



# ARCHIVIUM

**Blundell's School Archive Newsletter**



*House music, from a collection of recently digitised images dated c. 1988-91*

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### CURIOSITY OF THE MONTH



- 14<sup>th</sup> century discovery

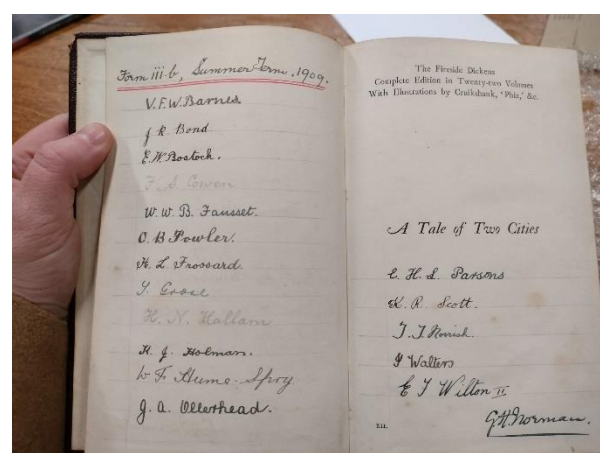
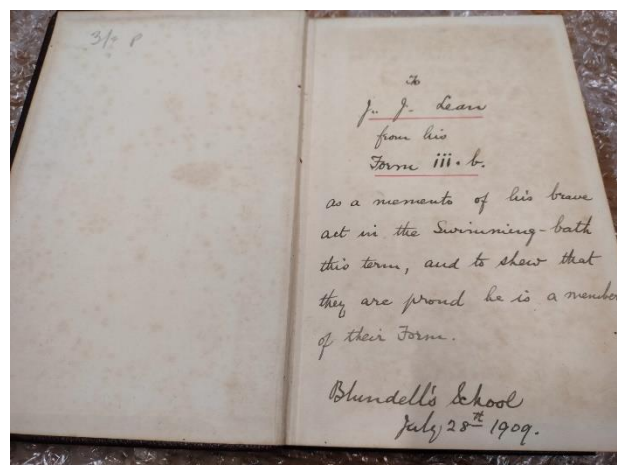
## WELCOME TO ARCHIVIUM

Welcome to the latest edition of *Archivium*! I hope you have all had a restful festive season. Thank you for all of you who have been in touch since the last issue with bits of information and for the positive response I have received for the first virtual exhibition on the School Chapel ( accessed here: [https://my.blundells.org/devoffice/archive/\\_pdf/virtual-exhibition\\_chapel.pdf](https://my.blundells.org/devoffice/archive/_pdf/virtual-exhibition_chapel.pdf) ). I am already in the middle of the next one on the school in the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century which should be available around Easter. As I embark on another exciting year, it is with great pleasure that I share the progress made this term in preserving and celebrating our rich history. From meticulously ingesting new materials to maintaining our extensive collection, the behind-the-scenes routine work forms the backbone of my archival efforts. Not to mention, I've been actively assisting countless inquiries from alumni, researchers and members of the public. That said, there have been various interesting bits of news, which I am delighted to share with you below.

### CELF

## NEW ACQUISITIONS

We have been grateful for several new items since the last *Archivium*, including a swagger stick from the 1910s with our crest on it, a fantastic rugby action shot from 1936, and a collection of NC memorabilia. A rare purchase on behalf of the archive was made by myself last term. A Dicken's tome appeared at auction for a very low price which was irresistible. The book was presented to J.J. Lean in 1909 as 'a memento of his brave act in the Swimming Bath this term' and was signed by all of his form as well as his tutor G.H. Norman. A bit of digging in my own time has revealed that John Jennings Lean was exactly the sort of Blundellian of which the school is so proud. The Blundellian reveals that he saved a member of his form from drowning. As well as this heroic act, he captained the First XV before serving as a bombing officer in France with the Highland Light Infantry during the Great War. He was reported missing in August 1916, before being found four days later with a gunshot wound to the ankle. Once he had recovered from this injury, he returned to the front and went on to have an illustrious military career, rising to the rank of Major.



## NEWS FROM THE ARCHIVE

### Heritage Website

One of the big updates I have for you is the upcoming heritage website for the school community. The work is being done by SDS, a specialist digital records company who work with 500 schools and small collections across the UK including Eton, Harrow, Wellington College, Charterhouse, Cheltenham, Canford and Clifton. With over twenty years of experience, and a very generous grant from the Ted Crowe Will Fund, the inaugural website should be in place by the end of 2024, showcasing photos and documents from the archives.



This will be an organic website with new contributions being added every year to be enjoyed by alumni, researchers and current students alike. I hope you will enjoy it when it comes out!

### Salvete Scholastici

Last term the School introduced a new chapel service to replace the traditional harvest service for the lower years. The new service is called *Salvete Scholastici* (if your Latin is a bit rusty, it stands for *greetings students*) and is designed to welcome all new pupils to Blundell's – not just the new year 7s but new pupils across the entirety of the school. As part of this celebration, items pertaining to the history of the school were brought up to be presented on the altar, representing the different areas of



Blundell's life. Among these included one of the School Registers; cricket and rugby caps from the 1930s; a plate produced by Poole Pottery in 1967 to celebrate the new 'Big School' and Dining room to be opened by the Queen Mother; a school mission box and a cup presented to the school in 1903 by the mothers and sisters of those Blundellians killed in the Boer War. As part of the ceremony, our Head Porter, Bron Chmiel agreed to lead the procession with the 'Blundell's Staffe'; thought misplaced for many years, it was simply hiding in plain sight in the archive. This staff was presented to the first Head Porter, Edward German, in 1699 and has been used throughout the ages for ceremonial occasions, including OB Day, and it is wonderful to see it in use once more.

## Remembrance

In a poignant tribute to honour the fallen, a remembrance display was meticulously crafted by the archive for Remembrance Sunday. The project involved creating a sea of red paper poppies on a number of standing display boards, each bearing the names of the nearly 200 pupils who made the ultimate sacrifice during the Great War. The heartfelt endeavour began in



the dining room, where students helped to assemble and asked questions about the symbolic blooms, infusing the space with a sense of collective remembrance. As the display took shape, the crimson poppies were then reverently moved to the chapel, transforming temporarily the space into a visual memorial, before standing respectfully in the entrance to the school building. The juxtaposition of the delicate yet resilient poppies, coupled with the solemn recollection of each student's name, created a powerful tribute to ensure that the sacrifice of these brave individuals is never forgotten.

## Mixed collections

Training at Gloucestershire Archives last term was an enriching experience where I delved into the intricacies of caring for mixed archival collections. The program provided valuable insights into the preservation and management of diverse historical materials, equipping me with skills to ensure the longevity and accessibility of all our archival treasures. Beyond the typical paperwork that you find in our archives (registers, letters, financial ledgers, photographs) we have a number of physical items in the collection – mostly school cups and medals but also a large assortment of historic school uniform. This uniform has become a priority for me this term as it is currently stored in an old cardboard box, which even a non-specialist must recognise



is not terribly good for it! I have spent a lot of time towards the end of last term, working out the best way of caring for these textiles on the budget that I have, and after much umming and aring, I think a plan is now finally in place for this term so please stay tuned for the next issue!

## Alain John

In a serendipitous turn of events, a forgotten box tucked away in a Californian attic has unveiled a hidden gem. For many years, Alain John, has been one of our famous but elusive alumni attending Blundell's as a day boy between 1932-1939. His sculpture of Christ blessing the multitude is known to all Blundellians as that which sits in the niche in the clocktower entrance. Born in India in 1920 to a family of Armenian extraction, it was deemed too far for John to travel back following his acceptance for King's College, Cambridge, so the School allowed him to remain on. While with us for this additional period, he began work on a sculpture of Christ blessing the multitudes under the auspices of his former teacher, Eric Gill who described it as the best sculpture produced in England that year. With war broken out, Alain joined the RAF and was killed in 1943, and a copy of the statue was later copied for a memorial for the Blitz at Coventry Cathedral, due to the Bishop of Coventry, Neville Gorton, being a former Headmaster of Blundell's. Keen readers of *Archivium*, will remember that I was trying to find an image of him among our community for a researcher who is in the middle of writing a book on Alain's life and work. The researcher in question, is a distant cousin of Alain and a recent review of the family's archive in California has uncovered box containing three photographs clipped together. One is labelled as Alain's father, one is of the sculpture itself and the final one is of a young man in RAF uniform. We know that Alain enlisted as Navigator Sergeant rather than seeking an officer's commission as he believed it would make it more likely that he could fly with his Blundell's friends. External experts have confirmed that the uniform in the picture and rank insignia on his arm are correct for a non-commissioned RAF sergeant in the 1940s. The man in the photo strongly matches a pupil in one of our day boy photos from 1937. All in all, the researcher and I are now fairly confident, that finally we have a face for Alain, whose sculpture plays such an integral part of the fabric of the school and adds a new chapter to the narrative of his life.



## Uffculme Talk

A public lecture was held at the Uffculme History Society in early January entitled: 'Echoes of Eternity: Blundell's School and the long seventeenth century' in which I discussed the early years of the school, with a focus on the Civil War period and the lives of two (or suspected) alumni, as we have no formal registers surviving before 1770). These were Peter Sainthill, the royalist MP for Tiverton who took part in the Council of Oxford before dying in exile on the continent; and literary rogue and self-proclaimed king of the Gypsies, Bamfylde Moore Carew. I also discussed the life and times of Headmaster Samuel Wesley for whom we hold some

important items including a pencil drawing (recently examined by a professor in Oxford) and some of his poetry. It was a wonderful opportunity at the end of the autumn term to check in on our 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century materials which include our Great Accounts Book, The Book of Orders, leases and wills and share images of these items with a wider audience, which included at least a couple of OBs. The lecture will be shared this week with our sixth form and hopefully they will find it equally informative and entertaining.



## CURIOSITY OF THE MONTH – A NEW DISCOVERY!

And how fortuitous it was too, to expand the scope of the Uffculme Lecture to include the early eighteenth century, as it has allowed for an exciting new discovery in the archives. Looking for materials pertaining to Samuel Wesley, the inventory made note of an Elizabethan book in the collection, which beyond some Latin travel writing in a sixteenth century hand, had been repurposed in the eighteenth century to



include some of Wesley's writings. Getting it down, I was amazed to find the fragments of two medieval manuscripts as part of the bindings. My husband being an associate professor of medieval History in Exeter has put me in touch with a colleague who works on lost manuscripts from the period, who thinks that these might be part of a manuscript from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and is coming to take a closer look at it in coming weeks. If indeed it is from this period, it would push the date of our archive collection back by fifty to seventy years which would be wonderful news for the archive and the school as a whole. I will keep you updated!

### CONTACT DETAILS

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Also if you've missed it...

The Archive is now on X (formerly  
Twitter)

[@blundells\\_arch](https://twitter.com/blundells_arch)