



# East Oxford Community Classics Centre: Our First Year

by Lorna Robinson

The East Oxford Community Classics Centre (EOCCC) has now been open to the public since October 14th 2013. It was set up and is run by The Iris Project and hosted at Cheney School, a large comprehensive school serving the East of the city of Oxford. It is run in association with the University of Oxford. The purpose of the Centre has been to provide a permanent presence within the school for all pupils to engage with the Classics in a range of different ways, and also to provide an exciting and accessible place for visitors of all ages from the local community to experience Classics and attend lessons, workshops, storytelling sessions and many other events. Activities are provided with no charge.

After a year of preparation involving extensively redecorating the space with vivid murals, new furniture and the creation of a classics library and miniature museum of original artefacts, the centre was officially opened with a large community festival. Hundreds of local school children, families and visitors attended to take part in classics-themed activities and stalls. Professor Mary Beard and Dr. Armand D'Angour gave excellent opening talks. Throughout its first year, the centre has offered hundreds of workshops, talks, and many exciting events, which have been outlined in this report on the EOCCC's first, eventful year!

## EOCCC Weekly workshops, talks and classes

Throughout each school term, we have run workshops and courses delivered by a mixture of volunteers - undergraduates and postgraduates from Oxford University, myself and also volunteers from various institutions. Weekly evening classes have included Beginners' Latin, Greek and Palaeography; and workshops have included drama

and the Odyssey, artefacts imaging, classical myths, and many others. We have also welcomed visiting primary school groups on Wednesday mornings, who have experienced workshops on artefact handling, Roman medicine, ancient Greek, and democracy. Evening talks have included Professor Stephen Harrison and Dr. Justine McConnell both visited the Centre for a Friday evening to deliver talks on 'Rome and Hollywood' and 'Whose Odyssey is it anyway?' respectively. We have also welcomed Professor Helen King who spoke on Roman Medicine, Dr.





Jonathan Katz and Dr. Celia Campbell on Horace.

## Cheney School Projects

### Classics and Positive Psychology for Cheney Plus Inclusion Unit

We delivered a workshop series on classics and positive psychology for Cheney Plus students throughout the summer term. Cheney Plus is a unit within Cheney School where pupils with special needs or those struggling with mainstream school get a personalised curriculum in a dedicated area of the school. The workshops are designed and delivered by Vicky Arvaniti, a positive psychology specialist, in collaboration with The Iris Project. The workshops were trialled in the Easter term, and their success led to the project being run for Cheney Plus pupils as part of a curriculum project. These workshops are the first of their kind, and we are making the resources we have prepared available for others to use.

### Mosaic Project

In January, 16 Year 8 and 9 Design & Technology students from Cheney School began a Roman mosaics project. The project began with a talk by Dr. Will Wootton on Thursday 9th January as an introduction to Roman mosaics. The students visited Chedworth Roman Villa to see the mosaics there and they received a guided tour by a local expert. The team

of Cheney students, led by mosaics expert Clare Goodall and assisted by local artist Katy Pike and the author, then had the task of designing and constructing the mosaic. We held two sessions exploring ideas for what might be depicted in the mosaic, and pupils all gave their views on what they would like to appear. Clare then drew up a design image for the four panels which incorporated the students' ideas, including a backdrop of Oxford city, the Headington Shark, a mini (built and designed in East Oxford) and a bicycle, the River Thames flowing through all the panels, open books as a pattern at the base of the panels, the goddess Iris and a number of other elements. The sessions were run twice every week after school from January through until the end of June. Students also attended all day sessions in the holidays. The mosaic panels were unveiled on 11<sup>th</sup> July.

### Themed Days

On 16<sup>th</sup> January we put on the first themed day event, the Roman Medicine Day. Professor Helen King from Open University spent the day with us and delivered a series of talks to various Cheney classes, on topics ranging from Galen to the Roman army. Artefact experts Towse and Graham Harrison brought their wide range of original and replica Roman surgical instruments and ran a number of workshops for groups. Pupils got to see some of the grisly equipment used to operate on and treat Romans two thousand years ago, including bone drills and blood-letting

cups. The Lane Building was decorated with graffiti walls, facts about Roman medicine, an apothecary store and a wide range of posters and other decorations. At lunch time there was Roman food, a healing and poison stall, the opportunity to have fresh wounds painted onto arms and faces, as well as a team of floating Roman doctors to diagnose and treat the wounded! After school there was a community artefacts workshop followed by an evening talk from Professor Helen King.

On 1<sup>st</sup> April we held a Classical Myth Day. This involved a series of workshops which took place across the day, aimed at pupils in Years 7 and 8, as well as a community after-school workshop and some peripheral activities. The storytelling workshops were run by the UNMYTHABLE team, who have created a highly-acclaimed show based on classical myths which they tour internationally. There was a school wide competition on the day which involved the students devising a summary of a classical myth in 30 words. Entries were tweeted and put up around school on the day. At tutor group registration time, volunteers visited classes to tell a classical myth in costume.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> July EOCCC held a double-bill of Ancient Athens-themed days to explore Athenian culture, language and history. The days were organised to coincide with the Year 6 Transfer Days, so incoming students could learn all about the Ancient Athenians while attending Cheney School for the first time. Athenian re-enactment organisation *Comitatus* came to camp on site at the school overnight





for two nights, bringing with them eight re-enactors, two beautiful white horses and their grooms, and a dazzling array of armour and equipment! They held six shows on the Athletics Field across the two days for Cheney students, Transfer Day students and also a community show for local primary school groups and other visitors. Their shows involved displays of their weapons including archery and javelins, live wrestling, bare-back horse riding and much more. Throughout the shows, Catherine Conyard commented, explaining the use of weapons in battle by the Athenians, and the historical sources used to recreate these items. Once the shows were over, students were able to try the helmets and shields for themselves, as well as meet the horses and re-enactors. Alongside the shows were several Greek-themed stalls, including face-painting, 'Parthenon'-building, an ancient Greek lucky dip, Greek bracelet-making and mask-making, as well as a display of some of the artefacts the Classics Centre is lucky enough to own. The Oxford University Greek Play team delivered a 'Greek Tragedy Circuit' for the Year 6s, where they got to take part in a Greek chorus and take part in a debate about the trial of Orestes, as well as making masks of the Furies, the vengeful spirits of Greek myth. Greek speaking workshops were held for older Cheney students, as well as a series of talks on Athens and the origins of Democracy for a range of audiences, delivered by Dr. David Carter from the University of Reading.

On 19<sup>th</sup> June a group of 33 Cheney School students from Years 8 to 11 set off on a trip to visit Hadrian's Wall as part of EOCCC's first residential trip. We visited Durham Cathedral and the University for a lecture on Hadrian's Wall by Dr. Darrell Rhol on our way up. While on the Wall, we visited Arbeia Roman Fort, Bede's World, Housesteads, Vindolanda and the Roman Army Museum. On our way home, we visited Chester's Roman Amphitheatre where students and staff took part in the time-honoured game of 'it' in the arena!

### Overview and future plans

Thanks in large part to the immense support from Cheney School, this year's activities at the Centre have been a great success. The themed days went extremely well, and the workshops which have taken place have been very well-received. The Mosaics Project was enjoyed by all and produced a beautiful work of art at the end. The Cheney Plus workshops and

Hadrian's Wall trip have been very popular and well-received too.

Funding, as one might expect, has been the main area of difficulty. There has been no funding for any time spent on any of the setting up and day-to-day running of the Centre. The Classics Conclave generously funded the Mosaics project and the University of Oxford kindly fund the DBS child-protection checks and travel costs for their university students when they teach at the Centre. The Hellenic Society awarded a grant towards the costs of the Athens Days. Other than these, no other funds have been received for the Centre since the centre was opened in October. This means that the Centre relies on someone willing to run it full time without recompense – this obviously raises serious sustainability issues long term which we are exploring.

For next year, the weekly workshops, courses and talks will continue, and we have a Roman cookery project due to start in September for Cheney School students followed by plans for a Sundial project in the New Year. We also have a Classical astronomy day scheduled for January 2015. The Centre is working closely to expand classics provision within the school time table. Cheney School hopes to offer Ancient History as an A Level option from September 2015. Through EOCC it will offer A Level Latin as a city-wide option from September 2014 – a group of 8 is already signed up. A new 'Classics Enrichment' course is also being developed and will be offered from September 2014 to Year 9 students on the curriculum.

### Festival of Ancient Tales

We are hosting a large community festival on 3<sup>rd</sup> October called the 'Festival of Ancient Tales'. This event will celebrate the Centre being open for a year, and several authors are giving talks, including Caroline Lawrence, Adele Geras, Lindsey Davis and Tom Holland. An evening performance is being given by Carol Ann Duffy. As with the opening festival, there will be stalls, activities, exhibitions and drama, as well as live music and dance. Schools, students, families and visitors of all ages are most welcome to attend and details can be found on the Iris website.

**Lorna Robinson is the Director of The Iris Project and East Oxford Community Classics Centre.**

