

# SENNOCKIAN

NEWS AND REVIEWS FROM THE SCHOOL AND ALUMNI 2006-2007



SEVENOAKS SCHOOL

# CONTENTS

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• Introduction from the Head	1
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**FEATURES**

• An interview with Geoffrey Streatfeild (OS)	5
• A visit to Paul Greengrass (OS) at Pinewood	8
• The Findlay Sport Scholarship, including an interview with Sam Stevens	10

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**SPOTLIGHTS**

Performing pupil profiles (Olivia Jageurs, Tom Morris, Chris Roe)	14
Glen Inanga (OS)	17
Hockey: How to remain unbeaten	18
Junior School Greek Holiday	19
Year 9 Lyon Exchange	20
The Italian Connection	22
Honduras Biology Trip	23
Matthew Burrard-Lucas, photographer	24
Model United Nations	27
Duke of Edinburgh's Award	28
Junior William Sevenoke Society	29
International Night 2007	30
Founder's Day 2007	31
VSU Gamelan	32
Kent Youth Disability Games	33
Gifted & Talented Workshop, Chartwells' Hat-Trick	34

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**REVIEWS**

Academic Review, including prizewinners and valete	36
Music Review	52
Drama Review	58
Sport Review	68
Trips and Activities Review	104
PA Review	108
Alumni Review	110

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**LOOKING FORWARD**

Development	126
Performing Arts Centre	127
The Campus	128
Leavers' Destinations	130
2008 Dates for your diary	136

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*Katy Ricks and Sevenoaks pupils*

## INTRODUCTION FROM THE HEAD

Welcome to the first edition of our new magazine, the *Sennockian*. This is a magazine for the whole school community: current students and parents, former students, staff, Governors, Trustees, and other friends of the school. We hope that news of the school today and news of our alumni will be of interest to all.

This has been a wonderful year for Sevenoaks: Sunday Times Independent School of the Year 2007-8, following the success of the 2006-7 school year; outstanding academic results for our students; a successful year for university entry; and some superb sporting and cultural achievements. The international reach of the school continues to grow, as does our commitment to service and the world beyond the school gates. We look forward to celebrating 30 years of the IB in the summer.

An exciting development has been the successful launch of the Sennockian Club, our alumni association, which we hope will thrive and grow as the number of reunion events increases, and we are able to provide more benefits and activities for members. We have enjoyed some lovely meetings between former and current students, who are always appreciative of the advice and experience on offer as Sixth Formers prepare for university and the world of work.

I am delighted to be able to announce the Foundation Trustees' decision to proceed to take the Performing Arts Centre project to full completion. The designs promise a spectacular new facility for the school, a fitting environment for our stunning young musicians, actors and directors. A number of articles in this publication celebrate some of the achievements of past and present students in this area.

We are delighted, too, to launch the Sackville Lectures, an opportunity for students and staff to hear from a distinguished range of speakers.

I hope the pages that follow will give you a vivid picture of the dynamic and vibrant world that is Sevenoaks and its alumni.



*Katy Ricks*  
Head

*December 2007*

*Sevenoaks School  
Selected by  
the Sunday Times as  
Independent  
School of the Year  
2007*



# FEATURES





## AN INTERVIEW WITH GEOFFREY STREATFEILD (OS)

### *Sixth Former Amber Medland meets the Royal Shakespeare Company's Henry V*

On 16 September, fellow Sixth Former Marta Szczerba and I travelled with Mr Taylor to the London rehearsal rooms to meet Geoffrey Streatfeild, 32, an Old Sennockian and immensely talented young actor, as he prepared for the title role in the RSC's Stratford production of *Henry V*. Relaxed as he was eloquent, Mr Streatfeild revealed a nostalgic love of the community atmosphere of our Sackville Theatre, a reverence for Shakespeare and his personal advice to student actors on how to 'uncork the genie'.

Since leaving Sevenoaks, Geoffrey Streatfeild has played a wide variety of roles in film, theatre and television. He has played Irwin in *The History Boys* at the National Theatre, Stanhope in *Journey's End* at the Comedy Theatre, and even dabbled in television's *Midsomer Murders*. Having played Prince Hal in the RSC production of *Henry IV Part I and II*, he then began work on his title role in the RSC's *Henry V*.

On reading his almost intimidating catalogue of work, it would be understandable to expect an older and less modest actor. However, his self-deprecating humour and thoughtful answers showed an untouched enthusiasm for his work. In fact, his expression was so animated as he exclaimed 'and I get paid to do this!' that several of our photos did not reflect his mature appreciation of the 'rich language' and timeless messages of Shakespeare.

Drama at Sevenoaks made an impact on Streatfeild; it was actually seeing a school production of *Huckleberry Finn* that sparked his desire to become a Sevenoaks student. He studied GCSE Drama and spent several years playing minor roles. In *Romeo and Juliet*, he was a 'man with a spear' and walked on 'whenever someone died'. He described the allure of the Sackville as the breaking down of boundaries between students and the provision of a 'real sense of community, where you were judged on merit and

could just talk and make toast'. Once when he entered a room the drama teacher Mr Edwards pointed at him and said, 'This is an actor.' This not only earned him instant respect from the Upper Sixth, but it was also the first time an adult suggested he had potential. When asked whether any individual had influenced his interest, he remembered Mr Waldron with a smile as the man who directed *Antigone*, acted in *Equus* and led the transformation of the then school magazine *Argos* into a scathingly satirical publication. As Drama A level was not available, he studied History, English and Geography but became involved in as much theatre as possible, taking part in *The Relapse* and *Guys and Dolls*.

It is reassuring to aspiring Sevenoaks actors that although Streatfeild is now extremely successful in his field, like any other actor he has overcome difficulties. In a Sevenoaks production of *Hobson's Choice* he was completely unable to laugh or cry, which he remarked ruefully was 'fairly key to acting'. Out of curiosity, I asked him about his Grade 5 qualification in the French horn. He answered with a groan that he had achieved an all-round scholarship to Sevenoaks and therefore had to participate in the orchestra. He was 'truly terrible' and when this was finally noticed because everyone else stopped playing for a moment, the Head of Music, Mr Woodward, allowed him to leave 'out of pity'. Streatfeild recently attended a ten-year Sennockian reunion and is still in touch with some old contemporaries, including Georgina Rich, who is currently starring in *Dirty Dancing* in the West End.

On leaving Sevenoaks, Streatfeild became a member of the National Youth Theatre from 1992 to 1997, auditioning originally as Iago. He described the six-week introductory course as 'brilliant', and said it gave him 'an understanding of what it meant to be an adult actor in the real world'. Working with a diverse group of 30 other young actors, he was also struck by the privilege of Sevenoaks drama. The National Youth Theatre is a foundation for many aspiring actors, and in his first role as 'third Cypriot gentleman', Orlando Bloom was playing the fourth. Streatfeild studied



Geoffrey Streatfeild talks to Amber Medland.

Drama at Manchester and remained deeply involved in theatre. He was 'lucky enough' to find an agent quickly, gain acceptance to RADA, and in 2000 he became a member of the RSC.

Although my question about his favourite role was met with nothing but a thoughtful pause he commented that he greatly enjoyed his role as Stanhope in *Journey's End*, which many Sevenoaks students study at GCSE, and became 'quite possessive' of it. He explained that there was more 'practical research' in understanding the thoughts of a soldier in World War One but 'shades of Stanhope' carry into his portrayal of *Henry V*. Streatfeild is convinced that there is no 'iron-set way' of getting into character, and it's important to combine Stanislavsky with Brecht and focus on the 'sound of the language' as much as anything else. He also stressed that it is important not to focus entirely on the internal, but on your audience.

'Sometimes you uncork the genie, and sometimes you uncork it too much; you can be affected too greatly by the emotional process.'

While Streatfeild's adoration of acting is obvious, it is clear that dedication is crucial to success. Only seven of his companions from NYT are still acting full time. 'Auditions are always intimidating,' he commented. 'There are things you are just not right for and you have to learn from rejection and not take it personally. You need to be realistic about where you are with your career.' This pressure remains while acting with the RSC, although American audiences are often more receptive: 'In England people sit in the front row, following it on the script, basically saying, "Come on then." We have to fight to be recognised.' Streatfeild thrives on this pressure and the challenge to take lines that have been said thousands of times from a new perspective and make them 'fresh'. Interestingly, he admitted that he doesn't always understand Shakespeare just through reading; his understanding comes with acting. When acting, 'any presumption you have on the character vanishes. When you act, you stop judging.' Streatfeild bases his deep respect of Shakespeare on the richness of the texts, and the manner in which one can continually return to them. He describes his role as Henry V as 'hugely exciting, a part that's got more mileage than I can drive'.

I queried whether he thought the continued teaching of Shakespeare in schools is important, knowing how a few of my peers sometimes feel. He emphasised that on stage, 'if actors are doing their jobs well, you can just sit there. You don't have to understand every single word to understand.' He also destroyed the common complaint that it is 'boring', exasperatedly pointing out that 'it is closer to *The Sopranos* or *The Godfather*. It is a desperate, blood-thirsty power-struggle; it is not just about kings and queens.' He is intrigued by other adaptations of Shakespeare, such as the recent production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at The Roundhouse theatre, in which the script was composed of a mixture of English and various Indian dialects.

Working in the theatre is not purely about words, and Streatfeild has become an expert stage fighter through his work with the RSC. For a two-minute fight scene in *Henry V*, 72 hours of rehearsal are required. After picking up a surprisingly heavy prop sword and almost dropping it, I asked whether there had ever been any accidents. Laughing, he replied, 'Everyone is well trained and it is very safe... but, God, you don't want to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.' He remarked that working at the Stratford theatre had been an amazing experience, from being involved in expressionist rope-climbing stage fights to working on a thrust stage where you 'have a real connection with your audience'.

Geoffrey Streatfeild's advice to any hopeful actor is both practical and passionate. 'Just keep going. It depends on what you want to do...find out exactly what you want to do and then you'll work out how to do it. Keep going.' On examining actors he admired as a boy, such as Ian McKellen, he realised that he had gone through a similar pattern of professional steps. He stressed that it is important to realise that 'very few people do a Keira Knightley', making it big straight away, or even work with a combination of theatre and TV, because the disciplines use 'different muscles'. Despite his devotion to his career, he is also down to earth about what it necessitates: 'You can take the job as the Halifax man in an advert and earn thousands of pounds. But then you are the Halifax man for your career.' I asked whether this meant he lost respect for actors who chose to become involved in advertising: 'Absolutely not. I have huge respect for people who do. It isn't selling out, it's trying to pay your rent, and it means you can do what you love.'

Geoffrey Streatfeild had been rehearsing for eight weeks from 10am until 6pm when the RSC's *Henry V* previewed in October. It is being performed in Stratford and London until late Spring 2008.

*Writer and Interview: Amber Medland (L6)*

*Research: Marta Sczerba (L6)*



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## A VISIT TO PAUL GREENGRASS (OS) AT PINEWOOD



*In late 2006, Sixth Form drama students Rachel Ashwanden and Sophie Gilpin were asked if they would be interested in spending a day at Pinewood film studios with Old Sennockian and film director, Paul Greengrass, during his filming of The Bourne Ultimatum. Needless to say they both accepted immediately. Sophie Gilpin tells the tale.*

The opportunity to meet Paul Greengrass came about as Katy Ricks, the Head, had contacted Paul to ask him if he would be able to come to Sevenoaks to give a talk to the Sixth Formers about the theatre and film industry. Unfortunately, at that time, he was busy filming the final installment in the *Bourne* trilogy, *The Bourne Ultimatum*, so he was unable to accept. However, Paul kindly suggested that Penny Hargreaves, the Head of Drama, Mrs Ricks and two Sixth Form drama students come along to spend the day watching the filming. Rachel and I were asked as we were among those hoping to pursue theatre and film in higher education, and ultimately as a career.

On the morning of Wednesday 6 December, a very excitable Mrs Hargreaves, Rachel and I started our journey to Slough, Buckinghamshire, where we were met at the station by a driver with a black Mercedes. As we pulled through the gates of Pinewood, we looked around to see people, cars and lorries all winding in and out of what seemed like huge barns and warehouses. We were escorted into the main reception where we had to sign a disclaimer saying that we would not reveal the plot line or any other information that we were given during the day. After signing this and being given day passes to hang around our necks, we were taken to the set where Paul was currently working. On the way we passed one warehouse being rebuilt and were told that it was where the Venice scene in *Casino Royale* was filmed but there had been an accidental fire. Fortunately filming had been completed before the disaster.

We were to meet Paul on the set of the CIA's control room but were waiting for a few minutes before he came. This meant we were able to have a quick look around. Even though there was no one sitting at the computers in the room, there were moving images on the screens. I expected everything to look completely different when I saw the film in the cinema but I was surprised to find that I was able to say exactly where we had been sitting and where the door was etc. Paul took us to the area used as one of the CIA conference rooms which a few members of the cast were using as a 'holding room' and had become a base for the

cameramen, soundmen and other technicians. Paul introduced us by name to all the people in the room and seemed genuinely excited to meet current students and teachers from his old school. Unfortunately, Matt Damon (Jason Bourne) had flown back to LA the previous day, but amongst others we met Joan Allen (Pamela Landy) and David Strathairn (CIA Deputy Director, Noah Vosen).

Paul was extremely friendly for the whole day; he sat with us at lunch and continued to introduce us to everyone he spoke to, including Alan Rickman (*Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves, Sense and Sensibility, Love Actually*) who happened to wander through the set in dressing gown and jeans, sipping a mug of tea, despite not having anything to do with this movie! Paul showed us around the entire set, pointing out which rooms were which, and explaining how it was possible to film the CIA offices on a set in London when the film would show a view of New York from the office windows (a complicated process involving filming a few shots of New York from a window without actors, and a backcloth with clever distortions and dimensions).

All in all, it was a fascinating day. We learned a lot and were so grateful for the time Paul put into hosting, entertaining and educating us, especially at so busy a time.

*Sophie Gilpin (U6)*



*The pictures show (left) Matt Damon, Albert Finney and Paul Greengrass and (above) Paul Greengrass, Julia Stiles and Matt Damon on set.*

Paul needed to do one shot before lunch. He gave us headphones connected to the television screen so that we could see and hear what was happening. The shot only lasted a few seconds but the whole process of takes and retakes took about ten minutes, a hint of just how long the entire filming process takes. I didn't consciously spot the shot when I saw the film, and it is hard to say whether I missed it or whether it ended up on the 'cutting room floor'! While we were there, Paul also showed us a short clip of Damon walking through Waterloo Station which had been filmed only a few days before. He explained that it hadn't yet been edited and that other shots would be interwoven and music played over the top. Seeing this initial section of the film and then seeing the final piece was fascinating – so much work had been done in post-production to further heighten the tension and increase the pace.

## THE FINDLAY SPORT SCHOLARSHIP



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*As shown above and on the Features title page, our second Findlay Scholar, Danny Caprice, has made a big impact since joining us.*

*We take this opportunity to feature the Findlay Sport Scholarship as our first scholar, Sam Stevens, completes his two years in the Sixth Form.*

The Findlay Sixth Form Sport Scholarship was established in 2004 by Jim and Carole Findlay, whose children Christopher and Henrietta both attended the school. The award is funded by the J & C Findlay Charitable Foundation. Our first Findlay Scholar, Sam Stevens, joined us from Darrick Wood School in Orpington in September 2005 and left us last summer, with a superb IB points score as well as a host of sporting accolades.

An interview with him follows, written by Alex Smith, one of our senior football coaches. It details Sam's experiences at the school and as a sport scholar. Our second Findlay Scholar, Danny Caprice, joined us from Chatham Grammar School in September 2006 and, like Sam, has made an excellent contribution. He has played regular county and other representative rugby, is currently in the Saracens Development Academy, and also played for the London Academy of Rugby against France U19s and England U19s in the Michaelmas term 2007. Both he and Sam have also been highly influential in the school's sports teams more generally.

By way of information, the scholarship is for a local boy or girl entering the Sixth Form from a state school. Candidates must meet all the normal entry requirements to the school in addition to the criteria of this scholarship and up to 100% day fee discount can be awarded if appropriate.

Candidates should have an exceptional talent in at least one or more of the school's major sports – rugby, football, athletics, cricket, hockey (girls) or netball.

We are keen to encourage a strong field of sporting applicants for future awards. Sennockian readers are therefore encouraged to pass on details of the award to any potential future applicants they may know locally and to suggest that they look at the school website or speak to the Director of Sport or Admissions department if they would like to find more information. As Sam and Danny have shown, it provides a wonderful opportunity for someone to join the school who might not otherwise have done so.



*Sam Stevens shields the ball under pressure from the opposition.*

## *Alex Smith interviews Sam Stevens, our first Findlay Sport scholar.*

### **SAM STEVENS**

Sam Stevens joined the Lower Sixth in September 2005 and has always struck me as a visible character, someone who has presence. When I spoke to a few colleagues about this interview their response suggested he was certainly someone who commanded respect amongst the staff.

Sam and I settled into my office the day before his last exam, Spanish. He politely accepted my offer of tea and chocolate cake, although he didn't touch the cake. He is an easy person to talk to: friendly, composed. I immediately saw this 'good bloke' thing, although there was certainly more to him than this rather hackneyed phrase.

Sam came to Sevenoaks from Darrick Wood School in Orpington, a large mixed comprehensive where he described himself as 'a good student', someone who was in the top sets in most subjects and determined to be successful. Sport was obviously a major thing for him and he spoke enthusiastically about his PE teacher, Mr Simpson, whom he described as an avuncular, 'no nonsense' character. Sam played in all the A teams of most sport at Darrick Wood, although football was his main passion. His football CV is impressive: he has represented Kent, been part of the Crystal Palace Academy, played for the South of England Public Schools team and was in the First Team squad for Bromley Town FC. I was particularly struck by his inclusion in the Bromley team; they are only a couple of divisions off the football league and to break into their First Team squad at 16 is a real achievement. As a player he feels he is not the most technically gifted but he reads the game well, is fiercely competitive and has the genuine pace (10.9 for 100 metres) to 'get himself out of trouble'. He is comfortable playing in midfield but considers his strongest position to be at the back.

After seeing an advert in the *Kentish Times* and speaking to the Makepeace family, Sam decided to apply for the school's Findlay Sport Scholarship. Looking at him now he probably represents everything the scholarship is all about: a pupil who is hard-working, intelligent, extremely good at sport and someone who really valued the opportunity of coming to Sevenoaks.

I was interested by his reaction to the social mix of the school which obviously contrasts with Darrick Wood. He was struck by the 'friendliness' of Sevenoaks. He agreed that people had been interested in him at the start because of the Sport Scholarship, but he was obviously pleased by the warmth and generosity of students and staff towards him. During his time at Sevenoaks he said he 'hadn't met anyone he didn't like!'

Coming to Sevenoaks with all its academic and co-curricular commitments ended his association with Crystal Palace and Bromley Town. Football is a funny season at Sevenoaks: ten weeks, about a dozen matches, the worst of the weather and mud-bound pitches. Sam said he enjoyed the football and, although the standard was lower than he was used to, he liked the atmosphere of the team and the whole match-day experience: the bus, match tea and the camaraderie of his team-mates. His description of the match against one 'leading public school' was interesting. Sevenoaks were losing 3-0 after 20 minutes when one of the 'leading public school' substitutes shouted to their players that Sevenoaks were 'no good and that they [the leading public school] should stop trying and treat it as a practice match'. This obviously rankled (to put it mildly) Sam and his response said a lot about him as a person and a sportsman. He said in a matter-of-fact, understated way: 'I was probably the best player on the pitch, playing against players of moderate ability, and they were showing a level of disrespect to us I couldn't believe.' He went on, 'I've played in games where we have been winning 12-0 but you still keep trying out of respect for the opposition.'

I asked him whether he had any criticisms of sport at Sevenoaks; he felt players at times were a bit too comfortable when they lost and whilst being able to accept defeat is, in a way, a good thing, it probably takes away the competitiveness needed to win more matches.

Sam's view of Sevenoaks rugby was interesting. He had played at a reasonable standard before but he saw the rugby here as a real 'step up'. I asked him how seriously he felt the rugby was taken at Sevenoaks. He paused, considered the question

carefully and then likened it to the seriousness he had experienced at the Crystal Palace Football Academy. He had obviously loved playing with the First XV and the coaching of Sean Holden and Phil Hulston. Indeed he was glowing in his praise of 'Mr Holden and Mr Hulston's commitment, enthusiasm, competitiveness, along with the feeling that the coaches were as much a part of the team as the players'. The coaching staff at Sevenoaks, and indeed at Kent, saw his speed and strength as a full back or as winger as a real asset to the team.

Reaching the last eight of the Rosslyn Park National Sevens represented a high point for him and he seemed to relish the challenge faced by the squad as Sevenoaks moved through each round of the tournament. I was interested by his observation of the team; he felt that 'everyone trusted each other and could depend on each others' commitment'. Finally, being knocked out by King's Taunton (the eventual winners) in the quarter-final, was painful but he took pride in the comments of some spectators who felt Sevenoaks and Taunton were the best two teams in the competition.

The IB was a challenge for Sam, but one he met with great success. He chose Higher Level History, Business & Management and English, along with Biology, Spanish and Maths at Standard Level. Business & Management was his favourite subject and he spoke so positively about the enthusiasm and commitment of all his teachers. He made quite a point about the passion of the teaching staff and commitment of all pupils at Sevenoaks to learning.

So where now? Well after a summer break in Majorca with friends from Sevenoaks, Sam will consider his offers from Bath and Nottingham Universities to read Business and Economics, or perhaps even consider Oxbridge. After that it may be a financial services career in the City or, like his grandfather, he might go and play for Arsenal. I hope it's the latter.

*Alex Smith*