

Friday 1 April 2022

Dear Everyone

Headline: *Look out for details of a Tea Towel design competition in the Circular. Our children have been invited by the Cathedral to design a Tea Towel to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee. The winning design will be used on Tea Towels as gifts for staff and volunteers.*

An extraordinary term ends with a tumult of activity. An exciting rejoicing of parents in the PTA quiz, wonderfully oversubscribed and a welcome return of Catherine Arbuthnott as the legendary quizzier. The event marked almost exactly two years from the start of the lockdowns.

With *Messiah* in the Cathedral, we've also had LAMDA and ABRSM exams this week, and a fabulous Ensembles concert held in the Great Room at Bart's yesterday. All these events are just a slice of the range of things your children have achieved.

A huge thank you to everyone, staff, pupils and parents for making this term so vibrant, and for the support of our governors and friends.

Plus, the long-anticipated announcement of the identity of the next Dean of St Paul's Cathedral.

The Queen has approved the nomination of The Very Reverend Andrew Tremlett, currently Dean of Durham Cathedral for election as Dean of St Paul's Cathedral.

Bishop Sarah introduced Andrew to the community of St Paul's on the West steps on Wednesday morning, and soon after he came into school to meet children and staff. Building on the extraordinary work of David Ison, our great friend to the school, we very much look forward to working with Andrew in due course. You can read about him in summary here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/dean-of-st-pauls-cathedral--2>

Last weekend I was in Oxford for a three-day conference on education. Time to digest the very many ideas is needed, and I will write about some of that another day.

However, in another part of Oxford in this springy season is its now world-famous Literary Festival. Author Kate Clanchy was accused of all manner of 'isms in a trial by social media in 2021 for causing offence in her best-selling memoir about teaching. The furore raised questions about what is permissible in books. Publishers, increasingly concerned about upsetting *anyone*, now employ 'sensitivity readers.' The idea is not new, at least in children's literature, where it is important to get the tone and content right for the target market (note the language of commerce) given their age.

Yet the employment of sensitivity readers is increasingly prevalent in mainstream publishing for adults. As author, teacher and journalist Rebecca Abrams argues, the role of publishers is not to "police author's imaginations or tiptoe around reader's feelings". If you are in Oxford on Saturday 2 April, Kate and Rebecca will be interviewed in a debate to be held in Blackwell's Bookshop at 2.00 p.m.

All this brings to mind the Lord Chamberlain's Office which, in a suppressing and depressing act of parliament of 1737 gave that office powers to censor drama – to put a stop to progress. Theatre had in any case been under censorship since the 16th century, so afraid that theatrical performances encouraged dissent, and the act made things deliberately trickier for writers and actors to try out ideas or to be critical of the prevailing powers of state.

When theatre censorship was finally abolished in 1968, it gave rise to the blossoming of some of the most exciting, progressive and demanding drama ever seen on the British stage (and stand-up comedy and improv). Yes, it causes offence for some people some of the time, but like all art, it can provoke and encourage debate and ideas and encourage positive change.

To follow on from last week's letter, art responds to world events. Planned long before the war in Ukraine, the new exhibition at the Barbican, *Post War Modern* is much more alive and pertinent as a consequence of the terrible atrocities happening now.

Paolozzi's fractured mechanistic body form sculptures make more sense with a backdrop of war, as do Auerbach's paintings of abstracted scarred landscapes. The marginalised lives captured by Frankfurter and Baker, two female photographers working among displaced people living in bombed urban environments could have been taken today, and Magda Cordell's huge canvases of what appear to be eviscerated bodies are hard to look at.

Where the work in the exhibition might once have felt nostalgic, especially the constructivist abstracts, they now appear to be back in the room with all the shock and horror they would have created when first made. For me, turning the corner and seeing Frink's small, muscular and malevolent *Harbinger Bird* held the most terror.

Get a baby sitter and go.

And, in the eggy season of Easter, for your inner child, here's the first episode of *Ludwig*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ThMmLVWZo8>



<https://www.trybooking.co.uk/BNSZ>

Have a great holiday, Simon