

# ATHENA'S BUGLE

THE OLD SUTTONIAN NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 1 - MAY 2022



## Note from the Chairman

I am delighted to be writing this introduction to the first edition of Athena's Bugle, the newsletter of The Old Suttonians. It is our intention to issue this newsletter termly and in doing so improve the exchange of information between the Association, its members and the school. To do so we need a decent flow of information and I would urge all readers to drop the editorial team at Athena's Bugle a line at [erc@suttongrammar.sutton.sch.uk](mailto:erc@suttongrammar.sutton.sch.uk). Don't worry too much about having to write a formal submission; we can help with that – just send us your news, ideas, photographs or memories and we will pick it up from there!

The Association's primary purpose is to bind together relationships between the former students of our school as well as with staff and the extended school family. Most important, however, is our desire to support and further the aims of the school. The OSA has been doing this consistently since it was founded in 1909 by former master Mr S A Birks. This support materialises in any number of ways, be it Old Suttonians supporting the school's career fair; providing opportunities for work experience; volunteering to serve on the Governing Body; working as Cadet Force Adult Volunteers in the Combined Cadet Force; managing and refereeing school football matches, and the list goes on and on. Indeed, it is unlikely that there is an aspect of school life that has not at some time or other been supported by an Old Suttonian.

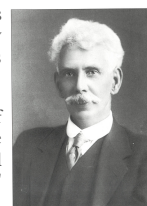
We are, however, aware that to many this active support is not well understood, and this newsletter aims to start the process of stronger engagement with members and potential members. This is important as the school itself continues to need our help and support. Every time we meet a new Old Suttonian we are reminded of how fondly most former pupils feel about their time at Sutton Grammar School and how grateful they are for the start it provided them. If we can better harness this extraordinary goodwill then we will be able to further accelerate the development of the school and its ambition.

So the newsletter is the start of something new for us, but it is not all we are doing. In addition to the newsletter, and in partnership with the school, we are in the process of building a new online platform for Old Suttonians, which will bring together alumni, parents, former and current staff, and friends of Sutton Grammar School. This will enable you to reconnect with friends, and find out about school and alumni events and keep up to date on school and alumni news. In addition, I am delighted to let you know that we have partnered with the school and the PTA to jointly fund a full-time school-based co-ordinator, Marie Brass, to ensure that we can provide a timely and professional service to our members.

The Old Suttonians Council is run by volunteers and, as lives have become increasingly busy, we are aware that we do not have the capacity to really develop and drive the Old Suttonians forward at the pace required. We believe these new initiatives will address that issue and I am convinced that this is the most significant step that the Old Suttonians have undertaken for decades. It will lead us to having a strong and engaged Old Suttonian community supporting our school, complemented by a superb range of social and networking opportunities, so that it is not just the school that benefits – it is you also. This proves that when you join Sutton Grammar School, you don't just do so for seven years – you do so for life!

M C Armstrong (OS: 1966 - 1973)  
Chairman

Mr S A Birks (pictured right), founder of the Old Suttonians Association, joined Sutton County School in 1901 as a Geography teacher. He was a dedicated teacher and specialised in coping with boys who were regarded as 'awkward cases'.



The Football Club, OSFC, was founded in 1906 through the initiative of Mr Birks, following the desire from Old Suttonians to continue sporting activities after leaving school. The OSA itself was then formed in 1909 thanks to Mr Birks' commitment to creating a formal 'old boys' association to ensure post-school contacts.

Mr Birks also created the school magazine, The Suttonian, editing and financing the publication. Sadly he died still in post in 1928.

## Annual Reunion Dinner

The 89th Old Suttonians Association Reunion Dinner will be held on Friday, 16 September 2022, at the Hotel du Vin, Wimbledon (Cannizaro House, West Side Common, SW19 4UE) from 7.00pm.

Old Suttonians, Honorary Life Members and school staff are all invited to attend, and we hope it will be a fitting reunion after the difficulties of the last two years.

Tickets are £65 per person, which includes a three-course meal served with wine, followed by coffee.

More information and tickets are available at [www.osadinner.com](http://www.osadinner.com)



# Rugby Club news



Keep faith. It's what you do on a wild and wind-blown pitch somewhere outside Croydon on a Saturday afternoon in early January, still carrying a few extra pounds of festive ballast. Faith that the blokes either side of you have got your back – there for a quick offload, or to open the defence up with an Oscar-winning dummy. To be there when you run into trouble.

This is an Old Suttonians 'Club' XV game: a gathering of players across the age, beauty and experience spectrums, against a Croydon RFC 2nd XV that clearly only wanted protein shakes and gym renewals for Christmas. The pitch is slippery, sucking, cold as clay. We set out to play a close, controlled game in the conditions, waiting for them to overstretch and make errors.

The errors come. The game begins to open up. A neat, angled cut-in from our fly-half scissors the defence and puts us on the scoreboard. We are a medley of players, a wild cohort, like those weathered bandits coming together for one last heist. One of our players has returned for his first game in three years following a major operation. Another is in his seventies, still embarrassing players a third of his age. Another came along solely to spectate, but finds himself cheerfully lacing up after half-time before causing havoc for us at the breakdown. We have little blokes and big blokes and most sizes in-between. Shouty ones, am-dram ones, quiet-but-wouldn't-wind-them-up ones. It is a democratic kind of violence.

## OSCC vs Wonersh (h) - The Onions are back!

After talking a good game all pre-season Humper got his big chance to open batting alongside Mr Quick-Between-The-Wickets and he cracked a couple of glorious fours through the offside.

Anything Humper can do Rajeeva can do better – he belted ten off the second over. Then Waqar was in at three the skipper at four and current schoolboy Vinay, came in at five. Sam Thoburn strode in with his new stick of willow and Imran, whose dental work the previous day had left him feeling under the weather, began to find his rhythm and hoisted their opener for a monster maximum off the last ball of his allocation. These two proved an invaluable partnership. We clapped the skipper's half-century with gusto.

After Imran fell, Venke, Waheed and Wellappili valiantly scrapped to 175 all out.

Sutts tea-d on the balcony and then went about defending the total.

Slowly, Wonersh headed towards their target. Also slowly but less surely, the Onions picked up some wickets. They needed six runs off the last four overs. Cometh the moment, cometh the man. Neil Wellappili. The good doctor cast a quick glance at his script, smiled and charged in. WIDE BALL. All part of the plan. WICKET! One wicket to win! WIIIIIDE! The denouement loomed. Neil hopped in. BOWLED HIM!!!!!! #absolutescenes

Sutts had grabbed a victory from the jaws of defeat and were off to winning ways in their favourite division.

Keep it real,

Humper

The score ticks up. An early Croydon counter is fizzled by a snippy little try through the centre from our scrum-half. Gaps emerge along a ragged Croydon defence. Both of our centres cling on to a soapy ball for tries apiece.

Keep faith. It's what you do when grassroots rugby, like other team sports across the country, is battling to retain players in a changing landscape. Teams are folding across Surrey and London at an unprecedented rate. But looking at this merry mud-soaked rabble, you think: this, here, is the beating heart of our community. If this goes, we lose so much more than a Saturday chug-around. And so we battle for it, like we battle for each other out there on the pitch. These games, each of them, mean something.

The clock winds down. Old Suttonians stretch away to a 10-24 win. Croydon shamble away, perhaps wishing they had swapped the occasional guns day for some cardio. We gather in a close huddle, chests heaving, wiping mud from our eyes. Keep faith.

Dan Clements (Club XV Captain).

## OSRFC diary dates

21 May	Summer Touch Rugby begins at Nonsuch Park every Saturday at 10.00am
30 June	Pre-season training starts at Northey Avenue every Thursday at 7pm



## Join Us

Please click [here](#) to find out how to join the OSA.



Will Humphries and Rajeeva Indiketiya, the OSCC opening batsmen





# Alumni memories

Both the school and the OSA recently had the great privilege of being contacted by our oldest Old Suttonian, Mr Geoffrey Brown (pictured right). He was born on 4 July, 1920 and attended Sutton Grammar School, known then as Sutton County School, from 1930 to 1934. In the late 1930s, Mr Brown lived barely 30 yards from the school and has memories of not only the school being built but also attending Sutton County School for four happy years until he moved to Westcliff-on-Sea.

Due to the extensive school archive, we have been able to provide Mr Brown with school reports for him and his brother, Derrick, who also attended the school for a year. Mr Brown was also very interested to see the Roll of Honour as he had often wondered if his classmates had survived the Second World War. Sadly it contained no fewer than seven names of boys he remembered who had died during the war.

Mr Brown has written an account of his schooling for his great-grandchildren and has been kind enough to share his memories with us.



## Sutton County School by Geoffrey Brown (OS: 1930 - 1934)

It was in 1927 or 1928 when, one day, I noticed some activity in the field opposite the end of Litchfield Road where we lived. The allotments that had occupied the lower end of the field had not been worked for some time and in their place a gang of men were digging trenches. I realised that they were digging the foundations of a large building which we were told was to be a school. A few days later, carts began to arrive bearing loads of sand or bags of cement. Using their shovels, the gang made a heap of sand, added a bagful of cement and mixed it thoroughly. Making a crater in the heap, they poured in a few buckets of water and mixed it again before putting the mixture into wheelbarrows and using it to fill the trenches. It took many days before all the trenches were filled. The carts reappeared, this time filled with red bricks, and they were followed by a great number of long, thin poles and some wooden planks. The bricks were stacked neatly and the poles were erected to form scaffolding all over the site. I was fascinated, watching the men as they set about the building work, mixing small quantities of mortar and laying bricks to form the walls, the bricks being carried to the skilled bricklayers by hod carriers. Gradually the building took shape, the roof put on and glass put in the window frames.



A team of bricklayers taking a break from their work in 1928

There was still a great deal to be done to the interior of the building and for many months large quantities of wood, plaster and paint arrived in carts and lorries and were taken inside. It must have been towards the end of 1928 before the great building was finished and boys in red blazers, red and black caps with a silver owl on the front arrived. It was interesting to me because I knew that if I passed my exams I would be going to that school. Pass them I did and so, in September 1930, I was taken to Dugans, the men's outfitters in Sutton High Street, to be kitted out in blazer and cap, had my hair cut at Renacres, the hairdressers, and on the first day of the autumn term walked the 30 yards from home to Sutton County School. I was just ten years old.



SUTTON COUNTY SCHOOL  
Newly completed Sutton County School opened in November 1928

We assembled in the school hall, where the new boys formed rows at the front, facing the stage, whereon stood a solitary elderly master surveying us, his severe looks belying his kindly, benevolent nature. He was Mr Horne, the deputy headmaster, and he was always there of a morning throughout the time I was at the school, maintaining order. Among ourselves we referred to him as 'The Old Gaffer'. He taught Latin and would enter the classroom saying 'All the boys with their books open at page ....' His oft-used phrase 'all the boys' was, of course, quickly picked up by us pupils and introduced into our classroom vocabulary. I was told that he was a lay preacher at the nearby church of St. Barnabas. When the boys were all in their places, the masters would enter from their common room and file on to the stage, followed by the head, for prayers and a hymn. One of the senior boys, who could play the piano, accompanied the singing and as we left the hall for our classrooms would play a rousing march to speed us on our way.



SUTTON COUNTY SCHOOL, THE HALL  
The school hall, which now has a new stage



After I had been at the school for a year or two, an organ was installed in the hall. It was a very fine instrument, a little bulkier than the upright piano, and once the latter had been tuned to its pitch it was played by Mr Coult, one of the chemistry masters, greatly increasing the quality and the volume of the music. The hall was also used for singing and as a gymnasium since there were no other rooms available for those subjects.

The headmaster, Mr J A Cockshutt, nicknamed 'Jacko' from his initials, held a theory that we learned more readily before lunch than after so the morning was long – from 9.00am to 1.00pm – and afternoon school was from 2.20pm to 4.20pm. There was a 15-minute break in the morning during which the tuck shop was opened by Mr Tutt.

On first entering the school, boys were placed in one of four 'houses' named Red, Blue, Brown and Green. I was in Green house and our housemaster was Mr Wells – 'Billy' Wells after a well known professional boxer of the time. He was also my form master for one of my years and was a most likeable man. Once a week we would meet as a house in one of the larger classrooms. In our case it was the chemistry laboratory. There was always a certain rivalry between houses, particularly when it came to sports. About once a year we would have a house tea when we stayed behind after school and had a good tea with plenty of jam and cake before playing a few games. At one of these the senior boys in the house wanted to make a presentation to Billy Wells and they asked me to do it. Flowers were considered unsuitable for a man so they had bought a huge bunch of bananas which, with some embarrassment, I duly took up and gave to him.

Scholastically, the school was organised in three streams - Classical, Science and Modern – and in each year there were three forms bearing those names. I was in Classical Two to start with and progressed to Classical Five in my fourth year, which was my last at that school as my family moved to Westcliff-on-Sea in 1934 and I transferred to Westcliff High School. We all studied the basic subjects – English, Maths, History, Geography, Chemistry, French – but Classical forms also took Latin and Art, Science forms included additional sciences such as Physics and Mechanics, while Modern forms taught commercial subjects and modern languages. I must say that I never got on well with Latin and my artistic ability was non-existent.

The subject I enjoyed most was chemistry, which I was taught first by Mr Bibby and later by Mr Coult. I particularly liked the way Mr Coult taught it. He would tell us to bring our stools and notebooks to the front of the lab where he would have all the experiments. Some were quite spectacular and I went home and replicated them in the kitchen because for Christmas and birthdays I used to ask for chemistry sets. My eldest cousin, Ron Brown, gave me a recipe for gunpowder and it was a wonder that I did not blow anything up. At the end of term, when exams were finished, Mr Coult produced a tray of 30-odd jars of white powder. Each jar was numbered but its contents not disclosed. I had to take one and analyse it, then go back to the master and say what it was. If I was right I was given another and by end of term I had managed to identify almost all of the compounds.



Chemistry laboratory in 1928

We were taught French by Mr Bird, whose nickname, 'Wuzzo', was derived from the French word for his name, English by Mr Trubshaw, 'Trubby', and I was delighted to read in the Old Suttonians magazine a few years ago that the latter, at the age of 100, had attended the O.S. annual dinner. I wished I could have been present. There was another master, whose name escapes me, who grew a ginger beard and was suspected of being a Bolshevik so was nicknamed 'Zad'. We were studying 'As You Like It' and the boy next to me took a pencil and in the phrase 'bearded like the pard' crossed out 'pard' and substituted 'Zad'. which caused puerile merriment all round.

In addition to over 20 masters, there were also two lady teachers, the white-haired Miss Meikle who taught maths, though I was never in her class, and the somewhat younger Miss Purver who for my final year was my form mistress. She was a lovely lady and we all adored her. In the middle of a term we learned that she would be away for two or three weeks because she had to go into hospital for a major operation. We, in her class, were most concerned and determined to show it. Each of us contributed twopence or threepence towards the cost of a very large basket of fruit and flowers which was carried by a deputation of two boys and presented to her in her hospital bed. I think she was quite touched.



Sutton County School staff in the mid-1930s. Many of Mr Brown's teachers are pictured here.

SUTTON COUNTY SCHOOL

REPORT for the *Spring* Term, 193*3*

Name *G. H. Brown*

Age on 31st July last *13.0*

Form *6L.V*

No. in Form *24*

Average Age on 31st July last *14.7*

Place in Form *16*

SUBJECT.	Place	Diligence.	Program.	Conduct.	Gen.	REMARKS.	Initials.
Scripture							<i>G.A.C</i>
English	<i>NP</i>	<i>1111</i>				<i>Continual steady work is reqd.</i>	<i>A.T.</i>
History	<i>22</i>	<i>1111</i>				<i>G. work done.</i>	<i>R.H.P.</i>
Geography							
Latin/German							
French	<i>19</i>	<i>1111</i>	<i>7</i>				<i>R.A.L.</i>
Arithmetic	<i>NP</i>	<i>1111</i>	<i>8</i>				<i>G.M.T.</i>
Algebra	<i>NP</i>	<i>1111</i>	<i>8</i>				
Geometry	<i>20</i>	<i>1111</i>	<i>7</i>				<i>A.B.S.</i>
Trigonometry	<i>17</i>	<i>1111</i>	<i>7</i>				
Higher Mathematics							
Applied Mathematics							
Physics							
Chemistry	<i>14</i>	<i>1111</i>				<i>F.G. He works hard.</i>	<i>H.S.C.</i>
Biology/Genl. Science							
Art	<i>4</i>	<i>1111</i>				<i>G.</i>	<i>F.A.W.</i>
Music							
Manual Work							

Mr Brown's school report from 1933



Most of the masters had served in the forces during the Great War and each year, on the anniversary of its ending, November 11th, Armistice Day, they wore their medals at the morning prayers. One such master was Mr Lloyd, who taught geography and also ran the boxing club. He had been wounded in the hand, which was slightly incapacitated in consequence and the scar was plainly visible. In the summer holidays of 1933 he had been to Germany and, like many others at the time, had been infected with enthusiasm for the new German leader, Herr Hitler, and his Nazi party. On his return he was full of praise for the new regime there. One day, he gave us a task to perform and while we were doing it he busied himself drawing a swastika and colouring it with crayons until it resembled a Nazi party member's armband. He walked to the back of the form room and pinned it to the wall. As far as I recall, he did not make any comment but we knew where his sympathies lay. Nevertheless, he was a popular master. I have often wondered what his reactions were when Britain went to war with Germany in 1939.

Mr Sawyer, who taught me maths, used to drive to school on his motor-cycle combination, bringing with him Mr Brocklebank in the side-car. Mr Sawyer dressed up for the journey in full leathers, helmet and goggles; Mr Brocklebank, in the comfort of the side-car, had no need of such protection. One morning they failed to arrive and later in the day we learned there had been a serious accident and they were both in hospital. Mr Sawyer, the less badly injured, returned to school after a week or two but poor Mr Brocklebank had suffered a fractured skull and was away for many weeks. When he did come back he was wan and scarred and it was a long time before he recovered his strength. I expect he was lucky not to have been killed.

Among the boys in my form were a few 'characters'. One of them was 'Joe' Hutton. He was academically brilliant and hard working. Throughout the school there was an incentive system under which good work was rewarded with points – plus 2 or plus 4 – while bad work or behaviour was penalised with minus points, all recorded on a chart for each form. When a form's net plus points amounted to four times the number of boys, we were entitled to a half holiday which meant finishing school at lunchtime. Occasionally, a master would award plus 2 to a whole group of boys but more often it was an individual who earned the points and Joe was the most prolific earner. Hardly a Latin lesson went by without the Gaffer awarding him plus 4 so it took only a few weeks to amass the requisite number and we would then choose an afternoon on which to spend them.



Deputy Head - Mr J W Horn  
fondly known as 'The Old Gaffer'.



Headmaster - Mr J A Cockshutt  
nicknamed 'Jacko', by the boys.

Looking back, it was not a good system because, naturally, we chose an afternoon when there were unpopular lessons and the teachers of those lessons complained that we were falling behind in their subjects. Usually, we would earn two afternoons off in a term, – sometimes three – until Jacko realised that our form was in danger of missing the number of days' tuition required by law. From then on the masters were told to be more sparing with their plus points.

Another boy in my form, Jack Sharp, grew to an unusually large size. At the age of 14 he stood six feet four inches tall, weighed 15 stone and needed size 16 shoes which had to be specially made for him. He towered over most of the masters and his school cap, perched precariously on top of his fair, curly hair, was much too small. So huge was he that one of the Sunday newspapers featured him on its centre spread, complete with photograph.

My particular friend in the form was Deryck Albert Proctor Simmonds, nicknamed 'Dappy' from his initials. His father owned the ironmongery in the High Street. It was strange that we should become such close friends because we had little in common. He was one year older than I but much more mature, in fact he was an adult whereas I was still a child. We used to go for lunch together and he would tell me what had been on the wireless the night before. I did not know because my bedtime was 7.00pm – his was 10.00pm or later. He had a racing bike and belonged to a cycling club. At weekends they would cycle 40 miles to Brighton and back. He had a girlfriend called Olga. I got on very well with him, as I did with everyone in the class, and after we moved to Westcliff I invited him to come and stay and he came for a weekend. I offered him some ginger beer I had made but he went out and bought a flagon of cider which we all enjoyed, including Hilda, our maid, who quite fell for him although she must have been nine or ten years older than he.



Sutton County School Boxing Club 1933

On Friday evenings the Boxing Club met in the school hall. Lessons ended at 4.20pm and after tea I would return, change into a vest and shorts and go into the hall where, under Mr Lloyd's supervision, the boxing ring would have been erected. I think it was kept under the stage all the week and when it came out on Friday the four posts were screwed into sockets in the floor and chairs for contestants and their seconds were placed in two of the corners. Other chairs for spectators were brought in from neighbouring classrooms and boxing would begin. Usually, it was training but occasionally there would be matches between houses and three or four times during the year there would be a match against another school. I enjoyed it and used to box at 5 stone, the lowest weight as I was small. Later, I went up to 5 stone 7 lbs. When we moved to Westcliff I missed the boxing, especially since 'Billy' Wells, my housemaster, had said to me that I would most probably have been house boxing captain had I gone back for the autumn term of 1934.

SUTTON COUNTY SCHOOL		9.	
REPORT for the Spring Term, 1934		Autumn	
Name.....	<i>G. H. Brown</i>	Age on 31st July last.....	<i>13.0</i>
No. in Form.....	<i>21</i>	Average Age on 31st July last.....	<i>14.6</i>
"HOUSE" REPORT.....		Form.....	<i>6.5</i>
<i>cross country</i>		Place in Form.....	<i>13</i>
<i>House Boxing Team.</i>		House Master.....	
		<i>R. A. L.</i>	

Mr Brown's House report mentioning him as a member of the Boxing Club





Sutton County School photo from May 1934

One afternoon a week was devoted to sports – cricket in the summer and association football in the winter. For these we had to walk a mile downtown to the recreation ground at Rosehill where the school had the use of several pitches. I never did well at sports as I was young and small in comparison with most of the other boys.



Cricket being played at Rosehill



School Cricket team in 1933



School Football team in 1933



Sutton County School playing fields in 1928

Towards the end of the summer term, when all the exams were over, there would be the school sports day which took place in the field at the back of the school building. The field was just about big enough to contain a circular quarter-mile track, though I am not sure that the finish did not overlap the start by a few yards. I cannot remember ever winning a race but we could earn points for our house by reaching a standard at each distance – one point for a high standard and half a point for a low one – so I entered for them all and gained a few points for Green house. One of the events was throwing the cricket ball, at which I was hopeless. The ball was thrown from the south-east corner of the field diagonally towards the north-west corner where spectators, including many parents, sat. One boy - his name was Mowat – threw it so far that it came down like a bomb among them and everyone had suddenly to scatter. Fortunately it did not hit anyone. I imagine it created a new school record and I wonder whether it has ever been beaten.



School Sports Day on the school playing fields in 1933

## Share your news with us

We welcome your comments and contributions for future editions of Athena's Bugle. From school memories to new jobs, carer updates, entrepreneurial endeavours, and life news, why not let the OSA community know what you have been up to. Please send an email with your news and a photo, if you have one, to the Athena's Bugle editorial team at [erc@suttongrammar.sutton.sch.uk](mailto:erc@suttongrammar.sutton.sch.uk)



# In Memoriam

## Paul Davis

In December, we received the news of the tragic and unexpected death of Sutton Grammar School teacher, Paul Davis.

Paul was a brilliant and hugely respected teacher, generous colleague and much-loved friend, and his sudden departure has left us with an enormous amount of sadness and a large Paul-shaped hole at SGS.

Paul began his career in 2004 as a young biology teacher. Only two years later, the Head of Biology post became available and Paul had his chance to lead his subject at a very early stage of his career and he subsequently became Head of Science.

Paul was famous for his knowledge of every student who took A-level biology. He knew their individual strengths and weaknesses and for many years he took a special interest in students who wished to join the medical profession. He made sure they had relevant placements in hospitals and were prepared for the entrance tests, doing practice interviews with them and supporting them throughout the application process. Sutton Grammar School has an excellent reputation for science teaching and Paul played a significant role in gaining and sustaining that reputation.

He was always a great asset on any residential trip and many Old Sutts can attest to his prowess on the ski slopes as he was a regular on the school's popular skiing trips. Paul was a keen Spurs supporter and ran one of the school's football teams on Saturdays, working keenly with them from the touchline throughout the winter. He saw education as a rounded experience for young people and he did more than his share to contribute to the pastoral side of school life.

His memorial event was a true testament to the impact he had on everyone who had the pleasure of knowing him. Over 250 colleagues, friends and Old Suttonians filled the sports hall in February to pay their respects.

The Old Suttonians who spoke at the memorial all mentioned the effect Paul had on their school life. They shared stories of his slightly off-the-wall sense of humour, his smile and infectious positivity, which greeted you every morning, his personality and his many acts of kindness, as well as his sarcasm and 'Mr Davis Randomness', and his legendary standing backflip.

Paul was one of the easiest of people to talk to, and his genuine interest and care for all his students and colleagues was extraordinary.

Paul loved all of us far more than he did himself and suffered from depression, which is a complex condition, and he hid his feelings from us all. Let's hope that through the shock and distress of what has happened, we can learn one more thing from such an inspiring teacher, and have more conversations about mental health and remove the stigma that is attached to it.

Paul was a true legend and these positive memories of him will live on forever. There is no better way of honouring him than through the words of some members of the school community that he served and loved.

'He genuinely cared about everyone around him, one of the many reasons why so many people gravitated towards him.'

'Paul nurtured my interest and spurred me on – it's fair to say I wouldn't be where I am now without him. At least I did manage to tell him this, when we met at the Sutton Grammar reunion several years ago.'



'Mr Davis was great at getting the best out of me, in a style that I'm not sure anyone else could. He became an ever-present mentor, and certainly had an impact on shaping who I became as a young student at Sutton Grammar, and indeed who I am now.'

'He just invested so much time supporting other people and making people's lives better in any way he could, whether that was just ruining your tie to make you smile or carrying you through biology to make it to university, and this is how everyone, naturally, will remember him.'

'He was literally one of my favourite teachers and he never even taught me.'

'Paul was an absolute inspiration to me, in ways that it is difficult to put into words. I owe him for much more than he could have known. He always put the needs of others before his own.'

'Every child needs an advocate in the world, and Paul was mine.'





# Alumni news

## Simon O'Donnell (OS: 2001-2008)

We were delighted to hear recently from Simon O'Donnell, who works for the Foreign Office and has shared a story from his posting in Beirut, where he is the Embassy's Political Officer.

'As the massive explosion ripped through my flat, I realised something might not be quite right...'

I found myself in Beirut on my first overseas posting with the Foreign Office, following three years in London, working on arms control, Brexit and learning Arabic (each with varying degrees of success!). Lebanon is a fascinating but deeply troubled country with four million citizens and over one million refugees from 18 different religious groups crammed into a country half the size of Wales. This sensitive demographic balance and Lebanon's difficult neighbourhood in the heart of the Middle East goes some way to explaining its bloody history of conflict, but Lebanon is also known for its beaches, mountains, incredible food and wine and general hedonism. As the Embassy's Political Officer, my job was to spend time with the warlords, playboy millionaires and celebrity politicians – and frequently people who were all three at once – and report back to London on what was really happening. All told, a dream first posting for a career in the Diplomatic Service...

More recently, Lebanon has been in the news for the wrong reasons again; the 2019 revolution and an unprecedented socio-economic collapse have thrown the country into yet more turmoil, and the 2020 Beirut Port explosion destroyed half the city, including my flat. The response to the explosion, working 20 hours a day with nothing but the clothes I was wearing when I escaped my apartment, was intense and required extreme resilience. But, more than dodging the flying glass, the professional and personal experience of working in a country in such turmoil was deeply humbling.

Throughout my career, I have reflected on the experiences at school that helped form my character and equipped me to deal with the most challenging moments I've faced. I am grateful not just for the excellent education I got at SGS, but that I was encouraged to be curious about the world and the people in it. Most of all, my school experience underlined the fundamental importance of good sense and good humour for navigating even the most acute challenges.

My job has its frustrations and difficult moments. But I would massively recommend it to any Sutts, or Old Sutts, reading this who are up for an adventure. On my first day my new boss promised me it wouldn't be boring – he was right.



Simon (third from left) being warmly welcomed by the Druze of Mount Lebanon. The Druze are an enigmatic minority religious community with an enduring affinity for the UK going back to the 1850s when the British armed the Druze to help counter French influence in the Ottoman Empire.



Simon (above left) briefing the Ambassador as, in the background, HMS Enterprise delivers vital aid supplies after the 2020 Beirut explosion

## Note from the Headmaster

I am delighted to conclude this edition of Athena's Bugle with a few words.

I was very proud to join the school as Headmaster and as President of the Old Suttonians Association, and it is evident to me that students and alumni, staff (past and present), and parents (past and present) are also justly proud to be members of the Sutton Grammar family. The many Old Suttonians I have met have talked about their time in school with affection and fierce loyalty.

We are building on strong foundations. There are already thriving sports clubs and links through the sharing of Northey; ex-Headmasters tend our amazing archives; Mr Marshall, through the CCF, and Mr Denton, through his careers links, maintain contact with Old Sutts to benefit our present students. There are many alumni who are in touch with their favourite teachers, keeping them up to date with their careers. I am ambitious to play my part to strengthen the bonds in this family and to galvanise the camaraderie to enhance and enrich the life of the school.

Alongside the OSA and the PTA, the school has invested in our brilliant External Relations Co-ordinator, Marie Brass. And as well as reviving Athena's Bugle, we will soon be launching an online community platform to provide a space for everyone in the SGS family to come together. Marie, in partnership with OSA volunteers, is committed to making our ambitions a reality and should you have any ideas to contribute to the project, or if you would like to get involved, please get [in touch](#).

I believe a sense of connection is more important than ever as we emerge from the pandemic and reflect on the love shared following the tragic death of Mr Davis. And so I am determined that, with the help of the new plans we have in place, we can work to forge a closer relationship with the Old Suttonians Association. Floreat Suttona!

Keep Faith,

Ben Cloves  
Headmaster