

# newsletter



## Welcome from Louise Hopper, Chair, SFOGA

This has been a very special year for the College and the Old Girls' Association. We have celebrated the 85th anniversary of the formation of the School by the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary, and 70 years since the first pupils were welcomed to St. Francis' Old Girls' Association.



On Sunday 1 July the Headmistress and SFOGA committee hosted a reunion luncheon in the College grounds to celebrate these landmark anniversaries. This was our best attended reunion with almost 170 old girls, former staff and some of the Sisters of Charity coming back to the school: we welcomed old girls from the 1940s right to the present day.

The weather was superb! Perfect for catching up with friends in the marquee on the field and enjoying the hog roast. We were treated to an organ recital by Mr Conyngham in chapel – absolutely brilliant! The rest of the school was also open to explore and to stir up some more memories – “I remember when the swimming pool was opened!” “The Geography room hasn't changed at all!” “Do you remember being allowed to ring the school bell when you got to Prep IV?”

We've since had so many emails to say what a great reunion this was. It was fantastic to meet so many of you and hear your stories from your school days – thank you for coming.

Photos from the event can be enjoyed on our SFOGA Facebook page or at [www.flickr.com/photos/131714726@N03](http://www.flickr.com/photos/131714726@N03) Here's to our next event!

## Message from Mrs Bronwen Goulding, Headmistress and President of SFOGA

It was a huge pleasure to meet so many of you this at the 85th Anniversary celebration. The warmth and affection which you all have for the College was self evident and heart warming to observe. When you visit, so many of you will say how things have changed and yet, also, how things have remained the same and how it feels the same.



All these thoughts are true as the heart and soul of the community remains the same even though the College continues to provide for a modern and future focused education. We have successfully changed our curriculum this academic year to include more ICT for the younger girls and introduced an enrichment programme for our Sixth Form which includes critical thinking skills, touch typing or coding and presentation skills among other things. This September, girls will be studying two new A levels which we have added to our offer: Computer Science and Government and Politics. Our results this year were excellent and continue to improve. Almost all our Upper Sixth were offered a place at their first choice university and are off studying a wide variety of disciplines at prestigious universities. We are wondering if this is a College record!

I would like to thank you, once again, for the support which you have given to our Sixth Form students as they look forward to future employment. It is so important that our young women of today are supported by their older and wiser alumnae by providing opportunity and role models.

I look forward to meeting some of you again in the forthcoming year.

## Welcome to new Committee members

**Louise Cupac** (Hall – class of 1993) knew at 16 that she wanted to get into construction, so after A Levels, went to University College, London and graduated with a degree in Architecture, Planning, Building and Environmental Studies.

From this foundation in design, she then moved into a mechanical and electrical services management role on a variety of demanding and innovative projects throughout London.

In her working life, she has seen great changes in the world of construction, both in attitude towards women and minorities, and in the approach to health and safety. She has had the opportunity to work on some incredibly interesting and complex projects, gaining an excellent knowledge of the construction business and its many disciplines. She now uses all of these skills to head a team at Kier that works closely with bid teams all over the UK, focusing extensively on a wide range of educational projects, (including primary, secondary, SEN and UTCs.) to help deliver interior space planning solutions for the proposed educational projects.



**Lucy Rahim** (2011) attended St. Francis' along with her sister Natalie, and, latterly, with her mum, Carol, who remains on the teaching staff. She spent most of her SFC years in the library bothering Mrs Purchon, asking Mrs Fenton to mark her extra essays or singing in the music rooms. She was Editor of the School Magazine and Head Girl, meaning that she spent most of Sixth Form running around from place to place, earning her the Award for the Busiest Bee. She studied English and Modern Languages at Durham University and has worked at the Society of London Theatre, The Daily Telegraph and currently the London Musical Theatre Orchestra. She is delighted to be able to join the SFOGA committee and give back to the school that offered her so much.



## Thank you and farewell to some long-standing members

The SFOGA committee work hard to ensure that SFOGA is sustainable for many years to come. I would like to personally thank committee members who have made the decision this year to step down from their role, for the hard work and time they have given to SFOGA.

**Susan Podmore** (Joyce – 1990) has been a stalwart and active member of our committee for many years and was also Chair of SFOGA from 2010 – 2015. Under her leadership, the SFOGA gained a new lease of life and held a highly successful reunion in 2013 to celebrate 80 years of the College. 'I'd just like to take this opportunity to thank her for all her work over the years and her personal support to me when I took the reins from as Chair. You will be missed Susan!'

**Angela Burke** (1960s) whose long standing family association with the College has ensured that we kept the history of the school alive through her time on the committee. Angela and her family presented SFOGA with the blazer that she wore during her time in the Prep school and which is now displayed in the main reception area.

**Jane Baerlein** (Hunter – class of 1964) and her daughter Sarah attended St. Francis' and had strong links with the Art Department. Jane was instrumental in ensuring that SFOGA was able to contribute memories when Adrian Mallett, the former Head of Art, passed away last year.

If you would like to join our committee, please contact Katharine Purchon or me at [sfoga@st-francis.herts.sch.uk](mailto:sfoga@st-francis.herts.sch.uk)

**Louise Hopper**

**Touching the sun - Nicky Fox (1987)** has been leading NASA's Parker Solar Probe mission for eight years. Her goal? To "finally go and understand how our star works" – "to touch the Sun".

The probe rocket launched from Cape Canaveral in early August and took twelve weeks to reach the Sun. It will then loop around the star 24 times, coming as close as 6.16 million km to the surface. She says, "I realise that might not sound that close – but imagine the Sun and the Earth were a metre apart. Parker Solar Probe would be just 4cm away from the Sun."

The probe is set to become the fastest artificial object in history, careering across our Solar System at 690,000km/h – fast enough to go from New York to Tokyo in under a minute.

Nicky writes that, "the most satisfying thing about being a scientist is that you are always trying to discover something new, and every now and then, you actually succeed."

*Dr Nicky Fox watches the launch on Sunday with Dr Eugene Parker, after whom the Parker Solar Probe is named.*



**'How are you?'**

**Selina Ferrar** (Turner – Class of 1994)

It's a simple enough question, but answering it when you live with an invisible disability is beyond complex. Do they want me to actually say how I feel? How do you tell someone that you are thoroughly exhausted and yet you cannot sleep because there is no position you can lie in that doesn't hurt. That as a result of not hitting REM sleep your brain has not been able to process all of the stresses yesterday brought and prepare it for those you will encounter tomorrow. You rise in the morning only to walk on the outside of your feet because to put your foot flat feels like walking on hot coals with pins and needles so intense that your finger tips burn; not to mention the grating through your joint hinges that sears through you causing migraines and stomach pains. Enough to make a person cry? Difficult when your eyes are so dry it takes effort just to keep them open. People are often off work with bad backs, migraines, injuries or the flu. But these ailments usually pass in a few days and are rarely experienced together. But that is my day to day on little or broken sleep. But that is just how I feel physically and after all the question is "How am I?"



Frustrated is not a strong enough word. I want to make plans and get stuff done but I have to chose between vacuuming or washing. I take meds that help me to function enough to collect my children from school and listen to them read. I want to take on freelance work but am only able to accept jobs with fluid deadlines in case I have a run of 'bad days' and let someone down.

This leads me to my next feeling; a constant, unforgiving state of anxiety. How can I get all this done when I know the first task that day will drain me so completely it takes everything I have not to fall? Can I control my environment? (Dramatic temperature changes amplify my symptoms). Will a situation arise where I am needed and physically can't do what needs to be done?. As a mother this is horrifying.

Even worse is that all this anxiety makes me incredibly angry with myself. I wasn't born this way. I used to ski, ride horses, walk the dogs and go running. I used to host or get invited to so many events, volunteer at school and in the community. Now, even minimal exercise is crippling, planning ahead is impossible and my invitations have all but dried up.

And that brings me to my final 'feeling', loneliness. The trouble with an invisible disability is that because it cannot be seen it is very difficult for others to understand or even believe it is real. So how can I answer truthfully to even those closest to me? How often can I say 'I'm exhausted' or 'everything hurts' when I look the same as them? How can I keep my faith in others and even medical practitioners when I must continually provide evidence of my pain to counterbalance the assumptions of laziness I often see in their eyes? Hence I write this to help people not only see the condition masked by my smile, but understand what the daily battle Fibromyalgia is like so that I can answer that question honestly. "I am surviving, but knowing you understand helps me live".

**Reversing the "resource curse" - Steph Rochford (2001)**

In many countries around the world, governments and citizens face a paradoxical dilemma: although their countries are "blessed" with valuable natural resources – the minerals (like gold, iron and cobalt), oil and gas that help to sustain our way of life across the planet – those same countries invariably experience extreme poverty and high levels of corruption; and lack access to basic rights such as education, health care and freedom of speech. This phenomenon is known as the "resource curse" and it is the reason that the charity I work for, Publish What You Pay (PWYP), exists.



PWYP is a member-based movement of civil society organisations in more than 45 countries who promote information disclosure; the rights of citizens to engage with governments in decision making; and strong institutions to hold both government and business leaders accountable for how a country's natural resources are used. We do this by providing training to activists around the world, sourcing and producing research about how to manage natural resources sustainably for the benefit of citizens, and engaging with policy makers and international institutions who can influence government and industry behaviours. As a result of PWYP's campaigning over the years, laws are now in place which require major oil, gas and mining companies to "publish what they pay" to governments around the world for those resources. This information is critical in enabling citizens in some of the poorest countries in the world to "follow the money" and ensure that it is spent on education, health and infrastructure for the benefit of all, rather than used to line

the pockets of those in positions of power.

As Director of Member Engagement at PWYP my role is to support our partners across the globe to build their capacity to engage on highly technical issues and to develop and implement strategies to influence governments and business leaders to manage their country's natural wealth

responsibly. It is a tough but rewarding job and I am privileged to have the opportunity to work with highly committed and courageous activists around the world to try to bring about change. You can find out more about PWYP on our website [www.publishwhatyoupay.org](http://www.publishwhatyoupay.org)

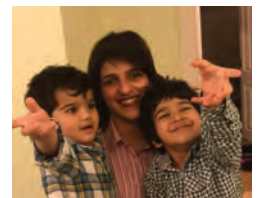


*Pictures: Sangaredi bauxite mine in Guinea, West Africa. Guinea has about one quarter of the world's resources of bauxite (which is used to make aluminium) as well as significant iron ore deposits. In 2016, Guinea was ranked 183 out of 188 countries by the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report.*

**Women in STEM\* - Prathana Thiagarajan (2004)**

It's guaranteed to polarise opinion in the working world. Its hashtag trending on twitter. And - as surely as the sun will rise, as surely as Donald Trump will tweet lies in caps lock - it will leave you wondering why there is still so far to go.

As a doctor, scientist, feminist and, most importantly, the mother of two young boys, exploring the facilitators and barriers to women entering scientific professions is important. Ensuring women are equally represented as career role models to my sons has become an uphill struggle (cue searching for ages on YouTube for videos of female astronauts, pilots and 'shark chasers'); but one that I am passionate about.



Evidence shows us that women are vastly under-represented in STEM workforces. Only 11% of the UK's engineering workforce is female. As a profession, engineering contributes 26% of the UK's GDP (in other words, £127,580,000,000 to our economy). The McKinsey Global Institute estimates that empowering women into engineering careers could contribute up to \$28 trillion to global economic output by 2025. Stats on women in computer science are similarly bewildering. Just 16% of computer science undergraduates in the UK are female.

Yet this is a field which touches all aspects of our lives, drives a booming Artificial Intelligence industry and whose monetary value will soar in coming decades. When the UK's economy, its competitiveness and its global position as a driver of scientific progress all rely critically on broadening recruitment in STEM fields, why are we having trouble closing the gap?

The answers are complex. It is innately compelling to blame gender disparities on biological differences, but this is not borne out by hard evidence. Experience changes brain structure and functioning, so causal proclamations about biological differences and success in STEM are circular. The degree to which society tips the odds in (or out) of our favour is crucial, and is well backed-up by evidence.

There are three domains to consider.

**Perception:** stereotyping remains entrenched in our culture. This begins in childhood. Open the children's toy section of the Argos catalogue and be engulfed in an ocean of pink and blue, of toy kitchens and construction tools: a binary representation of girls and boys. A US-based experiment demonstrated that adolescent girls were discouraged from applying for computer science when presented with a 'stereotypical' environment e.g. vitamin-D deficient boys with glasses and braces, surrounded by star trek posters and science fiction books. When this environment was changed (e.g. posters replaced by plants, female students, general rather than science fiction books), uptake among teenage girls for such programmes soared. Representation matters.



**Visibility:** it is easier to aspire to greatness when you can see someone who looks vaguely like you achieving it. Women make up just 13% of the STEM workforce, so access to role models is a challenge. California's Silicon Valley boasts a workforce that is 75% male, with an overt 'brogrammer' culture. Female pioneers are hard to find. I ask my 4 year old son what he wants to be when he is older, he says 'a pilot, an astronaut or a gamer'. I ask my 4 year old niece the same question and her answer is 'a princess'. Again: representation matters. Lack of workplace provision for things like 'having a family' and a dearth of visible female role models who are both scientists and mothers further distances such professions from women who aspire to be both.

**Confidence:** in a recent BBC documentary, No more boys and girls, the production team studied a primary school class of 7-year old children with a series of questionnaires, linguistic and arithmetic challenges and interviews. The results were fascinating. Girls consistently ranked themselves lower than their male classmates in terms of ability in science and maths. Boys consistently ranked themselves higher in the same domains. There was no objective mean difference in their test scores. In the interviews, phrases such as 'boys are cleverer than girls because they get into president more easily' and 'men are more successful because they could have harder jobs and earn more' were commonplace among both girls and boys. There is a self-esteem issue which relates to both perceptions and visibility. The Imposter Syndrome is familiar to many working women and I am no stranger to it. This phenomenon, in which successful women have high levels of self-doubt, consistently undervalue themselves and worry about being exposed as a 'fraud' when at work, is pervasive in medicine, engineering and technology. It serves to undermine hard-working women in their own eyes. It discourages them from realising their full potential.

What can we do to overcome these barriers? I think that visibility and mentorship are key. Developing and promoting career discovery programmes for young female students, and empowering them to explore their curiosity for science and innovation, might just encourage them to follow scientific career paths. Recognising our own unconscious biases and working actively to remove gender stereotypes to nurture a sense of belonging (e.g. erasing the 'brogrammer' culture, more 'gender neutral' advertising of toys) can encourage girls to feel 'accepted' in their interests in robotics, mechanics or computing. Having accessible female role models can transform the previously unattainable into a genuine career aspiration.

Simultaneously, we need to erase the perception that boys and girls are just 'naturally' good at different fields. 'Violet the Pilot' and 'The Knitting Dinosaur', both sit quite comfortably on our bookshelf and contain gender positive messages. In the workplace, developing robust, progressive standards to accommodate women in flexible working roles, together with a concerted effort by employers to enable shared parental leave without punitive financial consequences, might increase inclusivity, enabling women to pursue ambitious careers but also enabling men to connect meaningfully with their children.

Finally. Why is Science important to me? It isn't that I love equations, have a strange obsession with Breaking Bad, or really crave in-depth understanding of the structure of glucokinase (although all are to some extent true). No, it is that science by definition invokes critical thinking. Science is the relentless pursuit of truth. And in the current febrile political climate, the ability to critically appraise and to make an informed decision is incredibly powerful. This drives progress and also protects us against so-called 'fake news'. Science also teaches us to critically appraise ourselves, to examine our biases and prejudices, and how they might affect the way in which we approach concepts like gender. In acknowledging our own limitations, however uncomfortable, we carve a path towards freedom. In relentlessly pursuing the truth, we enable a brighter future for our children.

I finish with an impassioned appeal to any aspiring female scientists. Go for it. We need more of you. Though I often feel like a full-time doctor and part-time mother, I hope I am setting the right example to my boys that applying yourself with passion is a pretty good way of spending a life, and that gender does not have to be a barrier to personal fulfilment and career success.

\*Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

#### **Making a case for creative education – Lauren England (2009)**

I had the pleasure of studying Art & Design at St .Francis' under the direction of the late Mr Mallett. An inspirational figure to many of us, he was instrumental in my choice to study glass and ceramics at university and then undertake a PhD at King's College London on Craft Higher Education in partnership with the Crafts Council UK.

It saddens and worries me that many children don't have the same opportunities to engage with the arts in school today. Figures indicate arts are being squeezed out of our education system. There have been significant cuts to arts teaching and teachers at all levels, a -35% decline in arts GCSE entries and a -24% decline in A-Level entries over the past eight years. This is associated with the introduction of educational performance frameworks, budget cuts and negative perceptions of the value of arts education.



In higher education, the debate around 'value for money' is reinforcing a lack of parity between arts, humanities and social sciences subjects on one hand, and STEM subjects on the other. The use of blunt measurements such as graduate destinations and salary data as a proxy for value are also ill-suited to the pathways of creative graduates. Their potential use to determine university fee structures following the post-18 education review poses a significant threat to the provision of creative subjects in higher education and subsequently the creative economy.

There are inherent contradictions in this position and policy; in 2016 the Creative Industries supported 2million jobs and contributed £92bn GVA to the economy. There is also evidence that creative occupations are the least at risk of automation and that creative skills are crucial to future economic prosperity. While the 2018 Industrial Strategy championed the Creative Industries as a high growth sector, there has been a failure to address the ongoing decline in arts education, and in some instances blatant denial of the issue.

If misconstrued notions and purely economic valuations of creative education are allowed to usurp other cultural and sociological measurements of value, we risk undermining its significant contribution to the creative economy and our national culture. For those of you considering your child's GCSE, A-Level or University subjects now or in the future, I urge you to support their interest in taking an arts subject and encourage them to pursue a career in the arts if that is their ambition.

## A Bloody Good Cause - Sanya Masood and Sophie Harrold (2009)

We started our campaign in July 2015, in response to a viral petition called the Homeless Period. This raised awareness about the lack of Government provision of menstrual products to homeless shelters and refuges, while other less essential products (such as razors) were made easily available to male service users.

Our first campaign was for a homeless shelter called The Whitechapel Centre in Liverpool, where we used social media to turn a small local collection into hundreds of donations through the help of the BBC and local news.



Since then, we have delivered thousands of donations to numerous organisations in London, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Birmingham, Nottingham and Plymouth. We have had the opportunity to team up with similar projects and companies such as Freda, which sells organic and eco-friendly period care via a monthly subscription service. Freda enables our donors to donate products at cost via its website and a portion of any profit they make goes back into helping charitable causes in the UK and abroad.

Although our initial focus was homeless women, we have also been able to work with refugees, asylum seekers and school girls from low income backgrounds, as period poverty has now been proven to be a much wider issue. We have also been able to raise awareness around other issues such as the tampon tax.

Our campaigns constantly evolve with the needs of each organisation we partner with. As part of our latest campaign with Trevi House in Plymouth (a residential centre for women and children), we collected donations of nappies for the babies and toddlers in residence, alongside our usual donations of sanitary products for the women using this service.

We hope to continue working towards eradicating period poverty in the UK, one campaign at a time. If you are interested in finding out more about what we do, you can visit our Facebook page

A Bloody Good Cause

or our website [www.abloodygoodcause.wordpress.com](http://www.abloodygoodcause.wordpress.com).

## How to run a reunion

Working with the rest of the SFOGA committee to organise the 85th Anniversary reunion was a brilliant introduction to the Old Girls Association. Meeting in late 2017, July 1st seemed a million miles away, but time certainly flies when you have an event to plan. Our aim was to bring together as many generations of alumnae as we could, and so we decided to update our booking system to make it as easy as possible for past pupils to reserve their place at the grand event. We created an online booking form, shared via email and social media, that made it much easier to collate and monitor bookings. This helped to simplify the process of allocating tickets and organising tables. Though of course they still haven't invented a machine to help us stuff all the tickets in the envelopes!



Another crucial part of the organisation was creating the display boards that documented the history of the school. Working mainly from old editions of the school magazine and stacks of old photographs, Katharine Purchon has done a tremendous job in piecing together a picture of what life was like at St Francis' College through the ages. She and I spent many an hour poring over black and white images of the buildings and classrooms, trying to pick out familiar places and faces. We then separated our findings out by decade and theme (the Sisters of Charity, the curriculum, life as a boarder) in order to offer our guests a potted history of the College. It was a mammoth effort (and the work still continues!), but seeing this history come to life on July 1st in the smiling faces of our returning students made it all the more worthwhile.

Lucy Rahim



## SFOGA developments

### Our Charity – the Kanyike Project

St. Francis' College generously hosted a Musical Evening in late 2018 to raise much needed funds. With Alex Hetherington as compere and many former students performing music from jazz and soul to opera, there was something for everyone to enjoy. And we raised £4000. Thank you to everyone involved.

*Students on a 2018 visit to the Project.*



### Sad news

Sheila Ould (Wagstaff) died recently. She went to Addenbrookes from SFC in 1948 as one of the first nurses to work for the newly formed NHS. Donald, her husband, described her as – 'one of a unique band of ladies'.

## St. Francis' College news

At Speech Day the **Iris Lawlor Award** was presented for the first time to a year 13 student, Jovina Djulamsah. The award has been generously donated to St. Francis' College by Helen Muirhead in memory of her mother, Iris, who attended the College in 1933. She really hopes to inspire more women to go into science and engineering and is pictured here with her father, Patrick and the lucky recipient.



### Farewell and best wishes

to all who have left the College community this year: Lindsay Bryant – Assistant Head (Pastoral); Keith and Erica Buckley - Caretaker and Assistant Housemistress; Beth Foster - Director of Studies; Lesley Hetherington - Teacher of English; Helen Lomax – Administrator; and Paula Moore - Teacher of PE.

## 2018 – a celebration of SFOGA at 70 and St. Francis' College at 85!

### SFOGA's anniversary gift to St. Francis' College – the restoration of the Sacred Heart statue

In 1933 a group of nuns from Belgium came to Letchworth Garden City to open St. Francis' College. The Headmistress was Sr. Elisabeth of the Trinity and Sr. Patrick acted as her Deputy until her death at the College in 1956. It was Sister Patrick who founded our old girls' association in 1948 and SFOGA still thrives today, with over 1500 members. Sr Patrick was a strict disciplinarian. Her office was in the current base for reprographics and at the beginning of each term she would stand outside the Middle School gate to collect the fees from the day girls. It was impossible to sneak into school late without being reprimanded by her.



In December 1952 she celebrated the Golden Jubilee of her religious profession. The day began with several masses in the Chapel and the celebrant placed a gold crown of flowers on Sr. Patrick's head. Everyone then assembled in the Theatre where Sr. Patrick was presented with a beautiful statue of the Sacred Heart made out of Portland stone. Money for this statue had been raised from pupils and parents, past and present, and friends of hers in the UK and abroad. A speech of thanks on behalf of the senior school was given by Bindy Hewitt, Head Girl

The next day this statue was erected in the college grounds near the tennis courts, where it still stands. However, weather took its toll and the statue began to deteriorate. In 2018 SFOGA decided to arrange to have the statue restored to mark the 85th Anniversary of the College and the 70th Anniversary of SFOGA. The transformation was remarkable. Hopefully, the statue will watch over the College for another 66 years.

Bindy returned to the College on July 1st for the SFOGA 70th Reunion.

Katherine Purchon