

NETHERHALL NEWS



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I. EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Unfortunately – or maybe fortunately – for various reasons, this month's editorial is shorter than usual. Being written at the last minute is not, of course, one of these reasons.

Personally, the past month has been taken over by three things: a first official deadline for essays; an eventful trip to Rome; and, football (watching, not playing). The first of these is probably of little interest to most people (though hopefully not to my examiners). The other two things, however, are worth mentioning.

Below you will find an admittedly long travel diary from the week in Rome, which, I hope, conveys something of the flavour of the trip. Many details and anecdotes have been left out – it would have taken too long to describe an encounter on a tram with 'Morgan', an avant-garde Italian photojournalist who said that he was shot four times in the leg in Iraq after a burst of American friendly fire, while it would have been too surreal to describe the various antics of 'Steve', one of our group members on the trip. 'Steve' is what is normally known as a hat, though some of our group members attributed personhood to him.

Like Rome, football was pretty fruitful too this month. To cut to the chase, the prospect of the Champions' League final between Barcelona and Arsenal in a fortnight still brings a smile to the faces of almost all Netherhall residents, with the notable exception of the solitary Tottenham fan. It would not be fair to name and shame him publicly. Though, he may still have the last laugh.

What started out as a one-off joking space-filler for editorials has transformed into a more recurrent feature as Arsenal have – somehow – progressed to the final. Every football fan likes to think that he, while not actually playing for his team, nonetheless influences their results. I am no different. Perhaps Thierry Henry quietly reads the newsletter each month as a confidence booster (though, I must admit,

he is not on the mailing list). Wishful thinking? We'll see.

Whatever the result, I cannot promise that next month's editorial will not feature either gratuitous bragging or indulgent self-pity. In line with previous months, however, the editorial stance will be...you know the rest. Unless Henry has his say. Except, of course, as nerves build up before the tension of the game, one realises that he may not. And that we may lose. And even lose Henry. To Barcelona. And all those editorials will have amounted to nothing.

Clearly, then, there is a lot at stake this month. And, added to this – as if it were not enough – is the added tension of exams and essay deadlines. It will, I hope, be a nervy but fulfilling month.

The other thing worth mentioning from the past month was the visit on April 24th of [Baroness Greenfield](#), who is a leading neuroscientist and science writer. Before her talk, she participated in an open discussion with various people, including previous guest speaker and philosopher, Chris Martin, and Netherhall's resident man of ideas (and impersonations), Russell Wilcox. The discussion was incredibly wide-ranging and intellectually absorbing. I have tried to reproduce as much of it as possible (without a tape recorder!) below along with a summary of Baroness Greenfield's talk. While it is lengthy, I hope it conveys the interest and congeniality of a thoroughly engrossing evening. Baroness Greenfield was everything you could ask for in an academic – specialised yet intellectually open, witty yet articulate and approachable – and it was a privilege to have her at Netherhall for what was, in my opinion, the most impressive guest speaker slot of the year.

Best,

Ed.

II. DIRECTOR'S NOTES

A very happy Easter to you all.

Although I was away in Spain for the first few days of the month (an account of which can be found below), I spent Easter itself in Netherhall with about forty others. It was a very enjoyable time. Many residents attended the Easter ceremonies in St Thomas More Church, where **Fr Gerard Sheehan** (the former chaplain of Netherhall, 1994-02) has now been parish priest for a year. It was all very impressive.

On Easter Sunday itself, after watching the Pope's *Urbi et Orbi* address and trying hard to spot the Netherhall group

somewhere in St Peter's Square, forty of us sat down to a wonderful [meal](#) prepared by the administration.

May in Netherhall has a very particular atmosphere. It's a time when the sports pitch gets heavier than usual usage as students seek relief from exams. It's the month when we usually run the pilgrimage to Walsingham (this year on Saturday 27th). By the end of the month the academic year is almost over and already we are receiving applicants for next September. Time flies!

Peter Brown

III. NETHERHALL DIARY

MAY@ NETHERHALL

Tuesday 2nd

Guest Speaker

David Quirk

Guitarist

Monday 16th

Guest Speaker

H.E. Kenyan High Commissioner

Saturday 20th

Concert

European Camerata Chamber Orchestra

Tuesday 23rd

Cricket Match

Netherhall Occasionals

vs

Barnett Waddington

Friday 26th

House Event

End of Term Dinner & Show

Saturday 27th

Pilgrimage

Our Lady of Walsingham, the national shrine of England

PERSONAL IDENTITY IN THE MID-21st CENTURY: ANYONE, NOBODY, OR SOMEONE?

Baroness Greenfield is the Director of the Royal Institute of Great Britain and the Fullerian Professor of Physiology at Oxford University. While her primary research interest lies in investigating those regions of the brain affected by both Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, she also writes widely on the neuroscientific basis of consciousness and the impact of technology upon our brains (a point she has taken up in the House of Lords in recent weeks). On Monday 24th April, she came to Netherhall as a guest speaker. What follows is a summary both of the talk she gave and of a discussion, which preceded the talk, on a recent paper of hers on 'Personal Identity'.

Baroness Greenfield's bold thesis is, firstly, that we have a clear sense of the self, a sense of being *someone* that distinguishes us from all other primates. This self gives each one of us a unique narrative, providing us with a framework with which we can interpret the unfolding drama of our lives. And, secondly, that this 'someone' scenario is increasingly challenged by different forces. Widespread information technology and growing biotechnology have allowed what Baroness Greenfield calls "a culture of passivity and hedonism that obliterates the individual": we are reduced to *nobody*. Or, as in fundamentalism, individuality is suppressed in place of a collective narrative: we are reduced to *anyone*. Baroness Greenfield set out to (re)define our identity from a neuroscientific perspective and thereafter explore the inadequacies of certain conceptions of the self.

Mind / Brain?

Before starting, Baroness Greenfield, briefly commented on the soul. Since the soul is defined as immortal and the brain is perishable, it is neither sensible nor helpful, she contended, to ask a neuroscientist about the soul. On the other hand, neuroscientists can helpfully be asked about the mind. Neuroscientists, she noted, no longer think of the relationship between the mind and brain in dualistic terms and are increasingly aware of "how plastic the brain is". This has been demonstrated by a recent experiment.

The Piano Experiment

Three groups of adult volunteers, none of whom could play the piano, were assembled. The 'control' group merely inhabited the same room as a piano over the course of five days. The second group was taught to practise some five-finger piano exercises: over the short period of five days, daily brain scans revealed large changes in "functional brain territory" because of the movement of their fingers, compared with no real changes in the brain scans of the 'control' group. Most interestingly, the third group were not told to play the five-finger exercises on the

piano, but rather to imagine playing them. Remarkably, the scans of this group were almost identical to those of the second group, evidence of a mental process having almost the same effect on the brain as a physical one.

Genes as major players?

Unlike some philosophers of the mind, Baroness Greenfield stressed that genes, though necessary, are not the only important players in determining the “landscape of each individual brain”. Genes manufacture proteins, which, in turn, work within the circuitry of the brain to change relations between some neurons. This changes the aspects of larger networks of brain cells constituting whole brain regions. The personalisation and individualisation of the brain, she pointed out, lies in the constant shifting of the neuronal connections, which constitute our ‘mind’. It is not merely genes but interactions with the wider world that constantly shape our brains. In another recent experiment, some mice were genetically engineered to have the equivalent of Huntington’s Chorea, the congenital movement disorder, which, unusually for diseases of the central nervous system, is known to be caused by only one faulty gene. One set of mice with the disease were housed in a very bare cage while a second set inhabited an “enriched environment” with more stimulating conditions (hoops etc). Fascinatingly, the second set – exposed to stimulating conditions – showed a very modest impairment compared to the first set and, moreover, the onset of the impairment occurred much later. Even a disorder caused by a single faulty gene in the relatively (compared to humans) simple brains of mice is strongly shaped by environmental factors.

Human brains and minds

Understanding brains to be highly dynamic and personalised, where does this leave humans? Baroness Greenfield began exploring this by offering an intriguing definition of meaning: seeing something in the context of something else. The human mind is able to make all sorts of connections (correlating to the neuronal connections forged in the brain), thereby giving meaning to the information that is absorbed. This is

made clearer by comparison with sufferers of Alzheimer’s disease or very small children: in both cases, the flow of information constitutes “a one-way street”. There are no “checks and balances” with which to interpret and interconnect the information. The growing development of the mind – with the expansion of circuits of neuronal connections – corresponds to the “individual personalisation of the brain”.

Chimpanzees share over 95% of their DNA with humans, but, she pointed out, without our post-natal brain growth, chimps are incapable of metaphorical thought, of seeing one thing as standing for something else, prompting an important question.

Can human minds account for human nature?

Immediately, Baroness Greenfield pointed out that human nature is a “tricky term”. By “human”, we disenfranchise the rest of the animal world, and by “nature” we posit something ubiquitous. Further, she went on, human nature is often used as an excuse to justify actions.

Perhaps then, what human nature is comes out in the so-called seven deadly sins. What they all have in common, she boldly suggested, was that, while grounded in biological behaviour (lust deriving from copulation, gluttony from the need for nourishment, anger from the need to protect one’s territory etc), they transcend this biological basis in excess and are removed from their biological function and intent. These behaviour forms, rather than stemming from the need for survival, now say something about you – your identity – and, further, stem from particular social values and statuses. While the context may vary, she said, the response is uniform. How does this impact on modern notions of identity?

Personal Identity

In a consumerist setting, the individuality of being *someone* is increasingly bound up with materialism. As an example, Baroness Greenfield pointed to the trend in advertising: products are presented as being somehow expressive of the consumer’s individual identity. Thus, we go out and buy sofas thinking that they express our personal identity (until we realise that our next door

neighbour has the same one!). The consequence of consumerism for what Baroness Greenfield calls someone identity is to heighten the sense of individuality but, because of the materialistic emphasis, leaves us unfulfilled.

The *anyone* identity, by contrast, exemplified by fundamentalism, leaves people very fulfilled, in a sense, but wholly dispenses with the individual for the good of the collective narrative.

And, the *nobody* identity neither allows for a consumerist individuality nor sublimation into a wider collective. Instead, one becomes a passive recipient, like a very small child. Taking drugs, for example, alters the definition of the mind. All drugs, she stressed, in some way or other block connections in the brain and experience becomes a mass of buzzing confusions.

This “abrogation of the self” is common to all sorts of other sensual pursuits such as a penchant for fine wine. But, information technology provides a powerful new technology, which inhibits our ability to make wider connections, to imbue our experiences with large-scale meaning. Along with drugs, the world of IT “jeopardises the use of the imagination”, of the ability to form new mental connections.

This is not trivial. In response, she posited the vital importance of the nurturing of creativity, the ability to forge new connections. By creativity, Baroness Greenfield meant a premium on deconstructing to the abstract level; an ability to make unusual and idiosyncratic associations; and, that new associations trigger yet more extensive associations, both in the self and with others.

Questions

You spoke about the seven deadly sins - have you considered the virtues in terms of defining humans as distinct from animals? And what about the ability to choose between them?

You are right – human minds are predicated on an ability to think about the future. It is possible to think of virtues. The harder question concerns free will. How does it relate to the increasing ability of neuroscience to look at new connections in the brain? The

real question is, is it the correlate or the cause?

There is a school of thought that the greatest human fulfilment is characterised by reciprocity – play, language, dancing, the liturgy. Isn't there a balance here between the individual and collective: in all of these, a found source of grammatical symbols is also habituated?

The importance of reciprocity is reflected in how bad solitary confinement is. Perhaps it explains part of the appeal of the Socratic dialogue too. New technologies – including drugs – are inhibiting our participation in such things.

Do you allow for the possibility of a doomsday scenario?

Well, on one hand we still read books and so on. On the other hand, I fear for younger people with unsupervised access to all these technologies. There is, I think, a real danger of complacency.

Discussion

[S]usan [G]reenfield: The question I raised in the House of Lords was, how are we being changed by technology? By this, I mean visual images, multimedia – all these different ways of seeing the world, away from words. One interesting question is whether hyperactivity in kids – who will be prescribed Ritalin for it – is connected to this. If, for the first five years, you are exposed to the screen and are used to living in a world that is very fast, and are then expected to sit still in a classroom for half an hour, then of course you will fidget – and then be described as ‘hyperactive’ and possibly drugged.

What about chances for imagination, for reflection and so on?

[C]hris [M]artin: Well, even people of my own age sit in front of a television and channel-hop!

[SG]: Have you seen *Lost in Translation*? There is a scene in an arcade with a boy just

standing there, zapping away. The point is that we are being saturated with images.

I was commissioned to write a paper on identity, a sequel to *Tomorrow's People*, and envisioned this scenario for identities: the 'anyone' relates to fundamentalism, 'nobody' to a culture of passivity and hedonism, and the 'somebody' to consumerism.

[CM]: What struck me is that you seem to set the paper out in a Cartesian or post-Cartesian way of seeing the self as a first-person being and so on. There are other concepts of the self – pre-modern concepts of the self – that do stress rationality and are not so easy to square with neurobiology. If the content of a thought is defined in terms of its relation to the truth, we cannot identify it with neurons (existing spatio-temporally). We cannot even square the brain with logical identity.

[R]ussell [W]ilcox: Aquinas would say, because the human is an embodied soul, it is necessary that it has a distinctive quality. But, nevertheless, the function of understanding is the process by which universals are abstracted from particulars.

[SG]: That's interesting. The notion of a self – a selfish self – some have said coincides with the rise of the novel. Before then, this kind of conversation would not have been comprehensible.

[RW]: Well, the philosopher Jacques Maritain argued that materiality is linked to individuality and hence the tying to the self is linked to the tying to the material. But, of course, in pre-modern thought, matter – in this sense, meaning the principle of individuation in space and time – is defined very differently from today.

[CM]: An ideogram is an intellectual representation [e.g. no smoking signs]

[P]eter [A]dams: So an ideogram replaces a word?

[CM]: Yes.

[PA]: Well, a world more dominated by ideograms is a world of pidgin English rather than ordinary English.

[SG]: In this regard, the idea of the 'nosphere' [from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin] – that we are nodes within a collective – is interesting. The nearest that I have seen to this is 'flashmobbing'. Have you heard of this? People phone each other up or communicate on the web to meet up at a neutral place at a certain time. A group of people then meet up and then go away! This gives me a nasty feeling of the 'nosphere'!

[RW]: It is interesting that you say we are losing individuality. But, of course, the individuality of a human being is only realised when the non-individual components are accessed as well. The former pope wrote a great deal on this. In the *Acting Person*, the then Karol Wojtyla wrote of the importance of self-governance and self-perception as persons.

[SG]: I would say that this individuality is not being challenged just by new fads but by fundamentalism too.

[RW]: In terms of fundamentalism, it is worth bearing in mind that fundamentalist Islam is a modernist, 19th century phenomenon.

[SG]: In fundamentalism, the emphasis is on the collective and so the individual can kill himself.

[RW]: Well, in this regard, the philosopher [Henri] de Lubac wrote that the battle of the 20th (and 21st) centuries would be fought over the 'person'.

[SG]: To go back to fundamentalism, there is usually a strong narrative – the little guy fighting the big oppressor. Recently, this is explicitly evident in ideas of world conspiracies, romantic revenge for the crusades etc. It is not unspecified violence.

[CM]: The narrative expresses the self.

[SG]: Right. I came across Sebastian Haffner, who wrote in Germany between the two world wars and was sympathetic to the Jews. In *Defying Hitler*, he set out to answer why Nazism should have worked. At the end of the First World War, there was nothing for Germans to identify with. In this period, sport began to emerge, providing a collective

narrative. And with Hitler arrived a more seductive narrative. It was written without knowledge of the eventual outcome of the war.

[RW]: Isn't it interesting that something that is essentially impersonal – the State – should use the idiom of the personal?

[SG]: Some speculate that at the time of its demise, the Soviet Bloc had become impersonal, far removed from its earlier narratives of struggle.

[RW]: Where does that leave us?

[SG]: Sports obsessed!

[RW]: Marxists would say that we are living in a self-delusion, a false consciousness. Postmodernism is a way to tranquilise ourselves.

[SG]: Certainly that is what I feel is happening to us. Perhaps we will be the last generation who can grasp this.

[PA]: What about the *Da Vinci* code phenomenon? Why such a huge success?

[SG]: It is hard to say because I have not read it.

[CM]: It presents Christianity as one big conspiracy theory.

[SG]: People have to see things put into a bigger context, as part of a whole, so that you can feel more in control.

[Anon]: It demystifies the whole of Christianity and gets rid of the mystery...

[RW]: Or turns the mystery into magic.

[Anon]: Yes. This then justifies watching television instead of going to church.

[SG]: And people then have computers and horoscopes to keep them busy.

[CM]: Or horoscopes on their computers!

[SG]: Exactly! People like feeling 'some bigger thing'. Think about the similarities

between Kennedy and Lincoln – the overlapping names of their secretaries, Kennedy was assassinated 100 years after Lincoln, both had vice-presidents called Johnson etc – this is the kind of thing people find attractive, giving things a meaning.

[D]avid [B]urke: To go back to your paper and the distinction between pre-modern and post-modern thought, I felt that your idea of the self did not bring out choices enough.

[SG]: Well, I would love you to explain what free will is to me! I do struggle with it. I was brought up in an entirely secular way, so I look at religion like an autistic child learning about emotions! Free will and religion is something I have never understood.

[CM]: Well, religion cannot work this out either! In the 17th century, there were such debates among theologians that the pope, intervening in a debate between two groups, declared it 'undecidable' and issued a moratorium for ten years (and ordered each side not to call the other side heretics). It is one of those definably undefinable questions like there are in mathematics.

[RW]: And it is not simply a theological problem.

[SG]: Well, a short time ago, I participated in an experiment whereby I pressed a button whenever I wanted and my brain activity was tracked. From the findings, it appears that brain activity occurred just before pressing the buttons. This raises interesting questions, as does, say, depression – does the mental state cause depression in neuronal transmission rates or the other way around? How do we correlate these?

[Daniel] Dennett's response to this is that there is no such thing as the mental, which is silly. As John Searle has pointed out, when I order a hamburger, I really do think that I am ordering a hamburger!

One practical consequence of this is that lawyers are already seizing onto it. For instance, the assassin of the Swedish minister was granted some form of reprieve because he turned out to be a schizophrenic who had not taken his drugs. Where do you draw the line? Bin Laden? Hitler? You can deconstruct everyone!

[RW]: In terms of religion and free will, it is complicated by the fact that terms have changed from their original meanings and that everything preceding is supposedly mired in ignorance – this comes out in Anthony Kenny writing on Aristotle and goes back to Alasdair MacIntyre’s ideas. Nobody touches the High Middle Ages.

[SG]: Well, the same is true of Islam. In the 14th century, Muslim doctors discovered the circulation of the blood, but this is not well known.

[PA]: How do human brains compare with the brains of our nearest relatives? Are they similar?

[SG]: Sure, depends on what question you are asking. The DNA material is very similar. But in terms of belief, it is very difficult to show this in animal models. How is it instantiated? What are the differences between secular and religious beliefs?

Another interesting idea for further thought is of human nature – so what are the differences among people?

[RW]: And, of course, in pre-modern thought, the idea of nature is quite different...

[P]eter [B]rown: I think we had better wrap it up there.

[ZM]

EASTER AT ROME 2006: DIARY

Saturday 8th

Following mass and breakfast at Netherhall, a large part of the English Univ group, comprised of several Netherhall residents and three guys from Trinidad – the “Trinidaddies” as they would affectionately be dubbed – set off for Stanstead airport by coach. Laughing on our way to the coach stop, among other usual pieces of travelling hilarity, we joked about how someone would inevitably have misplaced his passport. How we laughed and joked. At the coach-stop, we were informed that Netherhall’s deputy director was frantically looking for his passport during a last-minute packing spree. We joked that this was not the time for jokes. Our informant, however, was not joking. Thankfully, the deputy director appeared a few minutes later, with suitcase and passport in tow, and we made moves to catch our flight.

We landed in Rome in the mid-afternoon and a small coach was waiting, ready to take us to our lodgings. For several of us, this was our first taste of those famous Roman roads. Like the trip in general, they really do put your life in perspective.

Arriving at our lodgings, located in the north-east of Rome, off the Via Nomentana,

we were greeted by a smiling band of nuns and priests belonging to a small order. We also met our guide, Randy, whose constant smile, patience and knowledge of Rome’s bus system would help us throughout the week. The lodgings were effectively a hostel at the back of a school and in the courtyard one could see the dome of their charming chapel as well as a large statue of Christ. Even there, you could plainly discern a recurrent characteristic of Rome, one that certainly sets it apart from the daily backdrop of London: namely, the easy and almost ubiquitous integration of artistic representations and religious iconography within the cityscape.

After settling into our rooms, we gained our first sit-down experience of Italian hospitality. Setting the tone for the rest of the week, we were served up a hearty three-course meal with plenty of second helpings by a group of smiling nuns and their assistants. Out of politeness, we humbly ate up these second helpings and even graciously accepted third spoonfuls of pasta, out of courtesy, of course.

Sunday 9th

Following breakfast, we boarded a bus to take us to the Vatican. *En route*, we met the American group staying at our lodgings. There was a military precision about them,

dressed in a uniform of navy jackets and ties – in fact, one of them was preparing to join the army in the summer and, in the evenings at the lodgings, could be seen doing more pull-ups than I had previously thought possible. They were thoroughly decent guys.

The bus journey, incidentally, became a staple component of our Rome trip. Over the course of the week, I am convinced that new records were set for the number of people who can fit onto a single bus without injury or fear of reprisals from angry locals. Unlike Londoners, Romans rarely seem to be bothered by the prospect of standing up in cramped conditions on a moving vehicle full of noisy tourists.

Reaching St. Peter's, we hustled in through the queue to take our seats for the outdoor Palm Sunday mass. The square was packed full of people, old and young, and, judging from the flags that were being waved, they were from every corner of the world. With the sun beating down upon our backs, the procession of the palms and mass itself were long – and with large chunks in Italian! But, nonetheless, the buzzing communal experience was memorable, as was the vibrancy on display at the end of the mass, as the crowd shouted, "Viva il Papa!", incessantly.

After lunch, we got down to our first bit of sightseeing, expertly masterminded by Jack. Firstly, we saw the Pantheon, which had once 'housed' the panoply of Roman gods. (Those of us with classics degrees paraded the incredible practicality of the subject by pointing out that 'Pantheon' comes from the Ancient Greek for 'all' [the *pan* bit] and 'gods' [the *theon* bit]). We briefly stopped off at a sumptuous *gelateria* – which even served fig and chestnut ice creams – before moving onto the Forum and Colosseum sites. Though the edifice has not survived, the markings of the Circus Maximus – the stadium in which 250,000 people could watch chariot races – were visible. But, one needed less imagination to be struck by the sheer scale of the Colosseum itself, which dwarves the grand arch of Constantine standing next to it. The Forum is a heady maze of impressive ruins that spanned hundreds of years of Roman history. Those of us with classics degrees were sadly unable to identify the buildings located there. But, thankfully, one of the 'Triniddies' – Eric, who is an artist

and art historian – was able to fill us all in on various intriguing details.

We then finished off the afternoon with a visit to St. Peter in Chains, near the Colosseum, which is reputed to hold the chains that bound St. Peter, and then returned to our lodgings, eagerly anticipating the nourishing meal that awaited our return.

Monday 10th

After mass and breakfast, we made our way once more to the Vatican and filed into the Paul VI hall for an audience (of thousands) with Pope Benedict. Despite the language barrier, we could make out that Pope Benedict was emphasising to us the importance of apostolate and friendship. Several young men and women were fortunate enough to meet the Pope on stage, face to face, including Charlie from London and the two Finns (who were part of our group in Rome). (Since coming back to England, I have learned from a reliable source that Charlie's meeting with the Pope appeared as an image on television in Malta).

Perhaps unlike the last Pope, Benedict appears to be a little shy but, endearingly, he still embraced the adulating throng of people who ran to shake his hand as he proceeded out through the central aisle. A little anecdote reflects the fondness with which many young people regard him.

Before proceedings, an announcer had urged in several languages that, out of courtesy, it would be improper to sing songs, chant chants or shout in general when the pope arrived. Intriguingly, the articulation of this message in Spanish seemed to last longer than in any other language. Anyhow, as soon as the Pope arrived, the crowd greeted him affectionately and loudly by singing songs, chanting chants and shouting in general. Despite the admittedly antinomian nature of this spontaneous enthusiasm, we later learned that the pope had warmed to this in his own way, suggesting afterwards that this show of fondness was not for him personally but for the Vicar of Christ.

We also saw a bit of St. Peter's that morning before lunch. Each day, the splendid organisation of Univ had arranged for lunches at various haunts around Rome. On all other days, these were at Italian restaurants / cafes that served up wholesome (and plentiful)

grub. On Monday, however, we were treated to a gourmet Italian eatery called 'McDonalds' specialising in traditional delicacies and a relaxed – some might say, typically Italian – ambience.

That afternoon, we saw a few churches. Firstly, a church (whose exact name I forget) holding what are reputedly slivers from the true cross and some of the nails from the Crucifixion. We then moved onto the Scala Santa (Holy Steps) within a church near St. John Lateran (technically, the pope's cathedral). This set of stairs is said to be the same set of stairs that Christ ascended to speak to Pontius Pilate. Traditionally, pilgrims ascend the stairs – slowly – on their knees while praying, as a form of penance that looks easy but certainly is not in practice. Still, it was a suitably penitential act for Holy Week. From here, we moved onto the magnificent St. John Lateran, with its procession of huge statues of the apostles lined up along the central pews, rounding off another packed, tiring but ultimately rewarding day.

Back at the lodgings, we were getting to know the various guys staying there, from Kenya, South Africa and Sweden as well as France and the USA. That evening, Francis and I – who had been English language teachers at Netherhall in 2004 – were delighted to meet Nader, a student on the language course, who had come with a group from Israel. It was a notable example of, paradoxically, how familiarly small and yet amazingly big the Catholic world can be.

Tuesday 11th

As Jack had cautioned us the previous evening, we had an extra early start – waking up before 6am (for some of us, this was a first) – to make it for mass in the crypt of St. Peter. Despite the sleepy eyes struggling to get to grips with the exhilarating, death-defying bus journey, it was well worth it. Descending into the crypt, we saw a plethora of small chapels, with celebrants saying mass. Before our mass, we visited the tomb of St. Peter as well as the beautifully simple tomb of the late John Paul II nearby. Our mass was in the crypt's Irish chapel, conducted by an (allegedly, as several people consistently reminded him) Welsh chaplain for an English group comprised of Finns, Spaniards, a

Belgian Italian and the 'Trinidaddies', one of whom – Eric – is Irish. More seriously, it was a humbling, memorable experience to have mass in the crypt of St. Peter's and in such close proximity to the tombs of various popes and saints.

After mass, we made our way to a university hall to attend part of the Univ Congress. The keynote speaker was a British journalist with Sky News – Colin Brazier – who spoke fascinatingly about his experience covering John Paul II's death and funeral, both as a reporter and a recent convert (he was received into the Church at Easter last year).

At lunch, we learned a bit of Trinidadian lingo. Apparently, to 'jib' or 'lime' means the same thing as to unwind in a relaxed, sociable way with one's peers (or, in contemporary cultural patois, to 'chill out'). So, after a bit of jibbing and liming (or, as the Trinidadians would retort, 'after a spot of tea') we went on to Villa Tevere, the 'HQ' of the Work in Rome, and saw the tomb of St. Josemaria, suitably rounding off a day of visiting the remains of several saints.

Unsurprisingly, after the long day, we (or, at least, I) crashed out, preferring an early night to the otherwise normal routine of late night chatting, cigarettes and ice-cream at the lodgings.

Wednesday 12th

Waking up at the slightly more reasonable time of 7ish, we made our way – to the best of my knowledge – some way outside of Rome to the catacombs at St. Domitilla. The catacombs stretch out for several kilometres underground, housing the spaces where the tombs of whole families – and, poignantly, the tiny graves of infants – once stood. After following our wonderful tour guide, we had mass within the cool catacombs with our American buddies. A sense of rootedness with the past made it a special mass.

We made our way into central Rome for lunch before travelling to Cavabianca, in the outskirts of Rome, for a get-together with the Father, the Prelate of the Work. In a packed courtyard, he spoke to us (equipped with translation kits) about the importance of prayer and apostolate, and urged to us pray for the Pope. The get-together was also an opportunity for Francis and I to bump into yet

more ex-students and temporary residents from that crazy summer of 2004 at Netherhall.

Thursday 13th

We started Maundy Thursday with a visit to the Vatican Museum. Among the many fascinating and attractive features of the fabric of Roman life – the affability of the people, the food, the cityscape – one of them is, strangely, the system of queuing. Or, to be more precise, the fact that a system of queuing has not yet been invented in Rome (at least in the tourist hotspots). To people coming from England, this is something of a culture shock. *En route* to the museum, several people had become separated. The queue to enter the museum snaked back round the side of the building. But, these stragglers were reunited with the rest at the front of the queue. And, instead of being greeted with at least indignant stares if not words of complaint from those behind us in the queue, we only encountered utter indifference. After initial scepticism, we concluded that the Italian queuing system is actually a great thing indeed.

Although we saw an abundance of great works of art, two particular and rather obvious features stood out. Firstly, Raphael's paintings of the Eucharist (with its marvellous depiction of Old and New Testament figures celestially sited above a set of saints, surrounding the Eucharist) and the school of Greek philosophers (which famously centres around Plato pointing upwards and Aristotle pointing down). Before going in, Eric had helpfully primed us with enough background information to decipher the various figures. And, secondly, the breathtaking Sistine Chapel. The sheer magnificence of Michelangelo's Creation and Last Judgement, as Eric pointed out, lies in the fact that you don't even pay attention to the other masterpieces dotted along the side walls of the chapel.

After lunch, we all took a breather, jibbing and liming for a while. We visited a *cafeteria* called Café Eustachio, which is supposedly one of the finest coffee houses in Rome. It did not disappoint.

In the late afternoon, we went to Maundy Thursday mass at a church called St Andrea. To the best of my knowledge, it is not considered to be quite in the top league of

Roman churches (along the lines of St John Lateran etc). But the masterful pictures dotted around the church, including a huge, striking picture of a pained, crucified St. Andrew behind the altar, were still pretty damn impressive, symptomatic of the way that, in Rome, these works of beauty are not deracinated from their cultural origins and stored away in a dry museum, but, rather, are very much incorporated into living buildings.

Friday 14th

On Friday morning, we saw more churches: St Mary Major (the Italian, St Maria Maggiore sounds better, I think) and another church built upon the baths of Diocletian.

After lunch, we went to Villa Tevere for an absolutely packed Good Friday service. After the service, a small group of us were shown some of St Josemaria's possessions from his life, ranging from boyhood books to his garments as Monsignor.

That evening, we made our way towards the Colosseum for the Way of the Cross. There was an immense mass of people congregated outside, while the Colosseum and surrounding area was beautifully illuminated, providing a suitable backdrop to the solemnity of the Way of the Cross. Pope Benedict's brief meditations at each station were wide-ranging – from the dignity of women to the importance of penance – and, ultimately, stirring.

Saturday 15th

For most of Saturday, we had a lot of free time to see whichever parts of Rome we pleased. No doubt, however, everyone was at some point consumed with thoughts about a particular controversy that had cropped up at various points during the week. I am referring, of course, to the 'Jive Controversy'.

Fr. Joe's impressive impersonations of Trinidadian lingo always involved the word 'jive' in some verbal configuration. The Trinidaddies would retort with their own impersonations of uppity English speech. They did, however, strongly deny that even a single Trinidaddy – in the whole history of Trinny – has ever said 'jive' (though, as someone suggested and at the risk of getting bogged down in intricate philosophical details, the very act of refuting

Fr. Joe's allegation itself makes use of the word 'jive' and is, hence, self-refuting). The controversy is still debated by great thinkers today. I am not sure where the answer lies. I do know, however, that the sight of a British priest, speaking like Bob Marley, in conversation with a couple of Hawaiian-shirted Trinidaddies, speaking like Basil Rathbone, while walking through packed Roman streets, was really quite fun to watch.

For that evening, Jack, the man with the plan, had got us all tickets to go to the 10pm Vigil Mass at St. Peter's itself. We had been advised to arrive at St. Peter's well in advance of the 8.30pm opening of the doors. Upon arriving at around 6ish with two comrades, we managed to get close to the front of the queue, before the rest of the group joined us.

(Incidentally, we spotted, a tiny bit ahead of us, the American group who had unsurprisingly and admirably managed to make it to the very front of the queue by arriving there at 4pm. Unfortunately for some of them, following the initial surge when the barriers were eventually opened, several of them were pushed to the side, relinquishing their deserved place at the front of the queue after four and a half hours of queuing there...)

The queue itself was characterised by a vibrant atmosphere, with singing and cheering. It also offered another striking example of the small / big Catholic idea outlined above. While praying the rosary with a friend, a girl asked if she could join in (which was convenient, since my companion only knew the litany – the set of prayers at the end of the rosary – in Spanish and I only know it in, er, an obscure form of Latin, but thankfully she knew it in English). Speaking to her afterwards, she turned out to be the sister of a guy I knew from my undergraduate days and, what is more, she knew Eric's sister from back in Ireland.

Anyhow, we eventually made our way inside, through the clamouring and running crowds, and a few of us were lucky enough to get seats next to the central aisle along which the pope would enter and leave. So, we sat and waited, flicking through the bilingual booklets (Latin and Italian) handed out for the mass.

Now, if I am honest, I was initially a bit alarmed by the prospect of going through all 80 pages or so of the booklet that comprised the readings and responses for the mass. But,

the Vigil Mass turned out, for me at least, to be the highlight of the whole trip. Admittedly, I was lucky enough to be sitting next to Jack, who had translations of all the readings in (or on?) his palm (or 'palm'?), and Francis, who expertly translated the Pope's homily for me. But, beyond that, the mass was, yes, long but unforgettable. In particular (for a convert, I guess), the procession of baptismal candidates was inspiring – they were all dressed in distinctive formal regalia, ranging from traditional suits to bright kimonos – and it was amazing to witness these lucky souls being baptised and confirmed by the Pope himself. And, after the mass, following a chorus of 'Happy Birthday', the euphoric rush to greet the Pope as he proceeded down the aisle was likewise a remarkable spectacle. But, ultimately, it was a privilege simply to be present for the three intervening hours or so of the mass in the huge expanse of St. Peter's with that sense of spiritual solidarity with the surrounding throng.

After the mass – and more choruses of 'Happy Birthday' – we headed back in the early hours of the morning (thankfully, by coach, actually in seats). Back at the lodgings, or 'home' as we now called it, there was a bit of a tippie and loads of food to celebrate Easter Sunday, with one of the Finns, Emir, putting on a genuinely dazzling magic show for everyone. I think I ate my bodyweight in 'Columbas', the traditional Italian Easter cake, before sitting outside and talking to a few guys from South Africa and Israel, with our celebratory cigarettes illuminating our smiles in the early hours of the morning.

Sunday 16th

After a relative lie-in on Sunday morning, we went to St. Peter's once more for the Pope's traditional Easter blessing, *Urbi et Orbi*. After our final lunch in Rome, we made our way towards Cavabianca in order to watch a show that was being put on – which included our own guide, Randy, on lead vocals. Unfortunately, we were late, though we caught the end of the act. We picked our suitcases up and then were driven to the airport, where we ironically had our first pizzas of the whole week, before flying back home, tired but satisfied, returning to the

more mundane everyday realities of essay deadlines, impending exams and jobs. And, hopefully, we have brought something of our experiences of the extraordinary in Rome

back to London to illuminate and animate these seemingly mundane realities. (Click [here](#) to see photos from the trip).

[ZM]

SPANISH TRAVELOGUE

On Friday 31st March, armed with brochures depicting the plans for the improvements to the oratory, Javier Castanon (73-93), Jorge Gonzalez (03-06) and I set off from Gatwick airport on our six day fund raising trip to Madrid and Barcelona.

From the moment we touched down in a beautifully warm Madrid, the hospitality we received in Spain was wonderful. It began when Jaime Castanon, Javier's elder brother, picked us up at the airport in Madrid. Jaime turned out to be our chauffeur, guide and general advisor throughout our stay in the Spanish capital.

From the airport we drove directly to Retamar School in the North West of Madrid. It was here that we were planning to host our Madrid reunion the following day and we thought it wise to take a look at the venue beforehand.

On two occasions on this trip I was overwhelmed by institutions that I visited and Retamar was the first of these. Retamar is very, very, impressive. 2,300 boys attend the school in which the spiritual side of things is entrusted to Opus Dei. It's enormous. When we arrived there on Friday evening, former pupils and parents were already using the facilities and this continued all weekend. It's a tremendous asset. Antonio Orol (1988-89) is the assistant head master. He looks after the junior end of the school. We interrupted him in his preparations for a meeting for some 500 parents the following morning. The whole thing made me think about how much work we have to do in the UK to get something like that up and running.

Once we had had seen our venue for the following night Jaime took Javi, Jorge and I off to Moncloa, our home for the next three days. Just as we were getting back into the car we met Juan de Santiago (02-03) who was at Retamar with a group of boys from a local club.

Saturday 1st April was the first full day of the trip and it started with a pleasant surprise. As Mass, ended I heard the door of the

oratory open and saw a grinning Enrique Huesca enter. Enrique spent the summer of 2003 in Netherhall as a 17 year old. Although originally from Mexico, he is currently studying for a year in Pamplona at the University of Navarre. By pure coincidence he was visiting Madrid to see his aunt that weekend. It was great to have him along and once he had seen his aunt he accompanied us on journeys around Madrid.

After breakfast and a planning session we each went our separate ways to meet up with different former residents. My first port of call was with an Englishman, Peter Millington, the brother of three former residents - Joe, his father, Michael (96-99) and Steve (98-99). Peter has lived and worked in Madrid for eight years and is now married with five children.

At this point I should mention another factor that impressed me throughout the trip. It was striking to see the number of recent former residents who are already married with children. Especially in Madrid, I have never heard so many young men speak so much about babies!

After tapas with Peter, I walked to the apartment of Javier's mother in a beautiful area of Madrid. His brothers and sisters meet up most weekends in their mother's apartment and this weekend was no exception especially since they don't get to see Javi too often. I arrived before Javier and so was able to spend a few minutes with his mother. It was impressive how much she knew of Netherhall and the work we do in London. She clearly prays a lot for us. It was all very encouraging.

After a wonderful lunch we headed (again courtesy of Jaime) to Retamar for the reunion. Enrique and I climbed aboard the car of Pablo Perez de Madrid (2003) who very kindly organised the catering for the reunion. Pablo has settled well back into Madrid life. He lives with his brother and his grandmother and works as an accountant.

Some 20 people made it to Retamar for the evening reception. Others phoned to say they were heading home after getting lost amid the roadworks and new road layout in the area

around the school. It was great to see Pepe Sellers (58-62) who was very much involved in the building of the oratory in the 60's, Manolo Martin (82-83), Henry Landeta (76-80), Nacho Bravo (83-84), Alfonso Bonilla (74-79), Pablo Perez de Madrid (2003), Jorge Martinez Bermejo (03-04), Alvaro Maestro (04-05), Borja Arrostegui (04-05) & Isa his girlfriend, Gabriel Silva, Jaime Silva & Elena, Jesus Maria Susperregui (Chuspe) (2003), Antonio Orol (88-89), and Miguel Puig (03-04). German Sastre (94-96) who, in order to come all the way from Valencia, had to get up early to catch the coach and would not get back home till the early hours of Sunday morning. Nearly 1000 km of coach journeying within 24 hours!! What a hero. (Click [here](#) for the Madrid reunion).

We finished the day slumped before the TV watching Madrid v Barca, as the rest of the country seemed to be doing.

On Sunday 2nd after Mass and our usual planning session, Enrique and I went off for lunch with Chema Alamo (02-04) who had come all the way from Zaragoza for the reunion but then got lost in the roadworks! Chema is now working for a bank in Zaragoza and seems finally to have overcome problems with his knee. After lunch we met up with Pablo Cantera (98-99) and his wife Maria. Pablo and Maria have two wonderful children and Maria is expecting a third child in the summer. I must confess it was strange to see Pablo as a father of two when my most vivid memory of him in Netherhall is seeing him climbing in the window of the bursar's office at 4am early one Sunday morning with three or four others in tow.

In the meantime Javier was collected at Moncloa by Henry Landeta and taken to see his house and meet his wife Are. Both are talented architects and so have designed and built a beautiful house and studio for themselves. Javier came back full of praise for the house and architects. Later that morning Henry took him back to Moncloa where Cano Landeta (76-77), Henry's brother, took him to his house for lunch. There they had a wonderful time with Alistair Dougal (76-80). Cano, his wife Mercedes and their four children are a most cheerful family and Alistair, himself a magnificent raconteur, made it a truly memorable lunch and afternoon. Cano drove Javier to meet Gustavo

and Quiruca before coming to meet us at Felipe's apartment.

Pablo and his family drove Enrique and I to the flat of Felipe Martinez Caballero (98-99) and his family. Poor Felipe who ekes out a living with a Madrid law firm has fallen on hard times and lives with his wife Silvia and their three children on the 5th floor of an inner City block of flats. Their only compensation is that the flat is enormous, has a fabulous balcony, is shared by numerous Madrid celebrities and has its own security guard!

During the afternoon we were joined by Julian Perez de Madrid (2000-01) and his fiancée Teresa, who plan to marry this summer. Julian had been another victim of the previous night's traffic. The arrival of Julian and Teresa forced Felipe and Pablo to speak about something other than babies that wake them at 5am!

As Pablo and his family left Gustavo Ron (94-96) and his wife Quiruca arrived. Quiruca is expecting a child in August. Gustavo has just completed his new film Mia Sarah. The film is due to be released later this year and we are in negotiations with Gustavo to have the UK launch in Netherhall. Gustavo has managed to get Fernando Fernán Gómez to play a role in the film.

Monday was a day of rushing around trying to meet former residents who had been unable to make it to the meeting on Saturday. First stop was Pablo Wesolowski (1986-7) who is now managing partner of a law firm in Madrid. He has seven children, the eldest of whom is off to Pamplona to study at the University of Navarre in October!

After meeting Pablo I paid a quick call to the central offices of Opus Dei in Madrid where the parents of St. Josemaria are buried. I was received with great hospitality, shown around and, very importantly, given a telephone with which to make a last few phone calls to try and contact former residents.

Before lunch I met up with Borja Nocito (95-96) who works in Madrid for a company selling advertising space in all sorts of media. Borja still looks very dapper and remains the complete salesman. He could sell snow to eskimos.

I then joined Javier and Joaquin Santisteban (97-98) for lunch. Joaquin works in Madrid and over lunch he did his best to explain to us what he does. Joaquin reminded

us that he had actually met his wife in Netherhall. He had just returned from losing to the director at squash (at least that's what I recall him saying) and his future wife was waiting to meet someone in the entrance of Netherhall. She took pity on poor Joaquin and tried to cheer him up. They were married a year later and now have five children!

After this Javi and I had just enough time to grab coffee with the effervescent Roland da Silva (90-93) before being picked up by our untiring host Jaime Castanon and taken to the airport.

Barcelona is a beautiful City nestling between the coast and the mountains. We arrived there late on Tuesday evening and were picked up by Jorge Gonzalez (I half expected to see Jaime Castanon smiling at the terminal exit!) Jorge had left Madrid the day before to spend a day with his mother in Lerida. It took only 20 minutes to drive to Pedralbes, the Netherhall of Barcelona – with a swimming pool.

After spending a couple of hours on the phone trying to find former residents my first meeting was lunch with the unchanged Luis Velosa (98-02). Luis has just completed his two-year MBA at IESE and has enjoyed it enormously. He is applying for jobs in Madrid where his girlfriend lives. Poor Luis had handed in his final year dissertation at 4am so he was quite sleepy. Some things don't change!

Whilst I was meeting Luis, Tayo Casas (76-85) came to collect Javier and they went to meet Toni Tobella (76- 81) at the Princesa Sofia Hotel. There they met Luis Foix who although strictly speaking lived in his own flat during his stay as London correspondent of La Vanguardia in the mid seventies, “ he really was a part of Netherhall House's life during those years”. In the afternoon Javier went to visit the parents of Luis Gilabert (73-74).

Later in the day I met Joseba Campos (summers of 2001-5) who is doing a doctorate programme in IESE in English!

As the clock struck 8pm so our guests started to arrive for the [Barcelona reunion](#). First to arrive was Fr John Joly, chaplain of Netherhall from 1988-1992. He was followed by Jordi Picasso (90-94), Alberto Heras (97-98) who is now married to Aurora and has

two children, Agustin Puerto (02-03), Jordi Serret (03-04), Diego Barroso (03-04), Ferran Ferliu (2003), Albert Creixell (2005), Carlos Ngonde (03-04), Joseba Campos and Jose Cuevas (01-02). Jose and his wife Alejandra are expecting their first child in August.

On Wednesday Javier and I went to see the great IESE Business School. Cesar Beltran who has spent many a summer in Netherhall took us over the road to show us the new buildings that are due to be completed in September. This was the second occasion on the trip when I was overwhelmed by an institution. IESE is quite special. Cesar took us, with hard hats on, all over the new buildings, ranging from the new underground car park for 300 cars to the fantastic roof terrace with wonderful views of the City. Again I was only able to dream of the day when we can establish similar projects in the UK.

For lunch I switched hard hat for crash helmet as I was picked up by Carlos Torredemer (93-94) on his motorbike. Carlos is married with 2 children and works in a paper company. We were joined for lunch by Fr John Joly (chaplain of Netherhall from 1988-1992) who is unchanged in all but the grey hair.

The day ended with a rather unexpected visit to the home of the mother of Willy Wilkinson (83-93). In the morning Javier and I had telephoned to say hello to Mrs Wilkinson (I had been in her house some 20 years earlier when the Wilkinson family had helped out a friend and I at the end of an insolvent inter-rail trip around Europe). However, to our great surprise we discovered that Willy, his wife Helga and their two lovely children were actually in Barcelona visiting Willy's mother. It was great to be able to see Willy and all his family.

From Willy's home, Javi and I made our way across a City grinding to a halt as kick off time approached for the Barcelona v Benfica Champions League match.

The following morning after a quick breakfast Jorge delivered us back to Barcelona airport and after a short delay (cousery of the French air traffic controllers' strike) we were on our way back to London.

[PB]

IV. FORMER RESIDENTS

We were sad to hear news this month of the death of **Professor Terry McLaughlin**, who was a former speaker at Netherhall.

PASSING BY...

This month saw **Simon Chandhuri** (1997-99) drop by Netherhall during a weekend trip with his girlfriend. Simon now works with an American bank in Dusseldorf, Germany.

Dilip Bassi (2001-05) was in hospital with an infection following surgery on his back. Thankfully,

everything is ok now and he has started working at the Northwick Park hospital, North London.

Fran Pena was briefly in Netherhall while "between flats".

And, **Gabriel Olearnik**, who is now a solicitor, was in Netherhall for much of the month.

[PB]

NEWS FROM FORMER RESIDENTS

Fernando Albino (2000-01) recently wrote to us with the news that he

and Sofia were celebrating the birth of their first child, Francisco Maria, who was born on 7th March. They live in London.

He also informed us that he was recently visited by **Ricardo Irarrazabal** (2001), with his wife and two children, who were making the long journey back to Chile from Scotland. He writes that, "We obviously reminisced about the good times in Netherhall but quickly moved on so as not to embarrass ourselves in front of our wives!"