



News and views from the School

Twice termly: Issue no 15

Welcome to Issue No. 15.

It's Art in Action time again here in the UK. Why not come along and participate if you are within reach of Oxford - you'll see the School at its best. You may even be trained as a pancake chef!



The articles here:

- Discovering Shakespeare
- Pilgrimage
- The Dead Sea, Israel

Go to [Schoolinsight](#) for sign-up form, back issues and other material.

With very best wishes,

Christine Lambie, editor

Barbara started in the School in Brussels many years ago and now lives near Dover, attending the London School. Becoming interested in Shakespeare, she invited people from her village to come and read plays at her home.

Discovering Shakespeare Barbara Boehling, London

Shakespeare's enormous popularity has long fascinated me. Who else could still command this degree of interest and enjoyment of his work almost 400 years after his death? What is it that we find so endlessly attractive?

Village Shakespeare Group

Some six years ago, the idea suddenly entered my mind to begin a Shakespeare group here, in this small village by the sea, nestled among the White Cliffs. After inviting a few friends, and local people from the village, we soon had eight interested participants.

What has proved an ideal format presented itself: to meet during term-time every two weeks for two hours; to read through a play with parts allocated to everyone; and to pause every couple of pages for any

discussion. In play after play, Shakespeare seems to hold up a mirror to each of us, so it's for everyone to form their own interpretations. It later emerged that showing a DVD of the play helps us to come to grips with the plot, the names of the characters, and their relationship to each other; and to work with the Arden edition of the play, which gives the relevant notes on the same page as the text.

So we were off to a flying start, which lit up the winter months, and gave us a feeling of satisfaction of doing something worthwhile as we enjoyed each other's company. Most of us feel that reading each play more slowly gives us time to savour the language, and to appreciate better the intricacies of the plots and characters, and is, perhaps surprisingly, preferable to a theatre performance.

Insight into Shakespeare

Three books by John Vyvyan were recommended by friends: 'The Shakespearean Ethic', 'Shakespeare and the Rose of Love', and 'Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty', and on reading them they totally transformed my understanding of the plays. I now see that there is an unlimited depth to his works, which I would not have found on my own. They made me more aware of Shakespeare's vast intelligence which greatly enhances the enjoyment.

Vyvyan demonstrates that there is a strong ethic running through the plays, the essence of which is the hero's spiritual journey. The hero's soul is either rising or falling; it is a journey to redemption with the heroine as guardian angel, or it is a path to destruction. Vengeance is not an option; his alternative for vengeance is creative mercy, which, for example, Prospero displays in *The Tempest*.

Perhaps Vyvyan's most important talent lies in recognising and defining the allegory. For example in *As You Like It*, behind the obvious interaction of characters, there is the allegory of the Platonic ascent of the soul to perfect beauty. No other writer today seems to be accessing this level of allegory, without which some of the plays don't make complete sense. Vyvyan also speculates on Shakespeare's excellent education. The grammar schools of the time were guided by the enlightened spirit of Erasmus.

Equally impressive, as Vyvyan points out, are some of the heroines created by Shakespeare, such as Julia, Helena, Juliet and others. They display perfect love and constancy, and by so doing provide the ethical direction for the hero.

Reprinting Vyvyan's books

Clearly, these books needed to be back in print. So a small, enthusiastic team of us set to work on this task. Our first hurdle was one of finance. However, one of our team was so impressed by the first book that he offered to finance it himself.

For the modern reader, we felt some additions were necessary. So we have given translations of the foreign texts; all the quotations have been referenced, and the index has been expanded. There was a question about what to have on the cover, but - lo and behold - we had the perfect image depicting Shakespeare from one of the stained-glass windows right in front of our eyes at Mandeville Place (*the School's building in London*).

Vyvyan proved to be as elusive as Shakespeare himself. Finally our efforts at the British Library gave us some biographical details. Because of the copyright investigations we made, we are now in touch with Michael, one of Vyvyan's sons. He is extraordinarily pleased that notice is finally being taken of his father's works. I hope to visit him; perhaps he can tell us more of his father's unique studies.

Anniversaries ahead

2014 is the 450th year since Shakespeare was born. 2016 is 400 years since he died. So the reprinting of these three books is therefore extremely timely. We really hope that these books will reach as wide an audience as possible. They so easily lead the reader to a more profound understanding of Shakespeare. Shakespeare's genius turns the lessons of life into entertainment in the most enjoyable way possible. It seems to me that the sense of the eternal pervades his plays; it's this magic that satisfies the mind and touches the heart that we take with us as we leave the theatre.

Note from Editor: this contributor is my mother!

The Three Vyvyan books:

First two available now at [SchoolBookshop](#), 3rd book coming at the end of August.



The Shakespearean Ethic



Shakespeare and the
Rose of Love



Shakespeare and
Platonic Beauty



Top Tips

Items recommended by readers

The Art of Freedom by Earl Shorris. This book is about teaching the humanities to the poor. The project was started by the author in 1995. Since then some 10,000 students have attended the course in which Socrates is the central figure.

2. Muhammad Yunus. The founder of the Grameen Bank talks about his work, the bank, microcredit and his vision for social business in this 69 minute lecture. Go to [LSEYunus](#). Impressive.

3. Ant city. Watch this 3 minute film to see the architecture created by a colony of ants. It looks as though one mind created this huge structure. Go to [Antcity](#).

4. Power of concentration. Watch Miyoko Shida balancing one object on top of another in this amazing 8-minute display. Go to [MiyokoShida](#).

The two head teachers of John Scottus schools in Dublin walked the 790km Camino route and other



routes over 9 years. At the end is Santiago de Compostela's massive cathedral, with the remains of St James the Great.

Pilgrimage Mary and Michael Telford

We had heard about the Camino from a relative who had walked it. It sounded like a spiritual journey; it sounded hard, harder than it turned out to be. We loved the sense of adventure, a different place to stay each night, the sun,

warmth and air. That is why we started.

Abandoning wants

The most walked Camino route (and there are many) is now the Camino Francés across the north of Spain, from east to west. It has 'World Heritage' status, is 790km long, can be walked in about 32 days, at 25km per day, is not difficult walking terrain, and is very well serviced by villages and hostels – called refugios. The refugios are largely free though most people leave a 'donativo' according to means, desire and what the facilities were like! Dinner is in the refugio itself, especially if you stay overnight in the middle of nowhere. You can also make your own meal using the cooking facilities; or in the towns and villages, restaurants offer low cost meals for the 'Peregrino' (*pilgrim*).

While you can find up-market accommodation, it is not the best way to do this walk: if you want to abandon wants, to enjoy the present, to rub shoulders (sometimes literally) with others, and let go the controlling element in one's psyche, then refugios are the way to go.

It is all about the walk, and not about getting there; and the reminders of God are omnipresent: in the ancient churches, in the crosses dotted along the way, in the piles of stones at every turn which pilgrims add to when they remember. The pilgrimage is low on sense gratification and high on freedom and beauty: there is pleasure but it is simple, and there are aches and pains to keep one earthed.

First day

We began the Camino Francés with great gusto and with a great tent - bad idea. We used the tent once, that first night, and carried it (an extra 3kg) for the first day's interminable 11 hour walk from St. Jean Pied-de-Port, up over the Pyrenées for 36km, which did include a wrong turn. This tent got posted back home a week later! That first day was easily the most difficult day of all the 9 years we have been doing this....

Why they have to put the Pyrenees at the start of this route is a very good question. To make matters worse, it was wet, and at the end of this first day the refugio turned out to be a huge single room with about 80 bunk beds in it, run well by a Dutch voluntary organization and with good washing facilities and a strict rule about 10pm lights out – after then they lock you out.. There is also a little restaurant, with little food! It was all easy after that!

How we walk

It takes us three days to get our walking legs back each year, to get used to the weight of the rucksack. We have pared it down now to 8-10 kilos; the ideal is 7kg. The feet, the hips and some muscles and joints in the shoulders take time to settle down, but once they do, it's all about the walk. We walk between 25-30km each day, starting at 6 am, or if very hot, earlier than that.

In Spain people like to leave early in the morning and arrive early, because you cannot book in the refugios. We buy and then carry our lunch if there is no town on the way that day. The sight of a café during the early morning is the most delectable and happy sight - on a par it has to be said with finding a church. If there is no watering stop, you may find yourself in some local's house who out of compassion offers coffee and

limitless supplies of fine biscuits.

There are also householders along the way who leave out water, or a flask of coffee and tea at the bottom of their gardens, or in little tents, just for the pilgrims. We have always felt looked after, and never expected it. Lunch is always outdoors and your most frequent companion is a herd of cows, or sunflowers or maize or oats.

A Typical Day

The magic measure is the day itself: it consists only of rising, meditating, starting walking, stopping walking, washing, eating, and sleeping. Never has boredom clouded the mind. No day is ever the same. Whatever you anticipate rarely happens. Early mornings are remarkably beautiful whatever the weather: the stillness, the light, the sounds and the clicking chorus of hiking sticks against the ground satisfy all the senses. Afternoons are testing. You get tired, it gets hot and the weight of the rucksack begins to get to you. Shakespeare's sonnets have come to the rescue as learning them by heart takes the attention off the hardships, and delivers a mountain of wisdom.

Fellow Travellers

And the people we met? Men, women, and children of every age, 0-80, plus dogs and even donkeys. People such as Christoph from Switzerland, a young man on his fourth time who was walking the Camino in both directions, there and back, in sandals.

There was the unexpected compassion of a grumpy Spanish pilgrim who helped a lady who had fallen sick along the way, and carried her rucksack on his front and his own on his back. We gave her our sticks. He looked after her, and she struggled on to the next rest place. We didn't see her or our sticks for a few days, but the lady made sure we got the sticks back, and we still don't know how she knew where we were. There are as many stories as there are days on the Way.

Arriving in Santiago

We did the 33 days in two bites over two years during the summer – high summer. Arriving in Santiago was special. We made sure we went through the correct door, and put our hand on the sculpted tree of Jesse at the west door, and hugged the Saint at the altar. But it was the following day, Sunday, when they swung the fabulous Botafumario: this is the largest censer (dispenser of incense) in the world and is a hair-raising display. We joined in the Mass, and while walking out of the Cathedral, tears flowed uncontrollably: it was something to do with leaving this way of life, its simplicity, its beauty and its sanctity. We came back for the next seven years, to the Portuguese Camino route, and to the Caminos in France, and we have no excuse, yet, ever to stop.

So, come, walk free – upwards and onwards - Deus adiuva nos!

Sacred Sites - The Dead Sea, Israel

Bleema Adler (left in photo) and Jeannette Liliana (right), both students in Israel, write about a spiritual centre in their country.

The Salt Sea, known the world over as the Dead Sea, is located 400 m below sea level, in the Syrian-African Rift, about an hour from Jerusalem. The waters nestle against a backdrop of mountainous hues ranging from pink to azure blues to purples depending on the stages of the day.



It has historically been used for two main purposes: as a refuge and for healing. From biblical times, the dry air and the healing properties of the mineral-laden waters and mud, were well known.

Amazingly, close by the Dead Sea, amid the arid mountains and dry wadis, there are fresh water springs enabling people to survive the harshness of the desert and even grow date palm orchards, fields of melons and tomatoes.

Around 70 AD, a group of religious zealots, the Essenes, isolated themselves near the Dead Sea to pursue a communal life of asceticism, abstinence, poverty and purity. They were also scribes who copied the scriptures to preserve the traditions for future generations. They protected the "Dead Sea Scrolls" by hiding them in the Qumran caves, to be discovered only in the first half of the 20th century.

Recently we too sought refuge and healing in this beneficent place. As we descended into the lowest point on the planet we could feel a palpable shift in the vibration of the surrounding landscape: from the green fields testifying to the recent rains, to the mystical, enchanting desert. Here time stands still and people from all over the world seek peace of mind, body and soul.

The emptiness and silence can be heard, the colours of mountains and sky reflecting on the water can be seen, the salt laden air and sand can be tasted, the heaviness and stillness of the atmosphere can be felt, the minerals in the water can be tasted. We have experienced the Dead Sea.

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