

OLD BIRKONIAN SOCIETY
115th Annual General Meeting over Zoom (due to Covid 19)
4th September 2021 at 10.00am

Present: Chairman, President, Hon Secretary, Birkenhead School Headmaster, Birkenhead School Alumni and Futures Co-ordinator, and 12 Old Birkonian Society members

1. President's Welcome Philippa McKeown

The President, Philippa McKeown (**PM**) commented her first year as President has been very unusual as a result of the pandemic. PM advised it was clear the Council had worked tirelessly to engage with OBs across the UK and world despite the challenges presented, and it was a good example of how adversity had led to opportunities.

PM thanked the Council for their efforts on behalf of the OBS.

2. Apologies for Absence Philippa McKeown

The following apologies had been submitted in advance of the AGM by email:

Mike Taylor
Hugh Morris
Richard Knowles
Tim Benbow
Barry Owen
Graham Wood
Roger Jermy
David Boughey
David Varey
John Sheldrake
Bishop David Hallatt
Professor Peter Goodall
Andrew Thomson
Rt Revd Donald Allister
Philip Lawford
Robin Lucas
Michael Morrison
Phil Adams

3. Minutes of AGM held on 5th September 2020 Philippa McKeown

The 2020 AGM Minutes were approved. TMJ proposed and William Nute seconded.

4. Matters Arising Philippa McKeown

- Honorary OB selection process Will Roberts

The Chairman, Will Roberts (**WR**), advised this arose from a query raised by Dave Edmunds and Allan Hansen at the 2020 AGM. Following discussions between the Headmaster, WR and Council, a process was underway to see from School records whether any previous staff members may have slipped through the net and need to be put forward as an Honorary OB. There is also an annual review of any current staff departures conducted by the Headmaster and WR. WR Thanked Dave Edmunds and Alan Hanson for raising the issue.

5. Chairman's Report

Will Roberts

WR commented he was pleased to welcome PM as President. WR noted that in 2020 it was not possible to hold the OB Weekend, any social and sporting events, or the Bazaar. Council therefore worked remotely via Zoom.

The Council is monitoring the pandemic situation and is aiming to hold 1 or 2 events before the end of the year. In the meantime, with the assistance of Carol Keegan, School Alumni and Futures Co-ordinator (**CK**), the Council is looking to continue to improve and make the OBS more relevant to members. There are developments in the pipeline which will be communicated in due course. For future developments to be effective the Council will need the engagement of the alumni network, and would welcome feedback from OBS members. The Council wants the OBS to focus on three key areas, social, careers and networking. WR urged OBS members to help current pupils, recent leavers and other members with careers advice and employment opportunities. WR commented it is important to encourage those at start of their careers to reach out to the OBS for advice and make the most of the resources available.

WR congratulated the Headmaster, Paul Vicars (**PV**), Mr FitzHerbert and all staff for their efforts in the past 12 months. The School has continued to provide a first class service to families.

WR thanked CK and PV for their efforts in assisting the OBS. WR noted his gratitude for the support received from PM, Archives and other voluntary members. WR thanked the Council members for their efforts and commended the OBS.

6. Treasurer's Report

TMJ

- To receive & adopt the OBS Accounts for y/e 31st December 2020
- To appoint an Independent Examiner (Duncan, Sheard, Glass)

The Treasurer, Trevor Mathew Jones (**TMJ**) provided a financial summary. TMJ commented very little has occurred due to Covid 19. TMJ displayed society accounts for the year and provided two comments. Income and Expenditure were the same as last year, producing a surplus of around £7,500.

TMJ advised the Council decided to provide OBS branded memorabilia to those leaving School at the end of Sixth Form, as had been done last year. The Council expects to continue this policy going forwards. Secondly thanks to PV and CK, over the years there have been reasonable number of estimates and there were corrections.

TMJ was pleased to report that, for the first time in 16 years, all outstanding issues with the accounts have been reconciled. He commended CK and a member of School staff, Kay, without

whom this would not have been possible. Although there have been no functions TMJ explained there was an item about OBS lunches and dinners that arose during the reconciliation process.

TMJ provided a brief summary of the two charitable funds managed by the OBS on behalf of the trustees. As regards the Endowment Fund, the primary rationale is to provide assistance to Schools mainly through bursaries and scholarships. Following consultation with the School the OBS Council has re-instated the War Memorial scholarships. Currently the Endowment Fund has just over £1.4m which is a good base to assist the School going forwards.

A question was raised as to the Endowment Fund's investment strategy in view of current stock market volatility. WR advised that the broad strategy is to invest the Fund in the upper range of medium risk assets, approximately 70% in equities and 30% in less volatile assets. Invested forever for the benefit of the School which helps with investment decision making as a long term approach can be taken, particularly as the emphasis of the Fund is now to only draw down income generated rather than capital. Historically capital has been drawn to help with capital projects e.g. the chapel. When there is market volatility Rathbones do what they can to react to circumstances but they cannot be seen to be panicking and moving into cash; market dips are blips with the passage of time, and are therefore focussed on the longer term time horizon.

TMJ advised the other charitable fund is the Prize Fund. Realistically this is an extension of the Endowment Fund. Its prime asset is the lodge which valued at £160k. The Lodge is worth more than that, however, it is not worth the cost of a full revaluation as the tenant is the School and we charge a non-market rent which is fair in view of the Fund's aim to support the School.

There is also a Restricted fund. 15 years ago Neil Gracey died and provided a legacy for a fund to be set up to help a pupil who would not otherwise be able to attend the School. The OBS does not know who benefits but the fees have been paid for School education. In 2020 the cash from the fund were exhausted. Although funds are no longer available the prize fund and endowment fund will continue to support one pupil.

TMJ concluded by advising that this will be his final year as a member of the OBS Council. He has been Treasurer for the past 16 years. This AGM should have been his last, however, he has stayed on due to challenges that have arisen due to Covid in obtaining a replacement. TMJ has enjoyed his time on Council. He noted that three years ago he was the second youngest / youngest member on Council, now he is the oldest member. TMJ believes the OBS is going in the right direction and will continue to survive and thrive.

TMJ proposed the accounts. Roger Ewing seconded.

7. Election of Officers and Members of Council.

Philippa McKeown

There are no proposed changes to the Officers and Members of Council. Accordingly they were proposed as a single group by William Nute, Adrian Fowler seconded.

- Chairman
Will Roberts
- Secretary
Andrew Maxwell
- Treasurer
Trevor Mathew-Jones

- Members
Daniel Ellis
Jennifer Taylor
Josh Stirrett
Kirsten Stewart
Phil Adams
John Williams
- President
Philippa McKeown

8. Headmaster's Report

Paul Vicars

PV thanked the Council and President for their input over the past 12 months. PV commented they are in very good health as a school. The new term started on Thursday 2 September in line with government guidance. Voluntary lateral flow tests are being undertaken. The School is participating in the 12-15 age group vaccination programme.

The School Leavers Ball was held last night, superbly organised by CK and was very successful.

Last week Mr Ian Huntley attended to provide Prefects leadership training. Mr Huntley was formerly in charge of the MOD Leadership Centre. PV advised there is lots of involvement in the School by Old Birkonians and the pupils are very grateful for their support.

PV advised that generally the School has been doing an induction for the last couple of days, there are sporting fixtures being held tomorrow, and academics start in earnest on Monday.

PV explained there has been significant disruption to school life over the past 12 months. However, pupils and staff did the School proud. There was a lot of remote learning with significant pastoral support, supporting both families and students.

Notwithstanding the restrictions the School pushed co-curricular activities as much as possible. The School invested more on sports coaching and music when students returned to ensure they could keep it going. Prep School were able to put on one performance of Peter Pan. Senior School put on 9 performances of Les Miserables which were superb. The Les Miserables performances took place 15-16 months after they were first meant to be performed. There were several rotations of cast and crew, one involving pupils who had left the previous year and returned to perform their roles. They were all very proud and the performances were emotional. There is a recording of one performance that the School will look to make available.

Academically the pupils are fortunate in terms of the remote learning and support provided by School. As a result, on the whole there is not a big learning gap between where pupils are and where they ought to be. The School is aware that this is not equal across society. As regards the formal exam results, all were teacher assessed grades. PC advised the attitude of all pupils was brilliant. The School conducted a Zoom meeting with 50 Upper Sixth parents who concerned at the outset with approach taken by the School of having March and May assessments. The School, however, believed the approach correct in terms of ensuring quality of evidence. Once the pupils understood the School's rationale their approach was excellent. PV commented that they had a very able set of students who were going to achieve top grades regardless of how they were assessed.

PV advised that the GCSE results were positive, with a straight set of grade nines for some students.

PV commented that the School is growing. This year they have taken on four new teaching staff in Senior School. The School has added two new internal roles, Assistant Head of Pastoral and Head of Middle School. PV advised it is important to keep a close eye on years 9-11 due to pupils' personal development during such times. The School is very much focussed on bringing in the right people with the right attitude.

PV advised the School has a great set of staff going in a strong direction, with Years 7 to Sixth Form having increased by 25% in the last 4 years. This year there are 109 pupils in Sixth Form compared with 119 last year. There has been another intake of around 80 pupils into Year 7, and the School expects that this will lead to around 140 in Sixth Form in the next few years as these intakes move through the School.

This year as government regulations reduce the School is looking to return to old, established successful teaching routines. For example, pupils moving between classrooms instead of teachers. PV would like a term's worth of good quality teaching and learning without government restrictions.

PV commented the School is going to push appropriate values, both in society and online. The School will consult OBS members, staff, students and parents on what they feel the School's values should be. The School was founded on Christian principles, there is the School motto, and also the more recently affirmed values of "Respect Responsibility and Resilience". PV rhetorically questioned whether the 'Three Rs' should be more prominent in Senior School as it is already prominent in Prep School. PV highlighted the Black Lives Matter and Everyone's Invited movements. PV understands the School was listed on a list published under the Everyone's Invited movement together with the Schools competitors.

PV advised there remains a push on co-curricular activities. As School number increase there will be more students playing sport and as such the School will need to operate more B and C teams.

PV advised two planning submissions have been submitted and the School anticipates a lot of objections from residents in the vicinity of the proposed residential development on Noctorum Field ("**Noctorum**"). So far there have been 300 objections and 100 commendations to the Noctorum planning submission. PV accepts that objectors will be more vocal. PV asked the OBS that if they are in favour of the proposals anything they can contribute would be welcome.

The proposed Noctorum development is directly linked two the second sports hall. This will contain a double sized atrium with climbing wall and three or four studios with meeting rooms. PV added that a significant portion of the proceeds from the sale of Noctorum will provide funds for transformative bursaries.

PV advised that the library refurbishment is going ahead next term. To assist with this the School will have a push on fundraising.

The School is due an educational quality inspection, as they are about 1 year overdue. PV is inspecting another school on 22 and 23 Sept to help understand what inspectors are looking for and attempt to get a sense of when they might visit.

PV commented this is his sixth year as Headmaster and that it is a good time to undertake a consultation with all stakeholders about all of the School's provision and write a new development

plan. The School has achieved a lot from the 2017 development plan but it would be good to undertake a refresh. PV commended Carl and the Estates Team who have worked very hard. For example, the Music School and Nursery windows have all been replaced. This was expensive for the Music School as it is a listed building. The Little School playground has been extended. The Sixth Form common room has been refurbished and 30 new whiteboards have been installed in the classrooms. PV advised they will probably redevelop the Prep School playground which will require around £30k-£40k. Generally PV likes to consider projects costing around £20k that make a big impact on enjoyment for pupils.

Currently the School has 939 pupils. From Reception to Upper Sixth the figure is 829, last year it was 819. PV believes the School needs a further increase of 50-60 pupils to achieve the optimal figure. If numbers exceed this the School may become a little more selective. The School doesn't want to get bigger for capacity's sake, and do not want to lose the current pupil to teacher ratio. Accordingly as the School increases numbers they are increasing staff numbers to maintain the ratio.

PV advised the School has started a fifth minibus with a new route into Liverpool. There are four students on the bus which is three more than expected. PV advised it is positive to have the branded minibus circulating the local area.

The School has four new Lower Sixth students joining. Last year there were nine, the year before there were eight. PV advised it was almost impossible to recruit as it was not possible to allow people on the site. Also pupils did not want to leave their existing schools as they had not seen their friends due to government restrictions. PV advised the School wants pupils to add something to Sixth Form. One of the additions is an Access Scholar with all 9s bar one.

PV advised he was hugely grateful for the continued OBS support, as well as that provided by CK, WR and the Council. PV advised the pupils know they get a lot of support from the OBS. For example, the School's apprenticeship work has involved OBS input. One person last year is now at the BBC, one person this year is working at Microsoft HQ in Reading.

As part of the School's drive to make the most of the OBS network they are likely to acquire electronic software to help connectivity.

PM thanked PV for his report. PM asked PV to address any questions by email due to time pressure.

9. Any other business

Philippa McKeown

PM thanked Council and believed it positive that all members are continuing in their roles for this year. PM commented that it is a source of pride to be part of the Birkenhead School community that has been thriving despite the circumstances, and it has been very positive to learn that there has been outreach to support all members of the community.

PM thanked the AGM attendees, including those who asked questions. PM hoped we will be able to meet in person before too long and in time for the next AGM. PM looks forward to meeting those she has not already met and seeing others again.

AGM ended.