

Penicuik High School

Parental Newsletter Christmas 2013

It is a great pleasure for me to have this opportunity to write to you about some of the many excellent achievements and events of the last few months.

**Model United Nations**

On the 1 November this year, Penicuik High School hosted its 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Model United Nations conference. The Model United Nations club involves students attending conferences which mimic the real United Nations by debating dilemmas which face the global community today. Thanks to our MUN advisor Grant Fraser, who started the club at Penicuik High School four years ago, the Penicuik conference has grown each year with over 250 delegates representing 40 countries attending. The conference opened with speeches from our Head Teacher and one of our two Secretaries General, Michael Cook. We were delighted to have Ewan McIntosh as our guest speaker this year, who spoke to us about the role which the United Nations has to play in aiding less economically developed countries and how we as individuals can make a difference.

The delegates were split into 7 committees which each concerned themselves with different issues. I was the chairperson of the Political Committee, along with Ellen Woodhouse, and we had a particularly heated debate on the topic of enforced secularism for all nations. Other committees included the Human Rights Committee, who considered the legitimacy of polygamy; the Economic and Social Committee, who debated whether in the modern world internet access is a human right; and the newly formed Youth Committee. This committee, designed specifically for people new to Model UN, was new to our conference and was very successful in encouraging and supporting new members.

Later the Emergency Debate was announced, in which the delegates have to think on their feet as they only have an hour to prepare a solution to the problem. This year our emergency was a crisis at a nuclear energy plant in Japan which threatened global catastrophe if not averted. Although a solution could not be agreed on by all the nations, it was an exciting and high-quality debate.

The day ended with awards being given by Head of Education, Peter McNaughton, and a closing speech from our other Secretary General, Annie Tucker. Every committee commented on the successful debates and the amazing levels of participation by all the delegates. It's exciting to see the conference expand so successfully each year, and without a doubt MUNPH will be back bigger than ever next year!

***Rose Andrew S6***



## **S1-2 competitions**

Two competitions are running this term. S1s are being asked to think who the Greatest Scot is in each subject. Later in the year we are going to have a great debate to decide whether Science, Art, History or another area can provide the Scot who has made the greatest difference. Last year was such a great success and as ever we are keen to build on this into the future.

## **Emergency Numbers and Severe Weather Closure**

Can I ask that all parents and carers make sure that the school has the most up to date information including emergency contact numbers to enable us to contact you in an emergency. In the case of closure due to severe weather before school starts an announcement will be made on Radio Forth. In the case of closure during the school day pupils would be sent home without parental contact. Pupils travelling by school bus would normally be the first sent home at the instigation of the bus company. Can I ask that you ensure that your child has somewhere safe to go to in the event of severe weather closure and that they know these arrangements. If there is a problem with these arrangements please contact us before severe weather arrives to allow us to discuss the individual needs of your child in this eventuality.

## **Comenius visit to Penicuik High School**

Penicuik High School hosted pupils and teachers from across Europe for the Comenius project, with the first group arriving on Saturday 7 September 2013. Comenius is a funded exchange program which allows any pupil to take part. Our project promoted a healthy mind and a healthy body, allowing us to see how other children our age live. The countries involved in this particular Comenius project were Spain, Slovenia, Holland, Italy, Czech Republic, Iceland and of course Scotland. They came over for the week which includes “The Big Day”, which coincidentally has the same idea behind it as Comenius. At Penicuik High School, regular classes are paused and we get involved in healthy life style activities, like sports and learning about healthy foods and eating choices.

On the first official day of Comenius, Wednesday, there was a welcoming ceremony from Penicuik High School. Comenius students accompanied their hosts to their classes before tasting the Bite Site cuisine, followed by presentations from pupils about people who inspire them. At the ceilidh in the evening we all enjoyed dancing the Gay Gordons, accompanied by our own fiddle group, as well as listening to Sophie Burt, Caitlin Andrew and the clarsachs.

Thursday was “The Big Day”. Pupils tried shinty, Highland games, and an army assault course and also took part in the sponsored walk around the Clerk Estate. Most students took their Comenius partners to the Burnt Out Records Gig that night (Burnt Out Records is our own record label). It was well attended with over 70 people to hear the magnificent artists, all from Penicuik High School.

On the Friday everyone went into Edinburgh, to visit some of the sights including the Parliament, Holyrood Palace, Calton Hill where we watched the ball drop at one o'clock, and Edinburgh Castle. We even found time to shop on Princes Street. Our last stop was Murrayfield where we had a lovely dinner of lasagne before watching the Edinburgh V Newport Dragons rugby match.

Until we had to drop them off on Sunday for them to go home we had our own time to do what we wished. Some went back into Edinburgh to go to the zoo or visit other attractions, with many of us meeting in the Princes Street Gardens for a last get together with our new Comenius friends. The whole trip was very successful and was enjoyed by all involved.





### **My Visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau**

“The one who does not remember history is bound to live through it again.”– George Santayana. Quite frequently, the Jews that were murdered by the Nazis are portrayed as figures; just a number among millions. However, actually seeing the Holocaust sites – the concentration camps, death camps and ghettos- gives us a much deeper emotional oversight to the abomination that happened during the Second World War. I was fortunate enough to visit the largest of the death camps used by the Nazis to persecute millions: Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The Lessons from Auschwitz project, run by the Holocaust Educational Trust, gives the opportunity for two S5-S6 pupils from each secondary school around Scotland, to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland.

Before we went on our visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau itself, we had a visit from a survivor of the Holocaust called Kitty Hart-Moxon, who told us her story. Kitty and her mother survived two whole years in Auschwitz. Hearing Kitty’s testimony made human what the Nazis did. I was quite surprised to learn that Kitty’s favourite job during her imprisonment in Auschwitz was cleaning out the toilets because the SS guards would not go anywhere near the toilets due to them being unhygienic, so prisoners could have some privacy. Also, workers could do their business whenever they wanted, whereas other prisoners had 30 seconds once or twice a day.

The actual visit to Poland consisted of three parts. We firstly went to the town of Oświęcim, where we stopped at a Jewish graveyard. I was expecting to find a grand memorial of the Holocaust, but what I did see was shockingly the complete opposite. There were gravestones strewn everywhere, cracked and faded, and the ground was completely covered in nettles and weeds. Before the war, 58% of the town’s population were Jewish. However, there are now no Jews at all living in Oświęcim.

Birkenau entrance



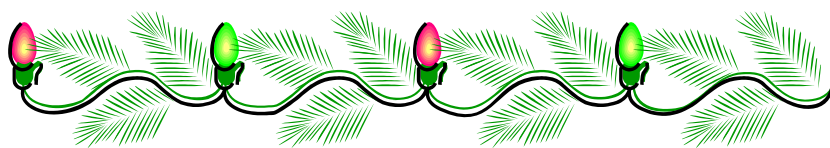
Auschwitz-Birkenau is made up of three main camps – Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II (Birkenau) and Auschwitz III (Monowitz) – and there are also many sub-camps. We visited both Auschwitz I and Birkenau. Birkenau was so vast; you couldn't even see the end of it. The weather correlated with the atmosphere – cold, grey and dull. The camp gave me an odd ominous feeling, which built up as the day went on. Most of the huts were rebuilt to give a representation of what it would've looked like, as the Nazis tried to conceal the evidence of what they had done. The most shocking and disgusting thing I saw was the massive mound of human hair, about 3 metres tall and the width of two houses put side by side, that had been shaved off prisoner's heads once they had arrived in the camp.

During the experience, I have learnt that one can never fully comprehend the number of innocent human beings murdered during the Holocaust, even after seeing Auschwitz-Birkenau itself. I've learnt that humans have a great strength and willpower to survive, even when all seems lost. It has made me question whether I would have done something to prevent these terrible events from happening if I was alive during the Holocaust. The experience has made me appreciate everyday things we take for granted like warmth, food, security and liberty. We, as human beings need to learn from our mistakes in the past and never allow anything like the Holocaust to repeat in the future.

*Kelsey Shortiss*

### **Duke of Edinburgh's Award**

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is one of the most prestigious and established ways of challenging students outside the classroom to achieve in a new Skill, Sport, Service to the Community and in an expedition to wild countryside. This year we have had an outstanding success with 26 students completing their Bronze Award. Another 21 have started in the new S3 and another 10 are going on to do Silver. This means that once again we have more doing Duke of Edinburgh than the rest of the schools in Midlothian combined. This effort is only possible thanks to the huge input from the parents' association funds and from staff - last summer 14 staff gave up their time in one way or another to help our students complete their awards. Thanks and congratulations to everyone.



### **S2 History and Biology Trip to Surgeon's Hall and the National Museum**

What do you do with a murderer? Make his skin into a book?!

S2 have been studying '**How Medicine has improved**'. The whole year group was taken to Surgeon's Hall for a History experiment to examine the History of Surgery and then to the National Museum of Scotland to continue learning how Medicine has changed. Students learned about the body snatchers, Burke and Hare, as well as the invention of anaesthetics and anti-septics and 'cow-ination'. They had a go on an endoscope, a dentist's drill and a spot of surgery 1800s style. Ask an S2 student to see if they really know why medicine improved!



### **Activities Week 2014 - Brussels, Bruges and the battlefields...**

This coming summer we are all very excited about our joint History and Languages trip to the battlefields of WWI and Belgium. As it is the centenary of the First World War in 2014, this trip also carries high significance for both students and staff. We plan to visit various battlefields, such as Flanders Field and lay wreaths to commemorate the fallen. We also hope to enjoy a day in the medieval town of Bruges and have a look round the European Parliament in Brussels. Of course, no Belgium experience would be complete without a trip to a chocolate factory!

### **Summer Trip to Rome 2013**

Pizzas, Piazzas and Penicuik...

40 students and 4 staff members had an early start last June for a flight to Rome for the History trip in Activities Week. We had a wonderful time visiting the historical landmarks of the Coliseum and the Pantheon. We took in the beauty of the Trevi Fountain, the Spanish Steps and the Sistine Chapel. In addition, we learned the joys of the Italian private beach system at Santa Marinella, where we soaked up the sun. Oh and we ate a pizza or three too.



### **Higher Trip to Dublin and Belfast**

Anarchy in the UK! Well at least in the Irish part of it in 1916 and in the troubles in Northern Ireland until 1998. History students in S5-6 study this period and as usual a vital part of History is seeing and learning about events in context. 15 Penicuik Students made the trip to Dublin and then on to Belfast to research the reasons and results of the Irish troubles. They were helped by Ms McLennan and occasionally hampered by Mr Hayes. (For reasons of economy we travelled with small bags; so packing was an issue for some.)

We went round the only Victorian gaol in Europe that is open to tourists (there are plenty open for other inmates). We stood outside the General Post Office and read the Irish Declaration of Independence. We checked out Ireland's top university, Trinity College Dublin, and sampled some of Dublin's fine architecture. We then moved into the North to see the memorials of the Troubles, take the Black Taxi Tour through some of the front line areas of the troubles and added our graffiti to the so-called Peace Wall that still divides the two communities.

The students were a credit to the school- with exceptional interest and engagement in what we were doing. Well done!





### **Penicuik Thyolo Partnership**

On Thursday 28 November, the Penicuik Thyolo Partnership were delighted to win an award at the 'Celebrate Midlothian' Award Ceremony, held at National Mining Museum. The Partnership group, who returned from a successful visit to Thyolo Secondary School in Malawi in October, had been shortlisted in the 'Partnership' category, for their continuing hard work and commitment to the long-standing relationship between the two schools. Miss Warren (Partnership Co-ordinator) was accompanied to the event by three pupils; Ross Cole (S6), Thomas Hawker and Hannah Lawson (both S5); and all four were thrilled to see the efforts of staff and pupils at both schools - with more than 7,000 miles between them - recognised and celebrated by the Authority.

### **International School Award**

Just as the British Council said in their description of the International School Award, Penicuik High School has always made sure to “open a window onto other cultures and bring the world to our classrooms”. The aim of the award is to reward schools who have made links with other school around the world in order to improve the standard of work, teach pupils about different countries and cultures and improve international relationships. With all the work the school has done in recent years to do just this, it is no surprise that the British Council have presented the school with the award.

The school has been in a partnership with a high school in Thyolo, Malawi for six years and has been involved with many visits to the high school, as well as welcoming staff and pupils from Thyolo into the school over the years. There is also a Malawi group within the school that works towards making the partnership stronger and raising funds for the Malawian school.

Penicuik High School are one of seven schools in Europe that are involved in a Comenius project, currently promoting “a healthy mind in a healthy body”, which aims to teach pupils that “we are all citizens of one world” and provide direct links between institutions, as well as an understanding of the diversity of different cultures and languages. Students and staff from Penicuik High School have already visited schools in the Netherlands, Iceland, the Czech Republic and Italy, where they learned about life in these countries and the differences between cultures. Trips to Slovenia and Spain are already on the cards for 2014.

Another international link within the school is the Model United Nations group, who attend conferences where they are able to take part in debates, discussions and consultations based on real-life world problems before developing solutions to these by working as a group and compromising. The school is one of the only Scottish state schools to hold their own conference.

The International School Award is awarded for 3 years and if the School continues down the same path it is currently on, it may well be that there are more awards for our international links to come in the future.



## **Staffing**

We welcome on to the staff Mr Scott Cairney, teacher of PE, and Ms Yvonne Harper, teacher of RME. Mrs Morven Murphy has taken up the position of Principal Teacher of Music whilst her husband is seconded to Education Scotland. Congratulations to Ms Ellen Leonard Principal Teacher Home Economics who was safely delivered of a son during the summer holidays. We say a farewell to Mr Damian Hayes in History who leaves to take up a position at Newbattle High School and to Mr James McKinstry who is leaving to take up a teaching post in Clydebank. Our thanks also go to Miss Laura McKell who was part-time teacher of Music. Our best wishes go to all.

## **Remembrance Day**

The Flanders poppy was first introduced as a flower of remembrance by Colonel John McCrae. At the second battle of Ypres in 1915 he wrote the poem "*In Flanders' Fields*" on a piece of paper torn from his dispatch book. His poem talks of passing the torch on saying "if ye break faith with us who die we shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flanders' Fields". The significance of the poppy as a symbol of remembrance and respect for those who were lost, those who lost loved ones and those who suffered throughout war has been a uniting tradition across Great Britain. The poppy represents a collective wound felt by everyone, a scar on the chest of service men and the common man alike.

The Head Boy, Scott Glen, and Head Girl, Annie Tucker, laid a wreath on behalf of Penicuik High School at the War Memorial in the public park along with other organisations from across Midlothian as a mark of respect from one generation to another. At St. Mungo's Church, the Remembrance Sunday Service was conducted by the Reverend Hugh Davidson. His sermon focused on the act of remembering. He mentioned the "flame of war" that had burned throughout time. This image is strikingly appropriate, not only because of the destructive forces of fire, but the fact that war, once ignited, is hard to contain. Just as war can grow from a previous battle, a flame can rise from the embers of a dying fire. Therefore, it is important to remember the past and mourn the loss of our service men and women. Lest we forget. We will remember them.

## ***Annie Tucker***

## **Senior Enrichment Public Speaking**

As part of our Senior Enrichment program, pupils have been improving their public speaking skills. This culminated in a presentation of four minute speeches to invited guests, including the Rev Ruth Halley and Penicuik High School's own Mrs Margaret Foster. Topics ranged from 'Why I am a Feminist' to 'The Art of Complaining' and 'TV Violence'. Candidates were judged on many aspects, from their attire, tone of voice and confidence to their diction and volume. Everyone improved their skills and enjoyed listening to each other. A £15 iTunes voucher was won by Annie Tucker, who spoke about 'Being Misunderstood in America'. Special mention also to Calum Doig, Daniel Taylor and Kelsey Shortiss. A few members of the group will represent the School at Penicuik North Kirk's Christmas Eve service by reading parts of the Gospel to the congregation. Many congratulations to all who took part.





### **School Golf Team**

Our team have made an impressive start in defence of their title in the Midlothian Schools' Golf League. Already two games have been played and two have been won. First at Glencorse, the team beat Beeslack High. Here we welcomed some S1 pupils to our team of players, and although they did not compete they played in preparation for future competitions. Secondly, despite the onslaught of rain and the gloomy clouds at Broomieknowe, morale held high to finish with a convincing win over Lasswade. More games will follow in 2014 and we are ever hopeful of another victorious year. Should any golfers wish you join our team, please do not hesitate to let Mr MacDonald or Miss Adamson know.

### **STV Referendum Debate**

Our school entered the second round of the Scottish TV 'Referendum on Independence Debate' held at Bowhill House near Selkirk. Our team of Daniel Taylor and Amy Sylvester led the attack with the strong support of Emma Young. The discussions were excellent and can be seen on the STV website at <http://news.stv.tv/debating-matters/the-competition/> as part of the preparations for the referendum next year. The competition was fierce from some of the top schools in Edinburgh, the Lothians and the Borders. Our team didn't get through to the final round but very many congratulations nonetheless.



### **Happy Holidays**

Can I take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy Christmas and a great New Year. School closes at noon on Friday 20 December for pupils and staff, with school resuming for all on Monday 6 January.

*Mark Edie*  
*Head Teacher*

