



# The QM Observer

## TASTE OF THE WORLD

Taste of the World was a lively celebration of the diversity present within the school community. This event tied together diverse cultures, allowing teachers, students, and parents to get involved and enjoy an amazing night. The event was hosted in the main school hall on Saturday 2nd December, and had a great turnout, with families coming to enjoy a special night out, students coming to be more involved within their school, and teachers immersed in an event that is dear to the school. There was an excellent series of activities for people to partake in, ranging from food stalls to an open mic competition that allowed all attendees to enjoy a vibrant showcase of skills and expertise with bands coming in to play. The BBX bhangra group, a magician and the school Indian drum ensemble were a few of the notable performances. It is an event that is new to the school but is quickly becoming something that is closely treasured by the school community and is hopefully something that continues for a long time, as a reminder of what the school stands for.



The event itself was organised by students who volunteered over the Saturday evening, who helped engage with the massive turnout of people, and helped with setting up different stalls that involved games such as 'play your cards right,' 'ball in a bucket,' henna painting and the food stalls. Following a conversation with one of the sixth form volunteers, he said he volunteered as a manner of giving back to the school community and due to his strong, *'emotional connection to the school.'* The open mic competition was the most memorable event of the night with an admirable display of talent, with bands coming to perform and special tombola prizes up for grabs.

Taste of the World is also significant because it offers something that can't be found in other schools – a powerful sense of school spirit and community. The powerful sense of community dominated the atmosphere on that Saturday simply because everyone was so readily involved, showing respect and an appreciation of diverse cultures. A Year 12 student attended the event for the first time with their family as *'a fun family night out.'* The student was truly amazed by the experience, because their prior school hadn't held any events like this – reflecting how the school goes beyond what is necessary to maintain an environment that ensures both students and parents feel secure. It just further demonstrates how events such as Taste of the World elicit a sense of school spirit, comfort and joy within the community.



ASHIMA LUTHRA

## CHANGE YOUR MIND



Originally a one-off project, created for a competition, Change Your Mind is now a national (and international) success! Change Your Mind started in 2016 with four Year 12 pupils who wanted to create a project based around mental health, and won the runners up prize for the 17-19 age category of the Speaker's School Council Awards. Instead of resting on their laurels, the team decided to expand the project to become an extra-curricular option, with workshops being delivered to 11 primary schools the following academic year. It then became a block E option, with certificates and badges awarded at the end of the year for exceptional contributions.

Mrs McPhee has been running CYM for eight years and this year is a significant one. The 2023 cohort is the largest yet; there are 60 Year 12 pupils taking part, a notable increase from 48 last year. The programme now boasts a selection of guest speakers for enrichment sessions teaching safeguarding, financial wellbeing, resilience and many more skills which can be implemented not just into workshops but also students' personal lives.

The programme has far exceeded the initial expectations of everyone involved, having featured on a podcast and on BBC Radio WM, being adopted in schools in Paris and Saudi Arabia, mentioned in the House of Commons and becoming the "second most popular E-block option" at QMGS. Workshops have been delivered to over 1000 primary schools, and I'm certain there are many more to come.

AVINASH KAUR



# TRIPS AND VISITS: VIETNAM EXPEDITION



During this year's summer holidays, two groups of 15 students embarked on a month-long expedition to South-East Asia, visiting the countries of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The trip was partly designed to develop planning and leadership skills, therefore the entire trip was student-led and largely student funded. Transport, food and accommodation all had to be organised by those taking part, so the success of the expedition as a whole depended on them. One student on the trip expressed the importance of the role that students had, pointing out that if they didn't plan correctly the group would have nowhere to sleep at night.

Throughout the expedition, the pupils immersed themselves in the cultures which surrounded them, trying local cuisines such as Vietnamese barbecue and cockroaches in Laos. Furthermore, the teams took part in unique activities such as trying dressmaking in

a village outside of Hanoi, which were activities that couldn't be found in many other places around the world.

An important part of the trip was the involvement that the students had with a range of organisations, visiting and learning about many including 'ChildSafe' and 'Free the Bears.' Project work was carried out at the Bear Wildlife Centre, where many tasks were undertaken such as cleaning cages, preparing food and carrying logs. As a result, much was learnt about the important work that the group carries out in Cambodia.

Needless to say, the unpredictable nature of a self-led trip led to many challenging situations, such as working in paddy fields and spending long hours travelling (including an 11-hour night bus), which students claim tested them massively and changed them as people. These moments were extremely beneficial to the students, and the lessons learnt will undoubtedly be carried by them into later life, especially since they are in their teenage years and developing into adults. One of the main things that kept everyone going through the ups and downs of the overall experience was the company of each other which they all shared. One team took part in their own 'Secret Santa' (in the summer) which highlighted the bonds that they had grown throughout the expedition, and the memories which they had all shared.

Overall, for the students that took part, the expedition was an unforgettable experience which was challenging, fun and extremely rewarding. With this in mind, a new group of students will be very excited to take part in a similar experience during the 2025 Malawi Expedition.

**JOE WATERMAN**



## COMMUNITY NEWS SPEECH DAY

The end of this year's first half term on the 26th of October brought us to our traditional Speech Day celebration, a day which blends our 469 year past with our vibrant and forward-looking present.

The morning was very much focused on the traditions of the school, as the school community attended a service of thanksgiving at St. Matthew's Church. Even though this was a Christian service which reflected the history of our school, the readings and speeches were very much focused on being relevant to our diverse, modern reality. In particular, our guest speaker, Rev. Emily Reynolds, the vicar of St. John's Church in Pleck, delivered a really pertinent sermon on the virtue of persevering even when you make mistakes. The speeches, which were also given by the Headmaster, Captain of School and the Rector of St. Matthew's, Rev. Jim Trood, were interspersed with rousing renditions of traditional hymns like 'Bread of Heaven' and 'Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven', and of course the school song, an annual favourite which was sung with great gusto. In many ways, this year's Speech Day was a testament to the Headmaster's commitment to '*recognise and respect our school's history*'.

The afternoon took a somewhat different shape, with old Marian Jonathan Ball OBE being invited to deliver a seminar to the upper school on his experiences after leaving the school in 1981 to read Modern History at Brasenose College, Oxford. His unique interactive seminar, focusing on ethical dilemmas which he faced in his 12 years of service as an army chaplain, was thoroughly enjoyed by all attendees.

The centrepiece of the day for many was the celebration evening, in recognition of what not only we as individuals have achieved, but what we as a community have achieved, through the Change Your Mind programme, house competitions like the annual foodbank challenge, and raising almost £700,000 for the FutureSport project. This underlines our commitment to being generous in approach. Truly, Speech Day really shows just how much we have to be proud of, not only as an academic institution but outside the classroom, and as the orchestra played their final songs as we left the hall, it was hard not to feel both pride in what we have done, and hope that we can match it again this coming year.

**WILLIAM STEVENS**

## LANZAROTE DIVING TRIP 2023

Over the October half term, students from Y11-13 went on the school's second consecutive diving trip to the island of volcanic beauty- Lanzarote. Unlike the previous year's trip, however, this year consisted of a mix of first-time divers working towards their PADI Open Water qualification, and experienced divers from last year's trip eager to further develop their skills through achieving the Advanced Open Water qualification.

Leaving the day after Speech Day, the students looked forward to an action-packed week promising two dives a day and the new experience of diving from a boat. Starting from day one, we found ourselves vacillating between the extreme heat on land, and satisfying chill of the ocean as we developed new competencies such as underwater navigation, drift diving and deep diving- this skill allowed us to dive to depths as great as 30m. (For reference, Buckingham Palace has a height of 26m!). Further, students marvelled at the dramatic rock formations as they plunged further down into the dive site, whilst encountering resting stingrays and shoals of barracuda. Arguably the most exciting dive was the dive to Playa Flamingo, a brand-new dive site rich in biodiversity. Students encountered octopuses hiding in rocks, butterfly rays disguised under the sand, and angel sharks- an endangered species and pride of the Canary Island's ecosystem. The wreck dive was also a highlight, watching the huge ship emerge from the water to be one of the most exciting sights ever.

Still, dives were not free from issues, for instance when a boat disembark had to be aborted due to choppy waters at port, or a fin was lost only ten minutes into another dive. Regardless, these issues helped the students develop important skills such as problem-solving and maintaining their calm since scuba diving, though proven to be safe, does hold an element of risk. Regardless, the trip was an immense success with all 20 students being certified by the end. On behalf of all who went, I would like to extend my thanks to Mr Rendu and Mrs Mehta for organising and accompanying us on the trip.

**HARRY SHARMA**





## CLUBS AND SOCIETIES ArtFest

In 1503, the iconic Mona Lisa emerged from the talented hands of the renowned Da Vinci. Later on in 1889, Van Gogh illustrated to the world the mesmerising Starry Night. In 1937, Pablo Picasso crafted the powerful Guernica. Now, in 2023, the vibrant walls of Queen Mary's Grammar School produced these wonderful mosaics.

ArtFest is a celebration of creativity and self-expression which debuted last summer. It was a testament to the importance of nurturing artistic endeavours within our community. The mosaic of talent displayed by our fellow peers showcased the boundless beauty that arises when imagination meets skill. The atmosphere on the 8th of July, 2023, was nothing short of tranquil. Music echoed through the air as our choir, with their harmonious voices, filled the school with melody. Our talented actors took the stage, delivering a drama piece that left the audience in awe. Art has various forms which was on full display, captivating the senses of all who attended. From fair rides to games, raffles, and even finger painting, ArtFest provided a diverse range of activities, ensuring engagement and delight for everyone present.

As we eagerly anticipate the return of ArtFest in the upcoming academic year of 2024, we promise an even greater event. Mrs. Gray shares in our excitement, anticipating the vibrant tapestry of the ArtFest community unfolding with each passing day. We invite you all to join us once again, as we look forward to another unforgettable celebration of creativity and artistic expression. See you at ArtFest!



**SATVEER SINGH**

## QMGS ALUMNI DINNER

Each year, the school hosts the Old Boys' Dinner, a gathering of QM alumni to celebrate the school's storied history and strong community spirit- a culmination of the school's centuries long tradition of celebrating success and remembering our roots. The event is certainly unconventional compared to a modern dinner, with guests enjoying a four-course meal interspersed by grace in Latin, various speeches and toasts, and a talk from a selected alumnus.

As a member of this year's PSLT, I was fortunate enough to be invited and it was certainly a night I will remember. Not only was it a fantastic time

to bond with the other PSLT members, but demonstrated the immense pride we should have in our school not just as an educational institution, but a pillar of the Walsall community; the oldest alumni present was at the school during the 1940s. As Mr Langton called upon us to toast headmasters past, I could not help but be filled with wonderment at the history of the school and of the importance of connecting with the past. The event was also a wonderful opportunity to speak to recent leavers about their experiences at university and in their early careers. I look forward to when I will have the chance to attend again.

**THOMAS SHARMA**

## REMEMBRANCE PARADE AND R.A.S.T.



Remembrance Parade happens every year, on Remembrance Sunday. This year it was November 12<sup>th</sup>, and the Queen Mary's Grammar School CCF Contingent assembled in Walsall Town Centre, as it does every year. The Banner Party consisted of the Banner Bearer, a Banner Caller, and escorts. This year, Army Cadets took the role of Banner Bearer and Banner Caller for this Remembrance Sunday, and two other Army Cadets were designated escorts, while three RAF Cadets were also designated escorts.

R.A.S.T., standing for Regional Air Squadron Trophy, is an annual competition that takes place a week after Remembrance Day. This competition is for the best of the RAF sections within the West of the UK, with 15 schools in total attending from the West and from Wales. Typically a squad of 12 (+3 Reserves) are led by their Cadet Warrant Officer and the 2ic Flight Sergeant. The squad are marked together on Drill, Uniform, General Knowledge of the RAF, and a command task. The squad are then also split into sub-teams, with those on the main squad being divided for three specialist options being, First Aid, Air Recognition and Shooting.

This year, the squad was taken to RAF Cosford and the competition began at half past nine in the morning, and finished with the results at half past five in the evening. Overall, the QMGS RAST Squad 2023 performed well, scoring 5<sup>th</sup> overall (an improvement on last years 9<sup>th</sup>), and two members of the Squad achieved full marks on Air Recognition. RAST is a memorable day for all those who participated, and QMGS CCF are looking to win next year.

**JACK MARTIN**

## SCHOOL COUNCIL

The school council is a student-run organisation which aims to promote student voice. We host meetings every Week Two Wednesday lunchtime at 13:20 in the annexe and welcome all members of staff and all students, regardless of if you are a member of the school council.

We often discuss topics in which you, as the student body, have issues, problems or suggestions with. These discussions are passed to and from forms with their solutions. During most meetings, the headmaster is present, and so these queries are heard and noted by him as well.

Some topics which we discuss include behavioural issues and

uniform policies, about the physical school property and the canteen.

Once every half term, we meet with the canteen staff to discuss what the school body wishes to change or credit positively. A particular type of meeting we hold are student – staff meetings, in which members of staff prepare a set of questions beforehand for form representatives. They are then expected to discuss this with their form group and collect their responses regarding a certain topic.

If you have any questions, please visit our surgery room in H4 which is open on a week 1 Wednesday lunchtime or email the chairman, Ayrik Jahedi or the teacher in charge- Ms McPhee.

**AYRIK JAHEDI**



## SPORTS NEWS THE SPORTS UPDATE



The Autumn Term saw many sporting events, such as major rugby matches against other schools in Walsall, inter-house sporting competitions such as house netball and a basketball shooting competition as well as many other great sporting accomplishments achieved by the members of our school.

In terms of rugby, the senior team have experienced many victories, such as a massive recent victory winning 24-12 over King Edwards Five Ways on the 6th of December. The Senior Team was not the only team with major accomplishments as the Under 15s rugby team also won 15-0 in a game against Lawrence Sheriff School on the 29th of November.

The first ever Wednesday Night Lights took place, where QMGS went against local rivals Bishop Vesey in an extremely competitive match on the 22nd of November. Both teams played very well but, in the end, the Veseyans were victorious and did win 38-17. A member of the Senior Rugby Team, Virain Spolia, has said that the game against Bishop Vesey was 'the most professional game the majority of us have played in our school career. There was a great atmosphere throughout the night, and it clearly shows how the QMGS sports department are taking huge steps forward for its players.' Aragon house came on top in Year 7 House rugby, securing a well-deserved win against the other houses, followed by Petypher coming in 2nd place and Darby coming in 3rd. Petypher also experienced another massive achievement of winning Senior House Rugby with the team winning 12-10 against Aragon as well as 10-7 against Gryphon.

The QMGS Hockey Team have also represented our school well, with a triumphant victory against Loughborough Grammar on the 10th of October, winning 4-1 with Alfie Patel scoring 2 goals, Floyd Cheetham scoring 1 goal, and Jeevan Sandhu scoring 1 goal. Pleasingly, Queen Mary's Grammar School has been named in the 2024 'Top 100 senior schools' in 'The Cricketer Magazine' for the 6th year in a row. This is an immense achievement for both the staff and the student's who support the cricket team as it highlights the achievements of the sporting department at QMGS.

Finally, inter-house netball took place this term amongst the sixth form, involving many netball matches of teams from each house playing against each other in what can only be described as a very friendly but competitive competition. Darby House won overall, and Petypher House came second. The increased participation within girls' games was very positive to see and shows the wider inclusivity of the school as a comment from netballer Juriel Owusu states that 'Within our school, there are two prestigious netball teams that feel like a family and are a great social community to be a part of, and it is such a privilege to be a part of. I am very grateful for the sporting facilities and opportunities that our school provides.'

**ONISHA MADHAR**

## THE SPORTS LEGACY PROJECT

On the 25th of October, David Moorcroft and Katharine Merry visited the school to find out more about the great Sports Legacy Project. The Deputy Lord Lieutenants of the West Midlands were incredibly supportive of the project, especially in the project's benefits to both the students and the local community. In fact, the project is already attracting attention from Sports England and the Active Black Country. Staffordshire Cricket have also show strong interest, alongside the English Cricket Board.

One month earlier (on the 23rd of September) QMGS took part in the Walsall Arboretum 5k Parkrun. 25 volunteers took part, helping to promote the Future Sport Project from our own stall, set up by Mr. Langton and the QMA. Mrs. Walker said that "staff, students and parents came ridiculously early on a cold Saturday morning. Fortunately warm samosas were given out by the generous QMA parents! There was also lots of enthusiastic cheering, especially essential on the grueling last lap." The Parkrun has clearly served to raise the profile of the Sports Legacy Project.

John Waters, the Campaign's Chairman and an Old Marian, also spoke at the Alumni Dinner later that month, successfully promoting the communal project. Currently, the Sports Legacy Project has amassed £650,000 in pledges: over one quarter of the total cost of the project! Evidently, the Sports Legacy Project has already brought lots of excitement, and is ready to boost the School's and the locality's performance, wellbeing and sense of community!

**ZAYAN PANNUN**

## HOUSE UPDATE

From 3-point competitions to science poster showdowns, this term has certainly been an exciting one in terms of house events. House Netball, Rugby, and Darts have been great successes, with the winning teams awarded no less than 100 house points. Aragon has done exceptionally well this term, securing first place in at least 9 of the 17 events that have taken place. Furthermore, this term has seen many members of the school collecting their Bronze, Silver and Gold Community Awards, as well as a number of Year 13s receive their Marian Awards – the highest marker of service to the school community. Petypher notably leads the pack when it comes to community awards.

Now, what we've all been waiting for... As things currently stand, Gryphon takes fourth place, with 1800 house points. Coming in third is Aragon with 2250 house points. Wrestling for the top spot are Darby and Petypher, and with 2400 house points Darby takes a very respectable second place. This can only mean that Petypher currently holds the top spot as we approach the end of the Autumn Term with 2750 house points, a whopping 900 of which is derived solely from community awards! However, Petypher's place at the top of the podium is not set in stone just yet. House points for the poetry competition, food bank competition, and Christmas Jumper Day are yet to be totalled and added to the current score. It's still all to play for!

**ANANYA RISCHIE**

## EDITORS

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# Queen Mary's Grammar School

Academic In purpose - Generous In approach - Enterprising In spirit - International In outlook

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