

# Old Lancastrian Club NEWSLETTER



2021

**OLC Neck-scarf**

Rebecca Denver (*Upper Sixth*) writes: Since 1913, the Old Lancastrian Club has supported LRGS and represented the community spirit which has given generations of former pupils a continued sense of belonging. This network provides



Rebecca Denver



OLC neck-scarf

current students with excellent opportunities for which we are very grateful, such as the Sixth Form Awards and much-needed equipment for use in the School.

The current OL tie with its blue, black and red stripes is an iconic symbol of the Old Lancastrian ethos, and when worn makes an OL instantly recognisable from across the room at any event. The recent introduction of co-education to the LRGS Sixth Form made clear the need for a fitting alternative to the OL tie to be worn by female Old Lancastrians, so over the last few months, together with other female students, I have been working alongside members of the Club's Committee to design a silk neck-scarf which is as striking as the tie. It combines the OL stripes and the OL crest, representing the perfect ensemble of tradition and innovation, and we hope that it will become as iconic as the men's tie and will be proudly worn by the first cohort of female Old Lancastrians.

**Hong Kong Dinner**

The Hong Kong Branch held a dinner at the United Services Recreation Club on Thursday 29 April, at which Ricky Chow gave the opening speech in honour of the School. As the first OL dinner globally of 2021 we had a collective duty to make a big dent in the wine and beer stock at the USRC (as well as the curries) and – even without the best efforts of the Brothers Glenwright

and Messrs Alderson, Ayliffe, Percy and Oliver – I am delighted to say that we not only succeeded in that mission but were, as tradition also dictates, the last group to leave the Club.

Our next priority is to provide mentorship to the new boys and girls from here joining LRGS, and guidance for their parents, so we organised a Social Event on Tuesday 1 June at the United Services Recreation Club with Hong Kong OL Ambassadors (Messrs. Chow, Chen, Dransfield and Ma volunteered) and the LRGS Hong Kong parents' WhatsApp group.

The following OLs attended the dinner: Lachezar Angelov (08-10), Tim Cheng (04-11), Ricky Chow (03-05), Vincent Chow (09-11), Patrick Dransfield (75-80), Henry Kam (03-05), Edgar Lau (03-05), Eric Luk (97-00), Edward Ma (95-99).

**OLC Calendar 2021**

At the time of going to press, the following dates had been provisionally confirmed:

**Founders' Weekend Dinner:**

Friday 2 July 2021

**OLC AGM:**

Saturday 3 July 2021

**Cotswolds Dinner:**

Friday 10 September 2021

**Manchester Dinner:**

Friday 8 October 2021

**London Dinner:**

Thursday 4 November 2021



Left to right: Edgar Lau, Edward Ma, Eric Luk, Henry Kam, Lachezar Angelov, Patrick Dransfield, Ricky Chow, Tim Cheng, Vincent Chow.



Wood carving  
Assembly Hall 1929

mainly written for *Times Higher Education*, *Standpoint*, and a relatively new monthly magazine, *The Critic*.

Having intended to wind down, the past year's lockdown restrictions left him with little to do, so he produced

more articles than usual; recent ones have been on the topics of British expatriates, BBC Sport, and the effect of COVID and Brexit on London, as well as review articles on Sir Stanley Rous, written constitutions, and contemporary political ideas.

We have asked Lincoln to contribute an article for next year's edition of the *Newsletter*, a request to which he has kindly agreed. In the meantime, many of his essays and reviews can be read on the internet at: <http://www.lincolnallison.com>



### Bruce Manson (1890-93)

An OL has been included in a book about 275 first-class cricketers who made the ultimate sacrifice in the Great War. Bruce Edward Alexander Manson, the son of F B Manson (of the Indian Forest Service) and Emily Manson, was born in India and educated at LRGS and Bedford School. *The Lancastrian*

(December 1914) records that he was in the 1893 School XI, being a wonderfully stylish bat and a good all-rounder, though only then a 14-year-old boy. He played one first-class match for The Europeans vs The Parsees in 1903, the latter winning by an innings and six runs.

Manson was gazetted to an unattached second lieutenancy in July 1898 before being appointed to the Indian Staff Corps in October 1899. He saw service in China during



the Boxer Rebellion, being awarded the Military Order of the Dragon. Promoted lieutenant in the Indian Army, he obtained his company in 1907. He was ADC to HM King George V at the Delhi Durbar in 1911.

At the outbreak of the Great War, Manson found himself in East Africa with the 61st King George's Own Pioneers. The British aimed to capture German East Africa with an amphibious attack on the city of Tanga; however, after landing ashore, well-concealed defenders quickly broke up the advance and the fighting turned to jungle skirmishing and bitter street combat. Battalions of the Imperial Service Brigade retreated and the 98th Infantry were attacked by swarms of angry bees. Manson was one of the 360 dead and is commemorated in the Tanga Memorial Cemetery, Tanzania.

### Art Room Inspiration

It is ironic that it was the lesson on perspective that drove me to stand up, grab an easel, chalk, charcoal and grey paper, and join the Lower Sixth art group to draw a Cezanne-inspired still life of a wine bottle, cotton cloth and onions. My art master Mr Connolly, to his great credit, took this apparent infraction of class discipline entirely in his stride, and patiently watched the ensuing sketch unfold. I was told a little later that following the break when I had walked up the hill to Ashton House for lunch, that he admonished the Sixth Formers by telling them that a mere Third Former had bested them. At last, I had found my *métier* in the area of Fine Art.

I loved the old art room which occupied the top western floor of the New Building. It had a high-pitched roof and skylights, and it became my spiritual home for the next 30 months. I will always remember the slightly eggy smell of powder paints and the small motes of dust suspended in the air and caught by the shafts of sunlight as I opened the door of the art room over the weekends - my sanctuary!

I mentioned the irony of missing out on the classical perspective lesson that my other third-year colleagues dutifully fulfilled. Ironic relating to two later developments: my interests in photography and Chinese art. My recent talk\* for the Asia Society centred around my pre-occupation with mono-focal perspective in western art and the challenge to it presented by Picasso and Braque during what art historian John Berger has defined as 'The Cubist Moment' of 1911 to 1914. Of course, a camera by definition and practice *is* a mono-focal instrument and my subsequent pre-occupation was with photography rather than still-life drawing. And, as I have learned through various lectures listened to over the years, traditional Chinese landscape painting does away with mono-focal perspective. Chinese landscapes are usually rendered in ink using the same calligraphic technique as the traditional writing system and have multiple perspectives - points of view - depending on where your eye travels along the picture. This is intended to mimic the actual physical journey that the loan Daoist man as he (it is always a 'he') wanders ever upwards past the myriad streams to reach the mountain's summit.



I have always been grateful to Mr Connolly and to the kindness and encouragement he bestowed on me. He was the first practising artist that I had met who had actually exhibited. He held a solo exhibition in Lancaster Town Hall of small oil paintings in the style of Degas and Corot, I recall. At a time when photography was not universally embraced as 'Art' (John Berger did not include it), Mr Connolly encouraged my fumbling efforts with the unwieldy Zenit EM camera and even allowed me to trail up and down East Road searching for suitable subjects during the art lesson. He also entrusted me with the art room key and thus provided me with both a sanctuary and a creative outlet during what proved to be quite a lonely period of my life as an Ashton House boarder.

Being a boarder at LRGS during 'The Shirley Williams era' (Secretary of State for Education and Science, 1976-79), when many of the remaining grammar schools throughout Britain were effectively coerced into becoming comprehensive schools, was quite a difficult period in LRGS's history. I think I picked up on the general mood of anger as it seemed possible (at least to us 'foot soldiers') that the School might have to radically change by either becoming part of a comprehensive system or choosing to go fully independent, or even find itself coming to the end of its 750-year-long existence. This threat of radical change to an institution that had been an integral part not only of the community of Lancashire but also wider afield, was of such magnitude that it did not always bring out the best in all the teachers (facing an existential threat rarely does) and the School did truly feel to be under siege. I did not react well to that atmosphere and also to boarding generally, and hence the freedom of being allowed to be on my own with charcoal and chalk in hand in the art room proved to be of great significance to my own personal sanity and spiritual development.

I believe that one sign of maturity is to recognise that one's character is not entirely self-generated, but actually formed (for better or for worse) by many influences. One such very positive influence on my life is the School and in recent years I have become involved with the Old Lancastrian Club, working with Chris Percy to help bring the OLs together in Asia. And one thing we have both noticed is that there is a defining factor among the OLs we have met. We are quite a diverse bunch here in Asia, but all the OLs display a humility coupled with a determination to excel (but not at the expense of others) in whatever undertaking we set ourselves. And thus, with my photography. Nobody – apart from Mr Connolly – encouraged my interest in photography. And while studying Art History



*Datong Boys, Summer '86. Taken at dusk, across the arid Shi Li River basin, they stand at a liminal stage between childhood and manhood. Where were they walking to? I have no idea. The areas between the sleepers and the tracks are black with coal deposits, Datong's biggest contributor to China's economy. Indeed, steam trains were not only still in operation throughout northern China in 1986, but they were also still being manufactured in nearby Datong!*



*Hedgehog Man, Beijing 1986. Hedgehogs tempted by a saucer of milk in our extensive back garden was a feature of my privileged childhood. The rather disorientating fact here is that this evidently impoverished man is selling these hapless hedgehogs for the pot. I am not sure there were any takers.*



and English at Leeds University I couldn't afford either the film or the darkroom facilities to indulge in my hobby. It was only when I became established in my own tiny room on campus at a Beijing university in the summer of 1986 with the Seagull camera (a Rolleiflex-copy) that my discipline with the medium began to take off. When opportunity strikes it is important to seize it with both hands and over a period of twelve weeks, I took more than 800 pictures. Every picture was taken the hard way. I had no light meter, so every photograph required a certain amount of guesswork – and the roll of film in a mid-format camera is only twelve frames so this required a good deal of changing of film.

I also will allow a moment of digression especially for our younger readers who have been brought up on iPhones. To enter the world of China in 1986 was like going back in time to the equivalent of the 1930s in England. As a camera was a luxury item beyond most people's pockets, to have one's photograph taken was a significant event – that, coupled with the fact that the Seagull camera is a periscope camera held at chest height and hence 'non-threatening' contributes to the atmosphere of happy complicity people have picked up on while seeing some of these images during a recent exhibition at the Foreign Correspondents' Club in Hong Kong. That, and of course the Chinese people I encountered

had natural good humour and humanity which I also think the pictures manage to convey. I was used to a mechanical camera thanks to my hapless efforts with the Zenit and also steeped in fine art history (those art gallery visits in northern England orchestrated by Mr Connolly and especially my late mother certainly found their mark!).

For three months I dedicated myself to taking pictures – the Seagull camera proved a perfect companion as I could smile and enter into the scene that I was capturing. I was averse to the notion of taking photographs that would demean or somehow patronise the subject. My daily circuit of cycling consisted of a 30-kilometre round trip on my 'Shanghai Pigeon' – the Bentley of bicycles – starting from my primary place of work and accommodation, Beijing Shifan Daxue, then along the second ring road and past the Lama Temple, past the Forbidden City and through the lanes that intersected the *hutongs*, to the diplomatic quarter where I earned precious US dollars as a researcher for the China bureau of *Newsweek* magazine. Cycle, stop, click, enjoy the scene, chat (my *Putonghua*, though basic, was comprehensible to Beijingers), take a few more pictures, cycle and repeat – each of those 60 days passed in sunlight and a robin's egg peerless blue sky among single-storey *hutongs* and streets that had seen little change since the Ming dynasty. The day started at 6.30 a.m. and included a compulsory two-hour rest period after lunch because of low energy levels from the meagre diet. The whole city was shut down by 6 p.m. Steam locomotives were a common sight and donkey traps still made their ambling way along Beijing's main thoroughfare, Jianguomenwai. Even then I knew that I was capturing a fleeting time, soon to be lost forever. The square format of the Seagull I embraced as a challenge – having no other choice. But I was also conscious of the claustrophobic nature of Chinese street life and consciously



*Hot Potatoes, Xinjieko Free Market, 1986. While it may look innocuous, this picture records a moment of history as this is Xinjieko, one of the first free markets allowed and thus breaking China's planned economy. The sign behind reminds sellers not to cheat their fellow comrades! Yams were introduced to China in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and brought about a large population explosion – and roasted yams remain one of Beijing's most popular and enduring street foods.*



*Billiard Girl, Beijing. Xiao Chen recalls that this street game was state of the art for 1986 and that leisure activities of any sort were quite new. I am struck by how it is the little girl who is curious, aware and complicit in my candid capturing of the moment.*





*Fishing, Fourth Ring Road, Beijing. My usual route to my second job in the Diplomatic area of Beijing, close to Ritan Park, passed the Lama temple, and in 1986 there were still enough fish and the shade from the willows to make a morning of fishing an attractive pastime.*

tried to express that in some of the compositions.

This trove of pictures, unique street scenes of ordinary people doing quite ordinary things, languished in a shoe box for over 30 years, the negatives too tightly rolled to be of any use. It was only when our youngest son Jacob started boarding at School House around two years ago that I finally got round to doing something with them and was fortunate to find the excellent 'Colour Lux Express' photo shop on Hong Kong island who straightened and scanned the negatives. Both timing and empathy are everything in life. And you can judge for yourselves how these pictures talk to you - everyone's experience of an art object is unique after all. But I will say this much - we are all dependent at certain moments on the small acts of kindness of others. And if Mr Connolly had simply said: "Sit down, Dransfield!", I am not sure my creative path would have been the same. I am grateful to him to this day; and I still miss the old art room and the smell of freedom and adventure those tubs of powder paint evoked....

#### **Patrick Dransfield (76-80)**

\*Readers of the digital version of the *Newsletter* can listen to Patrick's webcast talk at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzilAV5Yfy4&feature=youtu.be>



*Escape! Datong 1986. I believe that I snapped this, while on a train, leaving Datong for Beijing. The slag heap of coal that the boys scramble up must be a relic of the past: I remember similar slag heaps of industrial waste in North-West England during the 1970s. Much of China circa 1986 reminded me of the rather industrial and backward scenes around the Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal.*

The photographs of China which have been chosen to illustrate Patrick's article can also be found in his recently published book *Track of Time: Moments of Transition - Images of Beijing & Datong from 1986*. With a foreword by Rana Mitter (Professor of the History & Politics of Modern China, Oxford University) and Patrick's essays and descriptions, the book contains 60 pictures which depict a country on the cusp of change.

Patrick's photographs were recently shown at an exhibition curated by Carsten Schael at the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents' Club, and the book was featured in the *How to Spend It* magazine, published by the *Financial Times* on 17 October 2020.

Ten percent of the proceeds of *Track of Time* will be donated to

the Children's Cancer Therapy Development Institute: <https://www.cc-tdi.org/>

Details of how to purchase a copy of *Track of Time* can be found at: <https://www.clearwaycomms.com/book-details-new>





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