



Robert Clack Alumni Association Newsletter

Issue 25

February 2019

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2019 - and a very belated happy new year! This edition starts with a very special article from Head Teacher Russell Taylor who had the honour of speaking to Iris Cannon - the daughter of our school's namesake Alderman Robert Clack. We also report back on recent examples of support for students from our brilliant alumni community - from negotiation skills training by a top lawyer, advice for aspiring medics from practicing doctors, inspirational talks from rugby stars, and former debaters going head-to-head (unsuccessfully!) with our impressive current school Debate Team. We are so proud that our alumni 'people power' continues to go from strength to strength. THANK YOU - and enjoy this latest newsletter offering.

Update from the Trust

The trustees met in December to discuss Alumni Association membership numbers (almost 1,500 former students are registered - but we want more!) and fundraising strategies, including case studies to showcase the fantastic work that our former students do within the school throughout the academic year. Head Teacher Russell Taylor updated us on a mentoring programme that a former student is keen to develop in the school (more on that in future newsletters), and we were pleased to welcome Kathryn Mason (Class of 2007) as a formal trustee. Kathryn is now a lawyer and has been a long-term supporter of the Alumni Association. Welcome Kathryn!



Keep in Touch

If you have any suggestions for newsletter articles, things that you would like to share with the Robert Clack Alumni community, or would like to know more about how you can get involved in the work of the school, please contact emonk@robertclack.co.uk

Head Teacher Russell Taylor Speaks to Iris Cannon - daughter of Alderman Robert Clack

Last year I was asked to speak at a Labour Party Conference about the current education climate. During this conference I referred to Alderman Robert Clack, after whom our school is named. He was the Mayor of the Borough of Dagenham, as it was then known, between 1940 and 1942. I wanted to talk about Alderman Robert Clack because the values he lived his life by are the values that permeate our school ethos today. Following his death in 1953, The Dagenham Post described him as a "*champion for social justice*". He believed in equality of opportunity and as a railwayman, trade unionist and local council member, he worked tirelessly to advance the cause of the people of Dagenham in order to secure better outcomes for them; he stood up for them and believed in them.

After I had finished speaking I was introduced to many people. However, I was approached by one lady who believed I would be very interested in talking to her friend. Her friend, I was shocked to hear, is the daughter and only child of Alderman Robert Clack, Mrs. Iris Cannon.

Iris now lives in Chesterfield and thanks to her friend, I was fortunate enough to speak to her on the telephone in October. Iris arrived in the borough with her family in 1932. She attended Dagenham County High School and worked as a librarian after school at Valence House.

She attended Brentwood College of Education at the age of 35 where she trained to become a teacher, eventually going on to teach at Brampton Manor School. Iris has two children; her daughter is a GP and her son works for the Foreign Office.

She was able to tell me more about her father. He was the eldest of four sons and had two older sisters. Robert left school at the age of 12. Many of his teachers saw his potential and encouraged him to take the 'scholarship', a precursor to the 11+ examination required to attend a Grammar School. His mother did not want him to do this and Iris relayed an amusing story of her father hiding under the bed from her while she tried to get him out with a broom. He managed to run out of the house and down the road with his mother chasing after him, broom in hand!

Iris told me that Robert joined the Merchant Navy at 16 and remained with them until he was 28. After this, he was married and Iris was born. Sadly, he died when Iris was only 22 years old; however, she has very fond memories of him. He taught her to read, write and tell the time. He encouraged Iris to become educated as much as possible and he was especially interested in the education of women. He was dedicated to the cause of social justice and equality for all. He died while at work on a Saturday morning and as Iris recalled, it was "*an awful shock for everybody*".

(Iris Cannon, cont.) I asked why Robert Clack was so well respected in the community. Iris said that he was hard working and believed in education and equality for all. She said that once he was asked how he felt about his daughter possibly growing up to earn more money than him and his answer was, *"That's what it's about"*. This summed up his view that each successive generation should have more opportunities and a better quality of life than the last, and that was ultimately what he worked towards during his very short life.

At Robert Clack School, we want our pupils to learn about and understand the importance of the values that Alderman Robert Clack lived by. This is why the values of mutual respect, compassion for others, self-discipline, high expectations and aspirations, and hard work, are central to the ethos of our community.

Robert Clack Entrepreneurs Visit Top London Law Firm, Sackers

On Wednesday 17th January, our Entrepreneur Academy students were invited to spend the day at Sackers - the UK's leading pensions law firm - by Senior Partner (and our very own Robert Clack Development Trust co-chair), Ian Pittaway.

Year 12 Entrepreneur Academy student Saheb Ahmed reports back on the day:

We walked in with the utmost curiosity of what Sackers had in store for us. We thought visiting the Gresham Street building would be the highlight of the day but we were wrong!

Ian Pittaway took a day out of his busy schedule to introduce us to the immense significance of negotiations; how it is used on a day-to-day basis, along with the many techniques that are applied in the professional world of negotiations. We quickly learned that negotiations were part of everyday life and would help us in many ways. One unexpected but effective technique we learnt was silence. The look of astonishment was clear to see in everyone's' faces (especially Year 12 student Nirbhay Bist who is not known for his silence!).

Shortly afterwards we worked in groups of four to take part in negotiations based on a set scenario. The negotiations were dynamic and exciting, and we were soon at logger heads, looking to use our newly found negotiation skills to work together for a solution. Despite several pauses and many silent glares (!), some deals were finally made. Evidently, everyone enjoyed the events and it made us excited about what our futures held - wondering if one day we would be doing this in our future professions!

Thank you, to Ian Pittaway who took time out of his busy schedule to teach us about the world of contracts and negotiations. We all believe these will be skills we will use for the rest of our lives.



Inspiring and Supporting the next Generation of Robert Clack Medics

Robert Clack Sixth Formers who hope to go on to study medicine at university had some top quality advice on hand recently - from two former students, now successful doctors.

Dr Nigel Kiely (Class of 1986), Consultant Adult and Children's Orthopaedic Surgeon at The Robert Jones & Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation, and Dr Alison Berner (Class of 2006), Speciality Trainee and Clinical Research Fellow in Medical Oncology, Barts Cancer Institute, and Specialist Registrar in Gender Identity, Gender Identity Clinic Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust offered support and advice to student embarking on the medical school application process.



Nigel and Alison carried out mock university entry interviews via Skype, and Alison checked all applicants' personal statements to give them the best possible chance of success.

Nigel commented: *"Thank you for the opportunity to help your students with a mock medical school interview. The candidates did very well and gave mature responses to some challenging questions. I hope the experience was useful and I wish them luck. It would be amazing to see some Robert Clack pupils become our future doctors"*. Alison - another regular supporter of the Alumni Association - added: *"It's always a pleasure to mentor future doctors from Robert Clack. I have no doubt they will achieve great things in their careers!"*

Thank you so much to Alison and Nigel. First hand experience - especially for those who may be the first in their family to attend university or have few existing contacts in the medical profession - really is invaluable. Robert Clack is incredibly proud to offer this support to our students - made possible through the work of the Alumni Association.

Calling all Fundraisers!

Can you help to give the next generation of students a 'helping hand' and ensure that potential and not background determines their future? We are looking for people to help us fundraise for the Alumni Association. This will include helping us to scope fundraising ideas, develop relationships with businesses, identify and pursue potential sources of income, and plan applications to grant awarding bodies. Perhaps you've got experience of fundraising in another voluntary or professional capacity, have key contacts that may be able to help, or just have some time to spare and want to get involved.

Whatever your experience (whether it's lots or none at all), however much time you are able to give (from a regular commitment to one off advice/support sessions) get in touch at emonk@robertclack.co.uk. We'd love to hear from you and we'd love you to join us on our brilliant journey to helping Robert Clack students be the best they can be.

Alumni Ire Onabajo Supports Year 10 Students

Senior Leader of the Learning Community Emily Valentine, called on the alumni community for support with a small group of Y10 students, inviting former student Ire Onabajo (Class of 2017) back to school to engage with the students. *"I asked Ire to come in because he was in a very similar position when he was in Year 9"* Emily said, *"His behaviour had deteriorated but he managed to turn it around throughout his latter years at Clack and has grown up into a really lovely young man"*.

Ire was happy to speak to the students and share his experiences - of both challenging and more positive times:

"I was gifted with the opportunity to speak to a few of the Year 10 students at Robert Clack, most of whom I already knew from my involvement with the Rugby Team. It reminded me of the time I was their age and how I let my behaviour hinder me from getting the most out of my lessons. I guess you could say the theme of our discussion was understanding that we are entirely responsible and in control of our actions and how much effort we put into things determines what we get out of life".

Ire felt positive at the end of his session: *"I feel like some of the boys started to grasp this concept which was super exciting for me to witness. I wish them all the very best. Hopefully, given the opportunity, I can help others like this in the near future"*.



One Year 10 student described his workshop experience with Ire as *"interactive, inspiring"*, commenting that Ire was *"personable and a great role model"*.

Thank you Ire for being such a relatable and positive role model and giving up your time to talk to our students. Former students like Ire can make a real difference to the lives of current Robert Clackers - and we loved having Ire back in the classroom!

We love to hear your feedback on our newsletter. Here's a small selection following our October edition.....

Great newsletter! Wonderful to see so much positive work going on within the school
Tina Dulieu, B.Ed., DipCEC

Great read, well done to all at the school. Alas I cannot commit to supporting as much as I would like these days, living too far away, but so pleased to hear of all these great achievements
Ken McCarthy

If you have any thoughts you would like to share, please contact Ellen Monk Emonk@robertclack.co.uk or Communications Team lead Teri Webster Twebster@robertclack.co.uk

Year 11s Crowned Winners of Debate Battle with Former Students

On Thursday 6th December, alumni of the Robert Clack Debating Society went head to head with the current generation of Clack debaters. The tournament took place in a knockout fashion: on one side - Years 10 to 13, on the other - Sixth Form classes of 2013 to 2017.

The battle of Old vs. New was judged by Head Teacher Russell Taylor and Debate Society Director Emily Valentine, as well as Robert Clack alumnus Jasmin Bath and comedian Eshaan Akbar. There were many excellent speeches, with standout performances from Tendayi Hove and Vanessa Cernat (Year 10), Olivia Collins (Year 12), Azaan Akbar (Class of 2013), and Yasin Weyli, a Year 7 student who stepped in at the last moment to join his brother Mohammad Weyli's team.

The final culminated in a debate between the Year 11 team, comprised of Wesley Oparaugo, Tannayo Fagade, Rubin Aboagye-Poku and Aerona Sheikh, and Class of 2017 alumni, Mohammad Weyli, Yasin Weyli and Harris Mahmood. The Year 11 team were judged the strongest side and took the winning title.

The event was a fantastic opportunity to showcase both the legacy of the Debate Club at Robert Clack, and the continued work of the club to develop our future thinkers, speakers, and leaders.



Robert Clack Development Trust Support South Africa Rugby Tour 2019 Fund

Over the last couple of years, the PE Department have been busy fundraising to help students with the cost of their South Africa Rugby Tour in July 2019. The tour will include a packed programme of sight-seeing together with a number of rugby fixtures along the way.

The rugby team will spend seven days in Cape Town, with an impressive itinerary of activities arranged including a cable car ride to the summit of Table Mountain, a game drive at the Aquila Private Game Reserve, a trip to Langa Township to see the local people and discover how the community is being transformed, a visit to the Two Oceans Aquarium on the Victoria and Albert Waterfront, a museum trip to the Springbok Experience, shopping in the Tyger Valley Centre, and a ferry across to Robben Island with a guided tour from a former inmate. The players will also fit in a training schedule and two rugby matches against local schools.

(South Africa Rugby Tour, cont.)

The PE staff set a target to raise £20,000 to help subsidise the cost of the trip for the students and their families, and students and staff have been working hard on a number of fundraising events. Our alumni trustees recognised the amazing opportunities that the trip offered to our students and were proud to donate £500 to top up the fund. The Department are edging closer to their target and want to thank everyone who has donated to make this life-changing trip possible.

We'll report back on this once-in-a-lifetime trip (hopefully with some impressive staff and student photos!) later in the year.

Class of 2015 Alumus Nicola Hare 'Warwick in Africa' Trip

Alumni Association member, Nicola Hare left the school in 2015 and went on to study Philosophy and Literature at Warwick University. She has now graduated and is taking a gap year before starting Law School. Whilst studying for her degree, Nicola was offered the chance to go to South Africa as part of 'Warwick in Africa' - a volunteering project teaching English and Maths in African schools. Nicola reports on this life changing experience and how inspiration from a few of her old Clack teachers helped her along the way:

The importance of education has always been instilled in me from a very young age. I think growing up in Britain often means that we forget how extremely privileged we are to have access to quality education because it is given to us without question.

(Warwick in Africa, cont.) I can only imagine the number of young females in third world countries that would trade for a position I have, perhaps taken for granted, and this was the reason I decided to take part in Warwick in Africa. The programme is run by the University of Warwick and takes seventy 'student teachers' to teach English or Maths in poor areas in Tanzania, Ghana or South Africa for the summer.

I was lucky enough to go to South Africa where I taught English at Tsosoloso Ya Afrika, a township school in Ivory Park. I taught classes of 14 to 25 years olds and my largest class had 80 pupils - in a single class. As I say that now, it sounds very normal because I got used to the idea of teaching 80 people at the same time but stepping into that class on the first day was one of the most nerve-wracking things I have ever done.

The experience made me appreciate and respect the effort, the preparation and the determination of those that teach every day. It is more than just standing in front of people and 'teaching', it is spotting those that may not understand, it is communicating differently to different people, it is being patient and gracious and also very vulnerable.

I was extremely fortunate to have some of the best teachers at Robert Clack - English with Mr. Butler, Chemistry with Mr. Spandl, Spanish with Mr. Ndiaye or History with Mrs. Parkinson and Mr. O'Brien, to name a few. I was spoilt in other words. It hasn't necessarily taken this experience to know that, but it has taken this experience to truly appreciate what it is that our teachers do for us.

(Warwick in Africa, cont.) The pupils I taught were vibrant and bright. They had dreams and ambitions and the only thing that they were lacking was opportunity. Kennedy said that *"not everyone has equal abilities, but everyone should have equal opportunity for education"* and this experience could not be summed up in better words.

Education is the most powerful weapon to the investment of futures and I think that to be denied that is the greatest crime of our society. Whilst I was not convinced to become a teacher, this experience has made me determined to be a vehicle for change. So, thank you, Robert Clack for giving me the stepping stone and I would like to say a special thanks to Mr. Butler who made me believe that I was capable of anything, and that has been my greatest strength since!



If you would like to find out more about events in the school that you can take part in, or want to tell us what you've been up to since leaving school, please drop Ellen Monk a line (EMonk@robert-clack.bardaglea.org.uk). There's always something going on and always opportunities for you to get involved

We'd love to hear from you and welcome you back to school!

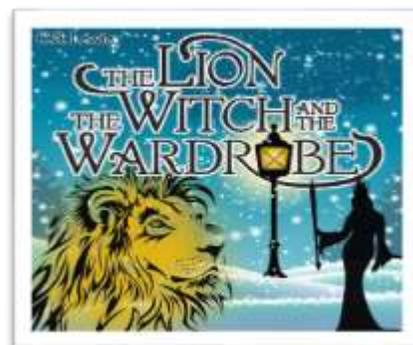
Drama and Music Department Christmas Productions

Over the festive season our talented students showcased their singing, dancing, and acting skills in an outstanding production of C S Lewis's second chronological novel *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*.

Together with the Drama and Music Departments, staff and students across all years rehearsed tirelessly to perfect their roles, and design and make props and costumes ready for the opening night - and what an opening night it was! The atmosphere created by the lighting in the hall and the performers ready and waiting standing like statues had the audience of staff, students, friends, family, and Alumni Association members gripped from the very start.

Performances were faultless throughout and ticket sales spoke for themselves - sold out on each of the three nights! The audience gave a standing ovation at the end of each performance with some stating that they felt they were watching a professional production.

Huge congratulations to all staff and students involved - your hard work really paid off and you did Robert Clack proud.



(Drama and Music Department Christmas Productions, cont.)

On Wednesday 12th December the Music Department held its annual Christmas Concert at the school's lower site in Green Lane. The school warmly welcomed students' family members, governors, staff, and again our alumni members to an evening full of fun and festivities.

The first half opened with the whole school orchestra performing *Carroll of the Bells* followed by *Jingle Bells* from the talented flute ensemble. The boys' choir gave their own rendition of *Fairy Tale in New York* accompanied by our very own Mr. Collins, followed by an array of acts from our impressive Clack musicians - performing songs, and playing the drums, piano and the now very popular ukulele.

After a short interval the second half kicked off with *Rockin' Robin* played by the school orchestra, then Year 13 student Sandy Nguyen mesmerised the audience with her beautiful piano solo, *Do you Wanna Build a Snowman?* Maddison Roovers - a regular at school musical events - played her ukulele and sang an original composition *The Snowman*, then Year 11 Yasmin Belkhir, and Sixth Former Tyree Glasgow-Alexander duetted on *'Tis the Season*. The show was brought to a close by the magnificent staff choir who put everyone in a festive mood singing and swaying to *Jingle Bells*.

Head Teacher Russell Taylor finished the evening by thanking the audience, and highlighting the importance of support from students' families, friends, and honoured guests. Without them, these hugely enjoyable evenings wouldn't be possible. Thank you to the staff and students involved in this memorable evening. The talent on show on evenings such as this never fails to amaze us - and make us incredibly proud.



Spotlight On... Dr Alison May Berner (Class of 2006)

In this edition we turn the spotlight on Dr Alison Berner, Speciality Trainee and Clinical Research Fellow in Medical Oncology, Bart's Cancer Institute, Specialist Registrar in Gender Identity, Gender Identity Clinic Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, and long-term fabulous supporter of the Robert Clack Alumni Association!

Working life

Alison left school in 2006 after her A-levels to study medicine at the University of Cambridge. After three years she graduated with a First and transferred to University College London (UCL) where she was awarded her final medical degree in 2012. Alison worked as a junior doctor at a number of speciality hospitals across North and East London and was part of the Academic Foundation Programme, enabling her to take part in laboratory and clinical research. In 2016, she specialised in medical oncology and, after a year of working with cancer patients, began a period of research into Neuroendocrine Tumours at UCL completing an MSc (Master of Science) in Genomic Medicine. Alison is currently studying for her PhD at Bart's Cancer Institute exploring the genomics of colorectal cancer, and works part-time in gender medicine, researching cancer care for people who are transgender.

(Spotlight on... cont.) Although always interested in science, Alison realised she wanted to study medicine quite late in her school life. Not long before her GCSEs it became clear how much she enjoyed working with people and that a career in science alone wouldn't be enough. *"I was offered some work experience at Bart's Cancer Institute during Sixth Form, and seeing doctors treating patients and performing cutting edge research in cancer got me hooked!"* said Alison.

School day memories

Alison has a lot of great memories of Robert Clack. She had lots of groups of friends over the years, and some really good teachers, especially during her GCSEs. She remembers laughing a lot and taking part in drama, music, and dance. Playing Sandy in *Grease* is still one of her proudest achievements!

If Alison could go back, she thinks she would have taken part in more sport at school and in the years following, as it is important for work-life balance. She enjoyed cheerleading at university and the years after but describes it as 'a hobby with a finite life span!'

How school has changed

Access to information and social media have exploded since Alison was 15.

"I had a phone at school (yes in the top left inside blazer pocket, where we all 'hid them') but it was calls and texts only, no internet, and that was distraction enough! ", remembers Alison. *"You've got information coming at you thick and fast and some of it is useful and some can be a negative influence. I think that makes the challenges of school different - we probably need to introduce a GCSE in how to critically appraise information and positive use of social media!"*

Alison's advice for students today

"What I have learned through meeting lots of people in many careers is that you don't have to know exactly what you want to do forever and have a big life plan! BUT you need to equip yourself with all the skills that would be useful in the fields you are interested in - keep doors open, research careers, and take opportunities.

Your perfect career might be something you never knew existed when you were 15, but if you've got good qualifications, extra-curriculars that demonstrate teamwork, leadership and communication, and a bit of passion, you can make it happen!"

Brilliant advice for our current students there Alison! Thank you for being 'Under the Spotlight' and continuing to inspire and support our hopeful medics of the future

Support the Robert Clack Alumni Association

Join us Sign up to the Alumni Association at: <https://networks.futurefirst.org.uk/register/robertclack>

Volunteer Come back to school as part of one of the many exciting events we run with current pupils throughout the year. Contact emonk@robertclack.co.uk

Donate Alumni can make a real difference to current pupils' lives. You can donate at www.justgiving.com/rcdt by texting RCDT08 to 70070 or contacting emonk@robertclack.co.uk

*** Look out for our next newsletter in May 2019 ***