

From the Headmaster, Mark Ronan BA

21 May 2009

Dear Parents and Guardians

Central to the Pocklington motto 'Virtute et Veritate' is the notion of courage, and this letter will, I hope, show just a few of the very real examples of the many forms that courage can take within our school. Atticus Finch, the lawyer hero of Harper Lee's famous novel '*To Kill a Mockingbird*', defined courage for his young daughter with these words:

'I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin, but you begin anyway and you see it through, no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do.'

Creating an environment in which our young people can try as many avenues as possible to express their courage and personality without fear of, or damage by, failure is pivotal to my philosophy of education. I am intensely proud of all the wonderful achievements of our students, some of which will be chronicled in this letter. I am, however, prouder still of the innumerable quiet and courageous attempts at personal development which are made every day, many of them unheralded, but nonetheless heroic for that. It is through the exploration of the seemingly impossible that we all come to know our heights and it is only through trying that we can truly look ourselves in the eye and know who we are.

Members of CCF challenged themselves over the Easter holidays during their visit to Keswick adventure training as they walked and scrambled up peaks, kayaked and more besides. I was fortunate to join a group on their pony trek and was immediately challenged by my horse, Wolf, the only one who required step ladders to reach the saddle! Thankfully, the trek itself was undertaken successfully by Wolf, who was most accommodating with regard to my lack of horsemanship.

Admiration extends to recent drama explorations. Following the courage of last term's political journey into the miners' strike of 1984 in '*The Hatfield Threepenny Opera*', AS students presented a journey inwards with the moving and unsettling '*4.48 Psychosis*'. Here, the subjects of suicide and mental health were explored in a piece staged in total darkness, with the audience carrying torches. Credit too, to the stylised horror of '*The Fall of The House of Usher*'. Both plays were staged successfully at Pocklington Arts Centre and showed the unflinching courage and originality of our drama students at their best.

A lovely spring evening, the calm setting of Burnby Hall Gardens with the scent of roasted hog and the music of the Pocklington School Swing Band - what could be better? The idyllic scene being in Britain of course meant that no guarantees could be issued with regard to the weather, but the food and music lived up to all expectations. Friday 8th May was the launch of the 2009 Flying Man Festival in Pocklington and the Swing Band was on hand to entertain the crowds. The bandstand in the gardens at Burnby Hall is perfect for such events and an audience of around 150 enjoyed the evening's entertainment, marred only by a brief downpour. This was useful preparation for the band as they build towards their summer tour to Rome and, if the standard of this evening is anything to go by, the Roman crowds are in for a treat.

Alastair Wright has been selected to join the orchestra for the Youth Music Theatre UK production of '*The Chosen Room*' which will be staged in Belfast in August. In addition, Alastair has been asked to arrange some of the music for the show and act as Assistant Musical Director! We wish him every possible success in this venture and in his future at the Birmingham Conservatoire of Music.

Congratulations to Max Galley, who became the first student to achieve the Pocklington Award. He was presented with his certificate in the final assembly of the Lent term. Max has been involved in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, including playing hockey, rock-climbing and playing trumpet in the brass group and Swing Band. We hope that Max will be the first of many students to achieve the Bronze Award this year.

Michael McKinstry's presentation in assembly on his planned 192 mile charity cycle ride across Massachusetts over two days this summer in aid of the Dana Faber organisation (Cancer Research USA) was inspiring and heartfelt. Ed Hamer is currently in Austria competing in an International Climbing event and we wish both he and Michael well in their challenges. Finally, congratulations are extended to Henderson Cox and James Jackson who have been successful at a residential camp held in Arbroath, where both have been granted Gliding Scholarships.

These are but a small selection of the daily triumphs and achievements of Pocklingtonians, whose courage and determination never cease to amaze and delight me. As I said earlier, it is only when we step outside our "comfort zone" (to borrow that now rather hackneyed, but accurate, term) that we really begin to challenge ourselves and develop what William Blake called our "inner infinity": a process which begins in youth and, with experience, continues for the rest of our lives. As Jonathan Swift wryly observed, "it was a brave man who first ate an oyster". It is often the things which terrify or appal us which prove to challenge us the most and constantly surprise us.

The strong sense of community, which so impressed itself upon me on my very first visit to Pocklington, creates the ideal environment for experiment and courage to thrive. I leave you with these words which, for me, encapsulate the spirit of "Virtute et Veritate":

Life is mostly froth and bubble
Two things stand like stone,
Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage in your own

Adam Lindsay Gordon

I wish you all a pleasant and restful half term, especially those who will return to public examinations where the classroom endeavours of the past years will be truly tested.

Yours sincerely

P.S.

I would urge you to keep looking at our website www.pocklingtonschool.com. You will see it now has a new look and we hope you will find it clear and easy to navigate. If you have any comments please do email Philip Donaldson at donaldsonp@pocklingtonschool.com.

The website will be used by the school as the main method of communication in any emergency, for example if there were an outbreak of swine flu.

We will also continue to contact parents and guardians by email as far as possible, and would be grateful if the school could be kept informed of your up-to-date email address.