

ROBERT CLACK ALUMNI ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the latest edition of the Robert Clack Alumni Association newsletter.

In this edition we update you on alumni activity in the school including assemblies, advising students on options choices, and talking science and fashion in the classroom. Our current Clack students have been out and about as well, with visits to work places and art trips - courtesy of alumni support.

We also celebrate alumni Professor Mark Brandon for his Polar Medal awarded by His Majesty King Charles III in recognition of his outstanding work and contribution to the scientific knowledge of the Polar Regions.

Finally, if you are inspired to support future generations of Clack students read on for how you can take part in our Year 10 interview day.

Keep in touch!

If you have any suggestions for articles, things that you would like to share with the alumni community, or would like to know more about how you can get involved in the work of the school, please contact emonk@robertclack.co.uk

Alumni visits to Year 9 options assemblies and Year 12 careers advice

Our alumni community didn't disappoint when asked to come back to speak to Year 9 students about their career paths. Alumni attended the final Year 9 assemblies of the winter term in December to inspire students to think about their options choices.

The Gosfield Road site welcomed four alumni representing varied careers paths to guide students to choose the right options for them:

Rhyanna Williams (Class of 2022) is now studying Law at the University of Nottingham. **Kingsley Oparaugo (Class of 2022)** and his brother **Wesley (Class of 2021)** both came back to share their knowledge and experiences of university life - Kingsley from studying Aeronautical Engineering at Loughborough and Wesley History and Politics at Warwick University. **Laurand Krasniqi (Class of 2021)** also gave his time to speak about studying Medicine at King's College, London.

All four alumni spoke passionately about their chosen degrees and what option choices they made at school. They advised to think carefully about future goals and choose subjects that students enjoy and are good at.

At the Green Lane site Kingsley Oparaugo spoke about his original aspirations to be a doctor, his sporting passions in school (especially rugby and football), and mentoring younger students to help fulfil their potential.

He began with a quick quiz about important facts when choosing options. He gave lots of tips about picking the right subjects, not to rush, take your time and think carefully about the subjects you choose. He also talked about the importance of seeking advice from as many people as possible including siblings, parents, and teachers, and through internet research and the options booklet. Kingsley advised students, once they have chosen their options, to create an action plan, looking at the exam board site and setting personal goals.

Year 13 student, **Imisayo Alake**, spoke about the subjects she is currently studying in Sixth Form - Biology, Physics and Maths. She gave good advice about picking the right subjects that will benefit students' futures and how important it is to start building good habits early with meeting deadlines, organisation, and revision.

Alumni visits to Year 9 options assemblies and Year 12 careers advice (cont.)

Wesley Oparaugo (Class of 2021), currently in the final year of his History and Politics studies at Warwick University, spoke to students at the Lymington Fields site about his time at Robert Clack. He was part of the Debate club, winning the Big Debate competition, where he had the opportunity to ask Bill Gates a question - what a fantastic opportunity! - and on the winning Essex Cup rugby team in Years 8 and 9. Wesley studied Maths, English, Triple Science, Sociology, History, RE, and Spanish and dreamed of becoming a Lawyer.

He had lots of good advice for Year 9 to be the best they can be, advising them to discuss their option choices with lots of people such as teachers, family, friends, and using their knowledge to help make their decisions. He advised students to stay motivated by using the guidance and experience of people around you, and said that he would tell his Year 9 self to stay calm, seek help when needed, manage time well, and embrace and learn from mistakes.



In January we were delighted to welcome back **Jamie Mason (Class of 2008)**. Jamie is now an Agency Account Director at Clear Channel UK - an outdoor advertising agency - and also represents The Brixton Finishing School which works to help young people get their first role in Marketing and Advertising careers. **Muhammad Weyli (Class of 2018)** also joined us for the January assemblies. Muhammad is currently on a gap year from university and working as an Interim Area Manager at Amazon.

As well as visits from our fabulous alumni members, members of staff from options subjects also went along to assemblies to promote their subjects and share information about the content of studies to give Year 9 students as much background information as possible to help them make informed choices.

Year 12 students have also benefitted from careers advice from our fabulous alumni this term. On Thursday 15th February **Joseph Adesanya (Class of 2021)** came back to school to speak to Year 12 assembly about working with the Bank of England.

Alumni visits to Year 9 options assemblies and Year 12 careers advice (cont.)

Joseph is studying for a degree in Finance at Loughborough University and has taken a year out to gain experience working in the banking industry with a role in The Bank of England. He talked to students about the work of The Bank of England, his role within it, and career routes in The Bank of England and broader finance sector.

Thank you so much to all alumni for coming back to share your wealth of knowledge and give students some great tips and advice. It really does make a difference!



Entrepreneur Academy visit to Clear Channel UK

On Wednesday 14th January, 24 Year 12 students were given a fantastic opportunity to visit the offices of Clear Channel UK, a media company based in Soho, courtesy of the Alumni Entrepreneur Academy and former student Jamie Mason.

Throughout an action-packed day students learnt about digital advertising and spotting good and bad advertising posters, which aligned well with their current school coursework. Students also enjoyed a session on the art of presentations, which really encouraged them to come out of their shells and get involved.

Head of Business Studies at Robert Clack, Zara Azad, said, *"Our students are very new to presenting, but Jamie and his colleague Hollie put them at ease and gave them some great feedback. The skills of presenting, working in new teams, and understanding a brief is integral to their adult learning journey and I am glad they had time to put into practice all the skills they learnt on what makes a good poster/advert."*

Entrepreneur Academy visit to Clear Channel UK (cont.)

I think it's brilliant that students can relate to Jamie, coming from the same background and school. Being honest about his journey really stuck with students who have no clue about their futures and what direction to go in. For the majority of them, this was their first experience in a London office and opened their minds that there are more possibilities in London - it is not just finance and law!

Jamie's down to earth team, who took time out of their schedules to come and speed network was honestly so heart-warming and the feeling of appreciation was felt across staff and students. The cherry on the top was Brixton Academy, an organisation that support people from under-represented communities to enter and succeed in the creative, media and tech industries, who also joined the session. Again, someone the students could relate to and another avenue of help and support.

Jamie's hospitality was second to none! He kept us well fed, made sure we were all comfortable and kept the snacks flowing - honestly, we were so spoilt! The winner gifts were not at all necessary, but again speaks volumes about how much Jamie and Clear Channel UK are willing to give back to our school community.

We cannot thank Jamie enough for hosting the Robert Clack Business Academy at his company. He and his team pulled out all the stops to make sure that both teachers and students were well looked after. On the way home there was a buzz from students around careers in marketing. All the students were talking about the adverts they had watched during the session and swapped ideas about which digital advert was their favourite from demonstrations seen in the office. Some of them were even keen for work experience opportunities - so it's fair to say Jamie made a lasting impression! We are ever so grateful. Thank you!"



Scientist Luke Grazette visits Year 11 and Sixth Form students

Scientist **Luke Grazette (Class of 2017)** grabbed the opportunity to visit his old stomping ground whilst being back in Dagenham over the festive period. He contacted our Development Officer, Ellen Monk, and a special assembly was arranged for Year 11 and Sixth Form students who study Physics.

Luke, who achieved three A^* grades in his A Levels at the school and went on to study Maths and Physics at Warwick University, is currently undertaking his PhD as an Experimental Particle Physicist at CERN in Switzerland, the home of the Large Hadron Collider.

Luke was eager to come back to school to share his exciting studies with Clack's budding science community. He spoke about his A Level journey, his time at university, and explained some of the fascinating work he is doing at CERN.

This was an amazing opportunity for our students who were clearly captivated with his work. They bombarded him with lots of fantastic questions, which Luke was clearly impressed with.



A huge thank you to Luke for giving his precious spare time during the festive holiday period to come back and give back to our current students. Visits like this really do inspire our students and shows them that, with hard work and determination, they too can accomplish extraordinary things.

Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM)

The 11th February is International Day of Women and Girls in Science - a day which recognises and celebrates the critical roles that women and girls play in Science and Technology communities, and encourages further participation. To celebrate, Robert Clack arranged visits from two inspiring former students to talk about their studies and science careers since leaving school.

On Friday 16th February we were delighted to welcome Mazie Gatt back to school to speak about her experiences of working in a laboratory as a Reproductive Technologist. Mazie (Class of 2014) left school after her A Levels, and went to work as a Make Up Artist, finally specialising in theatrical make up and even working on a couple of shows on Netflix.

In 2017 Mazie returned to her first love of science and began a degree in Biomedical Science at the London Metropolitan University. She then went on to complete a Master's degree in Research, Reproduction, and Pregnancy at the University of Manchester. In September 2023 Mazie took up a role as a Reproductive Technologist at Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

Mazie spoke to Year 8 and Year 10 students at Lymington Fields who were fascinated to hear about her work in an IVF laboratory and asked lots of interesting questions.

Mazie also took the time to speak in Years 1 and 2 in our Primary School assembly. The children asked lots of really good questions including 'What does a Scientist do?' and 'What does a Scientist look like?'. Mazie was very impressed with their interest and their answers to her questions.

Zuzana Lednarova attended Robert Clack as a Sixth Former after arriving in the UK at the end of year 4 and speaking little English. She attended Eastbury School initially, before joining the Robert Clack Sixth Form in 2012. Whilst studying at Clack, Zuzana worked at the school's leisure centre as a Recreational Assistant and Duty manager. She left in 2013 to study Geology and Earth Science at Imperial College, London. After this she completed her Master's degree in Geological/Geophysical Engineering in 2017.

Zuzana was keen to come back to speak to students; however, due to work pressures, was unable to attend in person. Instead, she made a detailed video about her work with Geoquip Marine.

Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) (cont.)

The video was shot from a vessel in the Netherlands and detailed her academic experience and current work living on a boat. This was a fantastic opportunity for our students to see an exciting, unusual career choice and workplace and provided a detailed account of Zuzana's offshore role. Zuzana has also made other videos, live from a vessel, to be shown in future assemblies, detailing the engineering work involved in drilling the seabed and an inspirational message for International Women's Day.

A huge thank you to Mazie and Zuzana for sharing an insight into both of your unique working lives and highlighting successful women working in the STEM field. It is widely acknowledged that STEM careers are male dominated, so promoting women (particularly 'Clack women!'), working and specialising in this field is truly inspirational.

We hope to hear more of your fascinating journeys in future assemblies.



Abbie Yallop's journey into the fashion industry

The HEATS Club recently had the privilege of hosting Abbie Yallop, a former student of Robert Clack School, who shared her experience of working in the fashion industry.

HEATS stands for Humanities Excellence All-Through Scheme and students are nominated by their teachers at the end of Year 7 in order to join. We look for children who are interested in the arts & humanities subjects and want to engage with the world around them. Our aim is to provide cultural enrichment and extra-curricular learning to increase uptake of arts and humanities subjects at A level and beyond.

HEATS students meet weekly at lunchtime to follow a programme of debate and discussion, as well as lectures and creative work. Every year we take six trips (so far this year we've been to the National Maritime Museum for a walking tour about women who fought back against slavery, the Fashion and Textile Museum, Borough Market, and the Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition at the Natural History Museum).

Abbie Yallop's journey into the fashion industry (cont.)

We also aim to invite six guest speakers from various fields to talk to HEATS students: we have had visits from a judge, an architect, an anti-racism mentor, a celebrated photographer, a book designer, and two award-winning writers. The guests talk to HEATS members about their career pathways, the pitfalls they've experienced and how they overcame them, and how arts and humanities have helped them. Abbie's visit in December was part of that programme of events.

Abbie's journey began when she selected GCSE art as one of her subjects at Robert Clack School. Later, she decided to pursue A-level art and a BTEC in fashion, which laid the foundation for her career in the fashion industry.

Abbie got an incredible opportunity through the school's work experience program and was able to do work experience at Vivienne Westwood. She described this as a magical experience for her, further motivating her to continue on a path towards fashion. After finishing her A-levels, she went to university to study costume design. She found it to be a challenging experience as she didn't particularly like the course, but she still appreciated the connections she gained from taking the course at university.

This allowed her to get an opportunity to be a part of fashion week in Dubai. After university, she started to work at a stable job outside of London. However, she felt that it was too stable for her and wanted to experience something new and challenging that would push her out of her comfort zone.

Abbie decided to move to South Korea and work there because of her profound interest in Korean culture and fashion. She thought it would be a great opportunity to enjoy her work and experiment. She now works as a freelancing fashion analyst and has partnered with big brands both in Korea and from all around the world.

Abbie talked about her career highlights and offered tips to students who aspire to work in similar fields or are passionate about fashion. She explained how it is necessary to step out of your comfort zone at certain points in life. She also mentioned that giving yourself a challenge allows you to grow. She emphasised that one just has to go for it and worry later - great advice from Abbie.

As a Year 11 student who can get quite anxious when opportunities arise, I found her story to be inspiring.

Article courtesy of English Teacher, Mrs L Mullen and HEATS member Destiny, Year 11.

Year 12 Art Trip

On the 8th December 2023, Year 12 art students attended an 'Artist Speak' event in London. They listened to notable current practising artists, photographers, and graphic designers speak about their work, creative processes, and career journeys. Insights into installation, production, job attainment, and material choices, amongst other subjects, enthralled the students, with the event culminating in a rather interesting sing song with Sir Grayson Perry himself - an English contemporary artist, writer and broadcaster - leading the chorus.

Students had a fantastic day. Lelia Z said, *"The art trip helped me see how the different mediums art can be applied and how you can use multiple mediums in one piece. From this talk, I could see the influences of other artists and how they could be used in my work in the future. It also gave me an idea of what freelancing entails and the process of creating art for a commission."*



This truly enriching experience was made possible through the generosity of the Alumni Association - thank you all!

Former student Mark Brandon, Professor of Polar Oceanography, receives the Polar Medal, presented by King Charles III

Former Robert Clack student Mark Brandon, Professor of Polar Oceanography, at The Open University has been awarded The Polar Medal by His Majesty King Charles III in recognition of his outstanding work and contribution to the scientific knowledge of the Polar Regions.

**Former student Mark Brandon,
Professor of Polar Oceanography,
receives the Polar Medal, presented
by King Charles III (cont.)**

Mark has been at The Open University for over 20 years and has been Professor of Polar Oceanography since 2018 in the Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

Professor Brandon, with a PhD in polar oceanography and over 30 years' experience, has led successful large-scale international research projects into the changing climate of the polar regions and their ecosystems and teaching around the way the oceans interact with the frozen parts of our planet in Antarctica and the High Arctic and how that affects us all through sea level rise and changing weather patterns.

As one of the UK's most experienced polar researchers Mark has spent several years conducting fieldwork in the Arctic and Antarctic regions and his pioneering research led him to be, for example, the first person to use robots to explore beneath the Antarctic sea ice.

The Polar Medal was first instituted in 1904 when it was awarded to the participants of Captain Robert F. Scott's successful first expedition to the Antarctic Region, and it was awarded to members of Sir Ernest Shackleton's expeditions. In recent years the award has been awarded by The Monarch to UK and Commonwealth scientists who have completed outstanding work in the arduous conditions of a polar environment, over a prolonged period, and have worked to advance knowledge of the Polar Regions.

Speaking about his award, Professor Mark Brandon said,
"I'm humbled, delighted and proud to receive this honour as the polar medal has a special place in polar history. I'm grateful to all the colleagues I have worked with and can't thank The Open University enough for supporting my research and enabling me to use it to teach our students about the importance and fragility of our polar regions."



**Former student Mark Brandon,
Professor of Polar Oceanography,
receives the Polar Medal, presented
by King Charles III (cont.)**

Professor Nicholas Braithwaite,
Executive Dean, Faculty of Science,
Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
(STEM) at the OU added:

"It is great to see Mark's long-term polar fieldwork recognised at this level. He clearly loves and respects this extreme terrestrial environment and he works hard to enthuse researchers, students and the general public through a wide variety of media, from scholarly articles, through engaging course-texts to strikingly well illustrated blogs."

Mark is committed to public outreach and was the Lead Academic Advisor on the prestigious Open University/BBC co-production, Frozen Planet and more recently he was a member of The Open University Academic team on Blue Planet II and Frozen Planet II. He was also involved in many other leading BBC programmes over the last two decades, shaping and developed the narrative of geographic knowledge in broadcast projects, watched by more than 200 million people worldwide.

What a remarkable journey Mark has had since his days at Robert Clack. Huge congratulations on this, very well-deserved, award - and such an inspirational story for our current students. Think big, chase your dreams - and look where your future could take you!

Article Courtesy of the Open University

**Year 10 Employer's Interview
Day - Wednesday 22nd May
2024**

Once again we are running our Employer's Interview Day for Year 10 students and are looking for alumni volunteers to be the 'interviewers'.

Our students always love this chance to impress and an employer last year commented:

'Your students had such a huge impact on me that I cannot even put it into words. I left the day taking the full energy of these young people with me.'

If you would like to volunteer to make a difference to our pupils please email emonk@robertclack.co.uk for the details.

Spotlight On..... Zuzana Lednarova (Class of 2013)

Zuzana Lednarova, a Geotechnical Engineer at Geoquip Marine, is under the spotlight in this edition.

Working life

When Zuzana was at Robert Clack, she aspired to study medicine at university. However, due to personal circumstances, she decided that spending time in hospitals and surgeries was unlikely to entertain her in the future. It was very close to the UCAS deadline date when she started to research science-based university courses and stumbled onto geology. Zuzana read more about the subject, decided it appealed to her, and successfully applied for a place on the BSc Geology degree at Imperial College London.

When she joined the course, she was unaware of what geology entailed and how this may be taught at university; however, she thoroughly enjoyed it. The course involved lots of traveling to different regions in the UK as well as abroad such as Spain, France, and Italy.

Following completion of her undergraduate degree, Zuzana went to study a Masters in Engineering Geology at the University of Portsmouth. She really enjoyed maths (after studying maths and further maths at A Level) so decided to pursue a career which combined this with Geology - Engineering Geology (or Geotechnical Engineering).

After graduating from the University of Portsmouth, she was offered a role as a Graduate Geotechnical Engineer which combined fieldwork and office work for projects around Kent and London. She continued to work on land between 2017 and 2020 as a Geotechnical Engineer, where she also looked at foundation design, contamination remediation projects, slope stability, railway improvement projects and more.

In April 2020 she joined her current company, Geoquip Marine, as a Geotechnical Engineer and has worked there ever since. At Geoquip Marine she has also worked as an Offshore Project Manager. Zuzana currently has the title Project Manager; however, still greatly enjoys the geology and engineering aspects of her role.

Spotlight On..... Zuzana Lednarova (Class of 2013) (cont.)

School day memories

Zuzana joined Robert Clack for Sixth Form and made good supportive friends during her time here. She remembers that there was a quiet study room available for students so they could do extra studies or catch up on homework. This was a good area which gave the studious students a place to work.

She remembers not understanding mechanics physics very well during her A Levels, and so her teacher spent extra hours with her to help her understand it better. Her teacher was very patient, and really supported his students to help them get the best grades.

Zuzana was very academic and had very good support from her form tutor and maths teachers. She also remembers the days working at Robert Clack Leisure Centre, where she eventually became a shift manager. She remembers some of the best days working there were the children's parties, led by staff, and participating in ACTIV8. This built strong team-working and communication skills... And it was fun!

"I think it was a very good initiative that allowed students to apply to work at the leisure centre as this gives many skills to students, allows them to build confidence and prepares them for working life in the future.

I don't think I would change anything if I could go back. I had the right support, good friendship circle, and I made the right decisions in the end because I love what I do now."

How do you think being at school has changed?

I would love to sit in on a few lessons to see how the teachers interact with students and how technology has changed over the years. Do you use robots in classrooms? I'm joking, but I am sure there will come a time when virtual reality or robotics are introduced into classrooms!

I can't imagine that schools have changed too drastically; however I think history may be taught differently with different topics, religious studies may have changed, and improved technology in classrooms is being used. I know for sure that Robert Clack architecture has improved, and the school has changed since I was there.

Spotlight On..... Zuzana Lednarova (Class of 2013) (cont.)

Academically, I think now there are more options and pathways out there which do not require a university degree for a good job. Apprenticeships have become much more popular now than when I was younger.

I think there are more and different opportunities because we recognise different learning styles and abilities much better now, than we did in the past. What I mean, is if someone isn't too good at sitting at a desk and learning from a book for many hours in a day, they might be absolutely amazing at being out in the field collecting live data and communicating their findings in a different way than writing up a black and white report. I would like to think that different learning styles are encouraged.

With this, I'd like to think that there is more support in schools now for students who do struggle academically and are encouraged to still aim high, but through a different pathway.



Zuzana's advice for students today?

First of all, it is important to have a good support network. It's always nice to have friends, but if you struggle with making friends or you're an introvert, then do find a teacher who will support you. Sometimes it could be nice to just sit in the classroom with the teacher whilst you are reading or researching.

I would also encourage students to look at apprenticeships from companies which offer their chosen career paths. From their research, they could even find a few contacts to get in touch with to find out more about their working life and ask for advice on how to reach their goals.

**Spotlight On..... Zuzana Lednarova
(Class of 2013) (cont.)**

I can recommend engineering companies such as AECOM and Atkins (both are very good engineering companies in the UK which offer diverse roles). Geoquip Marine also offer some apprenticeships; however, we are based in Bristol. I would be happy to discuss this with any interested students.

However, I have to say, I really enjoyed university and I wouldn't change my choice even if I was given a chance to go back in time.

Additionally, students should look into university taster days, and to go if they get chosen/are given the opportunity to. When I was at Eastbury School and at Robert Clack, my teachers supported and encouraged me to go to different universities for extra curricular activities. I once spent three days at Imperial College London on a residential STEM event, sleeping in their student halls. We received the full university experience!

It's okay if you go to a session and realise it's not for you, but what is important is that you took a chance to explore.

I once went to University College London (UCL) every Wednesday for around four weeks to study extra maths, but I realised after the sessions that this was not for me and that it was unlikely that I would study pure maths at university.

Have a look at this website for some STEM events (which could be fully funded depending on your personal circumstances):

<https://www.smallpeicetrust.org.uk>

And final words from Zuzana are - there are so many opportunities out there - go get them! Good luck with everything you do.

**Thank you so much for your memories
Zuzana and taking the time to be
'Under the Spotlight'!**



WISHING YOU ALL A VERY HAPPY EASTER!

LOOK OUT FOR OUR NEXT NEWSLETTER IN THE SUMMER

Find out more about our work

If you would like to find out more about events to support the school that you can take part in, or want to tell us what you've been up to since leaving school, please drop Ellen Monk a line (emonk@robertclack.co.uk).

There's always something going on and always opportunities for you to get involved. We'd love to hear from you and welcome you back to school!

Support our work

Join us Sign up to the Alumni Association at:
<https://networks.futurefirst.org.uk/register/robertclack>

Volunteer Come back to school as part of one of the many exciting events we run with current pupils throughout the year. Contact emonk@robertclack.co.uk

Donate Alumni can make a real difference to current pupils' lives. You can donate at www.justgiving.com/rcdt by texting RCDT08 to 70070 or contacting emonk@robertclack.co.uk