



# The QM Observer

## LESSONS FROM AUSCHWITZ

I took part in the 'Lessons From Auschwitz Project' alongside Amy Weir which proved to be an immensely enriching experience, offering profound insights into the atrocities of the Holocaust and its enduring impact on Jewish life and politics. We were taken through a program rigorously arranged in such a way that we could feel what life was like for Jews during the days of peace and then the fear when the war actually began. The Auschwitz Project had a clear structure, which aimed at increasing our awareness of Auschwitz victims and people suffering from similar atrocities in the modern day. Firstly, there was an introductory seminar, which navigated us into the intricacies of this issue starting from the wealth and cultural heritage associated with being Jewish. We got to understand that Polish Jewry thrived during pre-war times before the Nazi invasion in 1939.

In the next stage, we visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum. 80% of those sent to Auschwitz were never prisoners as they were seen as 'undesirable' and were killed off immediately. This fact was repeated throughout my visit as well as the ironic phrase of "*work sets you free*" as in reality the prisoners were worked to death. As we walked through the rooms one by one, the concentration camps looked much darker until all we could see were nail marks engraved on the walls. Seeing some participants faint reminded me of how important our time at Auschwitz was and how it is still one of the darkest chapters of European

history. We walked through the town centre and the encounters and experiences from that gave us an opportunity to learn more important lessons about Auschwitz as well as understand its relevance in today's world politics.

Our journey ended with a reflective follow-up seminar during which we listened to a Holocaust survivor (Janine Webber BEM) narrate her story firsthand. Amidst poignant reflections and shared feelings, I posed questions on the issue of Holocaust denial. Her answer reflected on the foolishness behind denying obvious historical facts when it was evident that a genocide occurred. I am now entering into new steps in my project with a renewed sense of purpose and responsibility. This includes activities such as delivering educational assemblies, as well as writing this very article. As a result, I will ensure that those voices hidden by history are heard and create a culture of remembrance and empathy. As I take another step ahead, I am moving closer to being an ambassador of the *Lessons from Auschwitz* (LFA) program and bequeathed the vital responsibility of making sure that these lessons do not disappear.

In conclusion, my understanding of the Holocaust has been deepened by The Auschwitz Project as well as my fervent commitment to honouring the memory of its



victims and maintaining the importance of remembering. In my future journey, these profound lessons about Auschwitz will accompany me towards creating a future characterised by empathy, understanding, and an unwavering quest for the unfiltered truth.

**Satveer Singh**

## BURNS NIGHT 2024

The annual Burns Night dinner is always a hotly anticipated occasion in the life of the school, and this year was no exception, with a healthy number of guests turning out to eat, drink and be merry in support of the Future Sport project. An evening of enjoyment, hosted by a true Scotsman in the form of Mr Magee, kicked off with the sounds of the traditional bagpipes, played by Scots since the 15th Century. As a school, we always have tried to conserve our traditions, no matter how strange they may seem to an outsider. The sound of the pipes once again resounded as the haggis, the main event of the evening, was "piped in" to begin the supper – a truly enchanting spectacle which did make it rather difficult to keep

my focus on the job at hand. Well-fed and well-watered with uisge beatha (the Scotch "water of life"), guests were then able to let their hair down with a variety of entertainment, namely the musical stylings of the ever-popular Ed Cusick and his band, a "casino", and a charity auction and raffle, giving lucky attendees the chance to win tickets to the Six Nations rugby, or, as many hoped, to win a wheelbarrow full of wine. In all, the supper went down marvellously, raising thousands of pounds for the QMA, and our thanks must be extended to everyone who made the night a success: staff, students, and valued members of the QMA committee.

**William Stevens**



## CCF UPDATE

Over this past term, the Combined Cadet Forces in the school have undertaken a variety of events and activities. Both teams for mRAST alongside MiSkills have been working harder week-by-week as their respective competitions are approaching quickly. From 8th March, a trip in very high demand took place in Farchyngs named "CCCT" (Cadet Command and Control Trainer). This trip simulated an exercise called a "TEWT" (Tactical Exercise Without Troops) to put into effect the strategies and ideas learnt by those in the CCF. The Royal Air Force will soon undergo an inter-flight competition. Flights in the RAF section will be tested on their knowledge of the RAF, first aid, drill alongside leadership. Year 10 Cadets have undergone their Part 2 examinations, which is their second step in their journey to being promoted to an NCO.

**Ayrik Jahedi**

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# AUSTRIA SKI TRIP



The 2024 ski trip to Axamer, Austria, began on 11th February, when the group finally arrived at the Olympic skiing resort 'Axamer Lizum' near the town of Innsbruck, which has over 40km of slopes and 9 ski lifts. The group got started with helmets and skis soon upon arrival. The first two days of skiing included the beginner ski group advancing rapidly and making lots of progress, with the skiing instructors pushing forwards lots of new skills. There were also plenty of skiing falls, the most memorable one being 'Dil of the Day'.

The group also experienced a range of immersive evening activities such as

on the first day of skiing where the group went to watch 'Wonka' in the cinema, which was described as an 'emotional roller-coaster' by Kacper Kawecki. Quiz night, the exploration of the enticing town of Innsbruck, as well as visiting historic sites containing beautiful architecture were just a few examples of some of the activities organised by Mr Rendu. On the penultimate day of the trip, the group had a pizza night, including special celebrations of Aaron Sehra's birthday, where the staff brought out cake to share. Furthermore, the pupils were able to spend more free time in the town, buying souvenirs and exploring Austrian culture through trying new foods like schnitzel, currywurst and pancake soup.

The final day of skiing involved the group dressing up in costumes, which was definitely a highlight of the trip. These included the three aliens from Toy Story, a naked bronze prefect, and my personal favourite, the four Teletubbies. The last day of the trip also involved a coach journey to Frankfurt, where the group visited Frankfurt Zoo and a shopping mall, where kilograms of ice cream and Chipotle burritos were consumed. As part of the final day, the group visited a quaint square with unique German architecture, providing a small taste of life in Frankfurt. As the 2024 ski trip drew to a close, it can certainly be said that it was enjoyed by all pupils and staff who attended.

Jason Tran comments that 'the ski trip was a 10/10 experience and I loved spending the week with my friends. My ski group was also amazing for picking up skiing really quickly, as beginners, and many thanks to the teachers who brought us along and gave us this great experience.'

**Monisha Madhar & Jasroop Ghatore**

## CHRISTMAS & EASTER CONCERT



This year's Christmas Concert was another huge success with one of the largest audiences we've had for a while. All 300 tickets were sold out a few weeks beforehand! Thank goodness we now have our new hall extension!

This year's event was slightly different to previous concerts in that there were no solo items on display; we now have such a variety of ensembles rehearsing week by week, there simply wasn't room to fit any soloists in. We had two brand new groups performing for the very first time; namely the Training Band (led by Mrs Tranchant) and the Intermediate Band. I thought both performed really well considering it was their inaugural performance. I'm really looking forward to watching both these groups develop over the next few months. They've already had new members join and lots of Year 7's which is great to see!

Other ensembles performing included the school's rock guitar group (with Joseph Guthrie on vocals and Ben Hay on kit), sax ensemble, clarinet group, Jazz band, Choir and Orchestra; over 150 pupils – amazing!

All the ensembles seem to be growing in confidence and it's been great to see participation levels getting back up to how they were pre covid. Thanks as ever go to ALL our talented musicians and to a growing number of staff who now regularly participate. I can't wait for the big spring Concert now!

**(A highlights video of this and previous concerts are now on You Tube; please subscribe to QMGs music)**

**Harry Sharma & Mr Vause**

## SOLOIST CONCERT



On the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, the school hosted an upper-school soloists concert, featuring a range of different instrumentalists playing a wide variety of music; for example, the guitar ensemble offered a rendition of "Back in Black" by ACDC, whilst Will Kenyon performed a clarinet concerto by Mozart.

There was yet another change in style with an excellent performance from memory of the jazz standard "Misty" on tenor sax by Aidan Fernandez. A wide range of instruments were also represented, with vocal solos from Edgar Shirley and Joe Guthrie; a multitude of clarinet performances from the aforementioned Will Kenyon, Ibrahim Naguthney – playing a Grade 5 piece – and Ray Chen, playing "Fukushigi no Kurute." There were a couple of drum solos from Joe Waterman and Edwin Hay; and even a Grade 8 glockenspiel performance from Mia Pell. I performed a grade 8 piece on trumpet.

Overall, the evening was very enjoyable, with the small audience allowing for a more intimate and relaxed atmosphere.

**Ben Westwood**



# CLUBS AND SOCIETIES

## QMGS SKIFFLE

Music has always been a great passion and the QM Skiffle Group is an essential part of making this true.

As they continue to embark on musical tours within the neighbourhood, playing at several venues, our pupils embody the school pillar of being "generous in approach." The Skiffle group perform hits from the '50s and '60s by the "King of Skiffle" – with new songs such as Wabash Cannonball and Mademoiselle from Armentières being added to the collection.

This academic year, we have seen a wave of new skiffles join, Year 7s, Year 13s and teachers in school and there is still plenty of room for more!

Skiffle is a chance to spread the love for music with others and to others - be it the small children in primary schools to the elderly at care homes – all whilst keeping true to the school motto of 'Quas dederis solas semper habebis opes': *It is what you give that you will keep as eternal riches.*

The skiffle group and I are grateful to both Mr Hughes and Mr Taylor for providing us with this opportunity as well as their ongoing enthusiasm and coordination of the band. The joy and satisfaction of touching so many hearts with our music and playing together shall stay with us for a rather long time to come.

"We are QM skiffle group we are – yes we are!"

**Sham Sakayanathan**



## YEAR 12 DEBATE CLUB

Over the course of the past term, a new club has entered the extra-curricular timetable at QMGS- Sixth Form Debate Club. Led by Ananya Rischie and Holly Walker in Year 12, the club meets on Tuesday lunchtimes and has had several sessions, the first being in December. Each livelier than the last. Every week questions are debated in many different settings: formally, informally, as well as in the context of learning new debating skills and terminology. Some recent debate topics have included whether violent video games are harmful, if violent protest is acceptable, and should the UK pay reparations to our former colonies? Debates often include a wide variety of opinions and viewpoints with students from a range of subject areas passionately defending their ideas.

My own experience coming to this club over the past few months has been nothing short of engaging as well as opening my perspective in terms of listening to other's beliefs but also arguing against them. I have learned valuable skills over the course of my time at the club, such as speaking clearly and concisely, thinking critically and analysing other's arguments. As well as gaining wider knowledge of the world and the nuances of difficult questions: that there is no true answer, but simply many ways to look at it.

Ananya Rischie, co-founder, states that she started the club "with the intention of getting some good conversations going and exploring some different topics" but now it has progressed to having "started to hear a lot more voices", with a regular attendance of around 20 people. So, if you are in Sixth Form, please do visit S12 at 1:00 on Tuesday lunchtimes, and prepare for some lively debate!



**Sophie Lawrence**

# HISTORY SOCIETY

History Society runs every Thursday in H9 from 1:30 PM to 1:50 PM with Mr. Franklin and is predominantly student led with presentations on various historical topics. Past examples include: "The Best Thing Since Sliced Bread", "Emperor Nero" and "Infamous World Dictators". The topics are usually formal; however, some interesting ones slip into the mix (which in my opinion is a great thing!) such as the "What If?" history.

History Society is friendly and welcoming to newcomers and has something for everyone. You are allowed to eat your lunch in History Society (assuming you make no mess!) and most people generally eat there. There are student-made posters around school weekly, informing you of the topic occurring that week, which are engaging and encourage you to attend. Sadly, if you do not arrive early enough the room can fill up and that means it's at capacity. At the end of each term, we usually have a quiz in the Sixth-Form lecture theater, which is great, and I recommend you go to. To finish this article, Mr. Franklin has a statement.

*"History Society has gone from strength to strength, featuring contributions from every year group that cover a wide range of times and places. It has regularly gathered over 40 enthusiasts. Thank-you to all participants - long may it continue."*

**Franco Bragoli**



# DRAMA AT QM

Traditionally, Drama has been a fixture of QM but in recent years has experienced a reduced focus. Mr Williams notes that in the past, the school's relationship with theatre was 'fertile and busy', involving sixth form revues and large-scale annual productions, but involvement and organisation behind such events has dwindled. The English curriculum's heavy focus on the works of Shakespeare has given students the opportunity to stage scenes themselves and deliver line readings though, as Mr Williams notes, there are no longer allotted lessons that wholly focus on this aspect. But the English Department, namely Mr Williams and Mr Newell, have made efforts to reignite interest, both in the academic and recreational sense.

Created two years ago, The Queen's Players (which encompasses students from Years 7-11) is active in creating a space for students to collaboratively work on plays. Following the recent success of 'A Midsummer Afternoon,' rehearsals for a stage production of Orwell's 'Animal Farm' are well underway, and the show is due to be performed in the summer. A Sixth Form production is currently in the works, but details are yet to be confirmed. While there are opportunities presented to lower school students to engage with Drama, students can expect to have Drama offered to them as a GCSE subject in the coming years.

It's not just involvement in Drama that's been due for a change. The English department have made efforts to explore literature with more inclusive subject matter, focusing on themes that reflect the diverse student body. The 'See Yourself' initiative has been created by the English department, creating a space for students to discuss their concerns with the current curriculum and suggest ways to move forward. The English department, with the help of students, has since taken steps to diversify the current course of study and challenge the study of texts typically considered as part of the literary canon. Notably, 'Of Mice and Men' is no longer studied, giving way to more diverse, progressive texts. Now, Drama is set to receive the same treatment. Discussions at the most recent meeting focused on ways in which we can broaden the range of pieces that the Queen's Players explore. Key ideas explored in this meeting included modernising Shakespeare, exploring contemporary theatre and playwrights from more diverse backgrounds – including those within the student body. Moving forward, the Queen's Players will be working with students to write their own plays, so that the repertoire of the recreational group is more representative of the experiences and interests of the school community. If you're interested in getting involved with this, please reach out to Mr Williams or Mr Newell, as they'd be more than happy to discuss ideas and support you with bringing them to life.

**Naina Sidhu & Ananya Rische**

## HARRY POTTER TRIP

On 13th December, 40 Year 8 students went on a visit to the Warner Bros. Studio in Watford; from the artists to the set designers, the students got to see a large variety of artistic careers applied to such a well-known movie. In fact, for many of the students, this was their first trip at QMGS. Obay Ahmed, 8Z, said that "it was an amazing experience," and especially enjoyed interacting with several sets and props; in particular, the students got to pull out their own screaming mandrakes, just like those seen in the Chamber of Secrets. The students also enjoyed seeing several recreated scenes, such as Buckbeak and Dobby's first introduction to Harry.

Additionally, this was also Ms. Morgan's first QMGS trip! She recounted the trip as

a "really nice time," for both staff and students, especially seeing how the movies were made. Interestingly, the Harry Potter movies did not use many special effects, relying on a large array of props, ranging from Snape's potion ingredients to the goblins' prosthetics, which were on display throughout the tour. The trip also coincided with Mr. Mackenzie's birthday, which the group decided made him obliged to open the Great Hall's doors! Within, the students got to see the magnificent room, decorated in the Christmas spirit. Finally, we give a huge thank you to the joint efforts of the Art and English departments, and to Mr. Mackenzie, Ms. Morgan, Mrs. Gray and Miss Westwood-Cooke, who accompanied the students on the trip!

**Zayaan Pannun**

## MENTAL HEALTH

In the week commencing February 5th, QMGS held a Mental Health week. This included a range of activities for both students and parents aiming to improve the overall wellbeing of our school community through creating an open dialogue about mental health.

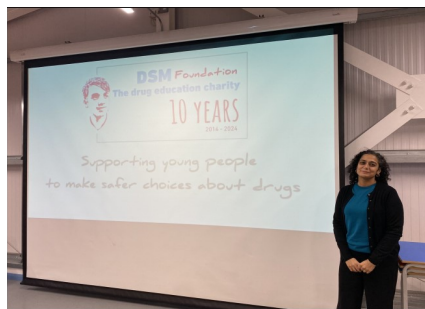
Every lunchtime, members of staff hosted lunchtime talks (mainly for older year groups) where they discussed their own experiences of mental health and offered guidance on how to improve our own mental health. Many students said this gave them a "sense of comfort", because they learnt that teachers - often seen as role models by pupils - have successfully overcome their own difficulties. These talks included: Miss Morgan (addressing how to overcome generational trauma); Mr Ryley (how to use sport to improve mental health); Mr Collins (what it feels like to lose a loved one); and Mr Farnell (how to overcome 'toxic masculinity'). A Y12 student described Mr Collins' talk as "eye-opening", and Mr Farnell's as "moving" but also "educational" as it detailed why finding coping mechanisms to help our mental health is important. All of the talks were incredibly well attended, and I would like to extend a collective gratitude from the students to these teachers for their courage and words of wisdom.

Furthermore, we were privileged to welcome many guests to support the week, including Will Adolphy, founder of the men's wellbeing association 'M-Path' discussing healthy masculinity. Many QM boys described his talk as "useful" and that learning how poor mental health affects boys, as well as girls, has helped them in de-stigmatising their own mental health.

Additionally, we had 'CYMers' from our sixth form delivering form time sessions to all year groups such as 'How to keep fit and healthy with a busy schedule', and 'The importance of sleep'. Our sixth formers gave meaningful encouragement to form groups on accessing the

'Welfare Hub' and our SEMH mentors to gain support if necessary.

On behalf of the school, all students involved throughout the week would like to thank Miss McPhee for her diligent efforts in the success of this week.



**Radhika Sharma**



## SPORTS NEWS- RUGBY TEAM UPDATE

A great achievement this season! All the rugby squads across the year group have become teams that are now able to compete nationally. This season the school has played 114 15's fixtures (winning 67, drawing 7 and losing 40) giving the team a good 58% winning ratio. Currently the U14's and U15's have been ¼ finalists at Kings Macclesfield 7's- an honourable achievement. The team members have taken immense pride in consistently supporting each other and have a range of positive things to say about their experiences.

*"Over the season I feel like the team has bonded really well and the chemistry is at an all-time high. Furthermore, my favourite match to date has to be the Year 8 county cup tournament as we fought a tough battle and made it to the quarter finals and despite losing, we enjoyed ourselves thoroughly."* - Jason Tran Year 12.

There have been a number of highlights but the coach Mr Ryley's favourite is "My favourite match is a tough one to choose but the Wednesday night

## CHARITY SPOTLIGHT

Charity is significant as it involves the act of focusing on the wider community and being generous in approach. People support charities for various reasons, ranging from personal struggles to being part of a community, and cultivating close-knit bonds. However, regardless of the reason that drives you, the significance of charity is prevalent now more than ever with the economic situation worsening, political climates becoming more hostile, and climate change driving natural disasters to new heights.

While these are all international issues and potentially more difficult to engage with, within the School there has been a focus on helping amongst the local community. One of the most recent examples of this was food bank donations, launched as a competition for the houses, and appealing to the competitive nature of many of the students. All the items collected from the food bank were donated to the Glebe Centre in Walsall, which aims to provide a range of support services to rough sleepers and vulnerable adults. Over the past two years, donations surpassing 1000 items have been given to the centre and in doing this, we as a School have quadrupled the centre's food supply and typically the donated items tend to last over three or four months. This demonstrates the power of the School collective and how we can support the local community.

There are also a few upcoming charity events within the School calendar such as three charity runs that will take place throughout the year. Mrs Butt is organising a fundraiser for a humanitarian aid appeal, and Mr Ryley has been coordinating the shoebox appeal which once again focuses specifically on giving back to the local community.

**Ashima Luthra**

*Lights game vs Bishop Vesey 1st XV where we played a very tight game of 38-17. We lost but some great rugby was played making the school very proud!"*

With the wins and losses, the 1st XV achieves superb goals by positively working as a team and motivating one another!



**Jurriel Owusu**

**Queen Mary's Grammar School**

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