

LANGTON NEWS

The Newsletter of Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys
Editor: Susan Begg

December 2006 Issue No. 131

Christmas



**Simon is our
new best friend**

**Hat Trick for the
Environment
Club**



Boardslide Hero

**The Dawkins Debate
Part 2**



Who was Simon Langton ?

Brother of Stephen Langton and Archdeacon of Canterbury, Simon Langton founded the Hospital for Poor Priests in Stour Street in about 1240 for the support of 'aged and infirm ecclesiastics'. Its wealth grew. The Hospital escaped at the Dissolution under Henry VIII, only to be dissolved in 1575, when it was surrendered to Queen Elizabeth, who made over the Hospital and its revenues to the Corporation, 'a bountiful and worthy gift by our Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth to the Mayor and Commonalty of the City of Canterbury to the use of the Poor'. Thus the foundation ceased to be an ecclesiastical charity and become civic and local.

From 1575 to 1728 the property was devoted to maintaining a Hospital School for poor children and a 'House of Correction'. By an Act of Parliament of 1728, a Board of Guardians, including the Mayor, Recorder and Justices of the Peace of Canterbury, was appointed to administer the property. It was enacted that the Guardians should provide a House of Correction with the Hospital and 'for ever thereafter provide for, clothe, maintain, and instruct sixteen *Blue Coat Boys* in the said Hospital and put them to apprentice.' From 1870 to 1878 the boys were educated at the National School in Broad Street.

On November 27th 1878, an Order in Council was made declaring that the Foundation and its Endowments should be ministered under the names of the Canterbury Middle Schools. At the same time certain Charities were transferred to the Governors. The Scheme provided that new buildings should be erected on the Whitefriars' estate, which had been purchased by the Governors, and that two schools, one for boys and one for girls, should be built.

In 1879, by another Order in Council, the ecclesiastical endowments of Jesus Hospital were transferred to the Governors. The sum of £60 per year was devoted to Scholarships for Boys and £30 to Scholarships for Girls. In 1897, by order of the Charity Commissioners, the Schools were to be known as the Simon Langton Schools.

*The original
Langton
uniform?*



The origins of the 'Blue Coat Boys'

Bluecoat schools date back to Tudor times and the long blue coat which gives the uniform its name is a survival of the ordinary attire of schoolboys and apprentices of that time. The uniform was first adopted at Christ's Hospital in the 16th century and many subsequent charitable foundations imitated this style of uniform, becoming known as bluecoat schools. The white neckbands derive from the similar neckgear worn by 18th century clergy while knee breeches were also added to the outfit in the Georgian period.

Blue was a favoured colour for charity school children because in Tudor and Stuart times it was the cheapest available dye for clothing. Blue-dyed materials were economical and implied a humble status and were accordingly avoided by gentlemen and the aristocracy.

Langton Students continue to benefit...

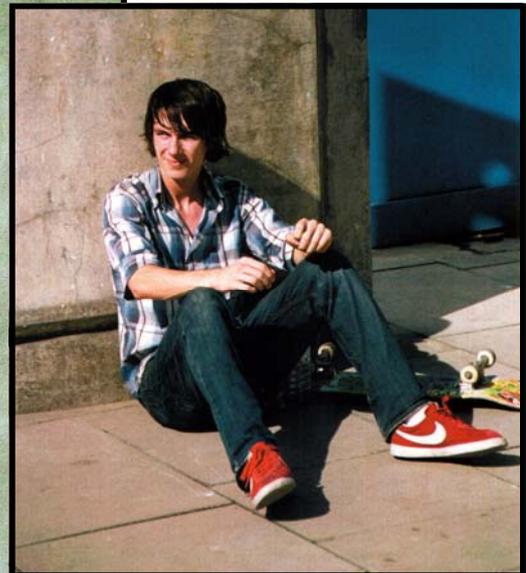
The Endowment Fund still provides funds for both Langton Schools. The money is used for extra-curricular events, trips and items which benefit students. For example, the prize money for the new Langton Challenge was provided by a grant from the Endowment Fund.



*Christmas Window Dressing
Year 7 Portraits are on display as part of a Christmas window display in
the shop 'Clothesline' on Wincheap.
Thanks to Miss Burr and Mrs Shaw for organising this.*



Myles is different; a bit special. Not sick in the head of anything...he likes to ride around on his skateboard like the rest of us and he pulls out some pretty mean stunts. But he's not a punk-ass, balls-out throw yerself down a load of steps guy and he's no uber tech, flip in/flip out G. I'm not sure exactly where he fits into the whole thing. He's an original, a one off and he really does just skate for fun. He has shed loads of talent, big bags of pop coming from those long legs and a knack for spotting tricks which most people wouldn't even think of. His creative steez definitely comes from shredding the streets of Canterbury for so long: no spots means you make the best of what you've got, build your own, travel and just mess about. Proper skateboarding. That's what made Myles the outstanding young chap he is today. His special moves are big jumps, weird tricks and floppy hair. He skates for Casual and is a member of the Snake Death family.



Former Langton Student
Myles Lucas
was given a double-page
spread in the

November issue of

DOCUMENT Skate Board Magazine.

Part of the article, written by
Mark Ebdon, is
reproduced here.



Simon Langton Parents' Association by Phil Day, Joint Chair

Alcohol Evening

The latest in a series of Awareness Evenings was held recently, and although the number of parents attending was less than hoped for, it may be that the subject was felt "not to be a problem".

It's true to say that in this school there is no great Drug problem, and certainly Alcohol falls in to that classification, but many pupils will be affected by it in some way during their school lives. The PSHE programme is well taught to our children, and they have visits from AA experienced addicts, sex education lessons with "beer goggles and cucumbers" (I won't go into details here but suffice to say that it covers contraception whilst under the influence of alcohol), and many other 'wise' words, but I wonder if a little home education as part of their lifestyle will be just as beneficial.

The French idea of letting children have a moderate amount of alcohol with the family meal was commented on and the difference in the continental attitude to drinking, along with the idea that it must be preferable to know your children are in a safe place (at home) rather than have them 'drinking cider in the park' because 'it isn't allowed'.

Whatever your views on drinking, (the facts and figures about unprotected sex and alcohol are pretty frightening), for me what really came out of the evening was that the idea of waiting to talk to parents about addictions until Yr 9 was probably too late, and that we should (as a Parents' Association) think about combining our Sex Education, Drugs and Bullying evening into one - and put this on before the end of their first year here.

I'll discuss this with the Committee Members in the New Year and get their views.

PA Website - information added

The website for the Parents' Association now has a simplified school calendar for you to view, which we hope will help ease the demise of the printed version you used to have. There is also a page showing the Clubs and Societies currently available at school.

For new parents, or those who can't find all the information about school policies and procedures that you would have originally been sent, there is a page with a download document that is a 'cut-down' version of the Parents' Manual issued by the School. We still haven't got any gossip for you yet, but I'm sure 2007 will produce some!

Don't forget it has a new address – www.langtonpa.org - much easier to remember.

Dates for your Diary

FEB 10 **Murder Mystery** – Start time TBA, School Hall.

MARCH 10 **Music Evening** – Details to follow – proposed Jazz Evening with well known local professional Jazz Band and Langton Boys supporting. Start time TBA, School Hall.

MAY 12 **Eurovision Party** – Start time TBA, School Hall.

DATE TBA **Awareness Event** – Bullying and Sex Education

Musical Notes

by Mrs L Braddy

This term is the busiest and many groups have been formed and rehearsed regularly for their concerts, keeping traditional music-making alive and above all - keeping music LIVE and unique every time.

This term is the first time I have handed over responsibility wholly to the students for their performance and on 25th November the Junk/Percussion Band under Biff Sharrock and the Jazz Band under Sam Day performed at a charity concert in the school hall and by all accounts did themselves, the department and the school proud.

The strings got the term going with their concert on 17th October - all prepared and rehearsed in 6 weeks - including the Year 7 String group and the A level students who all showed off their musical talent at the Canterbury Festival Lunchtime concert on 16th October.

Then it was a series of weekend engagements - first a performance by the Junk/Percussion Band in the Theatre Royal in Margate on 19th November followed the next weekend by the afore-mentioned Charity Concert.

Then the St. Nicholas Parade in Canterbury on 9th December, for which we had a graffiti-artist from *3rd eye* come in to help us decorate our chairs (instruments) and for once it was a beautiful day and we followed St Nicholas in his buggy which proved very useful for towing our big bin (drum!!). The wind and brass held their concert on 30th November and again all had diligently rehearsed at lunchtimes and after school for their performances this term.

Mr Hartley (our piano peripatetic) also put on a concert of his pupils which was a lovely relaxed occasion and a good experience for all concerned.

I thank everybody for their commitment and willingness to give all the music/ideas we throw at them a go, and for making this such a diverse department musically.



OUTREACH - SPREADING THE WORD

BY Dr G Poole, Director of Science



In the beginning was the word and the word was "Science", and part of our job at The Langton is to spread the word. As a Specialist Science School part of our role is to increase links with the community and local primary schools. We have 4 partner primary schools at Stelling Minnis, Stowting, Elham and Bodsham and here are some of the things that go on between us.

A favourite with the children is the big demonstration lecture. I have dressed up as Darth Vader as part of my "Thunder and Lightning" presentation; this also involves whole audience participation in trying to get the sound level sensor to go off the scale. I also have a gruesome look at the body in a performance entitled "Bodyfacts", which is guaranteed to bring screams of delighted horror from younger classes as they see the 8 fresh pints of blood and the 10 metres of intestines draped around the room. Dr Colthurst has presented his "Healthy Living" talk, again producing smiles and grimaces as the ills of smoking

and a bad diet are made clear.

Everybody loves freezing things in liquid nitrogen and it's amazing how much fresh ice cream gets consumed when Mrs Parker goes on the road with her "Cool Physics" roadshow.

We were involved in an excellent Science and Technology day at Stelling Minnis based on the subject of "Energy saving". Reception class investigated insulation, and older children looked at ways to save electricity in a shop by including a variety of switches in electrical circuits. Years 5 and 6 made solar-powered aeroplanes ... one to think about for the future.

Students from the Langton have e-mentored primary school children posing as Professor Frink and answering tricky science questions online. Incidentally, why *is* the sky blue? Lending equipment is one of our central roles. The Van is sent out to make deliveries ranging from electricity kits to balloons full of ice. No request is refused (within reason).

Each summer, when the laboratories become less crowded,

swarms of little people in strange school uniforms can be found carrying out scientific investigations and experiments that cannot be performed in their own schools. Typically we collect a year group in a minibus, entertain and educate them and get them back for lunch. Bodsham is still buzzing about Mr Connolly's electrical day.

One of the most testing tasks is to be an "Expert". One of our partners calls a scientist in for an hour to answer a barrage of questions from a class at the end of a science topic.

Is it worthwhile? Anything that turns children on to science is worthwhile. Is it enjoyable? Yes it is fun; it's great to be at an open evening and year 6 children come up to you and say "I remember that demonstration you did at our school", if it has been remembered it has all been worthwhile.

If your old school or your younger brothers' or sisters' schools would like us to contribute in any way to their science curriculum contact Dr Poole via the school's e-mail address office@thelangton.kent.sch.uk

Environment Hat Trick

For the third year running, the Environment Club, led by Miss Eley, has won the prestigious Blake Shield Award. The group were presented with the shield by botanist, author, broadcaster and environmental campaigner Professor David Bellamy OBE at a ceremony on Saturday 25th November.

For their entry, the Langton team carried out a bat survey of the Canterbury area. They used bat detectors to locate bats and identify the species. It sounds simple, but it took hours of patient work as bats only come out for a couple of hours after sunset - and even then there is no guarantee of finding them. The results collected by the group allowed them to build up a detailed picture of where bats hang out around Canterbury. Bats are on the decline in Kent and so the results are important to help monitor their population. On the plus side, we found more bats than we were expecting. On the down side, we found very few Noctule or Serotine bats, species that are supposed to be common in Kent.

On November 25th, the team travelled to Northampton for this year's presentation ceremony. Whilst we knew that our entry was the best we've submitted, it was still a surprise when we were announce as winners. The group had the shield presented to them by Professor David Bellamy. Most of the group were too young to know who he is, but those of you as old as Miss Eley will remember him (and his beard). As part of this year's prize the team are off to visit the set for the BBC's Springwatch.

On the way home the teams stopped off at Bluewater to let Miss Eley swoon over Daniel Craig as the new James Bond in 'Casino Royale'.



THE ROMAN

The Langton was lucky enough to persuade Simon Scarrow, writer of historical fiction set in first century Britain, to spend the whole day with us on 23rd November, when he gave a series of talks and workshops in the library.

I have to admit that I hadn't read any of Simon Scarrow's books before he came to the Langton. I have now. In the four days since his visit I have devoured the first two books in his 'Eagle' series and am now eagerly awaiting delivery of the third.

In his first talk 'Writing the Eagle' Simon explained how his love for Roman history had been awakened at school and, how after being unable to find the sort of book that he wanted to read, he decided to write it himself. Five years later, he found himself in the most enviable of positions – making a living out of his hobby - as he became a full-time writer.

'Sharpe in Togas' is how he described his series of books about the adventures of Cato and Macro during the Roman invasion of Britain in AD43 and his fans will be pleased to hear that he has no immediate plans to kill either of his main characters off and that further books are in the pipeline. Simon has also embarked on a trilogy following the lives of the Duke of Wellington and Emperor Napoleon, the first of which 'Young Bloods' is now available in hardback.

Two hour-long sessions were devoted to the aspiring authors amongst the student body. Specially invited students (who have demonstrated writing skills and who have expressed an interest in writing for a living) were privy to some top tips from Simon which included how to go about getting an agent, the importance of research and how to catch the interest of potential publishers with the crucial first paragraph on the first page of the first chapter. 'It has to grab the readers' interest immediately', explained Simon who quoted examples from one of his favourite authors, Philip K Dick (author of the books which are, perhaps, more familiar to us as the movies 'Blade Runner', 'Minority Report' and 'Total Recall')

Acknowledging that awful moment when an author is faced with a blank page, 20 minutes

or so of each of the sessions were given over to a writing workshop. Saying that he had 'done the hard part' for them, Simon had prepared three 'lucky dip' bowls. Bowl one contained slips of paper on which Simon had written brief ideas for characters, bowl two contained 'locations' and 'situations' were in bowl number three. Each of the students were invited to take a slip of paper from each bowl and to write an opening paragraph of about 250 words based upon what they had drawn out. Alex Baines (Year 11) was faced with 'grave digger', 'monastery' and 'murder' and came up with '**After I had killed the grave digger, I returned to my theology lesson**' which everyone agreed certainly grabbed the attention and made the reader want to know more – the essence of a successful opening line.

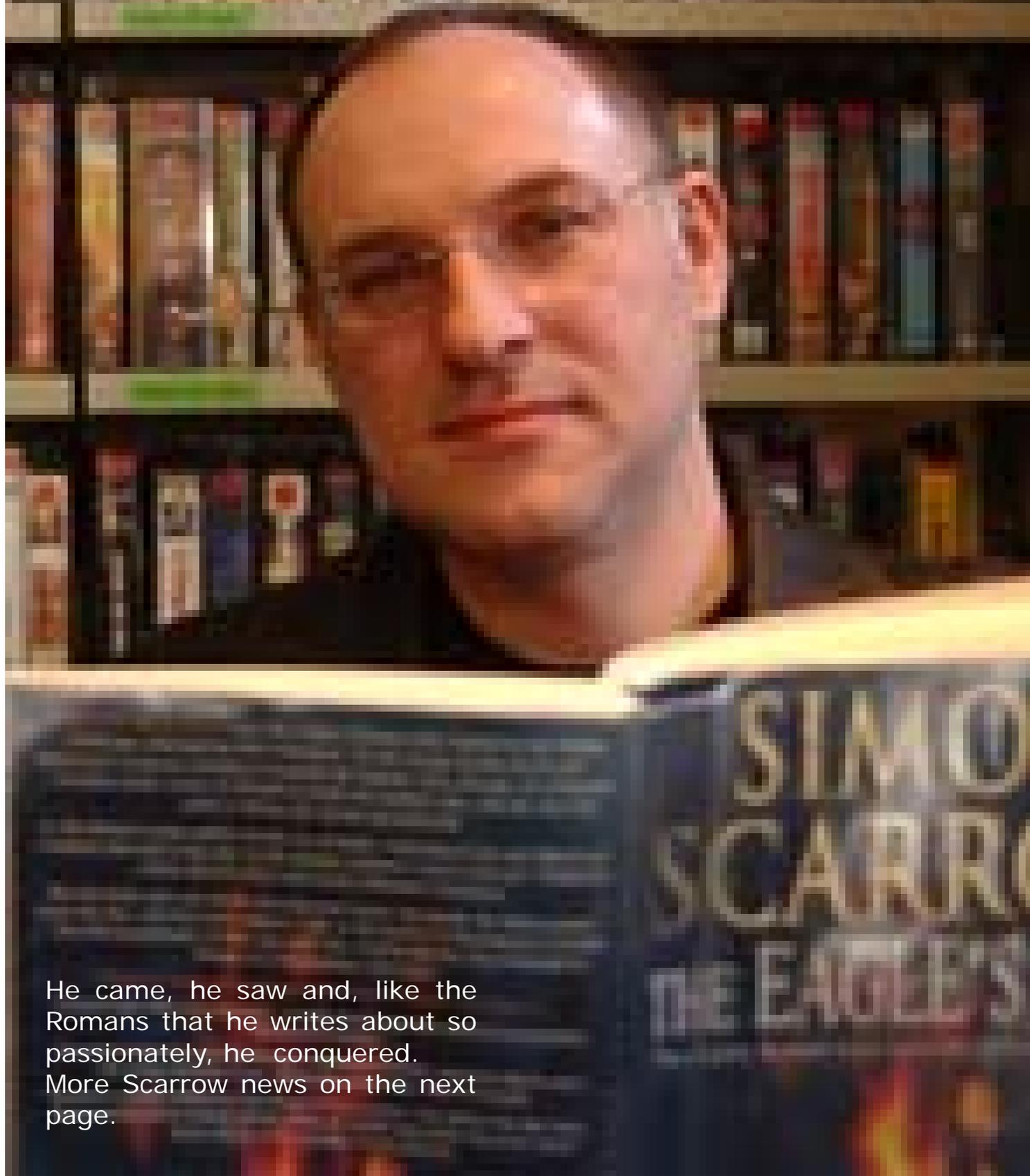
The librarian, Mrs Jones, had obtained copies of all of Simon's books for sale and these were snatched up enthusiastically by boys (and staff) who presented them to Simon for signing during the morning break. He found time to chat to each boy that approached him and was happy to write a personal message for each of them according to their wishes.

The final two sessions after lunch were talks about what Simon knows best – the Roman Army! Even though I have always thought it was a 'boy thing', I found myself listening with genuine fascination as Simon described the hierarchy in the Legions, the life of the Roman soldiers and the battles in which they fought.

Highlights of the day are hard to pick out – Simon Scarrow is, in the best possible way, the most 'ordinary' of people and his easy manner soon made us forget that he is, after all, a very well known writer indeed. His passion for his subject is perhaps only outweighed by his tremendous knowledge of the period and his enthusiasm for passing it on. The Langton hopes to see more of him in the future.

INVASION

by
Susan Begg



He came, he saw and, like the Romans that he writes about so passionately, he conquered. More Scarrow news on the next page.

If you would like to learn more about Simon Scarrow and his books check out his website <http://www.scarrow.co.uk>

Lost in Translations

a review by Mr Simon Cusden



Translations is a gripping and challenging drama which both uses and explores the richness of language and history to achieve its ends. Set in Donegal in 1833, the play tells the story of a small community on the brink of irrevocable change. Most of the action takes place in the home of dodderly school master Hugh O'Donnell (Ed Showler), where, in accordance with British law, Catholic pupils are taught classics and mathematics only.

As the play begins, Hugh's school has already lost at least two of its pupils to brewing political unrest as British troops and engineers have begun to conduct an ordinance survey intended to map the landscape for military intelligence and standardise the Gaelic place names in the King's English.

Hugh O'Donnell's two sons, Manus (Laurance Brasted) and Owen (Callum Atkins), both scholars in their own right, seem bound for opposing destinies. Manus, lame since childhood, lives at home and dreams of marrying the wild Maire (Amy Bowles), a student at the school. Owen has left home and is a successful businessman, but he returns in the opening scenes working as a translator for two British officers leading the survey.

Of the officers, one, Lieutenant Yolland (Neil Cox), is entranced with the romance of the land he has come to alter with language and law. The other is a more pragmatic captain here simply to do his job to the letter (Paul Sharratt). Personal and political conflicts are intertwined on the deepest levels as the action unfolds. Characters are constantly faced with questions about themselves in which the very words they speak are central to understanding where they have come from and where they are going. By the close of the action the story has not been resolved, the audience is made painfully aware of the threads of change which have begun to unravel the lines of communication between people, countries, and language.

The play's most important scene takes place immediately after the interval. Yolland and Maire share an intimate moment having fled laughing from a dance. They express their love for one another without understanding the words either is speaking. It is a brilliantly directed and acted piece of theatre which blends theme and characterisation perfectly. It is also the clearest illustration of the brilliance of having the entire play performed in English while expressing linguistic and historical distance between characters who are supposed to be speaking Irish, Latin and Greek, and those who speak only the King's English.

The scene also expresses a longing for understanding on more than just the obvious level. Throughout the first half we saw tentative relationships develop despite the differences between characters but the play becomes darker, reflecting the historical reality of the events in which a resolution becomes impossible. This moment is the pivot on which the drama turns, and it is beautifully portrayed by the whole cast.

The Langton production was outstanding in every way, from direction to set design. The

acting was of the very highest standard and the relationships portrayed on stage were vibrant and compelling. Each of the actors met the challenge of the dialogue well, working terrific characterisations through a demanding and complex text. The accents were remarkably convincing.

Fiery, laddish redhead Doalty was played superbly by Michael Sweetman whilst Edward Showler was particularly memorable as the elderly schoolmaster. He carried himself with modest dignity which only becomes apparent in the final scenes when he recalls his own small part in earlier rebellions. Neil Cox was perfectly wide-eyed as the Lieutenant, balanced and somewhat contrasted by Paul Sharratt's hard-edged captain. Both Callum Atkins and Laurance Brasted were strong presences as the master's sons. Callum Atkins played Owen with power and authority, while Laurance Brasted was quiet and very accomplished. Tim Worth was very effective as eccentric Jimmy Jack, the elderly student immersed in Greek and Roman learning who dreams of marrying Athene. The support characters Sarah (Rachel Callaghan) and Bridget (Romy Enfield) were played with an equal conviction.

This must be one of the best Langton productions ever, for its size for the professionalism of the entire production. Mrs Moore added to the impressive list of plays under her direction and as expected by everyone, directed with accuracy and style. A truly difficult play to stage, done perfectly.



A Survivor's Tale



As part of their English lessons, Year 7 students write and perform a monologue in front of their classmates.

7G were fascinated to hear Cameron Bigg 'become' his grandfather and talk about his horrific experiences in one of the Navy's greatest tragedies which caused the first ever News Black-out during the early months of the War. Langton News was so impressed by Cameron's work that we reproduce it, in full, below.

When death stares you in the face it is best to shut your eyes and hope his look will gaze another way. Our ship had been escorting the Queen Mary, ferrying troops from America to the battle front of World War II.

As Chief Petty Officer Kenneth Clarkson of Her Majesty's Royal Navy, I had just come off watch. My body was covered in engine oil but I was too tired to wash before getting some sleep – this oil probably helped to save my life.

Nothing had been particularly special on that October day in 1942 aboard the Curacoa. It was night and I was alone and asleep on the Stokers' mess

deck table when the collision woke me. The noise was deafening and on leaving the mess deck, I was met by a rush of water in the passage way. I am sure this is when death first looked my way. Surely I was to drown there and then. With a panicked strength, I made my way up to the sick bay from where I escaped.

Gasping the fresh air, I was washed overboard and swam hard to avoid being sucked under the swirl of the sinking ship. In the dark, I could hear men calling out, some crying for their families. I found a wooden crate to help keep me afloat. Death passed me by several times as I heard the voices around me grow fewer and fewer.

Rescue came after several hours in the cold sea; the engine oil I had been too tired to wash off had kept my body warm.

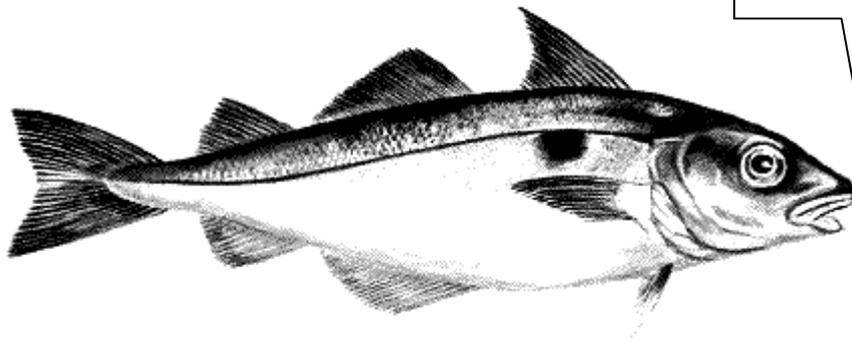
Out of the crew of 439, only 101 survived. Who was to blame? The cold comfort we received later was that the Queen Mary had gone off course and had sliced our ship in half. Our reward? All survivors were assigned to 'dangerous duties' maybe in the hope that we would not live long enough to tell about this embarrassing secret.

Death decided it wasn't my time and so I am able to tell you this sorry tale today.



Happy Christmas to everyone at the Langton
With love from The Head Students XXXXXX

Harry the Haddock says



**Remember, a haddock is for
life, not just for Christmas**

CCC OFFERS LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS

Langton News has been asked by Canterbury Christ Church University to publicise their FREE course for mature students leading to a Certificate of Higher Education in European Business. We believe that Lifelong Learning is what education is all about and so we are happy to pass on the details below.

The Centre of Enterprise and Business Development at Canterbury Christ Church University are currently delivering FREE programmes which are funded by the European Social Fund. The programmes are for mature students and offer a unique opportunity for people who:

- Have taken time out from work to look after dependants
- Wish to improve their employment prospects
- Are thinking of starting their own business
- Wish to gain a qualification

Students attend university over a period of 4 days per week (9.30 am to 3.00 pm) as well as undertaking home study for which full tutorial support is given.

With the location of Kent being so close to such a competitive European market, the subject modules taught within the European Business programme will give the students the necessary knowledge to enable them to seek jobs further afield. The programme is modular based and students study five core

subjects:

Business finance and statistics
European Business
European Language (French or Spanish)
Information Technology
Management and organisation behaviour

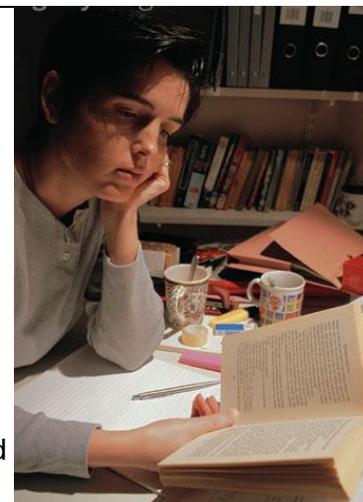
In addition, each student gets the opportunity to take part in a 4 week work placement.

If you are interested, please contact

Centre for Enterprise and Business
Development
Canterbury Christ Church University
Hall Place Enterprise Centre
Church Hill
Harbledown,
Canterbury
CT2 9AG

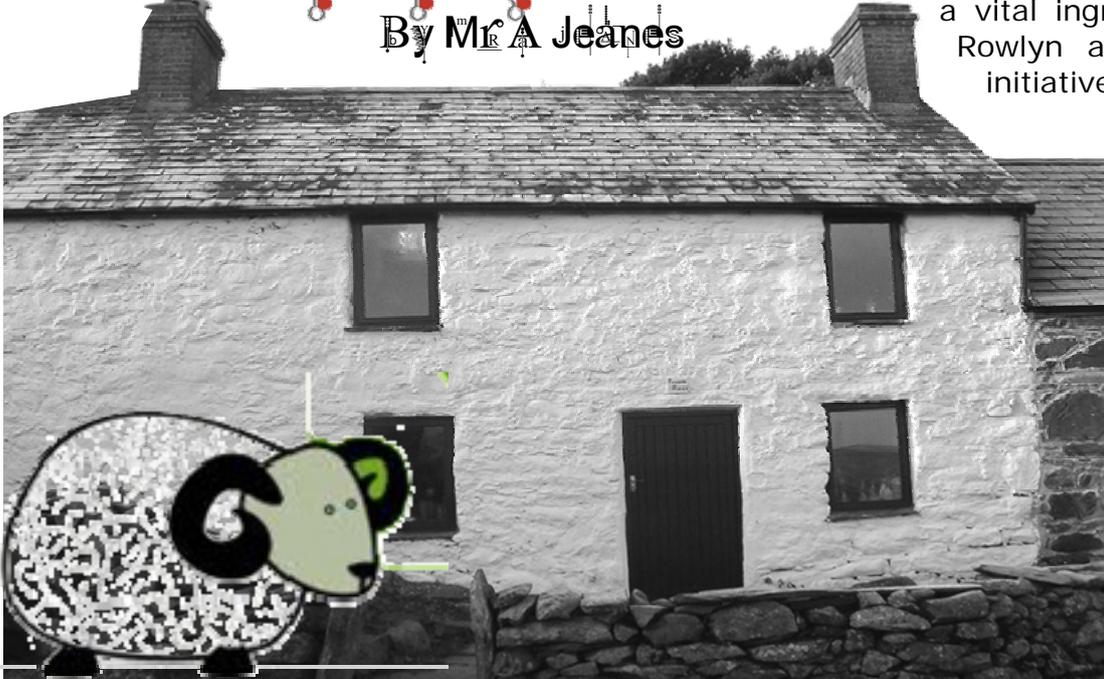
Telephone:
Penny Keogh 01227 782656/01843 609156

Email:
penny.keogh@canterbury.ac.uk



Rowlyner of the Year 2006

By Mr A Jeanes



Following the review of the 2006 visits to Rowlyn, the leaders have decided to award Rowlyner of the Year Certificates to:

Lewis Yardy, Ollie Smith, Charlie Gregory, Philip Redhead and Michael Mansfield.

Out of the 8 nominations received, the leaders felt that these boys had contributed most to the Rowlyn experience during the week. Teamwork is a vital ingredient during a visit to Rowlyn and these boys showed initiative, organisation and commitment, both in the house and on the hills. Congratulations to all of them.

The 2007 visits are already at the planning stage. A reminder that the Year 9 Rowlyn Information Evening for parents and Year 9 students will take place on **Monday 8th January at 7.30 pm**, in the school hall. I look forward to seeing you there.



student investor challenges 2007

More than 70 teams have registered for the IFS Student Investor Challenges.

They are a set of business competitions for UK students aged 14-19 that could win you a whole host of prizes, including a trip to New York. The most popular is the Portfolio Challenge where teams have to trade on the stock market to beat the City Fund Managers. They invest a virtual £100,000 on the stock exchange between November 1st and February 28th and the winning portfolio earns the winning team a trip to Wall Street in New York and prize money for the school.

Young Business Writer of the Year

Last year the Langton's Michael Wu wowed the experts with his essay on saving levels in the UK. He received a sizeable cash prize and was invited to the annual IFS dinner as a guest of the Financial Times who judged the essays. Could your writing skills give top financial journalists a run for their money? Do you want to take part in an innovative challenge that will test your research, analysis and report writing skills? Young Business Writer of the Year is for you! The title of this year's article will be released on 4th December 2006, and entries must be received by 28th February 2007.

See Mr Carney or Mr Speller for more information on these challenges.

You have to be in it to win it!



**LOCK
IT
OR LOSE
IT**

**Anything left
around at the
end of term may
be disposed of.
Make sure you lock
all your
belongings in your
locker before you
go home on the
last day of term.**

The Dawkins Debate - *Mrs Mitchell explains what it's all about*

A book has been published recently which has caused lots of arguments. In "The God Delusion", Richard Dawkins declares he has found so many weaknesses about belief in God, that not only can it be proved that God doesn't exist, but that religion is the cause of much evil in the world, and needs therefore to be eliminated.

Richard Dawkins, together with other writers from America, are being called "The New Atheists" (an atheist is someone who doesn't believe in God). They are different from other atheists, because they want to get rid of all religion, and replace it completely with science. Other scientists, who are also atheists, disagree, and call for everyone to have an open mind.

Richard Dawkins' book makes several bold declarations. He wants anyone who is religious when they open the book to become an atheist by the time they have finished reading it, but he misrepresents the Christian faith by making it appear weaker than it really is. He also cannot understand how other scientists have arrived at different conclusions. He can only say "I simply do not believe he meant much of what he wrote".

Dawkins is Oxford University's Professor for the Public Understanding of Science, and as such is a respected biologist and expert on evolution. It is good to continue the debate between science and religion which has been in progress for hundreds of years, in a respectful and reasonable manner, and most scientists do so. However, Dawkins and a few others want the debate to become open war.

Both scientists and religious believers use their own powers of reason to work out what they believe about the world. The debate between religion and science must continue in that respectful manner.

(If you want more articles about Richard Dawkins' book, see Mrs Mitchell)

The article written by Messrs Eagle which appeared in the last edition of the Langton News caused a lot of discussion around the school, not least in the staffroom. In the following pages two members of staff give their views.



**Dr
Mackay
gives
A molecular
astrophysicist's
addendum to Mr Eagle's most
excellent article in Langton
News (Oct 06).**

Rational scientific analysis shows that we live in a universe that is highly ordered and finely 'tuned' to the evolution of life such as ourselves. Life as we know it would not be here were the conditions (the 'laws of nature') not almost exactly as they appear to have been for the past fifteen billion years. It might be a mistake to give ourselves, at this particular moment of an ongoing evolutionary process and within a convenient cosmos, any particular status. Who is to say that the 'tuning' is for our benefit or this cosmos typical. Of course we hominids think we're special because we are self-aware. We haven't yet met any of the other advanced life forms that undoubtedly exist elsewhere, direct knowledge of whom will adjust our perspective on ourselves. We struggle to believe the cosmic 'design' could be conjured without a 'designer', and we are locked into traditional notions of 'purpose' and 'meaning' that underlie these questions with ourselves as the focus. Richard Dawkins' book is the latest reiteration of the simple fact that the complexity of life really does arise from the cumulative simplicity of the evolutionary process.

Interestingly, current scientific analysis of how the universe might have come into existence suggests that quantum fluctuations immediately prior to a 'big bang' initiated the expansion. Given the inherent nature of such processes, the notion of an exact pre-programmed start time (a moment of 'creation') is untenable, let alone the notion of a causal 'starter'. What the initial conditions were and what came before, of course, cannot be asserted and given that the materialisation of time is inextricably linked to the materialisation of space during the initial ex-

pansion, the question of 'before' may make no sense at all. Nonetheless, discussions of 'prior cause' (let alone 'First Cause') even in this non-causal context continue, and the present time is rich with stimulating suggestions of all kinds, including multiple and parallel universes, loops, crunches, local bubbles etc.

In all of these discussions, 'understanding' is taken to be the exclusive province of rational analysis. Richard Dawkins rightly criticises the absurdity of supernatural conjecture in the face of overwhelming naturalistic evidence. Mr Eagle and his brother remind us of the qualitative difference between 'strong' and 'weak' evidence as defined by a rationalist. None of us should doubt that there is too much irrational ignorance in the world for secular rational humanists to falter now.

There does nonetheless remain the possibility that this form of 'understanding' may be partial. Not only may the eye not expect to see itself. Alternative perspectives (often with the misleadingly simplistic descriptor 'spiritual' or 'mystical', when in fact their reality may be extremely 'concrete' and 'naturalistic') offer the individual an experience of an intelligible 'whole'. Experienced through a heightened awareness of sensory experience and/or the reduction of intellectual activity, this may be a different and legitimate additional route to 'understanding'. That form of insight into the way things are may seem very local, personal, and yet the experience is often described as negating distinctions between the individual and the whole. Perceptions and perspectives may be altered. We are thus reminded how closely conceptual insights are tied to linguistic structures.

Until we are more certain of what we mean by 'understanding', perhaps we should be mindful of too readily throwing a baby out with the bath water by condemning all difficult-to-define knowledge. Answers depend upon the questions asked. Scientific discovery (which is rational analysis at its most sophisticated), through both cosmological and quantum extremes, has taught us to question every detail of our conceptual language and to expect surprises.

Let us be wary of unexpected fish slipping through the net.



Mr Davis asks Is Dawkins a Terrorist?

Are those of us who believe in God emotional, illogical, superstitious no-brains, as Richard Dawkins would have you believe? Or is he missing something?

Firstly, a view on atheism, agnosticism and belief in God. Whilst many view this question as multiple choice (tick the appropriate box), I think that belief is more of a spectrum. In the middle is true agnosticism. Those here think that there is equal evidence for belief or non-belief in God. At each side of the spectrum are atheism and belief. Fundamentalists are towards the right, or left, of the spectrum. At the ends of the Belief Spectrum are 'extremists' of both types.

Those on either side of the middle of this spectrum are not always convinced of their viewpoint. One's 'faith' level changes with experience (both personal and global) and further information. An important question to ask yourself is, 'Where am I on this spectrum?' But don't think that's all there is to the issue. Things change.

If you consider yourself to be near either end of the spectrum, ask yourself, 'What would it take for me to change my view? What argument or experience would persuade me that I was wrong?'. If your answer is that nothing would convince you to change your mind, then you could be viewed as an

extremist. And terrorists are extremists.

I suggest that Dawkins is an extremist. He is absolutely convinced that he is right and others are wrong. Is he therefore a terrorist? A kind of 'belief terrorist'? Actually, I wouldn't call Dawkins a terrorist (though some might). For faith to be strong and sure it must be questioned and challenged. I welcome Dawkins's contribution to this.

Belief, or faith, is not just a matter of logic. If it were, we would all be led to the same conclusion. No, people make life-decisions based on far more than rational thought. I know of many people who believe in God: I know of none who have reached their belief by logic alone. Some say that C S Lewis, the Christian apologist and writer of the Narnia Chronicles was led to faith by logic. Certainly his books contain many coherent arguments. Others would cite 'Surprised by Joy' as a crucial point for him in his journey of faith.

Personal experiences and experiences of other, reliable people, are very significant in belief. All of us have experiences which we try to make sense of by using our existing underlying beliefs. If the experience goes beyond our current belief system, adaptation can occur. Unless of course, I am closed to any change. Unless I am an extremist.

The majority of the Langton community have some belief. The majority of the world believes in God. Although when it comes to matters of faith, democracy doesn't hold sway; after all, the majority could be wrong.

Let us not dismiss the beliefs, and consequently the lives, of so many people on the basis that 'the only God is Science'.



Very Much a Mutual Appreciation

Following his hugely successful visit to the Langton, Simon Scarrow has agreed to become the school's **'Writer in Residence'**. That doesn't mean that he will be setting up home in the staffroom but it does mean that he will be paying us lots more visits and giving up a lot of his time to help our students with their Creative Writing skills, including judging what we hope will become an important annual competition at the school. Simon said that he was 'honoured' to accept the position and is looking forward to working with the staff and students in the future.

This is what Simon has posted on his website about his visit to the Langton

'Thanks to the fact that the senior management team are all fans of the Eagle series, I spent a delightful day here presenting historical talks and conducting Creative Writing workshops.'

Simon Langton is the most impressive school I have visited in a long time. The students were intelligent, articulate and focused (as well as being very neatly turned out!). The staff are equally impressive and I just wish that I lived near enough to the school to send my sons here.'

Thanks Simon, but we love you more!



Langton Lego League Triumph

Once again the Langton Lions came away with the trophy for the best Robot Design at the First Lego League Tournament. Well done to Chris Porro who designed the triangular-tracked legobot. This autonomous robot is designed to accurately deliver loads, such as 'buckyballs' and Lego 'molecules', whilst deftly splitting apart magnets with a swipe of its tail. No wonder that the robot impressed the judges.

It was a difficult tournament with eighteen other teams competing and a lack of space due to building work at the venue at Kent University's Sports Hall. Between 10:30 and 12:30 the team had to present their research on Nano Technology, convince a team of Team Judges that the Langton Lions could act as a team, impress Technical Judges with their robot and complete difficult missions against others team's robots and the clock. All this had to be done with little time for any final preparations.

Unfortunately the odds were stacked against the team despite their best efforts. The Nano

Technology presentation was marred by leaving vital images and props back at school. Unexpected lighting conditions adversely affected the legobot's light-sensor controlled guidance system

which seriously compromised their efforts at the challenge mat. And it is difficult to award working-together points to any team that contains Ryan Esdale. Nevertheless we had a terrific day competing at the university.

Many thanks to the team: Peter Hatfield, Adam Sandey, Lachlan Bennett, Chris Porro, Sam Turner, Matt Phillips and Richard Ball.





What Goes on At University

Former Langton Student Benn Cody tells it like it is!

I was in two minds on how to write this little article; I can either write the way the Langton news

I can write it how every student wants it to be. I chose the latter. Well, after the severe stress of A-levels, the inebriated stage in between Mr Moffat leading 'Swing Lo' at Old City Bar for the sixth form leavers' do and A-level results day, all you want to do is get to the place you've been gearing towards from year 7 - University.

You pack up all of your belongings, usually consisting of a pair of jeans, a shirt, a pair of trainers, a top, a bag, a laptop and the odd dvd and you're shipped out to your new home for the next however many years. If you're in Halls of Residence, you'll end up with a box room with a ceiling so low Mrs Jayne would scrape her head along it, or you'll be placed in 'Student Housing' - in other words the opportunity to live in a house with people you would have nightmares about living with.

After you've sorted out your administration details - and do this on the first day else you'll miss out on all of the opportunities available to you during the best week ever...FRESHERS' WEEK!

This is when all of the second year students show you how to drink! (and the local area and some other things about campus and stuff, but that's not all that important....) You will learn where to buy the cheapest beer and the most important thing, you'll meet lots and lots of new people. Always remember that the people you meet in the first week will not necessarily be your friends by the end of week 2, but this is normal. I can only give one piece of advice ...just be yourself. It sounds clichéd, but it is so true. Pretension and how you look and act don't matter here, those social boundaries that are created in friendship groups, the 'cool' group, the 'emos', 'the drama lot' - none of this matters at uni, everyone starts afresh with a blank slate, so leap at the opportunity to show the real you!

The week of drunken antics passes like a flash

and you suddenly have lectures, seminars and lots of essays. Work is flung at you like lots of great big flung things and it soon piles up. Whatever you do, don't panic. The essays are all do-able, you just have to be willing to spend more than the night before doing them and be prepared for lots of research. The onus is on you when you get here, you aren't taught, you're asked questions and you have to come up with your own answers. This is a huge change from school. I don't want to tell you anymore about Uni because it'll spoil your own experiences, but all I can say is, enjoy yourself.

I'll leave you with

Cody's Handy Hints to University:

Come up with a nickname - it's uni, there'll be more than one Sarah, Ben, James. If you don't, you'll get given one - this is not always a good thing.

Do everything - Uni's about taking chances and joining clubs and doing things you haven't done before, so do them!

Don't stereotype people by how they look and act - it's probably just nerves for a start, but there's no room for prejudice in such a diverse society.

Don't worry yourself sick about essays - they can be done, and no essay is an end in itself, just a means to an end, plus, you've got three years to get it right!

Don't do work the night before, it's not going to happen. Oh, and the excuse, 'pc doesn't work' or any other 'useable' excuses don't cut it at uni, if you don't hand it in, no mark

Enjoy yourselves!

I have to run and do an essay of my own at the minute and my toast is burning! Good luck in your exams!!!

Signing off from Royal Holloway (not the woman's prison), Cody - my nickname, nice eh?

Merry Christmas to all
Langton Students and Staff

