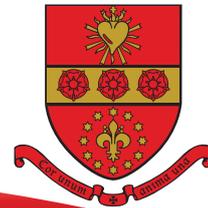


newsletter



Welcome

How quickly the last 12 months have flown by! The SFOGA committee have been as busy as always and there are some changes that we've been working on in the background since I last wrote to you.

Firstly, we are especially excited to have launched the new SFOGA website in April. We're really pleased that the new website allows alumni to login, find friends, share news and, in the future, book on to SFOGA events. We're also going to be using the website as a professional networking and mentoring tool, whereby recent leavers can use the SFOGA network to contact old girls who work in a profession or industry of interest.



As always reunions and events form a really important part of SFOGA business. At the end of last summer, Sheila Edgar ran a superb tour around the Royal Mews at Buckingham Palace - it was so informative and as always delivered with passion! Thank you, Sheila! Hopefully, we will have the chance to run one of these tours again. In addition, this summer sees the launch of the Open Afternoon for all old girls and their families - a chance to look around the School and catch up over Afternoon Tea. We hope this will become an annual event and something to put in the calendar each summer.

Thank you for your continued support.
Louise Hopper Chair

Message from Mrs Bronwen Goulding, Headmistress and President of SFOGA



Dear Old Girls

It's a pleasure to be writing to you one year on. The College continues to put the skills of the girls as a priority and we are thinking not just about what the girls require to succeed at public examinations and gain places at University but also what they need in the workplace once beyond Higher Education.

Last time I wrote to you, I talked about networking and our senior girls have had their first introduction to this process. We had a wonderful evening in which we introduced the idea of connecting people and helping others. I know that the girls who practised on each other really enjoyed meeting girls from different age groups and helping to build those mutual connections. I am hoping to move this exercise onto the next stage soon. Some of you have already volunteered to help and if more of you are willing, please do not hesitate to contact my PA at headspa@stfrancis.herts.sch.uk.

Our link with the Kanyike project in Uganda continues to remain strong and a number of our Sixth Form are travelling out this summer. In July, some longstanding staff are retiring; Mrs Pamela Wilkinson my wonderful deputy and Mrs Stone, Head of Prep who has served the College for nearly 35 years! I am sure many of you will remember both of them. I look forward to meeting some of you very soon.

Coming events

November 2016 - Fish and Chip Quiz Night at St. Francis' College

March 2017 - Drinks in London (venue tbc)

July 1st 2017 Afternoon Tea at St Francis College

2018 - St. Francis' College's 85th and SFOGA's 70th Anniversary

Website and Membership Information

We hope that many of you have looked at our new SFOGA website. It can be found via the Alumni heading on the College website www.st-francis.herts.sch.uk.

Phase one launched information about how to join, who is on the committee, photo galleries of past events and information and photos on the first three decades of the history of St. Francis' College. Work is now going on to complete other sections so do keep an eye on the website as we add more. Some items will be written by the committee, but for others to succeed we need your help. If you have any news or announcements just email sfoga@st-francis.herts.sch.uk and we can add them to the News section straightaway.

We also want to start our Alumni in Action section. The idea is to have short features about what members have been up to since leaving SFC. Personal successes, community and charity initiatives and work achievements could all be featured. Again, if you would like to contribute text and a photo get in touch via our email.

The majority of information on our website is accessible to all except for our membership portal where you need to log on with a username or password. This section gives members the opportunity to update their details, and contact former friends who are also SFOGA members. We would be particularly grateful if you could add information about higher education and career paths. Once we have enough of this type of data we can begin to offer more purposeful mentoring and careers advice to members. Don't worry if you have lost your password. Drop us an email and we will remind you.

We have also made huge strides in increasing our membership to over 1340. If you are in contact with any former friends from your school days who are not members of SFOGA, do encourage them to get in touch and join SFOGA. Membership is free for any former pupils or staff.

Much of our communication is via email so please let sfoga@st-francis.herts.sch.uk know your email address. For those of you that don't use email, you will still get your annual newsletter and a letter at the end of the autumn and spring term.



Photos of Recent Events

In September 2015, we were delighted to welcome back former students Jingle Lau (piano) and Louisa Haggarty (soprano), students at the Royal Northern College of Music, who gave a fabulous concert in the Chapel in aid of the Kanyike Project.



Two recent Royal Mews tours by Sheila Edgar for SFOGA members.
Factual but fun!



NEWS FROM MEMBERS

Nicole Bouquet (Deloof 1957) can hardly believe she celebrated her 80 birthday in 2015! She is delighted to unexpectedly receive SFOGA newsletters (which were delivered to her former home in Ghent, where fortunately her daughter now lives - she passed them on). She much enjoys her new home surrounded by green.



Nicole made many friends at SFC: Marina Rita, Paule, Maureen, Nicky, Magdalena, Philomena and Celia. She remembers Srs. Christophane and Francis, who taught the Belgians, and Sr. Mary Immaculate as an efficient (if severe) teacher of Greek literature. She stayed in contact with her. In 1971 she married her Civil Engineer husband. Their children, Chantal and Vincent, also both engineers, each have three children. Three boys and three girls!

Jane Bertin (Freeman 1973) is American and was delighted to find the SFC website on the internet recently. Her father worked in England for 30 years so she grew up in Letchworth and attended SFC from 1960. She was a house captain (St Bernard's) and then Head Girl. She still looks back fondly on those SFC days and the wonderful teachers and sisters who worked very hard to give their students the benefit of an excellent education. 'Miss Green, Miss Young, Mr. McAlister, Mme White and Sr. Francis come to mind along with Sr. Anne, the Headmistress'.



Jane went to college in the U.S. and has lived in Cleveland, Ohio for the last 35 years. She went into nursing and is now a hospital Infection Control



Nurse. 'Distance and time have separated me from the school friends I grew up with. I would like to get in touch with anyone who remembers me'. Bertinm15@oh.rr.com

Lottie Butler-Henderson (1986) (Charlotte to her mother and those who knew her at St. Fannies) left 'tooooo many years ago now', and moved to Buntingford to be closer to her parents ten years ago. She has two sons, Mason (15) and Finn (13).

'Work is fab': she's an Account Manager at Prêt-a-Portrait which operates world-wide and looks after schools in the UK, as well as Dubai, Qatar, Singapore, Thailand, China, South Korea, Jakarta, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Romania (to name just a few). With a team of about 60 photographers worldwide, work keeps her busy. It's a great company and based locally. She even gets to walk to work. 'Life has been kind to my little family so I can't complain and it's good to see the odd snippet of news on your Facebook page.'

Vincent Conyngham (Head of RE at SFC: 1986-1990) After thirteen years as Head of Music at St Martin's Ampleforth, Vincent will be taking up a new post as Head of RE (with some music!) at Cundall Manor School near Harrogate in September 2016. He is delighted to be returning to his roots, but he will miss the life that Ampleforth affords. During his time at the School, the Choirs have toured Malta, Italy (Venice and Rome), Spain, France, Portugal, Czech Republic and Austria. There have been appearances on BBC1 Choir of the Year Competition and they have sung the Morning Service on BBC Radio 4. Choirs have sung in Westminster Cathedral, York Minster, Ripon Cathedral, Lincoln Minster, Southwell Minster and Durham Cathedral.

He will be teaching both GCSE Music and RE, forming a new Boys' Choir at the School and also teaching Common Entrance classes. "I have loved my time at Ampleforth, especially being involved with music and musicians of the highest calibre, so that annual performances of Handel's Messiah and the Bach St Matthew Passion I began to take for granted! I will be very sorry to leave but Cundall Manor is another great school and I look forward to the new challenges".

Debbie Robinson (Price 1993) was very bizarrely thinking about SFC A Level history lessons recently. Her eldest son was doing WW2 (Yr 4). 'Perhaps I was a bit TOO excited that after all these years I could share the knowledge Mrs Fenton shared with me. Why is it that twenty years on I remember details about Von Papen, Hindenburg, Night of the Long Knives, Reichstag fire etc. but struggle to get school sports days/parents' evenings in my head!!!'

Her career path was rather random but took her around the world: she was a holiday rep/entertainer for four years in Spain - 'loved it but the hardest work ever'. Self-employment for sales etc. ticked things over until she fell into working for Cambridge Education Associates (helping set up performance management in schools). Next, she organised educational tours overseas for a school travel company to Germany, Russia, China, Iceland and Spain. She eventually did use her love of history and Spain, then children came along and travel was not really an option.

She spotted her current job with Headline Teachers (educational recruiters) which works well: lovely small team (young!!!), term-time and school hours only, and three days a week. She's not complaining as 'it's all about the boys now' although she does spend free time at the gym, shifting weights. She lives near Newmarket with husband and boys Ben (10) and Tom (6). ('I have two and am done!). Ben is sporty and never stops, while Tom is caring but clumsy. Chalk and cheese!

Sam Scully (Bloomfield, 1993) BSC MA VetMB GP Cert(SAS) GPCert(SAM) PgC(SAM) MRCVS has moved from London to Lincolnshire with her family, after a year on maternity leave. Her little son James is a blessing and she feels even more blessed to have **Freda Sundram** (1993) as James' godmother. With a Postgrad Cert in Small Animal Medicine from Harper Adams, she now works part time in small animal practice as a Veterinary Surgeon and also inspects veterinary practices for the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. Sam has also carried out research on canine neonate mortality and writes articles on animal neonate care.



Lisa Scoot (1994) married Aaron Hampton on Saturday 6th June in St. Francis' College Chapel.



Jennifer Barnett (2010) worked for three months in 2014 as a volunteer in Hanoi (Vietnam) with REACH. This charity provides free vocational education for young adults from underprivileged backgrounds in hospitality, graphic design and sales & marketing. She taught students the English skills needed to thrive in their potential careers (and they hopefully enjoyed learning a new language in the process!)

She had an absolutely fantastic time, participating in school life and in extra-curricular activities, such as a school



festival which showcased the students' creative talents. Jenny was constantly struck by how hardworking, genuine and enthusiastic both the students and teachers were.

She loved visiting the hometown of one of the permanent English teachers, Minh. Her home was a tiny rural village - certainly not on the tourist trail. After she finished her teaching post, she was able to explore Vietnam and spent a fortnight in the incredibly beautiful Myanmar. She enjoyed being immersed in the Hanoi community through her work in a school and made great friends.

Back in England, Jenny is pursuing a career in law and is studying for a Graduate Diploma at City University, London.

Emma Ritchie (2015) enjoyed three months of sun, sea and sand in the Fiji islands in 2015, but not lazing on the beach: she was a volunteer for Global Vision International's Community Development programme.



At the coastal village of Silana, lively cries of "Bula! Bula vinaka!" ("Hello! Welcome!") and a traditional "sevusevu" (welcoming ceremony) greeted her. She was assigned a local family to visit whenever she wanted (for Sunday lunch, tea, cakes and much more). Her family had seven children under the age of seven so visits were never boring! These people truly became her family. Emma will never forget their generosity and kindness.

All weekdays were different. She taught in local primary and secondary schools on topics ranging from Family Life and Careers to Recycling and Waste Management; helped to construct an incinerator for the village and collected data from other villages about their waste management practices; cleared a site for a volleyball court and so much more! Finally, she helped to organize a Christmas Fun Week with a treasure hunt for the children and a Christmas Fete which was hugely enjoyed by the whole village.



Some weekends were spent in Silana enjoying a district rugby tournament (with a player for the national Fiji's 7s team), a bonfire/barbeque night for the whole village and plenty of family time - all washed down with generous amounts of kava, (not the tastiest beverage, a bit similar to muddy water, but a staple Fijian drink and a replacement to alcohol in a dry village

like Silana). Emma also explored Fiji's current capital, Suva, as well as its old capital Levuka on the nearby island of Ovalau.

It sounds like a cliché, but Emma is confident that her time in Fiji has been the best time of her life. The volunteers, staff and villagers were inspirational in every way. The wonderful atmosphere in the village meant she was happy all the time.

Sadly, the paradise she considers a second home is no longer a paradise. In February, Fiji was hit by Severe Tropical Cyclone Winston, the largest known to have hit Fiji. The death toll reached 44, including an old lady from Silana. Emma's family's two room tin shack (which her 'grandfather' (aged 81) had built as a young man) was completely destroyed. The river overflowed and flooded the Community Hall where the villagers were taking refuge. The GVI accommodation was almost completely destroyed. The village was not prepared for a natural disaster of this severity, and so most of the buildings - homes, shops, even the church - have almost entirely gone.

An on-line campaign has helped to raise awareness of this disaster. People from all over the world (and Letchworth, thanks to an article in the Comet) have pulled together to help GVI reach its initial target of £25,000. Food and equipment for emergency shelter and construction materials have been bought.

Emma is deeply saddened to see what has happened to the place she called home. She kept in contact with friends in Fiji, and it has been heart-warming to see how positive everyone has remained; but the real struggle is only just beginning. Much more still needs to be done to rebuild Silana into the beautiful community that it once was and to provide new houses for these wonderful people who welcomed Emma so generously into their homes and into their lives.



If you wish to do so, here is the link to the fundraising site: <https://www.justgiving.com/Fiji-Cyclone-Winston-Relief-fund/>. And to see pictures from Emma's trip, follow this link: <http://world-areyouready.tumblr.com/tagged/fiji>

Farewells

Best wishes to all who will leave the College community at the end of this summer.

Pam Wilkinson - Deputy Head, 2006 -2016
 Helen Stone - Head of Prep. Department, 1982 - 2016
 Amy Wallace - Head of Sixth Form 2012-2016
 Alison Balcombe - Prep V Teacher 2002 -2016
 Jackie Hobbs - Teacher of Home Economics
 Roger Kennedy - Teacher of English
 Sue Simpkin - Independent Listener
 Sue York - Flute Teacher
 Heather Fuller - Prep School Teaching Assistant.

Obituaries

Sister Anne (Joan O'Connell)
 Headmistress 1968 - 1973



Sister Anne (1921-2015) was at her happiest studying and teaching French. She became Headmistress at Bideford, before taking up a similar position at St Francis' College from September 1968 - 1973. Her quiet strength and modesty meant that pupils found her very approachable and kindly during her time as Head. She returned as Acting Deputy Head from 1980 - 83, helping Mr McAllister during the change-over of the College to a Charitable Trust. After a Sabbatical year, she was involved in educational, and other, work in Wigan, Birmingham and Bury before returning to live in Spring Road, and helping with local parochial matters. Her declining health eventually led her to the Sisters' house in Ansdell, Lancashire, where she died.

Sister Anne was not only a caring Headmistress but an inspirational Sixth Form French teacher who had an obvious love of languages and, particularly, of French literature. It was she who inspired me to take up French at university and to pursue other languages. Subsequently, I became a teacher of French, Spanish and Italian.

Moreover, I remember her kindness at a difficult period in my life, having just lost my mother. She taught me what was important in life, and although I did not achieve great A-level results, Sister Anne kept me from going completely off the rails!

When I returned to Letchworth from Zimbabwe in 2000, with an Italian husband and three teenage daughters, I spotted Sister Anne at St Hugh's Church mass and had a lovely chat afterwards. She was still the kind, compassionate soul she always was and I was happy to be able to tell her how much she had influenced my career path. I am only sorry I did not manage to see dear Sister Anne again before she died.

Sarah Martinelli (Gillham 1971) sarahmartinelli@hotmail.com

Iris Lawlor (Hopkins) 1943

On Saturday 2nd April 2016 our special family chain was broken as sadly Iris, adored wife of Patrick and very deeply loved mother of Helen Muirhead, passed away in Lister Hospital. Iris was the only sister to Doug (recently deceased) and Keith Hopkins.



Iris was a St. Francis' pupil from 1933 when the College was founded and she stayed until 1943. Iris's daughter, Helen, also attended St. Francis' in the 1960s.

In June 2014, Iris was the star at the SFOGA Vintage Tea Party. Returning to St. Francis' was one of the happiest days for Iris. Attached are photos of Iris looking at the photos shared with old pupils and at the main entrance... which as a child she never used.



All our families and friends will miss Mummy Iris.
Helen Muirhead

REFLECTIONS on a life in the PREP DEPARTMENT

The journey through the Prep over the past 35 years has been varied, enriching, lively and yet very homely. Over the years, I have met some amazing and interesting people, some of whom remain close friends.

Drifting down memory lane to my first SFC experience, I always smile when I reflect on my initial impressions and reactions to the Prep. I was contacted by one of the sisters inviting me to cover some lessons, while teachers accompanied pupils on a trip abroad, I had previously worked at St. Thomas More [a state catholic primary school founded by the SFC Sisters of Jesus and Mary]. I had left to have my first child in 1980 and had no intention of returning to teaching for a very long time - or so I thought!



My instant reaction was that I could not possibly fit into this posh girls' school with lots of very high powered people. Eventually, however I was persuaded to visit to see if I would be interested in covering for a week. I was introduced to a very tall, severe-looking nun, who promptly took me on a tour of her very pristine and highly organised, polished classroom, full of gorgeous displays. My heart sank as she clearly explained in great detail the expectations and ritual of each day at St. Francis' Prep. Clutching my notebook in my perspiring palm, I followed her through the curriculum, listening to her emphasising that these parents are paying for their daughters' education and therefore the teaching must be of the highest calibre!



Secretly, I had decided this was not for me: as soon as I returned home, I would decline the offer. This never happened as I was whisked around the school, introduced to various members of very welcoming staff and eventually escorted to the Bursary (also beautifully polished and neat), but about the size of a cupboard. Behind

a tall Victorian desk sat a very small nun, glasses on the end of her nose, pen poised in one hand and her fingers on the other hand feverishly pounding on an adding machine! I had met my first Bursar! Within minutes I was signed up for SFC!

I went home and wrote copious notes on all the instructions I had been given. A few weeks later, filled with fear and trepidation, I arrived to commence my teaching for one whole week at SFC Prep. I have to say I was overwhelmed by the girls' behaviour, their enthusiasm, friendliness and natural confidence, not to mention the standard of work, both content and presentation.



Gradually, I began doing more hours in different areas in the Prep. The staffroom was again, not as I had expected, not at all stuffy or snobby, but full of humour and dedicated genuine teachers. I felt a sense of belonging!



In 1983 the announcement of the nuns leaving SFC caused great anxiety for parents and staff. Splashed across the papers and TV was the news that SFC was to close at the end of that academic year. As if by magic and true to form, that great SFC grit emerged, with a stalwart group of staff and parents determined to save our school. Before my eyes I watched these amazing people form committees and work relentlessly. In that year, the school lost some pupils, but we stayed open, a board of governors was established for the first time and new Heads were appointed in Senior and Prep.



It is difficult to summarise in a few words what it is that is special about SFC and explain the "SFC thing". I would like to describe it as the "Spirit of St. Francis". I feel this word encapsulates the very essence of our school, as it attracts spirited, energetic, creative and forward thinking individuals, with a strong sense of devotion to the pupils regardless of their roles. This spirit in turn transfers smoothly to the girls as matter of course, as though it was a genetic norm.



Even though there have been many changes over the years, the ambience remains firmly in the heart and soul of this community with that "spirit" still gliding through the buildings as it has done for over 80 years and will undoubtedly continue for generations to come, like a relay where the educators pass the baton to the next set of educators.



The photos I have selected are a snapshot of some strong areas that have been retained down the years. These are the Harvest Festival, Nativity Play, Carol Concert and end of year KS2 play. I have chosen images from the '80s and

2015-6. These photos highlight our chapel and theatre, where powerful work has generated tears of joy and sadness (from parents and grandparents) as they watch their girls perform in the "Spirit of St. Francis".

Thank you St. Francis' for all the years I have had the privilege and pleasure to know so many talented and dedicated staff and pupils. We have laughed, cried, worried and celebrated together, bonding in the true "Spirit of St. Francis."



Helen Stone Teacher at St. Francis' from 1981-2016 and Head of Prep