

Gad's Hill Gazette

Issue 09
July 2005

The Newsletter of Gad's Hill School

I'll charm the
air to give a sound,
While you perform your
antic round. *Macbeth. ACT IV Scene 1*

Students from Gad's Hill School had the benefit of top thespian training in order to take on would-be actors from all over the UK in a nationwide night of Shakespeare.

The BBC chose July 3 not to be its Twelfth Night but the ONLY night when schools and students from all over Britain were invited to take part in the BBC Night of Shakespeare.

In a bid to keep students of today in touch with the 17th century dramatist, the BBC came up with this unique night of Shakespeare, allowing students all over Britain to simultaneously perform some of the Bard's finest works – abridged to just 30 minutes- live on stage.

In the case of Gad's Hill, one of only a handful of Kent schools to be selected, the task in hand was Macbeth – or 'the Scottish play' as superstitious thespians prefer to call it – played out before a packed audience at The Sevenoaks Playhouse.

The production, supported by staff, proud parents and friends from the four participating schools was the culmination of months of hard work by the students at Gad's.

Some 400 schools nationally took part in the unique dramatic challenge at 100 different venues. All students were supported in advance of their one-night of fame with workshop guidance from the BBC, as well as extra work in-house to hone their performing arts.



In order to ensure the Macbeth battle scenes were played out to their best advantage, Gad's Hill School also sought advice on stage combat from Brian Nocella from the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts (LAMDA).

Paul Wadey, Head of English, said: *"The pupils demonstrated great enthusiasm and commitment and made excellent progress in the run-up to the event."*

"The 33 students from Year 10 really excelled themselves. They delivered a superb performance and made both their parents and the school very proud."

The play, which was adjudicated by a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company, drew widespread acclaim, especially for the title characters of Macbeth, played by Jak Modena, and his venomous wife Lady Macbeth, played admirably by Rupinder Shokar.

Jane Tranter, Controller, BBC Drama Commissioning says, *"July 3 was a fantastic opportunity for everyone involved to witness Shakespeare's stories brought alive in the most involving and entertaining ways for young people."*



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Restoration of Dickens' orchard unveiled

A project to lovingly restore Charles Dickens' old orchard garden at Gad's Hill has come to fruition.

Staff and pupils at the school, which now occupies Dickens' old home, had the chance to see the fruits of recent labours when the restored orchard was unveiled to the public in the Spring.

Dickens was particularly fond of his gardens at Gad's Hill and several apple and pear trees which the author planted back in the 1860s are still standing in the old orchard.

Also standing is an old Black Mulberry tree, Dickens' favourite and the first thing he saw when entering the kitchen garden from the house.

The Black Mulberry is quite unusual, with a heart-shaped leaf and edible fruit. In the 1860s, owning a Black Mulberry tree was on a par with owning a Lear Jet today!

Although the original still stands, staff at the school thought it appropriate to plant a second tree to mark the school's 80th anniversary this year and former pupil Joan Thornton, who was at Gad's from 1946 to 1952, performed the honours.

Mrs Thornton, a retired optician who now lives in Herne Bay, said: "The tree reminds me of the old school motto – "think clearly, feel deeply and bear fruit well."

As part of ongoing work to restore the house and grounds to their former glory, a team of workmen have rebuilt the old stone wall, which was in a state of collapse, and carried out additional planting in the orchard area.

More than 50 former pupils of the school gathered at Gad's Hill for the annual Old Gadshillian Reunion lunch when Mrs Thornton planted the tree to commemorate the day and the anniversary year.

Gad's Hill School Headmaster David Craggs said: "The school has been carrying out a number of improvements in recent years, including the building of additional classrooms. However, we have always endeavoured to ensure everything is in keeping

with the character and traditions of Charles Dickens' old home.

"Last year, we cleared a large part of Dickens' old kitchen garden, unearthing his old greenhouse and pigsty. Restoration of the orchard was a natural progression."

Gad's Hill, where Dickens died in 1870, opened for the first time as a school for young ladies in 1924. It became co-educational four years ago and today is a thriving independent day school, with more than 340 pupils aged from three to 16.

The school has invested almost £700,000 on improvements to the school in the past four years to bring it up to modern standards, while retaining its Grade I listed heritage.



Gad's Summer Fair is a knockout!

Glorious sunshine brought parents out in droves to support the annual Summer Fair at Gad's Hill School.

King of the Jungle, comedian Joe Pasquale, opened the fair and signed photos and autographs in his inimitable style before pupils, parents and staff pitched in for a sponsored 'It's a Knockout' contest on the playing field.

Maths teacher Rosemary Moss and her team of sexy schoolgirls took first prize for their fancy dress, with two more teaching teams tackling a valiant bunch of parents over a range of enormous inflatables on a booby-trapped assault course.

The day was organised by the Friends of Gad's Hill School and joint chairman Lois Watson said: "It was a fantastic day and the weather couldn't have been better."

The Pimms Tent went down a treat with parents while the children's favourites included Hook-a-Duck and Dress-A-Scarecrow. Plant and produce stalls, a karaoke contest, raffle, tombola and range of craft and have-a-go events completed the action, which raised the magnificent sum of £2,000 towards refurbishment of the school library, together with the purchase of new books and equipment.



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High jinks for last Gad's girls on the roof!

Eleven Gad's Hill school leavers made history this year – as well as making their mark on the 80-year old school.

The 11, who followed a decades-old tradition by scrambling out on the school roof to sign their names in the lead, weren't given a ticking off by Headmaster David Craggs, but a cheery smile and a handshake!

For 2005 is the last year that leavers from Gad's Hill will be of the fairer sex. The school became co-educational five years ago and next year's 36 leavers will include 23 boys!

Tradition has it that leavers are allowed to sign their names in the lead on the roof of the school before departing for sixth form or pastures new.

Until now, all the 1,000 or so names on the roof are those of girls – with the exception of a remark "Charles Dickens was eer" – almost certainly NOT the genuine thing, although Gad's Hill was the author's final home and the place where he died in 1870 while completing *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

Headmaster David Craggs said: "This is the last time we say farewell to a girls-only year and in 2006, we will see a mixed group of students graduating from Gad's Hill."

He added: "This is just one of a number of changes made recently to bring Gad's into the 21st century - but I think Dickens himself would have approved!"

Mr Craggs confessed: "When I joined the school five years ago, I was a little alarmed to find that it was perfectly normal practice for students to be allowed out onto the roof

on their last day at school. However, it is an old tradition and something which we supervise carefully. The views from the roof are magnificent, quite apart from anything else!"

A number of high-flying business and professional women are listed among the names engraved on the roof.



Charity Challenge

While most pupils at Gad's are looking forward to their summer holidays as a chance to relax and have fun, the Headmaster and his three children are psyching up for a marathon charity cycling challenge!

Joseph (8), Alice (10) and George (12) Craggs have set themselves the challenge of cycling 150 miles from one side of the UK to the other to raise funds for the Medway Maritime Hospital, where mum, Mrs Lizzie Craggs, is a nurse.

In a stunt dubbed *The Sea to Sea Challenge 2005*, the tenacious trio, accompanied by their father, will get on their bikes to tackle some 150 miles in just four days!

The family are all keen cyclists and enjoy getting away from suburbia for fresh air and fun.

However, this summer's cross-country cycling stint is their biggest challenge to date.

Scheduled to take place at the end of July, the children – together with the HM! - will set out from Workington in Cumbria, to cycle a distance of 150 miles from the Irish Sea to the North Sea, taking on terrain a world apart from the relative plains and plateaux of Kent!

Their journey will take them through the stunning scenery - and unpredictable weather - of the Lake District, across the Pennine Hills through historic Northumberland before finishing at the mouth of the river Tyne.

While the West-to-East route made infamous by Emperor Hadrian and that historic wall is renowned for its wild and untamed scenery, it is also a daunting task – at any time of year.

The challenge therefore presents the three children with a formidable task but one they hope to complete in just four days and, in doing so, earn some financial support for the Will Adams Cardiac Unit at Medway Maritime Hospital, where Mrs Craggs works as a Staff Nurse.

Mr Craggs said: "The children have always

enjoyed cycling and we generally have a few days away in the summer holidays. This time, they thought it would be a good idea to help raise money for a local worthy cause while putting themselves through the paces of cycling a serious distance each day."

The Sea-to-Sea route will see the children cycling up hills at over 2000 feet - twice the height as the highest hills in Kent. And, if that wasn't enough, they will have to cycle between 40 and 50 miles each day without the luxury of a support vehicle!

If anyone would like to sponsor Joseph, Alice and George in their endeavour and help to give much-needed support to the busy cardiac unit at the Medway Maritime Hospital, please telephone 01474 822366



Gad's Activity Week

A non-stop whirlwind week of fun and games marked a special Activity Week at Gad's Hill School.

Instead of running trips on random dates throughout the term, it was decided to pack the entire programme into one week – as well as embracing a whole range of other activities, including Sports Days and the annual and hugely popular DT Day.

Year 9s ventured the furthest afield, with a trip to Ypres and the Belgian battlefields.

There, they visited both English and German cemeteries, noting the differences between the two, and looked for names of relatives who died in World War 1 and who are commemorated on the famous Menin Gate.

Year 7 students stayed closer to home, visiting the Historic Dockyard at Chatham, where they learned about the history of the British battleship, the work of the RNLI and ropemaking.

L4 cleaned cars and U4 helped supervise the little ones on Kindergarten Sports Day.

L5 carried out a range of challenges, under the banner 'Discovering Science' – repeated later in the week by students in Year 7.

L4 and L5 also each undertook at nine-mile hike – under the guise of a Geography field trip! – and L4 learned about history in the London Dungeon.

In the Junior School, J3 went to Bough Beech Visitor Centre, J4 to the Museum of Kent Life at Cobtree, J5 to Bore Place and Remove to Longfield, where they got involved in tree climbing!

K1 went to Groombridge Place, K2 saw the wolves at Wildwood and KR went to Howlett's. Finally, children in KN went to Minnis Bay, while the other infants and juniors enjoyed a day of magic at the school.

The DT day was its usual splashing success for the Seniors, where this year's challenge was to devise a course along the lines of the popular Mousetrap game.

A chain reaction was started with a bin of water which activated a variety of pulleys and triggers, the eventual aim being to get a ball kicked into the goalposts.....

Beatty won the day, with Haig close behind.

Haig were also triumphant in both Junior and Senior Sports Days, making DT Day organiser and Head of Haig Mrs Natalie Dearnaley a very happy lady!

As part of the school's involvement in the local community, Year 10 pupils arranged for a group of local senior citizens to pop into school for afternoon tea and entertainment.

The pensioners were treated to a reprise of Year 10's 30-minute Macbeth before enjoying tea and scones and a game of bingo, where Alex Beagley and

Josh Williams were able to try out their skills as callers.

Although most of the staff confessed to being exhausted by the end of the week, they and the students voted it a resounding success. Hilary Elkins, who co-ordinated the timetable for the week, said: "The pupils thoroughly enjoyed everything that took place throughout the week. It was a whole week off timetable and, for a large part, they were allowed to wear their own clothes. It was hard work, but terrific fun."



Term Dates

Academic Year 2005/06

Autumn Term

Wednesday, 31st August –
Friday, 16th December

Half Term 17th October – 28th October

Spring Term

Tuesday, 10th January –
Friday, 31st March

Half Term 13th - 17th February

Summer Term

Monday, 24th April –
Friday, 14th July

Half Term

29th May – 2nd June

Academic Year 2006/07

Autumn Term

Wednesday, 30th August –
Friday, 15th December

Half Term 16th – 27th October

Spring Term

Tuesday, 9th January –
Friday, 30th March

Half Term 12th – 16th February

Summer Term

Monday, 23rd April –
Friday, 13th July

Half Term 28th May – 1st June

