

# St Mary's Newsletter

## Autumn 2015



The cover photos are taken from a selection of articles inside this newsletter

St Mary's Catholic School



Welcome to St Mary's Autumn 2015 Newsletter. As usual, the Newsletter reports on a tremendous range of activities in which our students have taken part over the course of the last term, as well as some activities that took place right at the end of the summer term, after we had gone to print with the Summer Newsletter.

You will find in the Newsletter articles reporting on the pastoral life of the main school, the Sixth Form, Chaplaincy and the school's spiritual life, whole school events such as the moving Remembrance Day service, opportunities for students to be of service to the community and their charity raising efforts, as well as the wide range of opportunities offered beyond the classroom in virtually every

curriculum area of the school, including a range of residential opportunities.

It has been wonderful to welcome our 240 new Year 7 students into the St Mary's family. They have settled in extremely well and have been a credit to themselves, their families and our partner primary schools who have given them such a fantastic primary education, making our job that much easier and allowing us to build on the excellent foundations laid.

We are excited about the prospect of building work commencing in the New Year, to extend the school and add space for around eight new classrooms by September 2016. This additional capacity will support both our growing Sixth Form and the main school generally. We will

write to all parents in the New Year to give more details and explain any impact that this might have, temporarily, on access and movement about the school site.

My thanks, as ever, go to all parents and governors for your on-going support for the school and for our students. We are blessed with a fantastic staff, here at St Mary's, both support staff and teachers. I am sure you will join me in thanking them for their excellent work and service, supporting every one of our students.

I wish everyone associated with St Mary's a holy and peaceful Christmas.

**J Foster**  
**Headteacher**  
**December 2015**



Rehearsing for the Christmas Concert



Festive fun at the Advent Fayre



Wrapping Christmas hampers

# Year 12 Students Go For Pope John Paul II Diocesan Award

At the beginning of this academic year, members of our Sixth Form were given the opportunity to take part in the new Pope John Paul II Diocesan Award. This has been created to commemorate the late pontiff who was so committed to young people and who had such belief and confidence in them.

Through the award, young people in the Hexham and Newcastle Diocese will be able to play an active role in the life of the Church and their local communities. They will also become more aware of the teaching and role of the faith in the world whilst understanding that religion is for living and not just for learning.

Fourteen of our students are taking part in this initiative across various parishes in Newcastle. They all attended the launch-event which was celebrated in October at St Mary's Cathedral. This fabulous occasion was led by the Apostolic Nuncio for Great Britain, Archbishop Antonio Mennini, and by Bishop Seamus Cunningham. All the students were given a blessing and a commission for the award.

Our school was also represented at St Mary's Cathedral by the sixty-strong choir which led the music. They sang



**Thirteen of the school's participants in the Pope John Paul II Diocesan Award**

beautifully throughout and, during the post-event reception, many people commented on how talented they were.

Please pray for the fourteen sixth-

formers who are beginning an exciting new venture. We wish them every success.

**Miss Jackson**



## Super Soup Friday

Our annual Soup Friday for CAFOD took place early in October. Some of our Sixth Form students spent the week leading up to this event selling tickets and encouraging as many people as possible to give up their usual lunch for a bowl of tasty soup. This was made by our lovely kitchen staff and the fresh bread rolls were generously donated by the Co-Op.

Once again, Soup Friday was a great success with many students and members of staff making the most of

the opportunity to take time out of their busy schedules to socialise in the Atrium. The volunteers who served the food did a fantastic job and there was a lovely community feel all through the lunchtime.

The event raised £191 and this has been donated to the CAFOD Refugee Crisis appeal. A massive thank you deservedly goes out to everyone who supported the effort in any way.

**Miss Jackson**

# Success In Northumbria Cricket Board Tournament



The Year 8 cricketers

The Year 8 cricket team recently competed in the Northumbria Cricket Board Tournament at the Westgate Centre for Sport. Facing Walbottle in the opening game, St Mary's bowled first and made a good start thanks to Will Campbell and Jack Pilling. The wickets quickly fell and, at the crease, St Mary's achieved a good score of 118 – 20 more than Walbottle – thanks to a great partnership between Muizz Sheikh and John Carr.

In game two, the boys played Excelsior. Jack started things off well by taking two early wickets, one of which was a fantastic one-handed catch by Alex Histed. In reply to Excelsior's 132 runs, Alex and Muizz got the innings off to a great start with some big hits and fast-running. In the end, after needing to score seven runs in the last over, some well-placed shots saw St Mary's record an excellent win.

**Mr Hook**

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# Another Thurston Adventure



One group enjoys the scenery and the Thurston experience

Thurston Outdoor Activity Centre is located on the shores of Lake Coniston in the Lake District and is a superb location to participate in outdoor and adventure activities. St Mary's has a long and proud link with Thurston, and has been taking students to the centre for over fifteen years.

In October, thirty-five students from Years 8 and 9 enjoyed one week of outdoor pursuits in some fantastic conditions. The students took part in activities such as mountain-

biking, ghyll-scrambling, hill-walking, rock-climbing, kayaking, canoeing and abseiling. Each evening, students faced further challenges with a range of activities which included a night-walk and orienteering using torches.

All the students involved had a fantastic time and stepped up to the challenges that they faced throughout the week.

**Mr Bone, Mrs McDonald and Miss Peach**

# Movember Madness



Dr Wood, Mr Turnbull and Mr Elliott are supported by Dr Winckler

Students were treated to an increasingly hirsute Science Department during November as Mr Elliott, Dr Jankowski, Mr Turnbull and Dr Wood each grew a moustache to promote Movember. The international annual campaign has been running now for

over a decade with the purpose of raising awareness of – and funds for – a range of men’s health charities. The moustachioed scientists’ efforts did not go unrewarded as they collected over £100 for the charity.

**Dr Wood**

## Peter Vardy Conference

In October, thirty Year 11 students attended a conference with Dr Peter Vardy. The group quickly realised after Dr Vardy’s first session that they had been given a unique opportunity to hear the thoughts and ideas of someone who is at the forefront of their field in the areas of philosophy, religion and ethics.

During this visit, students explored and debated themes that included the environment, human relationships and medical ethics. These topics were covered in a lively and engaging way by Dr Vardy during an event that was valued by everyone in attendance. We very much look forward to next year’s conference.

**Mrs Blackburn**

## Students Inspired By University Scheme

Soon after the half-term break, twenty Year 9 students visited the Great North Museum in Newcastle to attend an introductory Inspiring Minds Mentoring Scheme event. This whole programme has been designed to encourage students to challenge themselves and to consider university as a possible pathway. It is also run by local undergraduates who visit St Mary’s to deliver mentoring sessions several times during the year.

On the day of the event, the Year 9s received a full introduction and were then invited to write a letter of advice to themselves that they will read again in a couple of years. Following

## City Netball Tournament

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The team of Year 10 girls – Laura Dyter, Polina Kirkevich, Alexis Missick, Rose Nicholson, Christianne Salvatierra, Elizabeth Watson and Hannah Watson – were drawn in a difficult section for the annual netball tournament that was held at the Royal Grammar School in Newcastle. However, they arrived with a fantastic attitude and, during all their games, showed a tremendous determination which carried them through to a semi-final match against Gosforth A. Despite losing this contest 6–2, the girls nevertheless put up a good fight and did very well. St Mary’s player of the tournament was Rose who was chosen for her consistent shooting and supportive attacking.

**Miss Hillon**



The Year 10 netball team

this, they enjoyed a tour of Newcastle University’s main campus and were tested on what they had learned with a fun quiz. Overall, the students enjoyed a very successful and informative day. They were definitely inspired to start thinking about what they want to do when they leave school.

**Miss Milburn**

# Pilgrimage To Taizé

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Next July, St Mary's intends to take a group of students on a week-long pilgrimage to the ecumenical community of Taizé in Burgundy, France. There, we will join students from many other schools from both the UK and across Europe.

The monastic community of Taizé was founded after World War II and now has around a hundred brothers who have committed themselves to living a common and simple life as a sign of God's love. It is an extraordinary place that combines a religious monastery with the feel of a very large camp. Since the early 1960s, tens of thousands of young adults of different faith backgrounds have travelled there on pilgrimage or to take part in international youth meetings.

The meetings at Taizé encourage

young people to think both about what it means to be a human being and how they can help to bring justice, peace and hope into our world. The school pilgrimage to Taizé



is a trip that is religious in nature, but anyone considering taking part does not need to be religious or to have any such background. Students simply need to be willing to take part

in the programme, to meet new people and to go on an adventure.

The meetings throughout the week provide a space where young adults can socialise and talk about important things. Three times each day, everyone gathers for prayers, scriptural readings and silent contemplation. Time is also allowed for small-group discussions and for attendance at workshops to explore such things as cultural issues, social justice and world peace. Finally, every evening is given over to singing, dancing and other forms of entertainment.

The chance to go on the pilgrimage has been offered to all students in Years 10, 11 and 12. There are still places available for anyone who is interested.

**Miss Jackson**

## Remembrance Day 2015

The whole school gathered together on November 11th to remember both those who have died and those who are suffering as a result of conflicts. The focal-point for the service in the Atrium was a field of remembrance with poppies and two large wreaths. One of these wreaths was red and featured messages that were written by History students; the other was white and was inscribed with messages from RE students.

During the service, a reading from the prophet Isaiah was given which contained the promise that God "will settle arguments between nations." The chamber-choir marked a period of reflection by singing 'The Lord Bless You and Keep You' before the poem 'In Flanders Fields' was recited. There then followed a two-minute-long period

of silence which was led by a group of students who were dressed in their cadet uniforms. While representatives from each year-group laid wreaths in front of the display, the cadets gave a salute and Euan Restall played 'The

Last Post'. This was very moving and brought to mind all those lives that have been affected by war over the decades.

**Mrs Blackburn**



A detail from the Remembrance Day display

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# Swimmers Reach National Championship Finals

Congratulations to the four swimmers from Years 7 and 8 – Thea Cowie, Hannah Crowdy, Megan Darwood and Lily Hall – who competed this term in the 58th ESSA Secondary Schools' Team Championships. These were held in November at the London Aquatics Centre.

The girls competed in the medley event. Hannah led the way with the backstroke, Lily did the breaststroke, Megan swam the butterfly, and Thea finished the race with the front-crawl. All four performed fantastically well and, despite not progressing any further on the day, they achieved a very good time.

**Miss Knott**



The girls at the London Aquatics Centre ahead of the competition

## Year 12 Geographers' Trip To The Lake District

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Earlier this term, the Geography Department arranged the annual fieldwork-trip to the Lake District for Year 12 students. Incredibly, our usual attempts to survive the area's cold and wet weather were thwarted by a warm spell; the river-study was even threatened by a lack of water in the River Mickleden.

Fortunately, the students managed to find some rivers that were actually flowing in the amazing postglacial Langdale Valley. They were also able to explore some glaciated landscapes close to Easedale Tarn and some settlements in Hawkshead and Ambleside.

**Mr Gamesby**



The Year 12 geographers enjoy the spectacular scenery

# Successful Maths Challenges

In November, students from Years 12 and 13 took part in the National Senior Maths Challenge which is run by the UK Mathematics Trust. The challenge consisted of a 90-minute-long paper containing 25 problem-solving questions. Over 82,000 students took part from across the UK with the top 60% competitors receiving gold, silver or bronze certificates.

This year has seen the biggest success yet for St Mary's with 18 students – Fuzael Ahmed, Zac Allen, Thomas Armstrong, Tadhg Brennan, William Chapman, Daniel Eccles, Luke Foreman, Kate Garrett, Matthew Gray, Alex Higgins, Jack Hughes, Timothy Longley, Max Mak, Julia Marsh, Euan Restall, Callum Simpson, Ranjeet Singh and Sean Turland – all winning bronze awards. Two Year 12 students, Emma Young (who gained the best mark in the school) and Daniel Nagy, scored sufficient points to receive silver certificates.

In the same month, Alex, Emma, Jack and Sean represented St Mary's in the regional final of the Senior Team Maths



Sean, Jack, Emma and Alex at the Senior Team Maths Challenge

Challenge, an initiative that is run jointly by the UK Mathematics Trust and the Further Maths Support Programme. This took place at Northumbria University and involved teams from 22 schools.

Once again, the students had to apply their mathematical skills to solve challenging problems. Although not

placed in the top three, our team performed extremely well and enjoyed a very good day.

The Maths Department is very proud of the efforts of all the participants in both competitions and hopes that they will build on their success next year.

**Miss Johnston**

## Six Reece Scholarships Awarded

Congratulations must go out to the six Year 12 students – Timothy Longley, Max Mak, Daniel Nagy, Euan Restall, Sean Turland and Emma Young – who have been awarded Reece Scholarships. Recognition must also be made of the other students who made an application; the field was incredibly strong and, even though they were not selected, they still made themselves noticed.

The Reece Scholarships are award-

ed to encourage students to enter a career in the areas of Science, Technology, Maths and Engineering. The recruitment process is extremely competitive with a total of only 25 scholarships made available each year to students across the borough. All six of our successful applicants will receive £1000 throughout their time in Years 12 and 13, and will receive expert mentoring from a team of professional engineers from companies such as BAE systems.

The group that completes the best project will be eligible for a further prize of £400.

This is a superb step for Timothy, Max, Daniel, Euan, Sean and Emma towards making themselves extremely competitive in the process of applying for university places next year. We are excited to see how their project develops and to hearing all about their experiences.

**Miss Lowry**

## SIXTH FORM

# Year 12 Retreat

At the very start of the term, I was delighted to take my new year-group away to the Youth Village for a residential retreat. This was a fantastic opportunity for me to get to know the students, and for them to get to know both me and one another. It also served as a fantastic way of ensuring that everyone enjoyed a smooth transition from Year 11 to the Sixth Form.

During the retreat, students took part in an array of activities which not only allowed them to bond with their peers, but also gave them the opportunity to reflect on their own spiritual and personal development.

All the activities were designed to support academic study by fostering a strong work-ethic and traditional values. I was particularly impressed with the debating challenge during which many students spoke eloquently and passionately about some very mature topics.

The other central aim of the retreat was to identify those places in the modern world where God can be found. We also examined what it actually means to be a Christian and reached the realisation that to believe in a God of love is to believe in ourselves.

**Miss Lowry**



The retreat involved some role-play and drama

## YEAR 10

# Emma Contributes To Remembrance Day Parade

Emma Sole of Year 10 took part in a parade of cadets that was held in Walker to mark Remembrance Day. Members of the public were able to pay their respects while Emma and members of her group marched to the local memorial statue and stood to attention. As Emma explained, "It is important to remember all the soldiers who died in wars around the world." We are proud of Emma's contribution to this important event.

**Mr Tait**



## SIXTH FORM

# Biologists Solve Murder Mystery

In September, twenty Year 12 and Year 13 Biology students received the chance to attend a workshop at Newcastle University's School of Biomedical Sciences. This included a session on forensic DNA-profiling in which the students had to investigate a murder using genetic testing. After



comparing the DNA profiles of a number of suspects, the group solved the crime by analysing the samples using a technique called gel electrophoresis.

**Mr Gray**

# Macmillan Coffee Morning

Earlier this term, students and members of staff took part in Macmillan Cancer Support's 'World's Biggest Coffee Morning' event. On offer were lots of lovely home-made cakes, buns, flapjacks and fudge. Everything sold in a flash and the school raised a grand total of £250 for a worthwhile cause. This event also helped us as a community to think about those people who are seriously ill. A massive thank you goes out to all those who took part in baking, selling, buying and eating the treats.

**Miss Jackson**



# Budding Statisticians On Visit To DWP

A group of Year 12 mathematicians recently visited the Department of Work and Pensions in Longbenton for a day of activities that was designed to help them to apply their analytical skills to real-life problems.

Following a talk about graduate-level careers at the DWP, the students worked with a statistician who guided them through a challenging task. This involved having to forecast the Government's expenditure on pensions for the next five years, a calculation that relied on accurately predicting population-growth over the same period.

After a tour of the facility and some lunch, the afternoon involved even more complex number-crunching.



Three of the students attempt to balance the nation's books

The problem that the students faced this time was how to save £50 million from the national budget. Offered a range of difficult and politically-charged decisions, the students were soon involved in a heated debate. However, this did not detract from what was an excellent day for which everyone involved is grateful to the DWP for arranging.

**Miss Rossi**

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## British Biathlon Championships

The British School's Biathlon Championships culminate in London next April with a weekend of competition. In order to qualify for this event, nine students from Years 7 to 10 – Alsharif Almahdi, Sam Ashcroft, Toby Caisley, Megan Darwood, Phillip Davidson, Shakeel Gani, Kamran Haq, Archie McConnell and Holly Tibbs – attended trials in Hexham in October. They all performed outstandingly well in an attempt to gain as many points as possible over the two events. The national rankings will be released in January once all the other regional competitions have taken place. Hopefully, many of our students will then discover that they have qualified for the main event.

**Miss Hillon**

## What's Happening In The Library?

The increase in the number of students entering the school has ensured that the Library has had its busiest start to any year with 18,000 visitors this term. The Library has also processed the loan of 2,500 books and so remains on course to match – or possibly beat – last year's record-breaking total. This interest has been helped in part by the addition of hundreds of new items to the catalogue since the summer. Encouragingly, many of these titles have been recommended by those students who have used the 'Suggest A Book' feature that is part of the Library's dedicated website ([our-library.org.uk](http://our-library.org.uk)).

Earlier this term, students in Years 7 and 8 were able to display their knowledge of all things literary when the Library again organised the school's participation in the Kids' Lit Quiz. Two teams of four – Jasmine Gargi, Isaac Howell, Jasmine Peardon and Alexander Walters for Year 7, and Tia Collins, Jenny Connor, Isobel Guthrie and Ben Ray for Year 8 – were chosen to represent St Mary's in the regional finals. These were held in November at Gosforth Central Middle School and involved nearly forty teams. The competition was won by St Joseph's RC Middle School, but the two teams from St Mary's both did

incredibly well and finished in the top ten. However, the local bragging rights were taken by the Year 7s who beat the older students by a single point with a score of 70.

Plans are already in place for a range of activities next term. Among these, the Library will once again offer all students the chance to take part in the Delancey UK Schools Chess Challenge. The first, school-based stage of the competition will run until March. An announcement on how students can register will be made early in January.

**Dr Richardson**

# My Chess Journey

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When I started learning how to play chess two years ago, I merely regarded it as a hobby. I had no idea then that it would help me to gain some recognition and also give me the chance to represent both my school and county in national competitions.

Through St Mary's, I have participated in the Delancey UK Chess Challenge. In my first year (2013–14), I was new to the game and so my tactics and results were average. By the following year (2014–15), however, my skills and techniques had developed. With experience and preparation, I noticed an immense improvement in how I viewed certain positions and was able to execute a wide range of tactics. All this stood me in good stead last January when I took part in the first round of the competition. This stage was held in school and consisted of playing seven matches across seven weeks. With six wins and only one defeat, I scored nineteen points and thereby secured my place in the next round.



Mrugaya receives her Under-13 Suprema Trophy at the regional Megafinal in May

The regional Megafinal took place in May at the Royal Grammar School in Newcastle. I was very tense throughout this stage as I knew that my performance would determine whether or not I would fulfil my ambition of progressing any further for the very first time. Luckily, my improved tactics meant that I won five of my six hour-long matches and ended the day as the top under-13 girl. Receiving the Under-13 Suprema Trophy was a great

moment for me, but I knew that advancing beyond the next stage would not be straightforward.

The third round of the competition – the Northern Gigafinal – took me to Manchester in July to face some very tough opponents. Thankfully, I managed to win half my matches and so earned the right to compete as a Challenger in the national final – or Terafinal – of the UK Chess Challenge. This was held in Leicester over two days in August.

The three matches that were played both days were each scheduled to last two-and-a-half hours. Although my total number of wins was not enough to secure a prize, I nevertheless scored a satisfactory number of points and finished in a respectable position. I may have returned to Newcastle empty-handed, but I left Leicester with some great memories and also some ideas on how to improve my chess-play in time for this year's competition.

**Mrugaya Mulay (Year 9)**

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## New Students On Retreat

In December, our Year 7s went to the Emmaus Village for their first retreat. This was an exciting time away from school for the students who had the chance both to get to know each other a little better and to reflect on this first term at St Mary's.

The theme of the retreat was: "Be prepared for God's Kingdom; it is the smallest of all seeds." Students thought about how things are given a foundation and how they can be nurtured to develop and grow. To help the students do this, they made a tree-shaped display which was brought back to school. It will be added to

throughout the remainder of the year as an illustration to the Year 7s of how something continues to grow

through the small actions that everyone performs.

**Mrs Blackburn**



The Year 7s enjoy their first retreat

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# Rugby Festival Runners-Up



The Year 7 and 8 rugby squad

Eleven girls from Years 7 and 8 – Mariyah Ahmed, Eve Blakey, Thea Cowie, Hannah Crowdy, Rebecca Leitch, Kate Lievesley, Megan Lucas, Ellen Parker, Chloe Swinbanks, Grace Taylor and Lily Young – competed this term in the RFU Festival at Druids Park. The girls played four games against Churchill A, Gosforth A, Churchill B and Gosforth B. They finished the competition with two wins and a draw, and lost their only game against the eventual winners, Churchill A.

The team played brilliantly, and quickly improved their passing and

defending against vastly more experienced club-players. Grace Taylor, the captain, was a fantastic organiser and used her leadership skills to keep the St Mary's defence in the right positions all day. This, combined with a strong attack, ensured that the team finished the competition in second place which was a brilliant achievement for an inexperienced group.

Rugby training for girls is held every Monday after school and the sessions are led by a specialist coach from the RFU.

**Mr Hook**

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# The Term In Review

Our students have made a fantastic start to their time in Year 8 and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all. With one term over, now is a good time for them to reflect on their achievements so far and to focus on what they need to do to achieve continued success during the months ahead.

The students are a credit to the school, to their parents and to themselves. As their Head of Year, I am very proud of all their achievements and their very positive attitude to all aspects of school-life. They are always more than willing to volunteer for any activity, whether in taking part in a school assembly, representing the school in different events, or contributing towards a charitable cause.

Since September, the Year 8s have made sustained academic progress and there is clear evidence that they enjoy being at St Mary's. I am certain that, in the remainder of the year, they will remain focussed and will continue to aim high.

**Mr Gray**



**Students in the Sixth Form have been busy collecting items for the annual shoebox appeal that is run by the charity Samaritan's Purse. These will be presented to children in other countries who are living in poverty.**

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# Pastoral News

Year 9 students have made a fantastic start to the year and I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to be their Head of Year. Over the course of this first term, the students have shown tremendous amounts of care, compassion and maturity, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Year 9 for this very positive start. Each student is a credit to the school, to their families and to themselves.

As we approach the end of this term, it is now a good time to reflect on the many successes and achievements of Year 9. The students have worked exceptionally well in class and have shown a positive attitude towards their studies. They are always more than willing to represent their form-classes and year-group by participating in assemblies, extra-curricular activities and charitable events. For example, the students have worked tirelessly with their form tutors to

produce Christmas hampers that will be distributed on Christmas Day to those in need.

Many students have made progress academically and socially. They have also represented the school at key events throughout this first term and have thereby shown their outstanding gifts and talents. One student, Ellen Penaluna, visited Malta during November to compete in an international gymnastics competition. She performed fantastically well during this event and was awarded a silver medal for her overall achievements. Well done, Ellen!

I would like to thank all the Year 9 pastoral team for the guidance and support that they have offered the students throughout this term. I hope that everyone enjoys a wonderful Christmas and comes back to school in January refreshed and excited for the year that lies ahead.

**Mr McDonald**

## A Trip To The Tyneside Cinema

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Earlier this term, a group of Year 12 French students visited the Tyneside Cinema to watch *La Tête Haute*, a new film that was screened as part of an annual French film festival. This highly-acclaimed movie was directed by Emmanuelle Bercot, starred Catherine Deneuve, and told the story of Malony, a troubled youth who was constantly in and out of juvenile court. The students really enjoyed this opportunity to apply their linguistic skills outside the classroom and to begin to explore French cinema.

**Miss Mullan**

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## Language Club Meetings

Students from Years 7, 8 and 9 have been gathering every Thursday at lunchtime to take part in the range of activities that have been organised by the Language Club. This was launched earlier this year with a 'Day of Languages' event which celebrated the diversity of languages that are represented at St Mary's.

Since then, students have been able to write acrostic poems in Spanish, learn some German through an Oktoberfest event, and find out about the exciting and popular Day of the Dead that is celebrated in Mexico. They have also been lucky enough to welcome some guest-speakers from Years 11 and 13 who delivered a talk on the fall of the Berlin Wall and led a Russian taster-session.

**Miss Mullan**



Members of the Language Club mark the Day of the Dead with some artwork

## Thomas Sets His Sights On The Ivy League

Last April, I was selected from over 3,500 applicants to take part in the Sutton Trust United States Programme. This is designed to give students from this country the chance to learn more about higher education in America before they apply to universities there. In addition to preparing me for the whole application process, the scheme gave me the fantastic chance to visit America and to experience what the country – and its most prestigious universities – have to offer.

Based for eight days at Yale University in New Haven with thirty other British students, I was given an invaluable insight into the academic opportunities and cultural attractions that are available 'across the pond'. The visit began with an introduction to life on an American campus courtesy of some current students at Yale. I initially thought that US universities would be very similar to those in the UK, but my perspective soon changed. From learning more about the liberal arts



Thomas, sitting front-left, enjoys a meal in the refectory at Yale University

system of many colleges to receiving the chance to conduct research with world-renowned professors, I was made aware of the exciting opportunities that would be made available to me. During my introduction, I attended lectures by some of the leading professors at Yale on topics that ranged from American history to biomedical engineering; I even got to



Thomas visits the Rockefeller Center

see the Yale Bulldogs football team practise and visited Taco Bell for the first time.

My visit was not restricted to Yale as I was able to visit some top universities and tourist attractions in neighbouring states. These included the following: a trip to Princeton University in New Jersey; a two-day stay in New York which took in Columbia University, Central Park, the 9/11 Memorial Museum and the Rockefeller Center; and some time in Boston where I attended sessions at both MIT and Harvard College.

On the very last day of my visit to America, I attended a fair at Harvard which was held exclusively for students on the programme. This allowed me to introduce myself to the admissions officers of the top fifty American universities, some of whom will ultimately decide whether or not to accept an application from me.

My time in the States gave me a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to broaden my horizons as well as (if I am being honest) to have a great holiday with some terrific people. Since my return, I have applied to Princeton to study Mathematics and have already been interviewed for a place. However, if this application is unsuccessful, I will definitely be applying to several other American universities in January.

**Thomas Armstrong (Year 13)**

## A Holy Year Of Mercy

Pope Francis initiated a Holy Year of Mercy on December 8th, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council; this will end next November on the Feast of Christ the King. The motto of this period is "Merciful like the Father."

There will be a variety of initiatives, events and opportunities on offer throughout this year both to celebrate the jubilee and to act upon the words of Pope Francis. Within our own community we will be joining with the whole Church in prayer, and both staff and students will be given time to reflect and to respond to the mercy of God in their own lives.



**Miss Jackson**

## Patrick Performs In Ponteland

Patrick Scurr, a Year 10 student, recently performed in the Ponteland Memorial Hall's production of *Oliver Twist*. He joined a highly talented cast and, playing the role of Noah Claypole, was able to transport full-house audiences back to Victorian England.

The show was a huge success and Patrick's contribution to the production of Charles Dickens' classic story received rave reviews. As he reported, "I felt in tune with the character and thought that the audiences responded really well." Well done, Patrick!

**Mr Tait**

# The Advent Gift

Advent is a time of expectation, hope and prayer. We are invited to pause for reflection and to open our hearts, minds and lives to the ultimate gift of God coming into the world.

Throughout this season, staff and students have spent time thinking about the real gifts of Christmas. By taking the parable from each weekly theme and exploring an element of the Christmas story, we have helped students to understand what it is to give and to receive a true gift. We have also taken the time to think about how we can give gifts to those people who are in need through our annual hamper appeal for the homeless of Newcastle and by raising funds for St Cuthbert's Care with a series of Advent Fayres.

Finally, at the end of term, the community at St Mary's has celebrated together with a carol service and with liturgies on the theme of 'The Gift'.

**Mrs Blackburn**



# Forward Together In Hope

Over the past year, the Diocese has asked all parishes to take part in a self-assessment concerning how they work and their needs for the future. This audit has provided the opportunity for this school to share resources and information with the parishes regarding the preparation of students for the sacraments. In return, during the time of Advent, parishes have offered to help St Mary's with its collection of hampers and we are very grateful for this support.

As part of the Forward Together In Hope review, a questionnaire has been designed so that young people aged between 11 and 19 can communicate their thoughts regarding the Church. This can be completed online at the following site: [www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk](http://www.hope.rcdhn.org.uk).

**Mrs Blackburn**

# Day At The Museum

SIXTH FORM

The Bowes Museum and the Foundation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent have collaborated to create *Yves Saint Laurent: Style is Eternal*. This is the first exhibition in the UK to present a comprehensive display of the iconic French fashion-designer's work. In particular, it highlights the defining elements of his vision and the significant influence that this has had on design and the way that we understand fashion.

Year 12 and 13 A-level Fashion students were fortunate to be able to visit Bowes Museum this term to see



One of the displays featured in the Yves Saint Laurent exhibition

the exhibition. They were presented with a rare opportunity to view a collection that both references the history of fashion and its diverse influences and illustrates the development of a piece from sketches to toiles to the finished product.

Overall, the exhibition was a great source of inspiration to the students and they have been able to incorporate elements of their research into their own work.

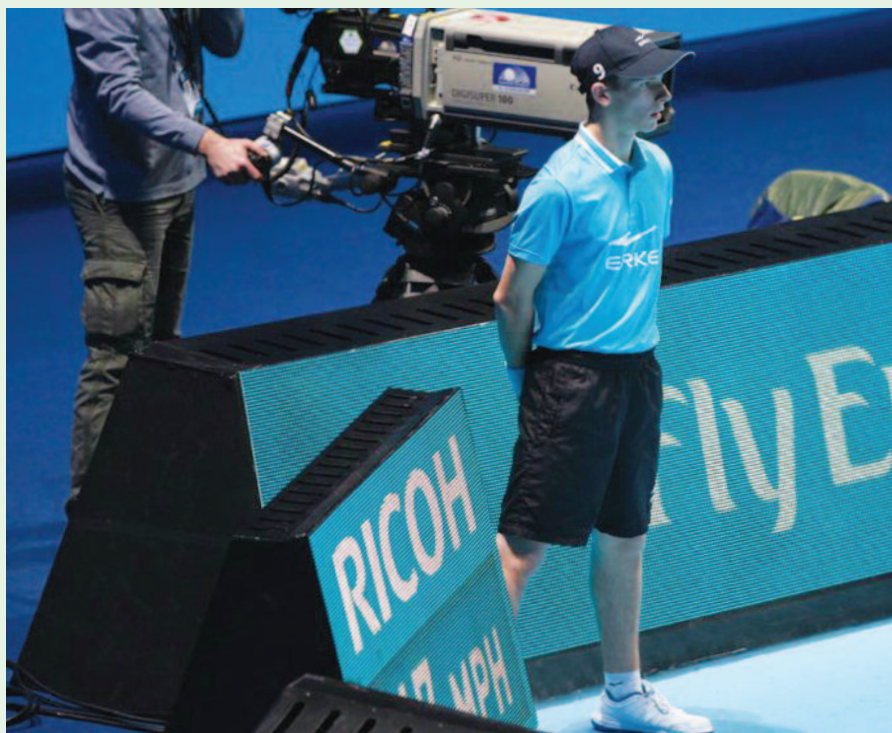
**Mrs Douglass**

YEAR  
11

# Robbie Serves As A Barclays Ball Kid At The ATP World Tour Finals

It all began one day earlier this year when, after training at my local tennis club, I opened an e-mail concerning an opportunity to be a Barclays Ball Kid at this year's ATP World Tour Finals at the O2 Arena in London. Obviously, I was very interested in the prospect of standing alongside the likes of Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic, Andy Murray and Rafael Nadal, and so I submitted an application. This led to me being selected for trials in Manchester and then, a week later, receiving the news that I was one of only thirty people out of a thousand original applicants who had been chosen to be a Barclays Ball Kid.

Most people think that, in order to do the job, you have to be able to catch and pass a ball. However, they do not realise that you also have to do these things perfectly while dealing with the pressure of working for some of the greatest tennis-players in front of 20,000 people at the O2 Arena and millions of viewers at home. This is why, two weeks before the tournament began in November, I and all the other Barclays Ball Kids prepared by attending an intensive five-day-long training camp in Southampton. In the run-up to the competition, I was also interviewed by BBC Newsround and Radio Newcastle.



Robbie on duty at the ATP World Tour Finals

The first day of the ATP World Tour Finals was incredible. We were split into five teams of six and my group was chosen to run on to the court ahead of the officials and the players while loud music played, laser-beams were shot and the audience cheered. Of course, that was only the start of an exhilarating week during which I worked as a Barclays Ball Kid in the finals of both the doubles and singles competitions. Running into the O2 Arena ahead of

the deciding match between Federer and Djokovic was easily the greatest experience of my life so far. I still do not understand how the two players remained so composed whilst I practically shook with nerves.

The whole week was unbelievable and I wish that I could do it all again. Unfortunately, you can only be a Barclays Ball Kid once otherwise I would be the first to apply next year.

**Robbie Brasington (Year 11)**

YEAR  
7

# Year 7 Student Meets Tennis Superstar

All our students in Year 7 are settling in well to their new routines. However, only one of them can claim that they have had the help of a world-famous sportsman in completing their homework.

A keen tennis-player from an early age, Joseph Hunsley was recently given an incredible opportunity to watch Rafael Nadal practise ahead of his opening ATP World Tour Finals match at the O2 Arena in London. Joseph then met his

hero and took the opportunity to ask for some help with his Spanish homework.

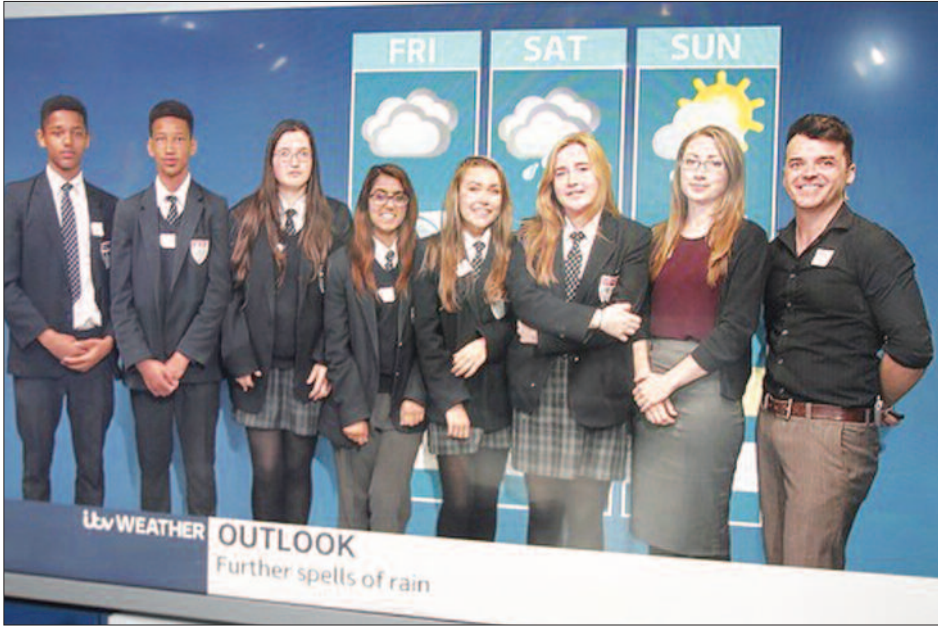
With the lesson on how to count up to twelve in Spanish completed, Nadal spent time signing tennis rackets for Joseph and his brother. The tennis-champion then posed for photos and commented that it had been an "absolute pleasure" to meet the youngster.

**Miss Largue**



Rafael Nadal with Joseph

# Students Make The News At Tyne Tees



The students and Miss Gray on the TV with Tyne Tees weatherman, Ross Hutchinson

Six Year 11 students were recently given the exciting opportunity to visit the ITV Tyne Tees newsroom in Gateshead as part of the Creative Diversity Network's Open Newsroom Day. The attendees were given an insight into the full range of skills that are involved in news-production. The students took part in hands-on workshops which covered selecting stories, writing scripts, presenting to camera, filming, video-editing and on-site reporting. They also had the rare chance to tour the facility which gave them a real taste of the typical jam-packed working-day of a reporter or presenter.

**Miss Gray**

## SIXTH FORM

# Year 13s Forge Links With Buddhist Monastic Community In Harnham

In October, Mr O'Connell and Mrs Conway accompanied a group of Year 13 students on a visit to a Buddhist monastery in Harnham, a village near Belsay in Northumberland. While there, everyone enjoyed a tour of the building, took part in a question-and-answer session with one of the resident monks, and spent some time in quiet meditation. The students really made the most of the whole experience, asked a range of insightful questions and showed extreme respect towards the Buddhist faith.



Mr O'Connell and the Year 13s with their guide, Bhikku Abhinando

In line with the faith-in-action brief of the Year 13 RE course, the students led an initiative to collect food which they delivered during the visit to the monastery. As Buddhists are

forbidden from cultivating and harvesting their own food in order that they have the time to focus on their own devotions, they rely solely on donations to sustain themselves. The gift was very gratefully received.

The Year 13s left Harnham with a greater understanding of their own place in a spiritually-diverse world. They also had the deep satisfaction of having had the opportunity to put their own faith into action and to forge strong links with the monastic community.

**Mr O'Connell**

YEAR  
7

YEAR  
8

# Indoor Athletics News

Athletes from Years 7 and 8 competed in the Sainsbury's Indoor Games in mid-November. There were standout performances from many students

and, in particular, from Joy Eze and the Year 7 boys. Joy won comfortably in both the four-lap and six-lap races, and the boys did brilliantly as a team to

finish second overall ahead of Walbottle, Excelsior, Benfield, Gosforth East and Gosforth Academy.

**Mr Hook and Mr Maughan**

YEAR 7 YEAR 8 YEAR 9

## Bronze Arts Awards

Congratulations to the 59 students in Years 7, 8 and 9 who were awarded the Bronze Arts Award by Trinity College, London earlier this term. This nationally-recognised qualification has given members of the Art Club a focus for their extra-curricular activities by allowing them to work in sketchbooks, create paintings and sculptures, and explore the work of local artists. The standard of work was described as exceptional by the visiting moderator and all the students have now started working towards their Silver Arts Award.

**Miss Eakin**

SIXTH FORM

## North East Skills

Earlier this term, students from the Sixth Form attended the Metro Radio Arena for the North East Skills event. Held annually, this is the biggest careers event in the region and it is designed to motivate students to think about their options. Through a range of interactive features, it also gives young adults the chance to gain a taste of different careers.

The students from St Mary's were given opportunities to network with employers and to attend talks or demonstrations. These gave an overview of the types of careers that are available with additional information on the best routes to take. Among the

exhibitors were the NHS Foundation Trust, Newcastle University and Rolls Royce.

**Miss Lowry**



Two Year 12 students discover more about their career-options

## Welcome To Our New Students

One of the ways we welcomed Year 7 students into our school community was by inviting each class to the chapel for a special session. This covered the role of the chaplain, the school's Catholic identity, and the availability of the chapel each break and lunchtime for quiet reflection. The groups also discussed other things including the symbol of the cross and the purpose of prayer. Some fantastic questions were asked by each class before the sessions ended with some quiet prayers. In summary, the time spent with the Year 7s allowed them to learn about an important aspect of the school and also gave me the chance to get to know them. Thank you to the RE Department for giving their time and support.

**Miss Jackson**

YEAR 7 YEAR 8 YEAR 9

## Badminton Competition

Early in December, ten students from Years 7 to 9 – Matthew Dyter, Morgan French, Daniel Hawkins, Ben MacDonald, Pawan Martin, Ben Nelson-Taylor, Lovedeep Sadhra, Muizz Sheikh, Tobin Togy and Daniel Young – competed in a badminton competition at the Tyneside Badminton Centre. This round-robin event consisted of both singles and doubles matches with the fixtures arranged according to each student's individual ranking. All the boys really enjoyed the afternoon which ended with Matthew, who won all his own matches, as this school's top-ranked player.

**Miss Hillon**

## Students Learn How To Manage Stress

Students from Years 12 and 13 recently took a welcome break from revising for exams to attend a seminar on well-being. This gave advice on managing stress and coping with pressure. It also explored the concept of mindfulness and dealt with strategies for prioritising tasks efficiently. The students found the session useful, enjoyable and relevant. As one person commented, "Preparing for A-levels is very stressful and so it was helpful to be able to think about how to deal with that pressure."

**Mr Spurr**

# Youth Friday Assemblies

Youth Friday was celebrated late in November with a series of assemblies. These were led by members of the LIFE Group who explored the idea that God's love is always there for us even during those times when we feel that we do not deserve it. The assemblies challenged all our students to decide which three people they would take with them in the event that they had to leave Newcastle in a hurry. The selection of people was unconditional and reflected the idea that God's love is unconditional as well.

The assemblies also included a message from Bishop Seamus Cunningham and contributions from two Year 12 students, Katie

Cowie and Idara Eshiet. Katie and Idara spoke passionately about how God has inspired and helped them through their lives. Their conviction of faith and sharing of personal experiences touched everyone who heard what they had to say.

As a final celebration of Youth Friday, members of the LIFE Group planned a surprise for every student in the school when they handed out sweets at lunchtime. These contained inspirational quotes from Pope Francis, the Bible and other sources that consolidated the message of the day.

**Mrs Blackburn**

## Staffing News

In a big school like ours, each summer sees the departure of a number of staff because of promotions, retirements or other new opportunities. In July, after wishing them the very best for the future and thanking each one for the great contribution that they had made to the school, we said goodbye to the following members of staff: Mr Stafford, Miss Kilgallon, Mrs Moffat, Mr Wake, Miss Vaughan, Mr Freeman-Myers, Mrs Mather-Shone, Miss Harrison, Mr Billany, Mr Swinburne, Miss Fraser and Mrs Johnson.

In September, we welcomed the following new staff to the school as teachers or as members of the support staff: Dr Stanton (Assistant Headteacher and Modern Foreign Languages Teacher), Mr Boyle (Maths Teacher), Miss Greenwood (Maths and Economics Teacher), Miss Marshall (Maths Teacher), Miss Gray (English Teacher), Mrs Nelson (English Teacher), Miss Scott (English Teacher), Mrs Tudor (English Teacher), Miss Milburn (Chemistry Teacher), Miss Uddin (Chemistry Teacher), Mr Turnbull (Head of Physics), Miss Mullan (Deputy Head of Modern Foreign Languages), Mr Kearney (Computer Science/ICT Teacher), Mrs Brown (History Teacher), Mrs

Anderson (Science Teacher), Mrs Clark-Hall (Design and Technology Teacher), Miss Smith (Learning Support Assistant), Miss Duggan (Learning Support Assistant), Mr Morris (Learning Support Assistant), Miss Gibbon (Learning Support Assistant), Mr Welford (Cover Supervisor), Mr Limer (Design and Technology Technician), Mr Donnelly (School Direct Trainee, RE), Miss Russell (School Direct Trainee, RE), Mr Webster (School Direct Trainee, Art) and Miss Peach (SCITT Trainee, PE).

In addition, the following new staff-members have joined us this term or will arrive at St Mary's in January: Miss Adams (Art Teacher), Miss Hynes (Art Teacher), Mrs Rutherford (Head of Health and Social Care), Mrs Clough (Head of English) and Mrs Lane (History Teacher). We hope that all our new members of staff quickly feel settled at St Mary's, and we wish them a long and happy association with the school.

Finally, we said goodbye at the end of term to Mrs Brown (History Teacher) and Miss Peach (SCITT Trainee, PE). We thank them for the great contribution that they have both made to the school.

**Mrs Fisher**

YEAR  
8

## Faith 15 Brings Schools Together



Bishop Seamus addresses the audience

In September, forty of our Year 8 students attended Faith 15, a huge event that was co-ordinated by the Diocesan Department for Education and the Youth Ministry Team and held at Northumbria University. This celebration featured music, dance and a series of talks, and it brought together people from many primary and secondary schools who were "inspired to inspire."

The day was led by David Wells, an inspirational person who speaks with care, compassion and humour. It also featured contributions from both Bishop Seamus Cunningham and Richard Moore. Richard is the founder of the charity Children In Crossfire which works to help young people around the world who encounter poverty and hunger.

We were sad that Faith 15 had to come to an end, but the students were certainly enlightened by everything that they heard and saw. We very much look forward to the next diocesan event when we can come together to be inspired once again.

**Mrs Blackburn**



# St Mary's Catholic School

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