

## President's Report to the OPC AGM on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Welcome to the first (and hopefully last) Old Pauline Club AGM to be held on Zoom!

That we are not able to hold this year's AGM at School as a prelude to the Annual Dinner highlights, if further evidence was needed, what an extraordinary and perhaps anti-climatic way this is to end the Club's year.

A review of activities in the last year can best be covered under five headings – **Communications, Social Events, Relationship with the School, Sport and Strategy.**

It is generally recognised that **Communications** are one of the great strengths of the Club not only because it engages with the greatest number of OP's but also because it is high quality. Monthly eNewsletters are sent out to nearly 7,000 OPs; this is out of a total membership of over 10,000. The bi-annual *Atrium* magazine is posted to 8,300 OPs as well as to current Paulines. The eNews has been revamped, with a number of Main Committee members providing the introductory message and it currently features five eminent OPs from whom will be chosen the "Pauline of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century."

Another important element of Communications is the **OPC Website** which was redesigned and re-built earlier this year. It now is much more user-friendly and can be managed and updated very easily. Those that have visited it in the last few months will have seen that there have been many more news items posted, including videos showing various classical music performances during the Lockdown and links to YouTube, including, for example, Dan Snow and Paul Cartledge on the History Timeline series. Recent back editions of *Atrium* and this year's monthly eNews are now all available on line.

For so many OPs, not just the younger ones, electronic communications are now an important aspect of life, and this has increased significantly in recent months as many of us have become familiar with Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meet. There is also an easy way for OPs to communicate with each other, for social, mentoring or business purposes via **St Paul's Connect**; the Pauline Community's own version of Linked-In. There are now about 2,000 registered users, including 1,400 OPs.

As to the Club's **Social Events** – immediately after last year's AGM, we had a most enjoyable Annual Dinner at the Honourable Artillery Company's base in the City, when OP Major James Kelly of the Scots Guards was the guest speaker. Our other main event was the annual Feast service at St Paul's Cathedral in February followed by a Drinks Reception and Supper at Mercers' Hall, where the Club continued the tradition of presenting the School Librarian with a number

of rare books for the Kayton Library. It was attended by 100 OPs together with many U8th leavers and their parents. The warmth with which we were received by the Mercers' House Warden and SPS Governor, Adam Fenwick, was much appreciated. There have been also been reunion events during the year, including those of the 1959 and 1979 School 1<sup>st</sup> XV's and a number of Year group reunions organised by the School. We continued with the monthly 'drop-in' Drinks event at a central London venue in the form of the 'Third Thursday Drinks'. Although these were much enjoyed by those OPs of all ages who came along, there were not really sufficient numbers to justify continuing with them, so we are still trying to find the most appropriate way of having a regular drop-in event at a London venue providing a 'social hub' for the Club.

Some events have inevitably been postponed or cancelled, including the Annual Dinner which should have been tonight. As you will have seen we have re-arranged the Dinner for 29<sup>th</sup> October, when John Simpson will be the guest speaker, and the portrait of Mark Bailey will be unveiled, which again should have been tonight. We are considering retaining the autumn date for the Annual Dinner in future and having a summer Drinks event at a central London venue in June. This would be in addition next year to the biennial Earliest Vintage Lunch.

**Our Relationship with the School** continues to burgeon . We rely heavily on Ellie Sleeman's team in the Development & Engagement Office not only for all the administration of social events, large and small, but also for the maintenance of the OPC website, the preparation of the eNews and other communications. We are most grateful for their contribution to the Club's activities.

Ellie's team also produce the School's excellent termly Events brochure giving information on a very wide range of events (music, drama, socials) open to a variety of audiences whether they be Paulines, parents, OPs or everyone in the Pauline Community.

You will not have failed to notice that fundraising by the School has become more prominent in the last year. All of us will have received information and updates on the progress of 'Shaping Our Future', which has made an excellent start. Various committees involving governors, parents and OPs have been set up and I, along with some younger OPs, are on Ellie Sleeman's Fundraising committee and hopefully we are able to make useful contributions.

As to **Sports**, the various team sports of rugby, football and cricket continue to be played at the excellent facilities at Thames Ditton with varying degrees of success and OP involvement. The Colets Health Club continues to thrive but the enforced closure for the pandemic lockdown will give rise to a number of challenges when they are permitted to re-open. However, it is better

placed than most other such businesses in the locality to recover. OP Golf and Fives continue to flourish. In an effort to coordinate the recruiting activities of the team sports and to enhance the relationship with the School, we have established a new position of OPC Sports Director; Jack Turner will be formally confirmed in this role at this meeting. Other sports initiatives have taken place this year, particularly in golf and cycling, which has increased enormously in popularity in recent years. Last July there was a successful inaugural Pauline Golf Day at The Berkshire, organised by Jon Morgan and Johnny Robertson, Chairman of Governors, and open to OPs, Paulines, their parents, school Governors and school staff. Last September there was a first outing of the St Paul's Cycling Network, organised by OP, Hugh Roberts, again open to OPs, Paulines and staff. More such events are planned and they should become regular fixtures in the OPC calendar.

And finally to **Strategy**. The Strategy Review Group continues with its deliberations on the issues identified to date and will be putting forward options and recommendations to the Main Committee later this year. The guiding principle continues to be to identify ways that the Club can remain relevant to the greatest number of OPs. That must mean broadening our appeal to OPs of all ages.

As mentioned earlier, the end of the year has been disrupted and the postponement of the Dinner was a great disappointment as, not only did we had an excellent speaker lined up, but also because it meant that we would not be able to mark on a timely basis the departure of two of the most influential members of the School in recent years - the High Master and the Surmaster. Mark Bailey has led and guided the School through a period of enormous change, during which time he has faced major challenges -- the re-building of the greater part of the school, launching a major fundraising initiative and dealing with historic abuse issues. If ever the Governors are to be congratulated on choosing the right person at the right time then the appointment of Mark Bailey was it. Richard Girvan has also made a significant contribution in his 17 years at St Paul's, with eight being in the demanding role of Surmaster. Under their guidance the School has continued to excel and flourish on all fronts during the last decade. They have both been good friends of the Club and have always been supportive of our aims. It is certainly hoped that both will be able to attend the Dinner on the revised date in October when we can show our appreciation in a more personal and tangible way.

In a few weeks' time there will be nearly 200 boys leaving St Paul's at the end of term and joining the ranks of the Club. Unfortunately we will not have the opportunity to speak with some of them at the traditional end-of-year events such as Apposition, the Apposition Dinner at Mercers' Hall and at the Leavers' Ceremony. They will, nevertheless, receive the usual gift from the Club

of the much-coveted red laundry bag containing a number of OP-themed items and a welcome letter detailing what they can expect from the Club.

Sadly in the last year we have lost two Past Presidents. Firstly, David Cakebread (elected President in 1992) died in October at the age of 89 and, more recently in April, Nick Carr (who was elected President in 2009). Special mention should be made of Nick. No other OP in recent times has had a longer, continuous active involvement with Thames Ditton, Colets and the Club. He played for many years in the 1<sup>st</sup> XV, and subsequently in the Vets, in over 700 games, serving as 1<sup>st</sup> XV Captain, Club Captain, Chairman and Treasurer. He was an active member of the OP Lodge and Master in 1998. He was elected a VP of the Club in 1995 and served as President from 2009 to 2011. He was a director of Colets for many years; with his most recent contribution being overseeing the major refurbishment completed a couple of years ago. We owe him a great debt of gratitude for all that he contributed to the Club.

While mentioning OPs to have given great service to the Club, many thanks are due to Simon Bishop who retired as Editor of the OP News magazine at the end of 2019. Throughout his 12 years as Editor he consistently produced interesting, entertaining and high quality magazines. As mentioned earlier it is recognised that one of the Club's strengths is the excellence of its Communications with OPs and this is in no small way due to his efforts. His final hurrah as Editor was to suggest that a change in the name to *Atrium* would be timely - along with a change in design. This took place for the autumn edition and was well received. As his successor we are lucky to have Jeremy Withers Green, who has made a most impressive start in the role with an excellent spring/summer edition and I am sure that he will continue to produce high quality editions of *Atrium*.

Also I would like to thank Alan Day for his contribution as Hon Sec for the 4 and a half years to 31<sup>st</sup> December and as you know by now, he has handed over to Sam Turner who will be able to add a welcome younger perspective, not least in social media expertise, to the running of the Club.

I would also like to thank Terry Knight who has retired after many years from his role as OPC Surveyor having made a significant contribution to various developments and initiatives at Thames Ditton, involving Colets and the Gaps houses in particular. I am pleased to say that Sam Hyman has now taken on that role.

Finally Rob Smith has now come to the end of his four-year period as Deputy President, President and Immediate Past President. I would like to thank him for all that he has contributed and achieved in that period.