



MOREANA

NEWSLETTER OF ST. THOMAS MORE ALUMNI

IT'S OFFICIAL—WE'RE NOW ALUMNI

As members will recall from the last edition of this esteemed publication a motion was tabled at the last AGM to rename our association as ***St Thomas More Alumni***.

Feedback from members was unanimously in favour and, consequently, on 14th May 2013 the new name was adopted.

It is hoped that by removing oblique references to age and gender from its title the association may appeal a little more to younger past pupils of the school.

Certainly since the new name was adopted we have seen a small, but noticeable, increase in membership applications from those who left the place after 2000.

The Alumni's traditions and aims continue as before because they have always embraced all ages and, when all is said and done, exist simply to provide a loose framework for people who have a shared experience from their youth, however recent or far back that may have been!

TIME TO DINE (AGAIN)

SATURDAY 15th FEBRUARY is the date for this year's Alumni Dinner.

As is traditional, the occasion will be held in the school Dining Hall at 7.30pm for 8pm.

The guest speaker this year will be non-other than our own Frank Keenan, whose associations with the school go right back to the 1960s and, of course, culminated in him being Headmaster from 1990 to 2005.

Anyone who has ever heard Frank give a speech will testify to his hilarious, dry sense of humour and pithy put-downs to would-be hecklers. We expect this to be an amusing and insightful



collection of anecdotes [*no pressure Frank—Ed*]. The big question, of course, is whether he'll be able to resist the temptation to include stories about those present!

Simply send a cheque payable to *St Thomas More Old Boys' Association* for **£20** (members) or **£25** (non-members who are

past pupils) to the address below to secure your space.

This year's four-course menu will consist of:-

Prawn and crab cocktail

Roasted red pepper and tomato soup, warm rolls and butter

Choice of
Steak and ale hotpot
OR
Chicken, leek and parsley puff pastry pie
with

Creamed mashed potatoes
Roast seasonal vegetables
Cauliflower cheese
Peas
Gravy

Raspberry and sherry trifle with whipped cream

Coffee and after dinner chocolates



MEET THE NEW HEADTEACHER

It's been eight months since the new Headteacher officially took up the post at the school and it seemed about time that this esteemed publication got to meet her. The astute readers amongst you will have noticed two, perhaps unexpected, words in that opening sentence: "Headteacher" (not "Headmaster") and "her" (not "him"). For the new person at the helm, is, for the first time in the school's history, female!

Of course, having been the Interim Headteacher for one year, she is not unknown to a number of Alumni members and has read the Execution Account of St Thomas More at two of our Memorial Masses. But for those of you who haven't met her, now's your chance...

Gemma Ackred has been at STM for 12 years having started there as a Science teacher in 2001. A native of Upminster she attended Sacred Heart of Mary High School for Girls where she became Head Girl and then went on to obtain a degree in Biological Sciences and Zoology from Kings College, London.

She'd always enjoyed outdoor learning, but although teaching runs in her family (her father was a teacher) it was a far from certain bet that she'd follow into the profession.

Whilst studying her A Levels she had become heavily involved with amateur dramas— studying and obtaining her LAMBDA and ISTD qualifications at the same time as obtaining her more academic qualifications. These led to her performing as a singer, dancer and actor with Shenfield Operatic Society taking on such roles as Reno in *Anything Goes* and Nicki in *Sweet Charity*. During this time she was teaching drama students and when the time came to decide upon a career she found that the enjoyment she had gained



from this experience led her to take a PGCE qualification at St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill in Twickenham.

After qualifying she got her first job teaching Science and Psychology at Canon Palmer school (now Palmers Academy) in Seven Kings. It was from there that she made the move to STM and, once in place as a Science teacher, the then Headmaster Frank Keenan asked her to introduce a Psychology course to the curriculum. She progressed to becoming Head of 6th Form and then, under Peter Travis, Director of Studies for 14-19 Year Olds, finally becoming Deputy Head in 2008.

Teaching doesn't only run in Gemma's blood, she's also married it! Her husband Adrian, with whom she has two sons - George (6) and William (4) - is a PE Teacher. Gemma herself doesn't particularly participate in sports (quite when she'd find the time is a major consideration) but she enjoys watching them and is full of admiration for Adrian's accomplishment last summer of a 600 mile bike ride from Scotland to Essex in order to raise funds

to help set-up a children's charity called the Emilia Heart Foundation.

So what makes a successful Science teacher and mother decide to move-up to the big time and enter school senior management? Gemma is quite open about the fact that she didn't originally set-out in that direction. *"I was very happy being a Science teacher,"* she says. *"It allowed me to use a little of my theatrical expertise performing experiments for Years 7 to 9, emphasising the magic and wonder of science. Explosions are always fun and exciting - did you know a Jelly baby screams if you heat it up?"* she asks with glee. *"But it was Frank Keenan who first suggested that I might have something else to offer. I've always loved St Thomas More High School and was always volunteering to fill gaps or step-up when necessary. I'm naturally an 'opportunity person' who is intrinsically driven and I love seeing students progress, perform well and move on. Frank inspired me to 'go for it' and after Peter made me Head of 6th Form - a position I really enjoyed - I began to realise that I did, after all,*

have the necessary skills to go further."

So it was that when Deputy Head John O'Hara was leaving he virtually insisted that she apply for his old job.

When, four years later, Peter Travis left she automatically became the Interim Head and, after an exhaustive recruitment process, was finally appointed to the position in her own right in the Spring of last year. So what is her vision for the school of today and where it will be tomorrow?

"To be an Outstanding Catholic school," she replies without any hesitation, before continuing, *"that provides a well-rounded education based on Gospel values to produce strong men and women of faith who can articulate their views and are successful."*

If that sounds a little rehearsed then it's no wonder. In the short time that Gemma has been Headteacher in her own right the school has undergone both an Ofsted and BRES inspection so she's bound to be a little focussed in the area of vision. Yet it somehow doesn't come across as a trite formula created to win bureaucratic

points. There is a genuine sincerity to Gemma as she thinks about what she wants the school to achieve and stand for.

"We have a good team here," she says of her Senior Leadership staff, "and we want to raise the expectations and aspirations of the whole school community - students, parents, teachers and governors."

This change is most obviously manifest in the area of student leadership. *"We consult with and listen to the student voice, through the student council, the student newsletters and various other fora and then respond to their views. The two most visible results so far are the canopies in parts of the playground and the re-modelling of the toilets throughout the premises - both of which were requested by the students."*

"We've introduced peer mentoring amongst students and encourage pupils to lead assemblies and provide the musicians for school Masses, both of which are new departures for the school, while at the same time developing the existing traditions of student fundraising and more traditional religious involvement such as reading and singing at Mass."

*"Our watchword in all our undertakings is **Focus**. Is what we are doing in our teaching or learning adding value to our day? If not, then it needs re-thinking!"*

It's true to say that Focus is something that Gemma is most definitely not lacking in and, as someone in their mid-30s, it is a talent that she will be able to bring to bear for much good at the helm of our old school for many years to come.

We wish her every success as she and her team strive towards their goal of making STM an Outstanding Catholic school!



AND NOT FORGETTING...

One tradition that new Headteacher Gemma Ackred seems to have continued is that of re-modelling the school buildings! As members will recall Frank Keenan was the most prolific of our "Builder-Heads" adding numerous extensions as the school expanded to take on a Sixth Form and five-form entry. Yet the desire to break-ground and top-out goes all the way back to Don McGregor's reign when the first major extension was added in 1973 to accommodate four-form entry.

Peter Travis continued the tradition with one or two alterations and Gemma, in her first summer holidays, had the office suite re-designed and all the boys' toilets throughout the school refurbished.

The old lobby area outside the original three offices in the 1960's block has gone—absorbed into the actual offices themselves, with the new Headteacher's office now occupying much of the

space. What was for many years from the 1970s to the 2000s the Head of Lower School's office is now the office of the Headteacher's PA.

Of course this has somewhat altered the "view" for someone descending the steps from the Dining Hall...no longer are you gazing into the dim, recessed lobby that, like some portal to the underworld, seemed to be reserved only for those poor unfortunates who were about to embark on a journey to oblivion. Instead you are confronted with what could have been just a typically bland wall in a corridor.

However, we are delighted to report that in an inspired decision Gemma has seen fit to use the portraits of past Headteachers to adorn this otherwise featureless area. Complete with the dedication plaque that the Alumni provided last summer these paintings are finally enjoying a position befitting their status and provide a watchful roll-call of past "helmsmen" leading to door of the current incumbent!

HATCHES, MATCHES AND DESPATCHES

It is with great sadness that we report this issue the deaths of four past pupils, two of whom had remained strongly connected to the school.

In late April David Patterson who left the school in 1987 and was the serving Vice Chairman of Governors died as the result of a heart attack suffered a couple of months earlier. He leaves two children (one of whom is currently a pupil in Year 11 at the school) and a girlfriend who gave birth to their baby last summer after his death.

On 27th May Richard Copley, who left the school in 1977 and was a long-time supporter of this association died after a six-year battle with cancer. His positive attitude and constantly cheerful persona during his illness was an inspiration to many. He was a regular presence at the annual dinner and leaves a wife and two sons in their mid and late teens.

Finally, in the autumn we received news of two more deaths—Tom Costello who succumbed to a stroke and lung cancer on 11th October and Chris Lawrence who died in November. Both were in their late 50s/early 60s which means that they will have left the school sometime around the late 1960s.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of all four deceased.

May they Rest in Peace.

MEMBERSHIP AS AT JANUARY 2014

Thanks to the continuing efforts of our illustrious Membership Secretary Liam Rand, membership is now showing very positive signs of growth for the first time in a number of years!

Liam's efforts have included giving a talk at Masses throughout the Deanery, producing an information leaflet for new leavers, attending the leavers' presentation evening, and the continuing use of the new roll-up banners and distribution of our business cards at any relevant opportunity and event.

We would urge all members to ensure that they have a small supply of cards on their person at all times—you never know when you might meet a past pupil or ex-member of staff!

The current membership is now:-

1961 Graham Lewis

1962 Kevin Butt
Michael Hughes
John Lewis

1963 John Bowman
John Sheehy

1964 John Griffiths
Ronald Patchett

1965 Brian Dalton
Alan Dobby
Terry Knights

1966 Martyn Barker
Patrick Clancy
Bill Clegg
Paul Hutchinson
Paul Wenham

1967 Tony Cane
Paul Clancy
Glen Sweeney
Mike Thompson

1968 Martin Duggan
Geoffrey Lewis

1969 Peter David
Paul Marsh
Chris McHale

1971 Bernie Brooker
Mike Donovan
Kevin Flynn

1972 Paul Culleton
David Thompson

1973 Phil Mahoney

1974 Kevin Bonham
Paul McArdle
Simon Millyard

1975 Eamon Day
David Ekers
Keith Exley
Chris Fairchild
John McDermott
Andrew McGregor
Gerry Thomas

1976 Christopher Barber
Laurence Blainey
John Chambers
Guy Francke
Clive Knight
Andrew McWilliam
Simon Ravinet
Martin Sullivan
John Todryk
James Tyrie

1977 Graham Axe
Phil Coath
John Cobbold
Mark Hidveghy
Martin Hodson
John Judge
Liam Rand

1978 Kevin Thomas

1979 Paul Clarke
Paul Driscoll
David O'Ryan
Sean Tyrie

1980 Sean Leggett
Martin McKeown
Nial O'Callaghan

1981 Sean Conlon

1982 Mark Harvey

1983 Richard Allard
Anthony Crowley

1984 Michael Barry
Mark Denton
Stuart Humfrey

1985 Tim Allard
Karl Streamer

1986 Iain Oconnell

1987 Martin Corr
Martin Diggins
Steven Hurren

1989 Damian Dillon
Justin Hennessey
Paul Lynch

1990 Christopher Hull

1995 Paul Bending

2000 Daniel Kelly (Chpln)
Martyn Rickard

2001 Chris Thompson

2011 Dale Claridge

2012 Sean Jones

2013 Fadzai Biti
Vanessa Chinoo
Jack Collins
Matthew Hedge
Valentine Mabondla

Assoc Matthew Hardiman
Assoc Chloe Spillett
Assoc Nick Spillett
Assoc Tom Wiltshire

DateTBC Peter O'Callaghan

HT Gemma Ackred

F/T John Askew
F/T Ian Britt
F/T James Devor
F/T Mary Donaldson
F/T David Finnigan
F/T Frank Keenan
F/T Tom Kennedy
F/T David Milne
F/T John O'Connell*

Hon Jan Lewis
Hon Helen Wigmore

*John O'Connell is currently a member of staff having previously left.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Firstly let me start with an apology for the fact

that this edition of *Moreana* has been so long coming! There are a number of reasons, amongst which were a lack of time and a lack of articles. Please always remember that *Moreana* is intended, first and foremost, to be an opportunity to communicate between members of

the Alumni and you are all welcome, indeed encouraged, to send contributions whenever you can.

Secondly I want to take this opportunity to let you all know that plans for the development of a Hardship Fund to assist current members of the school are well underway. Look out for full details in the next edition.

Finally I do hope that many of you will be at this year's dinner on 15th February. It's always great fun and I look forward to seeing you there.