

Chairman's Report

Duncan Byrne

Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School

Although I have been pleased to see ISMLA widely quoted in the press in recent months, the reasons for this give me less pleasure. ISMLA has, for the fourth time, been a partner in CILT's Language Trends survey this autumn and the statistics that came from this regarding the trends in the independent sector were both surprising and worrying. I have written at length about the survey elsewhere in the newsletter, but its findings demonstrate how we ignore developments in the maintained sector at our peril. With this in mind, I would like to encourage you to reply in a personal capacity to Lord Dearing's consultation on language learning policy (<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/>). ISMLA has submitted an official response, but we acknowledge that we cannot represent the range of views held by members.

The Language Trends survey is just one of many initiatives that ISMLA has been involved in since the beginning of the academic year, and I am extremely grateful to my committee colleagues who have given up considerable time to attend conferences, meetings and seminars to put forward the

views of language teachers in independent schools. ISMLA has been represented in meetings with QCA concerning the future framework of language examinations, the issue of 'severe grading' at GCSE and A Level, and the revision of GCSE subject criteria. We have also been involved in discussions concerning the new Pre-U examinations, a seminar with the Shadow Education Minister, David Willets, MP, to discuss future Conservative languages education policy, and a *Languages Alliance* forum to discuss the impact of the London Olympics on language learning. With such demands being placed on the committee, we are keen to recruit new committee members (particularly Hispanists) who would be interested in contributing to national debate and / or stimulating regional activity among language teachers.

At this stage of the year, our immediate focus is on the Annual Conference, which is to be held at City of London Boys' School on Saturday 3rd February. We are delighted with the quality and variety of speakers that we have managed to secure this year, and we are expecting a large number of delegates. Our two plenary addresses will be given by Professor David Crystal, a

linguist who needs little introduction, on 'Language BLANK Literature', and Mike Ullmann, Guardian Teacher of the Year 2005, a similarly inspirational speaker who will be talking on the topic 'Languages for the 21st Century'. These are complemented by sessions on European Cinema (Stephen Glynn of Oakham School) and Independent Learning (Vaughn Malcolm of St Mary's, Calne), followed by language-specific sessions in French, German, Spanish and Italian. If, upon reading this, you would like to attend at short notice, please contact me as soon as possible to secure a place. Contact details can be found elsewhere in this newsletter and at www.ismla.co.uk.

In the Autumn Term edition of the newsletter, I announced the launch of the *Joutes Oraitoires* French Debating competition. Despite very high initial interest, only four schools came forward to host regional qualifying events. Our pilot could not therefore include all ISMLA members, but the quality of the North London heats that I attended augurs extremely well for the future of this initiative. We hope to have a review of the finals in the next edition. To whet appetites for 2007-08 further, conference delegates will have the chance to observe a mock debate involving

students from Highgate and Whitgift Schools during the lunch break on 3rd February. I would like to reassure the sceptical that formal debating in a foreign language really does work and has real benefits for the oral skills required by examinations such as Edexcel unit 4.

I would like to conclude by recommending two further language events to you. Firstly, the Area Training Board 8 conference is already well known to many northern ISMLA members and consistently attracts excellent speakers. The event this year is on Friday 9th March at Manchester Grammar School and details can be obtained from Ian Popely at iap@ashville.co.uk. Secondly, the Association of Language Learning's annual Language World conference will be held in Oxford on 30th - 31st March. For those who have not attended the event before, its scope is extraordinary with a choice of 5 or 6 talks at any one time on every conceivable topic. It is also the chance to steal borrow teaching ideas from the very best language practitioners; I have certainly done this in recent years and cannot think of a better environment in which to renew one's methodology year on year. Details can be found on www.all-languages.org.uk.

I hope to see many of you at City of London Boys' School on 3rd February and wish you all an extremely successful 2007.

Languages Trends Survey 2006

Duncan Byrne

Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School

ISMLA's annual collaboration with CILT and ALL received a good deal of publicity at the beginning of November. The announcement of Lord Dearing's review into languages teaching a fortnight earlier had caught the media's imagination and the publication of the Languages Trends survey was reported in all the national broadsheets (and the Daily Mail). The survey showed a continuation of the downward trends at Keystage 4 seen over the previous two years, with fewer than half of all GCSE pupils set to take an examination in a modern language in 2007. However, of more concern to the independent sector was clear evidence that the trends seen in the maintained sector are beginning to have an effect on us.

The most worrying statistic was that the proportion of independent schools with compulsory languages in KS4 had fallen from 78% to 56% in

one year. A professional data processing company was used to make sure that our sample was representative of the whole country, and 200 independent schools (i.e. about one third) responded to the survey: this statistic can therefore be considered to be reliable. However, teachers' comments made to the survey, which are not reflected in the raw data, demonstrated a polarisation of approach and I was at pains when talking to the press to stress that a particular type of independent school seemed to be becoming more flexible in its curriculum organisation, sometimes but not always for sound educational reasons. I have always felt that journalists wrongly associate the concept of independent school with the high-achieving, ancient institutions that some of us represent, completely neglecting those schools that don't necessarily cater for the elite, but which make a huge difference to the lives of their pupils whose parents often make great sacrifices so that they can benefit from an independent education. This was, however, misreported in *The Times*, hence my desire to clarify the matter now to readers who may well have been confused by what they read at the beginning of November having little bearing on the reality in their schools.

The survey comments fell into three categories: those who had retained KS4 languages for all spoke of MFL being a 'fundamental parental expectation' and being 'an essential part of our educational philosophy'; a second group referred to small numbers of students being allowed to drop their modern language due to 'significant Special Educational Needs' or (particularly in boarding schools) because they needed to receive extra EAL teaching to access the remainder of the curriculum fully; and a final group of non-selective schools referred explicitly to the effect of the national decision to remove MFL from the compulsory KS4 curriculum having consequences in terms of pupils (and parents) stressing their 'right' to drop a language in favour of other 'easier' subjects. The comments of the first two groups were also a feature of the 2004 and 2005 surveys, but the emergence of the third (new) category does give considerable cause for concern, as it shows that some of ISMLA's members are already in an environment where modern languages are reduced to the status of an 'option' subject, fighting for their place among a limited number of pupil subject choices. It would be interesting to know whether the schools concerned

anticipated this when the government's decision was made two years ago, but I feel that this amply illustrates the need to show solidarity with the maintained sector in fighting against such measures, as they will eventually have consequences for us.

Other significant findings for the independent sector include the difficulty that some schools have in recruiting double GCSE linguists: a necessity if we are to locate enough specialists to go on to A Level and language degrees (and to become the language teachers of the future). The maintained sector has, not surprisingly, discovered that fewer and fewer pupils wanted to use up two of their subject options for modern languages, now that their first language is no longer compulsory. The independent sector again seemed to be experiencing a variety of trends. Some schools referred to very healthy levels of dual language take-up, whilst others expressed concern at reducing numbers of pupils taking two language GCSEs. Interestingly, this phenomenon was not split on selective versus non-selective grounds. Finally the variety of languages on offer in our sector gave a very positive picture. Although German continues to suffer largely at the hands of Spanish, other languages are clearly gaining in

popularity. Although the survey didn't ask respondents to give an indication of how many students were studying each language, a fifth of independent schools now offer Mandarin Chinese and a similar percentage Italian. Russian numbers also appear to have stabilised.

If you would like to read the report in more detail, it can be obtained from http://www.cilt.org.uk/key/lan_guagetrends/2006/ks4.htm.

ISMLA

welcomes any articles, reports and other contributions that would be of interest to members.

Please contact
Thomas Underwood
for further details
(See inside cover for contact information).

Articles for the Summer Edition of the Newsletter should be with the editor by Friday 13th April 2007.

Geoffrey Plow, as ISMLA Awarding Bodies Liaison Officer, is happy to act as a focus for communication for schools if they feel they have experienced difficulties over public exams at GCSE, AS or A2.

If a school has made an official comment to a Standing Joint Committee, he would be especially grateful to receive a copy of the form sent, so that correlation of any trends across the whole ISMLA membership may be made easier.

Geoffrey is happy to respond at any time to any comment made by an ISMLA member school in relation to public exam matters.

Please keep in touch with Geoffrey at

gaplow@hotmail.com, or via:

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Public Examination News

This Autumn, ISMLA has been involved in a number of consultations over curricular and public exam development. There have been three focuses:

(1) In October 2006, we were represented by Geoffrey Plow at a meeting hosted by QCA to discuss the historical discrepancy between public exam grades in MFL and those in other subjects. Peter Downes (ex-Senior French Master at Manchester Grammar School, headteacher at Henry Box School, Witney and Hinchingsbrooke School, Huntingdon, and a highly experienced chief examiner) was chairman, and he outlined to a number of exam board representatives, QCA officers and statisticians the thirty-year history of the shortfall MFL had suffered at 16+ and A level. Helen Myers, Assistant Head at the Ashcombe School, Dorking, and president-elect of ALL, then made the case in some detail for special consideration in regard to MFL. Helen has done much to outline the most recent manifestations of the problem of 'undergrading' - one that has been exacerbated by the national fall in numbers of pupils taking GCSEs in MFL since it became no longer mandatory

to include a foreign language in KS4. A number of ISMLA members have voiced disquiet in the last three years over this very issue. Often, their emphasis has been on the apparent downgrading of individual GCSE skills, in particular writing. What was remarkable in the October QCA meeting was the unanimity of concern expressed by schools and subject associations about GCSE grading in general - not just one skill or another.

(2) What happened next was a matter of truly fortunate coincidence. On 5 October, Alan Johnson, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, appointed Lord Dearing to consider what action should be taken about the severe fall in the numbers continuing with the study of MFL at KS4 in secondary schools. Thanks to Helen Myers' awareness that this was a rare opportunity to follow up the QCA talks quickly and productively, ISMLA were able in late November to meet, as part of a five-person delegation, with, amongst others, Lord Dearing and Lid King (National Director for Languages within the Department for Education and Skills). ISMLA were once again represented by Geoffrey Plow. This meeting materially affected proposals in chapter 7 ('What needs to be done') of Lord Dearing's interim report,

published December 2006. In this interim report, Dearing proposed that QCA should resolve as soon as possible the statistically authenticated complaint that the demands required to achieve grades in MFL at GCSE were more stringent and therefore more unfair than in other subjects. ISMLA stressed in the meeting with Lord Dearing and Lid King that independent schools felt just as concerned about this problem as those in the maintained sector. Quite how the rectification of grades would take place was a matter for statistical analysis within QCA. However, we were given to understand that 'as soon as possible' meant what it said.

(3) ISMLA had an input into separate discussions, organised by QCA, about revised criteria for GCSE, held in December 2006. We felt that more choice of content was now appropriate at GCSE than has been allowed since 1988, especially given that it is the restrictiveness of the 'areas of experience' and topic areas in general which have helped lead to dissatisfaction with MFL at Key Stages 3 and 4. We also felt that the current GCSE did not help pupils lead on realistically to A level, especially in the area of grammar, where the demands made on AS pupils in year 12 are considerably in advance of

their previous experience. We await the next stage of consultation, in the New Year.

Recommended action for ISMLA members: read and respond to interim Dearing report on falling MFL take-up at KS4, especially chapters 7 and 8 (responses welcome in January 2007; final report in February):
<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/subjects/languages/languagesreview>

Setting standards for leadership

October 2006 to June 2007,
CILT, London
£250 or £225 for members of
the CILT Direct scheme

Core skills in ICT

Autumn 2006, Spring 2007
and Summer 2007 dates

10.00-16.00, CILT, London
£350 or £325 for members of
the CILT Direct scheme

www.CILT.org.uk

Area 8 MFL Conference: Friday, 9th March, 2007 at Manchester GS

I am very pleased to announce the next ATB Northern Conference for Modern Languages will be held at Manchester Grammar School on Friday 9th March from 9:30 – 4pm. Conferences traditionally take the form of INSET over a whole day, with an excellent meal and a large exhibition of publishers' materials and Resources Exhibition at a nominal cost of £40 (£35 for member schools). Last year a record attendance of over 85 delegates attended the meeting at Leeds Grammar School.

The conference aims to serve all schools in the North of England both in the primary and secondary sector. Our constituency is primarily independent school teachers (Preparatory and/or Senior Schools), although in recent years, more state schools have accepted our invitation to join us, which is, we feel, as it should be – our concerns for the future of our children, our languages and of course our country being the same. I hope that you will therefore feel able to attend the Conference and I enclose the programme to wet your appetite! We are grateful to **ISMLA** for the sponsoring of the event.

Further details of this year's Conference can be found on the Area 8 website atb8.com or you can contact the organiser direct.

Many thanks for your support.

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Area 8 Conference for Modern Languages

Friday 9th March, 2007, Manchester Grammar School

Theme: Motivation in Language learning

Welcome by the High Master of MGS, Dr Christopher Ray

Resources Exhibition

“Motivating the reluctant learner”

Dr. Amanda Barton, Manchester University

The future of ‘A’ Levels and GCSEs: A Panel discussion led by Duncan Byrne, Kevin Dunne and Patrick Thom

The Key Stage 2 Framework for primary languages (Nigel Pearson, CILT)

Exhibition Time: until 13:00 including exhibitor presentations (20 mins each):-

- Motivating through technology (Eurotalk)
- Motivating through Courses (Heinemann)
- Go Chinese – Linda Wu

Lunch

Target language talks

French: "Faut-il défendre la langue française ?", Régis Faugier

German: “ Das geteilte Berlin, 1945-1990 ” Anika Teske

Spanish: "Breve análisis de la situación actual de la Inmigración en España" Ms Paz Gomez

Tea

Final Talk: followed by summative comments
Active and creative language games and activities
– Steven Fawkes

The Languages Report Consultation Review Provisional Proposals December 2006

1. We **propose** action by the Department working with overseas embassies to seek the engagement of multinational companies, and draw attention to events, like the Olympics, where, working with the media, the Department and its partners could promote interest amongst young people in languages. (paras 6.7 & 6.8)
2. We **propose** that language learning should be embedded in the National Curriculum for primary schools in the next review of the primary curriculum, based on a well founded understanding of what content and approach to language learning is most suitable for children in primary schools, and how best to build on that at Key Stage 3. In saying this we recognise that there will have to be some compensating adjustments to the primary curriculum elsewhere. (para 7.7)
3. We **propose** that over time primary schools should be enabled, with the help of specialist language schools and local secondary schools, to offer some choice in the language learnt. (para 7.4)
4. We **propose** that the provision for teacher support in primary schools should be continued and where necessary extended at least until 2010. (para 7.2)
5. We **propose** for consideration that a range of options to facilitate teaching in contexts that are motivating to pupils, from which the pupil would be required to select a specified number, should become the basis of a reformulation of the GCSE which is urgent and very much needed. (para 7.15)
6. We **propose** that the reformulation of the GCSE should take account of the issues of cognitive level and study of culture. (para 7.17)
7. We **propose** that action should be taken to arrest the continuing loss of qualified teachers. (para 7.13)
8. We **propose** that sufficient provision should be made for the continuing professional development of language teachers in secondary schools. (para 7.11)
9. We **propose** that the assessment of speaking and listening in the GCSE is changed to make it less personally stressful and hence a more reliable test of a candidate's capability. Moderated teacher assessment over a short period would be a better way. (para 7.28)
10. We **propose** that the Languages Ladder (Asset Languages) is now promoted for general use by schools. It will provide an important opportunity to recognise progress for learners of all ages from the earliest primary years through to A Levels and beyond. (para 7.30)
11. We **propose** that there should be non-statutory formative classroom assessment at the end of Key Stage 2, using the language ladder to facilitate continuous progression in learning from primary to secondary school, and thus avoid the frustration and regression that can occur when the move takes place. We have no wish for this to form the basis of any league table: the purpose is formative. (para 7.6)

12. We **propose** that current regulations on language provision are withdrawn and that schools should be able to offer one or more languages based on clear non-statutory guidance from the Department. (para 7.38)

13. We **propose** that the Department fosters and supports various nascent initiatives and proposals that have come to attention during the Review, for 'open school learning' providing excellent learning materials for use by pupils and to support the work of teachers in the classroom. (para 7.24)

14. We **propose** that continued resources are made available to specialist language colleges to support the National Languages Strategy and that concerted efforts are made to increase the numbers of second specialism and combined specialism in languages, including further opportunities for specialist schools to take up languages as a second specialism "out of cycle." (para 7.47)

15. We **propose** maintaining support for existing national and local bodies supporting language teaching and learning. (para 7.49)

16. We **propose** that the Department ensures that head teachers are aware of the contribution of awards under the Languages Ladder (Asset Languages) to points scores in achievement and attainment tables. (para 8.8)

17. We **propose** that schools should also be encouraged to value and wherever possible make provision for some learning of the languages of their local communities and to reflect those languages and cultures in the curriculum. This can be a powerful way of involving parents in the educational process. (para 7.5)

18. There has been long, sustained argument that the standards for the awards of grades are more demanding than for other subjects, and that this has contributed to the flight from languages, both because of the concern of students to get good grades and the concern of schools to do well in the 5 A* to C achievement and attainment tables. This is a continuing sore point: it is important and we **propose** that it is resolved. (para 7.27)

19. We **propose** that the DfES should make a study of the use of the Secretary of State's powers of direction to require schools to set performance targets and consider guidance to governing bodies. (para 8.17)

20. We **propose** that consideration is given to a 3 year programme for supporting local and regional consortia of LAs, SLCs, and Comenius Centres for example – who take on the role of coordinating and promoting lasting change in schools. (para 7.52)

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Press Reactions to the Dearing Report

Dr Geoffrey Plow
University College School

For a few days, modern languages suddenly became feature-page news in December, when Lord Dearing produced the interim report on KS4.

An *Economist* editorial told us (16/12/06), that 'forcing children to learn a language does not ensure success'. The headline attached to Peter Wilby's contribution in the *Guardian* on 14 December - 'It is sheer snobbery to make teenagers study languages' - seemed to pick up on this theme but with rather more vituperative force.

The reality of reading the articles was somewhat more moderate. Both the *Economist* leader and Wilby's piece saw the eminent sense in young people learning foreign languages. But Wilby in particular thought the arguments in favour of compulsory foreign languages came with the wrong emphases and, it seemed, from the wrong place. He was particularly severe on the *Independent's* Philip Hensher, who had

asserted (5/12/06) that languages 'contribute in a fundamental way to analytical powers of thought [...] and intellectual development' - not necessarily because of what Hensher had said but because of the mismatch between the sophistication of his view and what Wilby saw as the reality of 'a class of 15-year-olds on a wet Friday afternoon in Barnsley'.

What sounded like a cliché was certainly picked up on as such by readers, as we will see. But this was still chastening stuff for modern language teachers. One moment we were being reassured that we had a worthy calling. Then we heard that the fruits of that calling were not what the market wanted.

The *Economist* piece suggested a pragmatic approach. Yes, we were told, 'the British should learn languages, and they are easier to acquire when young. But be realistic. Make knowledge of at least one foreign tongue mandatory for university - and be ready to change policy if Chinese starts sweeping the world.' The motivation here for learning a language seemed to be an appreciation of what would happen to your academic future if you didn't do the subject - a bit like academic blackmail.

That would probably have been too elitist a rationale for Wilby. He concentrated his argument at the other end of the educational process, setting great store by the beneficial effect wrought by the teaching of languages in primary schools: 'With luck, a generation of children will arrive in secondary schools around 2014 enthusiastic about foreign languages and keen to continue developing their skills at least until 16. It may not work, but it cannot work less well than what we have tried hitherto. Until we have seen the results, the academic snobs and reactionaries who think all schools ought to teach exactly what Eton, Rugby or Westminster did 50 years ago should keep quiet.'

You can probably see why I found this combination of wish-fulfilment and prejudice faintly depressing. Interestingly, one piece of feedback on the *Guardian* website decried Wilby's 'appeal to emotion rather than logic'. This correspondent reminded us that being forced to do something at school was not necessarily a bad thing; a 'secondary school forcing in grammar' was the reason this writer had learnt languages more quickly as an adult (who was it who said that 'all education is

indoctrination'?). Another respondent minced his or her words even less, but laced them with sarcasm: 'Great idea. Drop languages and anything else that bored students can't be bothered with on a wet Friday afternoon. I would suggest that Mathematics and History be included on this list.'

But there might have been a greater danger in the smooth tone in which the *Economist's* ideas were couched. Remember, we were being counselled to 'be ready to change policy' - and that begged the question of what would motivate or underpin that change. The reference to China seems to indicate that the economic imperative would rule our thinking. And just how easy is it to 'change policy' on the hoof, when what you mean by 'policy' is the training and development, over years, of teachers to carry it out?

This kind of thing makes you realise what a difficult job Lord Dearing had. His most telling point in the Interim Report was about the inadequacy of Interim Reports alone ('Piecemeal changes are not the best way of doing the job', as he put it).

So perhaps the best thing would be to get rid of the need to be piecemeal. I never thought I'd turn Stalinist - 'scrap all the

exam boards except one; get it and QCA to run MFL teaching and learning from 6+ onwards; develop Asset Languages; abandon GCSE' - but that might be one way through the labyrinth.

Spread Your Wings

Despite Bill Gate's best attempts, the world retains a wonderful linguistic diversity, and as the global market opens up different languages are becoming more significant. Listen in to any economic discussion and you will hear the Chinese and Indian economies mentioned; our energy comes from Russia and the Arab speaking world; and on a lighter note, we manage a fair export of Brits to Spain every year.

There is no doubt that travel fills out the learning of language in a way that any other environment cannot. Simply being in a country, where your chosen language is the daily fare, turbo-charges the learning experience. Almost without effort, the contexts of the language are evident; the history, the cultural framework, and the common usages and forms are all plain to see and hear. I vividly remember the 'shock of

the different' that I experienced on my first trip across the Channel, even though the differences are tempered by our common heritages. For me to know French, I had to know the French. How much more significant is travel when studying languages that have no significant cultural tie-ins?

So, where's new? Whilst it is unlikely that the well-established facilities to be found in the traditional destinations, such as France or Spain, exist further afield, there are surprisingly easily opportunities to immerse students into more remote foreign cultures.

China is a very satisfying destination, and visits can be adapted to feature every day life events (for China!) such as train journeys, village visits and cookery demonstrations. Leaders are well supported, with tour features such as full-time, accompanying, bi-lingual guides, modern comfortable hotels and fully inclusive costs, which all ease the organisational stresses and strains. This means leaders can concentrate on maximising their students' experience.

Russia is a well-established destination for more adventurous History, Art and Language groups and can offer

similar group leader support. Visits usually concentrate on the two cities of St Petersburg and Moscow, and are particularly rewarding when combined. With enough notice, peer group contact is possible, as a pre-arranged school visit. This provides both a formal exchange of cultural experiences and an informal social meeting of young minds.

Innovation is alive and well within the more traditional destinations as well. Recognising the difficulties teachers have been experiencing when organising traditional home stays, NST have developed a new programme which combines the greater immersion into the French language found on exchange visits with the added security and confidence of staying together as a group. NST have established links with many French schools and colleges, who as part of their own language teaching are very keen to host schools from the UK.

Thankfully, much work is being done to counter anxieties which have previously put teachers off travel. The 2005 House of Commons Education & Skills Committee's report, thoroughly investigated the issues and concluded, "*...we have found no evidence to support the*

perception that school trips are inherently risky. Visits organised in accordance with health & safety guidelines should not lead to unfounded legal claims against teachers". This November's Manifesto for Learning Outside the Classroom builds on that base and fully supports teachers who recognise the enormous benefits of 'going and doing'.

Finally, choose a reputable travel partner. Teachers are not always aware that in law they are responsible to perform the same level of pre-tour safety checks on the component parts of a visit (accommodation, transport etc) that a reasonable travel company would do. Use of a travel company enables this lengthy task to be delegated, and by choosing a company that has external verification of safety management and financial security, leaders can easily demonstrate their own due diligence for their selection. The Assured Member scheme of the School Travel Forum matches that criteria, and is welcomed by the Outdoor Advisors Panel and the DfES as well as having the support of the NUT, NAHT, PAT, ATL and ASCL.

There has never been a better time to spread your wings, take advantage!

Ian Pearson is safety manager for NST Travel Group, the UK's leading educational travel company, which organises visits for language groups world-wide.

For more information visit www.nstgroup.co.uk

A Chinese Experience

Patrick Le Berre

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The exchange with the City of Liuyang and King Alfred School was set up by Julian Cottenden, our Deputy Head, and has been running for almost three years. We are more particularly linked with Tian Jai Bing Experimental Middle School. What is special about Tian Jai Bing is that it is named after a famous Hong Kong Businessman who donated 4 million RMB for its construction. Like King Alfred, it is experimental and has a founding principle to 'care for every one of its students and teachers ...and... help them to be creative imaginative and cooperative'. Initially, some TJB students stayed at King Alfred School as interns and followed a normal AS and A2 level courses whilst being hosted by KAS families.

As a result, KAS has been visited by many officials from Liu Yang to see how we teach Modern languages as well as other subjects. It has been an honour to have the Mayor of Liuyang and some dignitaries from the council amiably discussing our teaching methods during Upper-Sixth French. At regular intervals, we also have Chinese teachers visiting us, with or without their pupils, to see how we teach Modern Languages as this is Tian Jai Bing's main interest: how to develop English language teaching at home whilst promoting Mandarin in the UK. This is obviously a mutually beneficial arrangement and some of our students and staff go to the China every year and get the opportunity to discover a fascinatingly different culture.

As from this year, we also have an excellent Mandarin native speaker who teaches lower and middle school students during Choice activities on Wednesdays. Do not hesitate to contact me, should you wish to introduce Mandarin in your school.



ISMLA National Conference

Saturday 3rd February 2007

City of London Boys' School

Programme

- 9:15 Registration and coffee. Exhibition opens.
- 10:00 Welcome by Mr D. Levin, Headmaster of City of London School
- 10:15 **Mr Michael Ullmann**
Guardian Teacher of the Year 2005
Head of Language College, Hockerill Anglo-European School
Target language use for real communication
- 11:15 Annual General Meeting
- 11:30 Coffee served in the exhibition area
- 12:00 **Professor David Crystal**
Honorary Professor of Linguistics at the University of Wales and
author of many books on language and linguistics, including
Stories of English (2004) and The Fight for English (2006)
Language BLANK Literature
- 13:00 Lunch in the Dining Hall followed by coffee in the exhibition
area

14:30 *A choice of sessions*

Mr Stephen Glynn

Oakham School

Using European Film in the classroom

Dr Vaughn Malcolm

St Mary's School, Calne

Independent Learning

15:30 Language specific sessions

German

Mr Thomas Reimann

*Quo vadis Deutschland? Zwischen Reformen und Exporten
- ein Land sucht seinen Weg!*

Spanish

Dr Jonathan Thacker

Merton College, Oxford University

Golden Age Theatre

Italian

Dr Giuliani Pieri

Royal Holloway College, London University

Italian Post-War Design

French

Mr Richard Pelletier

"Environnement, qui est responsable?"

16:30 Tea in the exhibition area and departure

Student Award 2006: How does your experience of your course compare with any expectations you may have had?

Gemma Brown
University of Bath

Before coming to university, I was determined to ensure that the establishment I chose was the right one for me, in terms of location, accommodation, and, in particular, the languages course. For this reason, I made sure I visited each university I applied to and completed a thorough tour, as well as amassing as much information as possible about the universities and their courses from prospectuses, newspapers and the internet, and by asking advice from parents, teachers, and languages students. All this led me to believe that there was a very wide range of universities and courses available to me, with great variation between them.

I chose Bath University because, having researched the course, I learned that a strong emphasis was placed on the use of language in business and everyday routine. I wanted to be able to use my language

frequently in my future career, rather than complete my degree and get a job where I would not be using my skills.

For this reason, I also disliked the heavy focus on literature that many other universities incorporate into their course structure, preferring to concentrate on more practical and functional areas of study.

I therefore found the idea of studying both cultural and political modules in the course appealing, modules which I felt would build on my existing interests, and open up new ones. I also discovered that students had the option to choose some modules from outside the course, such as in Economics or Politics, to increase their knowledge in a specialist area, which was an attractive prospect because of my interest in politics, which I hope to pursue further through my language course.

In terms of language learning, being new to the Italian language, I expected to advance at speed through the course, progressing very quickly, especially as the department's stated aim was to bring all students (both those who had completed Italian A-level and those who had started *ab initio*) to the same level by the end of the second year- a challenge indeed!

This was the first marked difference between my expectations and my actual experience of the course: in the event, we got off to rather a slow start, focussing at first on the spoken rather than the written aspect, which I found hard to manage as I find writing things down usually helps me to learn more effectively. However I soon realised the value of learning orally before writing, as this gave teachers more opportunity to practice oral language with us in the classroom (this was sorely needed!) whereas students could develop their written knowledge more easily independently.

This was another element of the course which I had not expected: obviously I realised that some degree of work would have to be completed in my own time, but not to the extent of, for example, learning grammar from a book on my own. The total amount of weekly classes was around what I had anticipated, but I had not realised how much work would have to be done individually. This was a shock to the system at first, a sharp contrast to sixth form studies! However I began to enjoy discovering things for myself, relishing the sense of achievement this brought.

On this note, I had expected to undertake in-depth study of grammar, which takes place through weekly lectures and smaller classes in the course, but I had certainly not expected to have so many holes in my knowledge! I believed that I had already attained a good grasp of grammar through my previous language studies. However I had, and still have, several gaps which needed filling in. Moreover, I enjoy grammar lessons more than I expected, finding the science of language an interesting concept.

In both the Cultural and Political modules, I was surprised to find that they were not quite what I had expected. Cultural Studies contained a strong literary element that I had not counted on, as I had expected to be concentrating on the lifestyles of France and Italy. However I am enjoying this part of the course more than I had imagined, and I have realised that one can build up a good idea of a nation's culture through the media of literature and film. Having said this, I was relieved to find that after the first year it is possible, as I had anticipated, to move away from the literary aspect and delve into other areas of culture.

Politics and Society is an intensive history course, and I was surprised by the speed at which we were taken through a

large period of Italian and French history: we went through one hundred years of history in eight weeks, with a one-hour lecture each week, and the rest we must find out for ourselves, compared to A-level History, where we studied a period of perhaps ten years in great detail for a whole term. This difference suited me as I find it more useful and interesting to cover a larger area of history, and I felt it gave me a greater knowledge of the backgrounds of each country. However I was disappointed that no current politics would be covered in the first year, which is my real interest.

So far I have not mentioned European Studies, an integral part of the course at Bath. I had expected to enjoy this aspect greatly, and I do: I believe we should make more effort to be part of Europe, and I think this aspect of the course is helping me feel more European, rather than simply British. Something which I had not expected was to be participating in seminars so early in the course: indeed, in week three of the Semester, I found myself giving a group presentation on Europe in front of twenty students. Ours was the first seminar, and although a frightening prospect, I was glad to find that I would gain valuable skills both through the

course content and the methods of learning.

If a student's experience of higher education is different from what they had expected, all I can say is, whatever you feel is lacking in the course, it is your responsibility to pursue it as an individual. Some of my experiences may not have been quite what I had anticipated, but I can make up for this by studying, joining a group or reading on my own about the areas I am interested in. Higher education provides great opportunities to gain further insight into your interests and these should be taken up. Your course is what you make it!



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To write one article on recent French / Spanish cultural, social or political developments for each edition of the ISMLA newsletter.

If you are interested please contact

Thomas Underwood
(See inside cover for contact information)

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ASSET LANGUAGES - MOVING FORWARDS.....

We shared some background information on Asset Languages in the ISMLA summer 2006 newsletter so this time we would like to offer an update on schools' experiences.

Asset Languages is the assessment scheme for the DfES' Languages Ladder and is being developed by Cambridge Assessment through OCR and Cambridge ESOL, as part of the National Languages Strategy.

The scheme is for language learners of all ages and abilities: from preparatory school through to further, higher and adult education.

We asked three Independent Schools for their thoughts. Dulwich College was involved in the 2005 pilot. Brigidine School and Seaford College used Asset Languages assessments in summer 2006.

Dulwich College, London

Nick Mair, Head of Modern Languages

In summer 2007, over 100 language AS Levels will be taken by the current Year 12. This figure is a high proportion given the range of subjects offered by the College. There are around 200 Year 12 students.

He noted: *"Our vision is that every boy should have some sort of linguistic competence. We see that modern Europeans want to come to work in England and we want to prepare our students to be able to respond to the need to work in a multi-lingual business environment."*

Asset Languages and the Languages Ladder measures students in four skill areas - Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. There will also eventually be six different stages of achievement, Breakthrough, Preliminary, Intermediate, Advanced are available now, Proficiency and Mastery are to come.

Nick commented: *"Students can focus on one, two, three or four skills, so there is real achievement throughout and everyone who is correctly entered is likely to achieve something."*

"It is an improvement over the GCSE system since not all skills have to be examined - this is very useful as the writing component in GCSE Mandarin is very testing."

During 2006/2007 Dulwich College plans to enter 30 Year 10 and 11 students for Mandarin at Breakthrough Stage. The College is also hopeful the eight Year 11 students will also be able to participate in the Preliminary assessments.

Nick acknowledged: *"We also feel that the Asset Languages Speaking tests present challenges to our students, making them think more about their answers to exam questions rather than learning answers 'off by heart'."*

"We are currently planning to enter about 100 Year 9 students into the Breakthrough Listening assessments in 2007 - covering Spanish and German."

"The tests fit very well into the College timetable. Students are able to sit exams during their normal lessons, meaning that valuable learning time in other subjects is not lost."

Nick also plans to develop his learning of Mandarin over the next few months and take the Asset assessments in Listening and Speaking, at Breakthrough,

with a view to moving on to Preliminary stage.

He added: *"I feel that the real advantage of Asset Languages is that it allows me to do this, and not worry about my Writing skills which I do not really want to pursue at this point."*

Brigidine School, Windsor

Caroline Cahillane, Head of Languages told us about the work they have been doing at their school.

Brigidine School is a small school, of 250 students. Asset Languages is valued and it complements the GCSE system rather than replaces it. The school feels that it is an additional qualification.

Languages are generally very popular at Brigidine. French and Spanish are taught in Years 7, 8 and 9, though they are optional at GCSE level. Brigidine School is keen for all its students to continue to GCSE in at least one language.

In summer 2006, all students studying French were offered the opportunity to take the Asset Languages assessments at the Preliminary stage (Grades 4 to 6).

Caroline reflected: *"Students found the Speaking assessment*

quite difficult. It was not something they had done before, and is slightly different to the GCSE approach. Students were asked to describe a picture, which was difficult, but they were comfortable with making a presentation and the conversation aspect too."

"However, an overwhelming majority of our students achieved the required standard in all four skills, and some did better than they expected. Asset Languages gave our Year 9 learners a challenge and something to aim for through the year," added Caroline.

Caroline explained: *"We like the Asset Languages system because it gives our Year 9 students a language qualification, even if they don't carry on toward GCSE (and about half of our students don't move towards GCSE)."*

In 2007, Brigidine has plans for all Year 9 girls to take part in an Asset assessment in French and in Spanish. The class teacher will determine whether it is at Breakthrough or Preliminary Level in conjunction with each student. This means that 30 students will undertake assessments in all four Asset skills.

Caroline is looking forward too: *"In future years, we would like*

to introduce Asset further up the School too, and would like to expand our range of languages to also offer German and Italian."

Seaford College, Petworth

Shelagh Weekes, responsible for Key Stage 3 Modern Languages, set the scene at Seaford College,

Shelagh explained that Seaford College is a mainstream college and has a relatively high number of dyslexic students (around 44%) compared to other similar schools and colleges. This means that languages are seen by students as quite challenging and possibly the most difficult subjects to study.

Twenty students undertook Asset Languages assessments in Spanish in June 2006. This group represented a cross section of Seaford students, with abilities ranging from weak to very able. The students were examined on three of the four skills available, Writing, Reading and Listening. They did not take the Speaking test.

Shelagh recalled: *"Students enjoyed the experience, and were pleased to receive their certificates of achievement. Asset Languages tests are seen as a rewarding activity."*

"The Preliminary stage awards have contributed to building confidence of the young people studying languages at Seaford, particularly our dyslexic students."

Shelagh continued: *"We are pleased that Asset Languages allows our students to achieve examination success and gain a nationally recognised qualification whilst the same students find it difficult to achieve success in the GCSE format."*

Shelagh is pleased with the outcomes associated with using Asset Languages. She added: *"We find that for students and teachers, Asset Languages provides a sense of achievement. And for students, the assessments provide a positive reinforcement of what they can do and what they are able to achieve."*

Asset Languages assessments are being developed in the following languages: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Panjabi, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Somali, Swedish, Tamil, Turkish, Urdu and Yoruba.

To find out more about Asset Languages and how to register as a centre, please visit

www.assetlanguages.org.uk or
call 01223 553998.

Potential Reviewers!

Are you keen to review any new material that we receive from publishers (reviewers may keep the resource for the department)?

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Their contact details can be found on the inside cover.

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Reviews

Équipe Dynamique

Danièle Bourdais & Sue Finnie
Oxford University Press, 2006
ISBN: 978-0-19-912601-9

Équipe Dynamique is designed to be pursued over the final two years before GCSE, either to follow on from *Équipe nouvelle* or as a free-standing course. There is a Higher level course book with associated materials, aimed at C to A* grade students, and Foundation level equivalents, designed for C to E grade students. The teaching and learning materials at each level comprise: a course book, a *Cahier d'activités* (with reading, writing and grammar exercises, well suited to being set as homework), a Teacher's Book, an *En Solo* self-study pack for each learner (containing a book & CD with rôle-play practice, general conversation drills, pronunciation exercises and a grammar review with progress check questions), Practice and Assessment Packs for each of AQA, Edexcel and OCR designed to be used by the teacher, CD-Roms and audio CDs. If one has to make a choice, it looks as if the *En solo* pack is a resource each pupil needs to keep, whereas they can be loaned the course book itself.

The course aims to free itself from being 'the OCR GCSE course' or the 'AQA GCSE course', and its aim to be as generally applicable as possible is furthered by the *Cahier d'activités*, which helps to allay the problem we have all experienced in years 10 or 11 when homework has had to rely on handouts from past papers or other books. Thus, the course looks as if it will do good service in keeping pupils (and teachers?) organised. The vocabulary lists provided both in the course of the ten units and in the *En solo* self-study book seem practical and manageable. In the latter book, they are user's lists, geared towards what is going to help in the Speaking exam (for example). They have a real practical value for that reason.

Of course, any course book that offers advice about drafting and redrafting coursework, as this one does, runs the risk of becoming a hostage to fortune. However, for current circumstances - however long they run for - the book has useful tips.

I can't work out why the *En solo* book has not got substantive listening comprehension practice as well as pronunciation and general oral work. Having a separate learner's book for private exam-

orientated study (as opposed to homework, which is covered in the *Cahier d'activités*) is an attractive idea, but it looks as if an opportunity has been missed.

That apart, the book seems to be the complete GCSE primer it claims it is. This will be helpful for heads of department who want to be sure that given teaching sets are getting what they need, and it will help teachers plan effectively.

Dr Geoffrey Plow
University College School

AMICI

Carole Shepherd and Derek Aust
Oxford University Press
ISBN: 199124248

The book has a good coverage of the standard GCSE and IB Ab Initio syllabus. It has a fast moving style which exposes the student to advanced aspects of the language fairly early on; however this is done in context and in a very useful manner. For example already on page 12 some typical classroom environment questions and instructions are offered for recognition and memorisation.

Since the book is designed for use in an English speaking environment there are plenty of links between the two languages that can be used as effective memorisation aids.

The target audience is young adult beginners and the style and tone of the book well represents that. There are examples of youth speak and neologisms and anglicisms mainly used by young people in Italy, for example *chattare*. In order to successfully use this book the student beginners must have a language learning background and ideally know other foreign languages since a lot of inferences and deductions occur.

Interesting activities are presented and visual clues are used throughout the book; however I have found the layout personally very distracting and difficult to read. There is too much on a page and the style is too concise for me, but I might be too old!! The grammar pages at the end of the book are similarly too tightly packed.

The student's workbook is a good companion to the book with plenty of interesting and varied tasks. In my opinion it could contain more repetition and reiteration and I did not like the blue ink choice, in my

view quite a tiring colour to read, in the long run.

I will seriously consider buying this book as an additional resource and adopting it as my course book in the future.

Alessandra Symons
Sevenoaks School

Amigos 1

Vincent Everett and Emma Díaz Fernández
Oxford University Press
ISBN: 978-0-19-9126217

Amigos 1 is OUP's answer to *Listos 1*, and is very similar in its layout and style. It is aimed at students who are starting Spanish in Year 7, but could easily be incorporated into a Year 9 Scheme of Work in schools whose students begin Spanish at 13+.

The course is 'centred around a group of Valencian teenagers students can relate to', and the *Ciudad de las artes y las ciencias* adorns its cover and appears several times, which gives the course a thoroughly contemporary feel and a real insight into Spain in the 21st Century. Latin America does get a mention too, and there are some nice exercises at the back

of each chapter which offer comparisons between the two continents and an introduction to the culture of some of Spain's former colonies.

The student's book is well laid-out, with a good mixture of tasks on each double page, allowing for all four skill areas to be practised. Higher ability sets would cover two pages in a single lesson, allowing for plenty of extension work on the topics introduced. The back of the book contains an excellent Grammar Section (with exercises and answers) which is extremely clear and well laid-out, and an Extended Activities section to complement the student workbook.

The student workbook comes in two formats: *Cuaderno Uno* and *Cuaderno Dos*. The exercises are very similar in both, but slightly adapted in the latter to suit more able students. One feature of the workbook that distinguishes it from *Listos* is that there is a handy vocabulary list at the back of each chapter.

The teacher's book is excellent. The transcriptions and answers are easy to find, and at the beginning of each chapter is a 'ready-made' scheme of work, a week-by-week overview which enhances and facilitates planning for the term ahead.

Teachers who are used to *Listos 1* and want to consider *Amigos 1* in order to update their Spanish course at KS3 will have no problem in switching from one to the other, as it retains many of the user-friendly features. Those who are considering introducing Spanish into their curriculum in Year 7 might want to consider *Amigos 1* as a bright, modern and efficient textbook for their classes.

Melvyn Bardou

Haberdashers' Aske's School for Boys

Clipbank Spanish

4 Ventures Limited
www.channel4.com/clipbank

Clipbank Spanish is a collection of Channel 4 resources taken from four KS 3+4 Spanish language television programmes: Extra; Top; Aventuras Vascas and La Tienda de Luis. The programmes are broken down into small clips which can be grouped into themes and saved for easy access. The total of 250 clips available for Spanish, cover: Introducing and Describing Yourself and Others · Health and Fitness · Relationships · Opinions and Feelings · Food and Drink · Clothes · Leisure ·

Making Arrangements · Holidays, Travel and Places of Interest · Time, Weather, Months, Days and Numbers · Shopping, Services, Money and Directions · House, Home and School · The World of Work · Future Plans · Use of 'Ser' and 'Estar' · Present Tense · Future Tense · Past Tenses · Mix of Tenses · Commands · Prepositions · Asking Questions · Pronouns · Possessives · Adjectives

Clips have been carefully chosen so that they fit in as much as possible with a theme without bringing in any extraneous material. The DVD has many positive aspects which are:

- The format is ideal for inclusion in a lesson and very practical in that the teacher does not need to have a video wound to the correct place or DVD held on pause.
- No need to store racks of videos or Different DVDs
- The length of each clip is usually no more than 2 minutes at maximum, most being much shorter than that. Attention span
- Each clip is linked to related clips.
- Each clip has a vocabulary list.
- The language in each clip is very clear and relevant to the theme in question.

- The search facility can find clips on a particular theme e.g. football throws up 10 resources, clothes gives 14.
- Clips can be used as starters, plenaries, reinforcement of vocabulary/grammar or simply a break in the middle of a lesson.
- Clips might get pupils interested in watching one of the series they are taken from, either as a class activity, an after school/lunchbreak activity or independently.

Clipbank is not meant as a facility for viewing the whole series of each programme. This should be done from the DVD or recorded programme.

The library/ index is not ready yet, however online libraries have been prepared for Science, History or Geography, and if the language libraries are as clearly set out, they will save teachers time in searching for what they need.

As the clips cover all levels of KS 3+4, not all are suitable for every class, Top and La Tienda de Luis being more suitable for younger children and Aventuras Vascas and Extra are better suited for KS4.

The downside is the subscription. The initial cost £250 is not cheap but could be good value if used well like anything else. There is meant

to be an annual subscription of £250 + VAT, which I quite frankly cannot see the value of or fully understand. If your school decides not to pay this subscription are you then supposed not to use the DVD? This seems a little bizarre, and I have not had any satisfactory explanation from Channel 4 as to what it entails exactly.

Adrian Seddon
Colfes



Is your school organising an International Day? Are you interested in arranging a Japanese Language taster at your school? Sign up to the Japan Foundation's StepOutNet School Visits Programme and we will assist in arranging a school visit.

The Stepping Out Programme has been one of the core programmes undertaken by the Japan Foundation London Language Centre (JFLLC) to date. A structured programme of school visits, its aim has been to help introduce or support the teaching of Japanese in UK schools. Due to an increase in demand for Stepping Out visits the JFLLC is re-launching the Stepping Out Programme under a new name - StepOutNet -

opening it up to a wider audience of private tutors, teachers, volunteers and other enthusiasts interested in arranging and running Japanese taster lessons at primary and secondary schools in their area.

A Japanese language taster could form part of an International or Japan Day, and will give you and your students the chance to learn some basic Japanese from scratch.

To find out more information about how your school can benefit from the StepOutNet School Visits programme, and to download an application form go to:

<http://www.jpf.org.uk/language/courses/download/forschools.pdf>

For further information please email info.language@jpf.org.uk.

The Times Stephen Spender Prize

The Times Stephen Spender Prize for poetry in translation (see below) has come into being at a time when the number of children studying languages is falling and university language departments are closing. We want to encourage young people to read foreign poetry now that literature is no more than an optional module in A level

modern languages and try their hand at translating into English. Conversations with school and university language teachers have shown that we are not alone in seeing the benefits of translation - not least the way in which it teaches you to self-edit and scrutinise language - and there is a shared feeling that to learn French for five years or more and not read any literature is a great loss. Role play has its place, but so too should the reading of poetry.

Entrants translate a poem or an extract from a poem from any language - modern or classical - into English, and submit both the original and their translation, together with a commentary of not more than 300 words. We want to know why they have chosen a particular poem; the problems encountered in translating between the language of the original and English; the problems encountered in translating their chosen poem; and how they have approached it (have they tried to preserve the original rhyme or metre, for instance). The winning entries are published in a commemorative booklet (available free from the Trust), on our website (www.stephen-spender.org) and in The Times. It is unusual in any creative writing competition to be asked for a commentary, and the older translators seem

particularly glad of the opportunity to explain and justify their approach. In the case of the younger entrants, we hope that being required to write a paragraph or two will cause them to think more deeply about the process of translating and the many decisions they have had to take along the way. As judge and classicist Josephine Balmer writes, 'translation shows how treacherous language can be; how a single jarring word can throw an entire piece out of kilter, emphasising the need, as in all literary endeavour, for constant editing and revision'.

We know that teachers do not have time to digress from the curriculum, and mostly we have had just one or two entries from a school, with pupils alerted by their teachers and then entering off their own bat, some translating from a language studied at school, others from a mother tongue. Some schools, however, have been inspired by the prize to work poetry translation into their creative writing programmes: helping pupils to make a literal, word for word translation (of an Anglo-Saxon poem in the case of South Hampstead High School) and then setting them the challenge of turning that into a good poem in English. One group of year 8 children produced versions of three Jacques Prévert poems - it was

fascinating how different they were.

Although first prize this year in the 18-and-under section went to a translation from German of a poem by Wulf Kirsten, in the three years that the prize has been running the young classicists have done disproportionately well; we hope that in 2007 the modern linguists will strike back.

unvergesslicher augenblick

der sommer schlaegt sein gruenes dach
ueber den feldweg
bis auf die steinigen weinbergaecker.
waldwaerts zwei raederzeilen, tief
in den lehm geschnitten.
mutter im gespraech mit Lorenz, dem
backergesellen,
spaziergaenger unter kirschbaeumen.
meine augen starren auf
wadenstruempfe,
geschmueckt mit flauschigen bommeln,
sonntaeglich weiss.
gesicht und stimme vergessen.
auf den wortlaut
gab ich nicht acht.
der baecker musste einruecken.
blieb an der ostfront verschollen.
gefuehrt von anderen haenden,
schnell sein brotschieber
ueber die fussgrube.

die kirschallee ist abgehaun.
der wind hat freie bahn.
ich seh mich an der hand der mutter
in der allee.
ein schattengang voller laubfrische.
ein gespraech unterm kirschbaum,
belebend belanglos.

Wulf Kirsten

an instant, engraved

summer meshing its green thatch
over the path through the fields,
halted at the vineyards' stoniness.
towards the forest, the twin scorings of
wheels,
deep-carved in the clay.
mother in conversation with Lorenz, our
baker's boy,
a stroller under cherry-trees.
my eyes transfixed by his calf-length
socks -
decked with fleecy bobbles,
pristine Sunday white.
his face and the sound of his voice
forgotten.
of what he said
I had no idea.
the baker, conscripted,
was missing on the Eastern Front,
presumed dead.
grasped by other hands,
his paddle, its load of loaves, jolts
over the ruts foot-worn into the path.

now, the cherry-lane's cut down,
the wind ploughing its own tracks.
I'm watching myself - hand in hand
with my mother in that lane.
a shadowparing, full of the freshness of
leaves.
a conversation under some cherry-tree
reawakened, of hardly any consequence
at all.

Translated from the German by
Alice Malin

Alice Malin's commentary

I chose this poem because of its haunting, elegiac simplicity and its nostalgia in its precise recreation of the unvergesslicher Augenblick. The short sentences seemed to

create photographic snapshots of each different aspect of the meticulously remembered scene, and that's why my title is 'an instant, engraved', both because it is engraved on the poet's memory and because of this artistic delineation of the picture, as if sketching out a little more in each phrase. Elements of the poem, such as the fussgrube and the raederzeilen seemed to suggest, literally, an engraving onto the landscape. Although it's a controlled, apparently detached poem, there's a lot of pathos as, through the brevity of the phrases, Kirsten forces us to read meaning between, and into, every line.

The problem of the German was its compactness, and, specifically, how to translate words such as laubfrische, which seemed to me more of a concept than a translatable word. My greatest obstacle was the word brotschieber. Although it literally translates as peel, which is apparently an instrument for getting bread in and out of the oven, it's quite technical and not very poetic, so I changed it to 'his paddle, its load of loaves', because 'paddle' is a more recognised word and brot implies that, obviously, it would have loaves on it. In my approach, I tried to create the same atmosphere of an intensely remembered picture.