

How to get the best out of the weather

Friday 13 January 2023

Dear Everyone

Quick note about I1+ scholarships here at SPCS. I've just been reminded that the deadlines are, well, now. Today. Fear not. Do have a look here, and if you're child is in Year 6, do give it some thought. Please read the criteria carefully, though, and let me know if this might be of interest.

<https://www.spcslondon.com/admissions/scholarships>

From my office window I can see a group of children that have moved three wooden benches to create an enclosed triangle. Inside the triangle there is an imaginary house – they don't need props, they can see all the furniture, fixtures and fittings. One child is clearly in charge. It is all very amicable, at the moment, and clearly there is some negotiation going on.

One of my favourite books is a collection of letters and other writings of the Cistercian world from the 12th Century. Among the many tracts of religious contemplation are accounts of house hold management. Managing an Abbey community, it would seem, could be a tricky business.

This week marked the saint's day of the Cistercian St Aelred of Rievaulx, whose Abbey is now in ruins near Helmsley, Yorkshire. These were the kinds of places that I would visit as a child – old ruins and castles – and I would imagine myself as part of whichever community once lived there. Just as the children imagine themselves in the triangle of benches outside my window.

A side-note about old ruins. The heritage business is relatively new, and now these wonderful places are also home to museums and shops and cafes. I can see why, but I do have very fond memories of being able to clamber over the old stones unencumbered by rules and ropes. Much freer to make up my own stories as a result. I wonder about this from time to time and whether we encroach or restrict too heavily on children's own imagination to invent stories. Museums, by example, were once all serious wooden cabinets with polished brass handles I could turn to make steam engine models work and I admired the skill and delicacy of the engineering. Now interactive videos and bright colours abound in a kind of passive entertainment to inform.

The bell goes, and the little group of children dutifully spring back into the world of the school and line up to go back into class. I've no doubt that some part of their story travelled with them back into the school while also being the person they had inhabited a few moments ago, as I had once done in the back of the car, peering behind me at the etched outline of Rievaulx, or Tintern, or Tintagel.

As for these tricky monks, it's probably just as well that I hadn't been told about their drunken revels, fraudulent access to the infirmary to be fed fresh meat, or gawdy dress sense. My poor mum would have had a much trickier time containing my enthusiasm on our trips to piles of old stones.

Many of these places are open over the winter months, which are some of the best times to see and feel their mystery as the wind blows and the mizzle slowly seeps through our anoraks. Or are they cloaks, copes and suits of armour?

Even if you can only gaze out on the gray weather this weekend, you can go somewhere else with Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, Opus 14, here in a live recording from the BBC Proms.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfzGDHt7mJQ>

Have a good weekend.

Simon