

Day School End of Term

Friday 17 December 2021

Headlines:

Thank you, everyone!

Have a good Break.

Dear Everyone,

The last 48 hours has been interesting and what a friend and former colleague might have described as 'squeaky bum' time, but we got there, and the end of term service was uplifting and joyful, and at times overwhelmingly emotional to see and hear the children sing and speak with such confidence – thank you to all of you.

Reading through the reports, it is looking at the *pictures* of your children that brings me up sharp. I have known many of them for almost six years. I have watched them grow up through their early adventures and they are now emerging as young men and women already beginning to look ahead at what's next. They have clear views of their own, and a voice in what happens to them. What a privilege it is to be part of that.

Winter Solstice is on Tuesday 21 December, and many of the celebrations from the ancients have made their way into our Christmas festivities – decorating trees, wreaths, food. Lots of food. As part of Saturnalia, the Roman festival, social order was inverted for the day, and slaves took charge. Not for a moment do I suggest that pupils are slaves, but when Year 7 & 8 were asked this morning in assembly what they would do if given the school to rule over, it was very clear. Lie in bed with an all-day breakfast buffet on the go. Sounds like Christmas to me.

One of the highlights of the school year is our mixed voices Chamber Choir singing as the Lord Mayor throws the switch on the lights of the Christmas tree that stands to the south of St Paul's Cathedral. I don't know quite when it became an artificial tree, but I did notice for the first time this year the conical frame which, seemingly overnight, became magically treelike and very beautiful.

At the reception we host in the school after the tree lighting ceremony, the head gardener for the City of London Corporation explained that every branch component, of which there are many hundreds, need to be fluffed. A job that the gardeners 'really enjoy', he says with a smile. Their work, and indeed all the work that the Corporation's gardeners do throughout the year is truly exceptional. Our school is surrounded on three sides by wonderful planting. The beds in Festival Gardens as I write are a mosaic of brassica, their purple and cream heads laid in a wave pattern. We've been talking to them (the gardeners, not the brassicas) about starting a Forest School in their gardens. I can't wait!

Meanwhile, in Trafalgar Square, there has been a bit of a fuss about the spruce tree, an annual gift from the people of Oslo since 1947 to thank Londoners for their support during the second world war. It has caused a fuss because this year it is looking a little sparse and, as is the way of zeitgeists, whether it is time to change it to an artificial tree.

Near our home is the Tree Barn, a string of lights distance from the hamlet of Christmas Common (yes really). At this time of year, the Tree Barn is all a bustle with people coming from miles around to buy their tree, freshly cut from the tree farm. Hugging hot chocolate, the masked multitudes peruse the cornucopia of Christmas decorations on display in their shop.

We have had to replace all our glass baubles since the arrival of our dog Parker. The possibility of him jumping up and biting at the crystal orbs is too terrible to begin to imagine. So instead, we now have cloth and wooden decorations.

This is not a cheap expedition, either. Brits spend on average close to £80 a year on decorations, bearing in mind that most will have decorations packed and stored from the year before. Since last week, the dog has destroyed one felt Santa, a cotton elf and a mouse in a waistcoat, so the expected capital asset depreciation of our decorations has been skewed on the balance sheet of dangling objects, and not in our favour.

Are you a colour co-ordinator, a mix and match, or a hotch-potch? Do your lights flash like a migraine aura or are they still, like a clear night sky? Do you have a neon reindeer galloping on your roof? All sorts of delightful objects have appeared over the years. A 3D wire robin, with tiny LED lights, and a paper angel, made by a friend, a pink bow tying its wings into a fan are two of the lovely things on our sideboard. Who knows if they will survive the winter from the beast's jaws.

This year we have enjoyed two trees in the school. A real tree decorated in great style by the wonderful Joanne, whose eye for these things is exquisite, and the paper tree made by Pre-Prep. This ingenious tree is a series of interlocked paper boxes, each individually decorated by a child. In its different way, it is also very beautiful and the juxtaposition of the two trees, which stand together on the gallery, has really lifted everyone's seasonal joy quotient.

I'm not the keenest of shoppers, and have mercifully been unaware of *Slade* and other Christmas shopping musak ear worms this year. Intrigued, I've been hunting about for Christmas music for my own amusement. Notwithstanding the world class music we are enjoying, and will continue to enjoy in the Cathedral next week, a dig about in the archives of Christmas stocking fillers has revealed some crackers.

It's been a stinker of a year for many, so, to bring a smile, here is Diana Ross with *The Supremes* in a sassy Motown meets Bond style big band arrangement of *My Favourite Things*, a 1965 cover of the Rogers and Hammerstein number from the *Sound of Music* released on *The Supremes' 7th studio album, Merry Christmas*. (Here with lyrics so you can all sing along). I'm transported. Loud as your neighbours allow!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2brNtAfsng>

And the great Satchmo's, *Christmas in New Orleans* released on a 10" shellac disc played at 78 RPM (explain that to your children!), on the Decca label in 1955.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZ-xfh75cMM>

Ed Blunt fans will have seen this feel-good song and video, but it's new to me. Watch carefully, and you'll see the Mayor's tree at the end.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvx7poy-yXw>



We all know someone for whom gift buying is almost impossible. How about a St Paul's Cathedral snowdome with (feed the) birds? Classy and kitsch at the same time and available in the Cathedral's shop. I checked in the week and there are still some left.

The older I get, the more acute is the knowledge that childhood is fleeting. Embrace it. We are so lucky to share this special place together. As one parent said to me at the end of the Reception nativity play in the crypt of the Cathedral, we wear our luck lightly. What we do together, really matters. Thank you for being part of that.

A final salute to Eileen Ash, English test cricketer who reached more than a century and died this month at the age of 110. She attributed her long life to smiling a lot, liking people, yoga, apples, and most days, a glass or two of red wine.

Cheers everyone.

In whatever way you spend your Christmas break, may it be filled with love, good food and good company, and may your god be with you.

Best wishes,

Simon