CHAVAGNES CHRONICLE

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Dear parents and friends,

Much energy has been invested in the lives of the boys this term: I am thinking especially of more frequent choir practices, play rehearsals, debating. The youngsters especially have also enjoyed their rowing, swimming riding and country walks, as well as various *alternative* sports proposed by Mr Duke. Some of the Junior One boys have been taking Cross Country running very seriously and seem to do well at it.

We all deserve the long Christmas holiday that lies ahead. I hope and pray that it will bring all of us not just rest and enjoyment in our families, but also that peace that comes only from above. This special peace is a particular grace that we can seek in the quiet moments of the holidays, disposing ourselves to receive it by burying our old sins with the old year, and offering our *new selves*, full of good resolutions, as the best and purest gift we can give to the Christchild.

This is the peace I wish to all of you, from the bottom of my heart, as I thank you also for all your kindnesses to the College and to me personally over the last year. Please pray that my colleagues and I will be granted this holy peace too, so that we can further build up Chavagnes as a peaceful house of prayer, study and play in 2007.

Merry Christmas! God bless us, everyone!

F. D. McDermott, MA (Hons), MCIL
Principal

Living tradition at Chavagnes: a Morris dance involving ritual stick fighting captured the imagination of the Junior One boys this November.

It has been another pleasantly busy half-term. Just a few days after getting back into harness, I was rescued from our All Saints party and whisked off to the airport to reclaim two of our charges whom the airline would not hand over to anyone but me ... I had to get out of my Edmund Campion disguise (a cassock and a noose!) before I set out for Nantes, but in the end I got back in time to do some apple-bobbing and to get thoroughly drenched in the process.

On All Saints Day itself, we had the Blessing of hunting hounds (transferred from 3rd, St Hubert, patron of huntsmen and those bitten by mad dogs) and a little expedition into the woods with them, catching nothing. The only blood was on an enthusiastic, little beagle's ears, because it had got them snared on some brambles in its excitement. We also chopped down a large tree that had been damaged in the previous week's storms (the worst the Vendée has known for several years.)

All Souls day saw Father Pilon celebrate three Masses, two of them sung, with catafalque, Absolutions, etc. The day ended with a talk on Purgatory and ghosts from Dr John Newton, in a room in which a fire had been lit with wood that wasn't properly dried out (so that the smoke-filled room was soon host to the inevitable jokes about the fires of Hell.)

Guess which saint: fun and games for All Hallows' Eve on 31st October.

Younger Chavagnes boys enjoying an autumn walk.

Morris dancing *INSET* for the Masters, with Geoff and Chris Jerram of the Morris Ring.

St Andrew's Day was marked with suitably Scottish music at Mass and a special candlelight dinner. Fabrice's cookery pupils baked a plentiful supply of flapjacks for the occasion. We are already making plans to mark St David's Day this year, for the first time. St Patrick's and St George's will be observed as in previous years.

On Armistice Day, Matthew Prall played the Last Post from the tower, calling us all to the observance of the customary silence in memory of those who have died in war. As well as the traditional prayers, hymns and readings at the College's own War Memorial, pupils listened to the words of one of their predecessors at Chavagnes, read by Mr Andrew McDermott, formerly of the Royal Marines:

From a letter of young Marie-Lucien Guillard, student at the Seminary of Chavagnes-en-Paillers, wounded on September 8, 1914, who in his agony wrote:

My good and dear ones, --

"When this letter reaches you, your child will have gone to heaven, unless some kind Germans may have rescued him on the field of battle. Yesterday morning, September 8, at about half-past six, while you were at mass, owing to the holy will of Providence I was struck by a ball which went through my thigh and I fell. I am still on the same spot, for, by a truly unworthy similarity with the fate of my Saviour Jesus on the Cross, I am actually nailed to my cross, being unable to move my leg even the smallest part of an inch. My wound is not very painful, provided I do not stir, but I am suffering desperately from thirst. My morale is excellent, I am enduring no agony. My crucifix is before my eyes. I pray and I await the will of my good God. You knew that, before I left, I had made a vow to sacrifice my life. I have renewed this vow many times since yesterday morning. I renew it again now with all that may be pleasing to God to add or to retract. I have no fear of death; I have seen it and I see it still too near me even as I write. There is nothing horrible about it, because it brings happiness. As for yourselves, I pray that your grief will be silent, resigned, almost joyful. My greatest sorrow is to leave you, but I know that before long I shall find you again."

from "En Avant," parochial bulletin of Ardelay, Vendée, and a private letter.

After our own commemoration, Masters and boys marched in the civic procession behind the fire brigade and were present for the laying of wreaths at the town's memorial. This was followed by a Requiem Mass at the College for all those who have fallen in wars.

Our Christmas play (9th and 10th Dec). Faustus (Mr Duke) looks on while Lucifer (Nathan), Mephistopheles (Gregoire) and Covetousness (Gabriel) extol the benefits of sin and damnation.

A small group of drama-loving students was pleased to accompany Messrs Verrier, Jacob and Duke to a performance of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* on 8th November in Nantes, performed in English by five British actors, courtesy of *Theâtre en Anglais*. On 1st February, boys will have the opportunity to see the same company perform a dramatisation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Mr Jacob has been hosting a Typing Class twice weekly for the Juniors and this has proved particularly popular. Here is what Gabriel McHugh (aged 11) has to say about it (all typed by himself):

Before the typing class began I had no idea how to type; but now, the typing class has nurtured my typing skills and I am on my way to becoming a professional. The typing class is the best way to learn how to type.I find that learning to type can be annoying at times, but it really pays off! We also have an excellent teacher – Mr. Jacob - who makes the day joyful.

Typing class is also a lot of fun! You don't just sit there for an hour; in fact, you play games while you type, like Russian roulette. Sometimes there are even competitions for the top of the class crown. Then you can also play a game of team timing. Sometimes Mr. Jacobs comes in to play and it becomes ten times more fun. He also gives a break so we don't tire out.

So typing class does not only improve your skills tremendously. It is extremely fun!

So that is why typing class is a time to REMEMBER.

Typing class in full swing ...

Oracy this term was laregly focussed on the preparation for the play, but the House nearly voted itself out of existence when the motion was proposed : This house would ban private education. Our honour was ultimately saved by a single vote! In a multilingual declamation contest the dramatic energy of Etienne Mignot had us all reeling as he conjured up *Les Djinns,* a metrical *tour de force* by Victor Hugo. Declamation nights are held about twice a term and involve the recitiation of poetry from memory by two or three boys from each house (and even some Masters).

The Feast of St Cecilia (22nd November) was marked with our fifth annual concert in honour of the patroness of music. The evening began in the Chapel with the performance of some sacred motets by the choir, and some organ and trumpet pieces from Mr Verrier, with Christopher Masson and Matthew Prall.

Then the company moved through to the Refectory where an evening of more profane delights awaited. Our younger violinists and pianists (Oliver, Nathan, Matthew and David) had a chance to perform in public, some of them for the first time. An ensemble of male staff and older boys performed some negro spirituals, including *Steal Away*. The real show-stealer was, however, an ensemble of Miss Scott, Maryja Morrisson Peter Morrisson and Messrs Verrier, McDermott and Lloyd, who rendered with feeling two odes of love: *Four arms, two necks,*

one wreathing by Thomas Weelkes (1575-1623) and *Alma per chè t'affliggi?* by Giacomo Gorzanis (1520-1575).

On 4th December the Choir entertained residents at the Maison de Retraite Osmane de Guerry. After a programme of about a dozen carols in English, French and Latin the boys introduced themselves in French and spent time chatting with the retired ladies and gentlemen of Chavagnes. An informal sing-along session (including *Stille Nacht* in French) was followed by some welcome homemade cake and other refreshments. On 7th December the choir sang for the retired priests of the diocese, in Les Herbiers.

All the retired priests of the diocese were junior seminarians *chez nous* at Chavagnes, fifty-eighty years ago.

On the Feast of St Nicholas (6th December) the boys were again treated to another of Chavagnes' ancient traditions as the fourth boy-bishop, His Lordship Dominic McHugh, was installed for an evening of misrule from which the Masters have only lately recovered.

Bishop McHugh pontificated at Solemn Vespers for the Feast of St Nicholas, patron of choirboys, and then presided at Dinner. (After which he followed tradition by decreeing that the Masters should do the washing-up, giving permission to the boys to stay up late and watch a film.)

This year, for the first time, another ancient tradition was inaugurated, as is our wont: the ceremony of the Boar's Head, served cum sinapio (with mustard.) A boar's head, newly hewn from its late owner for the purpose, and boiled by the father of our chef, Fabrice, was borne in solemn procession by Messrs Hayes, McDermott, Verrier and Lloyd, with Peter Morrison in attendance. This merry band intoned a traditional lay in honour of the occasion:

The Boar's Head, in hand bear I
Bedecked with bay and rosemary.
Caput apri defero
Redens laudes Domino

Bishop Dominic makes some pontifical pronouncements: Masters on wash-up, no detentions, and all the ladies can put their feet up for the evening ...

A continuation of the Viking Yuletide blood sacrifice, the Boar's Head was also the classic first dish at Roman banquets. In the middle ages it came to symbolise the victory of Christ over sin (represented by the ferocious boar).

It is traditional for an orange to be placed in the mouth of the boar, and for the platter to be decorated with bay and rosemary. The presider at the feast (in our case, Bishop Dominic) gives the orange to the leader of the singers as a thank-you.

Why make such a fuss of St Nicholas' Day? The martyrology tells us that St Nicholas was born in what we now call Turkey in the third century AD. His wealthy parents died of the plague, leaving him a large fortune which he gave away to the poor. He became Bishop of the port town of Myra and performed numerous miracles, notably saving some young sisters from being sold into prostitution by their father. He did this by pouring gold coins down the chimney (hence Father Christmas). He also found time to raise three little boys from the dead: they had been murdered in time of famine, cut up into pieces and pickled in barrels ready to eat by an enterprising old lady. St Nicholas' skill at putting them back together again won him the definitive role of protector of children and especially of boys.

Mr McDermott helps Fabrice with the Boar's Head ... et voilà ! *Caput apri cum sinapio!*

NEXT HALF TERM ...

7th January: Boys return before Dinner.

25th January Robert Burns Night Supper and Dance. Highland Dress may be worn by all boys and Masters who have it. Parents who are interested in attending, please contact us by email before 10th Jan.

1st February: Optional trip to Nantes to see performance of a dramatisation of Frankenstein.

10th February: Boys leave for half term.

Dates to be confirmed:

Return soccer match against l'Esperance.

Visit to the *Historial* Museum

In Mr Duke's History class, they don't just learn about the Egyptians; they build real pyramids too. In this case, out of sugar cubes.

RESOLUTION FOR THIS ACADEMIC YEAR

Rome was not built in a day ...

Let us all do our best to build up Chavagnes in 2006/07: our fifth year.

The significance of our coat of arms

The College arms, adopted in 2003, contain some important symbols which tell the story of the College in heraldic language.

On one level, the three lions represent England and the fleurs de lys represent France. The *Three* represent also the Holy Trinity, while the lillies are a traditional symbol of our Lady.

In addition The *Three* represent the three classical branches of learning: logic, grammar and rhetoric, whilst the lillies represent religious faith, with a Marian spirit, obedient to the bishop (represented by the mitre.)

The Mitre also speaks of the monastic past of our property, given to a community of Benedictine monks in the thirteenth century by the Anglo-French family, Harpedan de Belleville, who then ruled the area. The monastery built at that time was dedicated to St Anthony of Egypt, Abbot and Confessor of the Faith.

In the years that followed, Chavagnes saw many changes and upheavals. In the nineteenth century, these walls housed the first junior seminary in France after the Revolution. Placed under the authority of the diocesan bishop, it received a royal charter from Charles X in 1826, as the 'Ecclesiastical school of Chavagnes', during the brief period of the restored monarchy. An interpretation of the *royal* fleur de lys and the *ecclesiastical* mitre as standing for loyalty to throne and altar would seem apposite in the context of the Vendée's historic devotion to both.

In conclusion, the College arms embody Faith and Reason; God and our Lady; England and France; Altar and Throne; personal devotion and obedience to the bishops.

Taken as a whole the Arms also signify universality and integrity, by virtue of their containing the three primary colours, from which the other colours can be made. Inherent in the whole design is also a sense of history and respect for tradition; and what better embodiment could there be of Catholic heroism than the three lions of England?

Above: On 7th December, Mr McDermott mourns the loss of a football match, at home, against l'Esperance (6-5), with the critical goals coming only in the last 2 minutes. Last time we beat them 17-1, so they had obviously been in training this time. The visitors were apparently very impressed with the very fine tea we gave them, and with the courtesy of our boys. We are to be invited to play them on their own territory in the new year. Below: choirboys play slaps.

A Dispatch from America and General Reflections

Brian Roxburgh, OC (2002-2005)

Recently, after a year out, (during which I worked in an hotel in Yorkshire, in order to save for my time at university) I began my studies at Thomas Aquinas College in California. Let me tell you a bit about the college and what I am doing there.

Thomas Aquinas College

The college is in Southern California. The area is incredibly beautiful: the campus lies in a valley bounded by rough mountains. These are of a rich, orange-tinted soil which glows a hot red in the evening. They are rocky, but abundant in trees and bushes. Shrubbery flourishes.

It is peaceful too: from my room in the day-time I can hear the tapping of woodpeckers; at night, the murmur of frogs and crickets. The summer here is hot, but not humid, and by nightfall it is cool. I say it is summer, for the weather is hotter than any I have experienced back home, though we are well into October!

The campus is spacious and well arranged: there are three women's and three men's dorms; two classroom buildings; the "commons" building, in which the chapel and the refectory are housed; and the library is a separate building. At present, work is well underway in constructing a separate chapel and also a faculty building. In its early years (70s - early 90s), the campus was pastureland and the buildings temporary, prefabricated. The majority of the campus as it stands today has only been built in the last ten years or so. Chavagnes is well ahead, in comparison to the early days of this University.

It is in California. By that I mean to say it is in the U.S. Yes – in America! Compose yourself: I urge you to discard that British scepticism which has most certainly gripped your mind. No matter, I intend to dispel any such misgivings.

Studies

The college was founded thirty-five years ago. The course of study followed is a degree in the Liberal Arts. This includes the study of Philosophy and Theology, and also subjects such as Lab. and Maths. The texts studied are from the great thinkers of the west, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, etc. The aim of the course is ultimately to develop the mind to the highest degree by a full exploration, by discussion and analysis, of our intellectual and cultural inheritance, the great books. Yes, there is a *LOT* of reading involved. I am enjoying this, though. I am relishing it, in fact.

Thomas Aquinas College, Southern California: the College's programme of Catholic liberal education is unique in American higher education.

The classes follow the Socratic method of discussion. I was somewhat apprehensive about this format, and whether I would be able to participate effectively. I find, however, that I am enjoying the classes immensely, and that the discussions, led by a tutor, are key to discovering truth and understanding *why* we know a thing.

The Nature of Education

There are many similarities which can be drawn between Chavagnes and Thomas Aquinas College. The essential focus of the University here is the fulfilment of a true Catholic education: aiming towards wisdom and the freedom to think for oneself.

In this outlook T.A.C. is similar to Chavagnes. A good formation takes into account the spiritual as well as the intellectual development of a person. From a secular viewpoint, it could be said that the formational benefits of the Faith lie in the development of a good personality and character. This is certainly a positive aspect. However, that which the Faith brings to Catholic education is much deeper, for both academic and spiritual growth are complementary to each other.

As Catholics, the final goal towards which we strive is union with God. Everything we do in life has a purpose which either leads us closer, or further away, from Him. Thus, in our academic studies we move nearer to God by our attainment of the truth, as He is the Source of all truth.

Likewise, spiritual development enhances academic growth. Truth by its nature is linked to reality, and if we wish to live holy lives as Catholics, we do so by aspiring to the virtues of charity and humility, the essence of which is found by living in conformity with reality. The observance of these principles not only develops self-knowledge but also skills of good critical analysis and a keen perception of the truth. These are necessary in an academic environment as they enable us to discern the good and the true in our studies, and from there to attain wisdom.So, education is not an end in itself, but a means to an end: a good preparation for life, for our journey towards God. This, I think is the essence of what both Chavagnes and Thomas Aquinas aim at; and for this reason the sacramental life of the church is central to the college community.

Exams are not everything

Having gone on about the "nature" of education, I must put in a word about qualifications. Because our body is a harmonic composition of matter and soul, then education, most of all things, must not ignore the requirements of either one. Hence, qualifications are essential to meeting practical necessities. Spiritually however, the truth is crucial to the nourishment of the soul: one must not be put off learning by the stress that comes from exams.

My time at Chavagnes led me to an appreciation of this. While I got good results at GCSE and A-level, I gained so much more on an intellectual, cultural and spiritual level. As seniors at Chavagnes, we studied the examination materials on a much deeper level than the course required. Forgive me from naming the culprits, but I am grateful to have had the experience: Spanish was

often like a philosophy class, English Literature a rich exploration into humanity, History more often the study of historical "thought," Theology (apologetics) was definitely philosophical etc. Extra-curricular activities such as debating are vital in fostering skills of analysis and keenness of thought. These were all of ***immeasurable benefit*** to me.

A Conclusion

This is certain: I left Chavagnes having received an education both deep and broad. It meant I was very well equipped to continue my studies here at T.A.C. In my studies of languages such as Spanish and Latin, in Literature, in R.E. as well as in the sciences, we learnt vital analytical skills which are serving me well in my present course of study.

Reflecting upon my education thus far, it seems that each stage has moved in a fitting progression – each equally important and crucial to the next: in short, the years during which I home-schooled established a foundation which my time at Chavagnes built upon; now that I am at Thomas Aquinas, I realise that Chavagnes equipped me perfectly for my continuing studies at a higher level. That is exactly what Chavagnes continues to do for its students. So far, I have been blessed with a good education, Catholic in both senses of the word, which has been both spiritually and intellectually beneficial.

Additional Thoughts: What Practical Use is a Liberal Arts Degree?

Concerning long-term plans, a liberal arts degree based on theology and philosophy is the ideal starting point for ongoing studies in whichever vocation to which I may be called. Whether I continue postgraduate studies or training for an occupation, whether I marry or enter a seminary, my studies here will serve as a solid basis.

I just glanced at the clock on my desk; it is getting late. I have just noticed that my short piece for the newsletter is spiralling towards the 1500 words mark. I haven't even discussed the students I am studying with, or the faculty who oversee things. Suffice to say that they are all uniformly good people; no; I am tempted to go further: they are, in fact, awesome. Not only are they wise in the intellectual sense, they even appreciate and actually play "soccer" here. I am very pleased about this.

I confess that in writing to you, I have an ulterior motive, namely, to advertise Thomas Aquinas College to all those of you who are considering where to study at University level. I am shameless about this. I proclaim its excellence! I urge you to visit; or at least to visit the website:

http://thomasaquinas.edu

And speaking of paying visits, I am eager to call in on my *Alma Mater* again, as soon as I can.

In the meantime,

God bless,
Brian Roxburgh.

The Boy Bishop; the good Doctor Conlon at work; the Clock;
Padams and Tiptoe; Mobbs looking very slick as 'Envy'; Dom, Oliver and Padams in clerical garb for the Play.

Above: A group of staff and boys visited Lourdes and northern Spain during the October half term: Father Pilon and Mr Jacob in the Ukrainian chapel at Lourdes; A visit to the cathedral at Toledo was included in the half term trip; a suitably named place to stay.

Above: Matthew makes a great music stand for Messrs Verrier and McDermott; migrating birds gather round the tower on an autumn night; All saints fun and games (four photos); Juniors after their beloved patisserie visit.

From the Head Master's Christmas letter

For much of the term the Christmas break seems like a distant oasis offering relief from the trudge of routine, the shortening days and the worsening weather. But when it actually comes, it comes as a climax to the term and offers such an opportunity to be sociable, hospitable and to display to you the fruits of long hours of rehearsal and choir practice on the part of your sons that it seems almost sad that everyone departs so soon afterwards.

It was a pleasure to be able to welcome so many of you to the College for the final weekend of term. Your participation in the College Mass on Sunday, your coming to our Sunday lunch, your warmly supportive attendance at Dr. Faustus and the Carol Service and your many kindnesses towards the staff of the College, all conspired to give the weekend, at least in my eyes, an idyllic quality and to make it seem a glimpse of a better world.

One detail of College life that has come to mean more to me during my time at Chavagnes is the restoration among us of the custom of genuflecting during the "Et incarnatus est …" of the Creed and the "Verbum caro factum est" of the Angelus. The doctrine of the Incarnation is one that defines us as Christians and as the feast of its commemoration approaches again I wish you all a happy and peaceful Christmas.

Dr. Thomas E. Conlon,
Headmaster

Jolly boating weather,
And a hay harvest breeze,
Blade on the feather,
Shade off the trees,
Swing, swing together,
With your body between your knees.

Rugby may be more clever,
Harrow may make more row,
But we'll row for ever,
Steady from stroke to bow,
And nothing in life shall sever
The chain that is round us now

... But we'll still swing together,
and swear by the best of schools ..."

(with apologies to *The Eton Boating Song*)

A special thank-you to Greg Morrison OC (2003-2005) and John Millington OC (2003-2005) who organised a very welcome Christmas card for all Masters and boys with messages from fifteen old boys around the globe. We were all very moved.

God bless you all.

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