

OLD BIRKONIAN SOCIETY
114th Annual General Meeting over Zoom (due to Covid 19)
5th September 2020 at 12.00pm

Present: Chairman, President, Hon Secretary, Birkenhead School Headmaster, Birkenhead School Alumni and Futures Co-ordinator, and 16 Old Birkonian Society members

Apologies:

1. **President's Welcome** MB
 - a. The President, Mike Burrell (**MB**), welcomed everyone to the 114th Old Birkonian Society (**OBS**) AGM and acknowledged the work of the Council over the past 12 months. MB commented on the unique format of the AGM and noted those able to attend from overseas as a result – Alan Hanson from Australia and Dave Edmunds from Turkey. MB advised he was stepping down as President and was very glad to have been able to serve the OBS over the past 3 years. MB advised the OBS was in very capable hands with the current Council, and provided a warm welcome to the new President, Philippa McKeown (PM).

2. **Apologies for Absence** MB
 - a. Robert Lee had provided his apologies in advance of the meeting by email. No other apologies were provided.

3. **Minutes of AGM held on 7 September 2019** MB
 - a. Approved as an accurate account by William Nute, seconded by Roger Ewing.

4. **Matters Arising** MB
 - Financial contributions to the School
 - a. The Chairman, Will Roberts (**WR**) advised this issue had been amicably resolved and would advise further in his report.

5. **Chairman's Report** WR
 - a. WR provided an account of the previous 12 months.
 - b. WR noted the election of John Williams and Phil Adams to Council, replacing Tom Harrison and Jim McGrath who were thanked for their years of service.
 - c. A recap of the 2019 AGM and OBS weekend was provided, noting that the School won the hockey, netball and lacrosse matches and the OBS won the rugby.
 - d. The inaugural under-25s drinks event at the Courtyard in Oxtun village was a tremendous success, attended by around 45 people. The Hoblyn Cup was won by Zach Smith at Caldly

Golf Club. The OBS Rugby Club annual fixture against Birkenhead Park took place on 28 December with the hosts beating the OBS in an entertaining game.

- e. In November, the London Dinner was held on-board HMS Belfast, attended by 70 OBS members and their partners. The biannual Liverpool lunches and the Bazaar also continued to thrive in 2019.
- f. Covid 19 led to the cancellation of all OBS events for 2020.
- g. The OBS Council made history in May by holding the first ever virtual meeting over Zoom. Part of the meeting was given over to a discussion with the Headmaster and three School governors as to how the OBS can use the funds held in the Endowment Fund to provide Access Scholarships going forward. WR advised that details are being finalised for Sixth Form Access Scholarships partly funded by the OBS. WR advised he had enjoyed working with the Headmaster and governors to ensure the OBS is able to help individuals join the School community.
- h. WR noted that there is a sense of community spirit at Birkenhead School and within the alumni network, and hoped this has been strengthened further in the face of adversity. WR noted that, as part of this community spirit, the School continues to work closely with local charities such as Wirral Foodbank, the Hive and Claire House, and called on OBS members to consider helping. He recommended they contact the School for further details. WR commented there is a lot OBS members can do to help others who are not in a less fortunate position.
- i. WR encouraged OBS members at the start of their careers to reach out to the OBS for advice; those established in their careers to provide support if asked; and those in difficulty to reconnect with their contacts. WR explained OBS members can assist current pupils and younger alumni through the Futures Department headed by Carol Keegan (**CK**). WR advised that now more than ever OBS members need to work together as a community and harness the spirit and energy that WR knows exists within the OBS and Birkenhead School.
- j. WR congratulated the Headmaster Paul Vicars (**PV**), Mr FitzHerbert and all School staff for the support they have provided to current pupils during these extraordinary times, and in particular for putting arrangements in place that allowed some year groups to return to School for the second half of the Summer Term. WR's daughter started Year One this week and WR advised the level of communication from the School has been first class.
- k. WR expressed his sincere thanks to his fellow Council members, the Society's outgoing President Mike Burrell, the Archives department and other voluntary leaders of OBS activities. WR also thanked CK and PV who have been hugely supportive of what the OBS are trying to achieve. Both are working with the OBS to ensure that it benefits all OBS members as well as current pupils.

6. Treasurer's Report

TMJ

- To receive & adopt the OBS Accounts for y/e 31st December 2019
- To appoint an Independent Examiner (DSG)

- a. The Treasurer, Trevor Mathew-Jones (**TMJ**) provided his report. He advised the Accounts had not yet been audited due to Covid 19. They are, however, complete, and approval will be sought subject to audit.
- b. The issues regarding School payments has been resolved, and TMJ thanked PV and CK for their efforts in both resolving this and in implementing a revised system to improve the payment process going forwards.
- c. The In Focus payment this year is higher than last year and this will continue.
- d. The OBS website costs are much higher this year due to the work undertaken in redesigning it. The costs should return to more normal levels in future.
- e. The OBS will continue to provide payment for entry into the Grafton Morris trophy and the team's kit has also been paid for by the OBS.
- f. There will be more events for younger members for which the OBS will continue to provide financial assistance.
- g. There has been a £5,000 increase in the value of the OBS investments and a £17,000 surplus this year. The OBS has over £100,000 in assets.
- h. The Endowment Fund realised a £25,000 surplus this year due to School contributions being lower than in previous years. In the past 12 months the only financial contribution has been for the new font in the chapel. The value of the Funds' investments has increased by £180,000. In total there is a net surplus of £200,000 and the Fund is worth £1.4m.
- i. The Prize Fund produced a very similar result to last year's surplus. The Neil Gracey Fund is coming to an end as funds dwindle. It was set up some 10 years ago to provide financial assistance to pupils. The OBS will continue to support such pupils through the Endowment Fund. The value of the 2019 Prize Fund is £230,000.
- j. TMJ proposed the adoption of the accounts, subject to audit, and the continued use of DSG as independent examiner. Roger Ewing seconded both proposals. Both proposals were agreed.

7. Honorary OBs

MB

The following former members of staff have been invited to become honorary OBs in light of their outstanding contribution to Birkenhead School over many years of service:

- Ian Allister (already an existing OB)
- Dave Edmunds (already an existing honorary OB but his contribution has not yet been formerly recognised by the OBS)
- Vanessa Belchier
- Kelvin Britton
- Stephen Gill
- Mike Hayward
- Sue Jarvis
- Rick Lytollis
- Martin Roden

- a. WR advised that those listed have devoted a lot of their careers to the School, and offered his thanks to CK for her assistance in compiling the list.
- b. Alan Hanson and Dave Edmunds advised there were other former teachers who appeared to merit inclusion in the OBS in view of their contribution to the School, and the selection process was queried. WR advised that the selection process was ad-hoc and that the points raised were valid. WR commented that the OBS would review the selection process at a future meeting.
- c. Alan Hanson passed on his best wishes to PM in her new role as President and wished her the best of success.

8. Election of Officers and Members of Council

MB

The following have been proposed and seconded: -

- Chairman
Will Roberts
- Secretary
Andrew Maxwell
- Treasurer
Trevor Mathew-Jones
- Members
Daniel Ellis
Jennifer Taylor
Josh Stirrett
Kirsten Stewart
Phil Adams
John Williams
- Proposed new President
Philippa McKeown

- a. All Council members and President were approved unanimously by those attending.
- b. PM was invited to say a few words by MB who explained that PM has a very special relationship with the School. PM was part of the first cohort of girls who joined the School in 2000, is married to an Old Birkonian, her brother, father and uncles are all Old Birkonians, and her grandmother taught MB in the Prep.
- c. PM thanked MB for the welcome and also on behalf of the OBS for his time and contribution as President.
- d. PM advised she was delighted to take on the role of President and expressed her thanks at being elected. PM advised her heritage provided a unique link to both the past and the future which PM believed would assist her in her role going forwards.
- e. PM praised the Headmaster and the School generally for their commendable efforts throughout the extremely challenging circumstances presented by Covid 19.
- f. PM invited the Headmaster to provide his report.

9. Headmaster's Report

Paul Vicars

- a. Paul Vicars (**PV**) advised that the School did not close and had between 40-50 children of key workers throughout lockdown. Nursery and Reception re-opened as soon as possible, and by the end of the Summer Term there were 250 pupils on site.
- b. Throughout the Summer Term remote education was provided as fully as possible, and PV expressed his pride in both the teachers and pupils in how they all coped. PV also praised the pupils' families in how they adjusted.
- c. The furlough scheme was utilised for 50 support staff who were brought back to work as soon as possible.
- d. Over the summer holidays Carl Williams and the Estates Team did an excellent job in making the site safe for over 900 pupils to return in September.
- e. This year's exam results were very tough for pupils who PV advised handled the experience exceptionally well. Ofsted and the Government eventually decided to endorse the Centre Assessed grades. PV vouched for the integrity of these grades. PV advised that teachers submitted each pupil's grades which were then assessed by SLT who also checked to ensure the grades were consistent with the cohort and the School's history.
- f. 80% pupils were accepted by their first choice Universities. Four pupils achieved all A*. One pupil took up an apprenticeship with the BBC after a very arduous process and having previously been accepted onto TUI's apprenticeship scheme prior to the company's collapse.
- g. The GCSE grades were also Centre Assessed. 20 pupils achieved all grades between 7-9, and one pupil achieved all 9s.
- h. The School is doing its best to work with government guidance in how the School operates.
- i. The School has had an increased interest from parents with pupils at other schools who have become concerned about state education in view of the relative provision of education provided by state schools compared with that provided by Birkenhead during lockdown.
- j. The School now has waiting lists for Years 7-9. In 6th Form the School accepted 8 new students last year and another 9 this year which is very positive. In that regard the Access Scholarships have resulted in 6 pupils attending 6th Form this year. The School has also seen an increase in pupils due to the collapse of Kingsmead School, which unlike Birkenhead, did not have an academic threshold for pupils to attend.
- k. The School has changed its Mission Statement to make it more concise and relevant. 'To be recognised as the leading School in the North West that best inspires each and every student.'
- l. Looking ahead this year, the Library is in need of a refurbishment and measures have been put in place to separate year groups where possible and to adhere to church rules.
- m. PM thanked PV for his report and concluded the meeting at 13:10.