

Start of the Second Half of Spring Term, 2022

Dear Everyone

Headlines:

Offers have been coming in for senior schools. Please try to make decisions promptly so that places are not held up for others who might want them, and do let us know your choice.

Warm welcome to Madeline Smith, Music Administrator, and Alison Jemmeson, Year 4 teacher, both of whom joined us just before the half term break.

We start back with Year 8 Mock exams.

The music storeroom has been magnificently refurbished, thanks to the generosity of the Chorister Trust.

Wot I did on my holydaze.

I wonder at what point I raise the topic with our neighbour about the fence, now listing into the camellias yet to bud.

The afternoon sun, sharp and clear after Eunice, strikes hard shadows in the greenhouse. Inside, the geraniums overwintered have held onto a few flowers. But only just. A failure to water for a few weeks had left the leaf growth weakened and, as any fule kno, plants need their leaves to prosper.

Charles Darwin's father kept a garden diary. Taken up by his sister Susan, the diary spans 30 years. Garden historian Susan Campbell has spent 35 years transcribing this wonderful record of gardens through the Victorian period, and is recently published by Unicorn. This kind of detail I find fascinating. Like old school reports.

I had suddenly to go to France at the beginning of the half-term to see my father and stepmother. During my visit, I read my father's school report. He was top of the class, literally. In the 1940s, school reports would rank children. I noted that the numbers of children in the class fluctuated from year to year, some years with 18 or so children, others with less than ten. Why that happened was unclear.

My father's comment was that, as he was consistently top of the class, the work could hardly have been demanding. He found it all too easy. We fell to discussing the modern phenomenon of the obsession with AIs. His view, based on his own experience as a boy, is that AIs only indicate a failure to make a child stretch their thinking.

On my return, and lying in the bath, I read an impossibly difficult paper unpicking the different views on discipline held by Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant and Maria Montessori, whose *Casa dei Bambini* at the turn of the 20th century changed the course of early childhood education for ever. Both held the view that developing autonomy in children was critical for their future flourishing, and moral agency. Kant held that this was to be encouraged through strict disciplines and certain restraints, whereas Montessori held that children are best served if they are given the freedom to be self-directed in a supportive environment. The majesty of the human mind is its ability to hold two opposing ideas simultaneously, and I can see that at our school, we more or less manage to do this.

Other things taxed my seething teeming brain. Travel to Europe, as many of you will lately know, is fraught with paperless paperwork. PCRs and PLFs specifically. Almost a hundred quid for someone to stuff a cotton bud up my nose for a certificate no one was in the least interested in looking at. As nothing is fully connected, except for the channels of my nostrils with the irritation in my limbic system, one begins to wonder where all this leads to.

Under occupied on the train, I started to do a bit of grumpy research into PLFs: Passenger Locator Forms, for the uninitiated, and found myself oversharing on social media, which prompted a flurry of similarly irritable responses from friends.

The day had not started well. The return car park for the hire car was on the North side of the station and, at 6 a.m. in the dark, I could only find the South side car parks. Picture a harassed middle aged overweight bloke swearing in the dark morning mist, running across the station with a bag now significantly heavier with two bottles of Tavel (local favourite of the region) and a jar of my father's fig jam, to the key drop, and wondering how on earth I was going to explain to the concierge by phone later that morning in broken French where I had left the car, and then having to leg it back through the station to Voie 4 for the 6.41 to Paris. Oh, the romance of travel.

Unbreakfasted, my only liquid a cup of tea at 5 a.m. (4.a.m UK time) I became possessed with the desire to know all there is to know about PLFs. Headlines: the idea appears to have been the brainchild of the WHO to track and trace people on the move in a pandemic. The UK government built one online and it is estimated it (the Home Office specifically) will capture vast amounts of private data of some 150 million people coming into the UK, many of them its own subjects. So far, so much money, and to what real end?

Unsatisfied, I read the GDPR privacy blurb that accompanies all this. It says:

We will only process your personal data where it is necessary to perform our legal and official functions. The legal basis for the processing of your data is Article 6(1)(e) of the GDPR – that is, that the processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller.

As the sun begins to break over the horizon, my blood sugar clearly under par, the phrase, 'official authority vested in the controller', fills me with a certain uncertainty. I feel like a character in a dystopic novel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xNnRBksvOU>

Back on home turf, a woman with two enormous and immaculately coiffured poodles attempts to get into a taxi at King's Cross. The conversation with the driver was very colourful. Home at last.

Meanwhile, I've been wondering who first determined the optimal starting positions of the stones on a Backgammon board, I've played for ten minutes at a time against invisible people as far flung as Estonia and Peru at Chess through Chess.com, and won, occasionally. Dawn and I also split the succulents currently in safe-haven in the bedroom and created nine new plants. We potted a box shrub, a replacement for one killed off by blight, and abandoned any hope of cycling this weekend. But we did go to a pop-up cinema and drank wine with old friends we hadn't seen in 20 months and watched a cheerful film.

The dog sleeps. The snow drops are magnificent.

Here is the wonderfully potty, and now deceased, Viv Stanshall's take on a trip out of the city.

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

Here's to Monday.

Best wishes

Simon