



Interview with Jeremy Madin

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In 2001, Jeremy Madin arrived from Christ Church Grammar School in Perth to succeed Bruce Carter's 15-year headmastership at Cranbrook. It was not long before he took the first steps towards the development that would become one of the defining legacies of his own eleven-year headmastership: Cranbrook's purchase of the old Rose Bay Bowling Club site later that year would allow for the construction of a new purpose-built Junior School, to replace that which was then housed in the Furber Building. The rest, it goes without saying, is history.

Beyond the physical, many of Jeremy Madin's contributions to Cranbrook have been 'spiritual' in nature. He has sought to continue in earnest the school's tradition of nurturing the individual, encouraging the production of 'Renaissance men' and caring for each other. In particular, a new program of pastoral care – administered through the house system – was instituted under his leadership. In recent years, this has been expanded to include a systematic ethics program, which all teachers have been equipped to instruct.

The house system itself has also been expanded – modestly – with the creation of a new house to accommodate a judicious increase in school numbers, in response to the reorganization of the Senior School campus. Harvey House is named after Sir John Harvey, the first chairman of the Cranbrook School Council and namesake of the building Harvey House, now known as Street House.

Cranbrook has continued its status as one of the best performing non-selective boys' schools in the academic realm; this has been supported by the implementation of a structured 'teaching and learning framework' in the Senior School, and a common curriculum through the International Baccalaureate in the Junior School. Further, the arts have flourished, with initiatives such as Curating Cranbrook and the publication of literary magazines reinforcing the liberal education that the school seeks to imbue in its students.

Jeremy Madin's successor, Nicholas Sampson, has been the Master of Marlborough College in England since 2004 and was previously the Principal of Geelong Grammar School. He has a strong interest in literature and the arts, and holds a Master of Arts in English Literature from the University of Cambridge. His appointment continues an association with Marlborough College that pervades Cranbrook's history: three headmasters – Brian Hone, Gethyn Hewan and Mark Bishop – either taught at or attended Marlborough.

Jeremy Madin kindly agreed to an extended interview with the Old Cranbrookians' Association to reflect on his eleven years of headmastership and on the future of Cranbrook.

Thank you for taking the time to speak to the OCA.

My pleasure.

Starting with the new Junior School (and congratulations on its recent completion!) – what was your initial vision in conceptualizing this “School in the Park” on the old Rose Bay Bowling Club site?

Two things really – first, I think it’s vital that primary school boys have a tonne of space; they don’t learn and they’re not settled in class unless they run like mad before school, at recess, and at lunch time. It concerned me that whilst the Junior School 3-6 here at Furber was a terrific building, and had great teaching and all those things, it was really a school on the side of a cliff with a concrete playground. So I wanted the boys to have more space.

Secondly, we really wanted to see Kindergarten to Year 6 integrated, so that, for example, a Year 6 boy might be writing a story and he can read it to a Year 2 boy, and all those sorts of things.

In fact there is a third really important thing: it was vital that we could get a chance to reconfigure the whole school – in order to do anything here at Bellevue Hill, you needed a game-changer. You needed somehow to move one part of the campus – whether it be boarding, or Years 3-6, or sports facilities – to somewhere else. So in 2001, we actually looked at a whole range of sites, such as Holy Cross Primary School, which was up for sale. But the bottom line was that we knew that the best possible place was the Rose Bay Bowling Club land – the last 2 ¼ acres of open space in the eastern suburbs, next to our playing fields – and if we could get that, then all other bets would be off. It’s given us tremendous flexibility.

This opening of the new Junior School is, then, really the culmination of your decade of headmastership – the process of buying the land, obtaining the necessary approvals, and then actually building the new complex. Do you see that as your main legacy as headmaster?

Buildings are very important, and being able to reconfigure the school so that you can have educational programs that are most effective is really important, but the *most* important thing is the boys and the spirit. I don’t like to talk of “legacy” particularly, because I’m one of a team, and we’re all passionate about the school and its values. Right from the beginning, the thing that struck me about Cranbrook was that there is a deep belief in the valuing of the individual and the nurturing of creativity.

And that doesn’t mean there isn’t wonderful corporate spirit too, but unless the individual feels strong enough in himself to contribute, then those other consequences won’t follow. So to me, if there was to be a legacy, I would hope that it would be a continuing honouring of the tradition of the school’s values, a continuing building of spirit and of assistance to each other, and a real focus on learning: I’m a teacher; I love evidence-based things – my background was law and history, for example.

I think that if you’re to talk of legacy, one important part of it must be that we now have a common language of pedagogy – of teaching practice – across all departments. That was a wonderful project driven by Mark McAndrew, Hilary Dixon, Helen Love – I’m hugely supportive of it. And we’ve got all departments now using similar forms of inquiry, so you have the same *language* of inquiry across the whole school. And in the Junior School, we now have a common curriculum through the International Baccalaureate. So to me, those projects have been far more significant things than the approvals and fundraising and building of the new Junior School – time-consuming though that has been. But it is those projects, I think, that are at the heart of the school, which is the boys and the feeling that they can be good learners, and spirited, and punch above their weight on the playing field – and those are really important things that set you up for life.

One element of those educational developments to which you've referred is the development of pastoral care programs, which did not previously exist. What was your initial intention with these programs?

Again it was a team thing – but when I arrived at Cranbrook, I found a great house system, but one in which there was perhaps too much emphasis on the housemaster as the repository of all that is pastoral, with the tutors – many of them great people – in more administrative roles. It concerned me that that was a waste of their great talents, and so we've tried to build the role of the tutor as part of the house team.

Secondly, I felt that there was an enormously good opportunity to deal with some of the big social issues and human issues – whether they be to do with cyber bullying, or resilience, all those things – overtly through the house system. That way, we wouldn't be relying simply on those tutors and housemasters who naturally talked about and helped in those areas; rather, we would have all the tutors engaged in a systematic program of thinking about different issues in a cyclic curriculum. Again, Helen Love was a driver there, as well as the great team of housemasters, and so we introduced the pastoral care program.

On top of that, when Michael Parker returned, he brought a wonderful initiative, which I've been thrilled to support, and that is to layer on top of the pastoral care program a properly systematic ethics program from Years 7-11. Two legs of it have been trialed and are working well across those year groups – one is the actual ethics lessons, and all teachers have been trained to give them. So if you're a tutor, you give ethics lessons every couple of weeks. That's also provided great professional development for everyone – thinking about the ethical issues and conflicts and situational analysis and so on.

The second leg is the special events that parents can be engaged in too, such as the Festival of Ideas dinners, where they debate around the table. And to link them together, all the ethics lessons are emailed to parents every fortnight, so that families can talk about them around the kitchen table.

The third element is to have a broad ethical service element that goes beyond the very good tradition of service here. Michael has developed that significantly; he went on a study trip earlier this year to explore opportunities within Australia and overseas, and that's underway now. So the three legs of the ethics program, on top of the existing pastoral care program, result in a much more systematic way of caring for kids and having them care for each other.

You've seen the creation of a new house – Harvey House – this year; what were the 'push' factors that brought it into existence, and how do you see it as affecting the future expansion or development of the school?

One thing that has come through in every survey of parents, old boys and teachers is that the school must not become too big. We're the smallest school in the CAS (in many cases, by far) – which means major challenges in winter sports, in particular – but balanced against that is the fact that there are many boys who'd like to come here. We're a non-selective school, and proudly so – we believe passionately in every boy bringing different strengths to bear – so we must offer a very wide range of upper school HSC subjects, more than a selective school would. And yet if our numbers are too small, that's highly uneconomic.

So there were number of choices – first, become more selective, and cut out students who bring great richness to our lives at the school; secondly, charge more for the upper years of schooling; or thirdly, simply add judiciously to the numbers, so that you can maintain the very wide range of types of course – from your Latin and Extension Maths, to a range of technical and creative courses. We chose the latter, working on the principle that we know the boys very well through the house system – an average year group of 135 students could happily become 155 without it

being a difficulty. To maintain pastoral care, though, we needed another house. We can remain limited but we will now be nearly as big as St Aloysius, and about two-thirds the size of the bigger CAS schools, instead of half as big. That's not a bad thing, especially as we don't accept sporting scholarships, so it's important that we all have a chance to play well against the opposition.

But a lot of thought went into the question of whether the school should expand – certainly it *could*, once Years 3-6 were moved to Rose Bay – but any expansion could not simply fill the space left in the Furber Building, because you need space for the big priorities of the Senior School master plan, such as a large school gathering place, better facilities for drama and music, and a truly integrated library / IT learning commons. Another priority is to build into this campus an independent study centre for senior boys, so that you're not sitting in the rain on benches around the school in study breaks. So we had the *potential* to grow by quite a lot, but we decided that there had to be an absolute limit: one more class group per year group. That's a cap – you never know what will happen in the future, but there's a strong feeling that it shouldn't be more than that.

From next term, the mathematics department will be in the Furber Building, where we have twelve classrooms that are being refurbished at the moment to be more suitable for senior boys. There will also be three houses (Harvey, Wakehurst and Chelmsford) – one on each level – because currently there are often two houses close together on the same level in the Senior School building. At the same time, we're extending the space behind the gym so that you don't have a 'pinch point' for student movement, and we've put ramps from Bishop Court up to Teaching Street, and a big lift on the Hordern Oval side of the Carter Building. So there'll be much better movement through the school.

What challenges or goals do you think your successor, Nicholas Sampson, might have?

Nick has just been here for ten days for handover and familiarization – it's been an enormous pleasure having him here. He is a thoughtful, interesting bloke and he fully supports the liberal educational tradition of this school. Nick will speak for himself, but a number of our big master planning challenges are first to bring the Bellevue Hill campus to the same high standard as our new Junior School, and to rethink the space here. Another big challenge is really engaging with Asia better: we've done some good work in that direction – we've introduced Mandarin as a new subject this year, we've got more exchanges and we want to really build links with other schools. I have little doubt that, particularly with Nick's experience with Asia and the wider world, there's a good opportunity there, if that's the way the school wants to go.

Another challenge is being able to manage really good sport in a more highly competitive environment, and to bring the joy back into sport, without having to compromise on issues such as sporting scholarships. We want to be able to offer smarter and better coaching – staff can't always do this, even though they may be great teachers. We need to hire top coaches.

Another really important area is the significant pressure on understanding technology – from next term, for example, each student will have his own laptop. But to better find the balance between what's essential in human relations and inquiry in learning (as opposed to mere access to vast quantities of information from a range of information sources), there is a constant challenge to navigate the technological world better.

A fourth area in which I know Nick Sampson brings enormous interest and expertise is the whole issue of whether our pastoral care program should really start looking, in an integrated way, at total wellbeing. He introduced the wellbeing project to Geelong Grammar School, and it's now leading the way in Australia; he worked with Prof. Martin Seligman from the USA in training all the staff differently in how they relate to each other. So I think that's an area of great interest.

In the academic area, as we move towards an Australian national curriculum, we want to make sure that we retain the rigour of the NSW curriculum. One way may be to consider the International Baccalaureate diploma. So there's a lot of fascinating challenges out there.

What are your plans post-headmastership?

Sally and I are going back to the farm – I really want to learn a lot more about farming. We came out of running an irrigation property into teaching, because we needed more cash flow for the irrigation scheme and got part-time jobs teaching in the local town! We fell in love with teaching and we've had a wonderful journey. But we couldn't manage irrigation while teaching and moving around the country, so we sold it and now have a grazing property, which has been leased out. It's given me wonderful projects during the holidays – fencing, shedding and getting dams sorted – but I really want to learn to better raise Angus beef.

On top of that, I really want to travel a lot more; as a typical headmaster, you don't have a lot of holidays each year, but I've been lucky enough to get to Antarctica on a Mawson huts expedition, but I really want to spend a couple of months along the Silk Route. I'm not retiring from work, but I'm retiring from the school, and I'm itching to get engaged in farming again.

I presume you'll still be on call for the odd Cranbrook function?

Absolutely; one thing I've loved about Cranbrook is the way that old boys welcome you and welcome each other, recognize differences – they're remarkable. I've been involved in reunions at many schools – schools I've led, schools where I've been a pupil – and there's nowhere that you find such open interest in everyone being different, and such warmth, as among Cranbrook old boys. That's something that I hope has built over the last decade, in working with Martin Pitt and Jim Morrow originally, and then James Williams and now Anthony Lees and David Lynch. We're trying to build more connections – we've built them in the country, which is really important, and it means that there are many more country boarders now; and we've built more overseas, with people going off to do really interesting expat activities. So if I'm traveling, I'd love to be able to connect with people, as an ambassador for Nick.

One highlight that I'd just mention before closing – I'm a history teacher and I love art, drama and things like that – is that I like seeing boys run the show in those areas. One thing that has been a thrill for me is to see people having a go at writing. One of the greatest joys was the development of Benchmark, by Jacqui Grassmayr, which grew out of the poetry compilations that Tony Ronaldson started. To me, seeing the literary side of school life developing is wonderful – this year in fact, there's now a new monthly magazine started by a number of boys called Antic, which is in competition to the Chronicle. They've even got an app and a website! To me, that's what it's all about – having a dream, and going for it, and in particular, being prepared to commit yourself on paper. And I love the way that this is the only school I know of in Australia where the 24- or 32-page weekly magazine, the Chronicle, is essentially written, edited and put together by the boys.

Thank you very much for your time.

It's a pleasure.