

ONIA

OLD NOVOCASTRIANS' ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE



RGS
NEWCASTLE

“

*I used to run a
tuck shop from
my RGS locker*

RICHARD HARPIN
ENTREPRENEUR

500 YEARS
OF RGS

ONA is the magazine for the
Old Novocastrians' Association

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Front cover photo: Caroline Briggs.

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JONNY CATTO (ON 97-03)

ONA PRESIDENT

This edition marks the close of RGS's quinqucentenary year, and what a year it has been. Over the last 12 months, the school community has celebrated this remarkable milestone through music, publications, social events, philanthropy, and many a trip down memory lane. While 500 years is indeed a remarkable milestone for any institution, what has struck me most is not the age of the school, but the vitality of the community it continues to produce.

From the archive visit that brought some of our most senior Old Novos back through the gates, to current students writing about what it feels like to be at RGS right now, this issue captures something that has stayed constant across every generation: a sense of belonging that doesn't fade when you leave Eskdale Terrace.

I hope this issue brings back memories, sparks a few conversations, and perhaps encourages you to get more involved with the Association.

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WELCOME

GEOFFREY STANFORD
HEADMASTER (STAFF 19–CURRENT)

I am delighted to introduce this special edition of *ONA Magazine*, reflecting on a year of celebration for RGS Newcastle. Our quincentenary has offered us the opportunity not only to commemorate 500 years of scholarship and service to the North East but also to reaffirm the values that have sustained the School since our origins in 1525 and continue to shape its future.

The Quincentenary celebrations brought together generations of Old Novocastrians, pupils, staff and friends of the School in a spirit of warmth and shared purpose. They served as a powerful reminder that RGS has always been at its strongest when it honours tradition while embracing change. That spirit is exemplified in a milestone of which we are particularly proud: reaching 500 bursary students supported to date, with 100 bursary holders currently educated at the School. This achievement speaks directly to our founding mission and our enduring belief that an RGS education should be accessible to young people of talent and potential, regardless of background.

Looking ahead, the recently announced formation of The RGS Group of Schools, which Westfield School has joined, marks an important new chapter in our history. This step has been taken in keeping with our charitable objectives to support education for young people across the region. Together, we will build on our shared strengths to broaden opportunity, enhance educational provision, and ensure long-term sustainability, while remaining true to our respective identities and values.

We have also been delighted to see the School's work recognised on the national stage. Being named Independent Senior School of the Year at the TES Awards is a considerable honour, and one that reflects the collective dedication of our staff and pupils. The judges rightly highlighted the School's outstanding academic standards,



Being named Independent Senior School of the Year at the TES Awards is a considerable honour, and one that reflects the collective dedication of our staff and pupils.

alongside what ISI identified in our latest inspection as a “significant strength”: our approach to diversity and inclusion. This recognition affirms our commitment to nurturing a community in which every individual is known, valued, and able to flourish.

Equally important was the acknowledgement of the breadth and depth of our partnership programme, through which we work collaboratively with schools in areas of greatest disadvantage across the North East to reach over 14,000 students last year. This work lies at the heart of our sense of responsibility as a leading independent school in the region.

As we reflect on these achievements, I am confident that the same ambition, generosity of spirit and commitment to excellence that have carried RGS through five centuries will sustain us well into the next.

RGS 500

A YEAR TO REMEMBER



Five hundred years is not something you mark quietly. For the Royal Grammar School, the Quincentenary became a year-long celebration that was as ambitious as it was inclusive, drawing together pupils, staff, families and Old Novocastrians across generations and continents. It was a year that honoured the past, celebrated the present, and looked confidently to the future.



From the outset, the intention was clear. RGS 500 would not simply be a birthday, but a moment to reflect on five centuries of education, social impact and friendship, and to shine a light on the school's enduring role in the life of the city. Above all, it aimed to inspire the next generation of RGS students to continue that tradition of service and contribution.

The celebrations opened in unforgettable fashion at The Glasshouse in Gateshead in March 2025, where the RGS 500 Choir and Orchestra Concert brought together more than 1,500 members of the RGS community. Bathed in sound, light and shared pride, the concert set the tone for the year ahead: joyful, ambitious, and firmly rooted in community.

Gold became the visual language of the celebrations. A new identity, RGS 500, was created, drawing inspiration from artefacts held in the school archive and introducing a rich colour palette that turned the school gold. The Quincentenary found its tempo within the reassuring rhythm of school life, striking a chord that resonated widely and deeply.

In daily life, RGS 500 was everywhere: on screens and noticeboards, in assemblies and classrooms, in corridors

and conversations, until the school itself seemed to glow.

The RGS 500 microsite formed the backbone of the celebrations, a new digital resource designed to guide the community through the school's history across ten themes: Buildings; School Life and Traditions; War; Royal Heritage; Academic Life; People; The Arts; Sport; Co-Curricular Life; and Impact.

Launched in two phases across 2025, the microsite brought together films, articles and memories, many created in-house by the External Relations team. Each theme was accompanied by a short film drawing on archival material and the voices of the RGS community, with Old Novocastrians playing a key role in bringing the stories to life.

Social media content, student-led assemblies, parent communications, press coverage and bespoke alumni opportunities ensured that each theme reached far beyond Eskdale Terrace.

Tens of thousands engaged with the content online, while more than 75 personal memories and nominations of inspirational Old Novocastrians were submitted and will now be preserved in the archives for future generations.

Within school, the Quincentenary was made tangible for every student.

Junior School stepped back in time for RGS 500 Day, while Senior School pupils took part in a 500-word writing competition and a 500-page reading challenge. A whole-school photograph, taken on one of the hottest days of the year, captured the scale, energy and good humour of the community at this historic moment.

New initiatives also took root. Junior HistSoc was launched, enabling pupils in Years 7 to 9 to explore The History of the RGS through hands-on projects, including the creation of an anniversary calendar to raise funds for the Bursary Campaign. The archive opened its rare book collection to students, bringing centuries of scholarship vividly to life.

A particularly significant milestone of 2025 was the welcoming of RGS's 500th bursary student, a powerful symbol of the school's long-standing commitment to opportunity and social impact.

Every student and member of staff also received a copy of the newly updated *Story of Our School*, continuing a tradition that began with the 400th anniversary in 1925. Revised and refreshed by Junior School History Teacher Clare Baker and school Archivist Louise Piffero, it featured commemorative bookplates designed by Junior School pupils.

The Quincentenary provided a fitting opportunity to celebrate generosity across the RGS community. A 500-themed philanthropy dinner brought together donors and supporters for an evening of reflection and gratitude, offering the chance to thank those whose support



(Clockwise) Mr Stanford leads the Founder's Day service at Newcastle Cathedral; the annual Philanthropy Dinner took on special meaning; each student received a copy of the *Story of Our School*, updated for our quincentenary year.

continues to make a profound difference to the lives of RGS students and the 10,000 pupils in Partnership Schools each year.

Two commemorative Giving Clubs were established during the year: the Quincentenary Club and the 500 Club. The generosity of the Giving Club members is recognised through personalised wooden books displayed on a newly installed donor bookcase in the school reception, creating a lasting time capsule of support marking this historic chapter in RGS's story.

Old Novos young and old also gathered at the annual ONA dinners

in London and Newcastle. These were unforgettable evenings of fellowship and shared memories, united by a playful "Touch of Gold" dress code and the unmistakable sense of belonging that defines the RGS community.

Events throughout the year, from the RGS 500 History Walk to the Founders Service for students and families, welcomed the whole community into moments of collective reflection and celebration.

More than 500 students took part directly in quincentenary challenges and events, while alumni travelled from near and far to be part of the special year.

As the Quincentenary year draws to a close, its impact endures.

New digital resources have expanded access to the school's history. Archive material has been enriched and preserved. Connections across generations have been strengthened. Most importantly, the celebrations reaffirmed what has sustained RGS since 1525: an inclusive community, a belief in education as a force for good, and a commitment to service beyond the school gates.

RGS 500 was not just about looking back. It was about carrying forward the values that have shaped the school for five centuries. In classrooms, concert halls and online spaces alike, that message was clear.

The story of RGS continues, and every generation has a role to play in shaping the next chapter.

Thank you for celebrating with us.

All students and staff gathered on the school's main pitch to capture a special whole school photograph. This photograph has been reproduced by kind permission of Gilman & Soame photographers and can be ordered online.



A FIVE CENTURY JOURNEY THROUGH THE CITY

For 500 years the Royal Grammar School has played an intrinsic part in the story of Newcastle upon Tyne itself.

We have always been a city centre school, never more than a short stroll from the medieval town walls, and that closeness has shaped our character from the very beginning. Each move we have made reflects not only the school's growth but the story of the city itself. This is a brisk tour through the places we have called home.

Our earliest known location, around 1545, was a small building tucked into the churchyard of St Nicholas', the mother church of Newcastle. It was a modest start, but one closely tied to the civic and spiritual centre of the town. When St Nicholas' became Newcastle Cathedral in 1882, the connection only deepened.

Even today, every new Year 7 cohort visits the Cathedral for a special Founder's Day service to celebrate joining the school and to connect with our long history.

By 1607, the school had outgrown the churchyard site and moved to larger accommodation within the Hospital of St Mary the Virgin on Westgate Road. At the time, the West Gate was one of the busiest entrances into the walled town, placing the school right at the heart of a lively, fast-changing Newcastle. As the Industrial Revolution reshaped the city, space in the centre became precious. When plans for the new Central Station were drawn up, the school's Westgate Road site was needed. The school moved out in 1844, and the centuries-old buildings were later demolished.

The mid-19th century brought a period of transition. The school spent four years in Forth House before moving to No. 6 Charlotte Square, a Georgian townhouse that, although cramped, supported a period of renewed growth.

Today, No. 6 Charlotte Square is the only one of our former homes still standing.

A significant step forward came with the move to Rye Hill in 1870, the first purpose-built site designed specifically for the school. It provided more space and better facilities, though its gloomy corridors and less convenient location meant it was never destined to be a permanent home.

In 1906, the school found its long-term home at Eskdale Terrace in Jesmond. Close enough to stay connected to the city, yet spacious enough to expand, it has proved the ideal base. Other than making room for the Central Motorway, the boundary of the site has remained consistent since 1906, even as new buildings have risen and older ones have been transformed. After almost 120 years here, it is hard to imagine the school anywhere else.

Below: Eskdale Terrace, 2025





A HISTORY OF RGS THROUGH ITS BUILDINGS

RGS has evolved across several sites since its founding, each location marking a chapter in its story:

c.1545

St Nicholas' Churchyard

The school's earliest home stood within the churchyard of Newcastle's mother church.

1607–1844

Hospital of St Mary the Virgin

RGS settled here for more than two centuries, shaping generations of students.

1844–1848

Forth House

A brief stop at the corner of Neville Street and Central Parkway.

1848–1870

Charlotte Square

A Georgian townhouse became the school's base for over two decades.

1870–1906

Rye Hill

Expansion continued at this site during the late Victorian era.

1906–today

Eskdale Terrace

The current home, purpose-built in 1906, remains the heart of RGS today.

Each move reflects the school's growth and its enduring commitment to education in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Clockwise top left: St Nicholas' Churchyard; Hospital of St Mary the Virgin; Eskdale Terrace (c. 1900s); Brandling Fields; Hospital of St Mary the Virgin OS Map 1861, 25 inch series, 1st edition. Co. Northumberland Sheet XCVII.3. Courtesy of Tyne & Wear Archives. Engraving of 'Michaelmas Monday – Election of Mayor on the Olden Time' from Reid's Handbook to Newcastle on Tyne, 1863. Photograph of Eskdale Terrace, c.1900s. RGS Archives, ref: 344



SCHOOL LIFE

100 HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Everyday school life has changed almost beyond recognition over the generations.

In the 1980s, **William Lough** (ON 1922–33, staff 1936–39) set down his recollections of RGS as it had been nearly a century earlier, including the celebrations for the school's 400th anniversary. The extract below is taken from *RGS: A History of the School in its Community* by Brian Mains and Anthony Tuck, published in 1986.

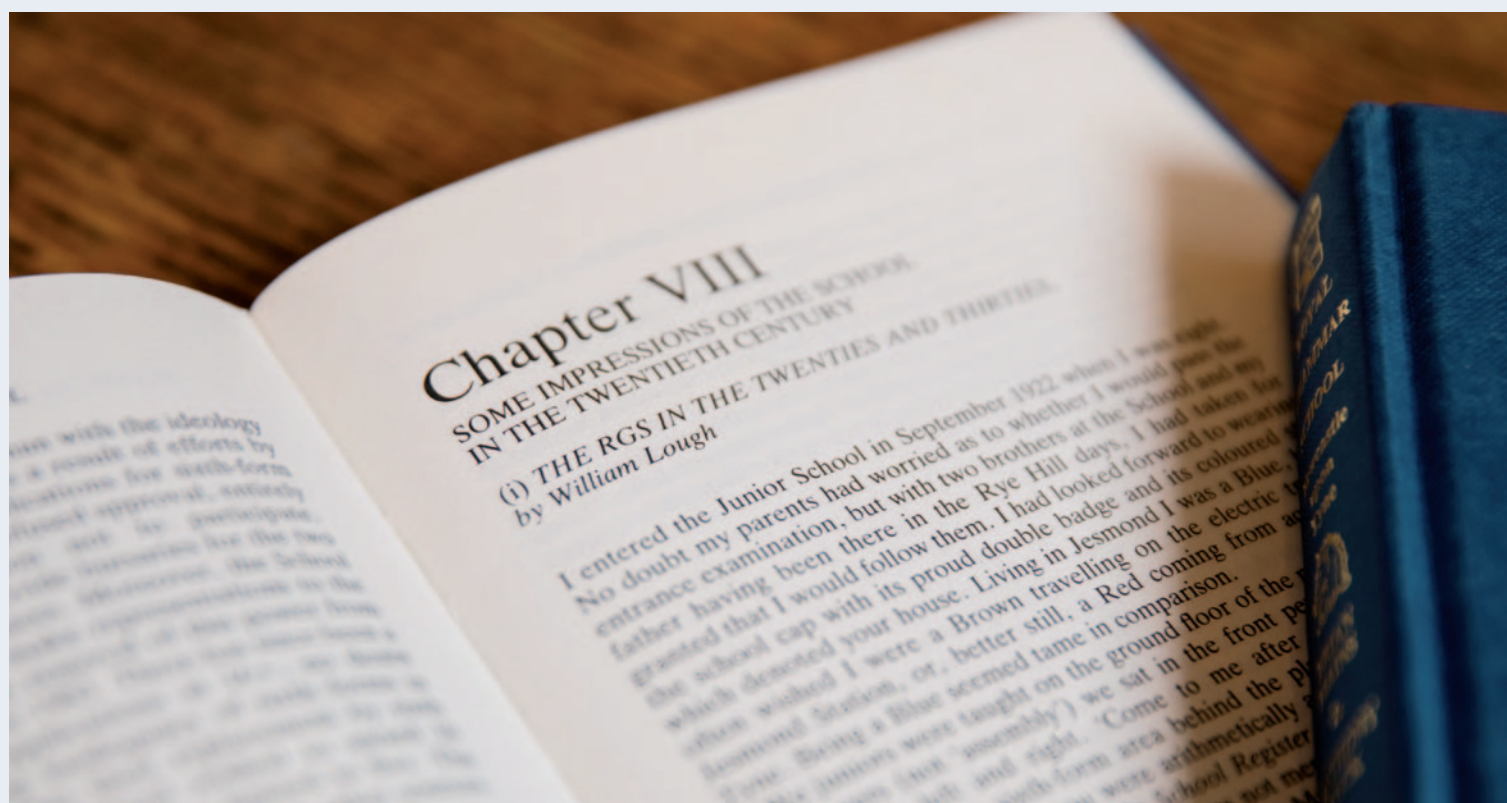
We place William's memories alongside a reflection from RGS Head Student 2025–26, Aysha P. The school they describe is in many ways very different, yet read together their accounts reveal striking continuities. Curiosity, friendship, strong teaching, and a deep sense of belonging remain constant.

A century apart, and still recognisably the same RGS.

William arrived at eight-years-old, proud to wear the school cap with its double badge and coloured house star. He was a Jesmond Blue, although he secretly envied the Browns who came in on the electric train, and the Reds who crossed the Tyne each morning. From the start, schooldays were shaped by the routines of the red brick building on Eskdale Terrace. Prayers, not assembly, were held each morning, and the youngest boys sat in the front pews under the watchful eye of prefects. Punishments were brisk. Lines were common. The 'cube' was a more advanced form of traditional school lines reserved for boys who were good at maths, requiring students to write the same sentence repeatedly in a square or block formation, creating a dense "cube" of handwriting on the page.

Teachers at the time were considered strict but fair. William recalls being told by his J1 teacher "never to pick up a mouse by its tail!", advice he took seriously for the rest of his life. William also remembered the head of the Junior School, **AWF Rutty** (Staff 1920–c.1927), for the Latin motto he kept chalked above his blackboard. On good days it read *Non Angli, sed angeli* ('Not Angles, but angels'), the phrase attributed to Pope Gregory the Great. When the class had annoyed him he would stride to the board and change it to *Non angeli, sed Angli* ('Not angels, but English') with feverish flicks of his chalk. When his temper cooled, he quietly changed it back.

The then Headmaster, **ER Thomas** (Staff 22–48), was the sort of figure pupils still talk



about decades later. William remembered him striding through corridors with his sharp 'Vite! Vite!' and remembered too the day Thomas attempted to make ozone in a chemistry lesson. The mixture exploded in his face. He left the room briefly and then returned, perfectly composed, insisting he was fine.

The school hall made a deep impression. The memorial organ had been installed in 1923 and the hymns sung there stayed with William for the rest of his life. Armistice Day was observed in complete silence. Prizegivings, concerts and school plays all took place in that same room. One visiting opera company made such an impact on William that he traced his later love of music back to that very performance.

William's account also includes a small but unforgettable moment from the school's 400th anniversary celebrations. During the rehearsal, which he found long and rather dull, he folded a paper dart and launched it out of an upstairs classroom window. To his horror it sailed straight into the hall where the rehearsal was taking place and landed among the assembled staff and boys.

He was immediately summoned to see the Headmaster where, to his relief, received nothing more than a stern telling-off, and the incident passed into school legend.

It was a time of great change at the school. Camps began in 1926 and quickly became a defining part of school life. There were also trips to France and Germany, sometimes on rough crossings that left both staff and pupils sea-sick. Back at school, music grew rapidly. Orchestras and choirs took shape, the Sutherland swimming baths opened, and the Plender Library became a much-loved space for Sixth Form work and lively debate.

Daily life changed too when **Miss Jean Steven** (Staff 31–57), known universally as 'Ma', took charge of catering. Lunch became a proper meal rather than sandwiches in a cold room. William remembered her fondly, particularly the moment she told the Headmaster to stop complaining and finish his pudding.

Outside school the world was shifting. Older boys read Owen and Sassoon, argued about pacifism and worried openly about the rise of extremist politics in Europe. William never forgot the sight of the sandbags piled high in the School Hall during the Sudeten Crisis in 1938, a sight that made the prospect of another war feel suddenly real.



Being a Sixth Former at RGS in its quincentenary year feels like living inside a beehive: always moving and buzzing with energy. My week swings between History essays, English discussions and Politics lessons, punctuated by hockey training on Tuesdays, the adrenaline of Thursday-night debating rounds, and finished off with CCF Army Cadets on Fridays. In between, there are the small rituals that make the pace manageable. Grabbing a hot chocolate at Angie's café with my friends during break, or slipping out to Willi's on Clayton Road at lunch before the next lesson begins, has become a comfortable rhythm that breaks up a busy day.

The school feels bigger than ever this year. Corridors pulse with movement and classrooms spill with vitality. Everyone is striving for something different, from grades to sports teams, drama roles and leadership opportunities. It is busy, but it carries a buzzing momentum that creates a cohesive environment and drives students towards success.

The 500th year has added a new layer to daily life. Assemblies feel more rooted in school history, making students more aware of the centuries behind us. Old Novos drift back through the gates – some I remember from when I was in Year 7, while others graduated in the 1960s with stories that feel like time

capsules. Their presence makes the school's history feel less abstract and more like a thread holding us together. Although our ages differ, our shared memories of the RGS connect us, giving both past and present students a sense of belonging to a school that has stood for 500 years.

Co-education has transformed RGS from a historically all-male institution into a modern, inclusive environment where all students are encouraged to excel. Opportunities for girls have grown rapidly in many co-curricular areas. The girls' hockey first team reached the Tier One plate semi-final in Spring 2026, while the all-female cast of *Six: The Musical* put on a breathtaking performance in Summer 2025. For me personally, it has opened doors to advocate against gender-based violence, and I am proud to be the third consecutive female selected for the main leadership role in Army Cadets. RGS feels like a school that is expanding in both size and possibility.

Right now, attending RGS means being swept up in a place where everyone has the chance to find a passion – academic, sports, music, or a mixture of all three. The fast-moving pace is relentless, but the community is authentic, offering a home to many students, where 500 years of extraordinary history sit quietly behind every ordinary day.



SCHOOL LIFE **COVID**

BY **SUNAA AHMED**
(ON 10-21)

During the Covid-19 pandemic, **Sunaa Ahmed** (ON 10–21) found unexpected space to reflect, grow and rediscover her love for learning, shaped as much by the seasonal rhythm of her garden as by the guiding presence of her teachers.

In 2020, when the world pulled down its shutters and locked up its doors, my garden blossomed into life.

For the first time in my living memory, I watched it all from my window. Watched as the dull yellow of the grass thawed into a vibrant green, as petals spilled from their buds in rich shades of pink and red, and apples swelled fat as musket balls on the crooked bows of the trees. Spring had come with its hot breath and busy fingers, and with its poking and prodding it had awoken in me an appreciation that had long lay dormant. Away from the formulas, essays, tournaments, and tests that had consumed my life for longer than I could recall, my eyes opened to the beauty of the everyday. Ironically enough, it took a world health crisis to shake me awake.

I was 17 years and three months old when Covid-19 brought the world to a grinding halt. Like many, I had been guilty of underestimating the scale of the crisis, treating the global sense of rising panic with a casual disdain unique to teenagers. Disasters had happened before, would happen again, but there was little chance anything remotely interesting could ever disturb the semi-drudgery that was my adolescence. Then, one grey March morning, I awoke to the news that school had closed its doors, indefinitely. The things that had mattered so much, GCSE's, A Levels, university applications, 18th birthdays, Leavers Ball, all of them disappeared into a kind of nothingness. The big wide world that had just started to open up shrunk back behind its mask, and suddenly the future stretched no further than the borders of my own garden hedge.

So RGS brought the world to me. It's no understatement to say this, though at the time I did not possess half the awareness to understand the effort this must have cost my teachers, all of whom were also experiencing the upheaval of a global pandemic for the first time. I believe it was only a matter of days before the school was up and running online, and



The big wide world that had just started to open up shrunk back behind its mask, and suddenly the future stretched no further than the borders of my own garden hedge.

within a week the lessons we had enjoyed in person only a fortnight before came to our living rooms. I remember well the sense of surrealness waking up to a call from form group or listened to an assembly in pyjamas, huddled over a bowl of cornflakes. When home and school have founded the two separate pillars of your life for such a long time, witnessing them come together requires a period of adjustment. Yet for me at least, when the storm cleared and the clouds parted, there descended a serenity I didn't know I needed.

There is a moment in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, when Dickon shows Mary how to plant the bulbs that will eventually blossom into her ethereal 'bit of earth.' He tells her to pull up the weeds surrounding her plants so that they gain the space to breathe. Of course, Mary and her bulbs are aligned by the power of metaphor, just as the unpolluted earth around her plants imbues new life into them, so too is the wilted Mary enriched by the delicious freedom of her new surroundings. The story comes to my mind whenever I think back to lockdown. Despite the tragedy, the terrifying uncertainty it brought, I recall how it dug away at the soil around me, uprooting the worries I had become so entangled in and making space for growth.

So much of that I owe to my teachers, one or two of them at least. If Covid-19 unwittingly gifted me the time to get to

know myself, it was the tireless work of my teachers that facilitated any kind of personal revelation. My teachers matched my growing intellectual curiosity with an academic rigour of their own, and I found a connection developing not in spite, but because of, the screens that stretched between us. I rediscovered my love of books; unearthed a world of literary criticism that hitherto eluded me; and discovered in that world a place in which my own, infantile ideas might one day gain the capacity to bring about real change. Where before lessons ended with the ring of a bell, lockdown allowed students to seek advice from their teachers well past their four o'clock deadline. And my teachers were always there. There to read-over essay plans, discuss secondary literature, to mark past-papers and proof-read paragraphs whose subject matter proved both enticing and terrifying in its novelty.

Not that this was ever one-sided. I believe many of my fellow students rose to the challenge at a time when the outside world threatened to overshadow some of the most informative years of our life. We woke earlier, worked later, all the while adapting to the loss of support systems that had carried us through school. When the time came to face our next chapters, we did so from the coldness of the virtual world, visiting prospective universities from our sofas, meeting future professors from behind a screen. But the teachers were there in all the ways they could be, reminding us that we were a school regardless of the vast loneliness lockdown demanded. When I couldn't get a place at my first choice university, the teacher who had made it a possibility to apply there reached out to me, sending me a poem that assured me that, no matter how I felt, it wasn't the end of the world. It was not in her job description to write that email, but she did so anyway, sparking a moment of intimacy I remember always, long after the pandemic faded, and the world once again opened its doors.

WEARING OUR STORY

A HISTORY OF THE RGS SCHOOL UNIFORM



Visible History: RGS School Uniform

School uniform has long shaped the everyday rhythm of life at RGS. Every blazer buttoned, shirt tucked in and every tie straightened helps create a shared sense of identity, both in the corridors and beyond the gates. For today's students, wearing the school sartorial identity is more than a routine; it connects them to the many generations who have walked these halls before.

While that sense of belonging has stayed the same, what students actually wear has changed dramatically over time.

School Identity

In the earliest years of the school, there was no uniform at all. Students wore whatever their families provided, and photographs from the 19th century show a huge variety of outfits.

Hints of a standard look began to appear during the school's time at Rye Hill between 1870 and 1906. Pupils started wearing similar jackets and caps and a more consistent style gradually developed. When RGS moved to Jesmond at the start of the 20th century, a defined and recognisable uniform became part of daily life and set the

pattern that would continue for decades.

Today, pupils wear different blazer colours for different year groups and have a wide range of sports clothing available to them, a level of choice that would have astonished earlier generations.

The Cap: An Early Symbol

For many years, the school cap was the standout feature of the uniform. Although it has now faded from everyday use, it was once a proud badge of belonging.

The earliest caps, from the 1890s, were tasselled and displayed a badge combining the Royal coat of arms with that of Newcastle, used before RGS received its own official coat of arms in 1931. As the uniform became more formal, students were expected to wear blue caps with matching blue blazers. Every cap carried the school badge, and for many years house symbols were embroidered above the crest.

Ties

Ties have seen plenty of variation too. Junior School houses had their own versions, and Prefects wore designs that set them apart. More recently, special edition ties have been

created for events such as the annual Cricket Festival. Some Old Novos may also remember the red, white and blue Junior School scarf that made an appearance in the 20th century.

Blazers

The blazer remains the most recognisable part of the RGS uniform, though it has been through many changes.

In 1960, following the appointment of Headmaster **WD Haden** (Staff 60–72), the traditional blue flannel blazer was joined by a black version for older pupils. Over time, flannel was replaced by more practical fabrics such as washable polyester blends. Sixth Form students were required to dress smartly in sports jackets, a precursor to the suit-style look of today.

A major update arrived in 2001 when the school moved to co-education. The introduction of girls prompted a full redesign. A distinctive RGS tartan was created for the junior school and new blazer styles were launched, with the school's coat of arms placed either on the lapel for girls or the pocket for boys.

Staff and Prefects

Uniform traditions once extended to staff and student leaders as well. Prefects wore an Oxford-style "commoners" gown, a sleeveless black garment worn over their jacket. This was a familiar sight from the early years at Eskdale Terrace but disappeared during the 1990s.

Teachers had their own tradition, too. Academic robes were everyday attire for masters and Headmasters well into the 20th century. By the later decades, robes were kept mainly for special occasions such as prizegiving. Today, they are usually only worn by the Headmaster for formal assemblies, such as the Founder's Day service.



THE STORY BEHIND THE RGS COAT OF ARMS



Sporting Colours

Sportswear has always been the most varied aspect of the uniform. RGS has awarded sporting colours since the 1890s, with the first known awards presented in 1893.

Originally, colours recognised outstanding performance in sport and were announced at prize giving. Rugby and cricket were the first sports to have their own colours blazers. Cricket retained its bold black, white and burgundy striped “venetian” blazer, while rugby adopted a solid burgundy version. The NEWTS swimming team also had a distinctive blazer in blue with cream trim.

By the 1950s, a wider range of sports awarded colours. Instead of creating separate blazers, students sewed coloured braid onto the edge of their blue blazer. White, yellow, blue and red trims represented achievements in sports such as swimming and boxing. Today, colours are also awarded for the CCF and the Performing Arts.

A More Flexible Approach

In recent years, the uniform code has been updated to give students more choice. Gendered descriptions have been removed so pupils can choose from the full range of uniform options in a way that feels right for them.

The school also runs the successful Threadaware scheme, which sells high quality second-hand uniform at discounted prices. All proceeds support the RGS Bursary Campaign, helping ensure that uniform remains affordable and accessible.



The RGS Coat of Arms, proudly displayed on the school blazer, is one of the RGS's most recognisable symbols.

The Double Badge

Before receiving our own Coat of Arms, RGS used a paired emblem: the 16th century Arms of England alongside the Arms of Newcastle upon Tyne. This “double badge” appeared on early tasselled school caps and served as our unofficial symbol from the 1880s onwards. At the time, the school motto was *Progrediendum est*, meaning “We must advance” or “We must progress”.

A Royal Beginning

The Coat of Arms was officially granted to RGS on 11 November 1931, purchased for the school by **Sir Arthur Sutherland** (ON

1878–1883), then Chair of

Governors. It was created by the College of Arms, the heraldic authority for England, Wales, Northern Ireland and much of the Commonwealth.

The original patent survives in the RGS Archives, kept in its red presentation box with three golden seals. Its vivid palette of red, blue, gold and silver was carefully chosen to reflect the school's heritage and prestige.

Alongside the design came a new motto: *Discendo Duces* “By learning you will lead”

A coat of arms consists of two parts:

- the shield design
- the blazon, the formal heraldic description

Blazon

Gules a Tower triple towered and in chief of the second two Horses' heads erased argent On a chief of



the second Argent a Torteau charged with a Lion passant guardant Or between two Hurts each charged with a Fleur de lys of the third.

Or

On a red background sits a three-turreted tower with two silver horses' heads above it. Across the top runs a silver bar featuring a red roundel with a gold lion of England, flanked by two blue roundels, each containing a gold fleur-de-lys.

What the Symbols Mean

Leopard and Fleur-de-Lys

These come from the Royal arms of Elizabeth I, marking her re-founding of the school in 1600 and our proud status as a Royal Grammar School.

Horse

A tribute to **Thomas Horsley**, who founded the school in 1525. His family arms featured three silver horses' heads on red.

Castle

A nod to our home city. The castle reflects the close connection between RGS and Newcastle, whose own coat of arms includes three silver castles on red.

ON ARCHIVE VISIT

For one Old Novo, a visit to the RGS Archive in March 2026 became an opportunity to dig out his old school blazer for a reunion with fellow ONs who were educated in the shadow of World War Two.





Clockwise: Charles Brian Gallon (ON 46-53) in the Archive; looking at the 1948 school photo album; the ONs meet Mr Stanford in the main hall; Royston Offord (ON 45-51) (R) and Jeffery Armstrong (ON 43-48) search for familiar faces

We had the honour of welcoming back some of our most senior and much loved Old Novos in March, returning to RGS some 80 years after their school days first began here.

One ON arrived at RGS as a Penrith evacuee during World War Two, while the others joined the school in the immediate post war years. Their visit offered a rare and direct connection to an important period in the school's history.

The visit began in the RGS hall, which remains largely unchanged since their time at the school. Sitting once again on the same wooden pews used for assemblies all those years ago, memories were quickly shared and conversations flowed.

Headmaster Geoffrey Stanford was delighted to meet this remarkable generation of Old Novos and to hear their reflections and stories.

Royston Offord (ON 45-51) even dug out his old school blazer for the occasion, explaining that he tried it on every year to make sure it still fitted.

"The school is very impressive, and it is good to be back," he said. "A lot has changed, but you can still see the old school as it used to be, places like the hall and the rugby pitch. We used to have to walk from

the school to woodwork, and it was a good 200 yards away. That has all gone now.

"It makes you realise how bloody old you are."

The group then toured familiar school corridors, paused by the ever recognisable rugby pitch, and spent time in the RGS Archives. Looking through photographs, yearbooks, Speech Day programmes and other historic material, they reflected on their schooldays and how RGS has developed over the decades.

Charles Brian Gallon (ON 46-53) commented: "The school has changed quite a bit, but the hall will never change. It looks exactly the same. I was a non descript student academically, but I did rowing, swimming and gym club.

"I can recall the names of most of the Masters and most of the boys from my form, and I was keen to look at the Penrith documents. My brother in law was there."

Jeffery Armstrong (ON 43-48) was the only Penrith evacuee to make the visit. He said: "It is amazing being back at the school. It is completely different to what it was. I recognised the hall, but the Archive and library are all new. The pupils are all wearing the same uniform. We did at the start, but by the end we had forgotten about it and were dressed in all sorts."

While looking at a map of Penrith in the Archive, Jeffery pointed out where he had stayed for around a year.

"We did our lessons for half a day at Penrith Grammar School, and for the rest of the day we played in various places around the town, including the gas tunnels," he said.

"I enjoyed my time at the school very much. I was not academic and I did not really try very hard, but I stayed out of trouble because I was good at rugby and good at cricket."

School Archivist Louise Piffero also shared a photo album created for retiring headteacher **ER Thomas** (Staff 22-48) in 1948, featuring portraits of every boy at the school. Much time was spent leafing through the pages, spotting themselves, their friends and half remembered classmates, with laughter as familiar faces were recognised throughout the album.

The visit concluded with lunch prepared by the RGS catering team, providing further opportunity for conversation and reminiscence.

It was a powerful reminder that while the school continues to evolve, the connections formed at RGS, and the sense of belonging it fosters, remain strong across generations.

ROYAL APPROVALS

From Great Charters to coronations, RGS's story is inseparable from the Crown. These pages trace four centuries of royal moments that shaped our name, our city and our school.



THE GREAT CHARTER, 1600

RGS is Newcastle's oldest institution of learning, founded in the reign of Henry VIII.

The year 1600 marked a turning point for both the city and the RGS. On 22 March, Queen Elizabeth I granted the city a new charter, soon known as the Great Charter.

This document confirmed Newcastle's rights to govern itself. It allowed the election of a mayor, sheriff, aldermen and other officials within the Common Council. It also incorporated the Society of Hostmen, securing their control of the coal trade on the Tyne. The Charter cost the Council £635, a sum that would equate to well over £115,000 today.

Among its many provisions lies a passage of particular importance to us. The Charter set out directions for

establishing a Free Grammar School of Queen Elizabeth and confirmed the right of the Common Council to appoint a master. In effect, it acted as a re-foundation of the school that already existed, and from this point we could add the word Royal to our name.

The original charter survives and is held by Tyne and Wear Archives at the Discovery Museum. It remains a remarkable manuscript, written in Latin on parchment and decorated with a striking portrait of the Queen.

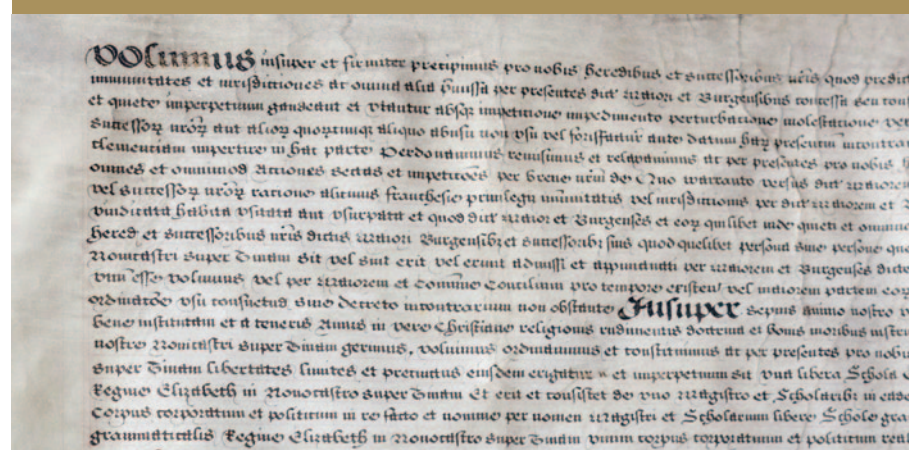
Thanks to Queen Elizabeth I and the Great Charter of 1600, we have been proud to call ourselves the Royal Grammar School of Newcastle upon Tyne for more than four centuries.

The Great Charter, 22 Mar 1600 [ref: MD.NC/D/1/1/15].
Courtesy of Tyne & Wear Archives

The historian Richard Welford translated the Charter, the section which refers to the school is shown below:

"Moreover, the queen, often revolving in her mind of what great interest it may be to the English commonwealth, over which the great and good God presides, to have youth well educated and instructed from their tender years in the rudiments, doctrines, and good morals of the true Christian religion, grants that there shall be a body corporate by the name of 'The Master and Scholars of the Free Grammar School of Queen Elizabeth in Newcastle-upon-Tyne', with perpetual succession, capable of purchasing lands, tenements, etc., in fee-simple or for terms of years, not exceeding a yearly value of 40 l., and not holden of the queen in chief, nor by knight's service, etc., with power to grant, demise, etc., lands, tenements, etc., to plead and to be impleaded, etc., in all courts, etc., as other liege subjects. Also to have a common seal, which they may break and change at pleasure. The Mayor and burgesses, etc., to appoint an honest, learned, and discreet man to be master, and another person, of a like description to be usher in the school during pleasure. And if the master and usher die, or leave, they may choose other persons of like qualifications in their place."

Translation by Richard Welford, reproduced in AR Laws' Schola Novocastrensis Vol. I, p.55-56



CELEBRATING CORONATIONS

Explore how the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle has marked the crowning of a new monarch, since 1911.



The Newcastle Town Hall decorated for King George V's Coronation. Photograph taken by an RGS student in the Photographic Society, published in *NOVO Magazine*, July 1911.

Newcastle celebrated the coronation in 1911 with a whole "Coronation Week" – the decorations on the Town Hall captured perfectly here by a student in the RGS Photographic Society.

Three special Coronation Prizes for essays were given out to students by the Lord Mayor at the 1911 prize-giving ceremony.

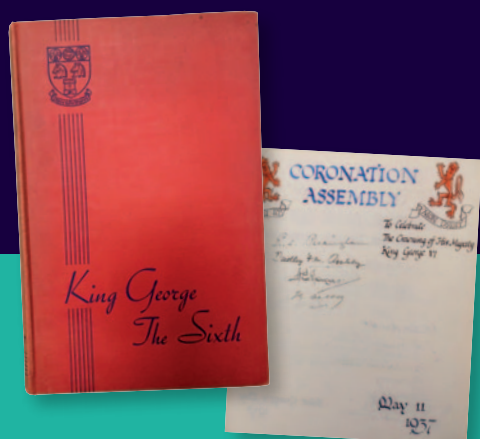
According to the *NOVO Magazine*, an ON had been commissioned to write an official history of the 1911 coronation. The project undertaken by Mr C Gray was approved by His Majesty the King.

Another ON, William Plender, was awarded a knighthood at the coronation.

An RGS student was lucky enough to witness the Royal Procession in London on the day of the coronation on 22 June 1911:

"Now to the procession itself! I think the most striking thing in it was the great State coach in which the King and Queen rode. The contingent of Beef-eaters, dressed in quaint old-world costume, was very interesting. I recognised Lord Kitchener, Lord Roberts, and Sir Evelyn Wood among the military men present. I was surprised by the apparent apathy of the London people, who are not in the least enthusiastic. A Newcastle crowd would have created twice the amount of noise - indeed, when King Edward and Queen Alexandra came to Newcastle, I am sure the cheering was louder than that in Piccadilly yesterday, although, of course, there was no comparison between the two crowds in numbers."

NOVO, July 1911

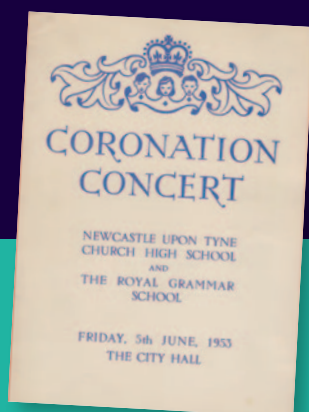


1937: KING GEORGE VI

For King George VI's coronation, RGS celebrated by giving students a copy of the official coronation book. Ours were printed with special RGS binding, and a bookplate inside.

This copy was presented to **Guy MacAlister Dowson** (ON 31–39) whilst at school.

A Coronation Assembly was also held, and a souvenir booklet produced.



1953: QUEEN ELIZABETH II

RGS celebrated the coronation in a variety of ways. The CCF Infantry and Basic section were asked to parade with the band in the main Coronation procession through Newcastle on 6 June.

A Coronation Concert was also held at City Hall on the evening of 5 June, with performances from the RGS First Orchestra and choir, alongside the choir of Church High School. The finale was a performance of Handel's *Coronation Ode, The King Shall Rejoice*.



2023: KING CHARLES III

RGS celebrated King Charles III's coronation with a special assembly.

Students in Senior School were given a special postcard in form time, where they were asked to write what they thought would be the most significant change to the world in King Charles III's reign.

Junior School students received souvenirs of the coronation, including a special engraved wooden medal.

FRONT RUNNER

From the RGS Dining Hall to the Olympic start line, triathlete **Kate Waugh** (ON 10–17) speaks to Caroline Briggs about the school corridors she once walked, and the support that helped carry her to Paris 2024 and beyond.

In its long history, RGS has produced judges, scientists, entrepreneurs, writers, surgeons, actors and explorers, but only a small and remarkable handful have ever earned the right to call themselves Olympians.

It is an exceptionally rare distinction, one now shared by triathlete Kate Waugh, whose debut at the Paris Olympic Games in 2024 secured her place among the school's most distinguished sporting alumni.

Long before her own name appeared in the school record books, Kate was already absorbing that history. As a student, she walked the dining room corridor each day, passing the sports Hall of Fame with its framed shirts, vests and photographs and other ephemera donated by Old Novos who have represented their country.

Today, Kate's senior Great Britain Olympic vest hangs there too, alongside her red and white England Junior Under 15s cross-country vest, worn when she made her England cross-country debut at the Cross Internacional Juan Muguerza in northern Spain in early 2016.

Kate competing at the
2024 Paris Olympics
©British Triathlon

Opposite top: Kate at the
2024 Paris Olympics
©VSP Images British Triathlon



"It was something I looked at every day while queuing for lunch, so it's surreal to think my trisuit is up there now," says Kate, speaking from Australia's Gold Coast where she is already in training for the 2028 Olympics.

But it is not the names on the wall that ignited her competitive spark. That began much closer to home. Her sister Robyn, two years older, was the original target of her ambitions.

"Growing up, I always wanted to beat her," Kate says. "She was bigger, faster and stronger. We get on much better now," she adds, laughing. "She always says she's gutted she never made it onto the Hall of Fame wall."

Kate still credits that sibling rivalry with shaping her competitive edge, alongside the wider influences of family life and school. Hard work and discipline were constants at home and at RGS she was surrounded by friends with similar attitudes, pushing one another on.

Nearly a decade after leaving the school, Kate has already followed a path few can imagine.

She is a European triathlon champion, a world champion and an Olympian. Yet her journey to the international stage began firmly at RGS, where learning to balance elite sport with academic life became a defining part of her development.

"I was at RGS from the age of 11 to 18, which was such a critical point," she says. "The support I had throughout school was fundamental in helping me become the athlete I am now."

Kate speaks particularly warmly of the flexibility shown by teachers who understood what she was trying to achieve. One moment stands out. Around the time of her A-levels, the school rearranged her English exam so she could



fly to the European Championships in Austria the following day.

"If they hadn't moved that exam, I wouldn't have been able to go," she says. "I became European champion and I'm so grateful."

That support has continued long after leaving the school. During her Olympic race in Paris, RGS organised a French-themed watch party, with breakfast croissants, coffee and TV cameras. Something Kate describes as meaning "the absolute world".

Paris, she says, was an unforgettable experience, but not entirely satisfying.

"Qualifying for the Olympics was a childhood dream come true, but I left feeling like I have more to give," she explains. "The first Olympics is hard to get right. I know I'm capable of more."

As she speaks, Kate is already focused on the road to Los Angeles 2028.

Speaking from the GB training camp on the other side of the world, her preparation now has a clear purpose. With an ocean swim expected in LA, her current training block includes extensive open-water work and heat training designed to mirror conditions as closely as possible.

Since Paris, Kate has briefly stepped away from short-course racing to test

RGS OLYMPIANS

Boda Gallon (ON 81–89)
Judo, 1992 Barcelona Olympics

Roger Brown (ON 80–87)
Rowing, 1992 Barcelona and 1996 Atlanta Olympics

Nick English (ON 86–96)
Rowing, 2004 Athens Olympics

Kate Waugh (ON 10–17)
Triathlon, 2024 Paris Olympics

herself in the T100 series, a near-sabbatical that demanded a very different physical and mental approach.

Guided by a new Italian coach, the shift paid off with a breakthrough season and a World Championship title. "I always knew I'd be competitive, but I never thought I'd win the series in my first attempt," she says modestly.

There have been setbacks along the way.

A calf injury forced her to miss the opening T100 race of the season, a frustration she accepts as part of professional sport. Looking further ahead, she can already picture new challenges, including a possible move into Ironman racing and, one day, the ultimate triathlon goal of Kona.

For students at her old school balancing sport and study, her advice is pragmatic.

Discipline and time management matter, but so does enjoyment. Sport, she believes, sharpens focus rather than detracts from it, even during exams.

"Go at it with all your heart, but don't forget to have fun and enjoy your school years," she says.

Kate remains closely connected to RGS and follows its life with interest. "It's crazy how much it's changed," she says. "I'd love to come back and see everything – especially my name in the Hall of Fame!"



RGS SPORTS HALL OF FAME

BY **LOUISE PIFFERO**, RGS ARCHIVIST

The RGS Sports Hall of Fame celebrates all current and former students who have represented their country in sport. If you've visited our Dining Hall, you'll have seen the hundreds of photographs and shirts proudly displayed across its walls.

The Hall of Fame was the brainchild of former Scottish international rugby union player Jim Pollock (ON 67-77 and Staff 02-19), who launched the campaign for contributions in 2009. Most of the items on display have been generously donated by Old Novos, and we hope they inspire the entire RGS community.

A major redecoration of the Dining Hall took place in summer 2024, giving us the perfect opportunity to redesign the Hall of Fame. During the holidays, 173 framed shirts, kit items and photographs were carefully removed for painting. Beforehand, Sixth Form students helped catalogue the collection so we could create a complete list of Hall of Famers.



Our aim was to bring a stronger narrative to the display by arranging items chronologically and adding more colour. Design agency Altogether produced a striking new look, incorporating vinyl wall panels in the RGS colour palette and archive images of sports teams and memorabilia. The project was completed in November 2024.

Research in the Archives revealed some new names for the wall. The earliest ON featured is **Edward Scafe Scorfield** (ON 1897- c.1900), who played rugby for England in a 1910 match against France, when the school was still at Rye Hill. Another ON from the 1930s, **Colin Matthew Seymour** (ON 32-39), son of 'Mr Newcastle United' Stan Seymour, is also commemorated on our Roll of Honour after being killed in World War Two.

The first female ON to join the Hall of Fame was **Eleni Papadopoulos** (ON 08-10) for her outstanding achievements in swimming and triathlon, including representing Great Britain in Paratriathlon, winning Tri3 British Champion and World Championship silver in 2013, and holding the European record for 200m Butterfly.

Today, 35 different sports are represented, with rugby the most frequent.

We hope the Hall of Fame continues to inspire current students and ONs alike. The wall will keep growing and if you know of anyone who should be included, please email development@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk.

View the full list of ONs featured in the Hall of Fame here



HOW RGS IS SHAPING ITS CURRICULUM FOR THE MODERN WORLD

Computer Science teacher **Chris Wilde** (Staff 17–current) reflects on pop culture, problem solving and the newest developments in the RGS computing curriculum.



As a child of the 1980s, my memories of growing up are inseparable from pop culture. Film, music and video games did not just entertain, they shaped how I saw the world. That influence has stayed with me, and it is why I am always keen to weave elements of it into our curriculum.

In computing, we aim to “trick” students into developing high level skills through experiences that are engaging and enjoyable. Judging by the growing numbers opting for the subject at Year 9, GCSE and A-level, it seems to be working.

I still remember watching *Tron* for the first time and imagining how incredible it would be to enter a computer and

explore it from within. We tap into that same idea when teaching programming in Year 7. Students imagine themselves inside the machine, “riding the turtle” to create repeating patterns and visualising how their code translates into movement on screen. I like to think Flynn would approve.

Flynn’s Arcade also lives on in our curriculum. It inspired a Year 7 homework project in which students use Scratch to design their own retro style games. Much like the invitation in *WarGames* “Shall we play a game?” (1983), we encourage students to explore, experiment and learn through doing. I will admit that staff have spent more than a little time getting lost in those creations when they were supposed to be marking them.

Retro gaming continues to influence our work through pixel art, or “sprites”. In Year 9, students design sprite sheets and display them on RGB LED panels, coding a Raspberry Pi Pico in Python. We also explore the legacy of text based adventure games, using *Zork* and *Deathtrap Dungeon* as inspiration. Students create interactive stories using HTML, CSS and JavaScript in tools such as Twine. Along the way, we introduce discussions around artificial intelligence, how it generates imagery, and how different models can be used, before students experiment with writing prompts for their own game artwork.

Even something as simple as buying a puzzle book from WHSmith during the summer holidays has found its way into our teaching. Problem solving is a vital skill in an ever changing world, so we begin every lesson in Years 7 and 8 with short puzzle activities designed to develop reasoning and logical thinking.

In many ways, we are going back in time to help students build the skills they will need for the future.

I remember loving Paul Daniels on Saturday night television. Not so much for the tricks themselves, but for the desire to understand how they worked. That curiosity underpins one of our Year 8 units, where students explore the mathematics and algorithms behind card tricks. There is a real joy in the moment when it clicks, when students’ eyes widen as they grasp the underlying logic. It reminds me of that instant understanding in *The Matrix* when Neo suddenly knows kung fu. Those “lightbulb moments” are what we strive for throughout the curriculum.

Another childhood favourite, *Short Circuit*, has inspired our work in robotics and physical computing. Through our partnership with LEGO Education, we have embedded robotics across the curriculum and extended it through our co curricular Robokai programme. At its heart, this work is about resilience. As Mr Miyagi wisely put it, “Must not lose to fear.” Developing solutions, recognising when things do not work, and having the determination to improve them is not just a computing skill, it is a life skill young people will need to rely on in the future.

So perhaps what we have really done is revisit the past in order to shape the future. As Marty tells George in *Back to the Future*, “If you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything.”

FIVE CENTURIES OF LEARNING

HOW THE RGS CURRICULUM EVOLVED

RGS began life as a traditional free grammar school, founded with a clear purpose: to provide a classical education that would prepare boys for university, then just Oxford or Cambridge. But what did that education actually look like day to day? And how did it change as the world, and Newcastle, changed around it?

Early Days: Long Hours, Latin and Longbows

In the earliest years of the school, the rhythm of the day was very different from anything our students would recognise. Lessons began at 6am and boys were expected to attend on Saturdays until 2pm. Thursdays brought a half day holiday for games, held in the Forth, where activities included archery. This was not simply recreation. In 1541, Henry VIII decreed that all children aged seven to seventeen should be taught to use a longbow and RGS pupils were no exception.

Sundays were dedicated to worship with compulsory attendance at the Church of St Nicholas.

St Nicholas Church



The academic curriculum centred entirely on the classical world. Boys studied Latin grammar, composition and verse making, read classical authors and learned prayers and liturgy. Mathematics and modern languages were not part of the school day and were taught only by external tutors. Basic English and arithmetic were taught separately at a writing school.

Inside the classroom, the master taught from a classical text, standing at the front while pupils recited from memory. Quarterly exams required the boys to deliver verses or orations in Latin or Greek as public proof of their progress.

Adapting to a Changing World: Late 18th to Early 19th Century

By the end of the 18th century the world had changed and the school had to adapt.

Newcastle was booming, shaped by merchant families, industry and trade along the Tyne. As a result, new commercial subjects appeared alongside the traditional classical core.

These included maths, accounting, geography (or use of the globes), English and modern languages such as

French and German. This broader curriculum reflected the needs of a town where many boys would enter trade, business or industry rather than university.

In 1793, Headmaster **Edward Moises** (Staff 1787–1829), (above) published *Outlines of the Plan of Education*, setting out a structure that still placed classical education at its centre but recognised the need for wider study. Boys were organised by age and attainment:

- Classes 1 to 3 taught by the third master
- Classes 4 to 6 taught by the second master
- Classes 7 to 8 and the Head Class taught by the Headmaster

From the fourth class onwards, students were expected to attend additional lectures in algebra, geometry and mechanics, which signalled the school's growing academic breadth.

Later in the century, Headmaster **James Snape** (Staff 1847–1871) reshaped teaching once more by introducing subject specialists rather than general form masters. For the first time, RGS had a mathematical master, a writing master and dedicated teachers in French and German.

Rye Hill: A Broader Curriculum Takes Shape

The move to the Rye Hill site in the late-19 century coincided with a more modern vision of education. An advertisement from the period of Headmaster **Brian Christopherson** (Staff 1873–1883) shows an expanded list of subjects:

- Maths
- General Studies
- Classics
- French
- Writing and Commercial Subjects
- Modern Languages
- Drawing
- Drilling (an early form of PE)

The curriculum was moving steadily towards the shape we recognise today.



Cicero, *Opera Omina*. Paris, 1566.
RGS Archives, ref: C3/27

Into the 20th Century: A Modern School Emerges

By the early 1930s most of the subjects taught at RGS today were already established. In his 1931 report, Headmaster **ER Thomas** (Staff 22–48) outlined a school with an impressively broad academic offer. Advanced Latin and Greek were still in place but now joined by French, German, Spanish, Modern History, Pure Mathematics, Applied Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Applied Mechanics, Mechanical Drawing, Botany, Zoology, Drawing, Painting, Music and Woodwork.

The curriculum had transformed, not by abandoning its classical roots but by building on them.

Five Centuries of Learning

The RGS curriculum tells a story of continuity and change. From early morning Latin recitations to a rich modern timetable spanning sciences, humanities, arts and languages, the school has always adapted to meet the needs of its students and its city.

Yet one thing has remained constant: a belief in rigorous learning, high expectations and an education that prepares young people not only for university or career but for life.

A WINDOW INTO THE 18TH CENTURY: THE STORY OF THE RGS LIBRARY CATALOGUE

Among the treasures in the RGS Archives is one of our oldest surviving documents: an 18th century catalogue that opens a remarkable window into the early library of the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle.

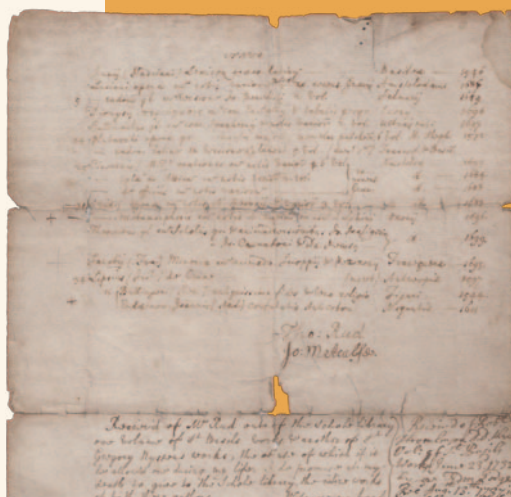
On 20 December 1709, Headmaster **Thomas Rud** completed the *Catalogus Librorum Scholae publicae Novocastrensis* — in plain English, a handwritten list of the books held in the school library. Neat, methodical and carefully arranged by size, the manuscript reflects both the scholarship and the diligence of its creator.

What the Library Once Held

The catalogue reveals the academic world of an early-18th century grammar school. The shelves were dominated by Latin Bibles, classical Greek and Roman literature, the writings of the Church Fathers and key Renaissance texts, including Erasmus's *Adages*. The collection mirrors the strict classical curriculum of the time, when a grammar school's chief purpose was to teach pupils to read, write and speak Latin fluently.

Rud himself contributed to that mission. He authored a Latin grammar and prose composition manual used by pupils at the school, and many of the works he catalogued were set texts. *Cicero's Letters*, for example, were a standard part of the fourth-form Latin course.

Catalogus Librorum Scholae publicae Novocastrensis, 1709. RGS Archives, ref: 782



More Than a List

Beyond its academic detail, the catalogue also captures the human life of the library. Later loans and gifts are noted in the margins, some with stories attached. In 1709, the Reverend Robert Thomlinson borrowed volumes by St Basil and St Gregory of Nyssa “for life”, promising that upon his death he would donate the complete works of both authors to the school. He never fulfilled that promise, but Headmaster **Edmund Lodge** recorded that the two borrowed volumes were finally returned on 13 August 1737 — an impressive 28-year loan.

Rud and His Legacy

Rud compiled the catalogue shortly before leaving Newcastle in 1709. His work testifies to a genuine love of books. On becoming Headmaster, he reorganised the library and oversaw the uniform rebinding of many volumes, helping to establish RGS as a serious centre of learning. His scholarship later led to his appointment as librarian to the Dean and Chapter of Durham, where he spent his remaining years cataloguing the manuscripts of Durham Cathedral.

Returning the Catalogue Home

The manuscript returned to RGS in April 2012, when it was purchased from antiquarian bookseller **Alex Fotheringham** (ON 50–58), who kindly offered the school first refusal. The acquisition was made possible through a joint effort by RGS, the ONA Committee and a group of dedicated Old Novocastrians. After conservation treatment by Tyne & Wear Archives, it was proudly displayed at RGS Day in 2013.

We offer sincere thanks to the donors whose generosity ensured this important piece of our history came home:

ONA Committee
Stephen Lawson (ON 53–64)
Richard Sharp (ON 60–71)
Prof Richard Tuck (ON 56–66)
Chris Calver (ON 60–71)

Adapted from an article by **Oli Edwards** (Staff 88–present) featured in *ONA Magazine* 86 (Autumn 2012).



IN CONVERSATION RICHARD HARPIN

Richard Harpin (ON 76–83) reflects on leadership, character and the RGS foundations that shaped his approach to business, philanthropy and making a lasting impact.

You notice it as soon as you arrive in Nun Monkton. A green-and-white maypole rises high from the village green, visible from every approach. Around it are the familiar markers of rural England: grazing cattle, a duck pond, the parish church, and the Grade II-listed Alice Hawthorne pub, named after a 19th century racehorse and still central to village life.

This bucolic North Yorkshire village has been shaped deliberately over time, its character sustained by stewardship as much as tradition. **Richard Harpin** has become part of that story. After building his fortune through the £4bn sale of HomeServe, he chose to invest locally, purchasing the Alice Hawthorne to secure its future for the community it serves.

That same instinct surfaced again more recently. To mark his birthday, Richard asked friends and family to forgo gifts and instead contribute towards restoring the maypole. It is still a work in progress.

It was a simple request, but a telling one. In a village where symbols matter, it reflected a belief in responsibility, and the importance of giving something lasting back. That same instinct now underpins his work in business, education and philanthropy, where the focus is on helping others build organisations that can last.

“Character determines whether leaders endure,” Richard says. “Intelligence alone is not enough.”

It is an outlook that can be traced back to his time at RGS Newcastle.

Born in Huddersfield, Richard moved north as a child when his father was promoted in the Civil Service and appointed District Valuer for Newcastle.

The family settled in Stocksfield when he was five.



Character determines whether leaders endure. Intelligence alone is not enough.”

“I always thought of myself as a Yorkshireman,” he says, “but really, I’m an adopted Geordie.”

“I went to school in Newcastle, got my first proper job at Procter & Gamble, and became a Newcastle United supporter,” he adds. “I’d still love to live in Newcastle today, but it wasn’t practical while running an international business.”

His mother now lives in Hexham, and he returns regularly. Football remains a point of connection. In the growth workshops he runs for founders and chief executives, Richard often uses Newcastle United manager Eddie Howe as a leadership reference point.

“There’s no better example of a great coach,” he says. “Step 9 in my book is about honing your character: curiosity, determination, persistence and, above all, low ego. Eddie Howe has all of those qualities. Step 3 is get some coachment. Hire a coach and a mentor.”

Harpin’s route to RGS was not inevitable. He also held a scholarship offer from Dame Allan’s but chose RGS largely on instinct.

“I just liked the look and feel of the school,” he says. “That came from sitting the entrance exams. I knew I’d prefer it.”

The decision placed pressure on family finances. Holidays stopped once he and his brother, both at the RGS but it taught him an early lesson.

“It was harder for my parents than it was for me,” he reflects. “They both worked full time to afford the fees, and I’m hugely grateful for that.”

“My results were disappointing,” he says. “But I think that’s because my focus was on business, not academics.”

There was a memorable moment at parents’ evening when his mother, tired of hearing how poorly he was doing, listened as his chemistry teacher complained that Richard was often late because he had been at the bank on Osborne Road paying in cheques from a business he was running on the side.

“My mum said, ‘Well, he’ll be a millionaire before you are’ to which he replied, ‘I’ve no doubt.’”

They were both, of course, correct.

Economics provided an outlet and an economics school trip to Budapest proved influential, particularly visits to factories transitioning from communist systems to profit driven models. While he was there, he bought a stuffed pheasant and brought it home on the minibus in the hope of making a profit, an event that made the pages of *NOVO*.

“I kept thinking, what could I buy cheaply and bring back?” he laughs. “But seeing those factories convert from state-run to profit focused really fascinated me. That stayed with me.”

Richard’s entrepreneurial instinct appeared before he joined RGS. When the family moved north, his grandfather gave him a white rabbit as a leaving present. Richard bought a second, bred them, and sold the offspring to friends. Also quick

to spot a money-making opportunity, he opened a “rabbit kennels” service, charging to look after pets during the summer holidays.

“I’d seen Lord Hanson’s helicopter land at the big house at the end of the cul-de-sac in Huddersfield where I lived,” he says. “That image stuck with me. That was my motivation for going into business.”

By the age of nine, Richard had joined the Northern Magic Circle and was performing at children’s parties. At RGS, his locker doubled as a tuck shop. In Stocksfield, he collected conkers and sold them to his horse chestnut-deprived city peers.

“At 12, while most kids were building Airfix kits, I was tying fishing flies,” he says.

Those fishing flies became a mail-order business in the days before the internet. Frustrated by never meeting customers, he took a stand at the National Game Fair at Harewood House near Leeds and learned an early lesson in pivoting.

“There were about 100,000 fishermen there,” he recalls, “and the wives, girlfriends and sisters said, ‘Those fishing flies would make really nice earrings.’”

“Off came the hooks, on went kidney wires, and I pivoted the business into high fashion earrings. I was about 15.”

Those early instincts eventually culminated in HomeServe, the home emergency repairs company that Richard cofounded and grew from modest premises on Osborne Road into a multinational business, sold for £4bn in 2023. Looking back, he identifies four decisions that mattered most.

“First, taking £500,000 early on and by selling half the business. We ran out of money twice, and we wouldn’t have survived without it. Second, copying and improving a proven model.

“Third, realising I was a terrible chief executive. I’m a visionary, not an operator. Hiring my own replacement was crucial.

“And fourth, replicating the model internationally, always with strong local leadership.”

Decision-making remains central to Richard’s thinking.

“My rule is slow at the start, then fast,” he says. “Gather the data, get people’s opinions, and when you have 70% or 80% of the picture, decide. Waiting for 100% kills businesses.”

These lessons sit at the heart of Richard’s book, *How to Make a Billion in Nine Steps*. The title is deliberately provocative, but the content is practical.



RICHARD’S 9 STEPS:

1. Copy and Pivot
2. Find an Investor
3. Get Some Coachment
4. Bricks and Clicks and Paper
5. Hire Your Replacement
6. Go Global with Locals
7. Evolution, Not Revolution
8. Follow a *Not-to-do* List
9. Hone Your Character



“If you look at my bookshelves, there are hundreds of business books,” he says, gesturing to the library of shelves in his study at home. “How do you know which ones are right? Many are written by people who haven’t done it, so they don’t truly know. I knew I had to get the messages out.”

His ambitions for the book are characteristically bullish.

“The hardback launched last year was an immediate *Sunday Times* bestseller and the paperback comes out in the UK in July. And then we’ll launch in paperback in the US in 2027.

“But we still have a long way to go. The best selling business book ever, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey, has sold around 40 million copies.

“I didn’t know these nine steps at the start,” he says. “If I had, we could have built HomeServe in 15 years, not 30.”

Today, Richard spends much of his time on Growth Partner, his investment and mentoring business, and on *Business Leader*, the magazine, podcast and peer group network he owns. He has invested more than £110m of his own capital into backing founders and committed to investing £200m in total.

He strongly believes that scaling midsize businesses is key to strengthening the UK economy.

Philanthropy plays an increasing role too, particularly in enterprise education. He is working with the Career and Enterprise Company and 10 schools across the North East to teach enterprise skills and encourage entrepreneurship as a viable career.

It was this combination of business leadership and wider contribution that was recognised with a Knighthood last year.

“I felt very honoured,” Richard says. “If it helps open doors so I can support more entrepreneurs and do more good, then it’s served its purpose.”

He pauses, then adds, “I did think it might get me a better table in restaurants. But apparently, they add a ‘sir charge’.”

It is a throwaway line, but it reflects a wider point. Recognition matters less to Richard than outcomes. What matters is building carefully, investing in people and, like HomeServe itself, fixing what needs fixing.

Sometimes that instinct scales companies. Sometimes, like HomeServe, it fixes what is broken. And sometimes, in a small North Yorkshire village, it restores a maypole so it can keep standing at the centre of the community.

A HISTORY OF THE RGS IN ITS PEOPLE

THE THEAKSTONE BROTHERS

BY DAVID GOLDWATER (ON 51–62)

I joined the School in 1951, beginning my 11 years there in the Junior Building at the south end of Eskdale Terrace.

We were somewhat aware of the ‘big school’, which occupied a good part of Eskdale Terrace up to Lambton Road, the heavy iron railings forming a notable border. Boys would follow the Junior Head, Thomas Tucker Anderson (Staff 24–60), known by his middle name, murmuring “put that light out”, many of them having no idea why this phrase was attached to him. Apparently, some boys had elder brothers who had been evacuated during World War Two to Penrith, where the kindly Mr Anderson’s main admonishment was to scold boys who switched on lights at night during the wartime blackout.

There were many quirky teachers, mostly men, with women only just beginning to appear on the School staff, initially in the Junior School. The earliest senior female teachers must have felt quite out of place in the Common Room, which was full of male smokers. Both doors, when opened regularly as staff came and went, would release a copious cloud of pipe and cigarette smoke.

One of the most remarkable characters was **Anatole Marquardt Theakstone** (1899–1980), who joined the Modern Languages Department of the RGS in 1925. His brother, **Louis Marquardt Theakstone** (c.1899–1968), joined the Mathematics Department in 1932. The brothers came from St Petersburg and attended a German Gymnasium there. In the early years of the Soviet Union, after the 1917 Revolution, they attended Moscow University. Their shared middle name, Marquardt, most likely belonged to their mother’s family.



Anatole Theakstone (Top) and Louis Marquardt Theakstone

Originating in Prussia, many Marquardts appear to have been resident in the Russian Empire and were Mennonites seeking freedom to practise their pacifist religious tradition. Until the outbreak of World War One, the family had probably considered itself part of the Russian-German community. Their father, VE Theakstone, was presumably of Yorkshire origin, but his family were almost certainly merchant venturers (like Horsley!) and must have been resident in Russia for some generations, as the brothers were “without nationality” when they arrived in Britain around 1919. Anatole was naturalised in 1927. Both brothers enrolled at Edinburgh University and graduated with the four-year MA degree. Anatole married Jean Buchanan Campbell at St Cuthbert’s Parish Church there in 1924 and moved to Newcastle the following year. Louis also obtained a BSc around 1926 when he trained as a teacher at Saltley College in Birmingham. In 1930 he

married Ceridwen Jones in St Asaph’s Church.

Louis was commissioned into the Royal Welch Fusiliers (TA) as a Second Lieutenant in 1929, becoming Captain in 1937. In that year he was second in command of the RGS Officers’ Training Corps (later the CCF). He joined his regiment in 1938 and, in September 1941, was appointed interpreter to the British Military Mission in Russia, serving at the international conferences at Yalta and Potsdam with Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden and, later, Clement Attlee and Ernest Bevin. Louis can be seen in news footage of the time, alongside other key interpreters who attended both momentous conferences. Hugh Lunghi was the British interpreter for Churchill, Eden and later Attlee and Bevin at Yalta and Potsdam at the end of the World War Two in 1945. Other principal figures included the Russian Valentin Berezhkov, Stalin’s primary personal translator for meetings with the Americans and British at Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam, and Andrei Gromyko (USSR), a key diplomat and future Foreign Minister, who handled high-level interpretation and served as a pivotal Soviet figure alongside Stalin and Molotov at these meetings.

Now promoted to Colonel, Louis returned to the RGS in 1946. He left in 1953 to become Head of Mathematics at Gateshead Grammar School.

His memorable brother Anatole became Head of Modern Languages at the RGS in 1954, where he introduced the teaching of Russian into the Sixth Form. Boys who attended his lessons will remember his fiery temper, which always subsided rapidly into a much kinder disposition. He wore a not very well disguised wig which would lift briefly from his pate whenever he dispensed some quite ineffective corporal punishment. He seemed deliberately to ignore the wholesome volumes worn under our trousers as armour against such primitive discipline. **FC ‘Freddie’ Galbraith** (ON 18–27, Staff 30–31 and 49–68), who was Head of History in the 1960s used to tell us that one of the Theakstone brothers had worked in a pharmacy in St Petersburg or Petrograd which had supplied the poison used to assassinate Rasputin.

Christopher Lloyd-King (ON 57–64) recalled: “The Latin teacher, Anatole Theakstone, had a wicked tongue. He also had a wig which fascinated us. It sat like a dead rodent on his head, a chestnut mat surrounded by the silver skirt of his natural hair. In high winds, he would scurry across the space between buildings, gown flapping and hand firmly holding the wig in place.”

HISTORY OF THE ARTS AT RGS

CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS

Today, the creative and performing arts are a vibrant and integral part of life at RGS. Dramatic productions, musical performances, dance shows and art exhibitions are now regular features of the school calendar, although this has not always been the case.

Before the 20th century opportunities for students to perform or to explore creative subjects were limited or did not exist at all. This began to change towards the end of the 19th century as the curriculum broadened, and the move to Jesmond in 1906 provided improved facilities, including a stage in the old RGS Theatre, that allowed the arts to flourish.

Over the decades that followed, the commitment and enthusiasm of many talented members of staff encouraged generations of students to discover and develop their creative abilities.

The opening of the Miller Theatre and Performing Arts Centre in 2006 significantly improved the facilities available heralding a new era of drama at RGS.

RGS Theatre, 1933



Sarah Davison (Staff 08–current) Head of Drama

Co-curricular Drama at the RGS sits right at the heart of what we do. It isn't an add-on; it's where so much of the real learning happens. The programme is deliberately ambitious, giving students the chance to work at a high level across performance, design, and production roles.

We are, of course, lucky to have the facilities we have (I remember being entirely wowed when I saw the Miller Theatre on my first ever tour of the school) but the breadth and quality of the co-curricular offering goes far beyond the rooms and resources. At the heart of co-curricular Drama is the people – students and staff alike.

Any Drama teacher will tell you that the best part of their job is putting on a school production. It is a great leveller allowing diverse members of the school community to work as a team together, on stage and off. It is also the place where

teachers really get to know their students and form the memories and bonds that last well beyond their school careers.

What are those memories for me? Too many to mention in a short article! The epic undertaking that was *Les Misérables*; a full day painting the stage with the first line of every Shakespeare play for *Shakespeare in Love*, while our students dropped in to help with every free period, lunchtime or after school slot they had; seeing the Agora glimmering with candlelight in a dark February night to perform the obscure Jacobean play, *The Revenger's Tragedy*.

But most of all, the times when students tell me and my Performing Arts colleagues how much being part of all of this has meant to them, how they will carry it with them into their futures and how much it will live with all of us as a very special part of our shared past.

RGS productions:

Below: *Shakespeare in Love*

Opposite: *Les Misérables* and *Revengers' Tragedy*





Dan H (R) has appeared in several school productions including *A Monster Calls* in 2023



DRAMA IN 2026

BY **DAN H**, HEAD STUDENT,
CLASS OF 2026

Every day, I am lucky enough to see what really connects students at RGS – a shared sense of belonging to the same community.

You see it in the way we cheer for our houses, in the buzz around big events, in the friendships between students, and even in the small, everyday moments that make school feel like a community of its own. It is these things that make RGS feel so special.

A huge part of this comes from the four pillars that shape life at our School: a sense of belonging, ambition to succeed, a love of learning, and belief in each other. These values are particularly evident during large events that bring students together, such as our house competitions.

Collingwood, Eldon, Stowell and Horsley are all different in their own ways, but each offers a place to belong, a reason to get involved, and something meaningful to contribute. Our house competitions are some of the most memorable moments of my time here. House sport, house music, house shout, house dance, and many more bring the whole School together in a way that feels both competitive and supportive at the same time.

Personally, for me as a drama student, house drama stands above everything else. There's something incredible about watching not just the people who do drama every week, but also those who've never stepped on a stage before deciding to give it a go. You see people push themselves and each other, step out of their comfort zones, and discover what they can do both individually and together. It's the perfect example of all four pillars of the RGS happening at once.

This is something I have experienced myself through being involved in school productions over the years. One of my earliest roles was playing Peter Cratchit in *A Christmas Carol* in Year 7, which was extremely enjoyable as it was my first opportunity to rehearse and perform with my school friends, as well as with my older



sister in the same production. Being part of such a large show with students from Year 7 to Year 9 was a great first experience, and it allowed everyone to be involved and contribute, helping us grow in confidence and experience as both performers and people.

I later played the role of Connor's dad in *A Monster Calls*, while also being part of the ensemble. This was a much more challenging role, but I felt it pushed both myself and the cast in a productive way. It encouraged us to develop not only our acting skills, but also our ability to work together, support one another, and take responsibility as part of a big project.

My personal favourite production was *Shakespeare in Love*, in which I played Kit Marlowe. This play like so many others gave me the opportunity to act alongside my friends across multiple year groups along with the rehearsal process feeling extremely collaborative and enjoyable, with everyone sharing ideas and working closely together throughout. It was a production that encouraged creativity and helped build confidence, making it a particularly memorable and rewarding experience.

The teachers play a huge role in this, likely far more than many people realise. They run rehearsals, coaching teams, organise music groups, and advise students when trying something new. Their influence has always been steady and encouraging, with leadership and guidance that has helped so many students, including myself, grow without ever taking centre stage themselves. In so many of these events, their enthusiasm is what sets the tone. They create environments where people feel safe enough to try, fail, and try again, and to enjoy the process along the way.

Even the Main Hall plays a part, as it is more than just a room. It is where generations of students have sat, performed and celebrated being at RGS, and that shared memory connects us no matter the decade. Especially now, with the School marking its 500th year, that feeling of being part of a much bigger story is stronger than ever.

ONA INTERVIEW

TOM GOODMAN-HILL

From a wicker-basket debut in the RGS theatre to an Emmy-nominated screen career, **Tom Goodman-Hill** talks to ONA's Caroline Briggs about the formative influence of family and his lifelong devotion to performance.

Tom as Darrien O'Connor in
Netflix's *Baby Reindeer*



“One of my earliest memories of senior school is being shut inside a wicker basket,” laughs **Tom Goodman-Hill** (ON 76–86), Emmy nominated actor, producer, and *Old Novo*, recalling his first foray into acting at RGS.

Crouched in the darkness, the young Tom was waiting for his cue to spring out as a mischievous sprite in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, while his elder brother **Max** (ON 72–82), playing Lysander, attempted to woo Helena.

An unconventional Shakespearean entrance, perhaps, but one Tom remembers with unmistakable affection.

“My happiest and strongest school memories are of the old RGS theatre,” says the 57-year-old, whose career on stage

and screen now spans more than three decades. “I can recall every inch of that space vividly. And my fondest memories are almost all tied up with my brother.”

The Hill brothers were a prodigious duo on the school stage, as countless *NOVO* articles, reviews and photographs attest. Tom's talents weren't confined to acting, either. He also drew praise for his musical performances, including a memorably atmospheric clarinet “cuckoo” in the sixth movement of Camille Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals*, delivered with such flair, it seems, that the elephant never stood a chance.

It was, perhaps, an early foreshadowing of an eclectic career that would see him inhabit a menagerie of roles, from historical figures to comic eccentrics, on stage and on screen. A cast to rival anything Saint-Saëns assembled.

“Max and I performed together in *Oliver Twist* in the round in the school theatre – I was Oliver, Max was Fagin,” he recalls. “We reminisced about that very recently with **Louis Taylor** (ON 75–85), who also had fond memories of playing the Artful Dodger.

“But my happiest memory with Max was co-presenting a comical take on the school year's news at the Penrith reunion in 1984.

“Max had written a series of reports in the style of *Not The Nine O'Clock News*, covering the year's and historical school events. We did our best to do a Mel Smith and Griff Rhys Jones delivery of them. Not sure if we entirely succeeded but we had huge fun!

“I recall the best-received sketch relating to the theft of four treasured Shove Ha'penny stadiums (school benches) that year...”

After leaving RGS, the brothers' paths diverged sharply. Max studied Law at Oxford before being called to the bar and rising to become Director of Public Prosecutions for England and Wales. Tom, by contrast, never felt the pull of anything other than performance.

“It's a cliché, but I honestly can't remember a time when I didn't want to be an actor,” he says.

“Mum did a lot of amateur theatre at the People's Theatre in Jesmond, and I used to watch her in all sorts of plays. That was definitely an influence, but if I'm honest, I think I'd caught the bug long before that.

“When I was five or six-years-old I played a character called The Weather Man in a play at my first school. I still remember it vividly. I wore this extravagant polystyrene headpiece my dad had made,

decorated with rainbows and clouds.

"It felt magical and I genuinely never looked back from there."

RGS contemporaries may also remember Tom's gift for mimicry, though often, he admits, for all the wrong reasons.

"I must have spent most of my pre-teens pretending to be Frank Spencer," he laughs. "I was probably incredibly irritating."

Despite his obvious enthusiasm, and the relentless impressions, RGS did not offer a straightforward path into the arts. At the time, the school's provision for drama was limited, and careers in the creative or performing arts weren't widely encouraged in an environment that prized academic achievement.

In the end, that frustration became fuel. "The lack of performing arts at school pushed me to seek them out elsewhere, which probably did me a favour. It made me very single minded about becoming a performer with a determination to become an actor against all odds.

"I will forever be grateful for the encouragement of **John Armstrong** (Staff 72-03), **Mike Oswald** (Staff 66-03), **Jeremy Thomas** (Staff 77-05) and **Dave Freeborough** (Staff 84-87). They recognised very quickly that there was only ever one thing I wanted to do, and they quietly found ways to support that," he adds. "That mostly meant turning a blind eye when I missed Games, encouraging me to apply for the National Youth Theatre (NYT), and suggesting that I direct plays as well as act in them."

Although opportunities at school were limited, Tom is not one to dwell on the ifs, buts and maybes of life. He takes a more philosophical view, treating those early challenges as part of the journey that ultimately shaped his career.

Tom Goodman-Hill (left) as Oliver with brother Sir Max Hill KC (ON 72-82) as Fagin in *Oliver!*, 1979



Tom on location as John Lilburne in Peter Flannery's *The Devil's Whore*

“

Who knows?
If the arts had been
encouraged, I might
have got it out of my
system at school
and ended up an
astrophysicist.

"Who knows? If the arts had been encouraged, I might have got it out of my system at school and ended up an astrophysicist," he laughs.

After RGS, Tom joined the National Youth Theatre and went on to study Drama and English at Warwick University, where he also completed a teaching qualification. It was there that his fledgling career began to take shape.

"It's a long old road," he explains. "Experiences such as directing *Epsom Downs* in the school theatre, performing in *Henry V* at the Regent's Park theatre with the NYT, working on productions constantly at university, running a fringe theatre company in London for two years and then training for two years at Bristol Old Vic all had a cumulative effect before I felt ready to enter the profession."

Today, Tom's face is familiar to millions. On screen, he has built an impressively varied career, with film credits including Sanderson Reed in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, Sgt. Stahl in *The Imitation Game* and Frank Crawley in Ben Wheatley's *Rebecca*. He is equally recognisable for his television work, with memorable appearances in *Humans*, *Doctor Who*, *Mr Selfridge*, *Hustle*, *Call The Midwife* and *Foyle's War*.

His stage work has earned him an Olivier Award nomination for his performance as Sir Lancelot in Monty Python's *Spamalot*, and he later drew acclaim for roles in *ENRON*, *The Cosmonaut's Last Message* and *Limehouse* at the Donmar Warehouse.

The latter traced the turbulent 1981 birth of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), with Tom winning critical acclaim for his portrayal of David Owen, capturing the politician's excitability and single-minded drive that defined the party's early years.

But it was Netflix's smash hit *Baby Reindeer* and his chilling turn as the predatory Darrien O'Connor that etched him most firmly into the national consciousness, earning him a Primetime Emmy nomination in 2024.

Through it all, Tom's career has been anchored by a clear guiding principle. "It always comes down to the script," he explains. "If I love the writing then I want to do the job. Whether it is the anarchic, surreal sketches of *Monty Python*, the wonderfully skewed humour of Milton Jones, or the hyper-real and unsettling recollections of Richard Gadd, I am a fan of great writing. That is what keeps me working."

For Tom, the role that struck closest to home was one with an unexpected link to the RGS: portraying John Lilburne in Peter Flannery's Channel 4 drama *The Devil's Whore*.

Known as 'Freeborn John', Lilburne became a key figure in the Leveller movement during the English Civil Wars, arguing that rights were innate rather than granted.

It is believed Lilburne was educated at RGS, and Hill family lore even hints at a shared ancestry.

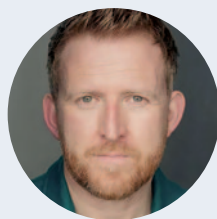
So it is little wonder Tom describes the role as his most rewarding to date. Stepping into the life of a possible ancestor brought together his craft and his family history in a way no other project has matched.

"John Lilburne is a figure who haunted my youth and our family tree, and the experience of filming that series has stayed with me," he says.

"We shot the entire series in South Africa, mostly in Oak Valley and the surrounding area along the Garden Route. I spent a lot of time on horseback and refining my swordsmanship, and the high point of the shoot was a full-throated reenactment of the Battle of Edgehill.

"The trial of Lilburne was also the best-written and most fulfilling piece of work I've ever done on camera. The whole experience was amazing and had a cast to die for."

In tandem with his acting career, Tom has remained committed to advocacy. He is a patron of *Scene & Heard*, the London charity giving young people a



I have always believed that the arts are essential to the development of students, and that they inform learning across every subject.

voice through theatre, and he believes strongly in the value of the arts in a holistic education.

"I have always believed that the arts are essential to the development of students, and that they inform learning across every subject," he says. "When I trained as a primary school teacher, I used drama to teach everything, even maths and science."

Today, in a world away from Tom's experience, that philosophy is now embedded in the classroom at RGS.

Drama and performance are part of the curriculum from the Junior School, and music is woven into the week for hundreds of pupils, through choirs, concerts and music lessons.

The arts are also used to deepen historical understanding through projects such as 'Digging Up the Past', Spanish lessons draw on creative work through the school's 'Day of the Dead' project.

School infrastructure too. Gone is the theatre space Tom recalls so vividly, replaced by the modern performing arts centre in the mid-2000s, and new art department, recently expanding its offering to include Photography A-level. The creative work, once something Tom longed for, now runs through the school's academic and pastoral lifeblood.

"I'm delighted that it is the case for RGS students now and going forward," he says.

"I only wish it were true of all schools nationwide. The country is only now feeling the effects of successive governments cutting the arts in education. The damage is huge, but I hope not irreparable.

"The creative arts build confidence, self-belief and resilience. They support learning in all areas, creating pathways in the brain that would not otherwise form, and they lead to real self-discovery. At their most basic level, the arts are a form of therapy and self-care, which is enormously important for personal development. At their most ambitious, they build and nurture whole communities. They are vital."

Tom's message to the next generation of actors follows the same clear line. Social media and the internet may have changed the landscape since he was young, but the fundamentals still apply.

"Focus on what you love and try to create work that means something to you," he says. "With luck, it will mean something to others too. Do not bend yourself to what the world tells you to do. Do your own thing."

Tom speaks from lived experience, aware the road to success can be an unforgiving journey. "If you are passionate about it, keep at it. Make art whenever you can. Bring it into your life however possible and it will pay you back. As a business the arts can be cruel and difficult, but as a way of life it cannot be beaten."

When pressed on his own plans, Tom remains discreet, if playfully so.

"Unfortunately, if I told you I'd get into terrible trouble, since I signed an NDA a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away..."

Tom as Hellfire Jack in *The War Below*



CO-CURRICULAR MEMORIES

At RGS, Co-curricular life sits at the heart of the school experience. From sport and music to debating, drama and science societies, these activities run alongside the academic curriculum to help students explore their interests, build confidence and develop skills for life beyond the classroom.

With a history stretching back to the 19th century, from early rugby and cricket teams to orchestras, choirs, the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) and countless clubs in between, Co-curricular life at RGS has always been shaped by enthusiasm and commitment. To celebrate that legacy, we asked Old Novos to share their own Co-curricular memories, capturing the clubs, teams and societies that helped define their time at RGS.

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

Sir Max Hill KC (ON 72–82) 1982 Debating prize-winner

"I was hopeless. At chess one lad asked why I had moved a particular piece a few moves earlier and I said I just wanted to move it forward – and quite soon after, at the end of the game, he told me he would have checkmated me considerably earlier had I not (inadvertently) made the move. Being part of the club made me realise I could not be good at stuff just because I wanted to be."

David Cromar (ON 63–67)



"T'was my first experience of camping. We had a delightful week in the Dales (it didn't rain all the time). Only personal disaster was causing the collapse of a dry stone wall we were made to clamber across. I also found one of the accompanying masters, Mr Watson, shaving in the stream."

Philip Minchom (ON 53–60)

"Camps were great fun. Mine were at Kirk Yetholm, in the borders, Swaledale, North Yorkshire and Eskdale (twice), in the Lake District. Whatever the weather, usually wind and rain, we tramped up and down hills, a jolly crew, eating very well, as I remember, from our camp fires grub. Once at Eskdale, we were washed out of our site and found refuge in a youth hostel, fortunately. At Swaledale I treasured a crow's feather to stir my watery tea each day. One boy here licked all the glue off a stamp for a card for his parents and so adhered it with raspberry jam; it reached its destination."

Alan James Castree (ON 53–61)

"One of the 'jobs' the Electronics Society was occasionally asked to perform was that of keeping a PA system working. Somehow, during an attempted repair, I managed to cause a short circuit, burned out a component, and purchased a replacement part. Next day, at lunchtime, one of my co-members was working on the amplifier, not knowing that I had 'broken' it the evening before, turned it on. A small gaggle of Year IIs were watching us from a safe distance. 'Ooh, look! It's smoking!' said one of them, and they all promptly disappeared behind a lab bench. There was an almighty bang, and a large capacitor blew its guts at the ceiling. It was not long after the exploding capacitor incident that I joined the Computer Society. Punched cards and software are so much safer."

Robert Lewis Bramwell (ON 53–61)



CO-CURRICULAR

PHOTOGRAPHY SOCIETY

The first mention in *NOVO* of a Photographic Club appears in November 1906. The club soon began hosting lectures on different aspects of photography, giving speakers the chance to present their work. In March 1909, Mr Foster spoke about his trip to Canada, illustrating his talk with lantern slides of his photographs.

The club continued to grow in popularity, even surviving the camera restrictions imposed during World War One. A darkroom was later installed in the school basement for developing prints.

RGS GAVE ME THE GREATEST START IN PHOTOGRAPHY

by **Nicholas Posner** (ON 75–85)

A camera in Year 9 was my most prized possession. My ultimate dream was to have a photo printed in *NOVO*, the pinnacle of artistic stardom. Head of art Kevin Egan-Fowler (Staff 76–13) gave me the strongest encouragement, even allowing me to use the school darkroom, a privilege usually reserved for Sixth Formers.

Before long I was *NOVO* photographer and set about recording every aspect of RGS life from 1981–1985. As well as the standard school play/sports day type pictures I particularly enjoyed capturing the more informal aspects of school life. A favourite is the one of three Year 11s sitting on a bench by the school field. The photo was featured in *NOVO* and soon afterwards Mr Egan-Fowler contacted me excitedly. Apparently, a parent had complained to the Headmaster that the photo brought the school into disrepute. Mr Egan-Fowler seemed quite pleased with the subversive nature of my work. Artists should always provoke a reaction! Probably just as well that the magazine did not feature the photo of my class 4K in 1982.

In 1985, three days after leaving RGS, I attended the Durham Miners' Gala and took candid snaps of Arthur Scargill, Neil Kinnock and



Opposite: Nicholas' photograph of three Year 11s sitting on a bench. Above: Prime Minister portraits by Nicholas (Edward Heath, John Major and Tony Blair); Nicholas and Michael Heseltine

Tony Benn. These three pictures were accepted for the collection of the National Portrait Gallery. It was undoubtedly the years of experience I had photographing RGS life that gave me the confidence to be a photographer of people and events. Throughout medical school and my years as a GP in Newcastle, the success of the Durham photos emboldened me to write to prominent characters to ask if I could take their portrait. I now have 18 photographs in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery and have had sittings with five prime ministers.

A highlight came in 2023 when I went to take the official portrait for Director of Public Prosecutions, **Sir Max Hill KC** (ON 72–82). Max had been deputy head prefect when I was at the school. We spent more time trading anecdotes than taking photos!

Now retired from general practice, and my wife and I having moved to Oxford to be nearer family, I have a great deal more time for photography. This year I was hugely honoured when Michael Heseltine came to open an exhibition of my photos, featuring his arboretum, gardens and beloved snowdrops.

But none of this can beat being a new grandparent. Now there's a photographic project.

THE 1960S: THE DARKROOM AT THE END OF THE HALL

by **David Goldwater** (ON 51–62)

As a student at RGS from 1951 until 1962, there were plenty of opportunities to exercise one's interests and even skills. An abundance of societies offered one the chance to balance studies with personal interests by developing a hobby.

One of these was 'snapping' pictures and as popular photography began to grow, it was no longer the preserve of those boys with scientific skills – the technical 'geeks'.

Fortunately, my father shared the interest with me and was keen to experiment with new ways. He once described how, as boys, he and a brother rigged up a crystal set with some speakers around their home (probably in the 1920's) and amazed his parents and some elderly aunts with this new technical 'magic'.

A fully equipped darkroom was situated downstairs in a tiny room at the bottom of the northern stairs from the balcony leading down to the Hall. As one descended further downstairs into the depths, the smell of chemicals grew stronger – the aromas of Ilford ID11 and Hypo Crystals or Fixer supplied by Johnsons of Hendon met you, indicating the proximity of this small space, where negatives and glass photographic plates could be turned magically into prints, even quite enormous ones! By turning the enlarger on its side, one could project a negative onto a large sheet of printing paper. These experiments often ended in failure, but it was all part of the learning process.

An interest in Astronomy meant regular visits 'after hours' to the observatory on the field, and despite the industrial murk which undoubtedly pervaded the Tyneside air, we managed to take reasonable pictures especially of the Moon, which could be developed within minutes down in the depths under the Hall.

We also discovered that one could bypass the stairs back upstairs and explore the entire underneath of the Hall with its labyrinth of pipework.

Excluding myself, of course, there was a photographic 'elite' in my day, demonstrating utmost professional skill, far beyond that of most Kodak Box Brownie owners. My contemporary **Philip Warren** (ON 51–61) showed great talent and ability and quite recently presented a portfolio of his work to the Archives.

NEWS & CONGRATULATIONS



NOVO DRESS

To celebrate 140 years of *NOVO*, editor **Matt Moore** (Staff 20–current) and the editorial team set out to create something distinctive to mark the anniversary and take pride of place on the cover of this special edition. The result is a striking dress, designed using more than 50 *NOVO* covers from across the decades, visually telling the story of the magazine's rich history.

Art student Sophia W, who specialises in textiles, took on the challenge of constructing the dress using custom-printed fabric. Large sections were hand sewn, with the remaining elements completed by machine. **Tracy Etherington** (Staff 2006–current), a former seamstress before becoming RGS swimming coach, generously

shared her expertise to refine the final finishing touches.

The dress was modelled by Sixth Form student Elena B, with photography by *ONA Magazine* editor Caroline Briggs. This was very much a collaborative project, bringing together students and staff from across the school, each contributing their skills, creativity and time to bring the vision to life.

Beyond featuring on the *NOVO* cover, the dress will continue to be used to showcase student creativity and celebrate this landmark anniversary throughout the year.

The dress will be on display in the reception foyer for the rest of the summer term.



ON ATTRACTS GLOBAL RECOGNITION FOR LATEST TV ROLE

Five ONs and seven current RGS students enjoying an Easter ski trip to Meribel, France: **Jonny Lees** (ON 95–02), **Chris Rutter** (ON 92–02), **Joel Dickinson** (ON 91–01), **Helena Strettle-Davis** (ON 01–03), **Jeff Davis** (ON 98–03)

Old Novo **Charlie Carrick** (ON 94–04) has attracted international attention for his role in *The Testaments*, the new TV adaptation of Margaret Atwood's novel on Disney+.

Carrick plays the sinister Commander Judd in the dystopian drama, with his performance as the powerful and enigmatic figure being widely acclaimed.

Charlie first discovered his passion for acting in a school production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He later trained at the Vancouver Film School, drawing on his family links to Canada.

He has since built a career in TV and film in the UK and US, with credits including *COBRA* (Sky), *Deep Water* (ITV), *Departure*, *Reign* and *Hidden Assets*.

Based on Atwood's 2019 sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Testaments* expands the story of Gilead and its resistance movement.

ON HONoured WITH KING'S COUNSEL

We are delighted to share that **Dr Alistair 'Nigel' Brown** (ON 66–73) has been awarded the rank and dignity of King's Counsel *honoris causa* in recognition of significant contributions to the development of the law through published writing and service as an expert evaluator for the Group of States against Corruption. Although he retired from the Bench two years ago, Dr Brown continues to write and shape legal thought.





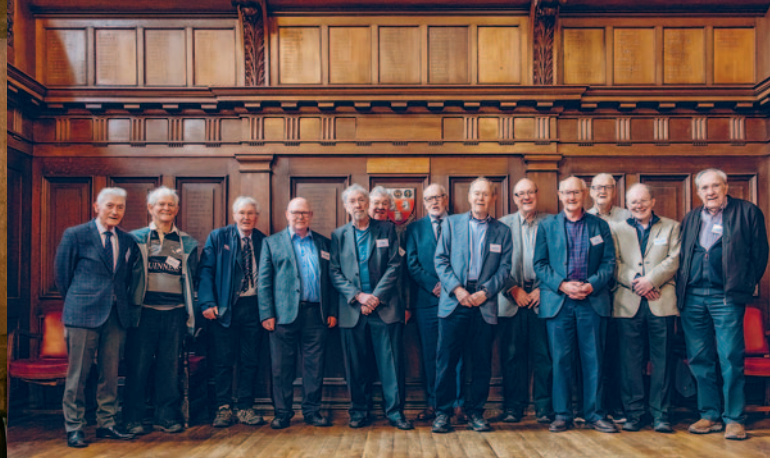
HOUSE DEBATING FINAL AND LAW NETWORKING EVENT

An outstanding House Debating Final took place in the Miller Theatre on 24 April, with some of the brightest RGS students showcasing their confidence and intellectual agility. The motion, “This House believes that the future will be better than the past”, prompted thoughtful and spirited debate from all involved.

After a closely contested final, Ann Olsen G and Avantika A emerged as worthy winners, bringing the Hill House Debating Trophy home for Eldon. The trophy was presented by judge **Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate** (ON 53–62) during an evening of law networking held in the Main Hall.

The networking event once again attracted ONs, RGS parents, and other influential figures working and studying in the legal profession. Students from RGS and our Partnership schools were keen to engage with them and greatly valued their practical advice on career planning, with many alumni generously offering ongoing guidance and mentorship to current RGS pupils.

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



CLASS OF '63 REUNION

An incredible 70 years after they started RGS, we welcomed 13 friends from the class of 1963 for a tour of the school hall, archive and a slice of celebratory cake.

LEAVERS 2026

Our latest ONs said goodbye to RGS this term in typical colourful fashion. Good luck... and stay in touch with your RGS family.



STAY CONNECTED

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

FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

www.facebook.com/OldNovos

www.linkedin.com/groups/95129

140 YEARS OF NOVO

Over the years, *NOVO* has evolved through a series of design changes, with each year capturing a distinct moment in its story. The examples below highlight how its style has shifted and developed over time, reflecting changing influences and design directions.



1885

The Novocastrian made its debut in November 1885, keen to build “esprit de corps” and capture every corner of school life under Headmaster **SC Logan** (Staff 1883–1912). With just 256 boys, no library and deep suspicion of a national “torrent of unhealthy literature,” the magazine busied itself with exams, football, science and lofty moral purpose. Early sport was refreshingly direct. One memorable try was scored when Garrett simply sat on the ball and refused to move.

1905

By 1905, *The Novocastrian* had found its stride, mixing school business with sport, humour, gadgets and alumni gossip. The Debating Society boomed, tackling urgent questions like summer versus winter sports and whether cameras might replace pencils. The real star was *Aal Aboot Pitmen*, a riotous comic sketch of North East mining life, bursting with dialect, dogs, pigeons and competitive Geordie storytelling, where being accused of lying was practically a compliment.

1925

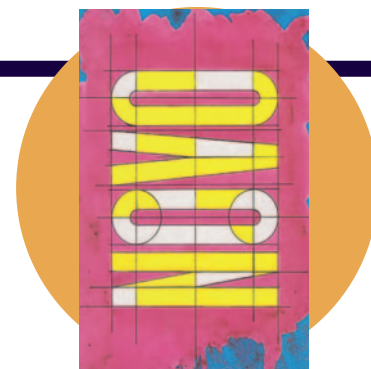
The March 1925 issue celebrated a big one, 400 years since **Thomas Horsley** set the School in motion. With 554 boys now enrolled, societies flourished. Debating, Wireless and Photography buzzed, and the library brimmed with Holmes, Buchan, Haggard and Wodehouse. History met comedy as the Old Pillars were formally presented, while “A Classical Revival” gleefully reimagined breaking up as a pagan festival to Terminus, complete with wild rejoicing.

1945

The March 1945 *Novocastrian* sits on the threshold between war and peace. Old Novos returned from service as far afield as Russia, India and North Africa, including a former POW from Germany. Plans were laid to preserve evacuation memories in an Art Society book. Yet daily school life marched on with debating, music, drama, cadets and the infamous Miller Cup run. The editors doubted the existence of people who enjoy running, but warned that field damage might earn offenders a role as a human pitch roller.

1965

By January 1965, the School was bursting with music, dance, debates and sport, but also worried about a growing cultural fault line. The editorial fretted over a split between “arties” and “hearties,” divided into cliques with different priorities. Alongside earnest analysis of the North East’s uncertain future came glorious silliness. A Prefects versus Staff football match ended in a draw amid mutterings of bribery and doping, firmly and indignantly denied.



1985

Spring 1985 finds *The Novocastrian* gleefully sharp, satirical and delightfully strange. The diary rattled through rugby, exchanges, services, exams and The Italian Straw Hat, while the Debating Society cheekily branded RGS an “exam factory.” Serious reports, like a *Politics Tour to Reagan’s America*, sat beside spoof book reviews and full blown surrealism. A mock Arthur C Clarke review located breakfast across the solar system, while Latin reached peak usefulness with suppedo, “I break wind quietly.”

2005

The Spring 2005 issue opens in pure UCAS mode, looping thoughts, nervous pauses and palpable anxiety. Achievement still abounded, from national debating success to sporting triumphs, an England U18 rugby captain and a rock concert raising £2,000 for tsunami relief. But this was also a more open, human magazine, acknowledging stress and self doubt. The liveliest moments came on the road and the stage, *Much Ado About Nothing*, a chaotic Classics trip to Italy, and a reflective Holy Island weekend involving poetry, Hob Nobs, stargazing and one regrettable North Sea swim.

2025

One hundred and forty years after *The Novocastrian* first set out to create an *esprit de corps* among past and present members of the School, the magazine was relaunched under Mr Moore and the PRESS Society: Photography, Reporting, Editorial, Studio and Society. The aim was to hand editorial judgement, design, photography and reporting back to students, while keeping the magazine as a place for genuine student voice. In an age of disappearing feeds and instant updates, *The Novocastrian* chose not to become purely digital, but to remain what it had always been at its best: a printed record of school life, made by students, for the student, and built to last.

NOVO STAFF EDITORS 1945–2026

Maurice G Robinson (staff editor 45–66)

Raymond W Bratt (staff editor 66–67)

Roger AS Hennessey (staff editor 67–73)

BJ Unsworth (staff editor 73–82)

Jeremy Thomas (staff editor 82–06)

Alan King (staff editor 07–25)

Matt Moore (staff editor 25–)

FEE ASSISTANCE THEN AND NOW



TREVOR CLARK (ON 66–72)

Since day one, access has been part of the Royal Grammar School's story. For much of the 20th century, fee assistance through schemes such as the Direct Grant system ensured that admission was determined by ability, not by family income. Bright pupils from across the North East entered the School on exactly the same terms as their peers, learning, competing and contributing side by side.

The impact was profound. Assisted pupils brought with them a breadth of background and experience that shaped the character of the school. Financial support was discreet, and what mattered was academic promise, commitment and contribution. Expectations were high, but so was support.

That experience continues today through the bursary scheme. Since it began, 500 pupils have benefited from bursary support. Each represents not simply financial assistance, but a belief that talent deserves opportunity, wherever it is found. Smaller classes, academic stretch, rich co-curricular life and strong pastoral care continue to open doors that might otherwise remain closed.

The national landscape has changed. Assisted place schemes no longer exist, and bursaries are now the sole means of widening access in independent education. This makes philanthropy central rather than supplementary, and generosity becomes the mechanism by which tradition is sustained.

For many former pupils who once benefited themselves, giving to the bursary fund is not abstract philanthropy. It is personal. It is recognition of an education that changed lives, and a desire to ensure the same chance exists for the next generation.

What follows is one such story.

Giving to the Bursary Campaign is deeply personal to me. I benefited from a free education at RGS, an opportunity that opened doors and enabled me to achieve far more than would otherwise have been possible. Now that I am in a position to do so, I want to give back by supporting the Bursary Campaign, so that other talented students can benefit from an RGS education that their families may not be able to afford.

I was towards the top of the class every year in my junior school with the aim of going to a grammar school at the age of 11, but as one of five children in a household where my father already worked two jobs, there was no chance of being able to consider a fee-paying school. However, based on my 11-plus results and, I assume, my family's financial circumstances, I entered RGS at the age of 11 with my tuition funded by Northumberland County Council. My brother Malcolm followed two years later on the same basis. I know we were very fortunate that the Direct Grant system existed at that time.

It was certainly an eye-opener moving to RGS from a local primary school: I met contemporaries from all walks of life and economic backgrounds, and they lived throughout Northumberland and County Durham. There were no real clues as to who was there with an assisted place or who was fee-paying.

I believe that my experience at RGS was life-changing. As well as the superb facilities for gym, games and swimming, I felt we studied subjects in greater depth than my peers in other schools. We enjoyed a far broader educational experience with timetabled non-curriculum subjects such as Topics and General Studies, as well as a variety of sports and school camps. Expectations

were high, but we had support in order to achieve those expectations. Although I focused on modern languages at A Level and university, my earlier strengths in sciences enabled me to move successfully into a career in accountancy, which took me to positions throughout Europe, linking back into my German language A Level and degree. I was inspired by **Alan Mitchell** (Staff 63–95) (History), **Geoff Harvey** (German) and **John Williams** (Maths) in my time at RGS, I do not believe that all of this would have been possible without the depth and breadth of experience at RGS.

I certainly appreciated the emphasis at RGS on community and team sports. I was in the water polo team purely because I could swim, and one year made up the house cross-country team for the Miller Cup. I was no runner, but I was happy to contribute to the points total. Thanks to **Jeff Knowles** persuading my parents that I had a talent for swimming, I joined a local club in my second term at RGS. I have competed every year since, in both open championships and, more recently as a Masters swimmer (over 25). This has again brought me international travel as well as friendships in several countries. Winning medals in European and World championships was the icing on the cake, which was initiated by an RGS teacher when I was 12-years-old. I could never have foreseen how far it would take me.

There are no longer assisted places within the education system. I therefore decided to donate to the Bursary Campaign in order that my contributions might, at a minimum, provide a full RGS education to other academically capable individuals. It is effectively a way of showing my appreciation of what I received, and of paying for my RGS education in arrears.

WHY GIVING MATTERS

ELAINE FLYNN

RGS HEAD OF DEVELOPMENT

Your generosity today becomes someone's opportunity tomorrow.

Every young person deserves the chance to fulfil their potential, regardless of financial circumstances. At RGS, this belief is not simply aspirational; it is fundamental to who we are. Our Bursary Campaign ensures that talented, bright and motivated students can access an RGS education, whatever their background.

Supporting the bursary programme is about much more than financial contribution. It is about opening doors, changing lives and strengthening the long-standing values that make RGS exceptional.

RGS has always been a place where talent is nurtured and ambition is encouraged. Sustaining a strong bursary provision relies on unity, commitment and the continued generosity of the wider RGS community. Whether through the 1525 Club, the 500 Club or another form of support, every donor joins a proud tradition of widening opportunity.

Supporting the RGS Bursary Campaign

In conversations with alumni, I often hear the same hesitation: "My contribution would be too small to make a difference," or "Surely someone else will give." I understand that instinct – but I want to reassure you, sincerely, that every single gift matters. Please do not underestimate the difference your contribution could make.

What is perhaps most striking is how few currently contribute. From the many thousands who have benefited from an RGS education, only 128 individuals give regularly, and just 197 people have donated this academic year. These numbers are not shared to criticise, but to illustrate how important it is for more of us to step forward.

Every donation, no matter the size, is deeply valued and has a real impact. Whether given as a one-off gift or as a regular monthly donation, your support helps transform lives.

RGS has always been a community, one built on shared values, generosity of spirit, and a belief in nurturing potential. The strength and future of our bursary provision depends on that same sense of collective responsibility today.

If you are able, I ask you to consider making a gift to the RGS Bursary Campaign. What may feel modest to you could be transformative for a young person. Together, our generosity ensures that future generations can benefit from the same opportunities that meant so much to you.



Join the 1525 or 500 Club

1525 500

Donating during our anniversary period and joining either the 1525 Giving Club (a one-off gift of £1,525) or the 500 Giving Club (a one-off gift of £500) offers a unique opportunity to secure your place in RGS history.

In return for your donation, you will receive a handcrafted wooden book engraved with your name or your family's name. These books will be displayed on our bespoke bookshelf, creating a time capsule that honours those who supported the school during this significant anniversary period. Members will also receive a limited edition RGS pin badge and an invitation to an exclusive drinks reception in September 2026.

Please note that the opportunity to join the **Giving Clubs closes at the end of July 2026**. After this date, no additional books can be added to the bookshelf.

To make a one-off payment or set up a monthly gift through online banking, our details are:

Royal Grammar School Bursary Campaign

Account: 10242985

Sort code: 20-33-85

You can make a payment via our website for RGS Bursaries, RGS Partnerships or Capital: Support Us – Royal Grammar School Newcastle
Your gift, whether large or small, truly makes a difference.

If you would like to discuss your options or find out more about our bursary campaign, please contact me directly development@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk



Why I give?

“As a donor, I’ve seen firsthand the benefits for individuals who would never have had the opportunity to pursue further education – opportunities they could not have imagined in any other circumstance – and who have gone on to build careers they otherwise wouldn’t have had. For those reasons, the sense of satisfaction is superb.”

David Ratliff (former RGS parent)

“If everyone set up a small donation just like me after leaving, that combined we would have a massive impact on someone’s life. The RGS Bursary Campaign supports students who wouldn’t have had the opportunities that school can give, and allows them to go on and do fantastic things, I am proud to play a part in that.”

Henry Young (ON 15-24)

“I was really fortunate to, to be able to come to RGS as part of the assisted places scheme back in the mid 80’s. My family, not very wealthy at the time, saw an opportunity for me to come here and we took it. By giving regularly I want other people to, benefit in the same way I did, now that scheme isn’t around anymore.

It’s a really nice feeling to know that I’m able to support other people to achieve in the same way as I have. It doesn’t have to be a huge donation, but just regular support for the campaign is hugely helpful.

I would encourage anybody who feels that they can give to give to support the campaign. Everybody can play their part.”

Alistair Jenkins (ON 86-93)

“I wanted to donate based on the fact that the RGS is a wonderful educational institution and I wanted to contribute to make it accessible to a child or children who might otherwise have not had the opportunity for such a special education”.

Danny Ryan (ON 96-03)

MY BURSARY STORY

BY **JEMIMA BARRETO** (ON 13–20)

I grew up in Chapel Park, in Newcastle, and went to the local primary school there. My mum was a single parent at the time, and although private education was not something she could afford, she had read about scholarships and bursaries. That is what first led us to the RGS Open Day. We loved it immediately. We went to a couple of other open days, but RGS was the only school we applied to. It felt like a long shot, but to our amazement everything fell into place. I went through the interview process, met the bursar, and was awarded a bursary.



What struck me on the Open Day was how focused the school was on opportunity.

I was very sporty in primary school, so the facilities really appealed to me. I already knew the school had a strong presence in the sporting world, but I never imagined I would be the one wearing that kit. Academically, I had always taken my work seriously and was often ahead of my peers, and my mum could see I needed more challenge than I was getting. RGS looked like a place that recognised individual potential and developed it.

Nobody from my primary school had gone into private education. Most families followed the Catholic state school route, so applying to RGS felt like unknown territory. But my school was supportive, and when I received the offer, I was both excited and overwhelmed. I also felt some imposter syndrome. My mum was very honest about the differences I might experience in terms of background and lifestyle, but she reminded me that I had earned my place. I started Year 7 determined to make the most of every opportunity that came my way.

I really did embrace those opportunities. I even appeared in the Year 7 musical, which doubled as both my debut and my farewell to drama. Sport, however, became a defining part of my RGS experience. I picked up hockey for the first time at school. Many of the girls had played before or belonged to clubs, so I was nervous, but I learned quickly and went on to represent the county and then join an England Hockey performance centre. That journey continued at university, where I became the first team hockey captain at St Andrews. I would never have even held a hockey stick if not for RGS. My primary school focused on individual sports, so the team ethos, the camaraderie, and the competitive spirit were all shaped by my time at RGS. Those lessons have stayed with me professionally and socially. I no longer play hockey, but I am now part of my office football team, which still brings me that same sense of connection.

Academically, RGS was exceptional. The UCAS support, the careers guidance, the encouragement to aim high, and the personalised preparation for university applications were invaluable. Applying to top universities felt normal in that environment. I applied to Oxbridge, and I also applied to St Andrews, which I

“

I cannot overstate how life changing RGS was. The support from teachers, the relationships built, the opportunities I was given, and the encouragement to push myself have shaped every part of who I am.

accepted during the pandemic without having visited. Thankfully I loved it. I studied English Literature and Spanish.

Throughout school I kept my bursary status fairly private. I told a few close friends early on, but I did not talk about it widely. I was aware that many people my age did not have the same understanding of finances that I had, partly because my mum had always been transparent with me. I worried that sharing it would only make me feel more different. By the end of school I was more open about it, but I believe most of my year group never knew unless they noticed for themselves.

Being a bursary student can feel isolating at times. You know you are in a minority, and those places are limited. Since leaving school, and especially since leaving university, that feeling has transformed into pride. I am proud that I earned a competitive place, and grateful for the opportunities the bursary gave me. It allowed me to thrive in an environment I could never have accessed otherwise.

I cannot overstate how life changing RGS was. The support from teachers, the relationships built, the opportunities I was given, and the encouragement to push myself have shaped every part of who I am. My peers challenged me academically, and for the first time I was surrounded by people who were brighter than me in different areas. That inspired me to improve and gave me a

standard to reach for. The teaching was exceptional, and the atmosphere motivated me constantly.

Today, I am a Recruitment Coordinator at tech consulting firm Neptune North, where I work with recruiters and hiring managers to review applications, arrange assessments, and guide candidates through the hiring process across a range of financial services roles. I joined the company in May 2025, and I enjoy the energy and pace of the environment. Before this, I worked in HR and administration in a much slower setting, which made me realise how much I value working alongside driven and ambitious people. That instinct was shaped at RGS, and it continues to guide the kind of workplaces I choose. I am keen to keep developing in the financial services sector and look forward to seeing how my career grows from here.

The bursary donors changed the course of my life. I would love to become a donor myself one day. The bursary fund is essential to the region. Without it, the demographic at RGS would be far less diverse, and many talented students would never have the chance to apply. Talent, attitude, ambition, and willingness to learn are not linked to social class or parental income. For students with drive and aspiration, RGS is the perfect environment, and it is vital that those opportunities remain accessible.

To any bursary student today, I would say this. Be proud of yourself. You earned your place in a competitive process, and donors have chosen to invest in your education. Let that empower you. Do not feel lesser because of your family's circumstances. I wish I could have told my younger self that. True confidence starts internally, and once you have it, it shows naturally.

There were times when I could not join in with every social plan, especially if they involved spending money. But I made the most of the opportunities available at school, and I found friends who understood and respected that. Those friendships made all the difference.

RGS unlocked something in me. It encouraged ambition, resilience, and the desire to be the best version of myself. Being surrounded by extraordinary people pushes you to reach your own potential. I do not believe any other school in the North East could have done that in the same way. The opportunity to aim that high has shaped who I am today.

LONDON DINNER

12 MARCH 2026



The ONA London Dinner on 12 March 2026 was another memorable occasion, bringing together 130 Old Novos from a wide range of generations, professions and backgrounds.

Held at One Great George Street, the evening was a lively demonstration of the enduring bonds forged at RGS Newcastle.

The evening's programme of Heads and Tails, the Treasure Tree and the raffle generated £2,400 for the RGS Bursary Campaign.

Guests were entertained by the keynote address from **Dr Sean Hudson MBE** (ON 80–87), whose engaging reflections about life as a medical doctor working in the field, along with an album of striking images, provided both humour and insight.

RGS is especially grateful to **Joel Dickinson** (ON 91–01), **Jonny Catto** (ON 96–03) and **Richard Milbank** (ON 73–83), whose generosity enabled subsidised tickets for ONs under the age of 25. Thanks are also due to those who chose to purchase a 'Pay It Forward' ticket or make a £10 contribution to the concession fund. Together, these initiatives ensure that ONA events remain welcoming and accessible to all generations of the RGS community.



Scan the QR code to book
your tickets for 2027!

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



NIGEL PATON (ON 66-76) BY SUSAN BECK, RGS DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL RELATIONS

I t is with the heaviest of hearts that I share the desperately sad news of the passing of Nigel Paton (ON 66-76), Chairman of the RGS Bursary Campaign between 2014 and 2020.

Nigel was a remarkable man whose connection to the School ran deep, and whose influence will be felt across our community for many years to come.

I want to speak personally, because from the moment I first met Nigel, his belief in the transformative power of bursaries was one of the reasons I was drawn to RGS. His sincerity, humility, and unwavering commitment to widening access were inspiring. He embodied the very best of what our School stands for, and he showed me, from our earliest conversations, what an RGS education can make possible.

Nigel was a baby boomer who attended RGS thanks to Direct Grant support. He often spoke with great honesty about how life-changing that opportunity was for him. He was a scholarship boy from Hexham, travelling every day by train, discovering card games and the awkward, amusing encounters of teenage life along the way. School was not always straightforward. He freely admitted that he really could not do maths or chemistry, and he often shared the story of the woodwork lesson with **Bill Elliott** that ended with a chisel and a hasty trip to the RVI. But he also talked with enormous gratitude about the extraordinary teachers who helped him find his confidence and his voice. **John Armstrong**, **Alan Mitchell** (Staff 63-95), and **Gerry Keating** were, in his words, brilliantly inspirational — guiding debate, encouraging independent thinking, and allowing students to discover ideas for themselves. Their influence stayed with him throughout his life.

He left RGS with the A-levels he needed to study law, and although he qualified as a lawyer, his professional journey surprised even him. He spent 25 years working at ICI (Imperial Chemical Industries plc), a fact he always recounted with humour, acknowledging that many who knew him found the idea delightfully improbable. He was a gifted orator, able to speak with clarity, wit, and real emotional intelligence — qualities that served him well throughout his career and far beyond it.

After retiring from ICI in 2011, Nigel embraced his long-standing love of creative writing. He returned to Northumbria

University to study for a master's degree in creative writing, a decision that brought him huge joy. His writing was elegant, perceptive, and filled with humanity. He contributed beautifully crafted pieces to *ONA Magazine*, and he wrote and produced *The Testing Point*, a film of which he was endlessly energised and deeply proud.

Nigel often reflected on the fact that the RGS of his time was a place where boys from many different backgrounds studied side by side. He valued that diversity. It shaped him intellectually, socially, and morally. It taught him that talent is everywhere, even if opportunity is not. That belief became the driving force behind his leadership of the Bursary Campaign. He knew from his own experience that the chance to attend RGS should never depend on a family's financial circumstances. He believed deeply that bursaries matter.

When Nigel stepped down as Chair, I wrote to him that he was a gentleman, and that one of the many reasons I believe so strongly in the Bursary Campaign is that RGS produces such outstanding human beings. If our bursary students — 500 to date — have hearts even a fraction the size of his, then we have done our job in nurturing good people. "Thank you," I told him, is not enough. It still is not enough.

Nigel was also a devoted parent, proud that his son **Alex Paton** (ON 03-10) had come through the School and found his own place here. He often said that while RGS is bigger now, and perhaps a little less eccentric, its ethos remains unchanged. He believed that wholeheartedly, and he dedicated years of his life to ensuring that young people from all backgrounds could share in that same ethos.

Nigel leaves behind his widow, Anne; his son, Alex; his daughter, Fiona; his son-in-law, Dan; and two much-loved grandchildren. Our hearts are with them at this deeply sad time.

Nigel will be profoundly missed. He was wise, warm, principled, and endlessly generous with his time and care — a loyal Old Novocastrian, a thoughtful mentor, a gifted storyteller, a tireless volunteer, and a friend to many.

May he rest in peace, knowing the difference he made and the many lives he helped to shape.



LORD BEECHAM

(ON 53-62)

BORN 17 NOVEMBER 1944,
DIED 9 APRIL 2026, AGE 81



Jeremy Beecham, later Lord Beecham of Benwell, was a significant figure in public life in Newcastle and the wider North East for more than half a century, combining national political influence with a sustained commitment to local communities. A tireless advocate for his city as leader of Newcastle City Council for 17 years and a councillor for the Benwell and Scotswood ward for 55 years, he devoted immense energy to public service, whether in Parliament, on committees, or through constituency work addressing the everyday concerns of residents.

Born in Birstall, Leicestershire, Jeremy was the second son of Dot and Laurence Beecham. His family later moved to Newcastle, settling in Jesmond, where he was educated at Akhurst Preparatory School and the Royal Grammar School. Academically gifted, he progressed rapidly through school before reading Law at Oxford, where he graduated with a First. Although encouraged to pursue an academic career, politics already held a stronger pull, evident in his early debating and organisational skills.

After university, Jeremy built a career that combined deep local engagement with national reach. He served on numerous committees and became widely respected for his policy expertise, political judgement and formidable work rate. Among his most consequential achievements was his role in developing the concessionary bus pass scheme, first piloted on Tyneside and later adopted nationally, improving daily life for millions of pensioners.

His contribution was recognised through honorary degrees, a knighthood and a life peerage, giving him a seat in the House of Lords. Despite these honours, Jeremy remained firmly rooted in Newcastle.

Jeremy and his late wife Brenda were a close partnership, deeply proud of their children, Sara and Richard.

JAMES MALCOLM DOUGLAS

CARMICHAEL (ON 44-52)

BORN 16 NOVEMBER 1933,
DIED 5 SEPTEMBER 2025, AGED 91



Malcolm, was born in Newcastle and spent his early years in Denton Burn before moving to Peterborough when his father was promoted. At four, his independent streak showed when he escaped nursery school with a friend, tricycling onto the A47 before being retrieved by the headmistress, a story he recalled vividly throughout life.

When war broke out in 1939, the family evacuated to Marple. Soon after his sixth birthday, Malcolm contracted diphtheria and spent three months in isolation at Hyde Park Hospital, an experience that taught him resilience and self-reliance. He later became head boy at RGS, excelling in chess, athletics, and music, and represented Northumberland in a chess competition in the Netherlands. A devoted Newcastle United supporter from age 15, he cherished the glory years of Jackie Milburn.

After A Levels, Malcolm studied geography at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and completed a teaching qualification. He served in the RAF from 1956 to 1958 in Germany, monitoring Soviet bombers. His career spanned roles at Joseph Lucas Ltd, Reed Paper Group, British Rail, and finally as Head of Public Transport Policy at the Greater London Council. He married Ann Jones in 1962; they raised three sons and later moved to Hexham.

Malcolm loved walking, politics, and conversation, and retained an extraordinary memory. He delighted in family life, welcomed three granddaughters, and never lost his quirks, like taking pork pies to the counter staff at his local bank. After Ann's passing in 2019, Malcolm remained his unique self and deeply loved by all.

NORMAN COVE

(ON 41-48)

BORN 2 MAY 1931,
DIED MAY 2024, AGED 94



Norman was born in Wallsend, the eldest son of Norman Harker Cove and Marguerite Shotton. The family lived first on Shields Road in Byker before moving to Heaton, and in 1940 relocated, without Norman Senior, to the Lake District, to a farm near Watermillock in the Lake District. Norman joined RGS in 1941.

In 1943, the family returned to Gosforth while Norman remained in Penrith, billeted with local families. He relished the freedom to explore the countryside, leading to various escapades, including arriving home on leave unkempt and carrying a mouse in his bag, much to his mother's alarm.

Following family tradition, he pursued dentistry, qualifying from the Sutherland Dental School in Newcastle in 1955. He then completed National Service in the RAF Dental Branch, serving at RAF Leeming and RAF Linton-on-Ouse, where his efficiency and commitment were noted by senior officers.

Returning to Wallsend, Norman joined the family practice. He married Elizabeth Adams in 1957, and, inspired while on honeymoon by seeing waterskiing, later designed and built a ski boat with his family. Water sports went on to become a major part of Norman's life, and he was also an accomplished artist.

Disillusioned with the NHS, a visit to the Bahamas prompted a permanent move in 1961 with Elizabeth and their children, Stuart and Sara. In Nassau, he built a successful dental practice, attracting patients seeking advanced treatment, and became active in the community.

A keen enthusiast of boating and deep-sea fishing, he helped organise tournaments and was a founder member of the Bahamas Air Sea Rescue Association.

ROGER MARK DOUGLASS

(ON 55-64)

BORN 27 APRIL 1946,
DIED JANUARY 2025, AGED 78



Roger Douglass was born in Forest Hall, the youngest of three siblings, and attended RGS in the 1950s.

In 1964, Roger achieved the Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award for an expedition by canoe from Low Hutton to York. His family still treasures his logbook, a work of meticulous detail and neatness. The award remains a point of admiration within the scouting community.

He studied at the London School of Economics, graduating in 1968, and later earned a Master's in Business Administration from the University of Birmingham. He enjoyed a long and successful career as a management consultant, working in both the public and private sectors in the UK and overseas. His first role was with BOX. Renowned for his attention to detail, organisation, and precision, his guiding motto was "Jamais arrière".

He also served as a business adviser to young people through the Prince's Trust, now the King's Trust.

Roger was immensely curious, witty, and full of humour. A man of passions, foremost among them football. Newcastle United was his team, and he continued attending matches almost until the very end of his life.

He chaired NUFC London for 20 years, a role he fulfilled with dedication, vision, and boldness. He loved real ale and visited most of the Wetherspoons pubs across the country.

Roger possessed a remarkable memory, recalling precise dates and days of events connected to football, travel, and family. He listened to *The Archers* every day.

A devoted father and loving grandfather, he will be deeply missed by his children, Natasha and Mark; his grandchildren, Daisy and Fred; and his wife, Claudia.

Claudia Forero

JOHN HEWITT

(STAFF 79-90)

BORN 27 SEPTEMBER 1931,
DIED 22 JULY 2025, AGED 93



John Hewitt joined the RGS Mathematics department in 1979, aged 48, drawn by the school's academic reputation and its strengths in music, sport, and outdoor pursuits. At RGS he learned the double bass to play in school orchestras and supported squash and sailing, as well as camping trips to Littondale.

His love of the outdoors began when his prep school was evacuated to Cumbria in 1940. At 13, he entered Dartmouth Royal Naval College, becoming Chief Cadet Captain before a naval career that took him to the Far East. At RGS he brought this experience to the CCF and served as Horsley housemaster.

Leaving the navy in 1960, John read Mathematics at Queens' College, Cambridge. He taught at Dulwich College and later became Head of Maths at Garforth Comprehensive before joining RGS.

In June 1983, he married Fiona during half-term, just before the successful NSPCC Fun Run he helped organise. He also represented the school as a trustee of the Rye Hill almshouses.

In retirement, John and Fiona settled in Hexham, where he enjoyed music, golf, and walking. He played double bass in the local orchestra, explored Northumberland, and remained an avid reader of history, biography, and polar exploration. In later years, he developed a deep love of poetry.

After John died, the words most frequently used in the condolence messages were 'kindness', 'modesty' and 'sense of fun'.

CORRECTION FROM ISSUE 115

DUNCAN YOUNG ALLAN (ON 82-90)

DIED 20 MARCH 2025

(Incorrectly called Duncan Allan Young)

GERARD FRANCIS KEATING

(STAFF 72-05)

BORN 23 JULY 1947,
DIED 30 DECEMBER 2025, AGED 78



Born to Irish parents, Gerry spent his early childhood in Derbyshire before moving to Cramlington when his father's mining engineering work took the family north.

The eldest of six children, he was educated at St Cuthbert's RC Grammar School. By his own account he only truly applied himself academically in Sixth Form, earning a place to read History at Downing College, Cambridge. History remained a lifelong passion, reflected in his heavily annotated and well-loved library.

At Cambridge, Gerry's commitment to sport flourished. Initially a decidedly modest runner, he eventually achieved remarkable endurance feats, including a marathon in 2 hours 38 minutes, the London to Brighton race, and a record 37 consecutive completions of the Morpeth to Newcastle road race. He also represented his college at table tennis.

After graduating, Gerry trained as a teacher and spent almost his entire career at RGS, teaching Politics and Latin from 1972 until his retirement in 2005. He inspired generations through his subject knowledge, high expectations, and distinctive teaching style. Beyond the classroom, he was a gifted athlete and dedicated coach, playing a central role in RGS's athletics and running successes at regional and national level.

A lifelong Liberal, Gerry served for 33 years as a councillor on Tyne and Wear County Council and Newcastle City Council. A tireless campaigner and astute strategist, he helped secure Liberal Democrat control of Newcastle in 2004 and was made an Honorary Alderman in 2012.

In retirement, Gerry pursued long-distance walking, cycling, and indoor rowing, winning national medals and setting world records. Gregarious, witty, and deeply loyal, he leaves his wife Lucy, daughters Joanna and Helen, two granddaughters, and five siblings.

DR ANDREW JOHN KILNER
(ON 76–83)

BORN 3 JUNE 1965,
DIED 22 NOVEMBER 2024, AGED 59



Andy finally succumbed to the brain tumour he had lived with for 13 years on 22 November 2024, surrounded by his wife, daughters, and recently arrived first granddaughter. For most of those 13 years he lived life to the full with his characteristic positivity and humour.

Andy was born in Gosforth and joined the RGS junior school in 1973. Andy thrived at RGS, gaining school colours in swimming and waterpolo, ascending the ranks in the CCF, performing the lead role in *Joseph and his Technicolour Dreamcoat*, and becoming Head Boy in 1982.

Andy met his soulmate Jo (who was at Central High) after a joint performance of *HMS Pinafore*. Thus began a lifelong relationship, initially long-distance, but followed by a year living in Perth, Australia before returning and getting married in 1993. Their daughters Becky, Katie and Ellie arrived over the course of the following few years.

Professionally, Andy became an anaesthetist, for most of his career at the RVI then the Freeman Hospital. He was made a consultant in 1997 and subsequently the lead clinician for intensive care. He became a fellow of the Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine in 2011 and was awarded the national Life outside work revolved around the family: helping with homework, annual cruises, and holidays with friends. There was still time for waterpolo – and attending Stiff Little Fingers concerts!

Following Andy's death, Jo received hundreds of tributes from family, friends and colleagues. We have set out some of these in the fuller version of this obituary which is available on the website.

Peter Kilner (ON 71–81)
Simon Kirk (ON 73–83)
Dai Richards (ON 73–83)

PETER MALONE
(ON 51–61)

BORN 15 FEBRUARY 1943,
DIED 14 MAY 2024, AGED 81



Peter Malone was born in Newcastle upon Tyne, where he and his brother, Donald, both attended the Royal Grammar School.

A school outdoor pursuits weekend in Scotland sparked his lifelong love of the countryside, where he spent much of his recreational time and would eventually retire.

After A-levels, Peter studied at the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies in Edinburgh, qualifying in 1966. He took up an assistant's position in Alnwick, Northumberland, with vets Bobbie Muir and Gerald Curry, and remained in the same practice until retiring in 1996. He became a partner in 1971 when the practice became Muir, Curry, Clark and Malone.

Peter met his future wife, Rosemary, at a college dance. She was training to be a nurse, and they married on 7 January 1967. His best man was Bill Howie, a fellow Northumbrian who became a respected equine vet in Australia.

Peter's veterinary focus was farm livestock, working during the early days of bovine TB and brucellosis eradication schemes. He was a skilled clinician who mentored many students and young vets. Rosemary supported him throughout his career, especially during out-of-hours duties.

Outside work, Peter enjoyed running and hillwalking, completing marathons and two full rounds of the Scottish Munros. He was a past chairman of Alnwick Round Table and later became a relief postman in Lochcarron, where he and Rosemary moved after retiring, becoming known locally as "Peter the postie".

Peter was a kind and inspiring man, fondly remembered by colleagues, clients, and friends. He is survived by Rosemary, their children Julie and Roger, and their families.

A full obituary by Peter's friends David Young, John MacFarlane and Peter Campbell can be read online.

JAMES BRIAN MCCAFFERTY
(ON 51–53)

BORN 23 APRIL 1934,
DIED 14 OCTOBER 2025, AGED 91



James Brian McCafferty was born on 23 April 1934 in South Shields to Ruby and John Lawrence. His father died less than a year later, and he was raised in a large Newcastle family, surrounded by many aunts and uncles.

He attended St Cuthbert's until 17, then secured a place at the Royal Grammar School after seeking the sciences he needed for medical school. In 1953, he began studying medicine at King's College, Newcastle, then part of Durham University.

At university, he captained the football team and later represented RAF stations as a tenacious, skilful goalscorer. He also played for the Fathers in the annual Fathers vs Boys cricket matches at his sons' school. In his youth, he earned spending money performing with his band 'The Multitones' in Newcastle clubs.

After graduating in 1958, he met Kay King while working as a junior doctor at the Royal Victoria Infirmary. They married in 1959. His RAF-sponsored training led to a posting in Cyprus, while Kay remained in Redcar awaiting the birth of their first child, Anne, in 1960. They went on to have six children.

RAF postings took him to Halton, Singapore, Germany, and Lincolnshire; the family eventually settled in Nocton. Leaving the RAF in the late 1970s, he became a consultant radiologist at Lincoln County Hospital and Louth.

He later took great joy in his eleven grandchildren, alongside holidays, the *Daily Telegraph* cryptic crossword, and lifelong support of Newcastle United.

BARRY SYRETT

(ON 54–61)

BORN 16 DECEMBER 1943,
DIED 29 OCTOBER 2025, AGED 81



At RGS Barry was a popular pupil and an energetic, easy-going, loyal and unflappable friend. He earned his PhD in Metallurgy from the University of Newcastle.

He emigrated to Canada, then to California in 1973, where he had a very successful career at Stanford Research Institute, followed by 30 years working for EPRI (Electric Power Research Institute), a non-profit organisation for applied research in electricity infrastructure. Barry managed multiple scientific projects for EPRI worldwide. His special field of expertise was monitoring water and chemical corrosion. He won many awards for his scientific research. He wrote a substantial book about this in 1993/4 while on sabbatical in England, and was widely appreciated as a speaker all over the world. Barry was also invited to be the keynote speaker at many USA and international conferences. He was a highly published author in many scientific journals and held 52 patents.

Barry's interests included science, music, limericks, books and theatre. He did a great deal of volunteer work, for example as a maths tutor at a nearby college, serving for many years on the board of NACE International, as a docent at Filoli (a famous historic house and garden), and fundraising for breast cancer research. He enjoyed running, cycling and mountain walking, and he loved Grindelwald, which he visited on a YHA holiday in 1963.

Barry married Joanne Lough just before they emigrated. They had a daughter, Nichola, but Joanne moved back to England in 1977 and the marriage ended. Later he met and married Christina Palm, and they were happily married for 36 years. Sadly, Barry developed Parkinson's disease about 20 years ago. He remained active on treatment initially, but the condition eventually worsened, greatly restricting his activity. He is survived by Christina and by Joanne.

HUGH WATSON

(ON 65–72)

BORN 30 MARCH 1954,
DIED 11 JANUARY 2025, AGED 70



Hugh Watson's love of nature was clear from the moment he could walk, roaming the fields behind his family home at Hartford Bridge towards Plessey Woods. He and his brothers, Nick and David (ON), enjoyed an idyllic country childhood.

Hugh began at Ackhurst Boys' Preparatory School, sailed through the 11+ and won a scholarship to RGS. There he found kindred spirits who shared his passion for wildlife, often bringing animal remains into school for examination. A brief stint in the Combined Cadet Force ended when he persuaded his father to pay £5 to buy him out. He kept the boots.

As a Sixth Former, Hugh and Piers Ibbotson (ON) won the Isaac Walton Travel Prize, claiming they wished to visit Atlantis on Santorini. In truth, Hugh sought praying mantises and trapdoor spiders. Headmaster **Bill Haden** introduced them as "a budding David Attenborough" and "a budding Olivier." He was right: Piers went into theatre; Hugh into zoology.

At Aberdeen University, Hugh paused his studies to hitchhike across Europe and the Sahara before joining an expedition to Ghana, where he survived three days lost in the bush. He later completed his degree, studied otters in Shetland and worked in Sarawak with VSO. He married Sima, raised two children and led the Northumberland Wildlife Trust before senior consultancy roles.

After Sima's death in 2004, Hugh found solace in research. Even after his MND diagnosis in 2018, he explored Northumberland on adapted bikes. He died peacefully at home, overlooking the woods that first inspired him.

ANTHONY HUNTER ARNOTT

(ON 44–47) DIED 27 AUGUST 2025

DAMIEN BENSON (ON 84–94)

DIED 2022

SIR GEOFFREY BINDMAN (ON 45–50)

DIED 4 NOVEMBER 2025

DAVID BINDMAN (ON 48–59)

DIED 22 AUGUST 2025

DR MICHAEL BRYSON (ON 51–59)

DIED 4 JANUARY 2026

DR PETER BURNETT (ON 39–49)

DIED 19 FEBRUARY 2025

GORDON CHESTER (ON 47–52)

UNKNOWN

CHRISTOPHER EDWARD 'KIT' COLEMAN

(ON 49–59) UNKNOWN

CHARLES GAVIN FAIRPO (ON 47–54)

DIED 28 FEBRUARY 2026

BEN JONES-LEE (ON 88–95)

DIED 30 APRIL 2026

DR ALAN MCNAUGHT (ON 51–59)

DIED 29 OCTOBER 2025

PHILIP MILNE (ON 44–56)

DIED 27 SEPTEMBER 2025

JOHN MORLEY (ON 75–82)

DIED 1 OCTOBER 2025

BRIAN OXLEY (ON 43–51)

DIED 31 MARCH 2026

NEIL PEACOCK (ON 42–48)

DIED 20 MARCH 2026

IAN RAMAGE (ON 38–48)

DIED 23 APRIL 2026

ERIC SHARFF (ON 38–50)

DIED 9 NOVEMBER 2025

PETER WALTER SELF (ON 41–48)

DIED 24 APRIL 2026

RICHARD SNELLING (ON 49–54)

UNKNOWN

JOHN KEITH SOWERBY (ON 44–52)

UNKNOWN

TIMOTHY STRAKER (ON 58–67)

DIED 22 MAY 2025

BERNARD HENRY THOMPSON

(ON 36–46) DIED 22 DECEMBER 2025

JOHN THOMPSON (ON 44–55)

DIED 2 FEBRUARY 2026

WENDY WILLIAMS (STAFF 76–99)

DIED 16 DECEMBER 2025

DEREK YOUNGER (ON 44–49)

DIED JANUARY 2026

ONA DIARY DATES



RGS
NEWCASTLE



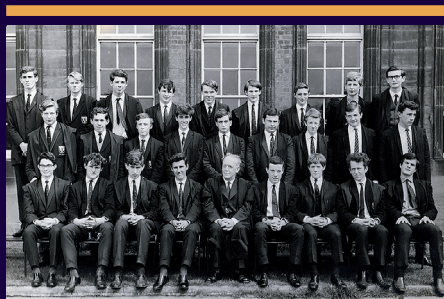
100TH ONA NEWCASTLE DINNER

Friday 9 October 2026

RGS, Eskdale Terrace, Jesmond

This year we will be celebrating reunions for the Classes of 2016 (10 year), 2006 (20 year), 1996 (30 year), 1986 (40 year), 1976 (50 year) and 1966 (60 year). 'The Class of...' relates to the year you left school. The reunions are being organised around our 100th annual Newcastle ONA Dinner. Not one, but two great reasons to come back to school!

Drinks reception in the main hall, followed by ONA dinner at RGS. The dress code is black tie – colours blazers encouraged!



RGS CLASS REUNIONS

Saturday 10 October 2026

RGS, Eskdale Terrace, Jesmond

Tea and coffee in the main hall from 10am, followed by a tour of the familiar old (along with plenty of new!) school buildings, a visit to the RGS Archive to see some treasures from your time here, and an opportunity to watch an RGS home sports fixture. Followed by midday light lunch at RGS.



ONA LONDON DINNER SAVE THE DATE!

Thursday 18 March 2027

One Great George Street, Westminster

You are warmly invited to join us at the RGS London Dinner for a fabulous opportunity to catch up with old friends and make new connections from the Old Novo community.

Keep an eye on Ticketsource for tickets being released. Coming soon!



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.