geoffrey Streatfeild

GULLIVER TRAVELS TO GERMANY



The Sackville Theatre's touring production of *Gulliver's Travels* played in four venues in Germany during October 2009. Enjoyed by audiences numbering a thousand in Hamburg and Ibbenbüren, this was the most successful tour in recent memory in terms of the quality of the production, the appreciation shown by the audience and the calibre of the cast. This review was first published in a local paper in Ibbenbüren:

The novel *Gulliver's Travels* by the Irish author Jonathan Swift counts, at least in the English-speaking world, as a major literary work. The fact that it is only known in Germany as a children's book with charming illustrations in no way does justice to the original. That could be plainly seen by those that came to see the performance of the touring theatre group from Sevenoaks School, partner school of the Goethe-Gymnasium.

This was the twelfth time that the Sevenoaks School Theatre Company has performed in Ibbenbüren, and as always the Bürgerhaus was nearly sold out. In a new adaptation for the stage by Andy Waldron, Jim Grant and Mark Beverley the 'Sennockians' brought the unbelievable adventures of the English doctor Lemuel Gulliver to the stage just as Jonathan Swift had originally conceived at the beginning of the 18th century.

The novel tells in four parts the story of the adventurous travels of the English voyager Lemuel Gulliver. The adventures which the hero has to endure on his journeys to distant places are full of fantasy, but at the same time the original is full of biting satire and malignant sideswipes at the human race. The Sevenoaks pupils succeeded wonderfully in making the original internalised world of the author visible without reducing the work to a fairy tale aimed at children. The actors shone throughout the three-hour performance, all acting many different parts, which they mastered with bravura. Wonderfully trained voices, imaginative costumes from the London Royal National Theatre and the extravagant joy of the performance made the evening into an extraordinary experience.

A misanthrope's thoughts adapted perfectly for the stage

GULLIVER TRAVELS TO GERMANY



At the beginning Lemuel Gulliver (Will Hearle) tells us about his family and life in Nottinghamshire. On his first voyage the boat is caught in a storm and he lands in the country of Liliput. There the man mountain is at first tied up by the tiny inhabitants, but later released on condition that he protects the Liliputians from their enemies from Blefuscu. After falling into disgrace he escapes and gets back to England. After a few weeks Gulliver (Will Barratt) is again attracted to travel and after a month he is stranded in a land of giants. There he is showcased in the market as 'the amazing miniature man', the star attraction. As he gets to know the king of Brobdingnag, he tells him about life in England. The king tells him, 'I have come to the conclusion that a large part of your citizens are the most rotten race of foul little worms which nature has ever had to cope with on the surface of the planet.' According to contemporaries, this precisely reflects the author's opinion of his fellow man.

The two last parts of the novel are rarely read and even more rarely performed on stage. On Laputa, a city on a floating island, Gulliver (Phil Sinclair-Jones) finds strange people who are only interested in mathematics and droll inventions. In the academy there is a man who tries to extract sunlight out of cucumbers, a second researcher who attempts to return human faeces back to an edible state, an architect building a house from the roof downwards, and a doctor curing patients by blowing air through them. The young actors from Sevenoaks portray all this idiocy with linguistic perfection, great zest and a real sense of enjoyment for the exaggerated satire.

In the fourth part Gulliver (Alex Paine) completes his transformation into a disillusioned despiser of mankind. After a mutiny on his ship, he lands in a country populated by Houyhnhnms. These equine-looking creatures are equipped with the human virtues of reason, friendship and goodness. They keep the wild human-like creatures, the Yahoos, as pets or beasts of burden.

Long applause bore witness to the fantastic achievement of the whole cast, who, both in long monologues and action-filled scenes, showed a very high level of acting talent.

Brigitte Striehn

Translated by Peter Kino

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY WEEK



It is perhaps true that, notwithstanding the French Revolution, the 18th century does not top the historical periods studied in school.

Yet in so many ways it is an era which has made us what we are today. Think of the advances in the arts, mathematics, science and politics – let alone the invention of the steam technology which led to the Industrial Revolution. With this in mind and with a production of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* set to open the refurbished Sackville Theatre the school decided to hold an Eighteenth Century Week.

The Middle School enjoyed assemblies on the religious movements of the period and the Declaration of the Rights of Man. The Theatre

hosted a lecture on the French Revolution, Politics and the Landscape Garden, Sevenoaks School in the Eighteenth Century, and the Mathematical Beauty of Leonhard Euler's Equations.

The week ended with the arrival of a magnificent steam-driven traction engine, *Endeavour*, on campus. It was followed by a procession of students, intent on capturing the moment on their 21st century mobile phones and eager to clamber on and admire the ingenuity of the machine's design. This was a fitting end to an enlightening week.

Jane Henshaw



Oliver Barratt's 'Listen Carefully'
Made of stainless steel resin
and paint.

OLIVER BARRATT

In the second half of the Summer term, the school was delighted to host an exhibition of sculpture by Oliver Barratt. Oliver has taught in the school's Art department since 1993, initially as Head of Department and for the last ten years combining teaching with making and exhibiting. His sculpture ranges from the handheld delicately intimate to monumental public commissions. The lovely simplicity of his work, with pure, uncluttered and clean shapes, has been acclaimed by art critics including Rachel Campbell-Johnston of *The Times*.

OLIVIA COLE

After leaving Sevenoaks School in 1999, Olivia Cole spent a year in US universities helping to research the archives of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ted Hughes. She read English at Christ Church, Oxford and has since worked as a journalist for a number of high-profile publications, including the *Spectator*, *Tatler*, *The Sunday Times* and the *London Evening Standard*. She was a winner of a 2003 Eric Gregory Award and quickly made her mark as a poet, winning a Barbara Mandigo Kelly Peace Poetry Award three years later. In 2006 she appeared on the BBC documentary *Betjeman & Me: Griff Rhys Jones*. Her first collection, *Restricted View*, was published to excellent reviews by Clive James and Christopher Reid in 2009.



ANDREW GOURLAY

Andrew has been appointed Assistant Conductor of the Hallé Orchestra and Music Director of the Hallé Youth Orchestra. Andrew's job is to assist Sir Mark Elder and visiting conductors to the Hallé and conduct the Hallé in public concerts. He began work in September 2010. Andrew recently won the Cadaqués Orchestra International Conducting Competition. The prize includes the opportunity to conduct at 29 concerts around the world with orchestras of the calibre of the Chicago Symphony.



JONNY LATTIMER

At the 2010 Glastonbury Festival Jonny had the surreal experience of being in the middle of a swell of people singing along to 'Starry Eyed', the hit single he co-wrote with Ellie Goulding. After playing in various bands, Jonny started writing for other artists a couple of years ago and then signed a publishing deal with Warner/Chappell. He focuses mainly on developing new artists but also writes with and for more established artists. A track by Jonny features on *My Cassette Player*, the debut album of Lena, this year's Eurovision winner – something he has described as 'an uncomfortable honour'. Another single written with Ellie Goulding, 'The Writer', was released in August. Jonny says, 'Anyone who wants to go into music is aware of all the platitudes about perseverance, but it's hard to fully understand them until you've actually had a go – the "being in the right place at the right time" fairy godmother can be an elusive and contrary creature. It has been a circuitous route since leaving school, via philosophy degrees and a "proper job".'

Navaneethan Kunaratnam

From *Travels in India*.

More trains, more travel

They've stolen my face to keep in their mementoes.

Cultures echoing through the soil while

High siren voices turned low on the radio

A nation: rejoicing in movement,

In the dance of temples and blue gods.

It's only the dance of small children,

Happy for the legs they have been given.

They hark back in the heat,

Hoping for the smell of the Kingdom,

Finding it is gone.

Rachel Wilson

Always a popular activity in academic lessons, creative writing is now firmly established in the co-curricular programme. Lower and Middle School creative writing groups meet on a weekly basis and Sixth Form students have a chance to take up creative writing as one of their CAS options for the IB Diploma. This year also marks the publication of the second edition of *Verve*, the school creative writing magazine, put together by a team of Lower Sixth editors, who not only selected the published work, but also helped to organise a number of events to encourage students to get writing.

This edition of *Verve* represents all year groups and is rich and varied in style. Containing poetry, prose fiction, travel writing and song lyrics, it celebrates the talent and creativity of all our young writers.

The published poem, written by Rachel Wilson of the Upper Sixth, was inspired by the Easter PROMO trip to India. The group visited the SKSN School in Rajasthan, a school for physically challenged children north of Jodhpur on the edge of the Thar Desert, where Rachel was involved in taking classes and organising activities.

Anne Durnford



Tout le monde a passé une semaine magnifique



En février dernier, un groupe d'élèves de troisième et seconde est allé dans une station de ski française qui s'appelle Les Menuires, pour skier et étudier le français. Notre hôtel se trouvait au pied des pistes donc c'était très pratique. Le voyage était un succès et tout le monde a passé une semaine magnifique. Entre les cours de français, il y avait cinq heures de ski chaque jour et le soir des activités organisées par M. Coquelin. Nous pouvions nous amuser la plupart du temps.

Les cours de français étaient dispensés par M. Rémy et ils étaient beaucoup plus intéressants et amusants que les cours à l'école. Après ceux-ci, nous faisons du ski avec un instructeur de l'Ecole du ski de France. Il nous parlait en français et il était très surpris par notre bon niveau de ski.

Nous avons participé à une soirée Karaoke pendant laquelle M. Coquelin a monopolisé le micro avec sa voix de « crooner » français. Nous étions tous très impressionnés par son interprétation de « Your Song » d'Elton John. Nous avons aussi passé une soirée dans une boîte de nuit, avons vu un film français et avons fait un quiz sur la France.

Pour conclure, à l'avenir, je reviendrai dans la station des Menuires parce que c'est une très bonne station avec beaucoup de pistes agréables.

Merci à Monsieur Coquelin pour avoir organisé un super séjour et à tous les profs venus avec nous.

Alistair Holland



ICELAND TRIP

Pure, natural, unspoilt

There are not many countries in the world to which such adjectives can be applied, but Iceland is one of them. Year 11 Geography students enjoyed a field trip to this remarkable country during October half term 2009. The diversity of the geographical location meant that students were actively connecting with the environment: climbing glaciers, wading through waterfalls, diving in the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, swimming in geothermally heated springs and flying over active volcanoes. This was true experiential learning.

On our first day we visited the Blue Lagoon, a unique, mineral-rich lake, formed from geothermal seawater. The blue-green algae and white silica mud give the lagoon its milky, aquamarine colour and provide a natural source of minerals renowned for their therapeutic properties. The lagoon has an average temperature of 37 degrees. We then moved on to our accommodation at Skalinn field study centre, with its magnificent views of the Eyjafjallajökull Icecap.

Day two began with a seven-minute light aircraft flight out to the island of Heimaey on the Westmann Islands, where we trekked up the crater rim of the new volcano of Eldfell to see the dramatic evidence of the 1973 fissure eruption. We walked over the 1973 lava flow and saw excavated homes before enjoying a swim at Heimaey geothermal pool.

On day three we travelled to Thingvellir National Park to see the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Thingvellir is one of the country's most important sites – nowhere else in Iceland is the rift between the European and North American plates more obvious, with long deep cracks running from the north-east to the south-west.

Students enjoyed diving and snorkelling in a crack between the American and Eurasian continents at Silfra Gorge, one of the top five dive sites in the world, where visibility was a staggering 100m.

We then visited the Strokkur Geysir, where boiling water erupts to 5m high every six to eight minutes. Nearby is the Great Geysir; once inactive, but after the June 2000 earthquakes, erupting twice a day. Around this thermal area are steam vents, boiling springs and beautiful turquoise blue pools. We headed on to Gullfoss (The Golden Waterfall), Iceland's most famous waterfall. The enormous white glacial cascade drops 32m into a narrow canyon (70m deep and 2.5km long). Its spectacular two-tiered cataract hung in the air like fine drizzle, which in turn formed a spectacular rainbow in the sunlight.



On day four we climbed the extinct volcanic cone of Stora Dimon, where we were greeted with a spectacular view across the braided glacial meltwater river of Markarfljót as it flows across the flat sandur outwash plains. We then drove to the breathtaking 60m high Skogafoss waterfall. As the water thundered down into the pool below, huge amounts of spray reacted with the sunlight to create a myriad of rainbows.

We drove on to the massive black glacier, Sólheimajökull for an ice-walking expedition on the glacier, among the glacial moraines and kettle hole lakes, before a swim in the geothermally heated Hvolsvollur swimming pool.

Day five saw us arriving at the 40m high Seljalandfoss waterfall, which is formed by the isostatic rebound of the lava and its lava flows.

Sam Cornish-Evans was awarded second place in a national photo competition run by the travel company Rayburn Tours, for this picture, left, taken in Iceland during the Year 11 Geography trip. The pictures were judged on their sharpness, composition, uniqueness and quality.

ICELAND TRIP



We walked behind it – the only known waterfall of its kind where this is possible. We headed on to the amazing southern coast near Vik, and spent the afternoon on the volcanic black sands studying the magnificent erosional and depositional landforms, including the 66m high Reynisdrangar ‘needles’.

On our last day we drove westwards to Reykjavik, passing over part of the Hengil geothermal field. The Hengil geothermal area sits astride the

western volcanic zone of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. All around there was evidence of the volcanic and geothermal nature of the landscape, not least the powerful columns of hot steam rising skywards.

This pioneering trip left all participants with vivid and heartening memories and a genuine passion for the unique landscapes.

Paul Thompson and Ellie Alchin

NORMANDY STUDY TRIP



The whole of Year 8 visited Normandy for five days from 7 to 11 June

Despite the arduous journey, both there and back, the group enjoyed themselves immensely and learnt a great deal on this cross-curricular study trip. The group stayed in the English-speaking Chateau du Molay in the town of Molay-Littray.



On the first day there was a visit to Arranches to see a short film projection of war images in the 360° cinema, followed by a trip to the American War Cemetery at Omaha Beach. The accompanying squalls were suitably dramatic but curtailed the visit, so that we were unable to have our

customary poetry reading facing out to sea. Nevertheless, that evening there were lessons in Geography and History, in which everyone learnt how the physical landscape had impacted upon the D-Day landing strategies. There was also a poetry workshop which allowed each student an opportunity to reflect upon the glory and futility of war.

The next day's emphasis was on French and History during a visit to the town of Bayeux. Splitting into groups of five, the students pooled their resources to buy an original item that they presented later that evening in French. The choice of items was startlingly original, from a pair of multicoloured African trousers to a model Citroen car made entirely out of recycled materials, and the standard of French in the presentations was generally excellent. After a tough judging process, the winning group of exuberant girls were duly rewarded for performing their work in rap form, accompanied by the beats of the djembe they had purchased! After lunch, the group visited the cathedral and world-famous tapestry, where they answered questions in their booklet. Later that afternoon, the group had a tour in French around a cider farm, which was delivered so clearly and ebulliently by the quintessentially Norman proprietor, that there was little need for translation.

On the final day, the weather put paid to any real attempts to complete a treasure hunt in St Malo and only a brief visit to Mont St Michel was possible, on account of the fairly unforgiving downpours. This was an enjoyable and at times sobering trip and the group should be commended for their exemplary behaviour throughout the stay.

Navaneethan Kunaratnam



Mark Hopkins (IC 1990) writes about his experiences directing his first full-length feature, the documentary Living in Emergency: Stories of Doctors without Borders.

Everyone thinks of making their film as an epic saga. Directors tell me horror stories of actors refusing to leave their trailer, starlets AWOL with 'nervous exhaustion'. I wonder if they think I'm lying when I talk about being stranded in war zones, dragged out of cars by machine gun, or capturing a French doctor's panic when, short of

supplies, he's forced to drill a dying man's skull with the wrong equipment. And that's before the real sticky moments as a director – trying to persuade people that you weren't about to hit them with another pious do-gooder film, because yours is about Médecins Sans Frontières.

'We've said no to everyone else, why say yes to you?'

When I set out to make the film, it never occurred to me Médecins Sans Frontières would be anything less than delighted at my interest. I tried not to let it show on my face when they told me, very politely, that I was the 26th filmmaker to have this bright idea. However, after they'd put me through a test shoot in the Sahara (complete with bouts of severe dehydration), they granted us access.

Unsure by now quite what we'd signed up for, we were off to the Congo with a bewildered crew and a guide.

'You can't be told what the field is; you have to see it for yourself.'

Our first night in the Congo, we flew a rattling plane (that crashed ten days later), filmed on no sleep, paid local thugs for a 'film permit', got back for curfew as armed militia circled the town, were given a security update containing the phrase 'forced evacuation'. Having spent time growing up in Kenya, I felt I'd be somewhat immune to African culture shock. I was wrong. As we were beginning to grasp, we'd entered a sort of different dimension – this was simultaneously so much more intense, fascinating, fun and tragic than any of us could have imagined.

Patients arriving in wheelbarrows, 'bushmeat' for lunch, a UN general inviting you to tea, a rebel leader doing likewise, all in a dizzying few hours.

The film's structure remained the same; several characters combining to form one story arc until the viewer gets a sense of what life is like in the field – the thrilling and harrowing intensity of life on the medical front lines. A life committed to the principle of doing a thing for the thing itself.

We followed the doctors to Liberia, Pakistan, Malawi, Paris, Liberia again, Kenya.

Five hundred hours of footage later, so tired that a day in Doha airport failed to register, we headed back to New York. Now all we had to do was to try and encapsulate this indescribable experience. Months of editing later, we arrived at our first rough cut.

'Where's the hope?'

Early rough-cut screenings were not a success. Having come for a Médecins Sans Frontières film, our test audience were expecting something more uplifting: a 'message moment'. The trouble is, Hollywood messages don't fit the world of front-line emergency medicine. Instead, life-affirmation comes from something unspoken but more powerful – the decision to leave one's life path and the safety of home, for the genuinely dangerous, \$14-a-day, psychological and physical minefield.

The 'moments' the film does show are the times where these doctors realise what they do best: their practice of medicine, which is reaching people who often don't expect help. Two billion people do not have access to a doctor. So the doctors practise medicine for its own sake – the patient in front of them. After watching the test screenings, we knew we had to do a better job of condensing the essence of that experience. Because the film and the environments it depicts are not without hope. They're a reflection of the real world, beyond the one in which you can buy a movie ticket for this film. It's our expectations of easy hope that don't match the front lines.



So back to the cutting room we went. This time, we focused on the life-force driving these doctors. They work hard, play hard, in the face of insurmountable need; the soldiering on. More rough cuts, more months, more screenings followed, until finally, one day, we were done. What shone from these doctors as they channelled Florence Nightingale and Keith Richards was, most of all, their commitment. In its own way, hopeful.

Living in Emergency: Stories of Doctors without Borders opens in the UK in late 2010.

This is an edited version of an article that was originally published in the Huffington Post on 10 May 2010. Reprinted with permission.

Left: Dr Brasher with film crew in Liberia.

Right: Mark Hopkins.

Photos © Michael Coles, Red Floor Pictures.



Combined cadet celebrations



On 10 March 2010, 32 of our cadets and eight officers from across the Army, RN and RAF sections took part in a public celebration of the 150th anniversary of the cadet movement, held at Tonbridge School. The 'Cadet 150' event involved cadets from Skinners', Judd, Tonbridge and Sevenoaks, displaying typical cadet activities. Also in attendance were displays from many regular forces including helicopters, tanks and weapons systems simulators. An impressive parade and drill display was accompanied by the band of the Parachute Regiment. Braving the cold, we laid on our Gun Run competition and provided a demonstration of sub-aqua diving for the many hundreds of visitors. The day culminated in a charity dinner with Sir Jock Stirrup, Chief of Defence Staff, as the guest of honour.

Lt Col Paul Bassett

*Sevenoaks cadets at
Tonbridge School*