

# verve

The magazine of the GDST Alumnae Network  
Issue 16 / 17



## *Rachel Singer: shaking things up on Savile Row*

This year's Emerging Talent Award winner

What makes  
**great  
teaching?**

A call to action from  
our new Chief Executive,

*Cheryl  
Giovannoni*

**Rio 2016**

Olympics & Paralympics  
round-up

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# Welcome to Verve 2016-17

– the magazine of the GDST Alumnae Network

In this edition, we're looking at what makes great teaching. From individual teachers who inspired a lifelong passion for a particular subject, to insights from our first Student Survey, brought to life in the infographic on page 5.

On page 12 you can read about a day in the life of Polly Tandy, an alumna of Brighton & Hove High School who designs oil wells for a living. She acknowledges that while the gender challenge is getting better, women in industry constantly have to prove themselves.

On pages 4 and 5 we hear from Professor Mary Beard (Shrewsbury High School), Professor of Classics at the University of Cambridge and Samira Ahmed (Wimbledon High School), journalist and BBC broadcaster, about the formative

influences of their youth.

Our unsung hero (page 14) is Jo Cann, Head of Upper School at Nottingham Girls' High School. She is responsible for the wellbeing and happiness of the older girls in the school's care. While much of what she does takes place in the background, the difference it can make to pupils is profound. We congratulate Rachel Singer, aspiring Savile Row tailor and winner of our Emerging Talent Award on page 13 and celebrate the achievements of award-winning costume designer and 2016 Alumna of the Year, Jenny Beavan, on page 15.

We welcome our new Chief Executive, Cheryl Giovannoni and Chairman, Juliet Humphries, on the opposite page. If you're already planning for the year ahead, turn straight to the back page for

details of alumnae events taking place in 2017. There's plenty to choose from as always.

Finally, as we went to press we were delighted to hear of several major awards to people who feature in this edition of Verve. Helen Fraser, until recently our chief executive, was made a Dame; our Alumna of the Year Jenny Beavan received an OBE; and Paralympic gold medallist Ellie Robinson received an MBE as did Olympic gold medal winner Sam Quek, and was also named BBC Young Sports Personality of the Year. Congratulations to all of them and the many other GDST alumnae who received honours.

Amanda Riddle,  
Director of Communications

# New faces at the top

The GDST is delighted to welcome its new Chairman – and also its new Chief Executive. We have new Trustees too.



Last January saw the arrival of Juliet Humphries at Trust Office. She's the GDST's new Chairman, but this is by no means her first encounter with the organisation. She was a pupil at both Sutton and Wimbledon High Schools and has been Chair of the Local Governing Body of the Belvedere Academy and a Governor of Wimbledon High. She's been a Trustee since 2014.

Juliet brings to her new role a lifelong enthusiasm for helping young people to develop as well as a broad commercial background, including several senior positions at Linklaters, one of the UK's leading law firms. Since 2004 she has run her own international consultancy specialising in knowledge management. One of Juliet's most important tasks in the first few months of her chairmanship was to join the Trustees in finding a replacement

for our outgoing Chief Executive, and in June the appointment of Cheryl Giovannoni was announced.

Cheryl has had a long and successful career working within WPP, the marketing communications group, and has run three of its companies, her most recent role being CEO of Ogilvy & Mather, the advertising agency. She's developed a reputation for creating and sustaining a creative and high-performance culture in the organisations she leads; she has a long track record in actively supporting the empowerment of women; and she has actively campaigned in various capacities for equality of opportunity in education – all of which, the Trustees felt, made her perfectly suited to the GDST Chief Executive post she took up in September.

Four new Trustees have also been appointed. They are:

- Kathryn Davis, a corporate lawyer who retired from City law firm Slaughter & May in 2013
- Rita Dhut, former fund manager in the City and now an adviser to fund management firms on risk and governance
- Mary Hockaday, an alumna of Oxford High School, who is currently Controller BBC World Service English
- Masha Gordon, a seasoned investment professional and founder of the charity GRIT&ROCK

# A call to action for pioneering revolutionaries

GDST Chief Executive Cheryl Giovannoni shares her thoughts on creating a movement. 70,000 alumnae should do nicely...



In 1872 four female pioneers defied convention and changed the course of history for women in the UK when they started the GDST. The organisation has, since that time, been responsible for the education of about a quarter of a million girls, often against the odds, helping them to realise their potential and to make a meaningful difference in the world. In this edition of Verve we showcase just some of the brilliant achievements of our alumnae network, worthy recipients of awards, plaudits, recognition and reward that make us all so proud. Our recently retired Chief Executive, Helen Fraser, is another fine example to us all, as she leaves us with a rich and lasting legacy after almost seven years at the helm (and a damehood for her formidable contribution to education).

ever more compelling and women continue to shatter glass ceilings, defy convention and change the world for the better.

We are very fortunate to have such a strong GDST Alumnae Network that can provide the kind of support to our girls they so badly need when they are thinking about career choices and life beyond school. Our mission is to find ways of connecting each girl with someone in the network who can provide informal careers advice, and answer any questions they may have across any and every field of study or career path.

#### How you can help

As the network continues to grow, we want to make sure we can offer this kind of support to all those who need it across the broadest possible spectrum of options. We can only do this with your support.

If you are happy to be contacted by us to see if you may be able to help advise a student or young alumna interested in your field of work, please do update your contact and career details at [www.gdst.net/alumnae](http://www.gdst.net/alumnae).

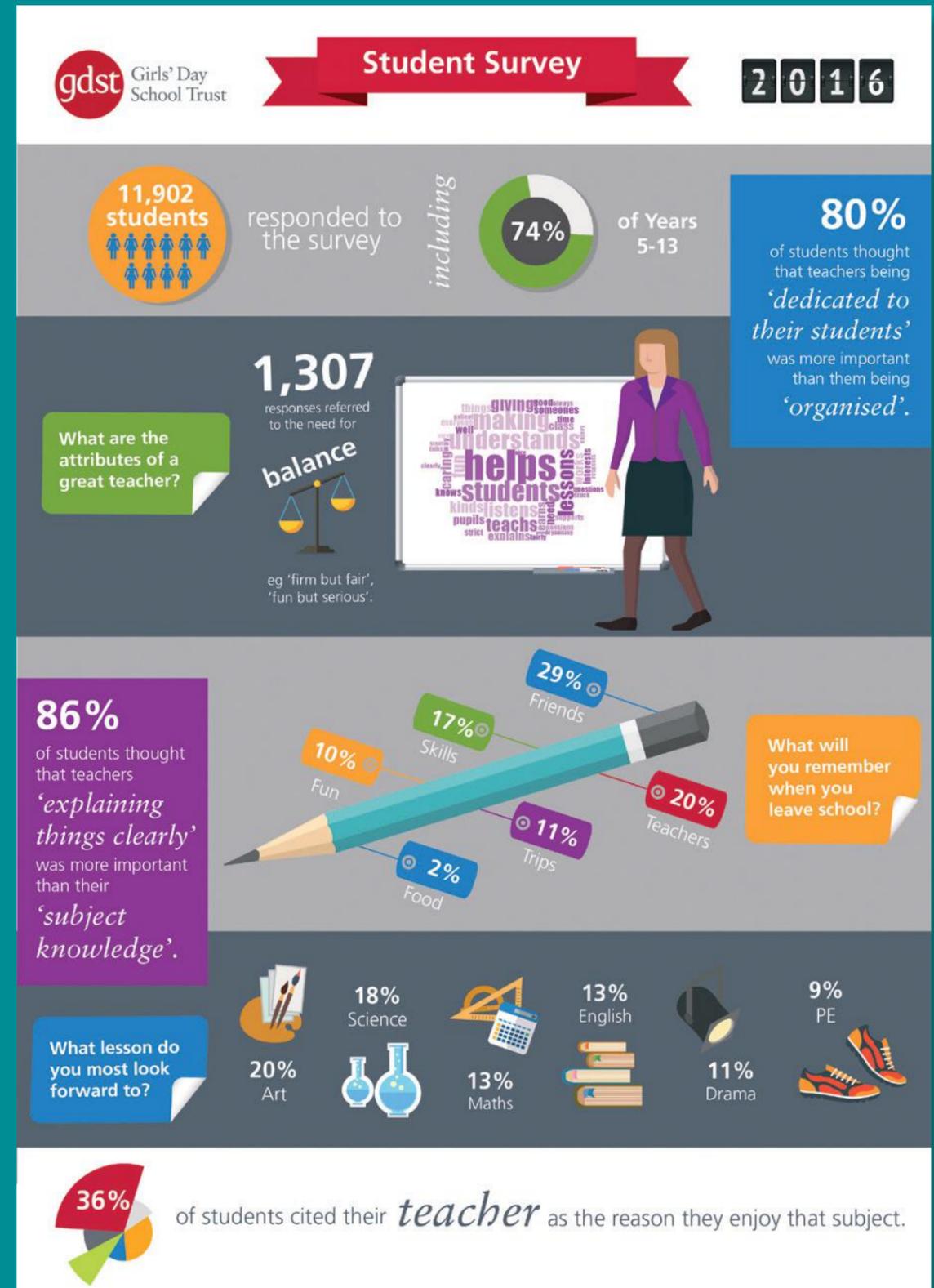
We will never share your details without your permission, but would be so grateful if you could take a minute to let us know what you are doing, so you might help inspire a young woman starting out in her career with the generosity of your time and experience.

And if you don't already receive our termly alumnae e-newsletter in your inbox, please add or update your email address. It's a great way to keep in touch with what's happening in your old school and across the network.

You can also choose to get Verve by email rather than by post – just email [info@gdstalumnae.net](mailto:info@gdstalumnae.net) to let us know.

I'm so proud to be Chief Executive of this remarkable organisation. I'm proud of its long history and look forward to contributing to its shining future. And, as we prepare for that future, I'm proud that the GDST has the support of so many alumnae – women like you – on the journey ahead. So please put your hand up. Together we can make a difference. Together we can change the world.

## What makes great teaching?



# Moving up in style

When Jacynth Bassett was setting up her online fashion business she decided to seek experienced advice – and found it through the GDST's mentoring scheme



Jacynth Bassett left Sydenham High in 2010 with a place to study law at New Hall (now Murray Edwards College) Cambridge. It was something she'd always thought she wanted.

Mid-way through her course she realised she'd rather go into business than law – preferably for herself, and ideally in fashion. The concept was clear to her: she liked shopping with her mother but they found it difficult to find smart, stylish clothes for

older women. Research established her mother wasn't alone in feeling this way: older women often feel sidelined. Jacynth then decided to focus the rest of her degree on course elements that would help her in business.

This has been extremely beneficial. For instance, she registered her own trademark and drew up her own contracts. But Jacynth still felt she needed support and guidance that only experience could

provide, and early in 2015 she applied to join the GDST's mentoring scheme. She was delighted to find herself paired with Katrina Beechey, who had left Sutton High in 2002 and is now a management consultant at Bain & Company, a leading international consultancy firm.

Verve met them both to gauge their views on the experience.

**Jacynth:** I was looking for someone who could help me with my confidence. I didn't expect to be paired with someone as ideal as Katrina. It was a perfect match.

**Katrina:** I wasn't sure what to expect from the scheme. Mentoring is an important part of being at Bain, so I was excited to use those skills to support the GDST. I was really impressed with the pairing system – obviously a lot of thought is put into the process. Jacynth and I have been a great match.

**Jacynth:** Not only had we been to the same university but Katrina had the insider business knowledge I was looking for. It was also great timing. Katrina was moving into fashion business consultancy at just the point I was looking for help.

Katrina gave me the confidence to really get going. In July 2015 I started a fashion blog as a way of connecting with older women and establishing a presence, and in November 2015 I decided I was going to launch the boutique next season. She also helped with the final structure of the business plan and my investment strategy.

**Katrina:** Jacynth had a lot of ideas and I helped her phase them, turn them into a workable shape, and decide 'Where do I want to take a risk, and where do I want to play it safe?'

It has been important to help Jacynth define her positioning and maintain confidence in it. It's so easy to get side-tracked by conflicting advice when you're starting out.

She's also quite a perfectionist. I persuaded her to do things in stages and learn from each one rather than trying to get it right

from the start. I also told her, 'Your first collection – in fact, any collection – won't sell out completely and that's OK.' I helped her maintain her confidence, latch onto the things that would keep her going, and help her get a feel for what success looked like.

**Jacynth:** The world of fashion can be quite exclusive and my model is the opposite: it's about celebrating all ages. I experienced that exclusivity when I first went to trade shows. Designers didn't want to be associated with older women and/or a new business. But I worked hard to find designers who supported me and my ethos. Now I'm more established, designers are wanting to work with me, including revered names that have been in the likes of Vogue and The Sunday Times Style.

We have exclusive pieces on the-Bias-Cut.com that I've co-designed with the labels,

and everything I select has to be of great quality, enduring style, and a flattering cut. I ensure we have what my customers are looking for, from the colour to the shape.

**Katrina:** Jacynth's got a great eye. She's good at spotting the right pieces, and as the collection grows and the business gets really well established that's going to be even more important.

The strength of the idea is the key to the-Bias-Cut.com. Everything is designed to provide a more positive experience for the target customer. For example on the website there are filters that address the issues women often face such as 'I want to cover my X', or options to enable customers to shop by shape.

**Jacynth:** Yes. My vision is to celebrate our customer by using real women as our models – all of different shapes and sizes. One of them is my boyfriend's mum and another is the mother of a school friend. I've also founded an online community called 'Ageism Is Never In Style' which brings together people of all ages to share their thoughts, inspiration and tips. It shows the fashion industry collectively that age doesn't limit style.

**Katrina:** Jacynth has always been clear that it's about more than the clothes, starting out by building her own blog. From there we have worked on how to get the brand and the products into the markets: for example, Jacynth does pop-ups in banks, law firms and in private homes. It gives people an opportunity to see and feel things, to

meet her and enable her to give advice. It creates a balance with the online presence and is working really well. These are small, intimate events with no pressure to buy.

**Jacynth:** Exactly. It's not always easy to buy online, especially from lesser-known brands. So at these pop-up parties people get a chance to know me and feel comfortable with the brand so they come to us online knowing more about who we are.

For some of these events I've also teamed up with others – a milliner, for instance, and a make-up artist. I also do private consultations for individual customers, or a client might bring a friend along too.

The business has been doing well and it's getting to the point where I know I'm going to have to relinquish control in some areas. That's going to be very hard for me as it is all very close to my heart.

**Katrina:** I think one of the things I have learned – and have been discussing with Jacynth – is that it isn't about being in control of everything but knowing where you need support. I think the ethos of the GDST is that you can do anything, there is no sense of your limits. That is critical to starting something on your own.

**Jacynth:** Yes. Being in an all-girls school – and then in my case at an all-girls Cambridge college – I felt very supported and empowered to do what I want. It gave me a structure so when I stepped outside all that, as I have now, I've got a solid framework to build upon. Strictly speaking



Modelled by Jacynth's mum Marilyn, this block print Lorena dress with drop waist and front pockets is by Belgian label Nathalie Vleeschouwer at [www.the-bias-cut.com](http://www.the-bias-cut.com)

each mentoring initiative has an end point, but we're going to keep this relationship open-ended. It's getting to the exciting part now – for both of us! I get a real buzz out of it.

**Katrina:** I completely agree. I couldn't imagine not continuing. It has been a really rewarding experience. It is a fun project to be involved in, and I think we give a good balance to it together.

To view Jacynth's latest collection please visit [www.the-bias-cut.com](http://www.the-bias-cut.com)

## It could be you...

The GDST's mentoring scheme started in 2014. Would-be mentors and mentees are invited to provide as much information about themselves as they can. Applicants who are matched work with one another within a set timeframe and meet or communicate as often as it suits them – although as with Katrina and Jacynth (see main article), they can choose to maintain the relationship when the set period is over.

"We put our hearts and souls into the matching process," explains Amanda Riddle, Director of Communications at the GDST. "We pore over every application not just to match needs with skills, but to

find other areas that might be a good fit – temperament or similar outside interests, for instance. It really helps that the GDST has the country's largest alumnae network: it makes the chances of creating successful pairs so much greater. And of course the more people who apply the more this will be the case."

If you would like support or to share your expertise, we'd be delighted to hear from you.

To find out more and apply please visit [www.gdst.net/alumnae/get-support/become-a-mentee](http://www.gdst.net/alumnae/get-support/become-a-mentee)

# Hello. Is it me you're looking for?

Over two weeks last summer Howell's School, Llandaff ran a telephone campaign to catch up with alumni and parents past and present. The result? Volunteers for mentoring, for careers advice, university interview practice and school talks – and £25,000 of donations too...

## Alumni

**Shereen Aboarkaba** "Everyone I spoke to, from wartime pupils who boarded to current parents, told me a Howell's education not only gives students a solid work ethic, it gives them the confidence to believe they can do anything. Listening to this I was filled with gratitude: if I had not been granted a bursary, I wonder if I would be researching cancer drugs and studying for a Masters in Chemistry. It was wonderful to receive donations towards the Bursary Fund from our incredibly generous alumni and parents."

**Sian Evans** "I loved hearing about parental involvement within the Parent Pyramid, which encourages flexible volunteering within the school. It was also brilliant to hear how individual children have been nurtured to reach their fullest potential as compassionate and confident individuals."

**Josh Rodgers** "I was Deputy Head Boy at Howell's in 2014-15 and loved my two years at the school. I am now reading mathematics at Bath. During the telephone campaign I found the older alumnae were intrigued about the

introduction of boys to the school. There were of course a few traditionalists to whom the news wasn't so welcome! This, though, made for an immensely absorbing conversation..."

**Laura Woods** "I'm currently studying at the Guildford School of Acting. During the campaign I got the opportunity to speak to students about applying to drama school and give them the benefit of my experience. This is what Howell's does so well: keeping us in the family even after we leave."



## Students

**Abby Thomas** "In every conversation I was able to convince people that Howell's has embraced its history as well as moving forward with the future. I have learned just how vital communication is and I have gained a lot of confidence participating in the campaign."

I have had a wonderful time working on this campaign, and I hope the GDST continues this fabulous initiative so more students will be able to reconnect with alumni, learn more about their schools and the GDST and also help to broaden the GDST community."

important part of Howell's: we like to call it the 'Jewel of the School'. I was astounded by how many people were interested in giving back to the school in many different ways. The campaign really has demonstrated how strong the Howell's and GDST community is, and over the course of the past two weeks we have made it even stronger."

**Sasha Yilmaz** "I have been at Howell's since Nursery and I am now in my final year as one of the Deputy Head Girls."

**Lara Watson** "What I found most enjoyable was talking to parents about the restoration of the Great Hall. It is such an

"What an experience! It's highlighted the fact that it takes an entire community to raise a child, and here in the inclusive, inspiring and compassionate environment that is Howell's and the GDST I feel we're at the top of the list. I feel so very proud to belong to such an amazing establishment."

"The funds we have raised will go towards the Bursary Fund and the restoration of the Grade II-listed Great Hall."

"We have been overwhelmed by the response from both parents and alumni, and the support – not just financial – they have willingly offered to help develop the school. This first Howell's/GDST telephone campaign was a challenging yet incredibly enjoyable experience. Thank you to all those who took the time to talk to us!"

**Vanessa Yilmaz, Director of Development & Communications, Howell's School GDST**

# Faster, higher, stronger

Verve celebrates the outstanding achievements of GDST alumnae and one current pupil who competed in the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Rio. They did us proud!



**Hannah Mills MBE**, an alumna of Howell's School, Llandaff and on the cover of this magazine four years ago, won a gold medal in the women's 470 class sailing event. She won a silver medal in the same event at London 2012. She and her sailing partner Saskia Clark went into the medal race only needing to finish to secure the gold – because they had a 20-point lead after winning three times and never finishing below eighth in the 10 races in the first series.



Photo: Owen Humphreys/PA Wire

**Sam Quek MBE**, an alumna of Birkenhead High School Academy, won a gold medal as a defender in Team GB's women's field hockey team, beating the favourites The Netherlands on penalties after drawing the match 3-3. She won her first international cap in 2008 while still studying at university.

Sam won silver medals as part of the England hockey team at the 2013 EuroHockey tournament and at the 2014 Commonwealth Games. She also captained the England team during the 2014 Champions Trophy in Mendoza, Argentina, competing in every game of the tournament despite, unknown to her, breaking two ribs on her right side in the

opening game. Sam also won gold with England at the European Championships in 2015. Sam has recently returned from the jungle where she took part in 'I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!'



**Ellie Robinson MBE** is a current pupil at Northampton High School and was still only 15 years old when she took part in the swimming events in the Paralympic Games. As well as being born with achondroplasia, which is a common cause of dwarfism, Ellie has also suffered from Perthes' disease, a painful childhood hip disorder.

With her fellow students watching on a giant screen in the school hall back home in Northampton, Ellie won a splendid gold medal in the S6 50m butterfly, setting a new Paralympic record in the process. Just days later she took a bronze in the S6 100m freestyle with a personal best time and a new British record.

She arrived poolside for the 50m butterfly final in a voluminous black jacket that was far too big for her 4ft frame, leading some people to tweet that she was "the most gangster swimmer ever." Ellie has recently been named the 2016 BBC Young Sports Personality of the Year.

**Fiona Bigwood**, formerly of Croydon High School, won a silver medal on her horse Orthilia in the team dressage event alongside Charlotte Dujardin, Carl Hester and Spencer Wilton.



Photo: Gareth Copley/Getty Images Europe

Fiona is a highly experienced dressage rider, winning silver medals at both the World and European Championships in 2010 and 2015 respectively. This was her first Olympic competition.

She and her teammates were beaten to the top by Germany, who won their eighth Olympic team gold medal from the last nine Games.



Photo: Nick Potts/PA Wire

**Emma Pooley**, a former pupil of Norwich High School, competed in the women's road race and also in the women's cycling individual time trial. She was disappointed not to be among the medals in the individual time trial, suffering a slight mishap at the start of the race and also feeling in retrospect she used a little too much of her energy reserves in the road race a few days earlier.

Emma won silver for the women's cycling individual time trial in Beijing 2008. She was also world time trial champion in 2010.

# Doing the groundwork

The paths we take and the successes we have are to a large degree shaped in our early years. Verve asked two well-known GDST alumnae about the formative influences of their youth

Minerva, the goddess after whom the GDST Alumnae Network was originally named, is known not just for her wisdom but for the manner of her birth: she sprang fully grown and armed from the forehead of Zeus.

It's safe to say this was a one-off. No one is born fit and ready for a role in life and few of us are set on a predetermined course. We make our choices and find our way as best we can. Of course, factors beyond our control play a part in outcomes but so too do the kind of people we are and the experiences we've had.

We spoke to Professor Mary Beard (Shrewsbury High School), Professor of Classics at the University of Cambridge, and to Samira Ahmed (Wimbledon High School), journalist and BBC broadcaster. What in their pasts has helped to shape them as the people they are now?

**Did you find your school years competitive? If so, was that daunting or invigorating?**

**Samira Ahmed:** Wimbledon High didn't feel hotly competitive in those days. I liked that about it. I was in competition with myself really, and felt quite happy not being compared to anyone else. We would hear stories about how much more competitive other well-known public schools were. I was always a hard worker and I think I benefited from not feeling in direct competition with my class. I enjoyed work for the sake of it.

If anything I disliked the sense of comparison that came around O-levels. It was purely negative. The teachers were inspiring, which helped, but I think it's an environment that's disappeared from a lot of selective schools now.



Professor Mary Beard, (Shrewsbury High School), Professor of Classics at the University of Cambridge.

**Mary Beard:** Competition is always a combination of the two, surely? The obvious key seems to me that we should always think of the losers as much as the winners.

OK, winning tastes nice, but the question is how to let people lose with dignity.

**Young people need to develop as individuals – but they also need to feel part of a group and to accept others as part of one. How did your school help you develop as a person and also as part of the school community?**

**Mary Beard:** That is hard to say. It's such a long time ago. It certainly gave me something to kick against and it was quietly supportive when I did. You probably can't ask more than that.

**Samira Ahmed:** I loved the idea of the school itself, its feminist history, and was fascinated by it pioneering women in higher education and the professions. I used to love reading all

those boards of names in the assembly hall who'd gone on to university since the early 20th century.

But frankly that drive came all from within me. What I got from school was a sense of achievement, trying out interests, and the great support of teachers. But I couldn't wait to leave. And it's interesting that I kept in touch with the boys from a nearby school and formed long-term friendships with them. Many of us ended up in journalism together.

**Would you say your time at school helped make you resilient for the challenges that lay ahead? If so, how did that happen, whether in the classroom or outside it?**

**Mary Beard:** It tended to disguise from me that there were people in the world who thought that women were less smart than men. By the time I discovered them I was tough enough to cope.

**Samira Ahmed:** Being in an all-girls environment in a school so secure in its sense of identity was vital. I guess over the 10 years I spent there we just absorbed a sense of resilience for the outside world by osmosis. All around us we saw girls doing and being encouraged to do everything. There was no such thing as a "boys' subject." School was a form of training for the adult world. It provided useful strength for dealing with the male arrogance one met outside and standing one's ground. However I would say the emphasis on academic success meant and still means girls are unprepared for negotiating on pay. That should be taught. We expect to be paid on merit and it took me years to realise that was never going to happen without asking and demanding. Young women need to be taught to negotiate and not be afraid to be assertive.

**Would you say 'true grit' is important? Has it been so for you personally, and why?**

**Samira Ahmed:** I suppose it was for me. I was bullied a lot at school so focussing on the long term was vital. It's also useful to have dealt with it before getting into the workplace. I am always struck by the very self-motivated young women who approach me for career advice. You can tell straight away the ones who have grit and determination and are willing to work hard. It always makes me smile.

Sadly I'd say a great deal of nepotism and cronyism still rule in some professional workplaces like journalism. Talent and determination are your only option if you're not born connected. And they make for far better citizens and colleagues. I think my school instilled that attitude.

**Mary Beard:** I don't really know what you mean by true grit, apart from the John Wayne movie, which doesn't mean all that much to me! If you mean that you have to fight your corner, then yes. But I think there are all kinds of other qualities that are as important. Wit and humour, for example.

**Can you give any examples of when you've really needed it?**

**Mary Beard:** Every single day!

**Samira Ahmed:** In journalism? I've lost count! The most important thing is to ensure you're always doing the best work you can. If you have the confidence of knowing your ability it's easier to stand your ground when you meet unreasonable attitudes or behaviour.

One of the most important skills I learned at school was the value of consistent hard work and steady progress. In adult life it means you're playing a long-term game and can keep your head down through rough times and pick your battles. I see so many women who just quit when they get married or have children without thinking through their options carefully – options like going part time or taking a break and then reassessing again in a year or two.

**Please tell us of any truly inspirational teachers you had. How would you say they have influenced you, whether that is in the career path you chose or the kind of person you now are?**

**Samira Ahmed:** Of all my teachers – and I was very lucky to have had so

many wonderful ones throughout my time at school – Mrs Kirman was the one who opened up a new vista. I went to her home for Oxbridge entrance classes, she took me to the National Theatre, encouraged me to edit the school magazine and she was so full of enthusiasm and passionate about English Literature. I wrote to her for a while after I joined the BBC.

The whole connection between doing English Literature précis for O-Level and critical appreciation for Eng Lit A-level made journalism come easy. I'll always be grateful for how much she built up my confidence and for making me seek out work that delights you and that still has you enthusiastic 30 years on from leaving school.

**Mary Beard:** A wonderful sixth form English teacher called Frank McEachran who made us (or at least encouraged us) to learn reams of poetry that are still in my head. And just occasionally he bribed us with a cash reward. It was 50p for learning Prufrock, I recall, and I managed that. It was five quid for the Wreck of the Deutschland, and nobody did.

And of course my Classics teacher, Eileen Lewis, who was slightly scary but pushed and pushed and pushed us. Forever grateful.



Photo: Jeff Overs

Samira Ahmed (Wimbledon High School), journalist and BBC broadcaster.

# A day in the life

Brighton & Hove alumna **Polly Tandy** designs oil wells for a living. It's a challenging role but a rewarding one, she says

**Where do you live?** Aberdeenshire.

**Who do you share your house with?**

My husband Mark, our 2½-year-old son Benjamin and our dog Bruno.

**When do you get up and leave the house?** I'm generally up at 5.00am and gone by 6.00am. It's a drive of around 30 miles to work and it's quite an early start, so I'm at Chevron in Aberdeen by 6.45am.

**What do your mornings consist of?**

Generally in engineering we'll be working on a well. This involves the design – each well is specific to its location and circumstances – as well as procuring the equipment and then working as part of the operations team as the project progresses to the drilling phase. Since I returned from maternity leave I've been the Drilling Engineering Coordinator. This is a non-operational role involving looking after some engineering projects we've shared with other companies, overseeing our policies and procedures and also coordinating the learning and development opportunities for our department. I also support our Engineering Manager, especially with respect to initiatives sent from our head office in Houston.

Several mornings a week we have operational meetings in which we assess reports and share experiences from all our rigs around the UK's continental shelf.

**What has been the most exciting day of your career to date?** I can think of two. Years ago, before my current job at Chevron, I was on a rig in the North Sea for a well test. We had drilled the well and were flaring it to test its architecture and productivity. The heat, the light and the noise were incredible and to me it was testament to the immense engineering feat that is the oil industry. Around the same time I was off the coast west of Ireland



early one morning and someone called me onto the deck. It was a perfect dawn, a clear sun on the horizon and not a ripple on the sea – and dolphins, hundreds of them, their sleek backs breaking the surface and parting to pass either side of the rig before regrouping. Just wonderful.

**What do you most enjoy about your job?** I have a product. Each one can cost hundreds of millions of pounds, and I get to see it become a reality. It leaves the drawing board, I engage with people and I see them bring the whole thing to life – not just on the surface but below the sea using ROVs (remote-operated vehicles). And with ROVs there's the bonus of seeing deep-water sealife. Some of it is really quite astonishing.

**What are some of the regular challenges you face at work?** For the industry as a whole, it's our reputation. Regrettable incidents in the past have influenced public attitudes and we're very conscious of our role as environmental custodians, which is why we maintain the highest standards we possibly can in this area and, of course, in safety too.

More personally there's the gender challenge. It's getting better, but women in industry constantly have to prove

themselves. I've sometimes found I have to keep reinforcing my status as the engineer on a project.

**What time do you leave the office?** I leave around 4.00pm to pick Benjy up from nursery. Right now I am not on an on-call rota but when we're drilling it is 24/7, so if something comes up on my watch I'll have to deal with it.

Dinner can be quite late. My husband and I like to take turns running or biking after work. I often go running at lunchtime too – my office is near a big city park so I try and fit a 10k in or alternatively head to the gym as often as I can.

**What is your proudest achievement in the last year?** At work I've been rolling out a system for mapping the competencies of our engineers. It's a global initiative we're using to help our people develop their skills in new areas and at new levels, and I'm really pleased with the results.

Outside work I've run two marathons this year – in Barcelona and Helsinki. I came sixth in my age category in Finland. Very pleased about that!



This year's Emerging Talent Award winner hopes to open a tailoring business on Savile Row focusing mainly on women – and there's no reason why she shouldn't make the cut

If a man wants to buy a classic item such as a suit he has plenty of off-the-peg or bespoke options. But women too need to be able to buy timeless pieces. They too need to be able to buy bespoke if they wish – and right now these needs aren't really being met.

Rachel Singer is determined to change all that. By the time you read this she'll have finished an intensive course at the Savile Row Academy where like her peers, male and female alike, she's been learning and extending skills that until now have been principally applied to bespoke men's tailoring.

"There is so much more variety in women's body shapes than men's," Rachel says, "so I'll be learning with each private commission I get. But if I can, I also want to encourage and empower a new generation of women who are interested in entering the trade themselves. They are still under-represented."

#### Starting young

When Rachel left Putney High School in 2009 she was already making clothes. Her graphic design experience at Kingston University has been enhanced by the practical and structural skills she's developed at the Academy. Private commissions have

been mainly from men so far and generate an income for her.

"School made a big difference to me," she says. "I was the only person to take Textiles at A2, and my teacher Miss Mescal was so supportive. She rooted out old sewing schoolbooks for me. I loved them and I still do: I've made it my life's ambition to own every sewing book there is."

Life at Putney High has helped Rachel in other ways. "The principles instilled in me," she says, "have enabled me to pursue my biggest ambition, which is to be a fantastic tailor, and not just a 'woman who is a tailor'. I am not and should not be defined by my gender. I think any GDST girl can crack a male-dominated profession: it's built into our thinking."

Times are changing, and GDST alumnae are creating and sustaining the momentum. In business, in politics and in other areas of public life, women are more than ever being seen in positions of influence.

They'll all need to look the part – and Rachel Singer is keen to give them a helping hand.

Contact Rachel at [www.rachelsinger.co.uk](http://www.rachelsinger.co.uk)

#### About the Awards

The Emerging Talent Awards were launched in 2015. Each year focuses on a different theme and this year entries were invited from the creative arts.

Sponsors and judges who generously contributed time and funds to the awards this year were:

- Faynia Williams (Brighton & Hove High School) – award-winning theatre director
- Anita Corbin (Putney High School) – internationally acclaimed photographer
- Caroline Raphael (Putney High School) – former Commissioning Editor, BBC Radio 4
- Caroline Hoare (Nottingham Girls' High School) – GDST Director of People

Our two other finalists this year were **Charlotte Tyson** (Brighton & Hove High School), a visual effects artist, and **Saskia Roddick** (also from Brighton and Hove High School), who is co-founder of the Quarter Club, a networking group for women in the creative arts. They both gave excellent presentations and impressed the judges.

Winning the £3,000 award has meant Rachel has been able to buy equipment including a steam iron, a steam generator, a vacuum board and a bust, enabling her to make suits at home from start to finish. "My work surface in our flat is a ¾-size table tennis table," she explains. "I have a very patient boyfriend."

The focus for next year's award will be engineering. To apply please visit <http://www.gdst.net/alumnae/awards/emerging-talent> or see the flier enclosed with this magazine.

## Be extraordinary

That's the motto of Nottingham Girls' High School – and they're words our unsung heroine Jo Cann lives by. Teaching is only part of it...

Whether we left school decades ago or only last year, many of us may struggle to remember certain things we learned in the classroom. What a mole is in chemistry, for instance. How to solve quadratic equations. The French word for ninety. When women in the UK were given equal voting rights with men.\*

But facts are just one thing. What we don't forget are the life lessons we learned, acts of kindness, the encouragement we were given or the people we came to think of as friends – even though some of them may have been teachers.

GDST schools pride themselves not just on the education they provide but on their pastoral support, and Nottingham Girls' High School (NGHS) is no exception. Verve's unsung heroine this year is Jo Cann who, in addition to being a teacher is Head of Upper School, giving her responsibilities for the wellbeing and happiness of the older girls in the school's care. Much of what she does in this role takes place in the background and at an individual level but the difference it can make to pupils is profound.

"I frequently meet girls for one-to-ones," she says. "So many of them have thrived here. From the painfully shy girl who really blossomed into a leading light when planning the Prom to the girl who battled with her own emotional turmoil to reach the top of Mount Vesuvius. It's great to see them all happy at school and to know our parents feel they have made the right choice in sending their daughters here."

For Jo, an integral element of her pastoral role is the link between school and home. Since her appointment to her current role in 2014 she's introduced a newsletter, parents'



coffee mornings, a tutor programme specifically tailored to the issues facing modern teenage girls, and parent seminars to provide advice and guidance on how to deal with a variety of scenarios, including the pressures caused by social media.

Jo says she couldn't succeed in her role without the support of the rest of the school team. "They do an amazing job each and every day," she says. "They are truly inspirational people whose dedication to the girls is extraordinary."

The feeling is mutual. Julie Keller, Head of NGHS, says, "Under Jo's leadership the typical Head of Year role has really grown. She prepares girls for the tough exam period and deals with the issues faced by every teenage girl, and at the same time is the kind, caring, approachable, traditional pastoral leader. In her the girls have a friend as well as a Head of Year, striking the perfect balance between gentle discipline and friendly advice with her inimitable cheerful nature – which is why she deserves the title of unsung hero."

\*One last thing. In case you needed reminding: a mole is a unit of measurement for the amount of substance. Quadratic equations can generally be solved by using the formula  $(a + b)^2 = a^2 + 2ab + b^2$ . There is no single French word for ninety (unless you accept that the hyphens in quatre-vingt-dix make it one word). And Jo, whose subject is history, will tell you that universal suffrage in the UK was extended equally to women and men over the age of 21 in 1928...

Is there an unsung hero or heroine at your old GDST school?

If you know someone who deserves an award for work behind the scenes, please let us know. We'll pass it on to your school. Your hero or heroine could be recognised locally – or even in the next issue of this magazine! Please contact [info@gdstalumnae.net](mailto:info@gdstalumnae.net)

# Dressing for the part?

The GDST Alumna of the Year, chosen by you, is Jenny Beavan, award-winning costume designer and Putney High alumna. Her first film was in 1978 – and she's still breaking new ground...



Alongside her ten Oscar nominations, of which she's won two, Jenny Beavan's many awards include two Emmys and three BAFTAs. They are a testament not just to the length and success of her career in costume design but also to its variety.

Take those two Academy Awards. The first, won in 1985 with John Bright, was for *A Room with a View*, while her second in 2016 was for *Mad Max: Fury Road*. So, then: one Oscar for Edwardian linen and broderie anglaise and another for dystopian leather and heat-moulded plastic body armour.

"I think costume designers, like actors, can be typecast," Jenny says. "I think I was. I was known for *A Room with a View* and *Howard's End* and *The Remains of the Day* and *Gosford Park*. But now I've broken out, so to speak, I'm being offered some very diverse projects! I'm deeply grateful to George Miller (director of *Mad Max: Fury Road*) for taking a risk with me."

It's not the first time Jenny's career has taken a change in direction. When she left Putney High School in 1968 she did a foundation year at the Bath Academy of Art and Design to study theatre design – and in that field she stayed for several years, also working in opera and ballet. But along the way she had met James Ivory and Ismail Merchant, and they asked her to help with costumes for Dame Peggy Ashcroft in a forthcoming film, *Hullabaloo Over Georgie*

and Bonnie's Pictures. She and Dame Peggy became friends and they went on location together in India where she was soon being asked to help with general costumes and props. "I even acted in the film!" she says. "I became part of the Merchant Ivory family and that prompted the changeover. It was organic, and I began to assist and later design the costumes for many of their films".

### Getting stuck in

There are many factors to Jenny's success. The obvious ones are talent, imagination, hard work and her lifelong enthusiasm for what she does. But there's a strong practical element too: it's about getting along with people and getting involved. She tells aspiring costume designers they should "find a good course and one that teaches costume construction as well as theory. Take every opportunity to work on real projects and learn from them. Even if you come out of art school with a first and thinking you are a costume designer, until you have dealt with all the personalities, the directors and actors changing their minds, the budgets, the crew and so forth – all of which is best learnt as a trainee – you won't be able to do the job properly."

When Jenny was named Alumna of the Year she was astounded. "I was not a good pupil. I was often skipping off to work in any small theatre or opera company that would have me, making tea, doing the washing, painting scenery or whatever. I scraped a couple of A-levels but I was so

passionate about working in the theatre that I guess that was what pulled me through." Her Putney High education helped instil her work ethic. "My English teacher Miss Sackett was very special and I grew to love Shakespeare and many writers through her. Also Mrs Johnston our Head of Music was inspirational. Oh, and the wonderful Miss Buss who struggled to help me understand maths. I never did get it but I loved our early morning sessions – and I can do a budget now!"

Jenny is enjoying the increased breadth of her career. Since *Mad Max* she's tackled the Soviet KGB in the Fifties (*Child 44*), a weird sanatorium in a timeless world (*A Cure for Wellness*) and just now a new version of *The Nutcracker* (*The Nutcracker and the Four Realms*). It's all a long way from Merchant Ivory – and the road ahead of her may still have a few more turns in it yet...

The charity to which Jenny chose to donate her £500 award was the World's End Neighbourhood Advice Centre. "I found it a lovely way to help directly the women who have been abused or suffered domestic violence and have had to flee their homes, often taking nothing with them. The clothing I have left over from films can go directly to help."

The World's End Neighbourhood Advice Centre (charity number 1097741) can be reached at 020 7351 5749.

[www.wenac.org.uk](http://www.wenac.org.uk)

# Events

## Uncover the secrets of Stansted Park

Thursday 23rd March, 11am

£12.00

Portsmouth



This tour will first explore the State Rooms, furnished as though the 10th Earl were still at home, and giving us a real sense of a bygone era.

Following this, we will explore the servants' quarters 'Below Stairs', an extraordinary contrast with the splendid mansion rooms above. There are hundreds of original artefacts and unique family portraits to take a look at before visiting the Chapel of St Paul in the grounds.

## A walking tour through Paddington and boat trip on the Regent's Canal

Wednesday 3rd May, 11am

£25.00

Central London

With blue badge guide Sarah Fordham, explore Paddington, an area undergoing tremendous change and redevelopment. Starting at the station made famous by a certain Peruvian bear, we will continue through Paddington Basin, into Little Venice and finishing with a boat trip along the Regent's Canal to Camden Lock. Along the walk, we will see extraordinary feats of engineering from Brunel to the latest technology, alongside homes of the famous from code breakers to psychoanalysts.

## Discover the oasis at Chelsea Physic Garden

Tuesday 20th June, 11am

£10.50

Central London

Visit one of London's oldest botanic gardens, a hidden gem and peaceful green oasis, tucked away beside the Thames. The garden is a real celebration of the beauty and importance of plants and contains a unique living collection of around 5,000 different edible, useful, medicinal and historical plants within its sheltering walls.

## Exclusive private tour of Waddesdon Manor

Wednesday 26th July, 11am

£19.00 / National Trust members £5.00

Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire

Built in the 1870s for Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild,



Waddesdon was created as a place to entertain guests at Ferdinand's famous 'Saturday to Monday' house parties. This French Renaissance-style chateau also houses his superb collection of 18th-century art treasures.

We will enjoy this tour before the house is open to the general public.

## A journey through Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Thursday 17th August, 11.30am

£17.00

Wakefield, Yorkshire



Yorkshire Sculpture Park is a pioneering place that aims to challenge, inspire, inform and delight. This outdoor walking tour will take us into the fascinating historical landscape. With the help of experienced guides, explore a range of sculpture on display, from monumental works by Henry Moore to inspiring pieces by Andy Goldsworthy and Barbara Hepworth. The tour will be followed by a Yorkshire lunch of seasonal and local produce. Guests are free to explore independently in the afternoon.

## An afternoon at the Tate Liverpool

Tuesday 10th October, 2pm

£10.00

Liverpool

Join us at Tate Liverpool, which houses a world-renowned collection of British and international, modern and contemporary art. The diverse collection includes works ranging from Picasso to Paolozzi, Renoir to Richter. We will be treated to a private collection talk, followed by a cream tea, with a chance to explore the galleries later.

## Look out for our 'Be Inspired!' series!

We will be emailing out further details of our 'Be Inspired!' events so please do make sure you are signed up to the GDST Alumnae Network. Visit [www.gdst.net/alumnae](http://www.gdst.net/alumnae) and register your email address to receive the latest event details.