

OB Day 2018 – Chairman’s report

Ladies and gentlemen – fellow OBs, welcome to the 2018 AGM.

In making an annual report, I would first like to take the opportunity to remind us all of the objectives of the Club:

- Maintain and foster the association of Old Blundellians, bringing them together in as many ways as possible and keeping them informed of the careers of fellow Old Blundellians; also of life and development at the School.

- Promote and further the interests of the School whenever possible ensuring its survival and good health, and to work for the greater good of the Blundell's community as a whole.

These are important head marks to us and are at the heart of all we endeavour to do and organise on your behalves. I think it hugely important that we record the specific input and support from both Cedric Clapp and Nicky Huggett. The relationship we have and enjoy with the School and Governors is largely driven by their leadership and practical and pragmatic work. More on the Head later, but a personal thanks to Cedric for his personal drive, interest and energy and ‘phone a friend’ advice and support. As we continuously develop the OB Club, the Committee continues to welcome any sensible suggestions to enable these objectives to be delivered and I thought it might be useful to highlight just some of the issues, activities and events that take place to enable this to happen; and happen in a very real and tangible sense:

- We continue to ‘own’ and run our OB Day each year and are already starting to plan and invite key people for next year already;

- We continue to run and support a range of social events – often in excellent partnership with the School. Both here in Tiverton and further afield, as well as abroad;

- Using our UK-based and international ‘ambassadors’ we work with the School to support the School’s quest for new pupils, as well supporting younger OBs as they start university life and then as they move into their professional careers;

- The Beale Centre is regularly used for social, academic and management events – you are all eligible to use the Centre and Janet has a simple booking process. I would urge you all to visit the Abram Room. This now-finished facility is perfect for small meetings, reading and interviews and is already well used – along with our own Beale Centre. The painting in the Abram Room is by a respected OB landscape painter – well worth viewing;

- We are developing the new database and are going to replacing the old, clunky and difficult to use, legacy system with a new database (In Touch) that will be easier to use, cheaper to purchase AND run (concurrently) and easier to log in to;

- Additionally, we have been urging all OBs to sign the General Data Protection Regulations forms. We were keen to get ahead of the game and have your consent forms returned – to enable you and us to make most use of the database system;

- The Winter Lunches continue to be well attended and Janet organises an impressive range of speakers to come and speak knowledgeably and with passion – all accompanied by a delicious meal. I would particularly like to thank Mike Daniels for his ‘chairing’ of these meetings over the last few years and our best wishes go to Maggie, who is in hospital today – hence Mike not being here and we wish her a speedy recovery;

- Various OB sporting clubs continue to participate at local and national level and we are delighted that The Magpies are enjoying a renewed lease of energy and on-target to recruit more youngsters, as well as Fives, Golf, Cricket, Tennis all enjoying a range of matches and events;

- On the subject of sporting excellence, we should publicly record the achievements of many OBs in gaining national caps, sporting milestones, awards and trophies – Jack and Sam Maunder, Dom Bess are recent flag-flyers, as is Alex Steele – now the national Ladies singles and doubles Fives’ champion. It was especially poignant to see Vic Marks give Dom Bess his first Cap, with just a few short words.....Though I chuckled at Mike Atherton in the Times who noted that whilst there was much similarity between Vic and Dom (Devon, Somerset, Blundells, spinner, etc), Dom would be ‘provably better with the bat and definitely and considerably more athletic in the field’. All inspire a next generation of School and OB sporting stars;

- We held the second Ladies Lunch in February. A broad section of the community was entertained and enjoyed fine fare and it was particularly pleasing to have a number of wives of former staff attending – who have all made their own indelible contribution, in various ways, to the life of the school in the past;

- An early summer OB cricketing lunch was held in the Ted Crowe Box, at Somerset CC, organised by Grant Dee Shapland and ably supported by Nigel Preston and Christian Brook. A full-house attended, including luminaries from the 70s and 80s (amongst others, Overtons, Champions, Malby's, Taveners, Brooks, Coes, Morgans and even an Ali Deighton Gibson) and there was also sighting of our very own TMS pundit, Vic Marks and we were graced by the presence of the Lord Lieutenant of Devon – though this time in his less formal 'Vic – do you remember.....?' role. Actually, I think it was the other way around.

- John Hollands recently launched a new tome and the event was held, also in the Ted Crowe Box at Somerset CC. It was also a delight to see Sir Christopher Ondaatje there, in support. Our OB President represented the OB club;

- The 'professions' and mentoring events continue to see OBs and the Blundell's community punching well above our weight in experience, innovation, success and support. OBs continue to do well in the hospitality sector and there is clearly an enduring theme of professional hospitality wherever the OB community are. Indeed, OB Will Palmer opened Parsons in London (to go with his other successful venture). Fay Marschler of the ES said:

'A paper placemat is the menu and wine list. Shellfish of the day and fish of the day are written on the white tiled surrounds of the small – seats 32 – room, in the middle of which is a chilled trough full of open wines. From several vantage points the writing is impossible to see, which encourages interaction with jolly staff. I view nearly all the dishes as irresistible...'

Jay Rayner said: 'I'm intoxicated by the food. Some great restaurants are anticipated with sweaty expectation. But every now and then a place like Parsons comes seemingly out of nowhere and delivers plates of food you just can't forget.'

- On this culinary subject, I must record our thanks to the Thurlstone Estate (and therefore, particularly the Grose Family), who have provided today's wine for our lunch. As ever, this generosity is hugely appreciated and makes a significant contribution to the day.

- Please do look at the Diary and website events' pages to ensure that you don't miss out on one of the events and come and join in. I'd like to highlight the 150 Years of Blundell's rugby on 8th December. Places are already being booked; so get in early to be at the sure to be a memorable event.

- Regarding other areas of sporting brilliance, several OBs ran in the Russell with Rob Backus beating 37 mins, as well as older OBs showing impressive form, including Roly Sykes, who had just arrived on a long-haul flight from Australia and pitched himself straight into the Russell – impressive; but perhaps showing the usual Blundell's grit and determination – combined with a healthy dose of can-do craziness.

As I mentioned, your committee continues to keep the OB club and its activities 'on the road' ably supported by Paddy and Janet, as well as the superb, behind-the-scenes, support of Sue Beale (as ever) and Jenny Park– my sincere thanks go to all.

The committee has hosted the Senior and Prep School Senior Leadership Teams (now a regular event, held in the depths of January) and will again host OB parent's to lunch before respective Speech Days.

The Committee includes the immediate past Head Boy and Girl and their involvement, contribution and comments to our wide age-ranging membership is extremely valuable; as we seek to include OBs of all ages in our planning and events.

Each committee member now has a 'portfolio' lead area; where we are able to draw on particular professional or interest/skill to develop our ideas.

In particular I must mention and thank Richard Giles, who steps down from the Committee after providing immense support to us for many years, based on his extensive teaching background, as a member of staff, as well as a parent. I always thought that a good test of the usefulness of any change to what we have ever done, was 'would it pass the Richard Giles Test? – "been there, seen it, done it, or it did or didn't work"' was normally enough test of possible effectiveness. Fortunately, Richard will continue to be able input his considerable experience to good effect through ongoing membership of the Peter Blundell Society

committee – and its stewardship of the ER Crowe Memorial Fund. I would like to publicly thank all the committee for their time, efforts and support and continued interest and endeavours

I also must say two special thank yous, too. Firstly to Amber Oliver, as she leaves later in the year to join her husband Kevin on his forthcoming posting to USA. We will have time to express our thanks for her tremendous assistance later in the year, but it is right to formally acknowledge her very real supportive work – without which the School's and our joint initiatives and events would have been half as successful.

The second is obviously to Nicky Huggett, our Head. We have been truly blessed to have her support, practical inputs, advice and friendship and whilst we will use the OB parents' lunch before Speech day to formally present her with an appropriate leaving gift, I want to formally note, in my annual report, her contribution to our cause and in developing the culture that allows us to realistically deliver on the aims and ethos of the OB Club.

I hope you will agree that this is a busy, relevant and vibrant Club and we rely on your support and input to ensure that we continue to meet the objectives I stated just now.

Richard Swarbrick – OB Committee Chairman