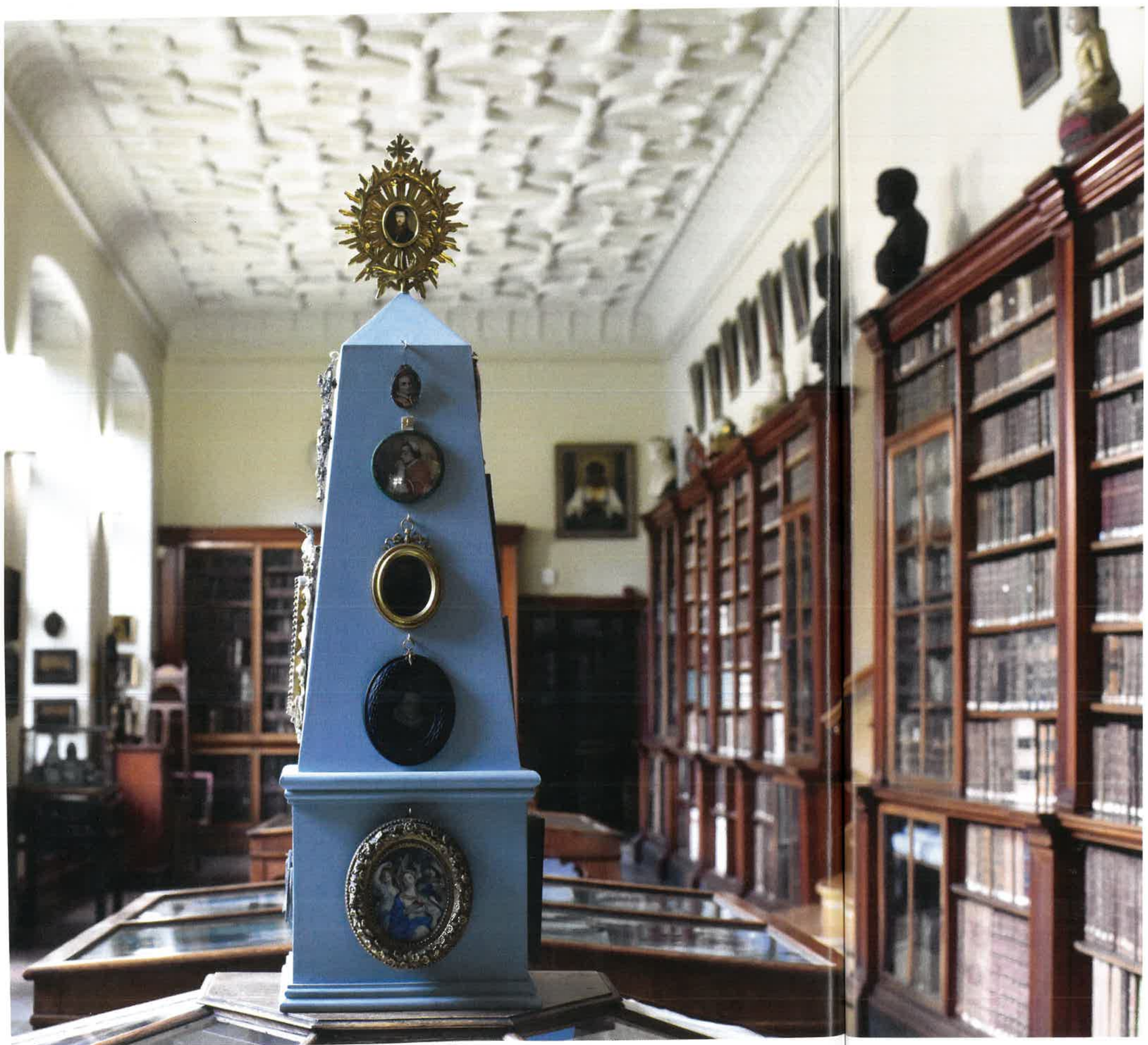


There's gold in them thar schools

Some of the most significant treasures and curiosities in British history, from Henry VII's golden cope to Alan Turing's reports, lie not in museums or galleries, but, unexpectedly, within independent schools, reveals **Madeleine Silver**

EACH autumn term, Harrow's new boys, freshly decked out with a straw boater and tentatively familiarising themselves with the 300-plus-acre campus, are ushered into a briefing by the school's curator. It's here that they learn about the generosity of their predecessors who bequeathed their collections to the school's Old Speech Room Gallery, an otherworldly compendium of curiosities, for future pupils to marvel at. Think Etruscan antiques, prehistoric implements and 19th-century watercolours by Turner, Ruskin and Cotman, as well as photographs by Old Harrovians Sir Cecil Beaton and Patrick Lichfield.

With more than 450 years of history, Harrow's collection might be staggeringly sprawling, but it's not alone. Eton College in Berkshire keeps the oldest known FA Cup programme, from 1882, a specimen of a kakapo, Henry V's will and a page from the draft of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Across Britain, archivists at public schools are presiding over treasures that not only tell the story of these great institutions themselves—each library stove, corps uniform or house tankard providing a telling snapshot of Britain at that time—but with prized pieces that wouldn't be out of place in the finest of national galleries.

> 'These prized pieces wouldn't be out of place in the finest of national galleries'

Churchill, Byron and Captain Pugwash at Harrow

Apart from two permanent displays featuring Greek vases and objects associated with 19th-century poet and old Harrovian Lord Byron, the Middlesex school's gallery offerings are cleverly rotated, so that nothing goes unseen by each generation of boys passing through—there is also a loans scheme in operation and boys learn about conservation and curating. 'From seeing a 5th century BC libation vessel being demonstrated in a classics lesson or the original sketches of Captain Pugwash and Harris Tweed, created by Harrow art teacher John Ryan in the early 1950s, to helping with the delivery of a bequest that included a portrait by Godfrey Kneller and paintings by Old Harrovian Richard Shirley Smith are truly special experiences,' says Harrow's curator Julia Walton. 'Having Churchill's *Distant View of Venice* or Queen Victoria's personally commissioned portrait of Old Harrovian Sir Robert Peel to gaze upon gives them a special appreciation for collections not only at school, but throughout life.'

The current exhibition in the Old Speech Room Gallery is 'Uncorking Old Sherry', celebrating the playwright Sheridan. The gallery is open to the public on February 28, March 1, 7, 13 and 20 (www.harrowschool.org)

Stonyhurst's 'cloth of gold'

'The college's tradition of collecting precious artefacts for the edification of its pupils is a long one, dating back to October 1609,' explains the Lancashire school's curator of collections Dr Jan Graffius. 'In that month, Cardinal Guido Bentivoglio visited St Omers College [where the school was founded, in France] and wore a cope commissioned by Henry VII in 1495 for use in Westminster Abbey, which he described as a "rich and rare memorial". The sumptuous cloth of gold and silk velvet damask cope was laden with Tudor →

Not every school library holds Mary Tudor's Book of Hours, but it's only one of many extraordinary artefacts at Stonyhurst