voices

PROFILES FROM PAST AND PRESENT ELLESMERIANS



Ellesmere

As the Acting Head of Ellesmere College, I'm delighted that you are looking at Ellesmere for your children.

Ellesmere's total commitment to developing individuals, enabling them to be successful human beings, is something that genuinely marks it out from the vast majority of other schools.

The best thing about this focus on the individual, is that it arises out of a very real sense of family and community.

The Ellesmere community is a wide one, and to have the opportunity to work with all its constituents: pupils, past pupils, parents and past parents, teaching, non-teaching staff, and governors, all of whom contribute to making Ellesmere such a wonderful place to work and to study.

Families who visit Ellesmere comment on what an incredibly friendly place it is, on its great atmosphere: whilst this is always lovely to hear, we do not take this for granted.

It is a friendly and supportive place where there is a genuine care and concern for the happiness of others.



One of the many great things about Ellesmere, is that it is also a very exciting place in which to work. Things do not really stand still here for very long and there is always some innovation that we are considering. Ellesmere College always looks to the future, we can always strive for better, and leading the desire for constant improvement makes the role stimulating and highly enjoyable.

I trust you will enjoy taking a look around our website but, even more importantly, that you will come and visit, meet our staff and meet our students, whom we rightly feel are the best advert for Ellesmere and the remarkable young people that develop at the school.

Mrs Vicky Pritt-Roberts





Lesley Turnbull

Parent - Managing Director,
Wish Upon A Dream

When Abby and I first viewed Ellesmere, it was apparent immediately to both of us that this was the school.

It was quite strange but after seeing Ellesmere we just didn't bother visiting the others. I loved the atmosphere both inside and outside the classroom and Abby felt the same. Obviously I had already done my homework on facilities and academic standards and saw no problem with any of that.

As a parent I was slightly apprehensive about letting Abby go to boarding school as we are very close. However I thought it would be a good preparation for University and indeed life itself. The proof would be in how quickly she settled in. Jan Purcell, her house mother, was amazing in every way, and Abby soon started referring to her as 'my Ellesmere Mum'. That is indeed praise and Jan was certainly key in getting Abby settled and feeling safe. So my experience as a parent has been positive, if my Abby is happy then I am happy. But it wasn't just Abby; the level of communications and support that I received too was excellent, I still felt a part of my daughter's life and growing up.



Ellesmere has made Abby a much more confident and positive person. Due to my own personal situation, it was hard for Abby to leave me and hard for me to let her go. However, I have seen her grow from a girl to a young woman; she was praised recently at my charity ball by corporate guests and professional friends, remarking that Abby had grace, poise and amazing social skills. I was so proud to see her that night and that was when I realised how she had grown as a person and, I believe, someone that Ellesmere would be proud to call 'one of ours', I am certainly proud to call her my daughter and my friend.

My lasting memory of Ellesmere will be sitting in the common room with the wonderful staff, that are now my friends, with Mr and Mrs Purcell who both Abby and I truly adore; proud of the decision I made to let her join Ellesmere. I will walk away with the knowledge that Ellesmere College is where my daughter became a confident, strong young woman and know that she is now prepared for the outside world and the next adventure.

Parent

James Baggaley

Head of Geography, St Luke's Housemaster



I joined the College in 2007 and, since then, I have never looked back.

Ellesmere fits perfectly with my vision of education - a focus on the individual, a rounded education that focuses on all a pupils' strengths allowing them to excel in areas that inspire them. The same can be said of my self;
I am always motivated by the variation within my days - literally no two weeks are the same. In my roles of Housemaster, teacher and sports coach I am fortunate to see pupils in a number of different environments, this allows me to see pupils who may not be good in one area prove their worth in another.

As a Housemaster of 6th Form boys I am able to see the boys learn new skills, become self sufficient and more confident young men. Under the simple moto of 'do your best and look after each other' St Luke's House is home to young men from a number of different nationalities and it is always impressive how they all unite and learn and share traditions and cultures. This plays a massive part in the development of citizens in an increasingly global world and thus, to be part of this, is incredibly rewarding.

Outside of the House I work with a range of different pupils throughout the day in my role as a teacher of Geography. Preparing pupils for exams is a crucial part of teaching any subject but more importantly is preparing pupils for their studies beyond their formal education. How to study plays as big a part in a pupils day and, again it is always good to see pupils develop these skills.

As a sports coach I see the pupils in yet another environment. Coaching rugby, hockey and cricket allows me to develop all the positive characteristics sport is designed to do. I am always encouraged by the development of the group or the team. Ellesmerians are tough and determined people who do not give up and continually punch above their weight which, in my opinion, are excellent characteristics.

Ellesmere is an exciting place which is busy, dynamic and full of variety and I am proud to be a part of what it aims to achieve.



"It is a fundamental trait of the school that teachers are not simply there in the classroom but are also part of all aspects of the fabric of the school."

Louise Paton

Head of History and Classics 2002 - current

I remember driving through the gates of Ellesmere College on a very sunny afternoon as a cricket match was taking place; it was the summer of 2002.

I had come to drop off my application form for the position of Head of History. I was on crutches at the time having broken my ankle and, as I struggled out of my car, I was met by a very friendly student who kindly offered to help me. When the interview day arrived I was very nervous as I knew that as well as separate interviews I also had to start the day being observed teaching a lesson. My nerves were very quickly put at ease when, upon finishing my lesson, I was given a round of applause by the class of Year 9 boys! These two instances really set the tone of the place and it is the friendliness and genuine kindness of the students at Ellesmere that has been one of its most enduringly positive features for me.

Since taking up my position at Ellesmere I have been given many opportunities that I wouldn't have had in another school. It is a fundamental trait of the school that teachers are not simply there in the classroom but are also part of all aspects of the fabric of the school. As Head of History I have climbed the 14 peaks of Wales on a charity fundraising trip with the Sixth Formers, visited great European cities such as Venice and Berlin with history students and on one camping trip to mid Wales watched my tent float away into the river Tanat at 3 am. Again though one student offered moral support saying that I was not to worry as they had managed to save their stash of chocolate and I was welcome to share it! There are definitely worse people to share adverse situations with than an Ellesmerian. Fundamentally what makes Ellesmere a unique place to work is the sense that we are all in it together, teacher and student alike, and this is manifested in so many different ways. It is a real pleasure to work with both staff and students.



When I came for my interview it was very clear that teaching at Ellesmere was going to be very rewarding experience and so it has proved. It is a supportive environment and I feel that as a teacher I am genuinely appreciated by the students who clearly want to learn. I gain as much enjoyment from teaching the young ones who are just starting at the College as I do the Sixth Formers who are about to embark on university. More importantly at Ellesmere I have the freedom to teach to students who are interested and enthusiastic and keen to learn. It is always lovely to see students walk out of the school at the end of the school year clutching a string of A*s but I feel the school genuinely also celebrates any students who have achieved their potential, even if that means struggling to achieve the C grades they need; all students are valued. This is ultimately my ambition for all my students at the start of the year, that I can help them to achieve their potential as well as inculcating a love of my subject.

Finally the reason I have stayed so long at Ellesmere is the personal satisfaction I gain from working here. As Head of History I am not only required to teach but I also have a key part to play in determining the curriculum students follow. During my time here I have also appreciated the sense of being treated as a professional with opinions and ideas that matter. I am able to help influence decisions that have a real impact on the students at the school. The aspect I most enjoy however is the fast moving pace of change at the school. It is a dynamic place to work and very forward thinking and as a head of department I have been made to feel that I can make a valuable contribution to this. The best example I can give is the introduction of the international baccalaureate which was introduced less than a year after it was first mooted. Within six months I found myself on a training course in Athens and 6 weeks later I was teaching it! Ellesmere is definitely an exciting place to work and is constantly challenging but more importantly rewarding.





Lorraine Evans

Parent to Todd, Zoe and Melissa

As parents, you always want the best for your children. Ellesmere stood out to us because of its friendly, welcoming atmosphere and the range of diverse opportunities and facilities.

Having a son Todd and twin daughters Zoe and Melissa, it was important to us that all three of them could attend the same school and when we visited Ellesmere, we knew it would be perfect for all of them. All three of them joined the Lower School aged 8 which we found to be a very caring and stimulating environment and as they progressed through the school until the age of 18, we were very happy to see them develop into the well-rounded individuals that they are today.

Throughout their time at Ellesmere, they received great support and encouragement from both inside and outside the classroom and were provided with endless opportunities. Communication between the school and ourselves was an important factor for us and we were keen to be involved in the education of our children and their personal progress. The regular period grades, school reports and parents' evenings always kept us well informed.

Sport was one of the main attractions for us and we were pleased when our children became increasingly involved with various sports teams. Not only did this improve their confidence and skills, it also gave us the opportunity to get to know other parents. We found it most enjoyable going to watch matches on a Saturday, cheering on the teams and catching up with new friends over tea and cake in the Dining Hall.

Thursday afternoon extra-curricular activities were also popular with our children throughout their time at Ellesmere. In their younger years, they were encouraged to do things like horse-riding, mountain biking, drama and art. As they progressed through the school, they became involved in the CCF and Duke of Edinburgh, resulting in all three of them completing their Gold awards – a very proud moment for us and a worthwhile achievement for them.

Whilst in the senior school, they were lucky enough to take part in various school trips, some of them overseas, including a Rugby and Hockey Tour to South Africa and Duke of Edinburgh expeditions to France and Canada. Academically too they were all supported very well by the school and achieved all they wanted and more to enable them to move on to university. They all particularly enjoyed the responsibilities given to them over the years from "show rounds" to being made captains of sports teams, prefects, house captain and even head girl!

We feel Ellesmere has encouraged our children to grasp every opportunity and make the most of life. They have all made a very strong set of friends who have continued to support each other through the new stages of their life and we all have some very happy memories to look back upon. Ellesmere has taught them valuable lessons and raised confident individuals who are now well-prepared for whatever future life may offer them.



Col Mike McMahon

Old Ellesmerian 1979 - Colonel Australian Arm

Since embarking on my British Army career, a mere 21 days after leaving Ellesmere College and then joining the Australian Army 26 years later, my journey's geographical dimensions have spanned three continents and many more societies and cultures.

My career has taken me to countries, not as holiday destinations, but rather to serve my country, have included: Northern Ireland, Greece, Macedonia, and Albania, Kosovo, Kuwait, Iraq and three tours of duty in Afghanistan.

The human dimensions of my journey have been, at times, dangerous and I have often been genuinely scared and frightened for my life and that of others in my care. I can honestly say that, besides the excellent military training I've had, it was Ellesmere that gave me the self-confidence, mental and physical capacity and humility to deal with the unexpected happening unexpectedly, which it will in any walk of life.

Ellesmere made me aware that life is not a rehearsal, this is the real deal. Every one of us has it within us to be whatever we want to be, and as individuals we all have a duty to do what we can, however limited you feel your contribution is, to make a difference to people less fortunate than ourselves.

What would I say to the Ellesmerians of today, those who are so fortunate to be in such a thriving, dynamic and successful community, 'Carpe Diem', or as we say Down Under: "Go for it, mate!"

Kok Liang Chew

Old Ellesmerian - Law

Think "Tom Brown's School Days" and you can imagine what Ellesmere was like during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Not as grim but for a Malaysian used to hot weather and great Oriental food, Ellesmere was a shock.



It was a cold, dark Gothic looking school with food which was so bad that we survived on toast and chips, pot noodles and a weekly run to Coral's Chinese takeaway.

Yet, to my surprise, Ellesmere changed me. I entered as a boy who was not sports or academically inclined, and somewhat of a nerd. I left, more mature and independent, enjoying sports and intellectually curious. I learned that friendship can bridge race, culture and creed. Most of all, Ellesmere pushed me to explore my physical and mental limits, and instilled a 'can-do' attitude in my life.

This was apparent to me when academically; I went on to obtain a degree in Economics & Law, a LLM and two postgraduate diplomas in Arbitration law and Islamic law. I qualified as a Barrister and practised in London, before returning to Malaysia to qualify as a Malaysian lawyer, setting up a legal practice.

Sports wise; I represented my university in fencing, coming in as quarter-finalist twice during the British Inter-University fencing competitions and representing the University of Wales in Europe.

In between running my legal practice, I joined the Malaysian Territorial Army and trained in counter-insurgency and jungle warfare. I used to tell my colleagues that as bad as conditions were during training and exercises, at least military rations were much nicer than my boarding school food! I rose to the rank of Major and helped set up Territorial Army societies in tertiary institutions to encourage students to join the military.

In my mid 40s, looking for more challenge in life, I left to work as a lawyer in Oman, United Arab Emirates and Singapore, where I recently qualified as a Singaporean lawyer.

To current Ellesmerians; you should enjoy and make full use of your time in Ellesmere. It may not be apparent now but the life lessons you learn in Ellesmere will stand you in good stead later in life. Thereafter, always remember, you are never too old or too late to fulfil your dreams.







Mai Jenal nee Ehlers

Old Ellesmerian 1991 - Architect and Project Manager at Wentz & Co GmbH, Frankfurt, Germany

When I was twelve our family visited friends whose sons had been to Ellesmere College as German exchange students.

Their exciting tales, as well as my romantic notions of life at an English boarding school led me to beginning planning my very own adventure abroad: as a Lower 6th student at Ellesmere.

It is difficult to summarize the positive impact the year at Ellesmere had on my life. The effects were manifold on many different levels that helped formed me as the integral person I am now. I would like to concentrate on two main aspects:

Essentially it was the curriculum at Ellesmere which led me to rediscover my love for the arts and creativity. Being "only" an exchange student, I enjoyed the freedom of choosing a very curious set of A-levels: Maths (my all-time favourite subject), French (so not to lose that language which under layers my newly acquired English) and last but not least "for the fun of it" Art. Without disregarding the excellent Maths A-level course I was allowed to thrive on the new horizons of French literature we were reaching for, essentially it was Art A-level which proved to be vital for my further development.

The absolute freedom of the Ellesmerian art course aiming to develop an independent creative personality with his or her own artistic agenda was at first hard to grasp for a student used to "learning how to exercise a technique" or "answering a set task".

But after hard work it finally paid off: I rediscovered the enjoyment of artistic creation, my passion for the creative process. Without A-level art at Ellesmere I am not sure if I would have gone on to study architecture and become an architect.

Setting language abilities aside, Ellesmere provided me with a complete set of "social" challenges to be mastered. Naively I arrived in Great Britain believing firmly that "we as Europeans are all the same" and that prejudices are "just that". Learning that there are sometimes minute, sometimes substantial cultural differences, gradually understanding and most of all respecting them was a never ceasing task throughout my time at school.

But it laid the foundation for the international life I have since been leading: After completing my architectural degree at a Germany university I was able to receive a Fulbright scholarship for a year at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, USA. Further equipped with this significant experience I started my working life at a well-known American architectural firm in London – none of which I believe would have been possible without my year at Ellesmere.

Only after having spent six consecutive years "abroad" I finally felt the need to return home to Germany – taking with me a set of fond memories, a love for English culture and the never abating need to return every once in a while to what has become my second home.

Emma Snow

Old Ellesmerian 1997 - Finance Director at the
Terrence Higgins Trust Trustee of Anti-Slavery International

It was the teachers at Ellesmere who first suggested that I should apply to Oxbridge. They really encouraged me to aim high and work hard to achieve my goals.

That encouragement meant that I left Oxford University four years later with a first class Chemistry degree. I then trained as a chartered accountant specialising in the 'not for profit' sector in the City of London. After stints at international development, social enterprise and human rights charities, I am currently Finance Director at the national HIV charity Terrence Higgins Trust and also a trustee of human rights charity Anti-Slavery International.

My time at Ellesmere laid the foundations for my future career in the charity sector. I was a founding member of the school Amnesty group, which sparked an interest in human rights and I volunteered with Operation Christmas Child and other charities as part of the community service scheme. It was at Ellesmere that I developed my love of rock music, much to the dismay of anyone who had to listen I'm sure, but this interest later led to managing the bars for Glastonbury, Reading and Leeds festivals with Workers' Beer Company.

One of the reasons I chose Ellesmere for Sixth Form was the vast choice of subjects - I could study for Art A-level as well as the sciences. No-one had to fit into a pigeonhole. Later, alongside working full time, I completed an evening Fine Art degree at Chelsea and I continue to make and exhibit Art.

We were allowed a reasonable level of independence in the Sixth Form and this meant that the transition to total freedom at university came as less of a shock - I already knew how to motivate myself to work, balance socialising with study, cook basic meals and wash my own clothes. It may sound simple but a lot of my fellow 'freshers' from other schools struggled!

Looking back now, I often think about Ellesmere's attitude to diversity, where everyone is a valued member of the school community, and I try to translate this into my own work. I remember that each of my classmates had a specific talent, whether academic, sport, music, art or drama - I'm now convinced that this wasn't a coincidence but the result of the College's efforts to make sure everyone who attended the school achieved something they could be proud of.













Jennifer Sampson

Old Ellesmerian 2000-2005 - Civil Engineer, Atkins Ltd.

A career in engineering had never entered my head until I was taken to a Careers Fair by Dr. Gareh at the end of Fifth Form.

I immediately came home and changed my A-Level choices, and went on to study Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Edinburgh. It was due to the genuine interest of the teachers in our futures, and the help and encouragement I received that enabled me to follow the slightly 'less-trodden' path, and I will always be grateful for this.

On graduating I joined Atkins, an Engineering Consultancy, where I have now been working for 18 months. I am a civil engineer in the Rivers and Coastal department, working on river management and flood defence schemes, as well as environmental projects such as habitat creation. My work is extremely varied, which I love, and it was Ellesmere that first let me realise this need, and more importantly, the ability, to lead a diverse life, enabling me to experience lots of new activities and subjects.

I have recently become graduate representative for the Atkins Water and Environment sector. This involves working with other sector representatives to welcome and integrate new graduates as they settle in, and connecting the graduate community across the company. This role means a lot to me, I think largely due to my time boarding at Ellesmere. It was through living with my peers that I had the most fun, but also that I saw the hard bits - the homesick friends, and the fallings-out (not to mention the early starts if you wanted breakfast!). It taught me the importance of consideration towards others, and that has stayed with me ever since, as have the best friends I made there, soppy I know, but true.

As well as providing me with an academic education Ellesmere taught me the value of keeping perspective, the importance of a supportive community, and the power of tradition, whether it be the humbling Remembrance Day service, or the joyful strawberries and champagne on the Terraces. However, I must also warn you, that to this day I have an instant reaction to check that I'm smart when I walk into a Church or Chapel, I still forget that you can't get everywhere in 5-10mins, and I sometimes find myself keeping off the grass!

There's so much on offer at Ellesmere, and I would encourage any student to take full advantage of this, get involved and give it a go!



Dave Anders-Richards

OE Ex-Head Boy - Student, University of California, Los Angeles

I began my life at Ellesmere as a very shy person. I loved the arts, but outside of them I found it very difficult to connect with others.

My childhood had been filled with times when I was afraid to talk to others of my own age, and I myself was filled with massive insecurities. So, naturally, when I first joined Ellesmere, I stuck to what I knew. I auditioned for plays, joined the school's choir, and began to find people like me, whom I could talk to comfortably. That was all I planned -- to go on living my life in pretty much the same way I always had, keeping within myself, and never branching out to discover all the other amazing things that were out there to be explored. There would have been nothing wrong with that if it was all I really wanted to do, but in my heart of hearts I knew that I wanted more.

If you had told me then that one day I would go on to be a senior cadet in the school's Combined Cadet Force, I wouldn't have believed you. If you had told me that one day I would travel to South Africa as part of the 1st XV rugby team, I would probably have laughed in your face. If you had told me still that I would go on to do all that, as well as play cricket and hockey, take part in an adventurous training course in Scotland, debate in an international competition, sing in music festivals, and meet people from all over the world, all while being able to take my acting to the level where I would become a member of the National Youth Theatre, I probably would have fainted. And yet, that's what happened. Ellesmere gave me every single opportunity I could have ever asked for.

The school and its staff support any activity from novice to professional - in the arts, academics, anything! But the thing I really loved is that, unlike other schools, you are able to do all those things at the same time. There is nothing at Ellesmere that says you have to be just a rugby player, or just a musician. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Everyone at Ellesmere encourages you to go out and be all that you can be; take part in as many activities as you want, study to get the best grades you can, learn as much about as many walks of life as possible. It's the ethos of the school's education, and it's obvious in all aspects the college.

When you become an Ellesmerian, you're not just becoming another student at a school. You are entering into a family. Just like a good family, they believed in me when I doubted myself, gave me their support when I faced strife, and pushed me to strive for everything I wanted at every turn. The friendships and bonds I made at Ellesmere are some of the closest I have ever had, and I cannot describe how much they have helped me throughout my life. Because of Ellesmere, I became a more confident person, learned invaluable life skills, and gained a place at one of the most prestigious universities in the world. Without its holistic education, I would not be the person I am today.





Ellesmere

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