



# RADLEY

A Tutor wrote to me last week to tell me about a Social Prayers that had been given by a Shell on a difficult topic . . . that had received a standing ovation. In the Steeplechase yesterday, it was lovely to see senior boys encouraging the juniors, perhaps particularly those for whom the event is not their natural metier. At the Winter Jam last Friday, I was particularly impressed that a Shell boy should feel confident enough to write and perform his own song by himself in front of 150 boys, including many from 6.2. He brought the house down. On Saturday, another Shell boy read the notoriously difficult first reading of the carol service with real distinction in front of a packed Chapel. Shell boys are already at the heart of the backstage crew and the Video Unit. Shell boys sang solos in the Partsong – no easy gig.

All those examples make the same point. Of course, not all boys find their confidence quickly but there is something supportive about the Radley culture that allows them to. Perhaps the highlight moment for me of the term was the ‘Red Army’ (the self-styled rugby supporters’ club who have not in the past always endeared themselves to me) using half-time in a Bigside game to move the focus of their raucous enthusiasm to another pitch . . . to support the somewhat astonished (boys and parents) of the lowly Midgets 6 side. Something about that is special.

As we reflect on a busy term – and I never fail to be surprised both at how quickly it passes and how much gets packed in – there is much to celebrate. Academically, I have been particularly pleased to see the continued growth of debating. After last year’s headline successes of the leading groups (and we hope they can repeat that), what has been noticeable is the culture that is developing, seen in the number of debates and the numbers attending debates. Seen in the new initiative that has had eight Sixth Formers teach the fundamentals of good debating to all Removes. Seen in the quality of preparation for the debates on a Thursday evening: less recourse to cheap laughs and empty rhetoric and more research and intellectual weight. Seen, of course, in the keenly contested senior Inter-Social competition and the roar of the large crowd in Coffee Shop as results were announced. G triumphed (narrowly) over D. The new Deputy Head (Academic) described debating as ‘intellectual Bigside’. I agree with him.

Staying on academic matters, can I encourage three topics of conversation over Christmas. As ever, I would encourage you to ensure that the boys are thinking about the world beyond the gates of Radley: 2024 will be an election year in the US and probably the UK. We have major conflicts in the world that need nuance and knowledge to navigate. Please help them to think, and think well, about such things; perhaps particularly discuss with them – as part of our wider digital ‘conversation’ - where they are getting their news from . . . an increasingly important question. Secondly, can I encourage the value of using the break wisely to consolidate progress made over the term, to identify areas for improvement and to fill gaps and, above all, to keep things ticking over so that it does not feel like the first month of every term is spent recovering lost ground. Thirdly, please buy your son a book for Christmas. Give him money to buy a book or two. Read it/them with him. Develop some reading goals with him. You may have seen an article in a recent Bulletin from the Deputy Head (Academic), Mr Porter, on the importance of developing a habit of reading and we are launching a review of this next term. Your support will be hugely valuable.

There have been some amazing individual academic achievements this term. Eight boys – itself very impressive – qualified for the British Mathematical Olympiad Round 1 and one of them, Kelvin, has qualified as one of only twenty in the country for a training camp (held in Hungary) for national selection. It is a senior competition; he is a Vth Former in C. Well done also to two boys – Bernardo (H, 6.2) and Kim (K, 6.2) – who have already secured places at Cambridge in this year’s process: for Maths and Music respectively.

The reason why they have already been successful is that the academic assessment is held early for organ scholars – so this is a stunning musical achievement as well. We have now had three successful organ scholarships at Oxford and Cambridge in the last two years: a real example of and tribute to the musical

provision at the College. As ever, the number and quality of events has been wonderful: a varied festive programme in this week's Christmas Concert, three beautiful carol services, the Partsong competition (well done to E), a Winter Jam, Faure's Requiem, the Music Flood week in local primary schools as part of our partnership programme, the Choir's visit to Salisbury. The Hudson String Prize: a wonderful evening with a mesmeric winning performance (of a piece by Mendelssohn) by Wallace (E, 6.1); well done to him on his place in the prestigious National Youth Orchestra and the Junior Royal Academy. Two separate choral scholarships to go with the organ ones. And, of course, perhaps most importantly, singing in Chapel day-to-day: I was delighted to hear several Shell groups at cocoas with me this term, when asked what the best thing about Radley was, say . . . 'Chapel singing, Sir'. They might have been saying what I wanted to hear. But I don't think so.

We were treated to a visual feast – over 200 lighting cues and amazing costumes – in this year's College Play: Rose Lewenstein's 'Darknet'. It was wonderful to see so many involved with a cast of over fifty on or behind the stage. Particular thanks should go to those with lead parts who led us deftly through what was challenging material . . . the Director and I agreed that it was a year's PSHE syllabus on one evening. Thought-provoking and profound. The Haddon Cup was more light-hearted and, as ever, the 6.1 script-writers and directors drew great performances from the Shells: the denouement in the winning play (well done to C) drew an audible audience gasp. Impressive.

It has been a wonderful rugby season. There is something special about the successful pursuit of an unbeaten season. We have a remarkable eight this year: congratulations to the players and coaches of the 4th XV, 6th XV, Colts 4, JC1, JC3, Midgets 1, Midgets 3, and Midgets 4 sides. Bigside and JC1 both reached the national quarter-finals with JC1 still to play their game early next term. Three boys have had international trials. Pride of place goes, however, to Orlo (6.2, C) who finishes five years at Radley having not missed a minute of match-time since he joined. The club won every 'block' fixture. And for the stats minded . . . the collective difference between Radley and our opposition was more than 3000 points. All those points have been scored on very wet pitches and I want to make a particular point of thanking Adam King and his staff for all their hard work on the pitches and the grounds: they always serve us fantastically, but this has been the most challenging of terms.

It is rare to have a Lord Lieutenant's Cadet; it is rare for a boy to gain an Army Scholarship: both are prestigious. This year we have both: well done to Arthur (6.2, F) and Thomas (6.2, G). They are but two highlights of a very successful CCF and outward-bound programme; it is all too easy to miss the regular trips – a 'Three Peaks' Challenge, a Climbing Trip, the CCF Field Weekends, the D of E expeditions - that are such a normal feature of Radley life: I am grateful to all dons and wider staff who plan and take them. And as I watched and took part in another excellent Remembrance Parade, I am reminded of why such things matter.

We say farewell to two members of Common Room this term. Cedric Ploix has graced the Languages Department and D Social and will be remembered for his style, his wit, his brain, and his phenomenal piano playing: his leaving concert to a packed Silk Hall will not be forgotten by any there. Our loss is Brussels' gain. Peter Taylor has been a dedicated Radley Chaplain and now moves on to Eton; he has wisely guided and led us in Chapel, quietly offered care, support and comfort without ever seeking the limelight and has been a wonderful old-fashioned schoolmaster: in sport, in CCF, with Partnerships, with Charities; teaching both History and Theology. We will miss them both.

We face challenging times as a sector. I expect most independent school governing bodies are preparing for offsite strategy sessions early in 2024: we certainly are. But as I review the above, we should be positive too. We are in good shape; we know what we are trying to do. And we are doing it.

A family member of a new operational member of staff said to me at a drinks party at the start of term that he had known nothing about independent schools before his partner applied. He had looked at our website and was wary about the 'propaganda'. But having arrived, met the staff and, most importantly, the boys, his conclusion was that we did what we said we do . . . and it was good. I might introduce him to Sir Keir Starmer. And when I see the value of the contribution we make as a College through our Partnerships work – with an emphasis on true mutually beneficial partnership, not a self-indulgent ticking of bureaucratic boxes - I am sad that what we do should be under attack.

Amidst all the success on the one hand and amidst the tedious regurgitation of arguments for and against independent education on the other, let us remember what matters. I received a note from a parent after their 6.2 son left in the Summer. I hope he will not mind me quoting it.

*“Radley has in my mind produced a proper education. I do not measure that in academic or sporting results, but in the person; [be can] work with people who have had no such privileges. He appears to have manners and kindness. I cannot, or could not, have asked for more’.*

Amen to that.

A wonderful Christmas to you all.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Moule', with a horizontal line underneath.

**John Moule**  
**Warden**