

ONIA

OLD NOVOCASTRIANS' ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE



RGS
NEWCASTLE

“

*RGS is a vital resource...
this incredible educational
opportunity should be
available to everyone.*

TOM GUTTERIDGE



FAR THEY WENT
FORTH

ONA is the magazine for the
Old Novocastrians' Association

All correspondence should be
addressed to:

Caroline Briggs, Editor
The Development Office
Royal Grammar School
Eskdale Terrace
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE2 4DX

Telephone Development Office:
0191 212 8909 email:
development@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk

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Please include relevant pictures if
possible. They will be returned as soon
as the magazine has been printed.

The ONA Magazine is available online
Please note that the magazine is
circulated in hard copy and is available
on the RGS website shortly after
circulation. By submitting an article or
news for inclusion, the contributor is
accepting that it may be available
through either or both formats and
will also be accessible beyond the
Association membership through
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Front cover photo: Caroline Briggs.

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JONNY CATTO (ON 97-03)

ONA PRESIDENT

As this latest issue of *ONA Magazine* hits the press, we are halfway through our Quincentenary celebrations. The celebratory calendar began with the London ONA dinner and the RGS 500 Choir and Orchestra Concert, and what events they were.

The London ONA dinner saw a record 230 ONs gracing the spectacular Great Hall at One George Street, Westminster, most sporting a 'Touch of Gold' tribute to the Quincentenary. The following week, those of us lucky enough to have attended the RGS 500 concert at The Glasshouse were treated to a sensational evening of vocal and musical performances from the Junior School, Senior School, and RGS Community Choirs, as well as the school's Brass ensemble and Symphony Orchestra. The remaining Quincentenary celebration events are listed on page 41. This issue, *Far They Went Forth*, celebrates ONs who have truly gone far from our school of the North. I'm sure you'll enjoy reading about these remarkable ON journeys as much as I have.

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WELCOME

GEOFFREY STANFORD

HEAD

“**F**ar they went forth, from the School of the North.” The words of our school song, proudly familiar to many an Old Novo, ring especially true this year as we mark the remarkable milestone of 500 years of RGS Newcastle.

It is a privilege to introduce this edition of *ONA Magazine*, celebrating not only the legacy of the school but the incredible journeys our Old Novocastrians have taken – across continents, through careers, and into communities around the world. Their stories are a testament to the power of an RGS education and many of them generously credit the school for shaping their paths. It is therefore a pleasure to report that the RGS continues to receive national recognition, this year being awarded the title of Independent Senior School of the Year for the whole of the UK.

In this issue, we look into some of those journeys. From treasures held in our archive about **Admiral Lord Collingwood** (ON c.1756-1761) – perhaps our most famous son – the past is brought vividly to life by archivist Louise Piffero. Our cover star, TV producer **Tom Gutteridge** (ON 63-70), reflects on the meaning of success, of travelling far, and of returning home. Filmmaker **Bharat Nalluri** (ON 78-83) shares his journey from Newcastle upon Tyne to Newcastle, New South Wales, and what “home” means 5,000 miles away.

However, going far is not just about distance or personal achievement. For many, it is about ambition, impact, and lifting others along the way. Our RGS Partnerships programme is doing just that by helping pupils from across the North East reach their potential, whether it is learning to swim or thriving in Further Maths. Meanwhile, Head of Classics



Zeta Hill (Staff 22-Present) writes about the transformative experience of our Year 7 and 8 pupils on their annual trip to Pompeii.

In this anniversary year, it is especially fitting to mark another milestone: 500 pupils have now benefitted from our bursary programme since its inception in 2002 thanks to the support of the RGS community. On page 2, Tom Gutteridge shares why he chose to give back by supporting some of our very first bursary students and why he believes an RGS education should be available to more young people. The RGS has a culture of generosity that continues to this day. If you visit Eskdale Terrace to reminisce about your school days – or skip to page 34 of this very magazine – you will see the names of some of our most generous donors etched onto the very walls of the

building. We remain deeply grateful to them and to every Old Novo and supporter who has contributed to our bursary fund over the years.

Finally, those who attended our spectacular 500th Anniversary celebrations at The Glasshouse earlier this year will have sung along to our reorchestrated school song, *Triumphians*. English teacher **Lucy Stadward** (Staff 17-Present) tells the story of how this much-loved anthem was thoughtfully updated to reflect the modern ethos of RGS, balancing heritage with progress while staying mindful of the deep affection ONs continue to feel for it.

Please do join us as we enter the second half of our 500 anniversary celebrations and together perhaps raise the roof once more! *Fortiter Defendit Triumphians!*

A portrait of Tom Gutteridge, an older man with white hair and glasses, sitting on a couch and resting his chin on his hand. He is wearing a dark blue jacket over a light blue shirt. The background features a grey wall with white paneling and a white bust of a woman's head on a dark surface to the right.

TOM GUTTERIDGE

Acclaimed TV producer **Tom Gutteridge** (ON 63-70) speaks to ONA's Caroline Briggs about how his school days shaped a trailblazing career in broadcasting. With warmth and insight, he traces the path from the corridors of RGS to major TV studios in the UK and US – a story of education, creative ambition, and staying connected to his roots.



It's late morning in Cullercoats, and a soft, silvery light spills through the window of TV producer Tom Gutteridge's east-facing Victorian home, casting gentle shadows across a scatter of half-emptied moving boxes.

In the high-ceilinged drawing room, the air carries a faint scent of fresh paint. The subtle grey-green walls shift with the changing light, echoing the restless moods of the North Sea outside.

The leaden sky, streaked with silver like brushstrokes on canvas, is the kind of brooding scene that may have stopped artist Winslow Homer in his tracks. Old Novo Tom takes it in quietly, savouring the view with the instinctive eye of a storyteller.

"The light and sky change every 20 minutes," he says, momentarily lost in reverie. "It's beautiful. If you grow up near the sea, like I did, it becomes part of the essence of who you are."

He nods towards the grey velvet armchair nestled in the bay window. "And when the house renovation is finally finished, I'm going to sit in that chair with my coffee every morning and just enjoy this view."

Cullercoats is a long way – literally and figuratively – from California, where Tom lived until recently, and where he forged a wildly successful television career after leaving RGS, collecting an International Emmy and several BAFTA awards and nominations along the way.

From directing *Panorama* and producing *The Hot Shoe Show* to creating the cult hit *Robot Wars* and helping turn *BattleBots* into a global franchise, his credits read like a guided tour through late 20th- and early-21st-century popular television.

And despite the considerable distance, he still oversees *BattleBots: Destruct-A-Thon*, a live high-octane, metal-crunching spectacle spin-off staged just off the Las Vegas Strip.

But for Tom, the move from California's sunshine to a weathered house in Cullercoats is more than a change of scenery. It's a return to something deeper – a homecoming in the truest sense.

Now in his early seventies, Tom is embracing this new dynamic. He's begun writing his memoirs, part reflection, part celebration of a life built around storytelling. The move isn't just a return to his roots; it's a conscious decision to do more, to re-energise, and enter a creatively rich phase – far from the fighting robots and churn of social media.

A place where the tides mirror the rhythm of his writing and ideas.

"This was all I knew growing up," he

says, gesturing out of the window. "We didn't have much money. We rented the top floor of a house just a few doors down this very street, and I had the attic room overlooking the sea – it was the coldest place on the planet!"

"Back then, in winter, you'd be woken up at least twice a week by a rocket from the lifeboat station. If a ship was in distress, they'd fire a flare right above the house to wake the whole village. That was the signal for the lifeboat crew to get to the station. If a second flare went up, it meant it was serious.

"You'd wait for that second bang, then go to the attic window and watch the lifeboat being launched. You'd also see all the wives of the lifeboat men gathering. The whole of Cullercoats was built around that community."

““

We didn't have much money. We rented the top floor of a house just a few doors down this very street, and I had the attic room overlooking the sea – it was the coldest place on the planet!

And it's to that community Tom has returned – this time with his wife, fellow TV producer Joanna, and their teenage daughter.

"The first restaurant we went into when we arrived had a sign on the door that said 'Cullerfornia', and we just loved that," he says, grinning. "So that's what we call it now."

This return marks what Tom calls the fifth 'phase' of his life. The first began in London, where he was born, and unfolded through his childhood in Cullercoats and nearby Tynemouth, and, of course, his school days on Eskdale Terrace. Now, a generation later, his daughter is preparing to follow in his academic footsteps, closing a circle that began decades ago.

"There was a sense of community at the school from day one," he reflects. "And it has stayed with us. I'm sure many people say that about their schools, but with RGS, there was something unique about the spirit and togetherness."

"When my daughter got her RGS acceptance letter, and they asked which house she wanted to be in – Stowell, Collingwood, Eldon, or Horsley – she said Horsley because she likes blue. I told her I'd

never be able to come to school events and cheer her on – because I was in Eldon, so she'd have to get used to wearing green!

“She looked at me and said: ‘Are you serious?’ And I said: ‘Absolutely!’ That school spirit never leaves you.”

After school, Tom studied English and Philosophy at York University and later joined the BBC as a news trainee. “There were six of us who started on the same day – **Tony Hall** was one of them. He later became Director General of the BBC. I didn't, so I guess I'm the failure of the six! I was the creative one; he was the political one. He's still a very good friend.”

Tom quickly rose through the ranks, cutting his teeth on BBC current affairs heavyweights such as *Nationwide* and *Panorama*, before moving on to direct major live broadcasts, including the BBC's coverage of the 1983 general election, which delivered a landslide victory for Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party.

But despite his success in news broadcasting, Tom's creative instincts soon pulled him in a different direction, towards culture, becoming Executive Producer of Music and Arts at the BBC.

“During that phase, I produced entertainment shows like *The Hot Shoe Show* with Wayne Sleep, and a comedy series called *A Kick Up the Eighties*, which was the first TV appearance for Tracey Ullman and Rik Mayall,” he says.

Leaving the BBC, Tom founded Mentorn, which grew into one of the UK's largest production companies, responsible for hits like *Traffic Cops* and *Question Time*, and making more than 2,000 hours of programming a year.

Among its biggest hits was the groundbreaking *Challenge Anneka* starring TV's original action girl Anneka Rice: “It was the first prime-time reality show – Friday and Saturday nights on BBC One, up against *Blind Date*,” Tom explains.

“That was the contrast: *Blind Date* was traditional, full of scripted jokes and studio audience reactions. *Challenge Anneka* was completely different – single-camera, no audience, no laugh track, just Anneka Rice running around trying to build a children's hospital in four days.”

Mentorn also gave rise to *Robot Wars*, an unlikely cult phenomenon hosted by actor and presenter Craig Charles, that thrust Tom into the emerging arena of engineering entertainment.

“That show typecast me a bit,” he says. “When I went back to the US, the owner of *BattleBots* – a rival show – invited me to join him. I did, in 2015, and I've been there ever since.”

Tom's select TV credits

BattleBots: Champions
2023

BattleBots
2016–2023

Paradise Hotel
2003

Robot Wars
2002

Star for a Night
1999

Before They Were Famous
1997

You Decide
1995–1996

Challenge Anneka
1987–1995

Space Precinct
1994–1995

Six Little Angels
1993

Today's the Day
1993–1999

Lenny Henry: Lenny Go Home
1991

I Drew Roger Rabbit
1988

The Hot Shoe Show
1983–1984

Harty
1983–1984

The Russell Harty Show
1980–1983

A Kick Up the Eighties
1981

Decision 79
1979

Throughout his career, Tom has trusted his instincts, or perhaps tuned into a kind of collective unconscious, consistently showing a knack for staying one step ahead of the curve.

“A brilliant producer friend of mine, Daisy Goodwin, coined the term ‘Zeitgeist surfing,’ and that's really what TV production is about: sensing what the next big thing is and riding that wave.”

“I'm probably right less often as I get older, otherwise, I'd be a lot richer!” he laughs. “But the trick is to spot something and develop it before anyone else.”

Sometimes, though, the wave breaks too late. In 2007, Tom returned to the UK and, for a time, settled in Northumberland with Joanna, where together they founded the production company Standing Stone.

“People were just starting to use avatars online and Jo thought it would be great to do a dating show where people hid behind avatars – like *Blind Date*, but digital – and we called it *Loveland*.”

“There was a bidding war for the rights between ITV and Sky, and we ended up making a very expensive pilot at Elstree Studios. It was commissioned and then tragically it was cancelled because the executive who backed it left to run Channel 5, and Sky dropped all his projects. That happens all the time in our industry.

“Then, 18 months later, *Avatar* the movie came out. We realised we'd been absolutely on the right track, just a little too early.”

Ever eager to tell stories in new creative ways, Tom has welcomed the digital age with enthusiasm and curiosity, and these days is as at ease with TikTok and Instagram as he once was with terrestrial TV. Almost.

“I handle both the commercial and creative sides of *BattleBots*. We've built up a huge 17 million-strong social media following, and we're now in almost every country in the world.”

He's embraced the analytics-driven world of YouTube: “Just changing the first few seconds of a video can retain 15 percent more viewers for the next five minutes. That level of precision never existed in traditional TV.”

So, what's the next big thing?

“It's a tough industry right now. It's hard to sell anything,” says Tom. “Most commissioning editors don't really know what they want unless they're true visionaries. And most networks have no money because the streamers have killed traditional revenue routes.

“People under 30 don't really watch TV anymore, or they watch two screens at the same time. That's why so many young

people now watch with the subtitles on – it’s to help them follow the story while they’re distracted with Snapchat. Sad if you’re the producer.”

But Tom believes that despite all the changes, the heart of success remains the same: storytelling, albeit at a faster pace.

“The most important part of a book is the first sentence – it’s how you hook someone – and it’s the same with video. You must grab their attention immediately, but these days there’s more competition to hold onto the audience.”

As Tom’s own story unfolds back in the North East, he is finding ways to reconnect with RGS, drawing on a lifetime of experience to give back to his old school.

Recently, he spent time with the RGS Robotics team as they prepared to travel to Texas to compete in the VEX World Championship, where they won the prestigious Judges Award.

“I was really nervous going back!” he laughs. “I was worried the students might ask me technical questions I couldn’t answer!”

“I studied English, French, and German, not science. I thought I’d be exposed as a fraud – a TV producer who created *Robot Wars* and lives within the world of STEM, but hasn’t the first clue how to build a robot. I couldn’t tell you the difference between hydraulic and flywheel flippers, and I couldn’t begin to advise on the best control system for a bot, but I could tell you how much it costs to build one!”

While back at RGS, Tom recognised the quiet respect between staff and students, and deep reverence for the school and its traditions, from his own school days.

“At the same time, it felt progressive – cutting edge,” he says. “And you also realise how important the school still is to the region. That is something that has always mattered to me.”

In 1997, at an RGS Old Novocastrians’ dinner, Tom quite literally put his money where his mouth was.

“I went to my first old boys’ dinner with two friends. Between us, we’d spanned 21 years at RGS. None of us had been back in decades. We booked rooms on the Quayside and had a blast. The next day, we drove around reminiscing – ‘Where was your first kiss?’ that sort of thing, reliving our teenage years.

“At the dinner that night, **James FX Miller** (Staff 1996-08), the then headmaster, gave a speech about the abolition of the direct grant and the potentially devastating impact it could have on the North East.”

After “a couple of glasses of wine,” Tom quietly approached him with a powerful



From *Question Time* to *Robot Wars* – Tom has enjoyed an eclectic career



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offer: to personally fund four half-bursaries for seven years, provided that the school uses that pledge as a catalyst for launching a wider school bursary scheme. Today, nearly 500 students have passed through RGS on bursaries, thanks in part to that pledge.

“I said to him, ‘Just send me their school bills each term, and I’ll pay them. I don’t want the boys to know who I am, and I don’t want to be involved in choosing them. The only thing I ask is to see their school reports.’”

For Tom, the gesture meant more than simply helping a few children realise their potential; it was a step towards unlocking opportunity for an entire demographic, opening doors that might otherwise have stayed firmly shut.

“RGS is a funnel – it produces leaders in medicine, maths, and the creative industries. It’s a vital resource,” he explains. “And if you believe in the North East, as I do, then you must believe that this incredible educational opportunity should be available to everyone, not just a few wealthy kids from Gosforth.”

Now back in Cullercoats, Tom lives a life of contrasts – navigating the relentless hustle of Hollywood dealmaking while staying anchored in his new coastal surroundings.

And when he’s not directing metal-clashing mayhem, Tom can be found strolling along the shoreline with his three dogs. Amid the ebb and flow, his memoir quietly takes shape and with each walk, new ideas appear on the horizon.

From RGS to the BBC, from warring robots to real-world impact, it’s a life story shaped by instinct, imagination, and an enduring love for the North East.

And as the light outside his window shifts once more, one thing is clear: Tom is exactly where he is meant to be.



THE SCHOOL SONG

The passionate singing of the RGS school song *Triumphians*, echoing around the Main Hall at ONA dinners, and the sense of its place as a beloved anthem for generations of ONs, creates a certain nervousness in attempting a rewrite for the school's 500th anniversary.

BY **LUCY STADWARD**
(STAFF 17-PRESENT)

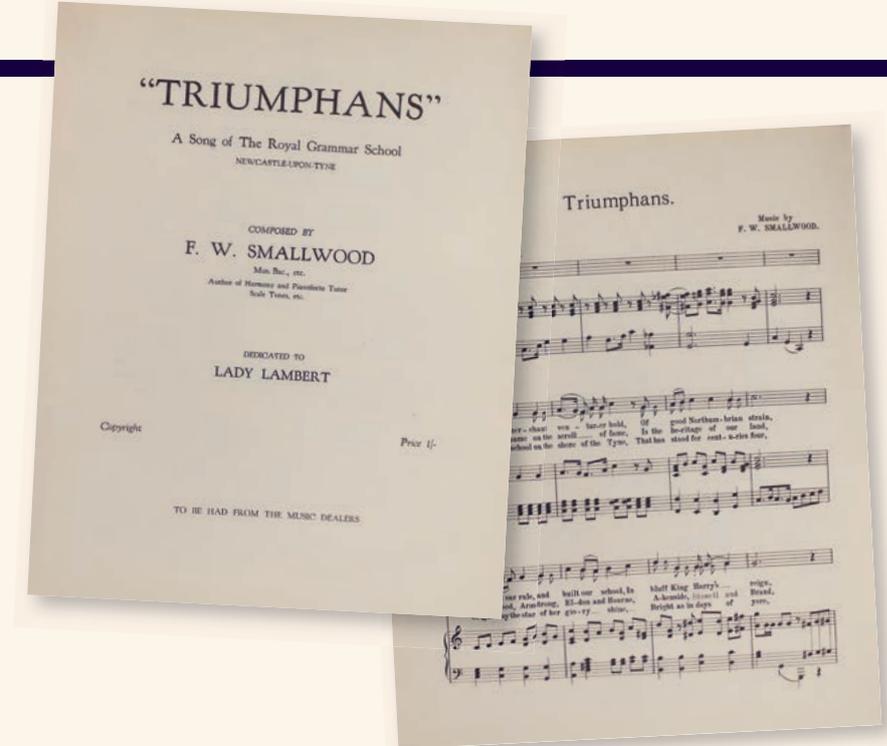
Composed by Frederick William Smallwood (Staff 1902-26) with lyrics by John B Brodie (Staff 1898-1928), the song was first performed in 1913. The collaboration between the school's then Music Master, Smallwood, and Senior English Master, Brodie, reflects just how intrinsic the song is to the heritage of the school and indeed the city of Newcastle. The song's stirring chorus, "Fortiter Defendit Triumphans" – "Triumphing by Brave Defence" – echoes the city's motto, inspired by Newcastle's courageous stand during the English Civil War in 1644 against the Scottish Army.

This heritage is something ONs are rightfully proud of. Speaking to our current pupils, the significance of the school to our region, the legacy of those on our 'scroll of fame', and the honour at being part of the RGS during the 500th year echoes this sense of pride, albeit for most without a genuine connection to the original song. The 500th Anniversary celebrations, and particularly the spectacular concert at The Glasshouse, provided the perfect opportunity to reinvigorate the school song.

As part of my work with RGS Diversity; our vibrant, passionate and ambitious society made up of pupils from Year 7 to Year 13 reflecting all aspects of diversity in school, there has been a driving force to better represent the views and experiences of our pupil body in all that we do at RGS. From our Cultural Festival, which is in its second year in 2025, to the newly established 'Identity Festival' in June, celebrating all that makes us unique, we are constantly looking for ways to promote and celebrate equality, diversity and inclusion in school. With such intelligent, open-minded and creative thinkers in RGS Diversity, they were the natural fit to look at ways to adapt the school song for 2025 and the 500th anniversary.

The approach was seemingly simple – retain the heritage of the song, retain the metric scan, reflect the new century, consider the broader diversity of the school as it is in 2025. The rousing chorus remains untouched, as does the first verse, which celebrates the founding of the school. The references to the 'wind that blows' and 'stormy northern lands' certainly hold their relevance!

The second verse with its list of notable ONs presented an opportunity, and one I hope will continue to be taken in future iterations of the song. In consultation with various interested RGS staff and pupils, the suggestion of 'Taylor'



“*The 500th Anniversary celebrations, and particularly the spectacular concert at The Glasshouse, provided the perfect opportunity to reinvigorate the school song.*”

to replace 'Bourne' was made. While **Henry Bourne** (1694-1733), the son of a hatter, who studied at RGS until 1709 and became a renowned historian, is certainly a worthy inclusion, we felt that **Peter Taylor** (ON 38-49) was an interesting figure to include in a slightly modernised version. Lord Chief Justice between 1992-1996, Peter Taylor was the son of Jewish parents who read Law at Cambridge University after his time at RGS. He was known for the literary allusions in his summary judgements and rose to public awareness when he chaired the inquiry into the Hillsborough disaster. While Taylor is only one of many significant and notable ONs from the last century, I would like to see his inclusion as the beginning of a move to reflect key names, perhaps revisiting the song every decade, eventually including a more diverse range of names, genders, and cultural backgrounds.

Other changes were made to better reflect the mix of pupils in school, for instance 'maker of men.' Becomes 'maker of all.', with the paired rhyme reflective of this shift. Similarly, the language of 'stood for centuries four,' is necessarily changed to 'centuries five,' with the paired rhyme becoming 'thrive' rather than 'days of yore'. The final couplet prompted an interesting discussion with RGS Diversity over the enduring relevance of 'God' in a secular school. As young people of various faiths and none, the discussion was interesting, and I hope reflective of a broader view. The group feel that due to the archaic nature of the song, the reference to 'God' is perhaps naturally aligned to Christianity, however it could be perceived to reflect all faith and is therefore acceptable. They also made the astute point that those who believe in God are likely to be far more offended by any removal than those who don't believe. We also discussed the shift from 'fathers trod' to 'forebears trod', from 'fight' to 'speak' and from 'Motherland' to 'scholarship'. The aim of these changes are to better reflect the ethos of the modern RGS, while honouring the past.

Meanwhile, the music has been reinvigorated by contemporary composer **Elliot Park** (ON 05-12) who arranged and orchestrated the piece.

As an RGS English Teacher, parent to two future ONs, and a convert to the heritage and tradition of our school, it has been an honour to rework *Triumphans*, in what I hope will become a regularly revisited reflection of the ever-changing community and legacy at the RGS.

THE SCHOOL SONG THEN & NOW

BY DR RICHARD TOMIAK
(ON 64-74)



Collective singing is an important and joyous part of the human condition and during my time at the RGS there was much communal singing. We sang in choirs. We sang at Assemblies to some of the remarkable lyrics and melodies that are to be found in the English Hymnal. We had singing sessions for the whole year where we proudly sang the great northern ballads and songs. We sang at school camps around bonfires, starting with *The Blaydon Races* and *Lambton Worm* and thence descending into bawdy rugby songs to much hilarity. And, on many occasions, we sang the school song,

Songs and anthems unify and build an institution's identity and culture and so it was with the school song. We all felt it was a bit cheesy then (not now I hasten to add, but we were teenagers!) but would belt out the song looking and smiling at each other as we still do at ON Reunions. My abiding memory was singing it at Prize Giving Day in the City Hall, the one of two highlights of an otherwise interminably dull event unless one was one of the chosen few being awarded a prize. The other highlight? This was at close of the evening when Director of Music **Jack Wolstenholme** (Staff 1948-



Songs and anthems unify and build an institution's identity and culture and so it was with the school song.

75), head of music, would ignite the mighty organ of the City Hall armed with its growling 32-foot stops – to an enormous cheer from the relieved boys – and play Widor's *Toccata*.

So, what do I think about the revised version? It has been sensible to bring it up to date generally and good to include **Lord Peter Taylor** (ON 38-49) in the Song; he was a former Lord Chief Justice. Might not consideration have been given to **Sir Gregory Winter** (ON 64-69), Nobel Laureate (our only alumnus I think) noting the RGS's contribution to science? Deleting the line 'Wielders of Sword and of Pen' sat uncomfortably with me as it downplays the importance of the school's alumni and their sacrifice in defending the nation over the centuries. I did though, very much like the orchestration: it augments and builds on the intrinsic confidence and majesty of Song.

Jack Wolstenholme said it was a very good school song compared to others. On comparisons I cannot comment. All I do know is that it brought much joy to us and is a tradition to be proud of and celebrate. Now that the school has wisely decided to resurrect it, I am sure it will continue do so for future generations.



ERIC MIDDLETON (ON 45-53)

Inspired by the words 'Far They Went Forth' from the school song, 90-year-old Old Novocastrian Eric Middleton reflects on his RGS days – and the journey life has taken him on since leaving the big red building on Eskdale Terrace in 1953.

"It was a privilege to have entered RGS as a scholarship boy – my parents couldn't have afforded any fees.

While awaiting the invitation to join, I was interviewed by the awesome **Dr Ebenezer Thomas** (Staff 1922-48) (his wife was rumoured to be called Florence, hence Ebb and Flo!). "What do you want to be, boy?" he challenged me. "An engineer, sir," I replied, after my cousin **Ronnie Dick** (ON 1939-47) in the Sixth.

Meanwhile, I was invited to stay with my uncle, Ronald Dick. At bedtime I was able to say the *Lord's Prayer* – "Our Father..." – and was conscious of the presence of the Father throughout my schooldays, reaffirmed by daily assemblies. My nickname became Spike – 'Spike Middleton' – and I am still called that by old RGS friends.

Not all went well. I received a detention for forgetting the future tense of "amo" – "I will love". Another Latin master, '**Hugh 'Slinker' Owen** (Staff 1923-1960), taught us in a corner first floor classroom. One day, annoyed by boys playing below, slammed open the window: "Can you be quiet?! There are boys trying to sleep up here!"

A tearaway at Junior school, my report said I was "inclined to fight too readily." A prophetic word in my first year, when my friend **Peter Robson** (ON 1945-53) challenged me to join the boxing club.

Much later, as boxing captain, I was fighting against the Ampleforth Captain and was knocked out. Staggering to my corner at the bell, I asked my coach, **Bill Cuthbertson** (ON 1928-35, Staff 1947-74): "Why didn't he hit me again?" "Because you knocked him out at the same time!" he replied. After another boxing match one afternoon, I was leading my string quartet in an evening Chamber Music concert, Beethoven *Op. 18 No. 3* that evening.

It was the inspiring **Jack Wolstenholm** (Staff 1948-75) who conducted our orchestras: Once with me and **Derek Downes** (ON 1945-53) playing Vivaldi's *Double Violin Concerto*, another time with Peter Taylor (later Lord Peter Taylor of Gosforth, whose portrait hangs in the school hall) playing a Beethoven Piano Concerto. We were to meet again much later at Pembroke College.

I was also inspired by my violin teacher, **Johnson Hood** (Staff 1935-70), who hearing of my next step, told me that he had "more faith in his little finger than the priest down the road." It was **Jimmy Herdman** (Staff 1922-66), my French teacher and tutor who told my parents of my ambition to go to Cambridge, saying: "Just let him get his foot in the door!"

It was **Donald Meaken** (Staff 1924-65), also in charge of cricket, who constantly encouraged us, so that I was top of the batting averages and appeared in

Wisden Cricketer's Almanack 1952. I was later to play cricket for Pembroke College, once bowling out the England Captain, David Shepherd. I studied Natural Science at Cambridge, later becoming Head of Chemistry at St Bees School, Cumbria. It was the RGS head, **Oliver Wordon Mitchel** (Staff 1948-1960), when I asked him what was needed to be a teacher, replied: "To be able to love the worst in the class!"

In my final year, I became head of Horsley House (after 'Horsley a merchant venturer bold, founded our rule and built our school in bluff King Harry's reign'). Other heads of house were **Peter Robson** (ON 1945-53), **John York** (ON 1948-53) and **Jim Watson** (ON 1946-1953).

Head of Art **Cecil Marfitt-Smith** (Staff 1932-70) started my interest in art, leading me later to paint ten large acrylic artworks, which I referenced in my third book *Surprised by the Spirit*. This was later to lead to a book-promoting tour of universities across North America, including being hosted by **Ken Reid** (ON 1946-54), Professor at Minneapolis University, earlier my fellow boxer and cricketer. On the flight over the Atlantic I was to meet the Holy Spirit when I believe I was given the gift of healing – healing of memories and often physical healing. I was supported here by my House Group and by Christian Fellowship Ministry, and John Rowling, ex-RGS teacher and later "Sir".

Following a Deputy Headship at Wombwell school – a mining town in South Yorkshire – I became head of a large comprehensive school in Hartlepool. Meanwhile, I was able to give a series of Epilogues on Tyne Tees Television, under producer Maxwell Deas, who was head of religious programmes.

I was then elected to a Fellowship at St John's, Durham, completing an MSc on The Origins of Five Dimensions.

Following 11 years as principal of Prior Pursglove College in Guisborough, I retired at 60 and was invited to be chaplain and counsellor at Bede Sixth Form College, in Billingham. Here with two other staff, we were to run annual retreats for students on Holy Island, Lindisfarne. It was about this time I was invited to speak at a RGS Founders Day service by the Head, **Alistair Cox** (Staff 1972-94) – a challenging event!

My wife and I enjoyed many holidays in Germany, Norway and Italy. My own extended trip was to see my son and family in their 14 years in north-west China. He was a teacher for Friends of China at the university there and we often met up with the Underground Church at secret places.

Now, after a series of operations, I am kept going by carers, and as I approached 90, I was encouraged to write a fifth book about science and belief: *Spike meets the Spirit*.

A SONG REBORN

BY THOMAS BILCLOUGH
(ON 06-17)

I saw a call for Quincentenary submissions on the RGS LinkedIn page and remembered that I'd started writing something at university when I was feeling sentimental about school, probably in 2019.



The poem evolved over time: originally there were some lines about 'crafty tabbers' and sneaking out for 'Country Whey sarnies', which I thought I'd omit. There's a Sam Fender reference in there, too, which must have been after he released *Seventeen Going Under*.

Structurally, I tried to mimic the rhythm of the school day with its various entrances and exits – fragments from lessons interspersed with the more uncomfortable and vulnerable moments of adolescence, where you're just trying to get by while avoiding the gaze of the teacher who wants someone to play Dromio of Ephesus in *Comedy of Errors*. Even though I don't have the strongest accent, (southerners never believe me when I say I grew up in Newcastle), I wanted the poem to reflect the region's rich dialect (spelk). I've always enjoyed writing poetry, though I'm technically bad. I've never really got the hang of meter, and primarily use writing as a means of processing the past. If there are any publishers reading this who would like to publish a collection of sentimental nonsense, then do get in contact. Although it provides a snapshot of an RGS day from my experience, I'd like to think it will resonate with both older and younger generations (current students should count themselves lucky that they never have to visit the old swimming baths...). 'Far went they forth from the school from the North' goes the school song, and it has often struck me – whenever I encounter an Old Novocastrian working on a cutting-edge project in a far-flung place – that an RGS education can lead you anywhere, blossoming out of those Geordie roots. It will come as no surprise to those who know how much I loved school and how much I wanted to emulate my brothers that I now work as an English teacher in Berkshire at the same school as my eldest brother, George...

FAR THEY WENT FORTH

8am – Jesmond Metty
Petals on a wet black bough.
Blazers slip past lurking checkies,
Queues jostle at the offie door –
Petty change spent on a sugar rush,
Tickets pressed like sticks of chud
Into the film of the station floor.
A palimpsest of Geordie prints,
Like bygone annotations on a
whiteboard,
Make their way to Eskdale Terrace
To learn and etch their names
Onto parking machines.
The man behind the counter
Thinks of the laces tied,
Ties fastened, hugs given,
On doorsteps across the region:
Pont, Crammy, Blaydon,
Corbridge, Gossy, Alnwick,
Durham, Shields, Boldon.
This was a big river.

'Wisht! Lads, hald ye gobs, an' a'll tell
yus all
an aaful story' goes the assembly
As a distracted lass in ill-fitting clobber
Scans the names of the war dead
Under the silent organ.
Dulce et decorum... She feels the
sudden, inchoate draw
To those who've sat in the pews that
crack
All those years before.
Standers lean on brass railings,
Catching snippets from the sermon.
Herein we seek wisdom.
The bell rings.

Write today's date,
your title is 'vectors',
We'll pick up where we left off -
Achilles about to kill Hector,
[Latecomers trickle in with spurious
excuses],
Anyone – Dromio of Ephesus?
Throw your voice across the stage,
Life is not a series of gig lamps
Symmetrically arranged,
Life is a luminous halo,
Agincourt was decided by the longbow.
Tilt and swirl your conical flask,
Move onto the extension task.
Tuck in your shirts, rubbish in the bin,
Stand behind your chairs.
The bell rings.

At break, coins are tapped by impatient
fingers
On the tuck shop counter –
Foil-bound stotties wet with
condensation.
In the Main Hall, portraits tune in

To weekend goss,
Catch a surreptitious touch
By an open locker,
A lift home, a date –
Meet me at Haymarket,
A film at the Gate.
Amid the nascent romance,
Someone doesn't feel right.
A bad trim, a spot, something at home,
Feelings repressed to be unfurled alone.
Canny chatter but he looks sad.
The bell rings.

A pellet of lithium skates
On the surface of a beaker,
When a volcano erupts like this
It's called a Caldera,
'Quand je serai plus âgée, j'ai l'intention
de suivre...'
Dunstanburgh Castle was which king's
seat?
Jack, what did you get for 4c?
'Has thou seen a lark in a cage?'
Do you know what Thatcher did to this
place?
The bell rings.

A distracted lad mixes jam
Into his rice pudding
Stirring his way onward
To make an irrevocable pink.
Bags are left on shelves,
People drift to secret spots.
Some pop into Town,
Passing the central motorway
Where footballs, over-zealously hoofed
Nestle together like forgotten
hatchlings.
The sound of a horn.
Sweaty afternoon registration.
The bell rings.

Lungs burn with cold air mid-jog
Through Exhibition Park,
Through the underpass,
Past the disused bandstand,
Over the Moor,
This city's past finding its way
Into the very marrow.
The old swimming baths where
Dry rubber caps rip out hair,
Turning the world black and white.
A doctor's note, a humid gallery.
Mercifully, the bell rings.

A boy studies an old team photo
Next to the locker room
While he waits for his Mam –
Same haircuts. Invincible.
The corridors are quiet again
As the lads and lasses make their way
yem.

IN CONVERSATION

FIONA SWIFT

Fiona Swift joined RGS in January 2025 as our new Maths Partnership Teacher, thanks to generous funding from The Reece Foundation. While she teaches part-time at RGS, Fiona's main focus is working with local schools to raise maths attainment and support non-specialist teachers – including running an expanding Further Maths GCSE scheme.

Building on the success of our existing Partnerships programme, Fiona brings energy, expertise, and a passion for making maths accessible and inspiring for all. ONA sat down with her to find out more about her plans for this exciting new role.

Tell me about your Further Maths GCSE initiative.

It was a project that started with just two kids about five or six years ago when I was teaching at Westfield, and it was thanks to an idea I had with Dr Corbin, the physics teacher. Her daughter attended UTC and came to Westfield to do Further Maths, bringing a friend with her. After that, we invited some girls from Kenton.

Originally, the plan was to run a “girls in maths” initiative to encourage more girls into the subject. But with only five students in a room full of empty seats at Westfield, it seemed daft not to open it up. We secured funding from REECE and expanded it to include boys too, which turned out to be crucial. Some schools weren't entirely comfortable promoting a girls-only programme, which is understandable.

From there, it just grew. Eventually, we had over 100 students involved, and that's when RGS stepped in. John Smith offered to provide an extra teacher, as I simply couldn't manage the numbers on my own at Westfield. Since then, Sarah (Sharp) has been teaching a virtual class – she's now on her third cohort, with a fourth starting soon.

In the past two or three years, we've had between 120 and 130 students and this year that's jumped to 276, which is incredible. We also recently welcomed another large Catholic academy, which brought several schools along with it.



How many schools are involved now?

Right now, we're working with ten schools, including Westfield. For the new cohort, I think we're up to seventeen.

It all started with a simple conversation. Once we began involving state school students, it became clear how much they valued the opportunity. In many state schools, there just aren't that many high-attaining maths students in one place. Often, top sets are still mixed ability, aiming for grade 6s or 7s, and the really top-end who are pushing for grade 8s or 9s don't always get the challenge they need.

That's where this programme makes a real difference. It creates a focused but relaxed environment where students choose to attend. They're engaged, they want to be there, and they want to learn. It began at Westfield because I wanted to stretch the top end of a mixed-ability class and there's a world of difference between what a grade 9 student needs and what a grade 5 student might.

This initiative offers real challenge and

encouragement. It builds confidence and opens doors to things like A-level Maths and Further Maths.

The schools I particularly enjoy teaching are schools from very deprived areas. We've had students from Studio West, kids from Excelsior, for years – only a handful, but they're awesome kids and they love coming. Their Head of Maths sent over some fantastic feedback, saying the programme is amazing for them it really broadens their horizons. Students begin to realise they're just as capable as those from independent schools. It's a powerful driver of social mobility.

We also support students virtually from places like Benfield, Hebburn, and Consett. In Sunderland, we've partnered with St Anthony's and St Aidan's – the Catholic boys' and girls' schools – which have strong engagement.

In terms of delivery, some sessions are in person. We organise taxis or minibuses to bring students to RGS after school. Others join virtually with around five

students logging in from home. It's a bit odd teaching without seeing their faces! I can go a whole year without knowing what someone looks like! But we still connect through messages, and some of the most lovely feedback has come from our virtual learners.

Personally, I prefer teaching in-person, but the virtual learning works really well too. One student from Kenton can't make the virtual lessons so we record everything, and she is motivated enough to watch every recording and complete all the work on her own. She only dropped three marks in her mock GCSE to get a 9. It's a brilliant example of self-motivated learning supported by tech.

As for outcomes, last year's cohort about 25% of students achieved grade 9s, and 87% got grade 7 or above in Further Maths. We're trying to track A-level outcomes too, though that's trickier since the data stays within each school. But at GCSE level, the impact is clear.

The Partnerships role is a unique one.

Tell me about that.

It's been a big shift from the standard school timetable. These days, I might teach Year 13 in one school, Year 11 in another, and then run after-school maths sessions – some online, some in person.

It involves more work in the evenings, but I get time during the day for admin, contacting schools, and managing logistics. We also run events – like a recent revision day in Washington that brought together several schools – and our Bright Sparks event at the Common Room of the North. The variety keeps things interesting. Different schools, different students, so it can be really busy, though I admit not massively enjoying the driving around part!

What is your favourite part of the job?

Definitely teaching Further Maths GCSE. It really feels like my project – something I've built from scratch – and it clearly makes a difference on the kids who come. Even after a long day, teaching at 5pm can still feel energising and it is important.

This role is very different from a standard teaching role, and a lot of it is about building relationships, with students and with schools. Further Maths involves a bit admin so we rely on teachers for help with logistics, like printing or arranging transport, so they need to believe in what we're doing.

Building rapport quickly is also important and it can be quite tricky. With Further Maths, we see students regularly, so that happens naturally, but with one-off



Students know when a teacher genuinely wants them to succeed and that's everything.

revision sessions, you need to win them over straight away. They have to feel it's worth their time.

And it's about being human. If a student asks for an extension because they missed homework, and it's a reasonable ask – why not? If they miss a session for cricket match, I'll ask how the match went. It shows you care.

Students know when a teacher genuinely wants them to succeed – and that's everything. One of my favourite pieces of feedback was: "The teacher really wants us to do well." and that was so nice. That's what it's all about.

And yes, the students are incredibly motivated, after all they're choosing to do extra maths after school. Some of them will choose to travel 45 minutes each way for a one-hour lesson. I've had students turn up on their day off, catching two buses just to get to Further Maths.

This role has given me a different sense of purpose. When you work in one school, your world can feel quite insular. Partnerships are the opposite as it's about reaching out. Your focus shifts outward, and that's a big change. Building trust quickly is essential, especially if you want to run any kind of programme. It's all about getting schools and students to believe in what you're offering.

Looking ahead – what's next for the Partnership programme?

From my perspective, I would like to grow Further Maths further. There are still so

many schools in the region that could benefit – so many students who don't currently have access to Further Maths but would thrive with it. I want to expand the programme as much as we can.

Another priority is improving access to work experience. Many of these students don't have the same connections that those in private or more advantaged schools do. I'd love to build a network of RGS alumni willing to offer placements or career mentoring for students from schools that don't typically have those opportunities. The same middle-class kids with good connections keep getting the best opportunities. I want to help level that playing field. These students are already putting in the effort – they're attending extra sessions, working hard, and they deserve to have doors opened for them too. They're the next generation of super-duper maths people to make the region better and absolutely we should be helping them along the way.

John and I have talked about running a conference day – a sort of celebration of Further Maths. We'd bring in employers, run a mini careers fair, and help students make real connections. It's not just about another qualification; it's about setting them up for whatever comes next, whether that's university apprenticeships, or jobs.

What are some of the biggest challenges young people face today when learning Maths?

There are quite a few. One big one is the influence of phones and social media. It's not directly related to maths, but it definitely affects motivation and concentration. Students today need more self-discipline than ever before.

That's one of the reasons I think the Further Maths programme is so valuable. It gives them a space to step away from distractions and commit to something challenging and worthwhile.

The current maths curriculum is another issue. It's not necessarily bad for the most able students, but overall, I don't think it serves everyone well. I'm glad the government is reviewing it. Right now, it tries to cater to everyone – and ends up not quite meeting anyone's needs.

Home life can be a challenge too. Some students come from difficult home situations, which affects their focus and success. What we can do is offer them consistency and opportunities to give them qualifications and skills that might help change their future and break out of those difficult backgrounds.

Was social responsibility part of what drew you to this role?

Absolutely. I have always believed that there are brilliant students everywhere and not all of them have access to the same opportunities. This role has let me take what I've learned in private schools and use it to support a broader range of students from different social backgrounds. That's why I love this programme – it's not just about helping a few individuals; it's about uplifting a whole group.

John has done a great job leading these efforts, and it really is a two-way street. I talk to teachers, learn from other schools, bring ideas back, and adjust how I run things. It's collaborative and genuinely enriching. We're here to make children's lives better.

Too often, schools work in silos, and that's a missed opportunity. Programmes like this encourage genuine collaboration. The rise of academies has helped that, and this is another way to link schools and share resources.

A bit about you – how did you get into teaching?

Funny enough, I'm not a Maths graduate, which is slightly unusual. I studied Chemical Engineering at Cambridge. At school, I liked maths but didn't know what I wanted to do, so I switched from computer sciences to engineering because I preferred applied maths.

After university, I joined Unilever's graduate scheme and worked in supply chain and factory management. At one point, I was planning production for Magnum and Solaro ice creams! Later, I did forecasting for frozen foods like peas and fish fingers, so I did management stuff pretty early in my career. It was all quite maths-heavy – lots of logistics and number-crunching – but what I really enjoyed was mentoring young team members. That's when I started to think I might like teaching. My next career step at Unilever would've been more boardroom-focused, which didn't appeal to me, so I retrained, did my PGCE in Maths – and I've never looked back.

Did you always love Maths?

Not really, not at first. I wasn't keen on it until A-level because I thought it was boring but now I really love hard maths! I think if I'd encountered something like Further Maths earlier, I'd have realised how much I enjoyed it. I still like doing tough maths for fun, and it's easily my favourite part of the job. The students say to me "you really love Maths, don't you, Miss?" And I do!



276

Students enrolled this year

17 (and growing)

Schools involved

25%

Grade 9s in Further Maths (last year)

87%

Grade 7+ in Further Maths

5

First cohort size: 5 students

Lessons delivered:

Online and in-person, across multiple locations

Anything else you'd like to add?

I just feel incredibly lucky to be here, running this programme. I've been given so much freedom and trust to shape it, which is great.

And I have to mention the Reece Foundation because they started funding the Further Maths project at Westfield and they have been very supportive about me growing it here. Westfield school too. The were the ones who first funded the project and helped it grow. That initial support really set the foundation. That's what partnerships are all about.

We even ended up delivering the programme as a collaboration between two private schools – which is pretty special. State or private, schools should be working together. At the end of the day, it's about doing the best we can for young people.

Did you approach RGS with the idea?

Actually, John Smith reached out to me. He was exploring ideas for growing the Partnerships work and didn't want to tread on anyone's toes. We chatted about what I was doing, and he offered support, initially just an extra teacher to help deliver a virtual class. Then the numbers took off, and I really did need the help!

We connected through the AMSP (Advanced Maths Support Programme), and I've been really impressed by the way Partnerships are run here. It's well organised, and the commitment from leadership makes a big difference.

Leaving Westfield was hard because I was very fond of the place, but this felt like the right move. There's real support here, and the resources for the Further Maths initiative to make a wider impact.

BEYOND THE POOL



RGS PARTNERSHIPS MAKING A LASTING IMPACT

When a local pool closure left several Newcastle primary schools without access to swimming lessons, the RGS stepped in to help. By opening its facilities to pupils from participating schools across the city, RGS is ensuring children don't miss out on learning this vital life skill.

When Newcastle's West Denton Pool closed its doors in 2020, it left a quiet but significant gap in the lives of many local children.

For schools in the Outer West Learning Trust, it meant a sudden halt to swimming lessons – lessons that are not just part of the National Curriculum, but a vital life skill. For some pupils, especially those without access to private lessons or family trips to the pool, it meant missing out entirely.

At RGS, we saw an opportunity to help.

In 2021, the Swimming Confidence Club was launched – the brainchild of RGS Director of Sport **Angela Ponton** (Staff 16-Present) that has since grown into a cornerstone of our RGS Partnerships work.

Each year, six schools visit RGS, each for a five-week block of swimming lessons. Many arrive unable to swim, some never having set foot in a pool. By the end, they leave with new skills, new confidence, and often, a huge smile.

RGS swimming teacher Tracy Etherington has seen it all. “Some of these kids have never been in a pool before,” she says. “They come in nervous, clinging to the side. But by the end of the block, they’re swimming lengths, smiling, and asking to show you what they can do. It’s incredible.”

One boy, she recalls, arrived barely able to float. Five weeks later, he was swimming 12 lengths on his back. “He was absolutely buzzing,” she says. “It’s moments like that that stay with you.”

The sessions are supported by trainee PE teachers from the North East Partnership SCITT, who gain hands-on experience teaching swimming – something often missing from their training. “They’re thrown in at the deep end – literally,” Tracy laughs. “But they rise to the challenge, and the children really respond to them.” For the schools involved, the impact is immediate and lasting.

Suzanne Richardson, headteacher at Milecastle Primary School, has seen the difference it makes. “Some of our children come to us having never been in a pool,” she explains. “This gives them a second chance to learn a life skill that’s so important. It’s intense, it’s effective, and the children absolutely love it.”

She also highlights the value of the experience beyond the pool. “It’s not just about swimming. It’s about confidence, independence, and being in a new environment. Our pupils meet new staff, visit another school, and build relationships. For many of them, that’s just as valuable.”

The programme concludes each summer with a joyful swimming gala – a celebration of progress, not competition.

Children from different schools swim



STUDENT VOICES:

“

I really like it and the swimming teachers are really nice to us. I have learned about life saving which is very important.

“

The teachers have helped us and guided us on each step. have learned what to do if someone is drowning. The bus trip there and back is so much fun. It has been my favourite club in school ever!

“

The people at RGS made the sessions fun and I can now swim more confidently.

POOL STATS (24-25)

120 students

7 schools

Atkinson Road
Westgate Hill
Milecastle
Westerhope
Lemington Riverside
West Denton
Waverley

together, teachers don Hawaiian shirts, and everyone leaves with a sense of achievement.

Thanks to generous support from the HMCK charity, and more recently the St Nicholas Education Trust, the programme remains free for partner schools, with travel and equipment costs covered.

It’s a true community effort, one that reflects the RGS spirit of service, leadership, and belonging.

For Old Novos, it’s a reminder that the values instilled at RGS continue to ripple outward – into the community, into the lives of young people, and into the future.

QUESTION MASTER

After decades behind some of BBC Radio 4's toughest quiz shows, veteran question-master and Old Novo **Paul Bajoria** (ON 73-83) returned to RGS to challenge a new generation. With his ever-curious mind and encyclopaedic memory, Paul brought his trademark mix of wit and intellect to the school's first-ever House Cultural Capital Quiz. He spoke to ONA's Caroline Briggs.



“I can't go anywhere without gathering facts and storing little interesting bits of information,” laughs Paul Bajoria, Old Novo and veteran BBC Radio 4 quizmaster.

“Whether it's something I've read or heard on a random radio programme, I'm always collecting ideas for questions. It's become part of my way of life, and I don't think that will ever change.”

Paul's memory for facts and knack for crafting clever conundrums has served him well since leaving Eskdale Terrace for Oxford University to study English in the early 1980s. He later joined the BBC as a trainee, where his career as a broadcaster took shape.

As a radio producer, Paul made his mark behind the scenes of some of Radio 4's most beloved and intellectually challenging quiz shows. For decades, regular listeners of *Counterpoint* and *Round Britain Quiz* have puzzled over hundreds of his questions, until earlier this year, when Paul finally hung up his headphones for good.

Retirement, however, is unlikely to quell his voracious appetite for fact-finding.

“I've got a mental folder of questions, and also a physical document on my phone where I keep notes and half-formed ideas,” he explains.

“It can take years to fully form a question. I'll hear something, and a little light will go on – I'll think, ‘Oh, that's it!’ Then the question often evolves into something else. It's never-ending!”

More accustomed to writing questions for Baby Boomers and Gen X, Paul's return to RGS in March to host the inaugural House Cultural Capital Quiz was an opportunity to write for a whole new audience – teenagers.

Four intrepid teams from Horsley, Collingwood, Eldon, and Stowell, each made up of four pupils and one teacher, squared up on stage in the Miller Theatre, kicking off a week of RGS 500th anniversary-related events.

And it was a quiz as tense as any *Brain of Britain* final.

Drawing on his decades of experience, Paul designed the questions to blend 500 years of school history with general knowledge about the arts and humanities, incorporating rounds on music, literature, art, history, and languages.

He approached the task as seriously as any BBC Radio 4 commission, balancing questions to challenge young minds and spark curiosity, while – hopefully – baffling the team captain teachers with popular culture.

“I didn't recycle questions from other quizzes, I thought carefully about what was appropriate for the school setting, especially since it was part of the 500th anniversary,” Paul explains.

“I included questions related to the school's history – events on Tyneside, notable figures who attended RGS. I covered a wide range of historical periods, but it was certainly a different brief from what I was used to.”

The eclectic quiz featured questions on **John Harle** (ON 65-74) and **Admiral Lord Collingwood** (ON c.1756-1761), as well as famous figures like Richard Burton, Vermeer, and Grammy Award-winning singer Charli XCX.

“I wanted to make sure the questions connected with the school, including the origins of the house names and notable figures from its past,” explains Paul. “There were some fun facts in there too, like how **John Scott, 1st Earl of Eldon** (ON c.1760s)





eloped with Bessie Surtees in the 18th century, and how the building is still called Bessie Surtees House today.”

“I tried to make the questions fun but informative, tying them into the school’s history so that even if students didn’t know the answer, they’d learn something.

“As always, a lot of the questions were off the top of my head, but I would never write one without checking that it was true. Fact-checking is instinctive in my work, so I brought the same principles to this.”

Alongside historical ONs, one of Paul’s own RGS contemporaries made an appearance in the quiz with the question: “**Sir Max Hill KC** (ON 72-82) is an Old Novo who rose to one of the highest offices in the UK legal profession between 2018 and 2023. What title did he hold?”

The answer, of course, is Director of Public Prosecutions. As Sixth Formers, Paul and Sir Max both spent much of their time outside school hours working for the same hospital radio station in Newcastle.

For Paul it was the start of a lifelong dedication to radio – while Sir Max embarked on a very different trajectory in law. They remained friends at Oxford and have followed one another’s careers closely ever since.

“It’s fun to be back at the school again,” Paul reflects, standing in the Miller Theatre, a new part of RGS built after his time at the school.

“

I tried to make the questions fun but informative, tying them into the school’s history so that even if students didn’t know the answer, they’d learn something.

“Both my children were pupils here, and they were involved in drama, so I’ve been in this building many times to watch them perform. I’ve seen the school through different eras and lenses – first as a pupil, then as a parent, and now as a quizmaster.”

From the RGS school hall to the corridors of BBC Broadcasting House, Paul’s journey into the quizzing world began almost by chance.

“I think a lot of what we do in life is by accident,” Paul muses. “I was a producer at Radio 4 in the 1990s when my boss discovered *Round Britain Quiz* was being revived.

“They needed someone to produce it, and I must have been walking past the office at the right moment, and I think she thought, ‘Oh, Paul’s not doing anything – I’ll give it to him.’

“And I must have done it reasonably well because suddenly all sorts of other quizzes were coming my way. Somebody must have thought I was capable of it and I’m grateful to them for that because it’s kept me in work for the last 25 years.”

In that quarter-of-a-century, Paul has honed the art of crafting the perfect quiz question. He takes most pride in his *Round Britain Quiz* questions, which he says are often intricate, weaving together multiple layers of cryptic complexity.

A recent example elicited audible groans in the studio when the answer

was revealed: “Explain why you might be transported by a Geordie who sang about hypersonic missiles, a publication from the trenches, a clump of bushes or brambles, and Pericles?”

The answer is that they all have names which are parts of a motor vehicle – the singer is North Shield’s Sam Fender, the morale-boosting comic publication created in the First World War trenches was *The Wipers Times*, a word for a clump of bushes is a brake – and Pericles (in the subtitle of Shakespeare’s play) was the Prince of Tyre.

Of the 250 challenging questions published in the eponymous 2019 book, 80% were Paul’s creations, but he admits it can be a nervous wait to get them into the world.

“What’s galling is when you’ve recorded a quiz which hasn’t yet made it onto air, and then you turn on University Challenge the following evening, and somebody asks exactly the same question.

“It hasn’t been stolen, it’s just that just that the same thing the same thought has occurred to two people in different places, which, of course, does happen.

“It feels a bit like being scooped! But, you know, I’m sure we do it to other people too, so it’s horses for courses!”

Perhaps surprisingly, Paul isn’t the only Old Novo to make their name as a BBC quizmaster.

He was preceded by the late, great, Geoffrey Wheeler, the long-time presenter of *Top of the Form*, a show often considered a forerunner of the modern-day quiz format that Paul so expertly navigates.

Beginning on BBC radio in 1948 before crossing over to television, *Top of the Form* saw secondary school pupils test their general knowledge nouse, making its theme tune, *Marching Strings*, part of the collective consciousness.

But while Geoffrey was known for wearing a trademark bow tie on the BBC, it’s a sartorial statement too far for Paul, who politely declined to wear a 500th RGS branded one to host the RGS quiz, joking: “Never trust a man in a bow tie.”

“I’ve always drawn inspiration from Geoffrey,” Paul says. “He is one of my all-time heroes – the ultimate old-school gentleman broadcaster. We’d often swap notes about RGS and marvel at how little had changed between his time here in the 1940s and mine in the 1970s and 80s.”

“His programme, *Top of the Form*, is the closest thing to this quiz format, really – and I’m sure his spirit was with me when I was writing the questions.”

After decades of producing quizzes,



Paul Bajoria’s ultimate pub quiz team:

Stuart Maconie

Writer and BBC 6Music broadcaster who knows nearly everything about music, modern history, art, and more besides.

Jenny Ryan

‘The Vixen’ on *The Chase*, not half as scary as she looks, and good on the ‘younger’ end of pop culture too.

Hannah Fry

A polymath and broadcaster, with a great sense of humour, and could handle all the science questions I would really struggle with.

“Importantly, they’d be great drinking company as well as a safe bet when it came to the answers.”

Paul recently retired from his role as head of Radio 4 quiz programmes in March, but he freely admits collecting facts or thinking up questions is a habit he will find difficult to break.

While he says he would “have fun” taking part in the BBC panel show *Only Connect*, presented by Victoria Coren Mitchell, he has no plans to become one of the more famous quiz TV game show personalities – such as the *Eggheads*.

“I don’t think I’d be very good at it! I think those people are awesome – the creme de la creme of the quizzing world – and you’d be amazed at how much time and energy they spend practicing and learning.

“My head is full of stuff that I’ve picked up along the way, but I don’t sit down and learn lists of capital cities, or world flags, or Wimbledon winners, or anything like that.

“I just know what I know, and that’s enough for me,” he says with a smile.



A HISTORY OF THE RGS IN ITS PEOPLE

David Goldwater (ON 51-62) continues his series of portraits of notable RGS Alumni across the years:

WILLIAM KENNETT LOFTUS (ON c.1835)



The Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle has a long and rich association with the RGS.

William Lord Armstrong (ON c.1820s)

was its President from 1860 until 1900. Those ONs and current RGS students over the years who have made use of the comparative peace and isolation of the Lit and Phil to study or revise, will be familiar with its labyrinthine stairways and passages. At the foot of the stark stone staircase, near the refreshment hatch, lie the conveniences and basement rooms, including the Loftus Room, where students' revision was somewhat disturbed by noises from the nearby Central Station. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the din largely emanated from the steam trains of the day and it still echoes down the ages.

At that time, five enormous ancient stone reliefs from the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh lined the walls of the staircase leading from the entrance up to the library. These were somewhat incongruous as one slipped from the bustle of noisy Westgate Road into this haven of peace and calm. The reliefs were presented by William Loftus to the Library after his appointment as geologist to the Turco-Persian Frontier Commission in 1849. Much of Loftus's time was spent in exploring the ancient sites of Babylon, Nineveh, Nimrud (or Nimrod) and Ur (of the Chaldees), the birthplace of Abraham.

Loftus notebooks

Photograph courtesy of Dr JE Curtis



The name Loftus will not be familiar to most RGS alumni, but William Kennett Loftus is a notable ON, born around 1821 in Rye in Sussex. He moved to live with his grandfather, a well-known coach proprietor in Newcastle, after the death of his mother. After attending the Royal Grammar School, Loftus gained extensive knowledge of Geology at Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, though he left there without a degree. Loftus was most certainly one of those ONs who travelled 'far from the School of the North', to quote the School Song. He acted for some time as secretary to the Newcastle Natural History Society, and he was recommended to Lord Palmerston for the post of geologist on the Turco-Persian Frontier Commission (all about the demarcation of frontiers by British and Russian officers!). Loftus was engaged on this work from 1849 to 1852. His work then took him most notably to Susa, Nineveh (May 1854-March 1855), Uruk/Warka (January-February 1850, January-April 1854), as well as several other sites in Babylonia. The British Museum holds collections of antiquities from these different excavations and some antiquities were presented by him to the Newcastle Museum, then based at the Literary and Philosophical Society in Newcastle. After over a hundred years, in 1961, they were sold to a Los Angeles Museum, and the proceeds of £40,000 paid for a long overdue ground floor of several of its rooms. I recall my father, in the late 1950s, hearing they were to be sold, advocated that they be presented to the newly envisaged Newcastle Civic Centre, but the



Doors to the Loftus Room, Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle

Lit and Phil opted for a more lucrative recipient for these treasures.

Loftus was then appointed to the geological survey of India, but his health broke down from sunstroke, following repeated attacks of fever while in Assyria, and he was ordered to Rangoon to recruit. Owing partly to the interruption of the survey by the Indian Mutiny or the First War of Independence, which took place from 1857 to 1859. He embarked for England on the Tyburnia in November 1858, where he very sadly died from an internal abscess on board ship within a week of sailing.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

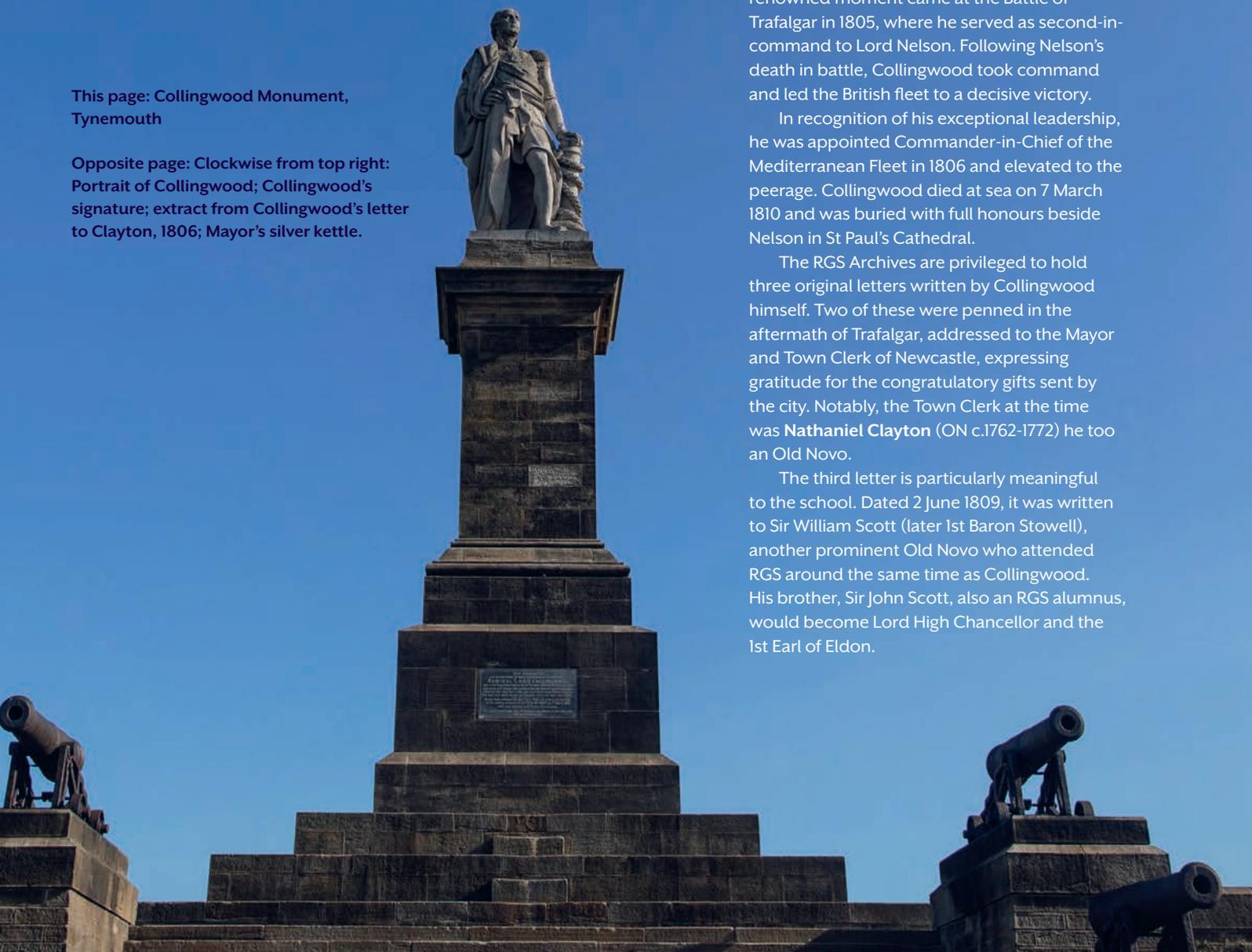
VICE ADMIRAL CUTHBERT COLLINGWOOD

A LEGACY REMEMBERED

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

This page: Collingwood Monument,
Tynemouth

Opposite page: Clockwise from top right:
Portrait of Collingwood; Collingwood's
signature; extract from Collingwood's letter
to Clayton, 1806; Mayor's silver kettle.



One of Newcastle's most distinguished sons, **Vice Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood**, began his education at the Royal Grammar School (RGS) in the 1750s, studying under the esteemed headmaster **Hugh Moises** (Staff 1749-1787).

Though his time at RGS was brief, it laid the foundation for a naval career that would span nearly half a century and help shape the course of British maritime history.

Collingwood played pivotal roles in many of the major naval conflicts of the 18th and early 19th centuries, including the American Revolutionary War, the French Revolutionary Wars, and the Napoleonic Wars. His most renowned moment came at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, where he served as second-in-command to Lord Nelson. Following Nelson's death in battle, Collingwood took command and led the British fleet to a decisive victory.

In recognition of his exceptional leadership, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet in 1806 and elevated to the peerage. Collingwood died at sea on 7 March 1810 and was buried with full honours beside Nelson in St Paul's Cathedral.

The RGS Archives are privileged to hold three original letters written by Collingwood himself. Two of these were penned in the aftermath of Trafalgar, addressed to the Mayor and Town Clerk of Newcastle, expressing gratitude for the congratulatory gifts sent by the city. Notably, the Town Clerk at the time was **Nathaniel Clayton** (ON c.1762-1772) he too an Old Novo.

The third letter is particularly meaningful to the school. Dated 2 June 1809, it was written to Sir William Scott (later 1st Baron Stowell), another prominent Old Novo who attended RGS around the same time as Collingwood. His brother, Sir John Scott, also an RGS alumnus, would become Lord High Chancellor and the 1st Earl of Eldon.

A Monument to Collingwood

Among the most compelling items in the Collingwood collection are extracts from 19th-century Newcastle Council meeting notes, documenting the planning of a memorial statue in Collingwood's honour.

In 1840, a proposal was made to place the statue on the site of the original RGS building on Westgate Road, which was due to be demolished to make way for Central Station. Ultimately, the council chose a different location – Tynemouth – in a prominent position just above the mouth of the River Tyne, close to the Priory and castle. The dramatic setting sees Collingwood looking out to sea, tying him inexorably to the maritime history and defensive significance of the coast.

Designed by the architect John Dobson and sculpted by John Graham Lough, the monument was completed in 1845, with four cannons from HMS Royal Sovereign, which was Collingwood's flagship at Trafalgar, added in 1849. The structure features a grand plinth accessed by a flight of steps flanked by side walls, on which the cannons are mounted. The statue of Collingwood stands tall on the plinth, draped in a cloak over his Royal Navy uniform, his left hand resting on a bollard wrapped in rope, forever watching over the sea he served so faithfully.



Transcription: Letter from Collingwood to Lord Stowell

Ville de Paris off Toulon, June 2nd 1809

The Right Honourable Sir William Scott

Dear Sir

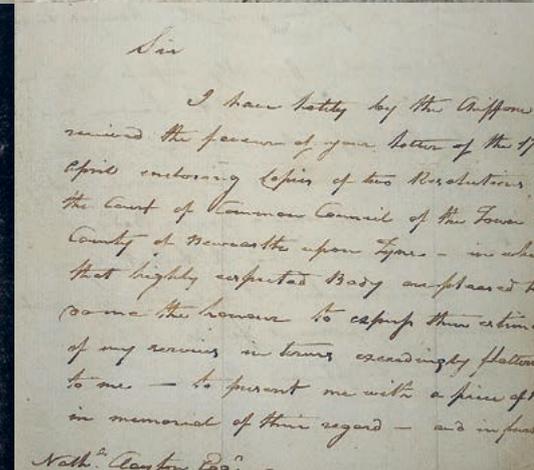
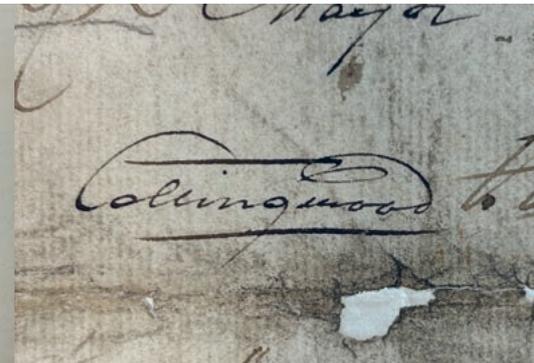
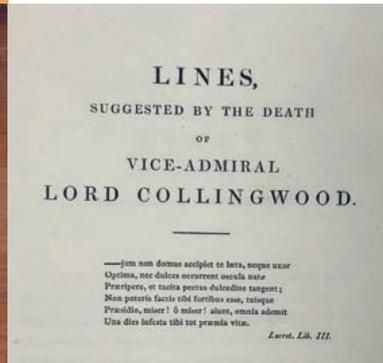
I received with great pleasure the kind letter you did me the favour to write to me by Mr. Stoddart, and beg you will believe I shall always have much satisfaction in complying with your wishes – and will be glad to give you a proof of this, should I have an opportunity to promote him – the opportunities do not often occur – for then he must take his chance, with the assurance of my good intentions towards him.

I was much gratified in receiving a letter from you Sir – whose extraordinary talents have been my admiration even from the time we were at school – (now half a Century) – and whose use of them – (I have not been so much out of the world as not to know), commanded my highest respect – with such endowments from nature, it was obvious to all men that in whatever path of life you trod, you would arrive at the highest degree of eminence – my lot depended more on chance, and occasion [occasion] – which it has ever been my care to improve by a diligent, and unremitting application to my professional duties. I am truly thankful for the view in which my services have appeared – the approbation of my friends has been to me an ample reward.

I beg Sir you will present my best respects & regards to your brother the Lord Chancellor, and yourself be assured of the true esteem with which I have the honour to be,

Dear Sir

Your Obedient & most Humble Servant
Collingwood.





MIKE DOWNIE

MEMORIES

For nearly four decades, **Mike Downie** (Staff 1988-2025) was a steady presence at the RGS – an impeccably dressed, highly dedicated teacher whose impact has extended well beyond the classroom. As Mike prepared to close his office door for the last time, history teacher **Oliver Edwards** (Staff 88-present) reflected on the legacy of a colleague who helped shape the futures of generations of RGS students.

There are three things that you ought to know about Mike Downie. He has consistently been the best dressed man at the RGS; he is supremely organised and efficient; he is almost always the first colleague to arrive in school and the last to leave. He has a prodigious capacity for hard work. Perhaps more widely recognized is his love of BMWs. Traversing the staff car park at the end of the day, you will always glimpse an immaculate vintage BMW, vehicles famed for their elegance, high performance and precision engineering. If owners reflect their cars, then Mike has met his marque.

Above all, Mike was a Geography teacher and it was precisely because he was grounded in the classroom that he excelled in all his other roles. Until 2019 he combined a substantial timetable with his responsibilities for careers and higher education, a superhuman workload that would have broken many people. He and I arrived at the RGS in 1988 and it soon became apparent that he was a committed career teacher dedicated to his subject and immersed in the school, the epitome of the old-fashioned all-round schoolmaster. Mike has become so identified with UCAS that it is easy to forget that he has been above all else an outstanding Geography teacher animated by a love of his subject. He could be strict when necessary but was no martinet. As with all accomplished teachers, behind the professional mask lay humour, humanity and pleasure in being in the company of young people. He enjoyed the verbal byplay of the grammar school classroom that was the product of a meeting of knowledgeable and clever teachers and sharp young minds. And there was a vast hinterland of subject knowledge. The lineage of the RGS Geography Department is distinguished. Over the years there have been inspiring and formidable figures, such as **Dave Rhodes** (Staff 67-81) and **Dave Merritt** (Staff 78-20) and Mike has maintained that tradition, teaching both human and physical geography with great expertise. His students have been truly fortunate. The spirit of exploration lives in every geographer and for years he ran voluntary weekend trips in which he ventured into the field with interested students. Here was authentic education: a teacher free from the confines of the classroom and the constraints of examination syllabuses sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm with his pupils. He would drive the minibus himself – no-one better or safer than Mike



Above all, Mike was a Geography teacher and it was precisely because he was grounded in the classroom that he excelled in all his other roles.

behind the wheel. He still teaches in Year 12 and 13 and shows the same energy and uncompromising attachment to high standards. He and I continue to pass each other on the Hall Balcony en route to lessons, he, seemingly ageless, striding purposefully towards the classroom, always running to time – he abhors lateness (and casualness about deadlines). He can also be seen in his office reviewing work with Sixth Formers, as dedicated to his subject and his students at the end of his career as he was at the start.

It has been in his position, however, as Head of Careers and Higher Education that he has touched the lives of so many students and parents. He largely created the role and adapted it to circumstances, student needs and, importantly, the culture of the school. In doing so, he accidentally acquired a fiefdom and has quietly been one of the most influential figures within the school for the last 30 years. The transition to higher education is the endgame for students and can be an emotionally charged business. At stake are young people's hopes and dreams. So tread carefully and Mike always did. He has spent many hours of his life guiding, counselling and consoling students and often their parents too. While the rest of us eked out the last fortnight of our extended summer holidays after the announcement of A Level results, he would be closeted in meetings in his modest office dealing with students who had fallen short in the summer exams. The qualities Mike brought to these encounters were those he brought to all his engagements: unrivalled command of the subject, authority, calmness (I have never seen him truly flustered in 37 years), candour, common sense and sensitivity.

Let us not forget Careers. After all, he was Head of Higher Education and Careers and indeed would not have made a

distinction between the two. He always saw how academic credentials and employment potentially fitted together. Though the RGS is an academic school, one of our duties is to prepare young people for the world of work. He introduced an expanded annual Careers Fair, operated a richly resourced Careers Library, fostered invaluable contacts with local employers (he personally introduced our prospective lawyers to local law firms) and oversaw a wide-ranging scheme of work placements. He and his team also sharpened the advice offered to our Year 11s, ensuring that their choice of A Level subjects matched university and career ambitions. There were other initiatives, such as the introduction of profiling to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and signpost potential A Level and career paths. Once again, there was a broader strategy at work here and the story was one of gentle modernization and reform implemented efficiently yet with a light touch.

Recently Mike provided me with a timeline of his career at the RGS on a spreadsheet. With characteristic modesty he appended the comment that he did not expect much of the detail to appear in farewell speeches and valedictory articles. On the one hand, it tells you everything and serves as a reminder of initiatives and responsibilities so far unmentioned: launching Young Enterprise, establishing the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme at the RGS, starting a Saturday Conservation Volunteer Group with Northumberland Wildlife Trust, preparing teams for mock trial competitions and all his years of being a Tutor and Form Supervisor, the last role particularly significant, an example of Mike the pastor among and supporting our students, never a remote administrator. On the other hand, of course, an Excel spreadsheet tells you nothing. How could his titanic contribution to the RGS be reduced to a single document? How could his influence be measured and his devotion quantified? He has been a loyal and faithful servant to the school for the past 37 years, giving more of himself to this institution than any employer could rightfully expect.

One final truth about Mike: he is as close to being irreplaceable as anyone at the RGS. His successor is to enjoy the grand title Head of Futures. For the past 30 years or more Mike has expertly and humanely tended the futures of generations of young men and women at the RGS. Many of them owe him more than they will ever know.

MIKE DOWNIE

MEMORIES



“

I was at RGS from 2011 until 2018 and just wanted to share how fantastic Mr Downie always was. He helped to support me throughout my time at the school (through good times and slightly worse times!) and I always knew I had a friend in him.

I'm now working in London in a job that I love and am happily planning my wedding for next year. I honestly believe my life could have turned out very differently if Mr Downie hadn't been there to help me during my RGS years. I had a somewhat tumultuous childhood, but he was always there to talk about anything I needed to and gave whatever help he could, which was invaluable to my personal growth and mental health.

He was the best teacher anyone could ever wish for, and I'll never forget the impact he had on my life.

Olivia Rhodes (ON 11-18)

“

Where do we even begin with all that we want to say about Mr Downie? They simply don't make teachers like him anymore!

Mr Downie's 40 years at the RGS, and all that knowledge that he has stored and shared over the years, could fill every bookshelf in the RGS. Let's be honest, 40 years doesn't even do justice to the amount of time he has invested in his role at school. For 40 years he has got up at 5am to work from early until late every day, at weekends, and during the school holidays, all with not a word of complaint. With all these extra hours, it probably adds up to more like 80 years of dedicated service to the RGS and all its students throughout his career.

We didn't really know Mr Downie until Sixth Form, and this is when he really stepped up and was there for us. Firstly, he supported and encouraged our music careers, probably more than anyone else in school. When we performed in Nashville, it was only right and fitting that we stood up and gave him a mention for his support. Secondly, we, and many of our peers, used his office as a 'safe haven' where we could distance ourselves from the trials and tribulations of A-levels.

He was always there to provide support, and endless supply of tissues, attentive listening, and quiet advice when everything became too much. We were in there so much, in fact, that we even got our own drawer dedicated to us in his office! No teacher stepped up as much as Mr Downie, and for that our family will forever be in his debt.

What a gentleman and a good soul, a dedicated and selfless human, and, for us especially, a real champion. Mr Downie's retirement will see the end of an era at the RGS. He is, quite simply, irreplaceable, and school will never be the same without his immense knowledge, quiet support, and kindness.

Hannah and Grace Stobart
(ON 13-23)



I had the pleasure of being one of Mr Downie's UCAS students, and he helped me all through the process. I wasn't applying for anything typical, compared to the rest of my peers, and he was such an amazing help and advisor. He was always happy to chat and help out, and still after leaving RGS, is still happy for an email or a chat about how things are going. It was an absolute pleasure to have him as my advisor, and I want to say thank you for everything!

Wendy Peacock (ON 15-22)



It was a privilege and a pleasure to be a colleague of Mike Downie, first as a fellow Geographer and latterly as part of his UCAS teams. He is a legendary long serving member of staff dedicated to the school, its ethos, its staff and its students. I particularly admired his meticulous attention to detail and his unfailing politeness even in stressful times. Countless students will be grateful for his help in finding the right career and getting into an appropriate university either through direct contact with him or through the department he ran. His encyclopaedic knowledge, availability and patience were invaluable in this enterprise. My own school base was right next to the Careers Office and we often enjoyed a post 6pm chat about the life and times of the RGS, past, present and future. Ah, the RGS – a good place to spend a career. And Mike Downie – a career well spent.

Dave Merritt (Staff 78-20)



This goes back to the days of exercise books, probably extinct now. There were a few types available at school. Jotters for rough work, soft back books and, importantly for this point, red or blue hardback books. We used the latter in 3rd year Geography. I still have mine somewhere, filled with such memorable things as Mt St Helens, ox-bow lakes and the Malthusian Crisis. You would hand in your hardback book, with the homework you had been set, ready for the red pen and – forgive me – but often totally illegible writing! I can say that now; I'm 47 and slightly less scared. That was not the case back then though. You could always tell how well you had done in your homework by the speed with which the hardback book was returned to you in the classroom, inversely proportionate to the mark you got. A light-touch pass for the high-flying clever clogs. A full-frontal frisbee-world-record-attempt-level onslaught for people like me. Catching these things was an art-form! I still don't understand what an escarpment is but I did go to Vesuvius recently and consider whether it was really a caldera in the true sense.

Tony Cornberg (ON 88-96)



I first met Mr Downie at school over 30 years ago as my Geography teacher. Strict but fair is how I would describe our Year 9 relationship, but in Sixth Form, I would say we became good friends in a way. Mr Downie provided a great sounding board, advice and general conversation that looking back provided great life and career guidance. He really cared and over the last 26 years since I left school, I have had the pleasure of catching up with him and school life regularly over this time. His impact on generations of students (including the next generation in our family!) are probably immeasurable. Well done and many thanks for a remarkable career at the RGS.

Gurpreet S Jagpal (ON 89-99)



I am eternally grateful for Mr Downie's unwavering support, he believed in me when I felt as though others did not, thanks to his support I am now studying Sociology at my first choice, Durham University. I have my confidence back and I want to thank Mr Downie for enabling this.

Ella Parvin (ON 19-22)



The irreplaceable Mike Downie deserves significant credit for my successful career as I certainly would not be where I am today without him. I will forever be grateful for his limitless knowledge and support over the years. I am lucky enough to now call him a friend and wish him a very well-deserved Happy Retirement!

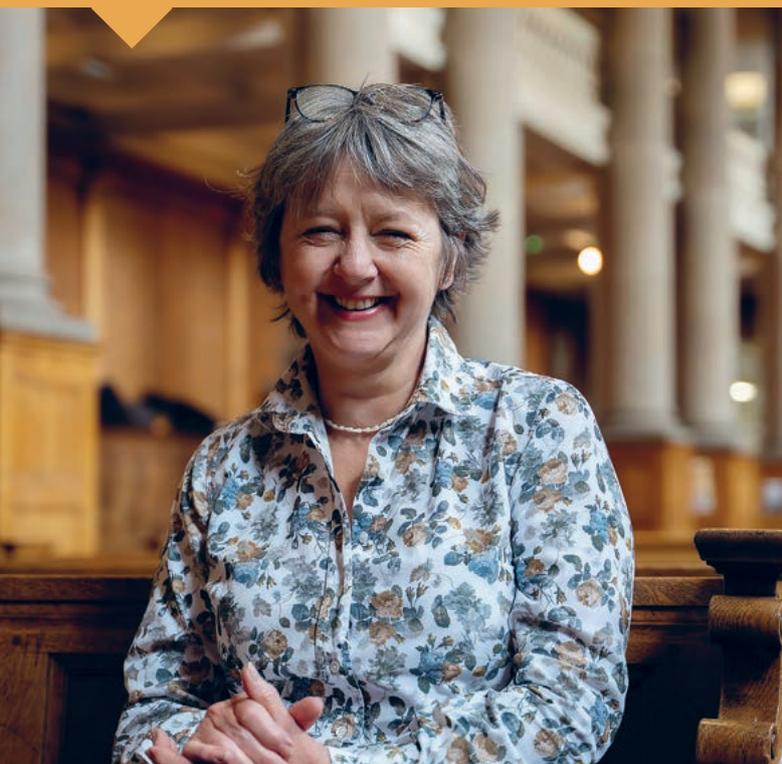
Dr Rachael Snaith
(ON 08-15)

CELEBRATING THE RGS REMARKABLE RETIREES

The academic year 2024-25 was the end of a teaching era at RGS. Along with **Mike Downie**, we said farewell to another five extraordinary teachers. Together, their dedication, passion, and impact totalled 167 years at RGS!

DR CHRISTINE MURGATROYD (STAFF 99-25)

From student teacher in 1999 to beloved Biology teacher and Head of Year, Dr Murgatroyd inspired thousands of students to foster curiosity and compassion in equal measure. Whether trekking in Cuba, or racing in costume on Sports Day, her spirit has left an indelible mark on the school and on the memories of countless students.



SYLVIE DEMOULIN (STAFF 96-25)

After 29 years teaching French and German, leading trips, and mentoring students across both Junior and Senior Schools, her warmth, humour and expertise as a native speaker have made her a cherished figure in the RGS community – even if many past students thought she was Scottish!

DEBORAH WILLIAMS
(STAFF 14-25)

As Head of German, she transformed the department into a leading light, with over 500 students studying the language. From international partnerships to translation competitions, her legacy is one of cultural enrichment and as well as learning.



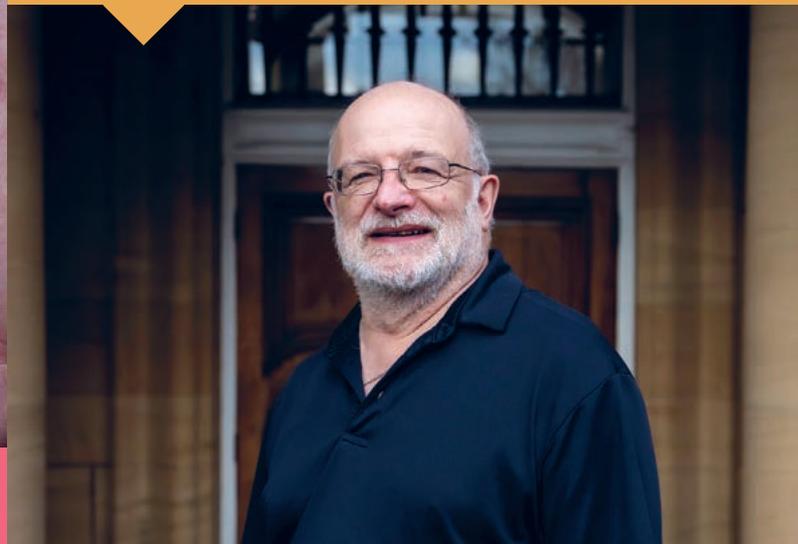
DUNCAN WILSON
(STAFF 90-25)

From leading field trips across the globe to coaching national champion squash teams, Mr Wilson's adventurous spirit and dedication to Geography and co-curricular life have inspired awe and admiration for over three decades. His stories from almost four decades at RGS are legendary!



ROGER LOXLEY
(STAFF 95-25)

An Economics powerhouse, Mr Loxley revolutionised the subject at RGS and helped steer the school to its title as North East Independent School of the Decade in 2021. His wildly successful annual London Economics Tour changed the lives of many RGS students.



To each of you: Thank you.
We salute your service, your passion, and your unwavering commitment to RGS students.



BHARAT NALLURI

FROM RGS TO HOLLYWOOD

From early experiments behind the camera to a successful career in film and TV, director **Bharat Nalluri** (ON 78-83) tells ONA's Caroline Briggs how his story began in a galaxy not so far away.

In the summer of 1977, a 12-year-old boy sat in a darkened cinema, eyes wide and captivated as *Star Wars* lit up the big screen and transported him to a galaxy far, far away.

Like millions around the world, Bharat Nalluri spent the next two hours immersed in dreams of rebels, droids, and distant planets. But for Bharat, it was more than mere escapism – it was a defining moment that would go on to shape his life's work.

"There's a whole bunch of filmmakers around my age who will tell you it all started with seeing *Star Wars* in the cinema," says Bharat, speaking from his home in Australia, where he lives with his family. "It was a game-changing moment for all of us."

Old Novo Bharat, then a schoolboy with a head full of stars, is now an internationally acclaimed film and television director known for TV hits such as the BBC's *Spooks*, *Life on Mars*, and Netflix's *Boy Swallows Universe*.

But his story didn't begin on Tatooine – or in Hollywood, or even London. It began in the corridors of the Royal Grammar School in Newcastle, where he arrived as a boy from Guntur, India, carrying dreams as vast as the universe he had glimpsed on screen.

"I found my dad's old Super 8 camera under his bed and just started making little films around school," he recalls. "I got a couple of friends involved, including Paul, who was in my year at school.

"Paul and I would make films; he'd act in mine; I'd act in his. We made ghost stories, supernatural tales, funny little things. We even made credit sequences with Scrabble boards and animated them for films we never finished!"

"I look back on that time of discovering my love of film in the heart of RGS and think if I hadn't found it there, maybe it would never have happened at all."

Bharat and Paul were an auspicious creative coupling. 'Paul' is fellow ON **Paul WS Anderson** (ON 78-83), acclaimed director of hit Hollywood movies such as *Resident Evil*, *Mortal Kombat*, and the historical disaster romance *Pompeii*.

For both, it all began at the school's film club, nurtured by cinephile French teacher **David M Walton** (Staff 1968-2005), and their early experiments in storytelling proved to be far more than just teenage pastimes.

"We were just trying to work out how to tell a story and get it across to an audience, however small – even if it was just in the art room at RGS. Dr Walton would screen our work, and we'd get either a round of applause or groans!"

"Honestly, nothing's changed in that respect! That's still my whole life – either a round of applause, or groans of 'why did you make this?'" he laughs.

Bharat joined RGS at the age of 13 and recalls it was then a highly organised environment with a strong emphasis on exams and academic achievement.

And yet despite the school's strict ethos, it unlocked something creative in him. "For me, that was the great thing about RGS. I found a bunch of other things that ended up leading me to become a director, surprisingly."

He hasn't been back to the school in decades – not since his very last day in Sixth Form – but he reflects warmly on his time: "I have really fond memories, especially of the film club!"

When Bharat left RGS in 1983, a career in film felt like an impossible dream for a boy from the North East of England. Undeterred, he wrote a script and convinced a group of dentists to pool £20,000 to help fund the project.



At the end of the day, as a director or filmmaker, someone is hopefully paying you for your point of view. That's what matters. If they're not, you're working with the wrong people.

"Back then, people didn't even know what a director or a producer was, let alone how to become one," he laughs.

Today he sees a more egalitarian industry, especially for young people with easy access to technology and a natural creative spark.

"Now, with the internet, all the information is out there, but the most practical advice I can give is what most successful filmmakers I know have done: just start making films, like I did with that Super 8 camera."

"You've got your iPhone, your computer so you can film and edit right away. You don't have to raise money for film or borrow equipment. Just start shooting things. Good, bad, indifferent – it doesn't matter. The only way to get better is by doing it."

For aspiring directors, he offers one main piece of advice: master the script. "Everything hangs on the script – it's the spark that gets the whole machine moving."

"Often, no one will trust you to direct a script if you haven't got experience, so the way many people get their first job is by writing their own. If people like it, don't let it go, say to them 'you can have it if I get to direct it.' That's how I did it. The script is key."

Over a 40-year career, Bharat has directed across genres and platforms – from romantic comedies, to thrillers, sci-fi, family dramas. His IMDB listing is certainly eclectic.

"I went to America at first and did quite well. But I realised America really likes to pigeonhole you: 'this is what you do.' I got bored of that, so I came back to England, where things felt a bit more open," he explained.

"At the end of the day, as a director or filmmaker, someone is hopefully paying

you for your point of view. That's what matters. If they're not, you're working with the wrong people."

Back in the UK, Bharat found his breakthrough on the small screen: "At that time it was rare for a director to move between film and TV and back again. Now, thanks streaming services like Netflix, everyone does it."

Bharat brought his cinematic eye to TV, shooting multi-camera and bringing a bolder approach to sound.

"We started using three cameras instead of one," he explains "We edited faster. We did a big surround sound mix, which no one did in TV at the time. Basically, we made it look like a movie as much as we could on a TV budget!"

The approach worked. It shaped three of the most iconic British dramas of the early 2000s: the slick con artistry of *Hustle*, the time-bending brilliance of *Life on Mars*, and the stylish spy thriller *Spooks*. It's the show taxi drivers still want to talk about – the ultimate litmus test of cultural impact.

"*Spooks* was a critical moment for me, but suspect it's probably unwatchable now," Bharat laughs, "but back then it was groundbreaking. It felt like having a movie on TV. I loved the script, and I was desperate to do something I hadn't done before. The people around me, the producers, and the team, were incredibly positive, and I liked their attitude. They were ambitious.

"Everyone came out of *Spooks* onto bigger things," he says. "At the time, no one really knew the three leads – Matthew Macfadyen, David Oyelowo, and Keeley Hawes and we fought and fought with the BBC to let us cast them. The BBC agreed because no one expected anything from the show. Now they're all household names.

"We were all lucky to find each other, and we learned so much from that experience, but creatively, *Life on Mars* is the one I'm still really proud of."

When it comes to choosing what to direct, Bharat says it's always on the strength of the script, trusting his intuition to lead the way.

"The film I just finished was seven years in the making. I got the script in 2017, and we kept working on it, tweaking it, getting rejected. Then we did a small tweak – made a couple of the characters sing a bit better – and suddenly all this money came in, and actors wanted to get on board.

"The business side of the industry means you often need a certain level of actor attached just to get the film financed. If you need tens of millions of dollars, no

one is giving you that unless there's a well-known name involved. So, you must marry business with artistic sensibilities."

Still, the surprises are what keep it exciting: "Suddenly, you see the film in a completely different way. Three actors can approach the same role in three completely different ways. None of them are wrong, they're just different."

"As a director, you must steer the ship. If one actor plays it a certain way, the others must adjust accordingly. It becomes like a chemistry experiment – mixing everything together to get the perfect formula."

"That's why it's like lightning in a bottle when a show becomes a hit. So many things must go right. It's like magic."

Today, Bharat lives in Newcastle – that's Newcastle, New South Wales. "My kids go to Newcastle Grammar School. No royal charter, but still – Newcastle Grammar! I love the synchronicity of that."

He jokes: "I keep telling them, 'My school is 300 years older than your country.' They don't like it when I say that!"

Despite the considerable miles, Bharat still returns home to Newcastle to visit family. While his accent has softened, with traces of Australian and American woven through, there's no hiding the Geordie twang.

"Give me a glass of wine and the Geordie starts to pop out!" he laughs, reeling off words like 'computer' – or rather, 'kum-PYOO-tah' – to prove his point.

"I'm a bit of a chameleon. When I'm in Newcastle, I sound Geordie. In America, I go a bit American. In Australia, I adapt but there are still some words I say that are very 'me' and I'm pleased my Geordie accent hasn't gone away."

Bharat's work has brought personal rewards too. While working in Thailand on a project about the 2004 tsunami, he met his future wife, foreign correspondent Kylie Morris. She had covered the disaster extensively for *Channel 4 News*, and her insight proved invaluable in helping Bharat portray the trauma with authenticity and sensitivity.

After stints living in Los Angeles and Washington DC, Bharat and Kylie are settled in Australia with their teenage children, though Bharat continues to direct globally, with recent projects for Apple and Netflix under his belt.

Even after nearly four decades in the industry, he remains fuelled by curiosity.

"I still watch a lot of TV, and I try to keep up as much as I can. You can't still be making drama like you did 35 years ago, and I really enjoy moving with the times," he says.

Selected filmography (director):

Last Days of the Space Age
(TV) (2024)

Boy Swallows Universe
(TV) 2024

Professionals
(TV) 2020-2022

Shantaram
(TV) (2022)

The Orchard
(Podcast) 2021

Little America
(TV) 2020

The Man Who Invented Christmas
2017

Mars Project
(TV Movie) 2016

The 100
(TV) 2014

Emily Owens MD
(TV) 2012-2013

Spooks
(TV) 2002-2011

Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day
2008

Tsunami: The Aftermath
(TV) 2006

The Hunters
(TV Movie) 2006

Life on Mars
(TV) 2006

Hustle
(TV) 2004

"The fabulous thing about directing is that you're working with a different subject matter every time you do a film."

"You become an expert in a world you didn't know before! The movie I did before the last one was set in the world of Dickens – *The Man Who Invented Christmas*. I spent two years diving into Dickens, and my latest film, called *Flavia*, is based on a book about an 11-year-old girl detective in 1950s Britain who solves crimes. She's a chemistry genius, so suddenly I'm immersed in chemistry in the 1950s."

"It's joyous, because you're always learning something new and figuring out how to tell the story in the most effective, resonant way."

Bharat adds: "I can talk about *Spooks*, *Hustle* and *Life on Mars* to one generation, then there's the American stuff I did for Warner Brothers, like *The 100*, which landed with Gen Z or Millennials. And now there's the newer work I've done in Australia that's hit Netflix."

With the screen landscape evolving at breakneck speed, Bharat is acutely aware of how the shifting industry is reshaping storytelling.

"Oh gosh! Who would have foreseen Netflix 10 or 15 years ago? Now the streamers own the world. There'll be consolidation eventually as we can't all afford subscriptions everywhere, and I think two or three big players will end up owning most of it."

"But it's constantly shifting. Netflix used to make short six-part series just to hook you in. Now they want to keep you subscribed, so they're moving back to long-running formats. That's the new thing – they're after shows like *Spooks*, or the 'Golden Goose' as we used to call them at the BBC – a series that runs for ten seasons."

"And it'll keep changing. Attention spans are shorter. People are used to watching things in a minute. We cut faster now, more responsively. And we know people are watching with a phone in one hand and the TV on in front of them."

It's a challenge Bharat is rising to with his characteristic versatility.

"There are two ways to deal with it," he explains. "One: make something so good, you can't look away. Netflix is brilliant at that – shows like *Adolescence* just suck you in. The other is to keep it simple. Repeat key points every five minutes so people don't get lost when they glance away. That way, you can scroll Instagram and still follow the story."

The tools of the trade may evolve, and the platforms may shift, but for Bharat, one thing remains constant: the story.

"Honestly, the cheapest and best way to get into the business is still just to write yourself a script," he says.

"All you need is a piece of paper and a pen and you can write *Star Wars*. You may not have \$500m to make it, but you've written it, and that's the beginning. Anyone can do that."

A long time ago, in a darkened cinema, a wide-eyed boy watched a story that changed his life. Now, four decades on, Bharat Nalluri is still telling stories – and proving that the force of imagination is as powerful as ever.

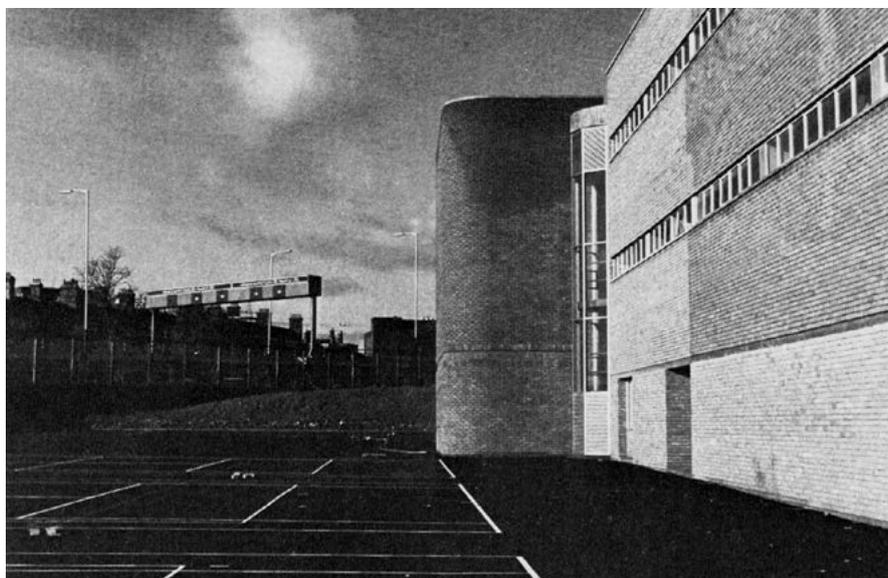
THE HISTORY OF BIOLOGY AT RGS

Fifty years ago, the RGS took a significant step into the modern age by adding biology to the main school curriculum. Until then, boys could only study the subject in the Sixth Form (Years 12–13), and only if they intended to pursue medicine at university. At the time, there was just one biology teacher, compared to four or five each in chemistry and physics.

BY **TIM BOLTON-MAGGS**,
HEAD OF BIOLOGY (STAFF 74-04) (ON 51-62)

A second biology teacher was appointed to start in September 1974 when biology became a compulsory subject in the Third Form (Year 9) timetable as well as part of a new 'science' course for the First Form (Year 7). At the same time, work began on a second lab, to be added to the new building that had just been provided by Newcastle City Council, replacing one which was demolished to make way for the motorway. Ironically, this was at the opposite end of the school from the other science departments!

The following year, biology appeared as one of the options in the Fourth Form (Year 10) syllabus but, like other optional subjects at this time, it was only allocated three periods per week – which involved 'stealing' one period from each of the other two sciences, which would otherwise have four. Consequently, the reduced teaching time compared with 'pure' sciences meant that when these boys took O-level in 1977, it was in 'Combined Science' which only counted as two subjects although it covered all three.



ROYAL
GRAMMAR
SCHOOL

Development Programme

REPORT TO ANNOUNCE ITS COMPLETION, MARCH 1977



Above: RGS Development Programme Report, 1977

Below: Biology Block, Prize Day Programme, 1976

Biology became an increasingly popular choice, putting a huge strain on the options system – as well as the labs, so the biology department took over the entire upper floor of the south block (until then the third room was a satellite of the geography department). A third biology teacher was appointed but the demand grew and the number of Sixth Form biologists rose correspondingly. The introduction of GCSE in 1986 meant that biology had to be treated as full subject and this caused a crisis in the timetable, solved by increasing the number of teaching periods from the original eight (with afternoon lessons 10 minutes longer than morning ones, originally to give more time for practical subjects) to nine. To do this without extending the school day, they were reduced to a uniform length and the lunch break was staggered. A fourth teacher was added to the department which spilled out of the south block due to the lack of teaching space.

The arrival of the National Curriculum put biology firmly in the core and prompted the decision to build a new 'Science and Technology Centre'. To achieve this, the old 1930s gymnasium was replaced with a modern sports hall triggering a major redevelopment of the school premises over the next two decades. The STC was opened by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in October 1997 and a fifth biologist joined the staff in 2000. Since then, staff have come and gone, new technology has been embraced and teaching syllabuses have changed in line with the exam regulations but, as a subject, biology has achieved equilibrium.

A FUTURE SET IN STONE

RGS NEWCASTLE
BUILDS ON 500 YEARS
OF GENEROSITY

The RGS annual Philanthropy Dinner is a special occasion to thank our remarkable donors whose generosity helps drive our mission to expand access to a world-class education, and strengthen bonds across the North East community.



Fittingly, this year's event, held on a crisp January evening, marked the official unveiling of a striking new addition to our building – the Donor Wall.

The installation pays tribute to the many individuals, families, and organisations who have supported our Bursary and Partnership Programmes through transformational gifts, either as RGS Fellows or members of the Sutherland Society.

Those listed as members of the Horsley Society are individuals who have remembered RGS in their will, or for whom a gift of £5,000 or more has been made in their loving memory. Each name has been carefully etched into stone, creating a lasting and public testament to their impact, visible not just to the RGS community, but to all who pass by Eskdale Terrace.

The craftsmanship behind the wall comes from Shiremoor based stonemasonry firm, Strettle Memorials, who kindly supplied and fixed the plaques at cost price. Following the Philanthropy Dinner, the company pledged a further 10 plaques free of charge.

Owner Gregg Strettle reflected on the significance of the project, both professionally and personally.

"We're proud to be involved in such a prestigious project," he said. "I come from a long line of stonemasons and letter cutters and I grew up watching my father chiselling into stone. Our business started in 1946, and over the years we've worked on thousands of commemorations – war memorials, mayoral plaques, we were even involved in the restoration of Grey's Monument.

"Our name sits proudly on almost every piece of monumental work across the North East, so it felt right to play a small part in honouring the people who have given so generously to the school. RGS is such a well-known name in the North East – its heritage is immense. Many of the donors are still with us and can bring their families to see their names on the wall. That makes this project feel especially meaningful."

Gregg said he drew inspiration from the building itself when it came to the design process.

"When we first saw the elevation drawings, we noticed the use of natural stone in the sills and mullions, so for us there was no other choice – it had to be stone. Anything else would've felt out of place. We also chose a classic Roman font



This wall is a permanent thank you to those who share our belief in education as a force for social mobility. Their generosity directly enables young people from all backgrounds to access an RGS education and benefit from our wider outreach work.



for the lettering to match the building's character to keep the whole project traditional and timeless."

Crafting the wall required careful planning. "Proportion is everything," he explained. "A well-balanced plaque is pleasing to the eye. Too big, too small, too cluttered – it just looks wrong. We had to ask: How many donors are we commemorating? How long are the names? How many plaques can fit comfortably into the brickwork? It took time to get it right."

"We've designed it so it can be added to as the number of donors grow," Gregg added. "We're ready and waiting to add more names as the school's story continues."

Headmaster **Geoffrey Stanford** echoed that sentiment.

"This wall is a permanent thank you to those who share our belief in education as a force for social mobility," he said. "Their generosity directly enables young people from all backgrounds to access an RGS education and benefit from our wider outreach work."

Currently, RGS supports around 100 pupils on bursaries, approximately one in every 13 students. Through the RGS Partnerships programme, the school also works with over 100 local schools, reaching more than 10,000 pupils annually with academic, creative, and enrichment initiatives.

The Donor Wall stands as a quiet symbol of the community that surrounds and supports RGS Newcastle – a lasting reminder of the power of collective generosity.

A HISTORY OF **RGS TRIPS TO POMPEII**

BY **ZETA HILL**, HEAD OF CLASSICS
(STAFF 22-PRESENT)

If you cast your mind back to your days at RGS, which memories stand out most vividly? I wonder whether any of them involve school trips. When catching up with old school friends, it's often those shared experiences that come to the fore. Now, as a teacher, running and accompanying trips has also become one of the highlights of my career.





Beyond the lifelong memories and the hilarious anecdotes enjoyed by both students and teachers, the value of school trips is undeniable – and their impact, perhaps, immeasurable.

The Classics Department at RGS has been running trips for many years, visiting sites from Hadrian’s Wall to Delphi. While researching for the school’s 500th anniversary, we reflected on Classics as the only subject taught at RGS continuously since the school first opened its doors. However, it’s harder to pinpoint exactly when the department began taking students to Classical sites.

Delving into the archives, we discovered a report by a student, **Stanley Alan Middleton** (ON 31-35), detailing a personal visit to Pompeii in 1934. The December 1934 edition of *The Novocastrian* revealed that Middleton had also delivered a talk about his trip to the newly formed Removes’ Classical Society, which was described as “extremely interesting and worthy of high praise”. In his article, Middleton wrote that everything he saw in Pompeii was fascinating and that he “was amazed at what the Pompeians must have known”. He noted how similar their “mode of living” seemed to contemporary life, describing it as “practically the same”.

We also know from Issue 100 of the *ONA Magazine* that in 1988, **Tim Clark** (Staff 84-17) organised and led the first of many trips to Greece and Italy. He later wrote that “there have only been a few years in the interim when a party of RGS students has not set off to experience the magic of places such as Pompeii, Athens, Olympia and Delphi”.

Fast forward to the academic year 2024–25 and, after a brief hiatus during the pandemic, Classics trips are once again in full swing: 43 Year 8 and 9

History of RGS trips to Pompeii – in the Archive

Personal RGS student visit to Pompeii in 1934, wrote up a report for Dec 1934 edition of *Novo* magazine [RGS/NOV/201]

Review 2010-11, Italy trip 2011 *Review Yearbook*

ONA Magazine 100 – former staff Tim Clark retirement and history of Classics trips run since 1988 *ONA Magazine*, Issue 100. Says that he was involved in starting the tradition, so they’ve been going since 1988.

Trip booklet from RGS Italy Trip, 1999. Front page, itinerary, info page on Pompeii.

Slides from Classics trips kept by MA Griffiths (Tony Griffiths), Head of Classics (1969-2002). See valette in *ONA Magazine 63*. Received MBE 2003.

Collection of slides that would have been used for teaching, from an undated trip to Pompeii (around late 1980s-early 1990s)

students visited Pompeii, 45 senior Classicists travelled to Greece, and 66 Year 9 students walked Hadrian’s Wall and explored Vindolanda.

Reading through decades of Classical trip reports, some key words appear time and again: “magical”, “amazing”, “exciting” and “interesting”. The ancient world has truly come to life for so many students. For me, few things are more thought-provoking than walking the streets once trodden by the Romans and Greeks. To think that you are following in the footsteps of Socrates in the agora of Athens, or imagining Oedipus seeking knowledge at Delphi, or picturing Agamemnon returning through the Lion Gate at Mycenae, unaware of the fate awaiting him at the hands of Clytemnestra. Or envisioning Caecilius at home in Pompeii, whether the figures you picture are historical, mythical or literary, to walk where they walked is truly breathtaking.

The tragedy, mystery and wonder of Pompeii has captivated minds for generations. In 1934, Middleton assumed from the positions of the bodies that the people had been sleeping when they died. Modern research and scientific advances have since revealed far more about their final moments. Yet, comparing Middleton’s account with a student report from 2024, I was struck by the shared focus on the deaths of the citizens of Pompeii and Herculaneum. The universal nature of human experience – the shared feelings of shock, pity and awe at such a devastating natural disaster, and the enduring desire to understand civilisation and culture – remains unchanged.

To visit these ancient places is to better understand both Classics and humanity. And, of course, it’s always a very fun school trip!





FROM THE COMMON ROOM TO **CAPITOL HILL**

From school theatre rehearsals to the halls of global influence, **Jane McIntosh** (née Wallace) (ON 07-09) has carved out a remarkable career. Now Global Director of Public Affairs & Regulatory at online review platform Trustpilot, Jane is at the forefront of some of today's most pressing global conversations – from AI ethics to online misinformation.

ONA caught up with Jane to reflect on her journey from RGS to the international stage, and how Geordie grit continues to shape her outlook today.

What are your strongest memories from your time at RGS?

So many – and all of them happy. I remember a real sense of contentment, surrounded by laughter, learning, and a brilliant group of friends. Some of my fondest memories come from the Sixth Form common room antics, the stream of rehearsals and performances for various musical and theatrical productions, and of course, the lively debates in class. It was fulfilling, fun, and formative.

How do you think growing up and being educated in Newcastle shaped your worldview?

The North East is an amazing place to grow up and I'm proud to call it home. One of the defining qualities of Tynesiders is their openness – that willingness to strike up a conversation with anyone, anywhere. It's a wonderful and powerful trait. That curiosity and warmth have stayed with me personally and professionally. There are so many interesting people out there to meet and learn from.

You've gone from the corridors of a school in Newcastle to the heart of policy conversations across the UK, EU, and US. What has that journey been like?

It's been incredibly rewarding. Working in current affairs and politics is endlessly varied. No two days are ever the same, and I thrive on that. After RGS, I studied History & International Relations at St Andrews, then moved to Brussels to work in the European Parliament. It was hands-on political work – negotiating legislation, building consensus, drafting policy. When I moved to London, I pivoted into public affairs and campaigns, eventually expanding my work to include EU and international trade. Now, at Trustpilot, I get to bring it all together in a global role that spans policy influencing and regulatory readiness across the UK, EU, US, and beyond.

Of course, there've been challenges, but each one has been a learning opportunity and helped build resilience. I feel very lucky to do work I find both fascinating and meaningful.

What first drew you to public affairs and advocacy work?

Honestly, I've always been a politics nerd. Even at school, I had a deep interest in current affairs – and plenty of opinions! Politics A-Level and studying International Relations confirmed that passion. A summer internship at the European Parliament sealed the deal.

Public affairs is such a dynamic space because it blends technical understanding with strategy, creativity, and people skills. You're constantly adapting to a shifting external environment, and that's what makes it stimulating and fun.

Was there a particular teacher or moment at RGS that set you on this path?

Absolutely. **James FX Miller** (Staff 96-08), the then Headmaster, was the first to give me a vote of confidence by offering me a place at RGS – something I'll always remember. I was also lucky to be taught by **Jon Neil** (Staff 00-Present)(Politics), **Hazel Jones-Lee** (Staff 84-09)(English), and **Oliver Edwards** (Staff 88-Present)(History). They went well beyond the syllabus and brought their subjects to life with infectious passion. They encouraged us to think critically and creatively, which has served me ever since.

Were there any pivotal career moments that reminded you, "This is why I do this"?

Many! Some of the more surreal moments include walking through 10 Downing Street,



RGS taught me critical and creative thinking, and above all, tenacity. Perseverance is essential in public affairs. You need the confidence to put forward new ideas and the openness to debate respectfully.

the White House, US Congress, the WTO, and even Buckingham Palace. But the most meaningful moments come when you see real change happen.

One that stands out was a parliamentary inquiry we helped launch into a company mistreating consumers. A woman who had been badly treated came to give evidence to MPs. Seeing her share her story directly with those in power was incredibly meaningful. The company's executive immediately offered a personal apology, and the company ultimately agreed to change its practices. It was a powerful reminder of exactly why I do this work.

Trustpilot champions transparency and fights misinformation. What motivates you to tackle these huge challenges?

At its heart, it's about helping people. Trustpilot empowers consumers to make the right choices and helps businesses to learn, improve and grow.

Yes, the online world has its issues, but the potential for good is immense. We need to fight to preserve that. Combating misinformation is essential, but it must be balanced carefully with protecting open debate and diverse opinion. That complexity is what makes the work so important and so interesting.

Can you link any of your experiences at RGS to how you tackle those challenges today?

RGS taught me critical and creative thinking, and above all, tenacity. Perseverance is essential in public affairs. You need the

confidence to put forward new ideas and the openness to debate respectfully. Those foundations were most certainly laid during my time at school.

Do you think people from regional backgrounds like yours have a role to play on the global stage?

Absolutely. Tech and policy are shaped by people from all over the country and the world. Diversity of background brings essential perspective. That's one of the things I love about this field – it's a real meeting of minds.

Does being from Newcastle influence your leadership style today?

Very much so. The friendly, direct and down to earth approach the Geordies are known for helps enormously in building trust and rapport. Whether you're negotiating with policymakers or leading a team, honest and open communication is vital. I try to bring that into every interaction.

What advice would you give current RGS students dreaming of making an impact beyond their hometown?

Seize every opportunity, both academic and extracurricular. The soft skills you build outside the classroom are just as critical as the ones you learn inside it. RGS gives you a foundation that can take you anywhere. Use it. It can give you the confidence and skill set to walk into any room in the world and contribute meaningfully.

What gives you hope, particularly around online integrity and AI ethics?

I am given hope by some of the incredible minds working in these fields and grappling with these issues. In public affairs, you get to collaborate with them closely, and it's truly humbling. That kind of talent and thought leadership gives me real hope for the future.

If you could go back and give your school-age self one piece of advice, what would it be?

Worry less! I'd tell myself not to overthink everything and simply enjoy the present.

Looking ahead – what's next?

There's so much more I want to explore. New challenges, new places, new ideas. I'm really excited for what's still to come and hope I get the chance to tackle plenty more of those big, meaningful questions in the years ahead.

LONDON DINNER

13 MARCH 2025



On the evening of 13 March 2025, One Great George Street in Westminster played host to a truly unforgettable gathering – the Old Novocastrians' Annual London Dinner.

Drawing together alumni from across the decades, the event celebrated shared memories of schooldays past, and the enduring spirit and camaraderie that define the RGS Newcastle community.

The evening sparkled with energy as Old Novos from diverse backgrounds and professions reconnected, exchanged stories, and forged new friendships. From recent leavers to seasoned professionals, the room buzzed with conversation and a deep sense of belonging.

What made the evening especially meaningful was the interaction between generations.

Younger alumni were visibly keen to learn from those who've walked before them, while more established Novos were equally eager to offer advice and encouragement. It was a living example of the RGS ethos in action – where mentorship, support, and mutual respect form the bedrock of a thriving network.

Guest speaker **Dr Amrit Ray** (ON 86-91) flew in from the US for the occasion, captivating the audience with a thought-provoking talk that struck a chord with everyone present. His words served as a reminder of the global impact Old Novos can have – and the shared values that continue to unite them, no matter where life takes them.

Thank you to all who attended, making the dinner such a memorable success. See you next year!



Scan the QR code to book your tickets for 2026!

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.

We proudly offer a range of sponsorship opportunities at our alumni and parent events throughout the year. These provide excellent brand exposure while supporting the RGS Bursary Campaign.

Join us as we commemorate five centuries of education, innovation, and community spirit.



Follow this QR code to find out more.



30 September 2025
Co-Curricular Theme **D**

7 October 2025
Impact on the City Theme launch **D**

10 October 2025
Newcastle ONA Dinner **E**

15 October 2025
Founder’s Service **E**

15 October 2025
Story of Our School Book launch **P**

29 October 2025
October CONNECT **P**

11 November 2025
Remembrance Assembly **E**

17 November 2025
Launch of commemorative Annual Review **P**

28 November 2025
Art of Hope/Winter Wonderland **E**

29 November 2025
November CONNECT **P**

16 December 2025
Carol Service **E**

12 March 2026
London ONA Dinner **E**

18 March 2026
Choir & Orchestra Concert **E**

Spring 2026
Junior School Play **E**

Key D: Digital Content E: Event P: Publication

NEWS & CONGRATULATIONS



RGS NEWCASTLE HONOURED WITH EDUCATION 'OSCAR' IN 500TH YEAR

In a fitting tribute to its quincentenary, the Royal Grammar School Newcastle has been named Independent Senior School of the Year at the prestigious Tes Schools Awards – a national celebration of educational excellence often dubbed the “Oscars of education”.

This landmark recognition honours RGS Newcastle’s innovative and inclusive approach to education, with particular praise for its work championing diversity, supporting students with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), and engaging meaningfully with the wider community. It’s a remarkable achievement at any time, but particularly poignant as the school marks 500 years since its founding.

Reflecting on the momentous occasion, Headteacher **Geoffrey Stanford** said: “Receiving the ‘Independent Senior School of the Year’ award at the Tes Awards was a proud moment – not just for what it says about

RGS today, but for how it reflects the values that have shaped us for over 500 years: a sense of belonging, belief in one another, a love of learning, and the ambition to succeed.

“To receive this recognition in our quincentenary year makes it all the more special.”

The awards ceremony held on Friday 20 June, brought further cause for celebration, with **James Miller** (Staff 12-Present), Head of RGS Junior School, shortlisted for Independent Headteacher of the Year. Though he narrowly missed out on the award, his nomination stands as an endorsement of his child-centred approach to leadership and the growing success of the Junior School.

Mr Stanford also acknowledged the RGS community’s far-reaching influence and impact, noting that Mr Miller was shortlisted alongside **James Dahl** (ON 88-93), Master of Wellington College, and RGS Governor Sue Woodroffe,

Principal of The Grammar School at Leeds, who took home the award.

The Tes Schools Awards, now in their 17th year, shine a spotlight exceptional educators and institutions across both state and independent sectors, from early years to secondary education.

Rod Williams, CEO of Tes, said: “The remarkable achievements of schools, teachers, and trusts celebrated this evening are a powerful demonstration of the excellence and dedication driving UK education.”





ON MATT BAILEY'S MESSAGE OF HOPE

As part of this year's Culture Week, RGS welcomed back former student **Matt Bailey** (ON 11-18), who returned to share a powerful and deeply personal message – especially poignant during Pride Month.

Matt, who left RGS seven years ago, reflected on his early experiences, describing his time at school as challenging.

During an assembly to promote WeAreRGS Celebration – a new RGS event which celebrates both Pride month and Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) at the school – Matt gave a powerful speech regarding self-acceptance and his own journey of discovering himself within the LGBTQ+ community.

Matt, who left RGS seven years ago, reflected on his time at the school, describing his early years as difficult.

"I was quite reserved," he said. "I was bullied badly, and it took time to find where I belonged." At the time, no one in his year of over 150 students was openly gay and feeling different left him isolated.

"There was no Culture Week when I was here," he told the assembly. "So, seeing the pride flag flying above the building today was a special moment."

Matt shared how he hid his true self during school, putting on a "costume" to try to fit in. "We all want to belong," he said, "but suppressing who you are isn't sustainable. Eventually, you have to live honestly."

Coming out a few years ago during Pride Month was, in his words, liberating.

Surrounded now by a supportive LGBTQ+ community, he urged students to be kind to themselves and take their time. "You don't need to come out until you're ready," he said. "But know this – if you haven't found your place yet, you will."

His parting message was one of hope and responsibility. "You're the future leaders of this country. Use your voice to create a world where everyone is free to be themselves."

Thank you, Matt, for sharing your story with students.

CLASS OF 1977 RETURNS TO RGS TO HONOUR DR CHRIS HORRILL

Last month the Royal Grammar School welcomed back a group of alumni from the Class of 1977, who gathered to remember their friend and former classmate, **Dr Chris Horrill** (ON 70-77), who died in March.

The reunion was a heartfelt occasion, filled with stories, laughter, and a deep sense of admiration for a life lived with purpose and passion.

Known for his boundless energy and competitive spirit, Chris represented the school in rugby, athletics, boxing, and fencing, even holding the 200-metre sprint record for several years.

After leaving RGS, Chris pursued a distinguished academic path, earning a PhD in Botany. But it was his work in Africa that defined his legacy, and embodied the school song lyrics 'Far They Went Forth'.

Over three decades, he became a pioneering force in marine conservation, working across Tanzania and Mozambique to protect coral reefs, support coastal communities, and shape sustainable environmental policy.

During their visit, the group visited the school archive to view old school photos, share memories of their school days, and reflect on Chris's remarkable journey. Chris's obituary can be found on page 48.



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)

FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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NEWS & CONGRATULATIONS

RGS ROBOTICS TEAM WINS PRESTIGIOUS JUDGES AWARD AT VEX WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

The RGS Senior VEX Robotics team, Robo Kai 3, returned triumphant from the VEX Robotics World Championship 2025 in Dallas in May having earned the highly sought-after Judges Award – a distinction reserved for teams that demonstrate outstanding ingenuity, perseverance and professionalism on the global stage.

Competing in the Research Division of the High School category, Robo Kai 3 navigated ten high-pressure qualification matches.

Judges were particularly impressed by the team's sophisticated robot design for this season's High Stakes game and their articulate responses during technical interviews.

“Walking into a hall that takes ten minutes to cross was mind-blowing,” said Eleanor I. “Once the first match started, we realised we were playing on the biggest stage school robotics can offer, and we loved every second.”

Matthew G reflected on the fine margins: “We lost one game by a

single point, so the lesson is clear – a simpler, perfectly-tuned robot beats an unfinished ‘clever’ one every time.”

For Roshan G, the experience highlighted the global nature of engineering: “Meeting teams from five continents reminded us that innovation is a global conversation.”

The team, consisting of Aarav B, Eleanor I, Matthew G, Roshan G, Tanish K, Will G and Zaher M, spent countless after-school and weekend hours refining their robot. Their journey to Dallas was made possible thanks to the support of **Dr Pete Warne** (Staff 05-Present) Head of Engineering, Design & Technology), **Dr Steve Bunce** (Staff 22-Present) (Partnerships for Robotics), and generous donors, including main sponsor TNEI.

Dr Warne praised the team's endurance: “The sheer scale of VEX Worlds is impossible to grasp until you're there. Yet the pupils kept going on minimal sleep for three days and were still improving the robot until the very end.”



JIM RYAN RETURNS TO INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION

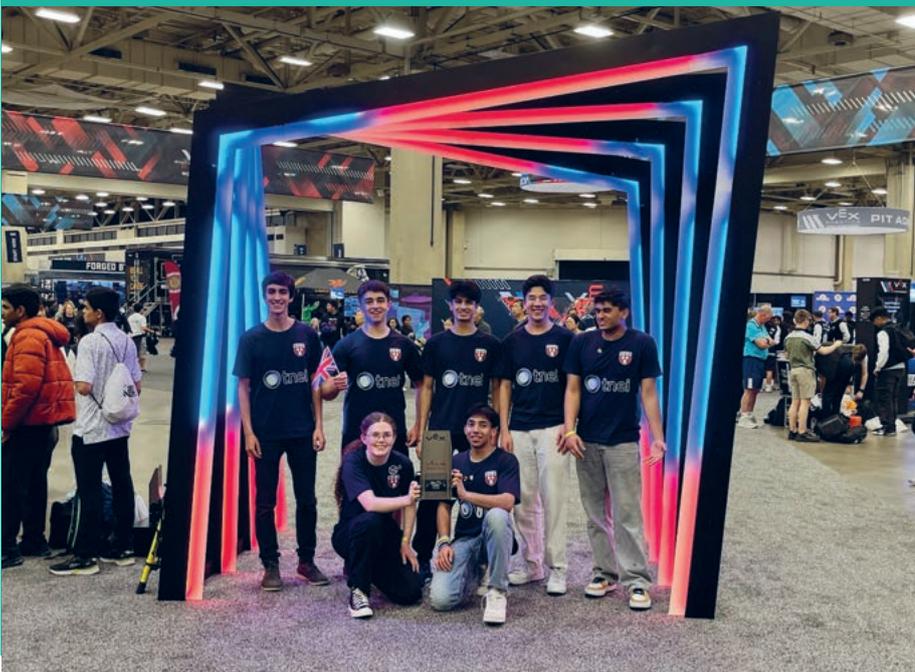
Former Global CEO of Sony Interactive Entertainment **Jim Ryan** (ON 68-78) returned to RGS for a packed day exploring how gaming and technology are shaping learning across the school.

Jim began with a Q&A session for A-Level students, offering real-world insights into the ethical, legal, and social impacts of the gaming industry – directly linking to their computing curriculum.

He then visited Junior School pupils working on entries for the BAFTA Young Game Designers competition, followed by a tour of the Fabricarium, where students demonstrated a wide range of creative projects. These included handheld consoles built with Raspberry Pi, text-based adventure games using Twine, and Scratch-based arcade games inspired by retro classics.

Jim also saw Minecraft builds, including Redstone-powered theme parks and historical landmarks, and spoke with students involved in E-sports and retro gaming. He even had time to catch-up with participants preparing for the annual ‘Ryan Cup’ speedrunning competition.

Jim's visit serves as a reminder of the invaluable role our ON community play in enriching the educational experience and ambitions of our current RGS students.

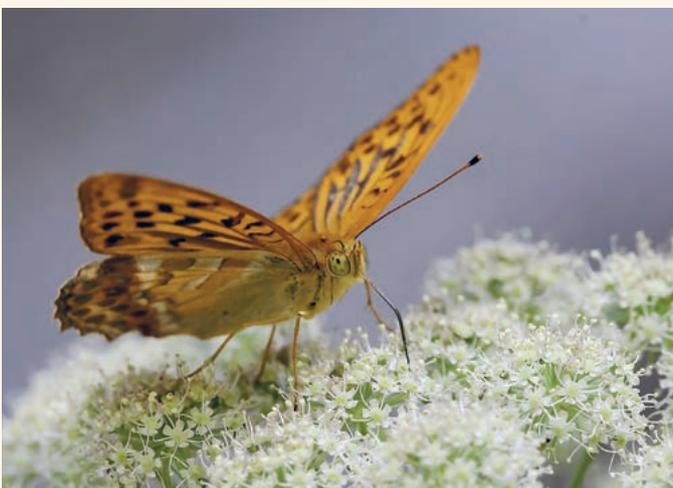




CHRISTINE PIPES

A PHOTOGRAPHER'S EYE

The whole school was deeply saddened by the death of **Christine Pipes** (Staff 98-25) earlier this year. Christine taught Engineering, Design and Technology at RGS for 26 years and was much-loved by colleagues and the hundreds of students she taught.



A talented photographer with a keen eye for composition, Christine left behind a rich portfolio of work, a selection of which now hangs in the staff common room. Her passion for travel, especially to Greece, inspired a growing interest in capturing the natural world through her lens.

This small collection of her work reflects that instinct: a Red Kite caught mid-flight, a Silver-washed Fritillary feeding on a cluster of wildflowers, and pelicans in a frenzied burst of motion. They showcase Christine's remarkable ability to anticipate and capture wildlife in its most dynamic moments.

A full obituary written by Christine's husband appears on page 49.

OBITUARIES

In *ONA Magazine*, we continue to honour the lives of our Old Novos with concise obituaries in print, while full tributes are available to read online. Each story is a heartfelt celebration, written by members of our community to remember those who have touched our lives.

This format allows us to cherish their legacies and share these memories with everyone, while keeping *ONA Magazine* accessible to all.

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



DR ALAN APPLEBY

(ON 48-55)

BORN 25 APRIL 1937,
DIED 27 OCTOBER 2024, AGED 87



Dr Alan Appleby was born on 25 April 1937 in Newcastle, England, to Henry James Appleby and Gladys Evelyn Appleby (née Simpson).

He was educated at Newcastle Royal Grammar School and earned a BSc in Chemistry and a PhD in Radiation Chemistry from Durham University. In 1960, he married Kathleen Anne Shippen.

He was a postdoctoral Fellow at Brookhaven National Laboratory in Long Island, New York (1963-1965), and a Senior Scientific Officer at the UK Atomic Energy Authority in Amersham (1965-1967). In 1967, he joined Rutgers University as Assistant Professor of Radiation Chemistry, becoming Full Professor in 1977.

In 1973, he conducted the first radiation chemical studies on accelerated heavy ions at the Princeton Particle Accelerator, continuing this work at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory during a sabbatical in 1976.

In 1989, he established the Eastern Regional Radon Training Center at Rutgers with EPA funding. He was appointed Graduate Program Director of Environmental Sciences in 1994 and was a Fulbright Fellow at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, in 1997. He retired in 1999 as Emeritus Professor of Environmental Sciences.

Dr Appleby authored and co-authored around 100 scientific papers on radiation chemistry, medical radiation applications, and radon measurement techniques.

A lifelong Episcopalian, he served in various church roles and was an acolyte at seven Anglican churches over 80 years. He was also active in choral singing with Cantabile Chamber Chorale, serving on its board.

He is survived by his wife of 64 years, Kathleen, daughters Sarah and Emily, and grandchildren Hannah, Kate, Bethany, and Alan.

THOMAS LANDER BANFIELD

(ON 51-62)

BORN 8 MARCH 1943,
DIED 2 FEBRUARY 2025, AGED 81



Tom joined the RGS in September 1951 at the age of eight. He learned to play the violin at school and was the leader of all three of the school orchestras.

After completing his A-Levels he stayed on for an extra term at school to study for the Cambridge entrance exam. He passed the exam with flying colours and was awarded a Major Foundation Scholarship in Natural Sciences to King's College, Cambridge. He chose King's because of the strong association with music. He studied at Cambridge from 1962 until 1968 when he obtained his PhD in Physical Chemistry.

Whilst studying Tom made lifelong friends with a group of fellow students who called themselves "the Drain", due to the location of their rooms in college. Following graduation, June 1965 was the date of the first Drain dinner; a (nearly) annual tradition which continued until his death, albeit on Zoom since Covid.

After Cambridge, Tom joined ICI where he worked for his entire career until he took early retirement in 2000.

After he retired, Tom threw himself into pursuing his hobbies and helping others. He was a dedicated committee member and was very involved with the Rotary Club, a number of orchestras and choirs, croquet, the Village Hall Committee and the Friends of Kiplin Hall. He took on various roles and responsibilities including secretary, president and treasurer.

In late 1971 Tom met Dil at the International Voluntary Service group in Chester. They were married in October 1972. Throughout his life, his family always came first. He was immensely proud of his daughters Catherine, Anna and Nicky, and of his four grandchildren: Leoni, Josh, Elizabeth and James.

Read a full obituary by Tom's family online.

PETER BATES

(ON 68-74)

BORN 20 APRIL 1957,
DIED 5 FEBRUARY 2025, AGED 67



Peter Bates was a committed Christian and a loving grandfather to Teddy, Elliot, and Gregory, father to Steven, and brother to Joyce and David.

He began his career in insurance after leaving RGS and earning a First-Class Honours degree in Mathematics from Newcastle University. He then embarked on a stellar teaching career at Hirst High School in Ashington before moving to Emmanuel College in Gateshead.

In his later years, Peter worked in home schooling, with many families testifying that his skills and approach helped their children achieve better exam results in Mathematics and Physics.

In his personal time, Peter wrote two books on his faith in God. He was also a keen chess player and loved watching Newcastle United!

CHRIS LAMB (ON 68-76)

DIED 4 JUNE 2025

MICHAEL MCKENDRICK (ON 44-51)

DIED 28 MARCH 2024

DEREK JOHN ORTON (ON 57-64)

DIED FEBRUARY 2025

NEVILLE ROBINSON ROWELL

(ON 35-44)

DIED 20 JUNE 2024

MICHAEL SMITH (ON 41-52)

DIED 17 APRIL 2024

PETER STOBART (ON 54-64)

DIED 5 MAY 2025

TONY BURKE

(ON 56-58)

BORN 7 DECEMBER 1938,
DIED 4 DECEMBER 2023, AGED 84



Tony Burke was brought up in High Heaton and joined the RGS in the Sixth Form to study geology. After the death of his father, an architect, Tony was persuaded to follow in his footsteps. He switched to architecture and studied at King's College (then part of Durham University), graduating with honours in 1963 after periods of study in Rome and Berlin.

Sociable and outgoing, Tony quickly became part of RGS life, with a love of athletics and rugby that continued throughout his life. He married Penelope Cove (whose brother Michael captained the school 1st XV in 1956/7) and they had two children, **Andrew** (ON 74-84) and Claire. The family lived in Gosforth before moving to Ovington, and later to Mountfield, East Sussex.

Tony worked with fellow ON architect **John Farthing** on projects for the Sage Group, before forming a partnership with Neil Saul and designing Sage's first building in South Gosforth, which earned an architectural commendation. He later became Sage's Architectural Consultant for their Newcastle Great Park headquarters—a role he relished for 15 years until his retirement at 70.

A lover of sport, Tony attended three Olympic Games and supported his daughter's international triathlon career. Rugby remained his passion—he was a regular at Medicals, Novos, Northern, and Twickenham, often alongside friend Derek Morgan. He co-founded the mysterious 'Black Handled Bread Knife Society'.

Tony's Sussex home housed a vast World Wars book collection known as the 'War Room'. Mischievous, charming, and endlessly sociable, Tony was great company and truly one of a kind.

Read a full obituary by **Frank Robson** (ON 66-76) online.

DR CAMERON ROBB DIXON

CAMPBELL (ON 50-60)

BORN 24 OCTOBER 1941,
DIED 1 JANUARY 2025, AGED 83



Cameron was born in South Shields, the only child of Elizabeth and Peter Campbell. He entered the Senior School at RGS aged 11 and remembered his time there fondly. It was at RGS that he discovered a love of the water, coxing the school rowing four and sailing on the Norfolk Broads through trips organised by Dr Tony Tomkins with the Green Wyvern Yachting Club. Norfolk made a lasting impression, and sailing remained a lifelong passion.

During his childhood, Cameron's father was hospitalised for an extended period. Visiting him regularly and witnessing the care he received inspired Cameron to study medicine at Aberdeen University. There, he met Pat, a PE teacher, at a Friday night dance. They married in Aberdeen on 30 September 1967.

Cameron began working as a trainee anaesthetist but soon realised his heart lay in General Practice. He moved to Norfolk and took a junior GP role in Thorpe St Andrew, where he remained throughout his career, eventually becoming Senior Partner.

He continued part-time anaesthetics work at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital and became active in medical politics, serving on local health authority committees and as Club Doctor for Norwich City FC.

Alongside his busy professional life, he stayed active with the Green Wyvern Sailing Club and Freemasonry, his lodge being one of the oldest in the country.

Cameron retired at 65 and enjoyed holidays and visiting family in Australia. Diagnosed with dementia in 2019, he moved into a care home in 2022 and died on New Year's Day 2025.

He is survived by his wife Pat, children Kirsten, Graeme and Mhorag, and many grandchildren.

A full obituary by **Timothy Duff** (ON 40-51) can be found online.

DR JAMES CHRISTOPHER HORRILL PHD (ON 70-77)

BORN 26 MARCH 1959,
DIED 21 MARCH 2025, AGED 65



Dr Chris Horrill was a tireless champion of the natural world – a passionate environmentalist, intrepid adventurer, and devoted advocate for marine and freshwater ecosystems. His life was a rare blend of scientific rigour, wild spirit, and deep compassion.

From a young age, Chris stood out. A gifted, energetic sportsman, he represented school and county in rugby, athletics, boxing, and even fencing – our very own Zorro! He held the school 200-metre sprint record for years, a small but telling sign of his lifelong drive to push boundaries.

After studying Plant Biology at Newcastle University and earning a PhD in Botany from St Andrews, he set off for Africa – his spiritual home for over 30 years. He mastered Swahili and Portuguese, travelled widely, and became a pioneering force in marine conservation across Tanzania and Mozambique. From mapping coral reefs to advising governments on sustainable fisheries, his work helped shape the “blue economy”.

Returning to the UK, he became Director of the Rivers and Fisheries Trusts for Scotland before returning once more to Zanzibar. There, among the coral reefs he loved, he spent his final days doing the work that gave his life meaning.

Chris lived boldly – facing disease, political chaos, and personal loss with resilience, humour, and heart. He was loud, mischievous, spirited, and deeply kind. “Love me, love my bike,” he’d say, and it was true – he lived unapologetically.

He is survived by his parents, his children, his remarkable body of work, and the many people and places made better by his presence.

Read a full obituary by **Tim Errington** ON online.

JOHN MCCONVILLE (STAFF 10-17)

BORN 18 SEPTEMBER 1955,
DIED 23 JUNE 2025, AGED 69



John was born in 1955 at Denton Burn. In his youth he was a rugby player and rower – an all-round sportsman – and served a five-year apprenticeship on Scotswood Road, making parts for Centurion tanks, 45 Guns, and later, Chieftain tanks.

He went on to work in highly skilled roles for some of the best engineering companies in the world, including Parsons and Clark Chapman. His career culminated at Rolls Royce, where he made everything from hand-sized pistons for Merlin aircraft engines to man-sized split bearings for Astute Class Nuclear Submarines. Somewhere deep beneath the oceans, on a bearing surface or two, his name is inscribed with pride: John Mac.

Later, John worked at the local Polytechnic as a senior technician, gradually taking on more teaching responsibilities until he taught CNC programming full-time.

He eventually left industry for education, becoming a much-loved and respected technician in the Design Technology department at the RGS. His knowledge of material sciences and mastery of the lathe and milling machine were unsurpassed. His generosity and calm support guided many pupils through tricky project stages.

A lover of the arts and music, John was kind to all. His oil paintings landscapes, nature, and historical scenes of the Tyne and its bridges – could grace any gallery. As I write, I’m admiring a Northern Lights scene he painted for me.

A gentleman Geordie, his passing is deeply felt. Thousands of RGS students knew and were helped by him. His craftsmanship lives on in the corridor outside the DT office.

You can read the full obituary by **Mark Bell** (Staff 95-24) online.

PROF. GORDON MILLS (ON 44-52)

BORN 28 JANUARY 1934,
DIED 27 FEBRUARY 2024, AGED 91



After leaving the RGS, Gordon obtained his first degree in Economics from Cambridge University. He applied for a professorship in Economics at Bristol University, but as there was a time gap before he could take up the role, he returned to his former school where he taught a course in **Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry**.

Bizarrely, this situation meant that he would be teaching his younger brother (being the author of this obituary!) so the younger brother promptly switched his course to Pure and Applied Mathematics as well as Physics, thus avoiding some considerable embarrassment!

After his period at Bristol University, Gordon became a professor at Canterbury University and later emigrated to Australia to take up the post of Professor of Economics at the University of Sydney. This had contractual freedom to take up various visiting professorships of a shortish duration around the world. He also sat on various Commissions for the Australian Government: one recalled by the author was to advise on the economics of transport systems across Australia.

Whilst at the RGS he learnt to play the cello playing in each of the School Orchestras of the time. This musical participation extended to playing in the annual North of England Musical Tournament, once with his father playing piano, but mostly with other students as a trio.

Gordon married Pauline Auty from East Grinstead whilst at Canterbury. They had no children. Gordon will be remembered with great admiration for his prowess in academia, his successful career, and his long life.

Kenneth Mills (ON 49-57)

GEOFFREY MOFFET

(ON 67-77)

BORN 24 MARCH 1959,
DIED JANUARY 2025, AGED 65



Geoff was a born and bred Geordie, an only child whose father worked at the now defunct Swan Hunters shipyard on the Tyne.

In a then rugby-dominated school, Geoff established himself in the basketball team as a regular player from Year 3 to the Upper 6th.

From school he went on to Leicester University where he gained an economics degree and moved to London to work as an accountant. There he developed a love for the hustle and bustle of the Big City, which never left him even after returning to his native North-East, which he did after a few years.

Back in Newcastle, Geoff worked at the Department of Work and Pensions in Longbenton, and after the death of his mother (his father had died some years earlier) he moved into the family house in Longbenton.

Geoff remained unmarried and lived the archetypal bachelor's life, exhibiting a minimalist lifestyle first developed in his London days.

Although solitary by circumstance, Geoff was not a loner by nature and was never happier than meeting up socially in a pub for a drink and chat.

He was not the ambitious sort, living very much in the present, quite content with his circumstances. His death was sudden and untimely and with no family of his own it was fitting that a small number of his RGS family were able to be present at his funeral. While Geoff was never one for big events, I, for one, will always remember him as a good and loyal friend.

Jonathan Holbrook (ON 67-77)

HIS HONOUR DENIS ALAN ORDE (ON 40-50)

BORN 28 AUGUST 1932,
DIED 28 DECEMBER 2024, AGED 92



His Honour Denis Orde was a Circuit Judge on the North Eastern Circuit from 1979 to 2001, a Deputy High Court Judge (Civil) from 1983 to 2005, Resident Judge at Durham Crown Court from 1986 to 2001, a Bencher at the Inner Temple from 1998, and President of the Mental Health Review Tribunal (Restricted Cases) from 2001 to 2005.

He was the author of two books, *Nelson's Mediterranean Command* and *In the Shadow of Nelson: The Life of Admiral Lord Collingwood*, both published by Pen and Sword and currently in print. He was also a contributor to the *New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

At RGS, Denis was sent to the evacuated junior school in Penrith, first in Woodland House, then Sandath. There he played cricket and boxed for the first teams. He returned with the school to Newcastle after World War II ended, remaining until he completed his education in 1950. After being commissioned as a Second Lieutenant during National Service (1950–1952), he went up to St Catherine's, Oxford, to read Jurisprudence, where he played for the college cricket and rugby first teams.

Having gained his BA in 1955 (MA in 1959), he was called to the Bar at the Inner Temple in 1956. He stood for Parliament three times and built up a busy practice in Newcastle, covering a wide range of work, much of it civil. He appeared in several reported cases, including the guideline case on identification *R v Turnbull* [1977] QB 224, which remains good law, before being appointed a judge in 1979. As a judge, he was known for his ability to summarise the factual matrix of a case, the relevant law, and the specific issues to be tried, succinctly.

Read a full obituary by Georgina Orde, one of Denis's daughters, online.

CHRISTINE PIPES

(STAFF 98-25)

BORN 9 DECEMBER 1971,
DIED 1 JANUARY 2025, AGED 53



Christine was born in Hetton-le-Hole to David and Maureen McMillan, a few years after her brother Graym. Her childhood was a happy one, filled with family days out and camper van holidays.

She did well academically and had a strong interest in Art and Design. After Sixth Form, she completed a 3D Design course at Northumbria University, taking great pride in her work. Following a PGCE, she began teaching Design Technology at Durham School before starting her long tenure at the Royal Grammar School.

In 1995, Christine and Richie moved to Shotley Bridge, to the home she loved and spent years improving. They married on 15 July 2000 at Ford Castle in Northumberland.

Christine had many passions – music, the outdoors, her pets, art, and especially travel. She explored much of the world, but in recent years developed a deep love for Greece, often travelling solo during school holidays. Photography became another great love, and her patience and eye for detail were evident in the beautiful images she created.

Christine was strong, fun, and loving. She wasn't always the most diplomatic, but her honesty came from a place of passion and care. Perhaps the characteristic we should fondly remember her for within the RGS community is her dedication to her pupils, her determination that everyone should be supported throughout education so that they can realise their potential. This was not limited to academic or artistic excellence, and many former pupils appreciate the support and empathy shared with "her" children.

Christine left us tragically early, but she touched many lives and will not be readily forgotten.

Richard Pipes

IAN ARNOLD POAD

(ON 58-68)

BORN 3 NOVEMBER 1949,
DIED 12 JANUARY 2025, AGED 75



Ian and I remained lifelong friends despite being separated by at least 100 miles since leaving school. We met in the North Locker Room around the age of 13, taking English with 'Spike' Thornton. We shared a love of the outdoors, Ian being deeply involved in Scouting – he even travelled to Idaho for the World Jamboree. He narrowly missed out on his Queen's Scout badge due to the 1967 foot-and-mouth outbreak.

Even as a schoolboy, Ian held strong convictions. He declined the chance to join a gymnastics tour to apartheid South Africa. An accomplished gymnast, he was awarded school colours in 1968.

Ian read history at the University of Stirling, part of the second ever intake. There he met his future wife, Dale. After graduating, he joined SSEB as a trainee and stayed throughout his career in HR. He became a key member of the commissioning team at Torness nuclear power station in the 1980s, and later, as SSEB evolved into EDF, he rose to Director of Integration – successfully navigating French HR policy and British employment law. After retirement, he served as a Lay Member on employment tribunals.

Ian was deeply rooted in his community – volunteering for the Fell Rescue Team, the Scout Executive, and serving as Chair of Round Table and President of Rotary.

Though based in Scotland, Ian never lost his love for Northumberland. From their home in Chirnside, he proudly claimed a view of it.

A devoted husband, father and grandfather, Ian died at home in Strathaven with Dale, his wife of 51 years, by his side.

You can read a full version of the obituary by **David Smith** (ON 61-68) online.

KENNETH JOHN REID

(ON 46-54)

BORN 3 DECEMBER 1934,
DIED 5 FEBRUARY 2025, AGED 90



Ken, Donald (ON 41-48), and Brian (ON 49-57) formed the 16-year RGS Reid brothers dynasty, spanning 1941 to 1957—playing and captaining First XV, First XI, Boxing, Gymnastics, and Chess. Each, in turn, headed Eldon and then obtained Cambridge degrees.

Ken studied Chemical Engineering at Birmingham, gaining a PhD from Cambridge in 1960, before studying as a fellow at the University of California.

Ken was Gymnastics Captain for Birmingham, Cambridge, and British Universities at Moscow.

Joining CSIRO Australia, he researched analysis and control of plant and processing, publishing *A Solution to the Batch Grinding Equation*.

In 1969, he became an Associate Professor at McGill, Montreal.

Two years later, he joined NCCM, Zambia, as a Senior Project Engineer on the new Chingola Tailings Leach Plant; he designed the control systems for the world's largest such plant.

Six years later, he became Director of the MRRC at the University of Minnesota, retiring in 2000.

As a member of SME, he produced the YouTube video *Is Mining Important?* He would love you and your friends to watch it.

Ken married Elizabeth in Cambridge, with Paul arriving as the travels began. Sadly, she succumbed to cancer in Australia.

After marrying Gwenda, who was similarly bereaved, Bonnie was born. Trudie's birth in Canada completed the international family. He took great pride in his family, who had careers as varied as a doctor, a business manager, and an RAF fast jet pilot.

Ken's retirement was spent with his daughters close by, he and Gwenda enjoying helping to raise their grandchildren.

CHRISTOPHER MILNE SMITH

(ON 52-63)

BORN 7 SEPTEMBER 1944,
DIED 11 JANUARY 2025, AGED 80



Christopher entered RGS Junior School in 1952, forming friendships that lasted a lifetime. His vocation to the priesthood was nurtured at St John's Church, Newcastle, where he sang in the choir. In 1963, he went to Selwyn College, Cambridge, to read Theology, where he discovered rowing – becoming Captain of Boats and overturning his image of himself as a non-sportsman.

After a year teaching religious studies in Leeds, he trained for the priesthood at Cuddesdon Theological College. Ordained in 1969, he began his ministry at Liverpool Parish Church, marking the start of 40 years serving in some of England's most disadvantaged communities. He was known for his inspiring sermons, ability to connect with people from all walks of life, and imaginative, community-focused leadership.

He spent 22 years in Liverpool, including as chaplain to a large hospital. In 1991, he became a Canon at Sheffield Cathedral, helping launch a breakfast project for the homeless which continues to this day. In 2002, he moved to St George's Doncaster, combining liturgical renewal with leading a major restoration of the historic building.

Appointed Chaplain to the Queen in 2004, he preached regularly at St James's Palace. After retiring to Berwick-upon-Tweed in 2010, he remained active in church and community life, founding the Berwick Literary Festival, leading the Bridge Club, and supporting a youth charity.

Christopher married Christine in 1971; they shared a loving partnership, four children, and nine grandchildren. He always loved parties and celebrated his 80th birthday in September last year with a large gathering of friends and neighbours. He died peacefully at home surrounded by his family.

A full obituary written by **Dr Peter FC Gilbert** (ON 52-62) can be read online

HOWARD REED TEMPERLEY

(ON 41-51)

BORN 16 NOVEMBER 1932,
DIED 23 AUGUST 2024, AGED 91



Howard attended the Royal Grammar School from the age of seven. He spent the first four years of his education living at Hazel Bank Hostel on the edge of the Lake District outside Penrith. This experience would lead to a lifelong love of nature and the outdoors. On completion of his schooling in 1949, Howard deferred his entrance to Oxford on an Open Scholarship to complete his National Service. He spent two years as an officer in Egypt guarding the Suez Canal. After four years at Magdalen College, Howard won a Fulbright Scholarship as well as a Yale Fellowship to undertake postgraduate studies.

Howard's academic career began in 1960 when he was appointed to a lectureship at Aberystwyth. The following year he moved to a lectureship at Manchester. In 1967, Howard was offered a Senior Lectureship in American History at the University of East Anglia in Norwich. Following his being awarded a Chair in American History, Howard spent a year teaching at the University of Virginia, after which he returned to UEA.

Following his retirement in 1996, he taught occasional courses for UEA and the University of London and continued writing and reviewing. He was former editor of *The Journal of American Studies*, a position he held for 10 years and a former Chairman of the British Association of American Studies.

By some contrast, in the early 2000's Howard published a children's book in rhyme about dinosaurs and continued working on his memoirs, while also mastering the challenges of digital painting.

Howard's wit and creativity is sorely missed by his wife, Kitty, his three children and seven grandchildren.

DR PAUL ANTHONY WELLINGS (ON 67-73)

BORN 2 DECEMBER 1955,
DIED 25 JANUARY 2025, AGED 69



Paul joined RGS in 1967 – just in time, after his father initially withheld the acceptance letter, only relenting after a visit from the headmaster, Bill Haden, a kind and persuasive man.

He was bright and occasionally mischievous. Once, he placed a sign on a supply teacher's cloak – unexpected behaviour from someone so thoughtful, but perhaps a sign that his intellect sometimes needed an outlet.

A gifted writer, Paul's essays were witty, original, and frequently read aloud in class. He loved sport, especially football, though RGS offered only rugby. Still, he represented the school in cricket and tennis. He once remarked on a tennis match at Ampleforth, where players wore cravats – he was not impressed.

Outside school we watched Newcastle United together at St James' Park and cycled to Whitley Bay to play football and meet RGS friends.

In 1974, Paul went to Cambridge to read Geography at Sidney Sussex, known then for its strong Geography intake. Always a prankster, he once tested if tutors read his essays by inserting nonsensical and incongruous sentences – no one ever noticed!

He later earned a PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), married Julia in 1981, and spent seven years working in southern Africa. Returning to the UK, he joined multinational construction, design and engineering firm WS Atkins.

A music lover, Paul revised to Led Zeppelin, later learning guitar and writing songs. He was a keen traveller, mountaineer, and dog lover.

Paul died in January 2025, following a short illness. He is deeply missed by Julia, family, and friends who loved him for his intellect, humour, and authenticity.

DUNCAN ALLAN YOUNG

(ON 82-90)

BORN 28 OCTOBER 1972,
DIED 20 MARCH 2025, AGED 52



After leaving RGS, Duncan attended Northumbria University, where he studied for an HND in Business Studies with Transport. He went on to hold managerial positions at various bus companies in Newcastle, Milton Keynes, and Lancashire. Following this, he became an Associate Director specialising in fares and ticketing at MVA Consultancy in Manchester, and ultimately served as Technical Director at Smart Applications Management (SAM) in Plymouth.

Duncan was with his partner, Alwyn – a former Dame Allan's Girls' School pupil – for 28 years. He took great delight in his step-grandchildren, Finlay and Nell. They all miss him terribly.

Throughout his professional career, Duncan quickly became a widely respected public transport expert, dedicating over 30 years to revolutionising the UK's fare collection and smartcard sector. His work spanned bus operations management, consultancy, and technical leadership, leaving an indelible mark on the industry.

In 2006, Duncan joined the engineering consultancy Systra, where he spent 16 years as a Principal Consultant and later Associate Director. His work in ticketing and smart payment solutions supported a wide range of clients – from transport authorities to bus operators and suppliers. A recognised expert in the ITSO specification, he played a key role in shaping industry standards.

In his final role as Technical Director at Smart Applications Management, Duncan led new product development and supported SAM members with his unparalleled expertise. His absence will be deeply felt by the close-knit team at SAM, where his professionalism, unrivalled depth of knowledge, and dry sense of humour made him both a valued colleague and a friend.

Read a full obituary by partner Alwyn Fox and former manager Andrew Seedhouse, online.

ONA RGS500 DIARY DATES



RGS
NEWCASTLE



CLASS REUNIONS

Saturday 11 October 2025
RGS, Eskdale Terrace, Jesmond

This year, we will be celebrating reunions for the Classes of 2015 (10-year), 2005 (20-year), 1995 (30-year), 1985 (40-year), 1975 (50-year), 1965 (60-year) and 1955 (70-year). The 'Class of...' relates to the year that you left RGS, aged 18.

While the Old Novo dinner on Friday night has sold out, for these year groups, we are delighted to offer additional reunion activities on Saturday 11 October. Join us from 10 am for...

- Tea & Coffee in the Main Hall
- A full tour of the school to see what has (and hasn't!) changed over the years since you left
- A visit to our Archive to see some treasures from your time at the school
- A light lunch is served in the Dining Room.



RGS ON LONDON DINNER

Thursday 12 March 2026
One Great George Street, Westminster

This much-loved annual event offers a wonderful mix of excellent company, shared memories, and new connections as Old Novos from across the generations come together to celebrate our remarkable heritage. Book early to avoid disappointment! Let's end this historic year with a full house and a celebration to remember.



RECENT LEAVERS & YEAR 12 NETWORKING

Tuesday 30 June 2026
RGS, Eskdale Terrace, Jesmond

Calling RGS Leavers from 2018-2025! Are you missing RGS? Join us on Eskdale Terrace for a special reunion event where you will have the chance to catch up with former teachers, enjoy RGS refreshments in the Sixth Form Common Room, and take a tour of the school and see what's changed (and what hasn't!)



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.



£25

Gold Cufflinks
Celebrate 500 years of RGS with our limited-edition Gold Cufflinks, made to mark this historic milestone with timeless elegance.

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 Limited Edition RGS 500 Bow Tie
Our limited edition RGS 500 Gold and Black Self-Tie Bow Tie is a fabulous addition to your black tie outfit.