

ONIA

OLD NOVOCASTRIANS' ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE



RGS
GIVES

ONA is the magazine for the
Old Novocastrians' Association

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JONNY CATTO (ON 97-03)

ONA PRESIDENT

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this winter 2024 edition of the ONA Magazine which celebrates the act of giving and the incredible history of philanthropy within the RGS community.

It is also a distinct honour to be taking on the role of President of the ONA at such an important milestone in the history of the school as we prepare for our Quincentenary celebrations which run officially from Spring 2025 to Spring 2026.

Our centenary year is a timely reminder that the history of giving at the RGS goes back to the school's very foundation, as it was in 1525 that Thomas Horsley bequeathed his estate for the formation of a grammar school in Newcastle. Five hundred years later philanthropy is still at the heart of the RGS community.

In this edition we will celebrate the many and varied forms of giving that are so important to the school.

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WELCOME

GEOFFREY STANFORD

HEAD

As the RGS approaches its quincentenary, I am honored to introduce this edition of the *ONA magazine*, which highlights the transformative power of philanthropy in sustaining our mission. This is more than a celebration of giving; it is a tribute to the enduring spirit of generosity that fuels the RGS community and a call to action for all Old Novocastrians.

Our vision has always been to inspire every student who passes through the school gates on Eskdale Terrace to make a positive contribution to society, an aspiration deeply embedded in the school's charitable objectives: to educate young people in the North East and improve lives in Newcastle upon Tyne and beyond. This noble endeavour is made possible by the unwavering support of individuals like you.

In recent years, we have expanded our impact through innovative partnerships. Today, we run over 50 projects across 100 local State schools, reaching over 10,000 young people and working with over 700 teachers—focusing our efforts where the need is greatest. Our philanthropically funded partnership teachers have enabled us to magnify our influence and deliver on our promise to uplift educational opportunities in our region.

Equally vital is our bursary program, which has transformed lives for generations. My own journey, and that of my wife, was made possible through similar support, so I know firsthand how life-changing these opportunities can be. Each RGS bursary student enriches our community, from achieving top national results in academics to excelling in music, sport, drama, and service.



This year, we are supporting 90 very deserving, full bursary students, and with your help, we can go even further. If we secure the funds to offer 26 new places in September 2025, we will have empowered 500 students since 1997—a fitting milestone for our quincentenary year.

As we look to the future, we want RGS to stand strong for another 500 years, continuing to shape lives and strengthen our North East community. But to achieve this, we need your support. Each of us has benefitted from the philanthropy on which the school is built—starting with Thomas Horsley's founding pledge in 1525, and continuing through the contributions of so many, commemorated in the

new stone plaques on our building and the donor bookcase in the school's reception.

These are challenging times, and the need has never been greater. If you feel you have benefitted from the RGS community, then I implore you to pay that forward, there can be no more of a pivotal time. Every contribution, no matter the size, brings us closer to our goal of transforming lives and building a brighter future. Join us in this vital mission—your support makes all the difference.

Together, let's honour our past by investing in the future, ensuring that RGS remains a beacon of excellence for centuries to come.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

BY **LOUISE PIFFERO**, ARCHIVIST
(STAFF 21-PRESENT)

The act of giving is at the core of RGS Archives. Whether that is through the donation of archive material to the collection, sharing memories of RGS or through volunteering, we are so grateful for all the support from our community in sharing and preserving our heritage.

Photograph of Eleanor Nicholson and James FX Miller (former RGS Headmaster), taken at RGS on Novo Day, 2002. Published in *NOVO* magazine, 2002.

Over summer 2023, RGS Archives hosted Sophie Bond on a volunteer placement to catalogue the Eleanor Nicholson Collection. Here she shares her experience:

What made you want to volunteer at RGS?

Research for my Master's dissertation [at Newcastle University] consisted of extensive archival work and understanding the field from a research perspective made me want to understand it from an archival perspective. This six-session project at RGS was perfect for giving me an insight into the day-to-day roles and responsibilities of an archivist, and helped me decide whether this could be a potential career path.

Tell us about the project you worked on.

The items in this project were donated by Eleanor Nicholson in 1994-95 and included items from her time in the Civil Defence during World War II, her duties as a Nationally Trained Fire Guard, and her role in helping the war effort.

What was the most interesting item/part?

The most interesting part of this project was uncovering the life of Eleanor Nicholson and getting to uncover her story. Personally, the most interesting items in the collection are the letters she sent to Mr Brian Mains (former RGS staff and





Sophie in the RGS Archives

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The most interesting part of this project was uncovering the life of Eleanor Nicholson and getting to uncover her story.

Archivist), alongside some of the items. These letters provided a great insight into Eleanor and who she was as a person, recounting anecdotes from her time on Eskdale Terrace and her work in World War II.

Any challenges?

Stepping into a role I had never been in before; I was pushing myself out of my comfort zone in the tasks I was undertaking. But already being familiar with using the archives as a researcher there were many elements that felt familiar – for example, the reading and categorising of the sources in this collection. However, the most challenging part of this project was understanding and applying the ISAD(G) standard to the archival descriptions when cataloguing the items.

What's next?

This project helped me decide that working in the archives is a career I would like to progress further into. Now, after finishing my 4th year at University, I am moving back home and have begun to apply for jobs to become an Archival Assistant.

Thank you so much to Sophie for all her brilliant work on the project – we wish her all the best for the future!

About the Eleanor Nicholson Collection:



Eleanor Nicholson's Civil Defence Arm Band, 1940s

During WWII, RGS staff and students were evacuated to Penrith. Our school buildings did not lay dormant, they were commandeered as the Headquarters of the Civil Defence Northern Region (No.1). The Regional Commissioner was Old Novo, Sir Arthur Lambert.

Eleanor Nicholson worked for the Civil Defence based at RGS and held the fascinating role of Regional Woman Officer. This was a unique post where her role, in her words, was to find any solutions to any issues affecting women working in any of the Regional Command Centres. She also became a Fire Guard Instructor in August 1944, responsible for training others in Civil Defence how to defuse incendiary bombs. She even got to meet Winston Churchill when he visited Newcastle and RGS, in 1941.



Nicholson's Fire Guard Instructor Badge, c.1944

Eleanor's father was **Robert J Havre** (ON 1899-1902), as was her son, **Paul Nicholson** (ON 54-63). She attended Rutherford College Girls' School, which was at that time based in RGS's former home of Rye Hill.

The collection includes her original Civil Defence armband and Fire Guard Instructor badge.

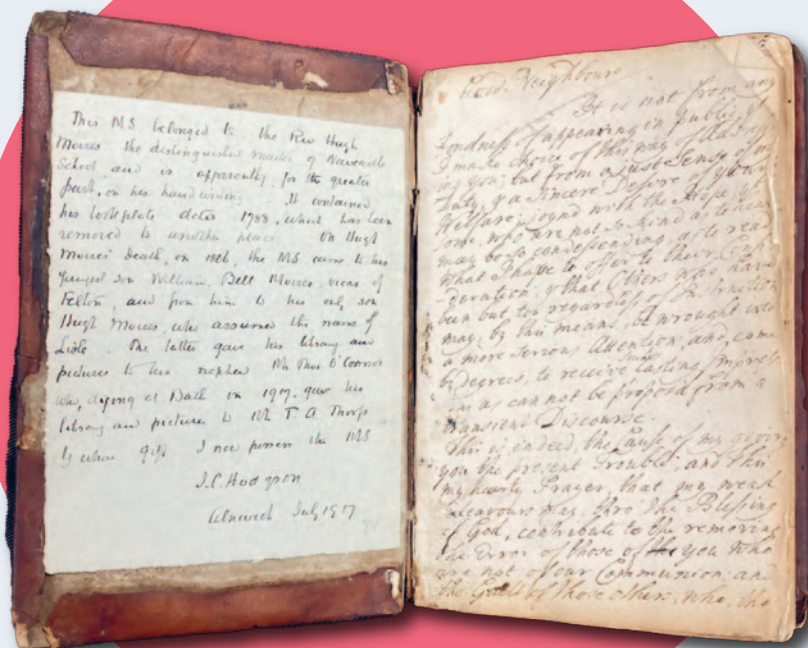


The catalogue is available to explore on our archives website: www.rgs-newcastle.epexio.com/records/ENP

A HISTORY OF THE RGS IN ITS PEOPLE

THE MAN WHO SAVED THE SCHOOL THE REV. HUGH MOISES

BY DAVID GOLDWATER (ON 51-62)



Moises notebook

If Moses delivered the Israelites from bondage in Ancient Egypt, it was Moises in the name of the Reverend Hugh Moises, who saved our School from oblivion. When he was appointed headmaster in succession to Richard Dawes in 1749, the school had existed for little over 200 years.

Moises, the son of Edward Moises, MA, vicar of Wymeswold, Leicestershire, born there in April 1722. Educated first at Wrexham School in Denbighshire, he moved to Chesterfield Grammar School, Derbyshire, under the Rev Dr Burroughs. In 1741 he went to Trinity College, Cambridge, where his elder brother Edward Moises, later vicar of Masham, Yorkshire, was a fellow. He graduated BA in 1745, with a reputation as a classical scholar and shortly after was elected a fellow of Peterhouse. In the same year he became an assistant in the school of his old teacher at Chesterfield, where he continued till 1749. In that year he proceeded to MA.

He followed the eminent classicist Richard Dawes as 23rd headmaster of the then Newcastle Free School, in March 1749, on the recommendation of the master of Peterhouse, Edmund Keene. Keene's family were close friends of Sir Robert Walpole, British Prime Minister from 1721 to 1742. At that time, the school was situated at the Virgin Mary Hospital in Westgate, one of the entrance pillars of which still stands near the Stephenson memorial on Newcastle's Westgate Road.

Moises found the school "almost entirely deserted of scholars" but pupil numbers grew rapidly under his stewardship and when he left there were 133 pupils. Having initially very few pupils, Moises was able to raise standards, becoming admired for his consistent approach, "not only," as Brand observes, "by his great learning and abilities, but by the sweetest manners".

His success in reviving the school's reputation was quickly recognized by the Corporation of Newcastle, who in January 1750 raised his salary from £50 to £120 and on 21 April 1761 they appointed him to the morning-lectureship of All Saints' Church.

On 14 June 1779, he was appointed master of St Mary's Hospital, Newcastle. Although many masters of the time were paid paltry salaries, Moises' combined emoluments will have been in the region of £350 (about £80,000 in today's value).

In April 1761 they appointed him to the morning-lectureship of All Saints' Church, in consideration of the continued success of the school. Described as affable and kind, Moises was assisted by two under-masters, by no means confining his pupils to a purely classical curriculum. English prose composition was taught, regular lectures given on the New Testament, as well as lessons on astronomy and geography, as well as Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

Hugh Moises married well. His first marriage, in 1754, was to Margaret Ridley, sister of Matthew Ridley, Member of Parliament. Margaret was described at the time as "a very agreeable lady, with an ample fortune." Within four years, he had married again, to Bella Ellison "a genteel and amicable lady" with "a considerable fortune." Six years later Ann Boag became his third spouse.

It is interesting to observe the intake of Hugh Moises' school. In Brian Mains and Anthony Tuck's book *A History of the School and its Community*, they note the bulk of the Newcastle Grammar School's pupils came from "the middling sort" – merchants, lawyers and more especially clergy – but also the sons of watchmakers, joiners, cordwainers, and tanners. He lived to see many of his scholars occupy positions of high dignity and importance and took great pleasure in those pupils' successes. Among his more illustrious pupils were the lawyer brothers John Scott, first Earl of Eldon and William Scott, Baron Stowell. The Newcastle antiquary John Brand, who later taught as an usher at the school, and Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood were also under Moises' charge. Of Collingwood, King George III, when reading one of Collingwood's despatches after Trafalgar in 1805, remarked on his splendid English, but then recalled himself that he (as well as the Scott brothers) "was one of Moises'



Moises found the school "almost entirely deserted of scholars" but pupil numbers grew rapidly under his stewardship and when he left there were 133 pupils.



boys". As John Scott, later Lord Eldon, recalled: "He [Cuthbert Collingwood, Admiral Lord Collingwood] and I were class fellows at Newcastle. We were placed at that School because neither his father nor mine could afford to place us elsewhere".

A great increase in both the school's and Moises' success came from the provision of scholarships endowed by private donors during his tenure. Most notable amongst these were the Crewe Exhibitions to Oxford University, Nathaniel Lord Crewe, Bishop of Durham, having left a very considerable fortune.

After nearly 40 years Hugh Moises resigned the mastership of the Grammar School on 14 June 1787, when his pupils presented him with an elegant and valuable diamond ring, on which was engraved the following motto: 'Optime Morenti' (the best of the best). That year Moises was presented to the rectory of Greystoke, Cumberland. He was succeeded by his nephew, the Rev Edward Moises. After living at Greystoke for some years he resigned the rectory, at the patron's request, and he spent the last years of his life in Newcastle. In 1801 he was appointed one of the chaplains to his old pupil Lord Eldon, who had become Lord Chancellor. Moises died in Northumberland Street, Newcastle, on 5 July 1806, in his 85th year, leaving two sons, Hugh and William, from his second and third marriages.

A fine white marble memorial by John Flaxman was placed in St Nicholas Church, now Cathedral, in 1810 by a subscription (400 shillings) amongst his pupils, with an elegant Latin inscription composed by Sir William Scott, Lord Stowell.

As we approach the 500th Anniversary of Thomas Horsley's will establishing the RGS, we can truly thank Hugh Moises for its survival through its leanest years into the modern era. The 20th Century motto which will be familiar to many alumni 'Discendo Duces' – by learning you will lead – is a suitable epitaph to the high standards he set.

**Above: Moises notebook cover
Left: Moises memorial plaque,
Newcastle Cathedral**



THE STEP BEYOND

At the recent Newcastle ON dinner, **John Humpish** (ON 73-81) captivated the audience with stories from his diverse career in marketing and fintech, and the life-altering event in 2019 that reshaped his path. Speaking with ONA's Caroline Briggs, he shared how that pivotal moment led him to reevaluate his priorities and discover a new sense of fulfilment through giving back.

Andy & John pose by sign at Land's End



Old Novo John Humpish had barely left John O'Groats when his Fitbit watch gave up and died.

He was at the start of a journey from the north of Scotland to Lands End in Cornwall, that would eventually take 79 days and raise more than £100,000 for the London Air Ambulance.

But just as John was finding his stride, his FitBit had already had enough.

"We had to wait until we got to Inverness to buy a replacement and on the first day, I wore it I did 65,000 paces," John laughs.

"For months I was a world leader, getting badges and medals and honours galore in the world of Fitbit.

"But the second I finished the walk I fell off a Fitbit cliff! Instantly, it was telling me it had all gone so horribly wrong, and I was consigned to the Hall of Shame."

John is visiting the Royal Grammar School for the second time this year, barely a month after finishing the epic walk. An experience, he says, he is still trying to process.

His first visit came in April as he passed through Newcastle on the meandering route he was taking from John O'Groats. By this point his journey had been defined by terrible weather, and punctuated by the kindness of strangers.

Reaching the sun-drenched finish line some 1,200 miles later, John and his walking buddy Andy Moore had recorded three million steps.

"Crossing the line we didn't really stop to look around and consider what we had done, but as soon as we did, it was like a switch had been flicked and we were euphoric.

"We definitely realised we had achieved something out of the ordinary and there was a huge sense of relief too."

Reaching Land's End to be greeted by family and friends was the culmination of a journey that started in April 2019 when John was a man with the world at his feet.

The successful businessman, who co-founded the mould-breaking Starling Bank, was 53-years-old, happily married with two teenage boys, and in seemingly robust health.

Just hours earlier he had watched his beloved Newcastle United lose at St James' Park – an event too frequent to be considered foreshadowing.

Walking down the steps from King's Cross Station to continue his journey home to Berkshire with his boys, John was gripped by a sudden breathlessness.

And it was at this precise moment of misfortune that a series of fortunate events was triggered.

As John instinctively lowered himself to the ground, an off-duty GP happened to be on the same staircase. He quickly realised something was dreadfully wrong.

Within seconds the GP was performing life-saving CPR, and an emergency call was intercepted by the London Air Ambulance. The simple fact John was on the stairs when he suffered what turned out to be a massive pulmonary embolism ultimately saved his life.

The service only responds to seriously injured patients in the capital – usually caused by traffic collisions, stabbings, falls, and incidents on the rail network.

"All Air Ambulance London heard was a middle-aged man had been found in difficulty on a staircase at King's Cross," explains John. "Obviously I felt very slighted by the term 'middle-aged'!"

"But the minute they heard that description, they knew I could have suffered trauma injuries falling down the staircase," John says.

"If they'd known it was actually a medical emergency the helicopter wouldn't have been dispatched."

The trauma team flew from their base in Whitechapel, landing on the busy Euston Road. It was then John experienced his next piece of good fortune.



Day 14 descent towards Devil's Staircase



Within seconds the GP was performing life-saving CPR, and an emergency call was intercepted by the London Air Ambulance.

"For reasons I don't understand even today, helicopter crews carry clot busting drugs but road ambulance crews don't," he says.

"They took out this enormous needle and it went straight into my chest cavity and basically just exploded the clot there and then.

"The air ambulance doesn't attend medical emergencies, road ambulances do. Road ambulances don't carry blood clot-busting drugs, but the air ambulance does. That's why I am alive today."

A further hour of CPR continued with John "completely beaten to a pulp" on the concrete stairs, but he was far from being out of the woods.

Vital organs began shutting down as he was flown to St Bart's Hospital where doctors were pessimistic about his odds of survival. As John lay in an induced coma his elderly parents, wife, and children filed in to say their goodbyes.

But John hadn't read the script.

"I woke up six days later," John says brightly. "Much to their surprise!"

"Then the consultant came around, quite a dour Scotsman, and he told me I'd have short and long-term memory loss, cognitive impairment, and I wouldn't be able to walk.

"At which point I said: 'have you got any good news, doc?' John laughs.

"I was in intensive care with 63 tubes,

electrodes and goodness knows what else going in and out of my body, but I felt actually very, very good... partly because I was on unbelievable amounts of medication.

"I knew I absolutely loved every facet of my life and I was going to fight to restore every bit of it."

Just eight weeks later John left hospital: first stop London Air Ambulance HQ where there was a surprise in store.

"I went into this meeting room and counted 25 people – all of them were involved on the day: road traffic police, the helicopter crew, doctors.

"They were all there," John explains, visibly choking up. "Every single one of them. Walking in and seeing their faces and hearing about their roles in saving my life absolutely destroyed me emotionally. Even talking about it now still gets to me."

Doctors later discovered the embolism had been caused by an undiagnosed rare blood cancer called polycythaemia vera (PV).

John by Wells cathedral





Left: John at St Mary's Lighthouse; Right: Day 31 Hartside summit 1903ft after 6 mile climb

With treatment, John's PV is non-life threatening or, as John describes it, a "couple of tablets a day and you're done" condition, dismissing the diagnosis with a wave of the hand.

While the pulmonary embolism and cancer discovery wasn't the end of John's life, it proved to be an ending of sorts, ushering in a new dawn that he hopes will define the rest of his days.

"In terms of my business career, I don't particularly have anything to prove to myself or anyone else," he says.

"This is a new phase of my life. I've got energy, time, and skills, and the right thing to do is to channel those into the right causes.

"And I was absolutely clear coming out of that meeting with the Air Ambulance that I was going to do something to pay it forward. Anyone in the same position would."

With the dour doctor's pessimistic prognosis still fresh in his mind, John came up with the plan to walk from John O'Groats to Land's End.

"I wanted to do something that was quite iconic," he explains. "It's a challenge but also grounded and relatable, the sort of thing that anyone with walking boots could have a go at doing."

John was joined on the walk by his friend Andy for the trek with a target of raising £120,000 for the charity that saved his life.

Other friends joined them for stretches of the walk, and some days were harder than others, especially when soaked to the skin. Conversation was sporadic, listening to engaging podcasts a must. The handful of occasions they walked more than 20 miles in a single day were "a killer".

From the beauty of the Scottish Highlands to jarring desolation under

66

We raised lots of money but for me it was quite an inward personal thing given the medical history. I wanted to close that chapter forever, and I wanted to close it in a positive way.

Spaghetti Junction in Birmingham, it was, John says: "Britain in a nutshell".

John and Andy started the walk on 1 March aiming to complete 100 miles a week – broadly 18 to 20 miles a day – for five or six days with one day's rest.

"There was a ton of goodwill and we attracted a lot of sponsors and supporters along the way, so I carried that responsibility quite heavily," he says.

"Everywhere we went people asked: 'What on earth are you doing?' When we explained they were kind of bewildered. We had hotel receptionists, taxi drivers, waiters say: 'Here's a tenner. We think what you're doing is phenomenal'.

"It was incredibly humbling.

"We raised lots of money but for me it was quite an inward personal thing given the medical history. I wanted to close that chapter forever, and I wanted to close it in a positive way."

Before co-founding Starling Bank in 2015 John enjoyed an eclectic and global career.

He attended RGS from junior school until the age of 16 when his family relocated to the West Midlands in 1981. It was there he finished his education.

A degree and Masters in mechanical engineering at Birmingham University followed before he pursued a career in marketing, a sector John admits was unusual for an RGS boy.

First stop was the confectioners Mars where John oversaw household brands like Bounty and Milky Way and enjoyed the perks of the job – free chocolate.

Stints at Procter and Gamble and JP Morgan followed, before he went on to run the marketing function globally at French insurance giant AXA, Deutsche Bank, and Zurich.

From there he entered the "Wild West" of telecommunications at Vodafone before seeking a new challenge in the fintech sector. At the time of his embolism, John was working on three different start-up companies, M:QUBE, Ziglu, and Onvestor.

"My work was basically international from the day I graduated. And what became quite interesting is that as I got further and further away from all things Newcastle and north-east, I met almost nobody in my professional environment who was from the area.

"So being from Newcastle became a much bigger part of my persona. The more remote I became, the more I identified with it, and became proud of where I came from."

As a Newcastle United season ticket holder for some 30 years, and with a son studying at the University, John has put down new roots in Newcastle with an apartment in the city centre.

This sense of belonging to the city extends to RGS, a place and time he credits for instilling in him the sense of moral and social duty that has become so important in his later life.

"It was always made clear we were being educated at the preeminent school in the region and there's a great sense of pride and good fortune in doing that," he explains.

"But with that privilege comes responsibility and you absolutely must do your bit for people that are less capable, maybe less fortunate than yourself.

"If you can do more in life to give back, then you probably should, and you'll enjoy it more than you can imagine.

"You've just got to find what works for you. Joining hands and finding ways of doing good is a very powerful thing."

THREADAWARE



But Samena's commitment to the cause is not just about the financial support it provides; it's also about fostering a sense of community.

Although her own children

have graduated – one studying English Literature at University and the other in Medicine – Samena continues to be a familiar and welcoming presence for parents at the school.

"I feel like it's a family. When I come to Threadaware, I feel like I am back home! Sort of like a little community, which I like to be involved in."

For new parents navigating the school's uniform requirements, Samena offers some practical advice: "Bring a list of what you require and come to one of the new parent events. Don't leave it until the last minute because a lot of the popular items go straight away."

"Blazers, jumpers, and skirts are always in demand so it would be a good idea to know the sizes in advance or bring your children to try things on."

Samena encourages all RGS parents to contribute to the cycle of giving.

"If anyone has old uniforms hanging around, please bring them in."

"Items only sell for pennies on eBay, but it makes a big difference here. Parents are doing their bit by passing on uniform to someone who really needs it, and the bursary students benefit too."

"I enjoy what I do. I like to see parents go away happy, it's all I ask for, and I will keep doing it for as long as I can."

For further information, please contact RGS Parent Volunteer Samena at clydevale@talktalk.net or the RGS Development team development@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk

What began as a modest uniform recycling effort has grown into Threadaware, a vital initiative supporting the RGS bursary fund. Thanks to volunteer Samena Syed's dedication, the project saves parents money, fosters community spirit, and funds almost a full bursary each year – all from donated school uniforms.

Like many new RGS parents, Samena Syed was keen to find a way to engage with her new community when her daughter joined the school back in 2012.

Through the Junior School Parents Association, Samena discovered the power of recycling second-hand uniform to support the school's bursary fund.

And thanks to her enthusiasm, the initiative has evolved from an ad-hoc school event, into the much-appreciated and impactful Threadaware project.

"The JSPA were involved in a whole range of charitable fundraising for the school bursary fund at events like the Christmas fair," Samena recalls.

"They had a range of stalls with things like raffle prizes and cakes, and within that was the selling of second-hand school uniform. It struck me as really good way of recycling clothing and I immediately felt I wanted to get involved."

Initially, Threadaware operated out of a "broom cupboard" – a modest caretaker-sized cupboard jam-packed with donated clothing.

"Parents would come in, or send their children, to have a look for what they needed so I thought that I would take time to set it up properly," Samena says.

"When my children were at school in the morning, I would come in and sort through recycling bags full of clothes, organise items, and dig out clothes for parents who had asked for certain things."

Word quickly spread about the availability of affordable second-hand uniforms and sportswear.

Samena's dedication to organising and maintaining the store did not go unnoticed:

"Parents were so grateful when I started getting involved," she says.

"I see struggling parents who can only just afford the fees to give their children a good education here, so I feel a great satisfaction helping them, helping other

parents, and I often receive little 'thank you' notes in return."

These days the broom cupboard has grown into an organised storage space near the Agora, with racks of blazers and sportswear, jumpers, and balled-up red socks in neat cubby holes.

It is open every Thursday during term-time when Samena arrives to sort through bags of donations and respond to clothing requests from parents.

Demand for second-hand uniform has increased in recent years, boosting the school bursary fund. The money it brings in funds almost 100% of a single bursary every year.


This summer a 'pop-up' Threadaware shop in the Agora raised £8,000 in just two weeks.

"Demand has been pretty steady," says Samena, "probably more so because of the cost-of-living crisis and fee increases, so when we have our sale for new Year 7 parents it is absolutely manic!"

"We're inundated with parents wanting cheaper uniforms."

With second-hand blazers costing just £20 against £70 new, and jumpers costing just £10, the savings for families can be significant.



A portrait of Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate, an older man with grey hair, wearing a dark green suit, a white shirt, and a blue patterned tie. He is seated in a wooden chair, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a blurred wooden interior.

Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate reflects on his RGS school days in the 1950s, where formative experiences shaped his character and confidence, paving the way for a career in law and politics. Now a passionate supporter of the school, he continues to inspire future generations through his dedication to giving back.

A SENSE OF PLACE

“The school doesn’t smell like it used to,” says Lord Kirkhope, taking a deep breath and allowing the olfactory memory to wash over him. Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate is sitting in a sunlit office at the Royal Grammar School, reminiscing on his school days in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Wearing a nostalgic smile, he says: “The Junior School had a distinctive orange smell from the cleansing polish or disinfectant they used.”

“It was the first sensory thing that hit me when I started as a young schoolboy, and it has stayed with me all these years.”

It may have been six decades since the former Conservative MEP roamed the citrus-scented corridors of the school as a young pupil, but his recollections are still as fresh and vivid.

In those distant days, Lord Kirkhope was known simply as Timothy Kirkhope, and, by his own admission, a student of unremarkable academic and athletic achievements.

Yet the formative experiences and education he received was, he says, pivotal in shaping his character and self-confidence, ultimately leading him to the corridors of power as a Conservative MEP for Yorkshire and the Humber for 17 years.

“Because I am not a great academic and I am not a great sportsman, you might say, ‘well, what was the point of coming to Royal Grammar School?’ he says. “There was a certain formality and rigidity about the school, which I suppose nowadays probably may not exist to the same extent, but it was especially important to me because in that in that aim of developing your self-confidence and your character, it was essential.

“It taught me an awful lot of skills in terms of my own self-awareness and so on, which I have developed and used throughout my life. Do I think I would be a different person if I hadn’t come to this school? Most certainly.”

Lord Kirkhope’s story is one of personal growth that took him from RGS to the House of Lords, underpinned by a keen sense of duty to give back to the institution that shaped him.

And it is more than just a story of personal achievement; it’s a narrative woven with commitment to future generations.

Lord Kirkhope’s visit to the school coincides with the judging and presenting of the inaugural Sir Max Hill Debating Trophy.

He explains how the school debating society was one of the most influential aspects of his school life, laying the foundation for his future career in law and, eventually, politics.



Above and right: Lord Kirkhope and RGS Economic pupils at the Houses of Parliament

“School Debating was something I enjoyed. It gave me confidence and developed my ability to argue and express myself, which is essential in law and politics.”

“School Debating was something I enjoyed. It gave me confidence and developed my ability to argue and express myself, which is essential in law and politics.”

“Because of what I learned, I’m willing to listen to the other side and discuss differing views respectfully, which is increasingly rare in today’s polarised political climate,” he adds.

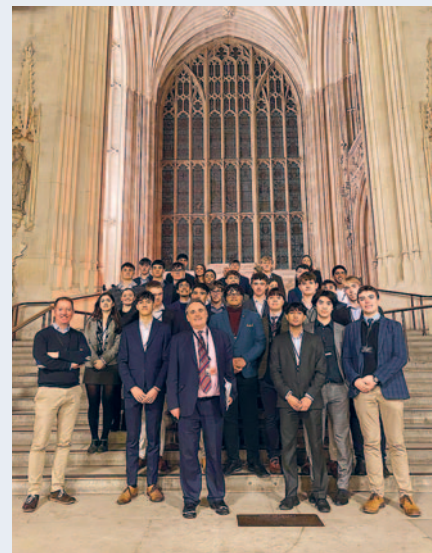
RGS has evolved significantly since Lord Kirkhope’s time. Like the citrus smell, many traditions have been consigned to history with new ways emerging.

“Physically, it’s changed a lot. There’s more choice for students now, both in academic and extracurricular activities,” he says.

Despite these changes, he still recognises the core values of discipline, character building, and self-confidence that remain integral to the school’s ethos.

Even today Lord Kirkhope remains connected to the school and its pupils through various initiatives, such as serving as president of the alumni association and joining the school’s governing body.

For the students themselves, a highlight of Lord Kirkhope’s ongoing association with the school includes a drinks reception and visit to the House of Lords during the annual Economics Tour in London.



The popular event gives students the chance to meet Old Novos who are willing to share their experience of working in the City.

This event is not just a tour – it’s an immersive experience where students witness the workings of government and gain valuable insights into economic and political processes.

“It’s important for me to give back and help young people benefit from my experiences,” explains Lord Kirkhope, whose commitment to his former school is driven by a deep sense of moral obligation forged while he was a pupil.

“With great privilege comes responsibility. I have had a lot of luck and opportunities in life, and I believe it’s important to share my experiences to help others,” he says.

This philosophy underpins his participation in the ‘Learn with the Lords’ program, where he engages with schools to discuss the political process and the role of the House of Lords.

As Lord Kirkhope continues to bridge the gap between past and present, his legacy at RGS is an example of the power of gratitude and the enduring value of giving back.

A PEACOCK IN PENRITH

BY LOUISE PIFFERO,
ARCHIVIST (STAFF 21-PRESENT)

In October 2023, we had a special visitor to RGS. **Neil Peacock** attended RGS between 1942 and 1948, spending two of those years evacuated to Penrith during World War II. Neil's parents were James and Hilda Peacock. James Peacock was an Old Novo and Headteacher at Newcastle Cowgate Council School. His older identical twin brothers, Raymond and Douglas, were also Old Novos.



We spent a lovely morning in the Archive hearing his stories from the war years – here are some extracts:

Do you remember being told you were going to Penrith?

Well, I knew I would have to go after I passed my exam, with my brothers already being there.

How was your RGS interview?

He [Headmaster **ER Thomas**] got off the train [at Hexham Rail Station]. He came from Penrith, presumably to Newcastle to interview other people. The train stopped naturally. The door opened, **Peter Smart** (42-49) and I moved to see him. He looked at me and said: “You’ve got two brothers at the school, haven’t you?” I said, “Oh yes, Sir.” That was more or less my interview! A couple of minutes at the most.

How old were you when you started?

I think I was ten, [a year younger than when most pupils start in the Middle School]. I think it held me back a little bit as I began to feel out of touch, when other people were growing up, I wasn’t in the same way. I had a very good hostess in Penrith. My brothers lived with the Jackson family. Mrs Jackson’s sister, Mrs Thompson, lived close by, they had a word with her, and she agreed to take me when I came to RGS. I was with her for the whole two years. Her husband worked for the Post Office; I think. He was a very nice man.

Their home was in a row of terraces, much smaller than the other houses. Rumour was that they had squeezed in another house! There was no electricity, but gas fires. We had to light a candle to go up to bed, and to get dressed on dark mornings.

Did your parents visit?

Yes, they would come occasionally, we went home in the main holidays, we may have gone home at half term as well. They talk about crowded trains now – nothing to what they were then. [When returning to Newcastle at school holidays] we had to catch a train from Penrith to Carlisle. They were quite often two hours late. We were in the Middle School, as they called it, we were supposed to catch one train and the others [in RGS] were meant to catch another train. Well, we all ended up on the same train. Of course, the trains were packed with servicemen and civilians, kit bags, all sorts of stuff in



the corridors as these were corridor trains, and 50-100 schoolboys would launch ourselves at the train – we all got on!

Do you remember it as a happy time?

You know I never really thought about it. We would just go out and play, go on the swings or something. I played chess, the school ran a scout club – nothing to do with the Penrith scouts. This was the odd thing, we never mixed with the Penrith children. The only matches played were with other public schools as far as I know. When I look back, I think it was dreadful, we should have mixed with them. We were never told we couldn’t mix, but things were set up, so you didn’t mix.

There were rules for bicycles – you couldn’t go more than five miles away. My brothers and I had bikes. We went swimming in the summer in the river at Eamont Bridge. I remember joining the library as a Junior. Detention was in the evening, but if you were living in a hostel, you were unlucky enough to have to do it on a Saturday afternoon. I never had to do it! We played conkers in season – most of the Middle School would go and collect conkers and have a battle.

During freer periods in the morning, weather permitting, we would go to the local park and play bowls, with old men watching and advising us.

I played in a concert with the Third Orchestra – this was to a public audience in Penrith. I played the violin but hated it!

I remember once we were having Science with a teacher, he was demonstrating if you put sodium in water, it gives off hydrogen. Well, he had this pneumatic trough. With another jar over the top he put sodium, presumably with tweezers, underneath. And suddenly an explosion! There was glass all over the place, it was lucky it didn’t break the window! I remember being in the front row, and with the rest of the front row we all ducked. I think the teacher was a bit shaken.

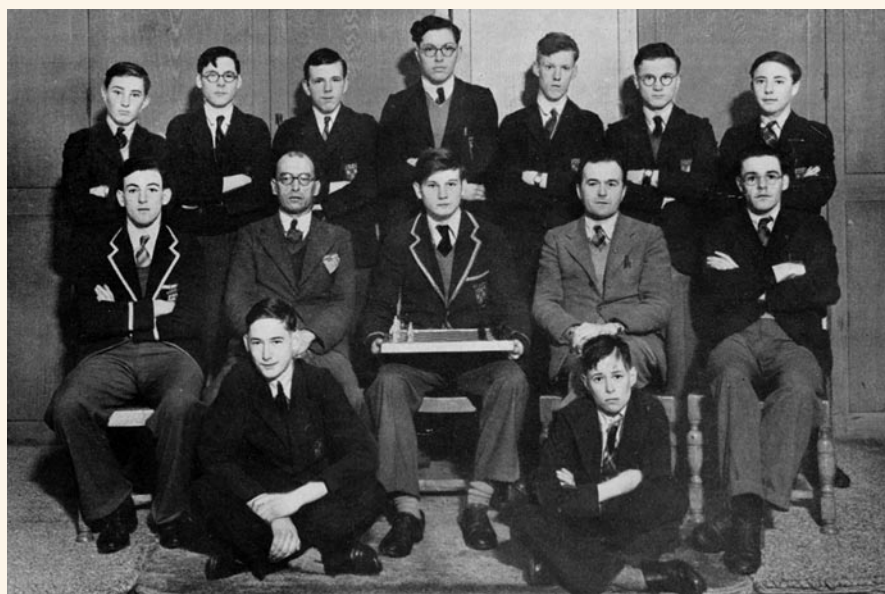
What was it like coming back to RGS after two years in Penrith?

I never really thought about it, you just accepted as a child that that was where you went. Once I came back to Newcastle, there were air raids. My father was an air raid warden. He would go off to his post. There would be Mother, Raymond, Douglas, me, and the dog (a Scottish Terrier, Rexie), all under the Morrison shelter in the front room. In the morning it was just me and the dog! The others had all gone back to bed after the ‘all-clear.’ I was fast asleep!

A huge thank you to Neil for sharing such wonderful memories with us.

Above: Neil, 1949

Below: RGS Chess Club, NOVO, March 1948



SHY LADS GET NOWT!

From Newcastle's RGS to the global circuit via Procter and Gamble and now Apple, for **Gianfranco Rosolia** (ON 91-01) the compass swings back to North with the publication of his book, *CLEAN AIR*, a TEDx talk at The Glasshouse and a blue plaque to be positioned at the home of his grandmother, Jennie Shearan, in Hebburn. Gianfranco, the guardian of a remarkable story, shares some thoughts with RGS students and the *ONA* magazine about speaking your truth quietly – but insistently.

Gianfranco on his recent visit to RGS



Gianfranco has a full schedule, due in part to the remarkable success of his book *CLEAN AIR* championed by the likes of Sting and Sir Jonathon Porritt and detailing a rich and epic narrative: the story of his grandmother Jennie Shearan's struggle against life-altering pollution emitted by the Monkton coke works in Hebburn.

Forming the Hebburn Residents' Action Group, Jennie and her allies took on the might of British Coal, proceeding to the European Parliament in the resolute belief that the basic human right of clean air should be given back to the people of South Tyneside.

The proceeds from the book go directly to Friends of the Earth, The Environmental Law Foundation and Hebburn Helps; copies made available in school were snatched up

by students who proved a rapt audience for the crowded lunchtime talk given by Gianfranco.

Aware of the significant turning points in a school career, Gianfranco came to share 'something to ponder' for students who started here as he did.

As an editor of and contributor to *Novo* with a love of theatre and chess (early training in anticipating the next strategic move), students

were exhorted to see the school as 'a remarkable gift.' Gianfranco explained in a later interview: "[The RGS was] an amazing space to learn about yourself, learn what you were interested in and develop your passions. I remember with fondness there were some particularly inspirational teachers and what I learned from them laid the foundation for what I went on to do. The skills that they nurtured in me and the ways of working and communicating, ways of thinking – that's all thanks to here."

With such a diverse range of interests and experiences, two places stood out for him as being particularly special: both were classrooms, where he studied French and English Literature with inspiring teaching to cement an association of place with those small but powerful intellectual epiphanies.

"You know, it's funny to be 40 years old and still recall certain moments in a classroom where your eyes opened to a certain reading of a text and thinking about it a bit differently thanks to those teachers. They were very different personalities and both very supportive to me; both saw something in me."



Gianfranco describes the time here as “foundational.”

“I was editor of *Novo* – I became a student editor at Cambridge and just as I did production and direction here, I also did it at university, then I experimented with stand-up comedy – I wanted to go on with Footlights... I tried out loads of things I didn't pursue but you try them all out and then you figure out where you want to go.”

Now based in California, Newcastle remains very high in Gianfranco's estimation: “I think it might just be a product of youth I guess but – I couldn't wait to leave Newcastle – not that I didn't like [it] – I just was hungry to see the world – and as I've got older, I've realised that this is a beautiful city. I don't think I'm glamorising or putting Newcastle on a nostalgic pedestal; I genuinely think it's a brilliant city, a brilliant place to live and to grow up.”

On her deathbed at South Tyneside hospital, Gianfranco's grandmother solidified this love and belief in the North East once more with a request that he write the book of her meticulously catalogued story of the Monkton coke works.

“I think she had faith in me that I didn't even have in myself; that's why she asked me to write a book, and I said yes, of course, I'll do it. And then I put it off for so long because I didn't have the foggiest idea how to approach structuring a book!

“At university, as part of my course which was predominantly Literature, there was also a film course – French and Italian cinema – and I really gravitated towards this, starting to read screenplays of successful movies. That's how I structured the book because I think there's something cinematic about the story itself.”

Using an Aristotelian arc and a broader historical context, he explains, “felt like a good way to find the ground zero of the story.”

He adds: “What was great about the RGS was that I wasn't intimidated about trying to enter a world I had little knowledge about, because you're cultivated and encouraged to approach any challenge and not be afraid of learning.

“My grandma was very, very clever because she left behind boxes and binders of all the legal court documentation, everything chronologically ordered – all the newspaper clippings, hours of VHS footage, cassettes recordings, photographs of the whole thing. It was a jewel of an archive and it'd been sitting there gathering dust. And so, one New Year's Eve I resolved: right, this is it, I'm going to do this now!

“It all started with that research, then actually connecting with people:



Gianfranco's grandmother, Jennie Shearan and the newly installed blue plaque

I connected with the barrister, and I connected with the lady who was an expert in public enquiries who found that barrister – she'd read about the case in Exeter – and then I connected with Sir Jonathan Porritt. There have been so many brilliant coincidences that I've often felt my grandma was looking over me.”

Being the employee of two global brands must have helped when grappling with the ideologies at play during the building and eventual dismantling of the coke works.

“Throughout the book there's a common thread about profits over people. Ethically, I feel very comfortable working at Apple which happens to be the most successful company in the world, but I also feel it carries on its shoulders a responsibility – it's going to be carbon neutral by 2030 – and there are many corporate drives to make me feel proud of working there.

“We all need jobs – we all need to work – and the nuanced message of the story was that my grandma wasn't fighting to close the works down, she was fighting to clean up the coke works. The legacy that she left behind is what's in its place. She was very closely involved in planning for contaminated land left when the works were demolished and how that space would be deployed. Now, there's a woodland and a business park that employs more people than Monkton coke works ever did. That's where the story ends.”

One notable moment in the book sees Jennie's father describe her as ‘a chip off the old block.’ Could that be true of Gianfranco?

He recalls: “When I was a little boy, she'd often come out with old Geordie sayings, and I used to just giggle – like ‘shy bairns get nowt’ – but one of them (she'd have a glint in her eye) was ‘I'm a rebel!’ Later I learned she'd gone up against the establishment. The key message she taught me as a boy was ‘always look people in the eye’ because you're no better but no worse

than anybody else. You've got to respect everybody but challenge authority if it's abusing its position: don't be afraid’.”

With workplace culture in America notable for a cut-throat aggression, Gianfranco says there's no room for shrinking violets.

“If you don't speak up then you'll never speak because there's a room full of people with very strong voices. I'm not naturally a loud person so I've earned respect and reputation through consistent results. That's why I wanted to talk [to students] about humility and kindness – because they can get lost in that world – [there's] a lot of ego and selfishness and you don't really have to behave like that.”

Speaking the truth clearly and giving words to those denied a voice has been the work of both grandmother and grandson. One of the many things the Hebburn Residents' group pioneered was the creation of their own health study. Surveying thousands of people about the impact of living next to the works, at the bottom of the questionnaire were four lines for extra details.

“[Those surveyed] would always go over onto the blank page,” he adds. “You'd read these stories, and it was a tough read sometimes. Data like that goes into a big machine of evidence but it also gives voice: they are the spoken words of the community.”

North-eastern voices and accents are described lovingly in the book. Would Gianfranco be interested in dramatising the story from page to stage or screen with those familiar, compelling voices from the past?

“If this isn't the end of it and we do take it to the next level then yeah, I want to be involved in writing the screenplay. I knew my grandma better than anybody else would. I definitely want to retain that Geordie spirit!”

JENNIE
SHEARAN

1922-2005

Environmental Campaigner

Led the Hebburn Residents
Action Group in their fight for
clean air in their town

Lived here
1953-2005



SIR MAX HILL

BY CAROLINE BRIGGS

Sir Max Hill KC is one of the country's leading barristers with a career at the bar spanning over three decades.

He served as the Director of Public Prosecutions for England and Wales for five years until October 2023 and was knighted in this year's New Year Honours List for services to law and order.

Sir Max attended the Royal Grammar School from 1972-1982 and in 1981, alongside two other students, won the North East heat of the English Speaking Union Debating Competition. That was only part of his rich RGS journey.

He was Deputy Head Prefect in his final year and awarded the Debating Prize at the RGS 1982 Prize-Giving event.

With a glint in his eye, Sir Max Hill playfully scans the room looking for a man with a big red book.

The Old Novo and former Director of Public Prosecutions for England and Wales is at the Royal Grammar School to bestow the eponymous 'Hill House Debating Trophy' for the very first time.

But first there's a trip to the Archive where Sir Max half expects Eammon Andrews to leap from behind the rare bookshelves when he sees what RGS archivist Louise Piffero has unearthed.

"I haven't laid eyes on this stuff in decades," he laughs, surveying the paper trappings of his eclectic journey at the RGS.

As well as debating, there's evidence of Sir Max's schoolboy love of drama and deep passion for history.

With a laugh he lingers over a black-and-white photo of himself delivering the news on ITV's Tyne Tees which was published in the 1980 Prize-Giving Programme.

It was a formative experience that would have a lasting impression on a teenage Max.

"Head of English Jo Unsworth mentioned a competition Tyne Tees had for kids to read the news", Sir Max recalls, "and he looked at me and said: 'You know, you should do it'. Months later, there I was, reading the news on TV."

Praised by then Head **Alister Cox** for "doing it in style, unabashed by the TV cameras", Sir Max's unexpected broadcasting stint sparked an enduring love for hospital radio and a heightened awareness of broader societal issues beyond the big red brick building on Eskdale Road.

Before long, Sir Max was nestled in a cramped studio within the former mortuary at Newcastle General Hospital delivering news bulletins for Radio Tyneside. It marked Sir Max's initial immersion into 'real' life.

"So much of our school activities lacked a community aspect, but [hospital radio] made a significant impact on me," Sir Max reflects. "I felt like this comfortable posh grammar schoolboy needed a few corners knocking off, and working unpaid in a radio station certainly did that."

"Since then, I've been involved in charity work, and you can trace a direct line from that experience to the charities I now chair."

"These days, the school seems to do a much better job of instilling social conscience in its students."

“*So much of our school activities lacked a community aspect, but [hospital radio] made a significant impact on me.*”

Today, RGS pupils engage in social issues through various initiatives, including community service programs, charity fundraising, and social awareness campaigns.

They participate in global citizenship activities, take on leadership roles to advocate for causes, and are involved in environmental projects. The school also encourages partnerships with local schools to foster a strong sense of social responsibility among students.

Back in the archives, Sir Max's passion for music and theatre also shine through.

In early 1980s editions of *Novo*, Sir Max's performances as the snobbish Sir Joseph Porter in Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore*, and as Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, are highly praised.

His portrayal of the complex criminal mastermind earned acclaim for being 'exceptionally impressive,' described as a 'guiding light' that held the production together.



Sir Max is a regular visitor to the school

As editor of *Novo* that same year, he also advocated for an updated colours system that includes recognition for the Arts.

While his younger brother (and fellow *Oliver!* star), the Emmy-nominated **Tom Goodman-Hill** (ON 76-86), went on to pursue a successful career on stage and screen, Sir Max found his own drama amidst the theatrics of the Royal Courts of Justice.

His law career is as impressive as it comes.

As Chair of the Criminal Bar Association, he defended and prosecuted complex cases of murder, violent offences, and corporate crime.

He was instructed in many of the most significant and high-profile murder trials of recent years, including the second set of trials around the killing of London schoolboy Damilola Taylor, and the London bombings of 2005.

Perhaps he drew on those early days on stage at the RGS when he appeared as lead prosecution counsel in Channel 4's *The Trial* (2017) in which real juries, together with barristers and judges, tried a fictional murder case to explore the workings of the jury system.

Growing up in Ponteland there was little hint Sir Max was destined for an illustrious career in the legal profession.

His grandfather **Thomas Geoffrey Coulson Hill** (ON 1911-1915), wartime hero uncle **Walter** (ON 1904-1906), and his own father **Thomas Rowland** (ON 1943-1948) all passed through the school gates, but none went on to read law.

Whilst Sir Max's pioneering maternal grandmother was an undergraduate at Bristol University at the end of the First World War, neither of his parents went to university.

"My mum always said I would make a good Lord Chief Justice and I have failed her because that will never happen," he muses.

"But one very distinguished fellow from the school has achieved that, so I think you've got that covered."

Sir Max is, of course, referring to Lord Chief Justice Taylor whose portrait hangs in the school's main hall – the venue for a post-debate law networking event later in the day.

Recounting a story of the time he faced the formidable **Lord Taylor** in court, knees trembling, hoping for mercy from his fellow ON, Sir Max was left wanting.

"What on earth are you talking about?" Lord Taylor demanded of an uncharacteristically flummoxed younger Sir Max.

Now in a more strategic role at global law firm King & Spalding, does Sir Max miss the drama of court?

"There's nothing better than being the sort of lawyer who can be effective on paper, but who can also be effective in court and in the criminal courts," he says.

"Conducting legal proceedings with brilliant advocates around you in the full glare of the public is really second to none.

"I had 30 years in court and the full ten of them as Queen's Counsel and I don't have any regrets. If I'd gone earlier, I would regret not enjoying those later years doing the cases that really interested me.

"I had more than a good run."

Without a familial influence, school proved to be a big driver in Sir Max's decision to enter the law.

Peter Murray Taylor, Baron Taylor of Gosforth (1930–1997, ON 38–49) was the Lord Chief Justice of England from 1992 until 1996



“Going to university meant, in my mind, having a safety net. History still fascinates me to this day, but it did not have the career prospects that law offered.”

Initially interested in following the footsteps of late great Master Alan Mitchell to read History at Cambridge, Sir Max's strategic mind eventually set a different course.

"The school had an influence, not in the sense that I was being told to study law, but the combination of the things that I did," he explains. "That included debating, public speaking and having an academic interest.

"Going to university meant, in my mind, having a safety net. History still fascinates me to this day, but it did not have the career prospects that law offered.

"I vividly remember conversations with Alan Mitchell and other senior masters who decided for reasons only they knew, that if it was going to be law and not history, then it had to be Oxford and not Cambridge."

Hours pouring over Latin papers in the Plender Library paid off and after a successful interview – and subsequent scholarship – for St Peter's College, his future course was set.

As president of the RGS Debating Society, Sir Max had previously won the North East heat of the English Union Debating Competition, and the RGS

Debating Prize, something he considers an important part of the "jigsaw" that led to a career at the Bar.

"Debating was about trying to structure your mind, trying to develop an argument that you could deliver crisply and persuasively. While I absolutely do not think I was the best debater in the school, and there were other boys who were capable of extraordinary flights of oratory, I did stick at it.

"There was something about lifting an academic argument off the page and vocalising it that resonated with me."

Sir Max is visiting RGS to judge and present the eponymous 'Hill House Debating Trophy', joking that ONs of the future will think an extra 'Hill' house had been added to the established Eldon, Collingwood, Horsley and Stowell.

The Debating Prize bowl Sir Max was awarded at the 1982 Prize-Giving has been lost to the mists of time, replaced by the new trophy that it is hoped will be presented for years to come.

And it was Sir Max who chose the debate motion 'This House believes that professional judges make better decisions than juries'.

After a lively debate in the recital room, it was eventually won by Izzy G and Rory S of Collingwood, with Lina A from Horsley getting a special mention for her skills.

"I was very impressed by all four House teams and all eight speakers," says Sir Max.

"They'd all absorbed the procedure extremely well, they were all, to varying degrees, confident in what they were doing. That will help them whatever subject they decide on university and whatever they go on to do, and I can certainly see one or two potential advocates amongst the group I saw today."

And what made Sir Max decide on that particular motion?

"Recently I came out on the media to argue in favour of retaining the jury system in this country and that was prompted by a television reconstruction of a murder trial with two side-by-side juries who ultimately reached different decisions.

"My view is that it remains the best way in this country of validating criminal trial, that we allow 12 ordinary people to make the ultimate decision on the facts. In setting this motion, I thought that there are probably an equal number of arguable points both before and against the motion. "The fact that I have a strong view one way and not the other is irrelevant, but I thought it was something that students would get their teeth into, and I wasn't disappointed."

The Debating Society is the school's most enduring society – records date back to 1896 – with motions that included 'The pen is mightier than the sword' proposed in 1905, and 'That the Camera is a superior instrument to the Sketch Book' later that year.

A century-ago the July 1924 *Novo* magazine reported on a debate about Shakespeare:

"On 7 March, a very successful debate was held, when Regnart proposed that 'Shakespeare is grossly overrated'." He said that Shakespeare was little more than a successful manager who had a genius for pleasing his public, and also objected to his vulgarity. Smith opposed the motion, enumerating on the poet's great points and showing that his universal popularity was sufficient proof of his pre-eminence." ... "defeated by the narrow margin of 12 to 14"

For Sir Max, the survival of the debating society is not the only soothing element of the school to remain.

"When you walk down Eskdale Terrace, you immediately see the clock tower, the black railings, the school gates, which are comforting sight, I think, to any old boy.

"Personally, seeing my great Uncle Walter's name on the War Memorial today, as I did every day at school for a decade, is reassuring, but there's so much that's different as well.

"The school is much better and much stronger for providing mixed education. I think the fabric of what students get up to is so fertile, so diverse, that it's just great to see.

"Any ON will see a lot of continuity here, but that has not been used in a restrictive way to strangle development. It's been used as a base from which a huge amount of diversity has been achieved. It's an exciting place to be."

One of the highlights for Sir Max is seeing the school's Performing Arts Centre.

Visibly thrilled, he pauses during the school tour to take a photo for his brother Tom, whose performance in the Netflix hit *Baby Reindeer* recently earned him an Emmy nomination. Tom has also received accolades for his stage work, including a Laurence Olivier Award nomination in 2007 for his performance as Sir Lancelot in the London production of *Spamalot*.

"What has come on in leaps and bounds at the school is the combination of the artistic disciplines," Sir Max says.

"The mere fact there is a Performing Arts centre here now resonates with anyone who, like me, enjoyed everything the school had to offer and that included theatre."

“

Any ON will see a lot of continuity here, but that has not been used in a restrictive way to strangle development. It's been used as a base from which a huge amount of diversity has been achieved. It's an exciting place to be.

For Sir Max, the reassuringly old and progressive new all add up to a school he wants to remain associated with.

"Distance puts a limit on what I can do, but when I am here visiting my mum it's an absolute pleasure to come to the RGS and listen to the next generation talk about what they want to achieve in life.

"Although independent fee-paying schools are very privileged in comparison to much of the state sector, huge effort is being made here to spread the benefits of an education at this school and I am



Sir Max will be speaking at the 99th Newcastle ON dinner in October

so pleased to see the ever-increasing bursary offer.

"So many moves made in the last 20 or 30 years – which old boys of 100 years ago would never have dreamt of – make this a stronger community.

"I'm pretty sure that any student here now feels they're in the right place, and that it is a privilege to be here at the RGS in 2024."

Archivist Louise Piffero showed Sir Max around the RGS Archive



UP FOR DEBATE

Collingwood's Rory S and Isobel G were the deserving winners of the first-ever RGS Hill House Debating Trophy this April. ONA caught up with Rory to learn how the Debating Society helped him find his voice.



For many, public speaking and speech impediments don't mix. But for Sixth Former Rory S, joining the RGS Debating Society marked the start of a big personal and academic shift.

Rory, now in Year 13, has been part of one of the school's oldest societies for three years, and he credits it with sharpening both his academic and communication skills.

But it's not just about improving on paper. Rory found the Society far more relaxed and engaging than its "stuffy" reputation might suggest.

"A couple of my friends pestered me to join, so I went to one session and really enjoyed it," he says. "It was a lot more fun than I was expecting, with lots of banter and jokes, but still good debating."

Debating is more much than just arguing a point. As Rory puts it, "it's about being able to form arguments, analyse, weigh criteria, compare judgments, and reach a logical conclusion about something that isn't necessarily based on anything real but makes theoretical sense."

For Rory, though, the personal growth has been just as important.

Having dealt with social anxiety and a speech impediment when he was younger, he found a supportive and inclusive space in the Debating Society, which helped build his confidence in public speaking. The British Parliamentary style of debate used in the Society – also the format for the World Universities Debating Championship – gave him the structure he needed to confront his anxieties.

"I used to have a lot of social anxiety, especially in group situations, which tied into the speech impediment when it came to public speaking," he explains. "I think it stemmed from worrying whether I could express myself fully, but also feeling like I was being judged."

Debating, he says, levelled the playing field. "You've only got 15 minutes to prepare, and everyone's just giving it their best shot. Even now I'm not fully over [the impediment], but I don't see it as a burden anymore. I focus on the content, not the delivery, and I know I can get my point across even if I stutter."

Rory's journey hasn't stopped at the school gates. Alongside his debating partner, Isobel G, he's seen success at a national level. They won the Nottingham Schools competition, made it to the gold final at Edinburgh, and advanced to the European Youth Parliament Final. Both are now co-chairs of the RGS Debating Society.

Debating hasn't just been a hobby for Rory – it's changed the way he looks at the world and shaped his future ambitions, specifically to study of debate and rhetoric. "I now want to study Classics at, hopefully, Oxbridge, which involves a lot of seminars and debating. After that, I'd like to become a barrister."

For anyone thinking about joining the Debating Society, Rory is all for it: "Go for it. I think the biggest barrier to achieving is people's self-confidence. Once you start debating, your self-confidence grows massively. It changes how you see the world because you start looking at everything through a more critical lens, which is really useful in life."

RULES OF BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY DEBATING

- Four teams, each with two speakers, divided into Government and Opposition sides.
- Each side has an opening and closing team.
- The first speakers, known as Prime Minister/Leader of the Opposition, set the terms and introduce arguments.
- Deputies consolidate arguments.
- Members extend them without contradicting their opening teams.
- Whips conclude by summarizing and weighing arguments.
- Points of Information (POIs) can be offered by opposing teams during speeches, but not during protected time.
- Only speakers from the opposing bench can offer POIs.



LAW NETWORKING EVENT

After Sir Max Hill KC presented the inaugural Hill House Debating Trophy to Rory S and Isobel G of Collingwood on 26 April, we were delighted to host an evening of law networking in the Main Hall.

The event drew an impressive group of attendees, including ONs such as Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate, RGS parents, and other influential figures working and studying in the legal field.

Students were keen to connect with these professionals and appreciated their practical advice on career planning, with many offering to advise and provide current RGS future guidance and mentorship.

We look forward to welcoming our law alumni back to RGS and thank them for their continued support of the school and its students.

OLD NOVO DEBATERS:

One of the earliest known RGS debaters was **Sir Josiah R Crosby** (1880-1958) (ON 1894-99) who was President of the Society in 1896. Crosby became a diplomat, serving as British ambassador to Panama, Costa Rica and Thailand (then known as Siam).

Brian S Shallcross (1937-2009) (ON 50-57) was Chairman of Debating Society 1955-56. He became a journalist, regional political correspondent on TV and radio and was Chairman of the Parliamentary Press Gallery.

Jeremy Hugh Beecham, Baron Beecham (ON 53-62) was Chairman 1961-62. He became a Labour MP, life peer until 2021 and was leader of Newcastle City Council.

Paul Haggie (ON 60-67) was Chairman 1966-67. Writer and former diplomat with posts in Thailand, Pakistan and South Africa.

Sir Max Hill KC (ON 72-82) was Chairman 1981-82. Barrister who served as Director of Public Prosecutions 2018-2023.





FROM CORPORATE STARTUPS TO **COMMUNITY BAKERIES**

Andy Haddon speaks to ONA's Caroline Briggs about his mission for food equality.

Above: Andy aims to bring together society, academia, industry, and government to improve the global food system

Baker Andy Haddon (ON 75-80) is a man with a mission – to change the world one loaf at a time.

The Old Novo is the visionary behind Big River Bakery, a small-batch bakery in Newcastle's Shieldfield. It specialises in handmade breads and pastries with locally-sourced ingredients, and it's also Andy's HQ for creating a fair and affordable global food system.

"Changing the world might be a crazy idea, but it's got to be worth a go," laughs Andy, who moved into the premises in 2019 after a successful Crowdfunding campaign. His journey began in corporate food logistics in 1990s China. Feeling unfulfilled, he later enrolled at Durham University for an MBA focused on sustainability and equity.

For over 20 years, Andy has been involved in startups like the National Renewable Energy Centre, the UK's largest social enterprise car club, and various food hubs. For Andy, bread is a conduit for change.



“Food banks and charitable giving are good, but we need more,” he explains. “Business models have to fundamentally change. A kinder form of capitalism is needed for humanity’s future.”

For Andy, the “bottom” is this more-stottie-than-sourdough bakery, geared toward sustainability and social impact. And it makes really, really good bread.

On a typical Friday, customers bustle in as a dog strains at his leash by the door, tempted by the aroma from within. Workers in hi-viz order sausage butties, and the humble stottie – at just £1 a pop – is the shop’s bread-and-butter.

In his mission, Andy employs a ‘quadruple helix’ approach, bringing together society, academia, industry, and government. The bakery supports the homeless, offers employability training, and provides a space for local producers. Many of the 15 staff, including some with autism, trained here and earn more than the real living wage.

Among them is Kaltouma, a refugee from Sudan who makes falafels for the bakery’s sandwiches and is being trained for standards needed to sell Big River produce on LUMO trains.

Behind the scenes, Andy collaborates on food and sustainability projects with partners, from PhD students to local government. “Health is key,” he says. “Supermarkets sell ultra-processed food that makes you ill. Outside that, food can deliver social value, health, and skills.”

One PhD project involved quinoa-enhanced bread. “We got paid to design these breads and gave them to volunteers

who were later tested and found to be healthier,” Andy explains. “With government funding, we could subsidise the bread so everyone, not just the affluent, could access it. That’s how you transform the food system.”

The stottie, a staple in Geordie culture, has been Big River Bakery’s linchpin. Earlier this year, Andy launched ‘National Stottie Week’ to revive its fortunes. It’s a bold claim. “Historically, the stottie helped poor people survive,” he explains. “Kids today don’t know what it is – we saved it from extinction.”

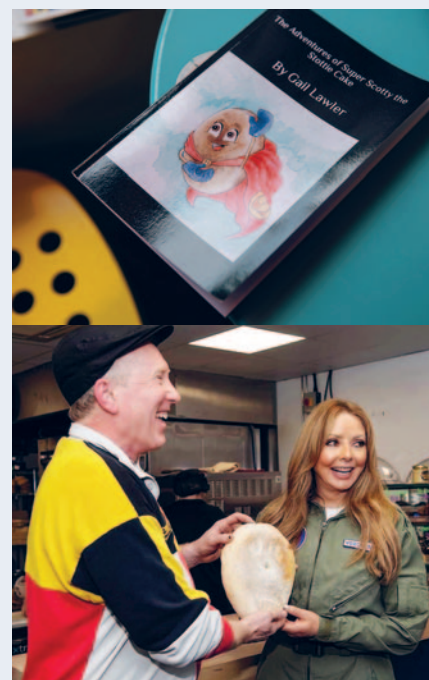
They’re even delivering ‘Geordie Afternoon Teas’ to Devon and running stottie baking courses. Andy’s wife, Gail, has written books about Scotty, an anthropomorphic stottie, and there’s a computer game too, *Scotty’s Kindness Quest*.

Innovation is baked in, with Andy’s “stottini” – a stottie-panini fusion. “It’s a very tangible example of innovation you can eat,” he says.

Andy’s stotties have also starred on TV, thanks to a chance meeting with Si King of the *Hairy Bikers*. “When you’re doing good stuff, good luck seems to follow,” Andy says. Their episode, delayed by Covid, gave the bakery time to prepare for the surge in demand it created.

Andy’s experiences in academia, economic development, and business have driven his vision for Big River Bakery, building community and partnerships. Today, it’s an internationally recognised social enterprise, proving that change is possible—one stottie at a time.

Below: The Big River Bakery team with *Hairy Bikers*, Si King and Dave Myers
Right: Andy’s wife Gail Lawler is the creative force behind the *Scotty the Stottie* books and Andy with TV presenter Carol Vorderman



BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS



School governors play an often unsung yet crucial role in shaping the success and direction of independent and state schools across the UK.

At RGS, our 11 current governors from backgrounds as diverse as law and finance, bring their time, commitment, and wealth of experience to ensure every child receives the best possible education.

Former RGS governor Claris D’cruz has been intricately connected with RGS for over two decades, navigating the school as a professional, a governor, and as a parent. She tells ONA’s Caroline Briggs about her profound belief in the power of education, and how strong governance can impact children’s lives.

The RGS looked very different when Claris D'cruz was first introduced to the school back in the early 2000s.

Specialising in charity law, Claris was about to play a pivotal role in the school's long history, but had little inkling how much the school was about to impact her own life.

Back then her role was to handle the legal work for RGS's transition from single-sex school to a coeducational institution, marking the end of an almost 500-year tradition.

It was a brave decision in the face of a small but vehement minority, and a responsibility Claris took seriously.

"Our task was to demonstrate why coeducation was in the best interests of the current beneficiaries, who were – of course – all boys," she reflects.

"The decision was not driven by financial motivations, as some assumed, but by a desire to provide a better education and enhanced opportunities for students.

Governance at RGS, she explains, was crucial in steering the school through this bold transition, helping it expand its vision while ensuring that it maintained high standards and values.

"At the time, there were other single-sex schools in the area for both boys and girls, but RGS wanted to become a leading coeducational independent school. It was about the school's vision for being able to provide an even better education and better facilities for its students. "They were focused on growth, but not in a way that would harm other schools in the region. They wanted to do things in a way that ensured the whole educational ecosystem would thrive and I found that inspiring.

"They, and their successors, have delivered everything they set out to, with bells on."

After RGS settled into its new co-educational status, Claris stepped away to focus on her young family.

But the school's ethos had gotten under her skin. Before too long her connection to RGS was rekindled when her son joined the school in Year 3, reinforcing her belief that education is a powerful tool for change.

Drawn to the power of governance in shaping opportunities, Claris soon joined RGS's bursary campaign to provide financial support to talented students.

"I've been fortunate to have had support in life and I felt a responsibility to pay that forward," Claris explains.

"I was motivated by the incredible sacrifices my parents made to send me and my three siblings to independent schools and the difference that education has made to me.



Claris and daughter, Ciara

"I believe strongly that schools like RGS should be open to any child who will excel in its environment and RGS has always had an outward-looking ethos, seeking to attract pupils irrespective of their ability to pay."

Through her involvement in the bursary campaign, Claris was invited to join the school's governing board in 2012 – a role she held until 2020.

As both a parent and a governor, Claris found herself in a unique position, balancing personal concerns with broader obligations giving her the opportunity to see the school from a completely different perspective.

"As a parent, your focus is naturally on what's best for your own children. As a governor, you have to consider everyone, which is a much broader responsibility."

"Running an organisation like a school brings many challenges, but it's also incredibly rewarding because what you do really matters."

While she stepped down from her role as governor in 2020, Claris remains deeply connected to RGS's mission, crediting the collective vision of the various governors, heads, senior leadership teams, and staff for guiding the school's evolution.

Claris highlights the work of previous Headmaster **Bernard Trafford** and current Head Geoffrey Stanford in embedding a growth mindset and pastoral care into the school's ethos.

Her governance experience at RGS also provided Claris with a solid foundation for her more recent work with Excelsior Academy in the west end of Newcastle's – a school with a vastly different demographic and set of challenges. But while the schools may be different in many ways, Claris believes that the core principles of education and governance remain constant.

"In my eyes, the mission remains the same: to give every child the best opportunity to fulfil their potential, regardless of their background. It's how you go about it that differs," she explains.

"Ultimately, a good education is about preparing young people to go out into the

world and make a difference."

As an RGS parent, one of Claris's proudest moments came when her daughter, Ciara, became captain of the school's cricket team. "She was the only girl in the team, and it really epitomised what RGS stands for – if you're the right person for something, you'll be chosen, regardless of the odds."

This experience, along with Ciara's role as a former Head Girl, highlights the inclusive and empowering culture that RGS fosters. In her final assembly speech, Ciara encouraged students to embrace challenges and step outside their comfort zones, adding "that is where you grow and learn the most."

It is a sentiment Claris wholeheartedly supports.

Today, Claris works as a Governance Consultant and Trainer and is enthusiastic about encouraging others to take on governance roles and trusteeships, especially younger individuals, or those from underrepresented groups.

Their voices, she says, are invaluable.

She shares the impact of having a young governor, a former student in their 20s, on the RGS board: "Their perspective transformed our discussions because they brought recent, lived experience that was so insightful."

"There is so much support available now for governors and trustees, so if you're interested, I encourage you to explore it. It is incredibly rewarding and helps develop your own skills while contributing positively to an organisation.

"It's about realising the difference you can make and what you can contribute in a richly rewarding way.

"That's enlightened self-interest, and it's something I'm lucky to have had the opportunity to do."



**Read more about our
current school governors**



A LIBRARY OF LEGACY

Standing tall in the RGS reception, a new bursary donor bookcase from NOOK Design is a striking tribute to those whose generosity has transformed countless lives. ONA's Caroline Briggs spoke to NOOK about their unique contribution to RGS Bursaries.



Above: Wooden 'books' engraved with donor names and installation of the bookcase in RGS Reception. Left: Geoffrey Stanford, Head of RGS and the finished bookcase. Photo © Martin Foster



For over a century, the Sutherland Organ has stood proudly in the main hall as a lasting and fitting tribute to members of RGS who lost their lives in the two World Wars.

Now it is hoped a new addition to the building will serve as visual salute to our bursary donors, whose generosity has changed the lives of so many pupils past and present.

An elegant 'donor bookcase' has been installed in the school's reception on Eskdale Terrace to recognise and individuals, families, and organisations who have made significant financial contributions to the RGS Bursary fund.

Wooden 'books' engraved with donor names line the shelves, and as new names

are added, the legacy of giving will continue to grow.

"When people see the names of those who have contributed to the education of pupils at the school, we hope it will instil a sense of pride," says Rhona Harris of NOOK Design, the Newcastle-based company who has kindly designed, crafted, and donated the bookcase.

"They'll see at a glance that they're part of something bigger than themselves."

Standing an impressive 3.3 meters tall, the bookcase is one of NOOK's largest projects to date and has been a collaborative effort to ensure it reflects the school's ethos and core values – a Love for Learning, Ambition to Succeed, Belief in Each Other and a Sense of Belonging

All NOOK furniture is bespoke and hand-crafted and manufactured in their Lemington workshop.



As more donations are made to the school bursary fund, the shelves will gradually fill with a library of 'books' individually made by Andy Barker of the school's Engineering, Design and Technology (EDT) department

A school crest etched in solid oak, also crafted in-house at RGS, enhances the bookcase design, with the names of our generous donors elegantly carved onto the spines of the walnut, oak, or cherry 'books' of varying sizes.

Dr Pete Warne, head of EDT, says the project has been rewarding for the department.

"It has been a real privilege to be asked to collaborate on the bookcase project," says Dr Warne. "It was a pleasure to be involved throughout the design phases to help develop the final product.

"We are really pleased with the outcome and the engravings and books that we have manufactured look fantastic in their new home.

"We see this as the start of a journey and look forward to continued involvement with more books as new donors contribute."

For Rhona and her husband John, the bookcase is so much more than a functional piece of furniture.

"It's symbolic of what the school is about," explains John. "It will stand there as a testimony to all those who believed in the future of education and wanted to be part of it."

The donor bookcase project represents a continuation of NOOK's journey as designers and builders

– a journey that began seven years ago when they founded the company.

"We were looking for a new challenge," Rhona recalls. "John has always been deeply involved in furniture making and design. He did a project for us at home, and I remember telling him, 'This is what we should be doing, you're really good at making the best out of small spaces.'"

That early encouragement led to the creation of NOOK Design, which initially focused on transforming tricky under-stair spaces into beautiful and functional places.

Business quickly boomed as word spread about NOOK's exceptional quality, craftsmanship and attention to detail.

Soon clients were asking for wardrobes, kitchens, media walls and dressing rooms – even full house refits.

Today, NOOK Design has evolved into a thriving family-run business, quickly growing out of their former premises in Heddon-on-the-Wall, and into a new workshop at the historic former Lemington Glass Works, in Newcastle.

What sets NOOK Design apart, Rhona explains, is their decision to keep everything in-house: "We still design everything ourselves; we still sell everything ourselves, we still make, hand-paint, and install ourselves. Everything's done by our own teams.

"We don't subcontract anything, and every customer has been visited by either John or me. Maintaining that level of personal contact is important to us."

John plays an active role in designing each project. It was his keen eye personally behind the traditional design for the donor bookcase.

The shape of the bookcase, with its triangular pediment, echoes the architectural form of the Sutherland Organ while the 'books' serve as a nod to learning and education.

This combination of classical elements and contemporary touches, like the hand-painted navy-blue finish, creates a timeless piece that connects with the legacy of the school in a modern reception space.

"The design is about heritage and legacy," John says. "It's not just about building a piece of furniture; it's about recognising the contributions that people have made to the bursary fund and hopefully encouraging other people to do the same.

"It's building a legacy that families and future students can look at and say, 'Wow, that's part of this place. It's part of what makes it special.'"



““

Projects like this remind us that we're part of the community. We're helping build something that will last and continue to inspire long after we're gone.

"It's built with the same dedication we put into every project, but this one feels extra special because of what it represents and we're proud to be part of that."

Rhona says: "Projects like this remind us that we're part of the community. We're helping build something that will last and continue to inspire long after we're gone.

"We hope former pupils will return with their own children to show them the names of the people who helped fund their education or show them the contribution they or their parents made to the bursary fund."

John adds: "And there is no reason it can't still be there in 100 years... but you might need a whole library by then! A room dedicated to donors."

Plans are underway to officially unveil the bookcase at next year's Philanthropy Dinner on Thursday 23 January, along with an external legacy wall too.

Both will act as a way of honouring our valued bursary donors for years to come.

"The bookcase is going to be something that not only looks beautiful but also carries so much meaning for everyone involved," Rhona says.

"We can't wait to see it unveiled."



Learn more about NOOK at
www.nookdesign.co.uk

FAR THEY WENT FORTH FROM
THE SCHOOL IN THE NORTH:

RGS'S HUMBLE HEROES

BY SUSAN BECK



For those of us who grew up in the North East, the iconic skyline, the warmth of its people, and the echoes of history create a lasting imprint. Life may take Novocastrians far beyond the rivers of the Tyne and the Wear, yet a piece of their hearts remain firmly anchored in the North East. Transcending distance, it's a connection to a place that forged each of our identities.

Among these devoted souls are generous donors – humble heroes who believe in the infinite potential of our homeland. They may venture out into the world, creating wealth and success in diverse fields, yet they are driven by a quiet, profound love for their birthplace.

Here are the stories of three humble heroes whose contributions have supported RGS to empower the next generation of Geordies to chase their dreams. These acts of generosity reflect a deep-rooted belief that the North East deserves every opportunity to thrive, just as they did.

Shortly, these selfless acts will be commemorated in stone, literally, on the school building which will stand as a lasting tribute to these donors' quiet contributions. Each name, beautifully etched into the stone by Low Fell-based company 'Strettles', represents so much more than any individual; it symbolises a deep, enduring bond between Newcastle and its people – a legacy of hope, opportunity, and unwavering pride.

BRIAN CALVERT DAGLISH

The story of the late Brian Daglish is one that echoes quietly through the halls of RGS, not through grand portraits or famous accolades, but through a simple stone plaque.

For those who pause to notice, this quiet stone etching will mark a life of unassuming generosity and a commitment that has profoundly shaped the school's community.

Brian Daglish, alongside his wife Christine, became an enduring figure in the RGS story, not as an ON, but as a devoted supporter who believed in the transformative power of education.

Though he never attended RGS – his path took him to Heaton Grammar School just a mile away – his dedication to our values and mission was unwavering.

Brian remained deeply connected to the North East until his death in 2023, despite spending many years living in Manchester. He and Christine visited us at RGS often, blending seamlessly into the school's corridors like any proud grandparents. Christine has continued to support the bursary pupils of since Brian's death, for which we are very grateful.

Following a stint in the RAF, Brian enjoyed a successful career as a Chartered Accountant and settled into a modest life with Christine. Yet, in their quiet way, they have contributed over a million pounds to the RGS Bursary Campaign over the years. It's an astonishing gift, one that has opened doors for countless students from varied backgrounds

who otherwise would not have had the means to attend RGS.

So, what compels a person like Brian Daglish to dedicate such a significant portion of his wealth to strangers – children he would likely never meet? At its heart, his giving stemmed from a profound belief in the potential of young people from the North East. Brian saw an RGS education as a powerful leveller, a chance for bright children from any background to thrive and that ability, not family background, should determine who benefits from an RGS education.

Brian's story is a testament to the power of giving – however small or grand. His approach was simple – do what you can, when you can. Over time, his small and consistent acts of generosity accumulated into a legacy that has changed the lives of so many. As he continued to give quietly, without seeking recognition, his generosity became a habit, a source of immense personal fulfilment, and a reminder of what can grow from small, consistent acts of kindness.

In remembering Brian Daglish, we honour not just his generosity but the quiet courage it took to give so selflessly, trusting in the unseen impact of his contributions. Brian's example encourages us all to consider what we can give to our communities.

He remains a humble hero of RGS, a beacon of compassion and dedication whose legacy will continue to inspire generations. He is greatly missed by his widow Christine and all of us at RGS.

Brian and Christine on a visit to the school in 2022



PROFESSOR GORDON MILLS (ON 44-52)

Gordon Mills, an ON whose academic excellence spanned continents and whose passion for economics shaped policy in both the UK and Australia, will be remembered not just for his intellect, but for his generosity.

Born into modest circumstances, Prof Mills won a scholarship to RGS in 1944, an opportunity that would set him on his path of lifelong academic achievement. It was an opportunity he would never forget. In his final wishes, Prof Mills left a significant gift to the RGS bursary campaign to give children the same opportunity he had received.

Margaret, who cared for Prof Mills in his later year, shared with us:

"Professor Mills was a very emotional man when speaking of his time at Royal Grammar School.

"He told me many times that his parents were not in a financial position to enrol him at RGS but were enormously proud when he earned himself a scholarship to the school. He used to say without that scholarship his life could have been very different."

Prof Mills distinguished himself early on during his time at RGS, becoming a prefect and throwing himself into many aspects of school life. He served as Secretary of the RGS Photographic Society in 1950 and played an active role on the Committee of the Music Society, where his passion for music thrived.

But it was Prof Mills' academic achievements that truly set him apart. In 1952, he won the Meikle Mathematics Prize, and that same year, received an Exhibition to Peterhouse College, Cambridge, where he initially studied Mathematics and Physics before pivoting to Economics.

It was the beginning of a distinguished career that would take him around the world, with professorships at Bristol University, Canterbury University, and finally Professor, later Honorary Professor, of Economics at the University of Sydney.



His expertise in microeconomics, transport, and retailing, combined with a stint leading the Centre for Microeconomic Policy Analysis, cemented his reputation in Australia as a thought leader in his field, authoring several books.

However, the distance never diminished his fond memories and friendships forged on Eskdale Terrace. Margaret recalls *ONA* magazine being a fixture on his coffee table.

"He loved the time he spent at RGS, he had the utmost respect for his teachers and made lifelong friends who he kept in contact with up until a few months before he passed away."

After the death of his wife, Pauline, in 2017, and with no children, Gordon saw his former school as his legacy.

Margaret remembers him talking regularly about the RGS bursary campaign and his hope of giving future students the same opportunity he had received.

While he may not have lived to witness the impact of his generosity, Prof Mills' gift will help fund bursary places for deserving students at the school, ensuring that financial barriers don't prevent our brightest young people from accessing the same kind of education that transformed his life.

"I used to say to him that one day I would visit England and go to the Royal Grammar School to see a building built in his honour," says Margaret, "and he would say with a smile: 'My plan is to provide scholarships.' This plan made him very happy."

PROFESSOR PETER S WALKER (ON 52-60)

Professor Peter Walker, a pioneer in orthopaedic bioengineer, and his wife Mrs Wuiliang Walker are enduring supporters who have made an indelible difference to our school. The now New York-based couple are soon to be honoured on a stone plaque, for their staggering contributions.



During a visit back to Newcastle last year, reflecting on his time at RGS, Professor Walker highlighted the invaluable education and lasting friendships he formed, along with the influence of dedicated teachers and diverse extracurricular opportunities. He credited key subjects like mathematics and engineering drawing for laying the foundation for his future career.

After graduating from Cambridge, Walker's groundbreaking work in joint biomechanics took him from the UK to prestigious institutions in the US, where he helped develop early artificial knee designs, including the widely successful Total Condylar. His innovations have transformed orthopaedic surgery, benefiting countless patients globally.

The couple, already honoured as RGS Fellows for their generous support of the school's Bursary Campaign, have continued their legacy by funding essential renovations to the historic Eskdale Terrace building. Their contributions have restored cherished features like the original lockers, wooden sash windows, and masonry, preserving the school's character for future generations.

In recognition of his remarkable journey and generous contributions, Peter Walker's name will be celebrated on the RGS donor wall as one of the first members of 'The Sutherland Society', symbolizing his deep connection to the school and inspiring future students to pursue excellence.

For Professor Walker and the other humble heroes mentioned on these pages, Newcastle's proud history and culture are more than memories; they are lifelines of resilience, generosity, and hope. These quiet benefactors – those who never forget where they came from – embody this spirit. They leave a legacy of opportunity, ensuring that while they may roam, Newcastle's future remains bright, its promise infinite, and its heart forever strong.

Our stone plaques are being added to our donor wall over the winter, and we look forward to sharing photos of the launch very soon. If you want to find out more about joining those celebrated on the wall, including our Sutherland Society, Fellows of the RGS, and Horsley Society, please do contact us or visit our website here.



RGS PARTNERSHIPS

BY **JOHN SMITH**,
RGS DIRECTOR OF PARTNERSHIPS

RGS Partnerships is a collaboration between RGS and local state schools to share teaching and learning opportunities across the North East. The initiative provides workshops, mentoring, and teacher training, alongside access to RGS facilities, resources and extracurricular activities, particularly to children in disadvantaged areas. This work reaches more than 10,000 children from around 100 schools every year.



Cross-sector work can be transformational, but only when rooted in mutual respect and humility.

At the Royal Grammar School we are showing that when independent schools invest their charitable relief in genuinely two-way partnerships with local schools, the results can be transformational. We are proud of our broad programme of impactful activities, which was recognised in the accolade of Independent School of the Year award for Educational Partnerships in Autumn 2023.

In the last academic year, our partnerships programme reached children from over 100 local schools, with roughly half primary and half secondary. We have built a sustainable scheme of 50+ activities from STEM to Sport, reaching over 10,000 young people each year, often from the areas of greatest disadvantage in a city with pockets of 40% child poverty. The key to growing this work has been a genuine spirit of co-creation: it is very much a conscious decision to replace the word 'outreach' (with its connotations of patronage), to 'partnerships', providing a better description of our collaborative approach.

Historically, partnership work has drawn on the goodwill of individual staff and spare capacity in the independent sector: this approach tended to result in projects that lacked longitudinal impact. We have developed a

model that is both sustainable and scalable by bringing together local business and charitable foundations to pool resources towards common local goals. This spirit of co-missioning has allowed us to build a collaborative model supporting a team of STEM teachers across Maths, Physics, Robotics and Computing. These teachers deliver and facilitate a range of projects alongside local teachers, schools and organisations.

In 2024-25, we are excited to bring this model to Rugby, thanks to the support and vision of England Rugby, who are part-funding a new community role, working partly in RGS and partly in local schools.

Independent schools can play an important role in a thriving school eco-system. For a school like RGS Newcastle, coming up to its 500th anniversary, there is a real sense of custodianship among governors towards the broader educational benefit of the school. They tend to think in decades and centuries, rather than electoral cycles.

In the current climate of educational crises around recruitment, retention, attendance, mental health and much more, we must move forward in a spirit of partnership and collaboration if we are to unlock the infinite potential of our young people.

As one governor put it to me recently: "It takes a city to educate its children".



RGS PARTNERSHIPS

IN NUMBERS:

10,000+

Over 10,000 students in local state schools have benefitted from Partnerships' activities.

50+

Over 50 RGS Partnership projects have taken place, including STEM, Sport, Languages, Classics, Debating, UCAS Mentoring and more.

4,000+

Over 4,000 hours of volunteering were delivered by RGS students.

17

17 members of RGS staff are governors at local schools.



IN CONVERSATION WITH DR STEVE BUNCE

RGS Partnerships teacher Dr Steve Bunce works across our partner state schools to develop robotics and computing. Sponsored by British Engines and TSG, Dr Bunce is a driving force in developing the opportunities available in the world of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).

As part of his role, he organises activity days to provide a way for students to learn in a fun environment, such as VEX Robotics and Lego competitions. Recently seven schools from the multi-academy ONE Trust in Newcastle took part in a robot Olympics using programmable mini robot balls called Spheros.

Can you tell us what attracted you to this role in partnerships?

I was very intrigued when I saw the job advertised, particularly the focus on partnerships and what it involved. When I came to speak to the school, I discovered a real love and passion for developing skills for everyone, which is why I took the job in the first place. There was a clear commitment to fostering collaboration among schools, and I felt this was something I wanted to be a part of.

What aspects of the job have you found most rewarding?

I've found a real joy in working with different schools and supporting each other. One of the things I was most pleased about when I saw the job description was that it's not just an outreach role. It's not about just going out to other schools to do work; it's truly about building partnerships. Over the past year, I've seen first-hand how everyone benefits from this



arrangement. It's not just about teachers working together but providing meaningful opportunities for them to collaborate with a clear purpose, which in turn benefits the children.

For example, we've introduced robot equipment into schools and conducted team teaching sessions. It's not just about us showing teachers how to do something; it's about working together and learning from each other. We also bring students from different backgrounds together in various events. Mixing students from state schools and our own creates a rich learning environment where everyone benefits from diverse experiences and backgrounds.

How do the students at the partnership schools benefit from these partnerships?

The students benefit immensely from these partnerships. By mixing students from different backgrounds, including state schools and our own, they get to learn from each other's experiences. This exposure helps broaden their perspectives and develop a deeper understanding of the world around them. Often, students form friendships across different schools, which is wonderful to see. They find common

ground and connections that enrich their educational experience.

For example, during various collaborative events, it's not uncommon to hear students say they already have friends in at the RGS and other school. This sense of community and belonging is one of the most rewarding aspects of these partnerships. The main message of RGS Partnerships is that collaboration and working together benefit everyone involved.

Is it working as you expected?

It's working even better than I imagined. The vision and leadership from the senior leadership team, particularly John Smith, head of partnerships, have been crucial. Their support enables and facilitates collaboration and ensures that we can support each other effectively. This leadership has been instrumental in making things happen and driving the success of the program.

When the job was advertised, Geoffrey Stanford mentioned that teachers often struggle to work with local schools sustainably alongside their own duties. This role, with its unique funding, addresses that issue by providing dedicated resources to support these partnerships. It's been incredibly fulfilling to see the positive impact this has had on both teachers and students.

Can you share a bit about your background?

I started my career as a maths and science teacher and then worked for the local authority in Northumberland. That's where I first gained experience working with teachers in different schools and supporting their professional development. Over the years, I've also worked in computing and ICT, behaviour management, and was a deputy head in



a middle school. These roles have given me a broad perspective on education and the various challenges schools face.

Later, I joined the Open University, where I supported teacher professional development and professional learning across the north of England. This role involved a lot of work with different schools, helping them integrate technology to support learning. Following leading educational consultancy across the UK for 10 years, a colleague in computing mentioned a great job opportunity, which brought me back to the north east.

What feedback have you received from teachers at the schools about RGS Partnerships?

The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Teachers appreciate the opportunities for their students to be part of these projects. For instance, we've had projects involving multiple visits to different schools, allowing children to get to know each other and work together on various initiatives. Teachers have told us they want to continue and expand these efforts next year.

Long-term, it's clear that students from state schools gain access to resources and opportunities they might not have otherwise. This exposure helps them develop their skills and realise their potential. It's amazing to see their talent and capabilities, especially in applying knowledge and using their computing and technology skills. Each teaching session reveals new surprises as we see what the students can achieve. This continuous discovery of their potential is one of the most rewarding aspects of the job.

PUPIL COMMENTS

CADEN, WAVERLEY PRIMARY

What are you doing today?

We're programming robots and driving them around the course. There are challenges, like making a face blink. You program one face, duplicate it, and then to make it blink, you change one eye to a straight line. Then you press start, and it blinks.

How did you learn to do these things?

Steve came to our school and taught us how to program. We use iPads to find the blocks we need. For example, if you need it to go straight, you set it to 255, but you only need that for a long straight line. You can also program it to turn 90 degrees or go backward.

What was it like learning how to do that?

It was really fun. Sometimes you miss other lessons, but it's worth it.



Learning to code is useful if you want to be a computer programmer when you grow up. Knowing how to use the blocks makes it easier to program.

Has it inspired you to learn more about robotics?

Yes, I want to learn what chips they use to make the robots move around.

Did you get a chance to go down to the RGS to do robotics?

Yes, and it was really interesting. I might get a job in robotics one day.

Do you get the chance to do more robotics at school?

Yes, and I hope more people learn about robots. Following your dreams is important, and robotics is the future. Lots of people are making robots, and they might take over some jobs.

JUSTINE, THROCKLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL

We just saw you playing with the Spheros, racing against the others. How easy is it to use them?

It's really hard because you have to control the direction carefully. If you want to turn left, it might go right. It's quite tricky to learn.

How do you remember which one you're controlling?

I'm controlling the blue one. You can change the colours, too.

Have you visited the RGS before?

Yes, I've been there for robotics and sometimes for swimming.

What's it been like working with robotics?

We've had a team, and my friends helped me with it.

Do you do robotics at your school?

Sometimes. Steve comes to our school and teaches us.

Do you think you'd like to do something with computer science when you're older as a job?

Yes.

TEACHER COMMENTS

JANE THOMSON, WAVERLEY PRIMARY

You mentioned you've done a few events with the RGS before. Could you tell us a bit about those?

Last year we did another Key Stage 2 event where they came and did some programming. They made an arcade game from scratch which was great. Each school kept their own arcade games, kind of like a Space Invaders game. We had three children from each school participate, and we went to our RGS to take part so that was really fun. We've also done swimming galas for two years in a row and participated in the Big Sing event at St James' Park. These events have provided great experiences for our kids, especially since they don't usually have access to this type of equipment.

Obviously, this is a partnership, but from your perspective and the school's perspective, what do you get out of it?

We get brilliant experiences for the kids. We have access to equipment that our school can't really afford to buy. The children get to meet other children from different schools and learn new things. It's really positive for our kids.

It's not just your school that benefits from this, right?

No, it's schools across the city that don't have the money for these things. It's really nice to have the partnership so the kids can have these experiences. For instance, we have one little girl who's really interested in coding and wants to pursue it as a career. This partnership opens doors and ideas for her. It's been really positive. I hope it continues!

Tell me about the swimming gala

Our children have also had swimming lessons. Last year, we had some children who didn't pass the 25 meters requirement, so we took them for extra lessons at the RGS pool in August. We used the pool after school, which was really good. In the end, all our kids passed the 25 meters requirement. That ran for about ten weeks, and then they took part in the swimming gala for the last two years. They come back full of it – they really enjoy taking part.



Former England Rugby player Charlie Maddison is the latest addition to RGS Partnerships programme.

Part-funded by England Rugby (RFU), Charlie is working half the time coaching at RGS, and the rest in our local partner schools to inspire the next generation in areas of low participation.

It's an exciting opportunity to build on the "funded-teacher" model that has been so successful here in Maths, Physics, Robotics and Computer Science.

Charlie, who previously played for Newcastle Falcons, is one of 40 School Rugby Managers working across the country, all working towards the twin objectives of creating 'sustainable rugby playing in schools' and providing 'transition' pathways in local clubs.

Charlie's working week will involve a mix of mornings in partner schools, motivating and inspiring the next generations; in the afternoons (and Saturdays!) he will be bringing a huge amount of expertise to the RGS rugby programme.

He says: "What we're trying to do is give kids an opportunity to get a ball in their hands, run

around, and get a taste of something they maybe haven't done before.

"Hopefully that will spark their interest and lead them to their local rugby club. It's a good way to help them connect."

John Smith, Director of Partnerships, says: "There has been huge demand for Charlie's rugby offer already – and we fully expect to reach thousands of young people this school year through this innovative programme, in partnership with England Rugby.

"There are areas of the North East where rugby won't be on the radar of children at all – it is our mission to change that, and to ignite a passion that might not otherwise be sparked!"

Andy McBride, RGS Deputy Head Co-Curricular, praised Charlie's "fantastic start" in the role.

"Mr Maddison is heavily involved in coaching all of our RGS teams and will also have significant impact on Rugby development in the wider community," he said.

"We are so pleased to have him at the RGS. He has all the values, attitudes and character traits that we hold dear to us at the school."

OMS ROCKS

BY **RACHAEL SHAW-KEW**,
TEACHER OF DRAMA



OMS Rocks was an idea conceived by me and Ben Squire on the coach whilst on the Paris choir tour. We were inspired by how quickly we could set up and perform with a huge orchestra in all different venues – band stands, hospitals, all over! We got to thinking about schools who don't have facilities like ours, who would benefit enormously from the experience of hosting a concert and having parents being able to see their children performing and enjoying music.

As part of the Partnership scheme, I have been doing some Community Theatre events in the Tyne Valley, where there is such an appetite for opportunities to develop the performing arts. There seemed to be a real disparity between the opportunities for additional sporting activities on offer and those in the Arts. This led us to approaching Ovingham Middle School

and meeting with them as to whether they would be keen to let us trial our 'pop up rock concert' idea, which they were absolutely over the moon to accept.

On 1 October, a group of 20 musicians and singers from OMS came over to our school for a morning of joint rehearsals, with our Sixth Form 'Funktion Band' members acting as teachers and mentors, and Miss Armatage from OMS taking a lead on the singing. I was astounded at how generously our students shared their skills to guide and encourage their younger counterparts, with the result that within minutes, all the students were making music and making friends. Sarah Bolt and Ben Squire had done a wonderful job of selecting and arranging popular and upbeat music, so that even the least experienced students could play it. It was fantastic to see the first three tracks come together so brilliantly after such a short rehearsal, thanks to Sarah Bolt's skilful and enthusiastic conducting and direction.

After a week of individual rehearsal, we set off early on the morning of 9 October, with a minibus full of excited RGS students and a van absolutely crammed full of every possible piece of equipment needed to create a very special concert. RGS stage crew worked effectively and professionally with budding technicians from OMS, to set up lighting and sound equipment and to transform their school gym into a spectacular concert space.

Another day of intensive rehearsal concluded with a marvellous concert, featuring an original rap set to *Rapper's Delight*, a group performance of *Happy*, *Don't Look Back in Anger* and *Higher and Higher* as well as some marvellous solo performances. The reaction of the audience, made up of parents and friends, spoke volumes about the success of the event. The applause went on and on and on, as the participants stood there, taking it all in and beaming with pride.

I would argue that there is no experience better than playing in a musical ensemble, working together with others to a common goal and achieving a joyful outcome together, and this was a very special event that really epitomised the great opportunities that the Partnership scheme provides. I am incredibly proud of my unbelievably hardworking colleagues, and of all the students who took part. It was a special day that will live long in the memory for all of us lucky enough to be part of it.



MY BURSARY STORY

LUCY CONROY

All the world is a stage for **Lucy Conroy** (ON 19-21) who recently joined the prestigious Italia Conti drama school in London to study for a degree in musical theatre. The 21-year-old came to the Royal Grammar School on a full bursary. Lucy shares her story with Caroline Briggs.

“From the moment I stepped onto the stage at Newcastle’s Theatre Royal as an excitable seven-year-old, I knew that performing was where I belonged.

Back then, it was *The King and I* and I was just a child with endless energy, but something clicked. My parents channelled my hyperactivity into something constructive by signing me up for performing arts class. Little did they know, they were igniting a lifelong passion.

Since that first musical, my journey through the world of performing arts has been nothing short of exhilarating. I’ve performed on so many stages – in shows like *Chicago*, *The Sound of Music*, *The Wizard of Oz* – adding another chapter to my story with every performance.

For me, the stage is so much more than just a platform for entertainment; it’s a place I can channel my energy and creativity. I feel a sense of purpose and fulfilment that I am making a difference to people’s lives in my own way.

Every day in the world of musical theatre brings something new and exciting. Whether it’s diving into a fresh script, collaborating with talented artists, or bringing a character to life in front of a captivated audience, there’s never a dull moment.

Musical theatre is not just a career for me, it’s a calling – a fundamental part of who I am.

Without it, I wouldn’t be me, and the RGS played a huge part in getting me here.

I grew up in Stakeford, which is smack bang in the middle between Bedlington and Ashington, and in so many ways it is a very small place.

Many friends who were content to stay in Northumberland their whole lives, were sceptical of my great big plans and dreams.





Sometimes I don't think bursary donors know and appreciate just how much their kindness has changed somebody's path and somebody's life. One hundred-per-cent they did that for me. I wouldn't have had any of the opportunities I've had in the past few years if it hadn't been for the RGS.

Me, barrelling in, going: 'I want to go to London, I want to do this. I want to go drama school. I want all the big things' meant there was a sense I was getting too big for my boots; that I should stay in my lane.

I didn't want to stay in my lane, I just didn't know how to get out.

Ever since I was a toddler, I've never been one to be told 'no'. If you tell me 'no, you can't do that' it makes me more determined to do it. I want to prove people wrong and I also want to show people that anything is possible. I have no doubt that there are hundreds – thousands – of unbelievably talented kids in the north-east who don't have the means to go out and do what it is that they're dreaming of. I want to be the one that says: 'you can do it' and give them somebody to look at and think 'well, if Lucy can do it, why can't I?'

One of my singing teachers who was also tutoring me in English, knew about the bursary scheme at the RGS. His grandmother used to teach at the school and they could see I had academic potential. As soon as me and my mum knew the scheme existed, we started to believe me coming to the RGS could be a reality, and the more I found out about the school the more I fell in love.

Coming to the RGS was key to getting out of my lane and it all came together piece-by-piece.

Waiting to hear if I had a place after my interview was horrifically nerve-wracking, so I was so relieved to be offered a place in December 2018. It was the best birthday present I could have asked for when I found out I had a full bursary the day before my 16th birthday a couple of months later.

Walking into the school for the first time was strange because I had to battle feelings that I didn't deserve to be here. My Sixth Form blazer was from the Next outlet shop, and my trousers were hand-me-downs from my grandma. Everything was patched together and for a long time I felt out of place. I sounded different, I felt like I looked different, and I felt like everybody knew I was there on a bursary.

Miss Davison (head of drama) was the first person to make me feel like it was okay. One day I was in tears outside the drama room and we had a really long chat. She said to me: "You deserve to be here as much as any of those other students – it doesn't matter how they sound, how they look, how much they have in their bank account. You have demonstrated you should be here, so go out there and take up the space you've earned". So I did.

I initially had very clear ideas on the drama schools I wanted to go to after A-levels and I stuck to that plan.

Then one night I had a dream about Italia Conti and I woke up with a very spooky feeling that I should have applied. Unfortunately, I had missed the deadline and I took that as a sign it wasn't my time. I just had to wait until the next opportunity. It gave me a chance to refocus, get my health in order, and attack auditions better than I've ever done before.

When I walked through the doors of Italia Conti for my recall audition I had a really bizarre feeling. My entire body was screaming: "This is it! This is the place that you have been meant to be all this time."

I waited nine days to find out if I had been successful. My phone was glued to my hand the whole time – except when the email finally came through! I was elbow deep in a bowl of soapy dishwater

when I saw my phone flash and I just started to cry because to finally have the email I had been waiting years for was the most surreal feeling in the world.

Even though I left the RGS a few years ago the school has continued to support me.

Mike Downie, the fantastic head of careers here, guided me through the whole University process. He helped with my personal statement and my UCAS applications, even things like watching my audition tapes to making sure I came across okay. One of the most remarkable things about this school is that you don't leave the community behind when you move on.

Sometimes I don't think bursary donors know and appreciate just how much their kindness has changed somebody's path and somebody's life. One hundred-per-cent they did that for me. I wouldn't have had any of the opportunities I've had in the past few years if it hadn't been for the RGS. I wouldn't have had the means to achieve my dreams of going drama school, and to work professionally in musical theatre.

If I am ever in the in the fortunate position to do so myself, I will donate to the bursary fund. I want to give back because there are so many children in the North East who are brilliant at what they do – sport, tech, business, law, whatever – and they should have as much chance to succeed as anyone else. There is a huge problem with generational poverty in the North East and I think breaking that cycle is so important by showing kids there is life beyond 'their lane' and life beyond what they've seen around them.

There's so many doors waiting to be unlocked, and so many big dreams to be fulfilled, and RGS bursary donors are key to that.



Join Us in Giving Back: Unleashing the Power of RGS Gives

RGS Gives is more than a campaign—it's a heartfelt call to our entire RGS community to rally together and give back to our beloved Newcastle and the wider North East. We believe in the boundless potential of our region, but to ignite true social change, we need your passion, support, and belief. Together, we can leave a legacy that transforms lives and uplifts our community.

There are countless ways you can make a difference—whether through donations, sharing your time and talent, or simply spreading the word.

**Every action matters.
Every gift counts. Every story inspires.**

How You Can Help: Find Your Way to Give Back



500 CLUB

Celebrate our 500th anniversary with a gift of £500. Your support marks this historic milestone and ensures our legacy continues for centuries more.



QUINCENTENARY CLUB

Commemorate 500 years since Thomas Horsley's visionary gift with a contribution of £1,525. Join a tradition of giving that dates back to 1525, shaping the future of our region.



BRIGHT SPARKS

Your one-time or regular donation, no matter the amount, will spark immediate change. Each contribution fuels life-changing initiatives that ripple across generations.



FELLOWS OF THE RGS

Fellows have given £100,000 or more to support bursaries, partnerships, or capital projects. Their extraordinary contributions are recognized with stone plaques on the school building—a lasting tribute to their generosity and vision.



BURSARY BENEFACTORS

By donating £10,000 or more, you're not just funding education—you're transforming lives. These transformational bursaries create a deep, generational impact, uplifting entire families and reshaping their futures. Benefactors receive special recognition with prominent books on our donor bookcase.



PARTNERSHIP PIONEERS

Your support helps us reach over 10,000 young people across the North East through tailored projects that align with your passions. Your impact spreads wide, transforming communities and touching lives far beyond our walls. Pioneers are also honoured with prominent, commemorative books on our donor bookcase.



HORSLEY SOCIETY

Leaving a legacy gift to RGS is a profound act of love and belief in the future. It's an investment in generations to come, honouring the transformative power of education. Your legacy will be etched in stone, a permanent reminder of your commitment to our shared values.



SUTHERLAND SOCIETY

Commemorate 500 years since Thomas Horsley's visionary gift with a contribution of £1,525. Join a tradition of giving that dates back to 1525, shaping the future of our region.

Direct Your Impact: Choose a Fund That Speaks to You

No matter the size of your gift, you can choose exactly how your contribution makes a difference. Here's where your support can go:



Help change a child's future. 1 in 16 students attend RGS on a means-tested bursary, and your donation—big or small—can transform their life trajectory.



Reach over 10,000 students in local schools, enhancing their education through challenging and inspiring academic programs.

BURSARIES HARDSHIP FUND

Support bursary families facing financial challenges with essential non-fee costs like uniforms, trips, and lunches.

CAPITAL PROJECTS

Strengthen the foundation of RGS by contributing to new facilities and equipment. Your support maintains our excellence and creates lasting opportunities for generations of students.

More Than Money: Share Your Story, Time, and Talent

Not everyone can give financially, and we cherish every contribution you make. Your talents, knowledge, and stories are invaluable to us. Whether you mentor a student, share your journey, or lend your expertise, you're helping to create a brighter future. Please get in touch to talk about how you can get involved.



“

I think about you, the donors I never thought I would ever meet, who made the ultimate act of kindness to help me, a stranger to you. Your generosity completely changed the trajectory of my life and it's indescribable the impact the RGS has had on all of the options and opportunities that I would not have otherwise had.

But there are many more kids just like me, with the same ability and a fire for knowledge. So please keep doing what you are doing. If you have given, please continue to do so, if you are considering it, please take the leap and support someone just like me. You are not merely investing in academic pursuits, you are investing in dreams, aspirations and the promise of a brighter future.

Charlie Potts (ON 22-24)

Together, we can show the world what it truly means when RGS Gives.



To see more about the difference you can make through our funds, please visit www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk/rgs-gives

LONDON DINNER

7 MARCH 2024



Over 150 Old Novos from across the generations came together at the prestigious Royal Automobile Club, on London's Pall Mall, to reconnect, reminisce and celebrate a shared passion for the RGS in a spectacular, joyful evening.

For those who left the school over 65 years ago swapped stories with Sixth Form Prefects before they too departed the school this summer.

Fellow Old Novo and Global CEO of Sony Interactive Entertainment **Jim Ryan** (ON 68-78) captivated the room with stories of his journey from Eskdale Terrace to the Sony Boardroom and the whole room raised the roof with a rapturous rendition of the *School Song*.

"God speed the School on the shores of the Tyne, that has stood for centuries four; Bright may the star of her glory shine, bright as in days of yore."

We are delighted to invite you to the next London ONA Dinner, where we will celebrate RGS Newcastle's Quincentenary in style!

Join us at the stunning One Great George Street in Westminster for an unforgettable evening featuring a drinks reception, a three-course dinner, and wine. To mark this special occasion, we invite all guests to embrace the glamour of the night with a black and gold dress code, symbolising 500 years of excellence at RGS.

Once again there are reduced-price tickets available for ONs aged under 30. We look forward to celebrating with you!



Scan the QR code to book your tickets.



RGS500 EVENTS



In 2025, RGS Newcastle marks an extraordinary milestone – our Quincentenary.

While the exact founding date of our school remains shrouded in mystery, 1525 stands out. It was the year Thomas Horsley, then Mayor of Newcastle, made an extraordinary act of generosity. Through his will, he gifted his estate to establish a grammar school in the city – a legacy that became the Newcastle upon Tyne Royal Grammar School we know today.

This 500-year-old promise has shaped generations of students, and in 2025, we honour Thomas Horsley's enduring gift with a year-long celebration spanning spring 2025 to spring 2026.

Our Quincentenary will showcase the rich history of RGS through ten inspiring themes, spotlighting the school's profound impact on the North East and beyond, while celebrating the individuals who have forged our remarkable community.

Join us as we commemorate five centuries of education, innovation, and community spirit. Let the celebrations begin!

23 January 2025 RGS Philanthropy Dinner (invitation only) E	13 May 2025 RGS 500 - Traditions and School Life Theme Launch D	28 June 2025 RGS 500 Festival E	17 November 2025 Launch 24/25 commemorative Annual Review P
6 February 2025 Economics Reunion (invitation only) E	20 May 2025 RGS 500 - War Theme Launch D	1 July 2025 RGS 500 - People Theme Launch D	December 2025 RGS 500 Art of Hope E Launch of RGS 500 Christmas video D
13 March 2025 London ONA Dinner at One Great George Street E	27 May 2025 RGS 500 - Royal Heritage Theme Launch D	8 July 2025 RGS 500 - Impact on the City Theme Launch D	(tbc) December 2025 RGS 500 Carol Service at St George's Church, Jesmond E
18 March 2025 Launch of RGS 500 webpages D	3 June 2025 RGS 500 - Academic Theme Launch D	September 2025 Launch of 'inspiring Old Novo' webpages D	Spring 2026 Launch of harvested memories D
19 March 2025 RGS 500 Choir and Orchestra Concert at The Glasshouse E	10 June 2025 RGS 500 - Performing Arts Theme Launch D	October 2025 Launch of RGS 500 commemorative ONA Magazine P	(tbc) March 2026 London ONA Dinner E
April 2025 ONA Magazine P	17 June 2025 RGS 500 - Sport Theme Launch D	10 October 2025 RGS 500 Newcastle ONA Dinner E	April 2026 ONA Magazine P
(tbc) April Lawyers' Reunion (invitation only) E	21 June 2025 RGS 500 Garden Party E	(tbc) October 2025 Back to 1525 day E	(tbc) May 2026 CLOSE OF CELEBRATIONS Special Choir and Orchestra Concert E
01 May 2025 RGS 500 Giving Day E	24 June 2025 RGS 500 - Co-Curricular (societies and character) Theme Launch D	15 October 2025 RGS 500 Founder's Service at Newcastle Cathedral E	Autumn 2026 Launch of 25/26 commemorative Annual Review P
06 May 2025 RGS 500 - Buildings Theme Launch D	27 June 2025 Story of our School book launch P	7 November 2025 RGS 500 Remembrance Service E	

Key D: Digital Content E: Event P: Publication

NEWS & CONGRATULATIONS



CLASSIC CAR RESTORATIONS DRIVE TONY'S PASSION FOR ADVENTURE

For **Tony Mather** (ON 55-62) a passion for classic cars has been a defining feature of his life since leaving the Royal Grammar School.

For decades he has indulged his passion for classic and vintage cars, restoring and competing in models like the 1930 Invicta to a 1973 V12 E-type Jaguar.

Tony bought his pride and joy, a Delahaye, in 2016 as a collection of parts, missing key components such as the gearbox and bodywork.

Through parts sourced from Europe and America, and with the help of a skilled friend, Tony restored the car to look exactly as the Delahayes were raced in the 1930s, finishing the project in 2019.

"So far, we have done over 5,000 miles in it; not without problems, mind," he says proudly.

One of Tony's most memorable adventures was the Inca Trail Rally, a gruelling two-month long, 15,500 mile (25,000 km) journey around South America in a 1973 Citroën DS23, with his

wife Pauline navigating.

"When competing in long rallies, washing and drying clothes becomes necessary," he explains.

"In South America we dried our clothes by hanging them on the slowly rotating ceiling fans. This worked well, until a pair of pants fell off, unbalancing the fan, causing it to wobble alarmingly then with a loud bang the entire hotel electrical system failed," Tony recalls with a chuckle.

Tony's love for tinkering and problem-solving traces back to his days at the RGS in the late 1950s. He was also a keen photographer, capturing many scenes of school life which he has kindly shared with ONA.

Inspired by science teacher **George 'Dixie' Dean** (ON 24-67), Mather developed a passion for physics after an infamous bomb prank during the Sixth Form dance led to a two-week suspension.

"Dixie Dean took great delight in explaining pressure waves in explosions afterwards," Tony laughs.

In an era devoid of strict Health and Safety rules, Tony and his classmates conducted other daring and questionable experiments, like making Nitrogen Tri-iodide, which exploded with the slightest touch when sprinkled on classroom floors.

Other school pranks included his brother Charles dropping Miner's Carbide into inkwells, causing the ink to froth over.

Perhaps it's no surprise that Tony went on to Leeds University after school to study for a degree in Physics.

He started his career at Grubb Parsons in Newcastle, mastering gas analysis, before founding his own business, Camic Ltd, in 1977 where he developed car exhaust gas analysers and later breathalysers for the Home Office, becoming one of only two global manufacturers.

His company also produced apnoea alarms for babies and diesel smoke meters for lorry exhausts until his retirement in 2010. He lives near Allendale.

L-R: David Hill, Tony 'Titch' Mather, Armstrong, George Dobeson, Peter Brock (standing), Danny Danskin, Oliver

DR JEREMY CATTO REMEMBERED IN NEW PUBLICATION

This autumn saw the publication of a biography of **Dr Jeremy Catto** (ON 53-58), a historian, essayist, and the quintessential Oxford don.

Described by former MP and government minister Alan Duncan as “part CP Snow, *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, and *Porterhouse Blue*,” Catto’s remarkable journey began at the Royal Grammar School in Newcastle in the 1950s.

Catto spent his career shaping the minds of countless students at Oriel College, Oxford, where he served as Senior Dean and tutor in Medieval History. Many of his protégés went on to distinguish themselves in the politics, academia, and finance spheres, carrying with them the sharp intellect and character Catto instilled.

David Vaiani, an Orielenis and author of the newly released biography, studied under Catto in the early 2000s.

David paints a vivid picture of his former tutor as a charismatic yet enigmatic figure with an eclectic social circle: “He had an extraordinary life and had a huge impact on many people over many years,” he recalls.

Indeed, Catto’s life was peppered with intrigue. A lifelong friend of musician Bryan Ferry and rumoured drinking companion of former Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, there are whispers that Catto may even have been a spy for British intelligence.

Despite these colourful associations, David remembers Catto

as a paradoxical figure – brilliant and funny, yet reserved and hard to truly know. “Generations of Orielenes owe him a huge debt of gratitude. I adored him,” he adds.

The biography offers a detailed exploration of Catto’s early years in the North East, including his time at RGS Newcastle.

Early hints of his future career can be found in the RGS Archive through pieces he wrote for *NOVO* magazine, including a report on History Camp to Canterbury, and a short item about the retirement of History Master **Sidney Middlebrook** in 1958.

At the 1957 prize day, Catto won the English and History prizes for Upper Sixth Form and was later awarded the Turnbull Prize for winners of open awards at the Universities.

His intellectual promise was apparent, earning him a Brackenbury Scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford, where his future path as a scholar was set.

After a brief stint teaching at Durham University, Catto’s heart ultimately lay outside the North East, but he carried fond memories of his time at RGS – particularly History under Mr Middlebrook – throughout his life.

Jeremy Catto: A Portrait of the Quintessential Oxford Don is published by Unicorn Press.

EMMY AWARD NOMINATION FOR ON, TOM GOODMAN-HILL



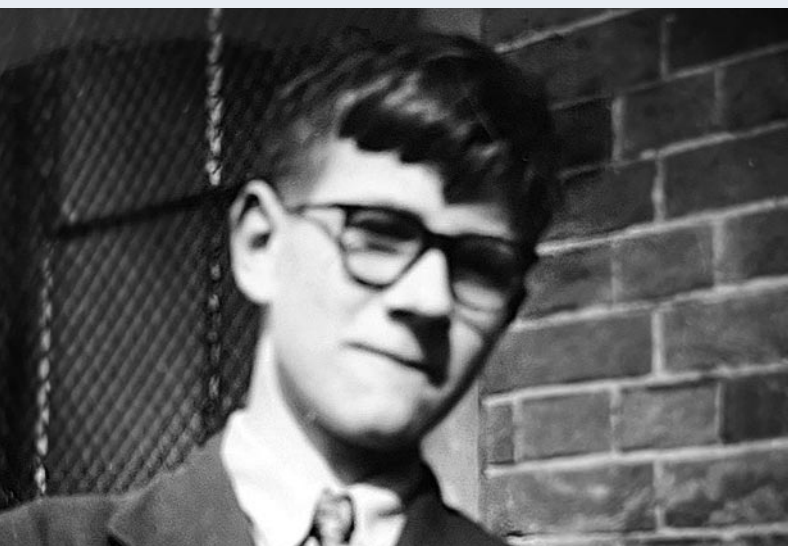
Congratulations to actor and RGS ON **Tom Goodman-Hill** (ON 76-86) who was nominated for a prestigious Emmy award for his role in the Netflix hit *Baby Reindeer*.

Goodman-Hill scored a Best Supporting Actor nomination for his portrayal of television producer Darrian who grooms a desperate young comic.

The award was won by Lamorne Morris for his role in *True Detective: Night Country* at the award ceremony in September.

Tom showed early promise as an actor while at the RGS, taking the lead role in *Oliver!* in 1980.

Left: Jeremy Catto; Right: Author, David Vaiani



NEWS & CONGRATULATIONS



OLHA MAKES THE GRADE THROUGH BURSARY DONATION

After escaping the war in Ukraine, RGS student Olha Volianyk has celebrated remarkable A-Level results.

Two years ago, the 18-year-old fled her home country with her mother and younger sister, eventually finding refuge in the North East.

They were welcomed by a local host family, who connected Olha with RGS's bursary scheme after hearing about her passion for Computer Science.

This summer, Olha's hard work paid off as she secured three A*s in Maths, Further Maths, and Physics, and an A in Computer Science.

"I dream of returning to Ukraine and contributing to my country," says Olha.

"For now, I've focused on my studies, earning a spot to study Computer Science at Cambridge. However, I've decided to accept an offer from MIT in Boston."

"I am so thankful to my mum for her brave decision to leave and protect us, to my host family who took us in, my teachers at RGS who pushed me to excel, and to the donors who made it possible for me to attend RGS.

"Although we've never met,

you've transformed my life. I will never forget it, and I'll do everything I can to make you proud."

Headteacher Geoffrey Stanford praised Olha's accomplishments: "Olha deserves special recognition for her resilience and dedication over the past two years.

"She's an extraordinary young woman who has not only inspired her peers but also our entire school community with her passion and determination."

The RGS class of 2024 had much to celebrate, with 90.9% of grades at A*-B, 69.5% at A*-A, and 36.1% at A*.

Twenty students achieved straight A*s, while 79 earned all A* or A grades.

Notably, half of all bursary students' grades were A*, and students with Special Educational Needs achieved comparable results.

Mr Sandford added: "It takes a community to educate its children, a principle rooted in our founding legacy.

"Thanks to our generous donors, we can support students like Olha, along with 90 others on bursaries."



DANCE SPECIALIST CLASSES PROVE HIT WITH PUPILS

It's been just over a year since Kayleigh Oborka-Letman joined RGS as the school's first-ever Dance Specialist, and her programme has already exceeded all expectations.

Initially uncertain how dance would be received at a historically all-boys school, Kayleigh says she has been blown away by the enthusiasm from both boys and girls. Participation has more than doubled across all year groups, with boys' dance sessions in the Senior School expanding and the girls' company now a flagship group.

Kayleigh has also launched the Intermediate Dance Company for younger students, providing a structured pathway for dancers to progress. The Junior School is fully on board, with younger students, including Year 3s, diving into dance with enthusiasm.

Beyond school, Kayleigh was selected for Matthew Bourne's New Adventures Overture program, keeping her connected with the latest trends in dance. She's also incorporating dance into the PE curriculum for Year 9 and led the school's first-ever summer dance camps, which ended with an exciting "dance in a day" performance.

With West End workshops and more dance shows and performances planned, RGS dance is going from strength to strength.





NEW WINDOW SHEDS LIGHT ON RGS' CO-EDUCATION BEGINNINGS

The RGS library boasts a striking new centrepiece – a stunning stained glass window designed by the acclaimed artist Maralyn O’Keefe from the Glass and Art Gallery in Consett.

Commissioned by the ONA to commemorate the introduction of co-education in 2001, the window was officially unveiled on 8 March 2024 by **Hazel Jones-Lee** (Staff 84-09), who served as Senior Mistress and played a pivotal role in the school’s transition from a single-sex institution.

The unveiling ceremony coincided with International Women’s Day and saw many of the school’s first 22 female students return for the event, where Maralyn was present to introduce her work.

The design is a blend of student artwork and brings together symbols from the school’s rich history with modern themes of diversity, inclusion, and unity.

The window sits next to Maralyn’s previous stained glass window commission commemorating the life and service of Queen Elizabeth II.



ON AWARDED MBE IN KING’S HONOURS LIST

Congratulations to **Ashley Summerfield** (ON 73-83) who was recognised by HM King Charles III in the King’s Birthday Honours List 2024, for services to Young People.

Ashley leads Egon Zehnder’s global CEO and Board Consulting Practice. He also served as Chair of the People Committee for National Citizen Service, a UK organisation helping thousands of teenagers become “world-ready and work-ready.”

The King’s Honours system recognises people from across the UK for their extraordinary contributions and service in many walks of life.

RGS BIDS FAREWELL TO BELOVED CATERING HEAD AFTER 26 YEARS

After 26 years and over four million meals, **Barrie Bulch**, Head of Catering at RGS, has hung up his apron for the last time.

Since joining in 1998, Barrie has become a cherished figure in the school, both for his dedication to the kitchen and his involvement in school rugby.

Reflecting on his career, Barrie said he will miss the students most of all, recalling chance encounters with former pupils around the world.

Originally from the Army Catering Corps, Barrie adapted quickly to school life, overseeing changes to the kitchen during RGS’s transition to co-education and expanding student population.

Known for his warmth and humour, Barrie recently enjoyed being a guest rather than chef at the RGS ON Dinner and says he’s ready to spend more time with his wife and “treat every day like a Bank Holiday”.



Scan the QR code to hear more from Barrie



STAY CONNECTED

Please join us by becoming a fan of the Old Novocastrians Association on our Facebook page, Twitter page and LinkedIn Group – Old Novocastrians’ Association (RGS Newcastle)

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BOARDMAN, H.S.	KING'S, CANTAB.	GILLIS, D.	ST. PETER'S, OXON.
BORRELL, A.F.	BRASENOSE, OXON.	JACKMAN, D.J.	NEW COLLEGE, OXON.
DUNCAN-JONES, M.O.	ST. PETER'S, OXON.	MACKINNON, I.A.	PETERHOUSE, CANTAB.
HOLT, R.W.	CHURCHILL, CANTAB.	MCINTOSH, R.G.	FITZWILLIAM, CANTAB.
JUDSON, R.L.	CORPUS CHRISTI, OXON.	MANN, A.L.	ST. CATHARINE'S, CANTAB.
KESSLER, D.S.	ST. CATHERINE'S, OXON.	NICKSON, R.A.	ST. CATHERINE'S, CANTAB.
MACFADEN, B.	QUEEN'S, OXON.	NORMAN, D.M.	LIOL, OXON.
McCULLOUGH, A.M.B.	ST. PETER'S, OXON.	ROBINS, P.A.	TON, OXON.
MERCER, A.D.	ST. PETER'S, OXON.	RICHARDSON, P.	IS, CANTAB.
MERRITT, D.J.	ST. CATHARINE'S, CANTAB.	ROBINSON, A.D.	DALEN, OXON.
MORAN, M.E.	ST. CATHARINE'S, CANTAB.	SAXELBY, C.	ST. PETER'S, OXON.
OGLE, S.F.	MAGDALEN, OXON.	WASSERMANN, J.	ST. JOHN'S, CANTAB.
PATERSON, A.	LINCOLN, OXON.	75-76 BAIRD, I.	ST. JOHN'S, CANTAB.
RIDLEY, D.J.	CLARE, CANTAB.	DEAN, D.W.	ST. CATHARINE'S, CANTAB.
ROBINSON, C.I.	ST. CATHERINE'S, OXON.	DOUGLAS, D.A.	MERTON, OXON.

OBITUARIES

We're introducing a new way of sharing obituaries in *ONA Magazine*. The heartfelt tributes written by our community to honour their loved ones mean so much to us. However, we must also be mindful of the limited space in our printed edition.

From this issue onwards, we will publish concise summaries of obituaries in the magazine, with the full versions available online. We hope the RGS community understands this change, which helps us keep *ONA Magazine* free for all while continuing to celebrate the remarkable lives and legacies of our cherished alumni in a meaningful way.

To read the obituaries, please scan the QR code below, or visit rgs.newcastle.sch.uk/rgs-family/on/obituaries



PETER BRODRICK (ON 48-56)
DIED 16 MARCH 2024

ANDREW BARBER (ON 83-90)
DIED 18 JULY 2023

JOHN GRAY (ON 57-64)
DIED SEPTEMBER 2022

ROBERT GRAHAM BELL

(ON 53-63)

BORN 17 MARCH 1943, DIED 4 FEBRUARY 2023 AGED 79



Graham Bell entered the RGS Junior School in 1953, one of three boys with the same surname in his year. Nicknamed “ARGE,” the name stuck throughout his school years. Another boy was amusingly dubbed “Tinker” Bell!

At senior school, Graham excelled in the sciences, taking A-levels in maths, physics, and chemistry. His closest friend was Robin (Sleepy) Macro, whose father, William was a maths teacher affectionately nicknamed “Simple Will” – a misnomer for such a skilled educator. Graham’s other friends included “Talker” Jones and Tony Balfour.

Wiry and tough, Graham shone at cross-country running under the guidance of master Bill “Porker” Elliott, but his true sporting passion was cycling, becoming the under-18s “Early Birds” time trial champion. Unfortunately, cycling wasn’t recognised with school colours otherwise Graham would have received them cum magnum laude.

A proud member of the school CCF, Graham rose to Sergeant. At annual camps on Otterburn Moors, he relished playing the “enemy,” delighting in outwitting the cadets. For his antics, RSM O’Brian often assigned him latrine duty or distributing “Number Nine” laxatives to constipated fellow cadets.

After RGS, Graham studied biology at King’s College, Newcastle, earning a BSc from Durham University. He then pursued a PhD in bacteriology at Downing College, Cambridge, researching Fenland soil samples – some of the gasses omitted stool to high heaven!

After marrying Janet, a nurse, Graham moved to Canada, teaching at Guelph and McMaster before joining Singapore’s Medical School. He eventually settled in New Zealand, working in meat preservation research.

Graham passed away surrounded by his devoted family, including four daughters and numerous grandchildren.

Read a full obituary by **Duncan Bell** (ON 58-63) online.

DR GRAHAM SYDNEY BLACK

(ON 34-44)

BORN 4 FEBRUARY 1926, DIED 28 MARCH 2024, AGED 98



Dr Graham Sydney Black was a talented and versatile sportsman during his school years, excelling in rugby and cricket at First Team level. A contemporary of Tom Graveney (Gloucestershire and England), he displayed great promise on the field. During World War II, he was evacuated to Penrith, a move that marked a significant chapter in his early life.

After qualifying in medicine at Durham in 1949, Dr Black continued his passion for rugby, playing for Novocastrians during his undergraduate years. He then served as Surgeon-Lieutenant in the Royal Navy, participating in active service during the Korean War, an experience that shaped his character and commitment to service.

For many years, Dr Black was a well-respected GP in Newcastle, providing compassionate care to generations of families. He was a vocal and active member of the Local Medical Committee, where his contributions were highly valued. Outside of medicine, he had a wide range of interests, including golf and fishing, pursuits he continued to enjoy well into his retirement in 1994.

Modest and unassuming in public, Dr Black was a sociable and warm individual in private, forming lifelong friendships with colleagues and friends alike. A devoted family man, he enjoyed good health for most of his life and passed away in Manchester.

He is survived by his wife, two children, four grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. His son, **David** (ON 66-76), and grandsons **Nicholas** (ON 03-10) and **Richard** (ON 05-12) represent three successive generations at RGS, a testament to the lasting connection his family has with RGS.

Read a full obituary by **David Black** (ON 66-76) online.

PROF. PETER BRITTON

(ON 47-59)

BORN 30 DECEMBER 1940, DIED 8 MAY 2023, AGED 82



Peter Britton began his education at RGS Newcastle, where he pursued cross-country running and the CCF. He often recalled the thrill of seeing the Northern Lights on a school camp at Glen Brittle and attending Outward Bound near Ullswater. Another vivid memory was the school assembly announcing the death of the King. During his school days, Peter met Dame Allan’s student, Ann, on the bus – she later became his wife. He went on to study **Physics and Psychology** at St John’s College, Durham, before focusing on **Psychology** for his PhD at Newcastle University.

Peter’s career in clinical psychology was shaped by his work on cognition and personality in older people, first as a lecturer at Strathclyde University, then at Newcastle University, where he became a senior lecturer. As course director for the MSc in Clinical Psychology and an honorary consultant clinical psychologist in the NHS, Peter bridged the gap between academia and healthcare. He earned a Fellowship of the British Psychological Society in 1988, and became a Chartered Clinical and Health Psychologist.

His work included clinical practice, notably at the Newcastle RVI’s haemophilia centre during the blood transfusion scandal, and research into intellectual changes following childhood leukaemia treatments and the psychology of ageing. His 1985 textbook *Clinical Psychology* with the Elderly, co-written with Bob Woods, was a seminal work.

A lifelong advocate for the outdoors, Scouting, and the church, Peter cherished long walks and nurturing strong bonds with his four grandchildren. In his professorial lecture, he championed adding life to years – a goal he exemplified in his own life.

Read a full obituary by **Frank Robson** (ON 50-58) online.

ROGER ELPHICK

(ON 51-61)

BORN 26 MAY 1943, DIED ON 25
OCTOBER 2023, AGED 80



Roger Elphick enjoyed a distinguished career as a civil engineer. After attending RGS, he graduated from Newcastle University (then King's College, Durham) with first-class honours in 1965. He became a member of the Chartered Institute of Highways and Transport (CIHT) in 1969 and a Fellow in 1996. An early career highlight was overseeing the construction of a stretch of the M62 motorway, linking to the Humber Bridge. As a young resident engineer, Roger managed one of the first motorways built using concrete due to rising oil prices in the early 1970s.

As Head of Highways Management at Durham County Council, Roger specialised in street works, lighting, and safety. He introduced Durham's thriving Park & Ride scheme and the more controversial rising bollard in Durham Market Place. Roger was Treasurer and Council Member of the CIHT and chaired its North Eastern branch. In May 2024, the CIHT created an Apprentice of the Year Award in his honour, recognising his dedication to mentoring young engineers.

A proud moment came in 2002 when he received an OBE for services to highways and transportation from King Charles III, then Prince of Wales.

Born in wartime Newcastle, Roger spent his early years in Seahouses, fostering a lifelong love of the Northumberland coast. He rowed, and played tennis competitively into his 70s at The Northumberland Club. At university, he met Susan Walsh, whom he married in 1968. They had two children, Simon and Jo, and grandsons Freddie and Harry, the latter still at RGS.

A Newcastle United East Stand season ticket holder since 1988, Roger fittingly passed as the Champions League anthem played at St James' Park for the first time in 20 years.

Read a full obituary by **Simon Elphick** (ON 88-95) online.

IAN CHEYNE GATENBY

(ON 50-61)

BORN 30 JUNE 1942, DIED 1 JANUARY
2024, AGED 82



Ian joined RGS Newcastle in September 1950 and quickly established himself as a "shining light," excelling in school life and academics. A keen participant in the Debating and History Societies, he also developed a lifelong love for music, literature, and poetry, with several of his works published in *NOVOS*. He displayed his theatrical talent as *Lady Macduff* in a school production of *Macbeth* and enjoyed rowing, representing the Boat Club's second team.

As a prefect, Ian received both a State Scholarship and a Stapledon Scholarship in History in 1961, securing his place at Exeter College, Oxford, where he studied History, English, and Jurisprudence. At Oxford, he continued rowing for his College team.

After graduating, Ian began a graduate trainee role at Dunlop in Newcastle but soon pivoted to law, completing his conversion course in Guildford and articles with Lovell, White & King. Specialising in Planning, he became a partner at McKenna & Co (later CMS), where he worked on landmark cases, including the Channel Tunnel and Heathrow Terminal 5.

An accomplished sailor, Ian raced dinghies at Ranelagh Sailing Club in Putney, where he served as Commodore. He also enjoyed Bridge, skiing, gardening, and singing. Passionate about opera, he regularly attended the English National Opera.

In 1998, Ian retired and, with second wife Anne, sailed around the world aboard *Fidelio* of London. Later, they settled in Maureillas, France, where Ian embraced village life, leading English workshops, and forming a comic singing group, *Les Copains*. He remained devoted to his children, Piers and Katie, and grandchildren, Humphrey, Beatrice, and Thomas.

Read a full obituary by **Anne Gatenby and friends** online.

STEVE LAWSON

(ON 53-64)

BORN 22 DECEMBER 1944, DIED 28
AUGUST 2023, AGED 78



Steve Lawson, a lifelong supporter of Newcastle RGS and Novocastrians RFC, passed away peacefully after a long illness following his diagnosis with Motor Neurone Disease.

Born in Low Fell, Steve later moved to Gosforth, attending Akhurst Preparatory School before entering RGS Junior School in 1953. He excelled academically and athletically, becoming Head Boy, First XV Captain, and a talented 440-yard runner, while also playing the violin in the school orchestra. He earned a North East Electricity Board (NEEB) scholarship to study Electrical Engineering at Downing College, Cambridge, where he embraced both academic challenges and social life.

After graduating, Steve joined NEEB, managing power supplies and implementing successful depot reorganisations, later joining the family business, Lawson Fuses. There he led the development of an innovative fuse design, establishing his company as a market leader. He expanded the firm globally, while maintaining close relationships with staff at the Ponteland factory.

Steve's lifelong bond with Novocastrians RFC began in school, where he played in the under-18 County Cup-winning team, later taking various roles, including President during its Centenary Year. At RGS, he remained an active ON committee member and President, supporting fundraising and school activities.

A skilled golfer with a single-figure handicap, Steve enjoyed membership at Northumberland and Bamburgh Golf Clubs, often representing the ONs in tournaments.

Steve married Sue, a former Central High School pupil. They shared a love of music and travel, and he was immensely proud of Sue's career and their family.

Read a full obituary by **Colin Peacock, Chris Magnay, with Sue Lawson** and Steve's daughters online.

ALLAN GEORGE RAMSAY LUNN (ON 29-38)

BORN 16 APRIL 1921, DIED 28 NOVEMBER
2023, AGED 102



Allan was born in Newcastle, the second child of George Ramsay and Beatrice MacCoy Lunn. His father, George, served as Lord Mayor of Newcastle during World War I and was knighted by King George V in 1919.

Like his father and grandfather, Allan attended RGS Newcastle, where he developed a lifelong passion for music and the cello. After leaving school, Allan supported his family following his father's death in 1931, studying for a London University external degree while working at Thomas Hedley, later Procter & Gamble (P&G), where he remained for 45 years.

During World War II, Allan served in the Royal Navy. He was posted as a seaman to HMS Illustrious before training as a navigation officer at HMS King Alfred and the Royal Naval College, Greenwich. He spent the rest of the war aboard HMS Bligh, conducting anti-U-boat operations in the North Atlantic.

Returning to Northumberland in 1946, Allan rejoined P&G, where he met his first wife, Sylvia. They had two daughters, Hilary and Stephanie. His career took the family to Frankfurt, where he headed finance and legal operations for P&G Germany. After their marriage ended, Allan remarried in 1977, to Elen, whom he met through their shared love of music.

In 1981, Allan moved to Cincinnati to oversee P&G's Latin America Division until his retirement in 1985. A dedicated cellist, Allan was principal in several orchestras and, at age 64, pursued further studies at the Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music. He played with the Kentucky Symphony Orchestra until his eyesight failed at 90.

Allan is survived by his wife Elen, her sons Walter and Robert, his daughters Hilary and Stephanie, and granddaughter Charlotte.

Read a full obituary online.

WERNER OSCAR MAIER (ON 44-47)

BORN 27 JULY 1930, DIED 23 MARCH
2024, AGED 93



Werner Oscar Maier's life was one of extraordinary resilience and joy.

Born in Germany, he was just a mile away from Jesse Owens' historic 100m victory at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. After fleeing Nazi persecution with his brother Jo and mother Hedwig, Werner's family found refuge in Newcastle, joining a group of Jewish industrialists. Initially facing hostility for being German, Werner excelled at RGS, where he earned a Distinction in English, despite speaking no English upon arrival. Lifelong friendships formed at this time, particularly with Kurt Lion, Freddie Ingram, and Eric Sharff.

Werner eventually took over his father's business, Distinctive Clothing, employing over 100 local workers. He was known as a kind and popular boss, always greeted warmly by former employees in retirement. Outside work, Werner enjoyed country walks, bridge, and bowling, especially at the Gosforth Bowling Club. He was also an enthusiastic member of a local art group, creating watercolours that, though sometimes good-humouredly critiqued by family, hold a special charm today.

A well-respected member of the Newcastle Jewish community, Werner served as Chairman of the local JIA and rarely missed a Newcastle United match, though one Yom Kippur service did coincide with the team's record 13-0 victory. Werner's sharp wit and love of wordplay were passed down to his children, and his memories live on in recorded interviews and the Lahav Jewish Heritage Project at Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums.

Werner's family will deeply miss his warmth, kindness, wisdom, and humour. God certainly didn't make a mistake when He put Werner in the world.

Read a full obituary by **David Goldwater** (ON 51-62) online.

ALAN MITCHELL (STAFF 63-95)

BORN 12 MARCH 1938, DIED 23 OCTOBER
2023, AGED 85



Alan Mitchell, a man of quiet elegance, is fondly remembered by his former pupils for his impeccable attire—shiny shoes and beautifully knotted ties—and for his deep, formal speech. He addressed pupils as “gentlemen” and maintained discipline with quiet authority, modelling the behaviour he expected. Despite his formality, he was deeply loved for the care he showed his students and his dedication to their learning.

As a history teacher at RGS Newcastle from 1963, Alan instilled in his pupils a passion for rigorous scholarship, emphasising research, evidence, and debate. His pupils, encouraged to form their own views, later credited him with shaping their intellectual lives. Nick Rugg, now a history teacher, said, “I will always be in Alan's debt... for the way he made me think.” Alan also instilled critical thinking skills that served his students in their future careers, as Paul Taylor, a journalist, recalled: “He taught us how to think independently and express ourselves clearly.”

Outside the classroom, Alan was known for his dry humour and mischievous streak, exemplified by his use of a rubber band catapult to target pigeons outside his classroom. He was also an officer in the Combined Cadet Force and ran school camps with meticulous attention to detail.

Alan was born in 1938 in London and evacuated to Bradford during the war. After completing his national service and studying history at Cambridge, he joined RGS. In retirement, he focused on historical research and enjoyed guiding at Alnwick Castle. He leaves behind his wife Christine, daughters Amanda and Claire, and many grateful pupils who cherished both his teaching and his kindness.

Read a full obituary by **Chris Bowlby** (ON 73-79) online.

MIKE W ROBINSON

(ON 68-78)

BORN 18 MARCH 1960, DIED 16
DECEMBER 2023, AGED 63



Mike, a Cragside primary schoolboy, joined RGS in Horsley House in 1971 at the age of 11. Sport was central to his life, representing the school, County, and South North in cricket, and playing badminton at St George's, Jesmond. He captained the RGS 1st XI in both the lower and upper 6th years, was Horsley House captain, and won full colours in both sports.

Mick Thompson (ON 73-80) recalls: "Mike was one of the finest batsmen of our generation- modest, positive, and proud of his family." Mark Dolder (Dame Allan's and SNCC) remembers: "Mike captained with calm determination, always inclusive, friendly, and competitive."

In 1978, Mike returned to RGS for a 7th term to take the Oxbridge entrance exams and was awarded a place at Magdalen College, Cambridge, to read Economics in 1979, one of 16 RGS students to win Oxbridge places that year. At Cambridge, he captained the Univ 2nd XI, the Crusaders.

Mike joined Coopers & Lybrand in 1982, becoming a partner in 1993 and Senior Partner of the Milton Keynes office. He retired from PwC in 2017 and became deeply involved in badminton and golf. Mike was appointed Chair of Finance, Risk, and Corporate Services for Badminton England in 2014 and later became Chair in 2019.

Sue Storey, Badminton England CEO, said: "Mike was utterly dedicated, committed, and worked tirelessly to transform the organisation."

Diagnosed with cancer in November 2022, Mike died in London 13 months later, with his partner Fiona and children Molly and Sam by his side. His doctor described him as "a gentleman of great courage."

Read a full obituary by **Duncan Stephen** online.

BERYL SILVERSTONE

(STAFF 86-01)

BORN 25 FEBRUARY 1942, DIED 22
AUGUST 2023, AGED 81



Beryl Silverstone joined the Modern Languages department at RGS in 1986, combining her two great passions: education and France. Raised in post-war London's East End, she excelled at Central Foundation Grammar School, became head girl, and studied in France before university. She graduated in French from the University of London, trained as a teacher, and worked in top London schools.

Beryl married Peter in 1971, and they moved to Gosforth, where she raised a family. As her children grew, she found great satisfaction in her work at RGS, particularly in running the GCSE oral exams for French. RGS became one of the things she loved most about Newcastle, where she relished teaching, helping pupils improve their accents, and guiding them to excellent grades.

Known for her thoroughness and dedication, Beryl instilled a lasting love of French in her pupils. She believed everyone could be a linguist, easily switching between French, Spanish, German, and even learning Russian as an adult. She also assisted the Latin department and taught Year 7 Latin in the later stages of her career. A highlight was joining the 1999 Classics trip to Pompeii.

Beryl believed a good education was key to success, a message she passed on to both her pupils and her family. She particularly enjoyed teaching boys at RGS, noting their spontaneity and sense of adventure.

After Peter's retirement in 2001, Beryl returned to London, where they enjoyed cinema, theatre, holidays in France, and their beloved grandchildren. Beryl passed away in August 2023, four months after Peter, at the age of 81.

Read a full obituary by **Ellie Cannon**, daughter online.

SIMON JOHN WYNDHAM

SQUIRES (STAFF 72-07)

BORN 11 MAY 1944, DIED 11 DECEMBER
2023, AGED 79



Simon John Wyndham Squires was a dedicated teacher at RGS from 1972 to 2007 and continued teaching Arabic to sixth form students for an additional decade. As Head of Examinations for many years, he made a lasting impact, alongside his passion for teaching Classics.

His expertise included Latin, Classical Greek, and A-level Classical Civilisation. In 1988, Simon introduced Arabic to the curriculum after a sabbatical at SOAS, University of London. He also ran the Printing Club from a portacabin, a hub of organised chaos, and led the Chess Club, guiding the school to the finals of the Times Schools Competition. Simon was active in school productions, sang in the choir, and chaired the Staff Common Room. Outside school, he was a member of the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society and bequeathed to the RGS Bursary Fund.

Simon co-produced Greek plays with Central High and was known for his quirky teaching style, often pacing the room, wearing corduroy jackets, and smoking a pipe. A founding member and long-serving chairman of The Durham Singers, Simon was also a keen musician, playing the viola da gamba and taking singing lessons. He served as treasurer of the Northumbrian Record and Viol School.

Born during World War II in London, Simon developed a lifelong passion for trains. After studying at Westminster School and Oxford, he spent time teaching at Heath Grammar School in Huddersfield. He met his wife, Ann, in Oxford, and they enjoyed holidays in Venice and time on their boat in Wales. Simon passed on his love of learning, leaving a lasting legacy at RGS.

Read a full obituary by **Noel Armstrong**, Classics Department (Staff 91-2005) online.

WILLIAM DAVID WADDOUN (ON 60-70)

BORN 7 OCTOBER 1952, DIED 22
NOVEMBER 2023, AGED 71



David Waddoup, a much-loved husband, father, and grandfather, passed away, leaving behind a legacy of intellect, warmth, and dedication. He will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

David's academic journey began at the Royal Grammar School (RGS), where he attended on a scholarship from the age of 11. He often spoke fondly of his time there. His intelligence was evident early, and he was advanced a year into a special class known as 'Remove,' allowing him to leave school a year earlier than his peers.

David excelled in both sciences and the arts. At RGS, he developed a passion for music, learning the oboe under Colin Kellett of the Northern Sinfonia. A highlight of his school years was a trip to Koenigswinter, Germany, with the school orchestra. He also performed with his family in local concerts around Hexham, playing an arrangement of 'Greensleeves' by his music teacher, Jack Wolstenholme.

David formed close friendships with peers he travelled with on the Hexham train, friendships that extended beyond school. Tennis was his preferred sport, and he became a skilled player at the R Mill Tennis Club. He also enjoyed technical drawing and woodwork, hobbies that stayed with him throughout his life.

David's academic achievements included a First Class Honours degree in Physics from Durham University (1973) and, later, a PhD in Electronic Engineering from Queen Mary University of London (2013). His professional career was spent as a Senior Research Engineer with Standard Telephones and Cables, later Nortel.

Above all, David was a devoted father to his daughters, Clare and Ruth, and a loving grandfather to his four grandchildren. He will be deeply missed by all.

Read a full obituary by **Shenagh Waddoup**, wife online.

ALAN WHITE (ON 54-59)

BORN 26 SEPTEMBER 1940, DIED 19
OCTOBER 2023, AGED 83



Born in Skegness, Alan White joined RGS at the age of 13 after his parents moved from Disworth, Leicestershire, to Stocksfield, Northumberland. He cherished his time at the school and remained a proud Old Novocastrian throughout his life.

In 1958, Alan went to Cambridge University to study medicine at St John's College. It was there he met Ann, whom he married shortly after graduating. During his time at Cambridge, Alan formed lasting friendships with Douglas and Rosanne Gough and Peter and Myra Burrows, relationships that remained important throughout his life.

Although Alan never pursued a career as a doctor, he applied his academic background to a successful career in market research within the pharmaceutical industry. His keen interest in local affairs also led him to become deeply involved in community life. In 1980, he was elected Mayor of Leighton Linlade, where he used his position to raise funds for The Royal Papworth Hospital, the UK's leading heart and lung transplant centre.

In 1972, Ann was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and Alan dedicated himself to supporting her and others affected by the condition. He became chairman of the local Multiple Sclerosis Society and worked tirelessly to raise money for the cause. He was also a passionate advocate for disabled people, helping to establish the Buzzer Bus transport link through the Access for All initiative.

Alan passed away after a short illness, leaving behind his children Christine, Vivienne, and Martin, and his beloved grandchildren Adrian, Josh, Zoe, and Emma. His legacy of dedication to both his family and community lives on.

Read a full obituary by **Chris Crabtree**, daughter online.

ALEX WILSON (ON 76-81)

BORN 15 MAY 1963, DIED 6 FEBRUARY
2024, AGED 60



Alex was born and raised in Durham and attended RGS, where he forged lifelong memories and friendships. He was an accomplished sportsman, representing the school and county in cricket and hockey, and later playing for various clubs. Known for his loyalty, generosity, and easy-going nature, Alex was always a charismatic and entertaining presence. He had a unique style, staying true to his personal sense of fashion seemingly indifferent to the whims and 'cool' fashions of the moment, unlike many of his peers. His relaxed, classic approach to clothing was evident from an early age and earned him a reputation as an individualist.

In 1981, during his time as cricket captain, Alex made an impression by wearing a stripey blazer, bright-striped cap, and silk shirt, a look that harked back to Victorian "Spy" cartoons. For Alex, this was simply a reflection of his personality - a true original. A gifted cricketer, he was known for his elegant, effortless wicket-keeping and pleasing stroke play. His approach to the game was aesthetically driven, with an emphasis on style rather than results.

While studying at Exeter University, Alex discovered a love of playing Rugby Fives and became deeply involved in the sport. He played a key role in restoring an abandoned Fives court at a Durham University college and attempted to teach many of his friends how to play. The sport was instrumental in his decision to go into the teaching profession following brief flirtations with accountancy and the law, and provide a lasting network of friendships.

The impact Alex made on his friends and those around him was enduring, leaving behind a legacy of camaraderie, self-assurance, and timeless style.

Read a full obituary by **Greg Anderson** (ON 76-81) online.

ONA RGS500 DIARY DATES



RGS
NEWCASTLE



RGS500 ON DINNER LONDON

Thursday 13 March 2025

One Great George Street, Westminster

The next London ONA Dinner will kick-off RGS Newcastle's Quincentenary celebrations in glittering style.

Join us at the stunning One Great George Street in Westminster for a drinks reception, three-course dinner, and wine. All guests are encouraged to wear black and gold to celebrate 500 years of RGS excellence. Reduced price tickets available for ONs aged under 30.



RGS500 CHOIR & ORCHESTRA CONCERT

Wednesday 19 March 2025

The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, Gateshead

A wonderful evening of music will mark 500 years since the founding legacy of the Royal Grammar School. Performances by the RGS's Junior School Choir, Intermediate Choir, Senior Choir, Community Choir, Brass Ensemble and Symphony Orchestra will reflect the school's rich musical history and debut newly commissioned pieces.



RGS500 FESTIVAL

Saturday 28 June 2025

RGS, Eskdale Terrace, Jesmond

Enjoy more to life at RGS when we open the gates for our annual summer festival. Whether you are an Old Novo, or current member of the RGS family, there will be something for everyone at this special event on Eskdale Terrace.

SAVE THE DATE!

ONA SHOP

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk/rgs-family/merchandise



PERSONAL DETAILS AND DATA PROTECTION



The school has a very special relationship with its former students.

In order to keep in touch we would like your contact details and consent. Please do complete your details at www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk/rgs-family/on. Alternatively to unsubscribe or change your preferences please contact us at development@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk or on 0191 212 8909.



£30

Water Bottle

Limited edition RGS branded black Chilli's water bottle.

Mug Full of History

A quirky and beautiful china mug featuring the words dear to Old Novocastrians. Handmade in England, from the Susan Rose pottery in Northamptonshire.



£20



£23

RGS Logo Silk Tie

A new design 100% pure silk, slip stitched and fully lined tie in school colours and featuring the RGS logo.