



Christmas 2000

## Headmaster's NEWSLETTER

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It is likely that somewhere on your son (and I am writing to parents of boys here, I hope it's not also true of the girls) you will have found quite a lot of mud last week. This has been an outstanding term for mud and mess. I am afraid that emptying trunks and suitcases as you welcomed your offspring home may not have been the happiest (or freshest!) moment of the holiday. Nevertheless I hope you and they feel that it was worthwhile. Mr Lewis and his team of rugby coaches have emerged from a very demanding season with some good wins, an unbeaten Under Fourteen side and a despairing laundry. Washing machines at home will have had a busy few days at the beginning of the holidays I'm afraid.

It has been good to see almost all the rugby teams competing strongly in their age groups. The exception has perhaps been the Under Fifteens where we are short on numbers and this has made it difficult to match our opponents for size and strength. The Under Fourteen team merit the "Team of the Term" award but there have been outstanding displays elsewhere. William Paddison led the Firsts by example and gained representative honours for Oxfordshire. James Larkin, Johnny Halsall, James Blanchard and Chris Mills achieved the same at Under 16 level. Squash has undergone an encouraging revival under the direction of our new Head of Geography, Mr. John Blunsden and began a new fixture list with a victory over the Eton College Under Sixteen team.

Lest Shiplake should be seen merely as a sporty school the same James Larkin mentioned above, spruced and polished, gave one of the most mature and confident performances by a schoolboy that I have ever heard when he sang the solo in the Vivaldi 'Gloria' accompanied superbly by Jenni Desmond on the oboe, at the Christmas Concert. We lost some outstanding musicians last summer but the new crop are coming through very well to take their places. The Concert, followed by the splendid performance of *The Hypochondriac*, a brave choice but carried off superbly by a strong cast under the direction of Mr Lindsay McDonald, proved that Shiplake pupils can excel on the stage just as well as on the river or the sports field.

It seems we have also led the way in Oxfordshire with our Lower Sixth Key Skills courses. Those teachers and pupils who have so successfully introduced the new Sixth Form curriculum are further heroes of this very long term. In all subjects I have been impressed with the willingness of colleagues to adapt yet again to new government initiatives and it has been particularly good to see the Key Skills element of the new AS courses being taught so confidently by Miss Suzie Ellis and our Chaplain Robert Prance. I am told that we are some way ahead of many of the so-called more "academic" schools in Oxfordshire in this respect.

Another highlight of the term was the memorable visit of Ben Hunt-Davis. It is no coincidence that, following a series of tests and trials this term, 1st VIII members Ed Greig and Jack Gregory have been selected to attend a training camp in Seville for potential Great Britain junior rowing team competitors. Only ten boys nationwide have been invited to the sweep oar section of the camp. Shiplake are privileged to have two boys in this group. This should improve their chances for Great Britain selection next summer and certainly enhance the prospects of the Shiplake 1st VIII in the coming season, provided of course our local lake returns to being a river!

There have been no fewer than seven dances or socials at girls' schools that our boys have been able to enjoy this term. Thanks are due to the Deputy Headmaster and those staff who give up their Saturday evenings to accompany the groups which have established a reputation on the girl's school circuit for good behaviour – not to mention the ability to enjoy themselves!

It is so good to be able to commend our pupils for the way that, by and large, they behave themselves in public. Two weeks before the end of term I spoke in Assembly about how well the term seemed to be going and expressed the hope that it would continue in the same way. We almost made it but I have to report a very sad ending as a number of boys let themselves down very badly indeed. Solvent abuse occurred on site and two boys were suspended. Then it became apparent that cannabis had been brought back to the school and there was another immediate suspension. The subsequent investigation resulted in the admission by a further seven boys that, if tested, they would almost certainly prove positive having indulged in drug taking at recent weekend parties or with friends at home. I remain very concerned about the prevalence of smoking and the use of drugs by Shiplake pupils away from the College.

I do not think our pupils are very different from those in other schools but we cannot ignore our responsibilities in this matter and I shall not hesitate to conduct tests next term and reserve the right to suspend anyone who proves to be under the influence even if they were far from Shiplake when they indulged. This may be an unfestive message but it is an important one as the Christmas party season begins. May I ask parents to be much more alert to the dangers and to be aware of how their offspring are behaving when at home so that we can work together to educate our young people about the dangers inherent in soft or hard drugs. (I am afraid that I cannot believe parents were entirely ignorant of what must have been going on beneath their very eyes. The notices below indicate just how seriously we are taking the problem.)

## **NOTICES AND DATES FOR THE DIARY**

### **YEAR 10 DISCUSSION EVENING**

As already advertised there will be an extra Year 10 parents evening on Thursday March 8th starting at 7:30 pm. This will be a non-academic evening and the discussion will revolve around areas connected with teenage relationships and with the challenges of growing up amidst pressures concerning sex, drugs, alcohol, etc.

At 7:30 pm there will be a talk in the Tithe Barn led by the Chaplain to Sherborne School followed by comments and questions. At about 8:15 pm parents will return to Houses to talk amongst themselves about the issues raised over some light refreshment. We shall aim to finish by 9:30 pm.

Year 10 parents are asked to note this date and make it a priority. In the next newsletter we will send a slip asking how many will be attending.

### **SIXTH FORM LECTURES**

Starting next term there will be two major Sixth Form lectures each term on pertinent issues. All pupils will be expected to attend both lectures and parents are also most welcome. Please let the school office know in advance if you wish to come. Seats will be limited. Next term the lectures will be:

Tuesday January 16th Dr John Rae, former Headmaster of Westminster School: *Alcohol, our favourite drug*

Wednesday March 7th Baroness Peta Buscombe, Deputy Chair Conservative Party: *The Point of Politics*

### **HALF TERMS, EXEATS AND HOLIDAYS**

Parents wishing to take their sons or daughters out of school early should seek the permission of the Headmaster and not the Housemaster. All matters of transport and taxis should then be arranged through the School Office and NOT through housemasters.

### **TOUCH TYPING**

We are hoping to provide courses in touch typing for pupils. Those interested should attend a meeting arranged by Mr Lowndes at the start of next term, to confirm numbers, days and times. There will be a charge for the course and parents should be aware that any training in skills like this will require self-discipline and practice in between lessons if the full value is to be gained. You should think carefully therefore before putting someone in who might not have the time or inclination to make a success of it.

### **BARBADOS CRICKET TOUR – 31ST MARCH TO 11TH APRIL**

There is one spare place on the cricket tour for a boy in Year 9, 10 or 11. If your son is interested in this place please contact Mr Hunt at the College immediately. The tour costs £1,020 and will include coaching, matches, island excursions and watersports. The balance must be paid by January 8th 2001.

### **HOCKEY**

From January 2001 it will be compulsory for all members of the hockey club to own and wear SHIN PADS - those which have ankle protectors are particularly recommended. The wearing of a mouthguard is also strongly advised.

### **BLAZERS**

Please remember that we expect all pupils in year 11 and below to return to school in the New Year with an official school blazer obtainable only from the College shop. May I respectfully remind parents that advance warning of this was given 18 months ago and there have been regular reminders. Mr Emerson, the Shop Manager, will be available by appointment during the holidays should parents wish to contact him. His telephone numbers are listed on the clothes list.

I very much hope that all Shiplake families have a wonderful Christmas and I look forward to seeing everyone again in the New Year.

HAPPY CHRISTMAS FROM NICK AND ANNABEL BEVAN