

OB Club Chair 2024 AGM Report

Fellow Old Blundellians, your better halves and the wider Blundellian community, It is my absolute pleasure to report on our activity over the last year - my first as Chair having assumed the role from Richard Swarbrick at the last AGM in September 2023. I would like, firstly, to record my gratitude to Richard for serving so passionately as our Chair for the past 7 years, and for his guidance and support as I have taken the baton this year.

The Club, working alongside the Development Office and new Director of Development, Tom Cowle, the Community Office and the Blundells Association, as well as with the Marketing team has been able to deliver directly, or in support, a significant number of development, engagement, social, and awareness occasions.

The ever-popular Winter Lunches held in the Beale Centre have continued with a selection of fascinating speakers(and exceptional food), as have the well-attended Coffee mornings and year-group reunions. Drinks receptions in Durham, Truro and London gave Old Blundellians who left school just recently - or many decades ago - a chance to reconnect with former friends and staff and form new connections.

The Club once again hosted the outgoing Year 13 for a quiz, beer and pizza evening here in the Beale Centre to introduce them to the Old Blundellian Club and the work we do - it was, as ever, a superbly fun evening. The committee continued on the success of previous years and welcomed the Senior and Prep School's Senior Leadership Teams for a drinks and canapés reception. This always proves to be a delightful occasion, and one of the only times the two SLTs are able to gather socially. We will again host OB parents and grandparents on Speech Day, with spaces very limited in recent years. The Garden cafe and community hub run by Charlie Olive continues to run successful community events, including, just recently an 80th Anniversary of the D-Day landings event.

OB Sports continues to thrive, with OB Sports Weekend being the highlight of the sporting calendar for many, offering the opportunity for OBs to showcase talents on the field - whether or not they have played since leaving Blundell's. We welcomed around fifty for dinner on the Friday evening with a total of over 85 members of the Blundell's community returning to compete in matches and support those that played. Hockey, Football and Netball matches took place, as well as Rifle Target Shooting. Touch Rugby was introduced as an additional sport this year due to the success of weekly community Touch Rugby sessions. The Reichwald 5s tournament also returned again this year, with much success. Just last night, the Beale Centre played host to the Blundell's vs OB Cricket Match, including a BBQ, drinks and music. Despite the weather, it was an excellent turn-out. OB Golf continues to flourish following sponsorship for young members from the OB Club last year, and the Ted Crowe Box at Taunton held their second annual open day in April, welcoming prospective members of all ages.

The Beale Centre remains a hub for Blundellians being used not only by the club, but by the School more widely. Used to conduct meetings, interviews, lectures, schooling and even social, sporting and entertainment events. It is a truly multi-functional space. However, it is in desperate need of redecoration to improve its appearance and functionality. In this vein, the IT system has been updated and is now regularly used to conduct hybrid meetings. Designs have been completed using the landscape of Blundell's as inspiration, and a redecoration project will go ahead this summer. We are excited to see the results and for this space, with one of the best outlooks on Blundell's, to be used to its full potential.

I want to take the opportunity to remember a number of our OB community who have sadly passed away in the last year, and I record our deep sympathies to their families and friends.

The OB Club has this year, in lieu of any individual sponsorships, decided to sponsor the current pupils' trip to Eswatini and Mozambique as part of the World Challenge Programme by providing their exhibition shirts. We look forward to seeing what great things they get up to and hope to have some of the students going on the trip give a Winter Lunch presentation in the next school year. The OB Club sponsorships have become an integral part of what we offer and provide to young OBs, and current Blundellians and I am so pleased to see this continuing this year. For those wishing to apply for a sponsorship, please do get in touch with Janet who will be able to give you the application form to complete for the committee's consideration. My thanks to David and Jonny for leading the sponsorship sub-committee.

I really want to thank the Committee for their support and input especially during my maiden year as Chair, remembering this is all done in their own time and done voluntarily. I especially want to thank Janet, our Club Secretary, for all the hours she puts in to making so many of the events mentioned happen, but also for her continued commitment to building and sustaining our community of Old Blundellians through phone calls, attending memorials and funerals on our behalf, and staffing the bar at busy events. Thanks also to Sue, Jenny and many others who support and give their time at events throughout the year. We look forward to welcoming the outgoing heads of school, Georgia Withey and Jack Ramsay, onto the committee when they leave school in just a few weeks to continue ensuring recent leavers' voices are heard in committee meetings. I myself had this opportunity 10 years ago and found it a most rewarding experience. Our meetings continue to be held in a hybrid fashion, thanks to the updates to the IT system in the Beale Centre, allowing members to join from their homes across the country, or indeed in other countries. Our daily links to the Development Office and other key School areas remains so important, and my thanks go to Tom Cowle and his team for upholding the strong relationships the club has built with the Development Office over the years and working with Janet so closely. In addition, we must thank the ever-patient catering staff, cleaners and porters that ensure our events and building run smoothly.

Over the next year we will be continuing to deliver a number of social occasions and we ask OBs to read their emails, The Popham Post and keep checking the website for details and events – your OB Day programme has a list of events and you will see how busy things are. It goes without saying that we really need people to keep their own details updated on the website and database , but you can always get in touch with us to ensure your details are correct.

Next year, we celebrate half a century from the first 6th form girl arriving at Blundells. A momentous occasion which we will all want to recognise. We will highlight and celebrate the many various and important achievements OB girls and ladies have contributed to – at School and across society. 2025 will be a really special year, and if you have ideas or want to contribute, please let us know. We want this to be a truly inclusive and memorable celebration.

Today we welcome and recognise one successful OB Lady, and our President for the day, Olivia Pinkney. You will find a roundup of her many achievements in today's programme - her policing achievements, senior leadership and influence are of particular significance. I am so grateful to her for accepting our invitation again following last year's cancellation.

Following the events of last June, you will have seen and heard how the Blundellian Community, including the Old Blundellian Club, has rallied around the school and supported each other, proving that the values of kindness and resilience, and sense of community stay with Blundellians throughout their lives. This chapter in the school's history is now coming to a close, and I refer you to the Head's immediate response on this.

The Club's relationship with the Governors continues to be strong. Having Jessica Mannix on the committee has been a vital part of those interactions and I thank her for all that she has done for the committee over her years as a Governor. Thank you to Nigel Hall, Chairman of the Governors and, of course, Bart for your engagement with me and the Club.

You will all know that this only a snapshot of our work and I continue to urge all OBs to take advantage of the variety of events on offer and – should you want to get even more involved – we are always open to ideas, suggestions and even a helping hand.

Katharine Sendell
Chair of the Old Blundellian Club
June 2024