

# LAUREL LEAVES



## The Edgbaston High School Laurels Association Magazine

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Winter 2023

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# CO CHAIRS' MESSAGE



The second half of the year has seen the Laurels embrace their new identity and name as well as a number of different events. Do watch out for the events coming up next year!

We have started to use various Social Media applications to keep in touch with Laurels - read more about this in the separate article and do 'follow' us for updates.

In August, we held the first event in London for a long time. This was facilitated by Louisa De La Pasca (née Venables). In spite of there being a train strike and the weather being dreadful it was a fun event and we hope to repeat it next year.

In September, the class of 2013 returned to

school for their 10 year reunion! They found that the school had changed quite a bit and enjoyed their tours given by members of the current Sixth Form.

We finished the year with our traditional Christmas event, this year renamed as 'A Merry Laurel Christmas' which was well supported and a good time was had by all.

We look forward to meeting you at one of next year's events.

*Very best wishes for 2024.  
Anne Lacey and Lizzie Hartley-Lever*

“ We look forward to meeting you at one of next year's events...  
*Lizzie and Anne*

# MESSAGE FROM THE HEADMISTRESS



I asked the whole community to strive to be more human

*Clare Macro*

The exploration of what it means to be human is a profound journey, especially during the formative years when we seek our place in a world that is both enchanting and occasionally unsettling. Reflecting on this theme with the community of EHS at the start of term, I was profoundly influenced by Matt Haig's "The Humans," a book that grapples with the essence of humanity.

The novel introduces an extraterrestrial on a mission to eliminate a man, Andrew Martin, who has made a groundbreaking mathematical discovery with the potential for immortality. The extraterrestrial, repulsed by human quirks and habits, assumes Andrew's identity but undergoes a transformative journey. Initially driven by a disdainful view of humanity, he becomes enamoured with the human capacity for forgiveness, caring, and hope.

Through the alien lens, the book unravels the contradictory, messy, infuriating, and wondrous facets of the human condition. It concludes with poignant and quirky advice for humans:

- Don't worry about your abilities. You have the ability to love. That is enough.
- No-one is ever completely right about

anything. Anywhere.

- Kindness is always courage. But caring is what makes you human. Care more, become more human.
- In your mind change the name of every day to Saturday. And change the name of work to play.
- If you think something is ugly look harder. Ugliness is just a failure of seeing.

Building on this contemplation, I delved into another medium with the pupils—movies, and specifically the recent Barbie movie— which, surprisingly, also provided insights into the complexities of being human. Barbie begins the movie in the fantasy space of Barbieland, where she and the other Barbies hold all the power and influence. In Barbieland, the only role that exists for Ken is following Barbie around. Kens don't really matter in Barbieland, so he doesn't know where he fits.

The perfect bubble of Barbieland bursts when Barbie starts experiencing anxiety and insecurity about herself: the result of the human playing with her in the Real World having similar thoughts. So, she and Ken head to the Real World to find this stressed-out human, and Barbie becomes suddenly aware of the full emotional weight of what it's really like to be a woman. She begins to question whether she is good enough, smart enough, capable enough and pretty enough.

Ken, on the other hand sees how men in the Real World so often occupy positions of power, and hold influence, and he decides that bringing those ideas back to Barbieland is the key to his happiness.

Ultimately, the movie has lessons for all. Barbie realises that it's no longer fulfilling to her to just be an "idea" of a woman. Her path to joy lies in becoming human and accepting all the complexities that go along with that. In turn, Ken learns that neither hyper-masculinity nor his role as Barbie's non-essential sidekick are going to make him happy. He must figure out who he is and what he wants on his own terms.

Ultimately, the movie, like "The Humans", invites serious reflection on what it means to be human.

It echoes the idea that being human involves navigating through messiness, complexity, and emotions. Being fully human is a journey marked by caring, love, and kindness as well as embracing the pain and joy of life.

So, as we embarked on this term, I asked the whole community to strive to be more human, to embrace the beauty of our complexities and continue to foster a culture of care and kindness. They rose spectacularly to this call, and they have shown their willingness to come out of their comfort zones, have challenging conversations in a respectful way, commit to charitable causes, support their peers through mentoring programs, embark on environmental stewardship, take an active engagement with the local community, and continue our development of an inclusive culture that celebrates diversity. These efforts have once again collectively contributed to the wonderfully compassionate and supportive school community that is Edgbaston High School.

*Clare Macro*

# LAURELS ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE

## President

Mrs Clare Macro, Headmistress

## Vice Presidents

Dr R A Weeks (former Headmistress, 2006-2019)

Miss E M Mullenger (former Headmistress, 1998-2006)

Mrs S J Wakefield née Horsman (former Headmistress, 1987-1997)

## Co-Chairs

Elizabeth Hartley-Lever (1998-2009) and Anne Lacey (staff, 1992-2018)

## Secretary

Lesley Bowler (1969-1980)

## Treasurer

Lindsay Lucas (née Farnath, 1973-1981)

## Past Staff Representative

Stella Pinkess (1946-1960)

## General Committee

Priti Bansel-Branch (née Bansel, 1985-1997)

Chris Evans (staff, 1998-2017)

Sophie Glover (left 2010)

Sally Hartley (Head of Prep School)

Anne Howarth (née Stirling, 1954-1961)

Elizabeth Hughes (nee Case, 2003-2010)

Sarah Learmonth (1993-2009)

Jennifer Powell (née Mayhew, 1999-2009)

Caroline Sprackman (née Wall, 1998-2003)

## Legal Advisor

Miss S Thomas (1961-1972)

## Production of 'Laurel Leaves' publication

Helen Holmes (née Maros, 1980-1985)

# CALENDAR 2024

**We would love to see you at one of our events in 2024! Here are some dates for your diary.**

## **Coffee Morning and Open House Saturday 2 March 2024**

Held in our refurbished Sixth Form Centre this is an opportunity to take a stroll down memory lane. Visit the classrooms of your youth, see what has changed - and what hasn't!

If you've been back to school recently enough and don't fancy a tour then why not simply come along for the cake and conversation - there are always plenty of sweet treats for the whole family at this informal event. We'd love to see you there. Tickets are free of charge but pre-booking is essential for catering purposes.

## **Drinks in the City May 2024, date to be confirmed**

We were delighted with the response to our first Drinks in the City earlier this year and it was so successful we'll be doing it again! We hope that the venue will once again be Gas Station, London. Look out for confirmation of the date.

## **Summer Lunch Saturday 6 July 2024**

Celebrate the summer and join us for a delicious sit-down two course lunch. We'll be in the Marquee at the playing fields (Richmond Hill Road entrance) and there is plenty of parking available. This is also the time when we bid a fond farewell to leaving members of staff.

## **Booking Information**

Check the Laurels Association section of the EHS website and look out for booking details in forthcoming editions of the Laurels News Bulletin (formerly Old Girls Reunited).

## **Committee Meeting Dates**

The next Committee Meeting will take place on Tuesday 27 February 2024 at 6pm via Zoom.

We're always on the look out for new members or even just occasional help if you have a few hours spare for a specific event.

Email us [ehsla@edgbastonhigh.co.uk](mailto:ehsla@edgbastonhigh.co.uk) for more information.

A full list of Committee Meeting dates will be published on our website.

# A MERRY LAUREL CHRISTMAS



This now annual event of wearing festive jumpers, singing, shaking jingle bells and enjoying festive fare was held on the afternoon of Saturday 9 December.

The choir lead the singing of traditional Christmas carols and songs including 'O come all ye faithful', 'Little Town of Bethlehem' and 'White Christmas' and the audience willingly responded to encouragement to join in. A sing along of 'Jingle Bells' was enjoyed by all and bells were shaken enthusiastically as the song was sung. In fact it was so enjoyed that the song was repeated for a second time and we were delighted to have some of our younger guests taking centre stage to show off their percussion skills!

The catering staff provided light and festive refreshments of mulled wine, soft drinks and mince pies. A genuine thank you to former EHS Music Teacher Heather Howell for organising and leading the music as well as accompanying on the piano and to former pupil Sarah Learmonth for helping to organise the event. We were truly in the Christmas spirit as we went home!

*Anne Lacey*





# ALL STAR CAST UNITE FOR MEMORIAL CONCERT

**This year's annual Pam Jelf Memorial Concert took place in the Octagon on Sunday 10 December. The event was attended by more than three hundred guests and featured many former pupils who are now working as professional musicians.**

All performers volunteered to give up their time free of charge to present this concert in order to raise money for this wonderful cause. EHS Old Girls and a number of male performers from previous school shows came from across the country to take part. Old Girl Suzie Murphy, now based in Vienna, made the trip for both rehearsals and the concert itself.

The all-star cast was supported by pupils from the school who had been specially invited to take part. Each EHS girl invited to perform has made an outstanding commitment to Music this year, so they were selected to take part in this extremely special concert - a great honour for which they did a magnificent job. Ava from the Prep School also joined the cast to perform 'Castle on a Cloud'. All singers were supported by a wonderful band of instrumentalists made up of staff, volunteers, and colleagues from other schools.

The evening was topped off with the presence of the esteemed Sir David Bintley CBE, one of the world's most respected choreographers. Sir David, who officially opened the newly-built Octagon building in 2003, addressed the audience before the second half commenced. He shared inspiring insights into his journey in the performing arts, emphasising the humble origins from which he developed his passion. Sir David was hugely impressed by the quality and professionalism exhibited by all the performers.

This all-star concert marked the final performance of my tenure as Director of Music at Edgbaston High School. I couldn't have wished for a more special evening - this concert has been the highlight of my career so far and it was a privilege and an honour to perform one last time on stage with EHS pupils past and present.

I wish EHS every success in the future and I will continue to be the Music Department's biggest supporter.

*Mr Robson, Director of Music*





# LEAVERS' DESTINATIONS 2023

From Medicine at St Andrews, to Law at Leicester and Graphic Design at the University of the Arts, London, we're incredibly proud of Edgbaston High School's most recent Year 13 leavers who have gone on to study a broad range of degree courses at sought-after universities, or are undertaking degree apprenticeships. We hope they're all settling in well, and wish them all the best for life after EHS. They will always be part of the EHS family as our alumnae, as our 'Laurels' as we now refer to them!

Destination	Courses	Number
Aston	Business Enterprise Development;	3
Bath	Education with Psychology (with placement)	1
Birmingham	Biomedical Science; Law; Philosophy; Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences; Theoretical Physics and Applied Mathematics	6
Bristol	Film and Television	1
Cambridge	History and Modern Languages	1
Cardiff	Business Management (Marketing) with professional placement; English Literature; Environmental Geoscience (with year abroad)	3
Coventry	Business Management	1
Exeter	Communications	1
Keele	Forensic Science with Foundation Year; Neuroscience	2
Kent and Medway Medical School	Medicine	1
Leeds	Product Design	1
Leicester	Law	1

Leiden (Netherlands)	International Studies	1
Loughborough	Graphic Design (with placement year); Physics; Psychology; Textile Design (with placement year)	4
Liverpool	Biological and Medical Sciences; Psychology	2
Liverpool John Moores	Interior Architecture	1
Manchester	Sociology	1
Manchester Metropolitan	Multimedia Journalism	1
Nottingham	Psychology	1
Queen Mary's, London	Mathematics; Mathematics with foundation; Mathematics with professional placement	3
Reading	Pharmacy	1
Royal Veterinary College, London	Veterinary Gateway Programme	1
Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Cardiff	Music Performance	1
Sheffield Hallam	Digital Media Production	1
St Andrews	Biochemistry; Medicine	2
Warwick	Media and Creative Industries; Neuroscience; Philosophy with Psychology; Sociology and Criminology	4
Westminster	Biomedical Science with Foundation	1
York	English; Nursing (Adult); Philosophy, Politics and Economics	2
UCL	English	1
University of the Arts, London	Graphic Design	1
	Degree Apprenticeships - Economic and Politics; Law; Royal Opera House	3

# Reunions

The Class of 2013's much anticipated reunion on Saturday, 30 September 2023, turned out to be a heartwarming and nostalgic event that brought together approximately 40 former students and a diverse gathering of current and former staff.

The celebratory atmosphere filled the school with laughter, shared memories, and the joy of rekindling old friendships.

As attendees arrived, they were welcomed with a glass of fizz to set the tone for the festivities. An early highlight of the day was a slideshow featuring old photos that captured their school years. The mix of delight and occasional embarrassment added a humorous touch, sparking animated conversations and laughter!

The delightful trip down memory lane continued as guests indulged in an exquisite afternoon tea spread. The tables were adorned with an array of delicacies, including finger sandwiches, freshly baked scones, and a selection of classic school puddings. Among these treats was the legendary chocolate concrete, a nostalgic favourite that transported many back to the care free days of their school lunchtimes.

The Class of 2013 then had the pleasure of being guided through the familiar halls and classrooms by a group of current EHS Sixth Formers. These students, who had kindly given up part of their Saturday to help, were able to offer insights into the changes that had taken place over the past decade while highlighting the aspects that had remained unchanged. Thanks must go to Annelle Rowlands, Director of Admissions and Marketing, Anne Lacey, Laurels Association Co-Chair, and to the collaborative efforts of former pupils Claire Griffin and Rachael Griffith who organised the day. Their commitment ensured that every detail, from the welcoming atmosphere to the thoughtful tour, contributed to making this reunion a truly special occasion.

*Class of 2013*



Wendy and Nicola started at EHS in 1971 and Carole started a year later when we were seven years of age. We left school in 1982 and went our separate ways. However, we kept in touch but sadly rarely met up due to life and our locations.

The last time we were all together was 29 years ago at Wendy's wedding. Nicola and Carole have managed to meet up a few times as they live nearer to each other. And thanks to recent events, we have managed some Zoom chats when we would just start talking as if we'd last met only yesterday - a sign of true friendship.

We arranged a lovely overnight stay at The Randolph Hotel in Oxford and enjoyed lunch at Quod followed by a sunset boat cruise on the river. The chat never stopped and we have vowed to not leave it another 29 years before we meet again.

We are (from left to right), Carole Evans (née Parker), Wendy Wilson-Bett (née Richards) and Nicola Todd (née Meering).

In the older photo there are the three of us at school. From left to right: Nicola Meening, Carole Parker and Wendy Richards.



# DRINKS IN THE CITY

We are delighted to have held the first London event in a long time and the vibrant atmosphere at Gas Station, a lively bar nestled near Kings Cross and St Pancras stations, transcended the challenges of a rail strike and unruly weather on Saturday, August 26.

This was the first gathering in London in a considerable span of time, bringing together individuals whose timelines at the school spanned from the swinging 60s to the dawn of the 21st century.

Despite the torrential rain and the logistical hiccup of a rail strike, the camaraderie among attendees was palpable. Conversations flowed as freely as the beverages, covering a diverse range of topics – from reminiscing about the good old school days to discussing the various paths life had taken them on since. The eclectic mix of attendees, each representing a different era of the school's history, added a unique dynamic to the evening.

Gas Station is strategically located near mainline and underground stations and, being so accessible, proved to be an ideal venue for the event. Notably, one participant had travelled all the way from Bournemouth, a testament to the anticipation that had built up over the years. As one person exclaimed, "I've been waiting for this event for 30 years!"

A special note of appreciation goes out to Louise Della Pesca, the driving force behind the organisation of the event.

The success of this reunion has sparked unanimous agreement among attendees that such gatherings should become a tradition! Plans are already afoot to replicate the experience next year, potentially in May, once again at Gas Station. Please do keep your eyes peeled for details that will be unveiled in the new year.



# NEWS FROM OLD GIRLS

## “Emma Harding

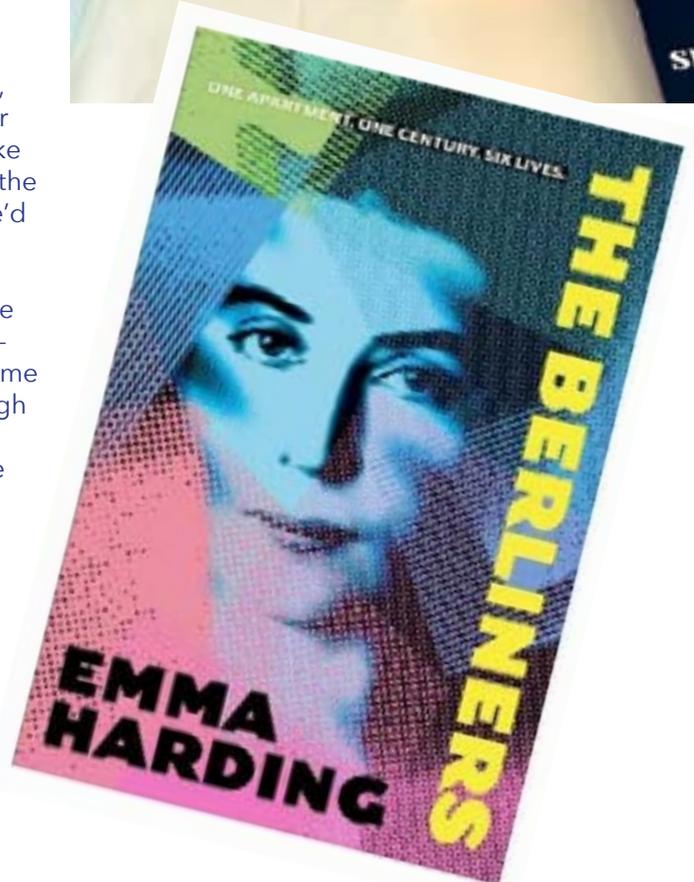
“I left EHS in 1994. I’ve recently published my debut novel, *The Berliners* (John Murray) which tells the stories of six characters who all live in the same apartment in Friedrichstrasse 19, but at different points in history.”

Emma Harding grew up in Birmingham and works as a BBC radio producer. *Friedrichstrasse 19* is her first novel.

Excerpt from the novel:

‘Sometimes I get fanciful and think the buildings speak. That all their history is locked into the walls and if you listened closely enough, you could hear all the people who’d once been there.’ Sigi lived upstairs from Sara at Friedrichstrasse 19 yet before they met, Sara had no idea that Berlin could be so thrillingly irreverent or that sex could be so intoxicatingly wonderful. But then came the war, and hunger, loneliness and barbed wire. It was just as a young girl, a protegee of The Academy of Magical Arts situated in Friedrichstrasse at the start of the century, had predicted. Battered and divided, Berlin, like its people, endured. Hans yearns to be part of the boundary-breaking spirit of the age but he’s haunted by his mother’s part in the war and the absence of a father. Ilse, who escaped from the East, wants nothing more than the freedom she risked her life for. In 1989 in a wild act of spontaneous joy, Heike leapt from the Wall into the arms of a stranger from the West. Thirty years later, she recognises that what she’d willed to be destiny was nothing more than naivety. Recently divorced, she moves into Friedrichstrasse, to begin a new life. But it’s impossible not to hear the echoes of the secrets and lies, visions and misunderstandings, lost loves and fatal mistakes, that have come before her. Time-travelling between decades, through the interlocking lives of six people, *Friedrichstrasse 19* relives the tumultuous experience of a city on the frontline of history.

*The Berliners* is out now in paperback.



## “ Sarah Dewing (née Webb)

Former Head Girl 1977

Sarah Dewing (nee Webb), former Head Girl 1977

Sarah has been in touch to tell us about her life in Jamaica. Please see her piece below:

Greetings from the land of Bob Marley and Jerk Chicken

I am writing this from a small fishing village on the south coast of Jamaica called Treasure Beach, which has become my second home-from-home over the last twelve years.

I originally came here in 2011 for a two-week holiday with my two youngest children and fell in love with the people and its unspoilt, low-key vibe and beautiful coves and landscapes. After several years returning again and again I bought a piece of land near the beach and together with a local designer and builder, created my beautiful Hummingbird Cottage, a three bedroom eco-villa with pool and landscaped tropical gardens.

I currently spend four to five months a year here, and when I am back in the UK I rent it out to people from all over the world who are visiting this part of the island. It is a great feeling to be sharing this experience with others, while at the same time contributing to the local community. employing people to help look after the property and the guests who stay here.

I have gained so many good friends, both local and those, like me. who are from further afield who have also fallen in love with the place. There is a very strong community here and I feel very accepted and supported, especially since I had eye problems at the beginning of 2022 that mean my vision is significantly reduced.

I was especially excited to host three of my best EHS friends (Year of 1977) in November; Hannah Madin-Gray, Candida (Candy) Wasley (nee Hamer), and Frances Galloway (nee Brewster). We had such a great time together, enjoying great Jamaican hospitality and cuisine, and exploring the local area.

A local fisherman took us to Black River Sanctuary to see the crocodiles and abundant bird life there, followed by a drink at the famous Pelican Bar (a bar on stilts in the sea), and the beautiful YS Falls, with its lush, tropical vegetation and spectacular waterfalls. We also visited the Appleton Estate to see how the local rum is made (and lots of opportunity for tasting!). There was also lots of relaxing by the pool, swimming, beach walks. meeting locals and eating in local restaurants. At the same time, we loved reminiscing about school days, old friends, and catching up on the years since school.



Spending time here has only emphasised the importance of family, friends, and community, especially in these times. I also realise how privileged I am to have the opportunity to experience a different climate and culture in a deeper way, that visiting as a tourist alone can't provide.

## “Candida Wasley (née Hamer)

I attended Edgbaston High School from Early Years in Westbourne, right the way through until the end of the Sixth Form in 1977.

I became a lifelong member and always enjoyed reading the latest news, but unfortunately lost touch with Laurel Leaves when I moved from Hertfordshire to Essex about eight years ago. Fortunately, I recently linked up with others in my year who are still in touch

with the association so it was an ideal opportunity to reconnect with the magazine.

I am retired from the teaching profession and enjoy life in the country with my husband and white German Shepherd. I have two sons, both settled with partners, and am now a grandmother to Alfie, born last year. What a joy he is.

In my spare time I play lots of golf, enjoy gardening and walking my dog with my sister who lives nearby.

## “Naomi Johnson

I left EHS in the early 90's and following my time at Bristol University and a subsequent MBA at Cranfield University I became CEO of a national Scottish Charity called Firstport which supported new start social entrepreneurs to develop businesses that would have a positive social and/or environmental impact. I now live in South West Scotland and work as a freelance consultant in Impact Investment, social enterprise support and the circular economy.

It's currently listed on Amazon and the Waterstones website also has a great review. The book details my 2.5 year trip cycling around the world and so I hope is really inspirational to others.

## THE WORLD AT 15MPH...ISH

**Aged 36 and ready for a change in her life Naomi set off to cycle the world with a man she'd met only three times before.**

This adventure of a lifetime would see her travel through various countries including riding from Cairo to Capetown and cross over the 5,416m Thorong-la pass in Nepal. With early school reports noting she would be better at sport if she at least turned up, this is not an athlete's journey - just an ordinary person with a great opportunity and a can-do attitude. The trip would be life changing and 26 countries and almost 20,000 miles later she came home.

**The book outlines how the trip came about, the journey travelled and what happened on her return.**

[www.bikemind.co.uk](http://www.bikemind.co.uk)

To book Naomi for an upcoming festival/event or bookclub discussion please email [naomi@bikemind.co.uk](mailto:naomi@bikemind.co.uk)



Naomi now lives in South West Scotland working as a freelancer for a variety of impact focused businesses and projects. She offers on line and face to face presentations and reflections on her trip to a variety of groups from corporate events to festivals, local interest groups and book clubs.



'A wonderful perspective to discover the world and a lovingly written account of overcoming setbacks, the spirit of wanderlust and refusing to become an athlete, despite cycling a very, very long way.'

Mark Beaumont

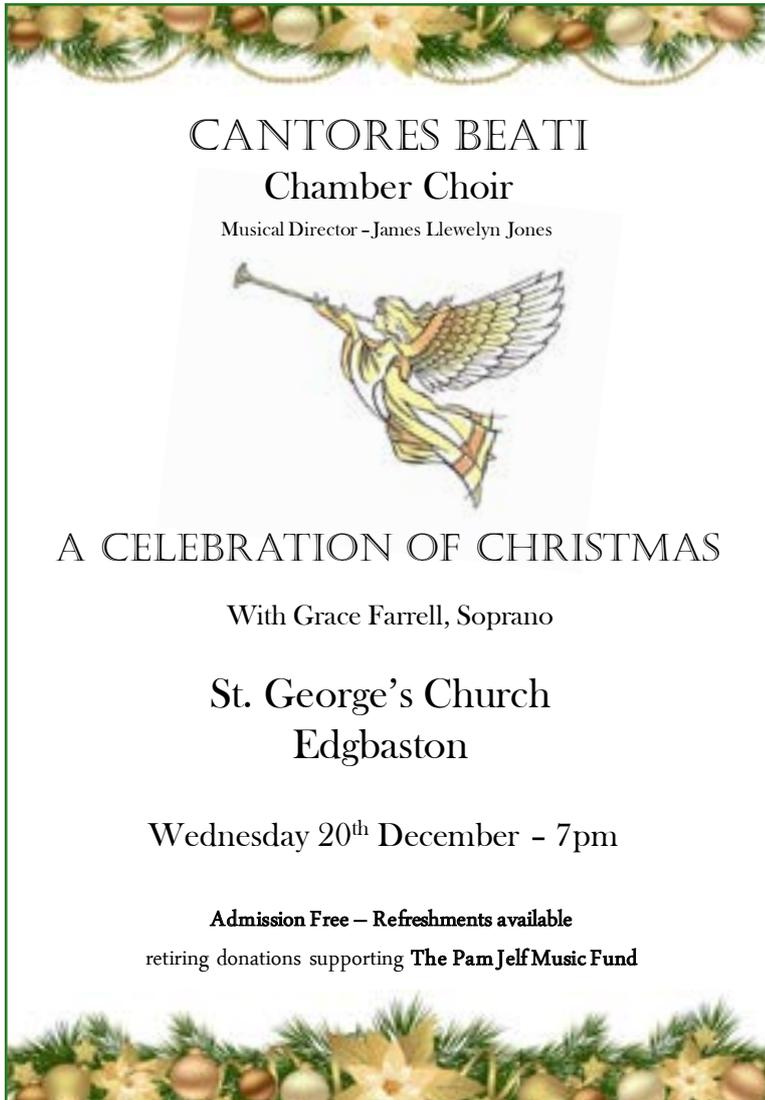


Excellent book - finished in one weekend

Brilliant

Any readers who cycle, or aspire to cycle long distances, will love this book. It is a gritty account of the author's determination and resolve, throughout a challenge that I know I could not even dream of completing. Despite the 'slow speed' of the title, this is a whistle stop account of an extreme distance cycle tour, including illness, setbacks, scares, exhaustion, camaraderie, exhilaration, friendships, fun and love.

# A Celebration of Christmas



CANTORES BEATI  
Chamber Choir  
Musical Director - James Llewelyn Jones



A CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS  
With Grace Farrell, Soprano  
St. George's Church  
Edgbaston  
Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> December - 7pm  
Admission Free – Refreshments available  
retiring donations supporting **The Pam Jelf Music Fund**

All are welcome to attend what promises to be a wonderfully festive evening of music.

We are delighted to have soprano, West End star and former EHS pupil Grace Farrell performing at this event.

All donations are in support of the Pam Jelf Memorial Fund.

We look forward to seeing you there.

## Stay Connected



ehs\_laurels

In October we launched our brand new Instagram account for the EHS Laurel Association (formerly the Old Girls Association), and we are thrilled to see the numbers of followers growing daily!

Having Instagram as an additional social platform will help us reach more of our alumnae, especially those who don't use Facebook, our other successful channel. Through this media we will post updates from your fellow Old Girls, our 'Laurels', pieces of school history, photos from the archives on #throwbackthursday, and memories from days gone by on #flashbackfriday. You'll also be able to keep in touch with upcoming events, news from school and lots of other information which we hope you'll find useful.

We would love to have lots of engagement on the page so please do like, comment and share our posts! Tell your fellow Laurels about it too - just search for ehs\_laurels on Instagram and click 'Follow'! As well as this, please continue to keep in touch with us and send us your news and updates so that we can share this with your alumnae either via our social media channels or in the Laurel Leaves magazine.