

BOT Assembly
Lent Term 2012

Welcome to the start of the new Lent Term, and new calendar year, 2012. I hope you've enjoyed a refreshing holiday and are looking forward to the academic challenge and lively mix of activities the term ahead holds for us.

It's a pleasure to welcome a number of new members of staff: in the Art department, we welcome back **Mr Mark White**, part-time, joined also part-time, by **Miss Sophie Brigden**; and in the Languages faculty, we welcome **Mlle Claire Berment**, teaching French. I know you will do what you can to help them settle in quickly. Congratulations to our new school captains, **Alix Abrahams** and **Bilal Mateen**, and captains of sport: **Emily Elliott**, netball, **Jack Hulston**, football, **Robert Laurenson**, sailing, and **Serena Yuen**, shooting.

We congratulate Old Sennockians **Professor Simon Donaldson**, mathematician, Fields Medal prize winner and professor at Imperial College, who was a student at Sevenoaks from 1972 to 1975, and has been awarded a Knighthood in the New Year Honours list. He was appointed to a Mathematics Chair at Cambridge at the age of 26. The shoe designer, **Emma Hope** (OS 1978-80), was awarded an MBE.

I know you will all do a great job on a Thursday afternoon. At the end of last term, I very much enjoyed visits to a number of your service activities, including a dazzling display of explosions and Chemistry experiments led by Dr Owen and members of the Sixth Form, for the whole of Year 6 from Amherst Primary School. I went to see others perform a beautiful concert at Kippington Care Home, a home for about 40 elderly people, some of whom need considerable medical attention, and many of whom suffer from the onset of dementia. I joined the Christmas festivities at Sennocke for the Thursday Club, where students from different year groups performed a range of musical entertainments, and served a lovely Christmas tea to able-bodied old people in the Sevenoaks area. I know many other things were happening at the same time in school and in the local community: students working at Valence School, for example. And I have been told that a number of individuals have made some particularly generous personal gifts: one student has given £1,000 of their own savings to Valence School, others are undertaking a sponsored marathon swim, and one student a sponsored skydive on a 16th birthday. Great gestures of philanthropy – love of your fellow human beings.

I often praise you for your commitment to making a difference to the lives of others within and beyond the school community. Visiting these service activities first hand only reinforced what a significant and valuable a part of your education this is, and how genuinely committed you are to it. It was impressive and touching to see how the smallest gift of your time, to the very young, to the very old, and to others suffering from disabilities and difficulties that most of us can barely imagine, truly has an impact for the good.

Seeing those old people at Kippington Care Home, many of whom have lost the full grasp of reality that we take for granted, moving in time to your music, clapping, making the occasional approving comment, was vivid proof of how important it is for you to connect in this way. I asked one of your teachers running an activity what she felt the value of our service programme is to you. This is her reply:

“It is so important that the students develop their compassionate side. I’ve seen many students during service who display the most amazing talents ... thinking on their feet, thinking of others, having empathy. I don’t always get to see this side of their personalities in the classroom. These are the things that make us rounded individuals of course, and ultimately, make for excellent managers in the workplace. I think the students don’t always realise that what they are developing here can have so much impact on their career success and satisfaction.”

Well, I hope you do realise that what you are developing in these service activities will indeed have a huge impact, not just on those you help, although we put that first, but also on you, and how you develop as a person able to play a responsible and compassionate part in the world you live in.

It is with this in mind that it is a pleasure now to award **service colours** to a number of individuals who have excelled in demonstrating the virtues of service: self-sacrifice, duty, and care. I will say a little about each student, and then ask those present in this assembly to come and receive their ties.

Service colours go to **Adam Gristock, Sam Cornish-Evans** and **James Holland** for outstanding and prolonged contributions to the RAF section. Since Year 11 when they started taking a lead, Adam, Sam and James have been exemplary cadets, organising and delivering activities and lessons every week. They have attended RAF courses in holidays and their expertise has enhanced their work with younger cadets and strengthened the section as a whole.

James Snowden and **Michael Jones** receive Service Colours for exemplary levels of commitment to the Army Section. Both have been senior NCOs, and have been instrumental in the planning and execution of teaching on Thursday afternoons, as well as holding command appointments on night and training exercises. As Senior NCOs they have been a superb example to younger cadets and to their Upper Sixth peers. In addition, in Music **James** has developed from being quietly keen on his singing and violin playing to being a soloist with the Sennocke Consort. Always willing to put himself out and contribute to the ensemble, James has become an integral part of the tenor section. He has also contributed as a violinist to our major ensembles and displays a winning attitude.

Hannah Broido and **Gualtiero Uslenghi** have stood out all year for their constant willingness to take on extra prefect duties. Always the first to volunteer and to give their time, their commitment and helpfulness, they have often ensured that a duty has been covered or a tour of the school given.

Tiffany Mak has raised money for the charity 'Education for All', including by running a high altitude half-marathon. She too has been an outstanding prefect, offering her time on a daily basis. She gains glowing praise for her extra work in the GIH and in the music department. Tiffany is a wonderful example of a student who gives quiet, selfless service throughout the year.

Now please come and receive your ties. Well done.

As I said at the beginning of the school year, this is to be a year when we emphasise in particular our commitment to service, and I want to highlight now two important events happening this term and next as part of that emphasis.

First, a Service Conference is going to be held for the Lower Sixth in February. All L6 students will be off timetable for a day, during which the focus will be social entrepreneurship – the creation of businesses set up for the benefit of society, businesses with philanthropic aims. The day will start with presentations from a number of established social entrepreneurs, who will go on to discuss the main issues with students, who will then be set a challenge related to social entrepreneurship. The day will finish with a talk from Derek Browne who worked for Merrill Lynch for many years but gave up this job to set up a social enterprise called Entrepreneurs in Action, an organisation dedicated to developing entrepreneurial skill in young people. This organisation will be running the day, which promises to be inspiring and useful for our Lower Sixth.

In addition to this, later in the year, after Year 11 have finished their IGCSEs and GCSEs they will participate in a four-day experience, 'Classroom to Boardroom'. At the start of the week the group will be set a challenge; for example, students at another school worked with the charity Whizz Kidz. They went to the charity headquarters and were set a challenge in the boardroom to come up with a campaign to raise awareness of disability in young people. Throughout the week our students will work on an equivalent project and receive training sessions on business related topics. Then at the end of the week they return to the boardroom and make their presentation to the senior leadership of that charity.

I hope both of these opportunities will be interesting and enriching, and will reaffirm, for the individuals involved, but also for us collectively as a school, our belief that we are here in part to serve others.

I know you will remember this, despite the intensity of the short term ahead. We wish the Upper Sixth every success in the forthcoming IB mock exams, and all of you now halfway through this academic year, success and enjoyment in your academic studies, and indeed in the many other opportunities of the term.

We look forward to the Knole Run on Saturday, when 500 runners will complete this historic race, to some exciting drama, *Holes* and *Blood Wedding*, and some dazzling music, the Alan Adler concert at the end of term; and to three Sackville Lectures – given by the poet **Simon Armitage**, the Politics Editor of Sky News, **Adam Boulton**, and **Charles Saumarez Smith**, the Director of the Royal Academy of Arts. I hope all of us will remember, too, not just the things on public show, exciting, glamorous, and wonderful as they are, but also the unseen quiet acts of service that run through our weekly lives at school.

Have a very happy New Year!