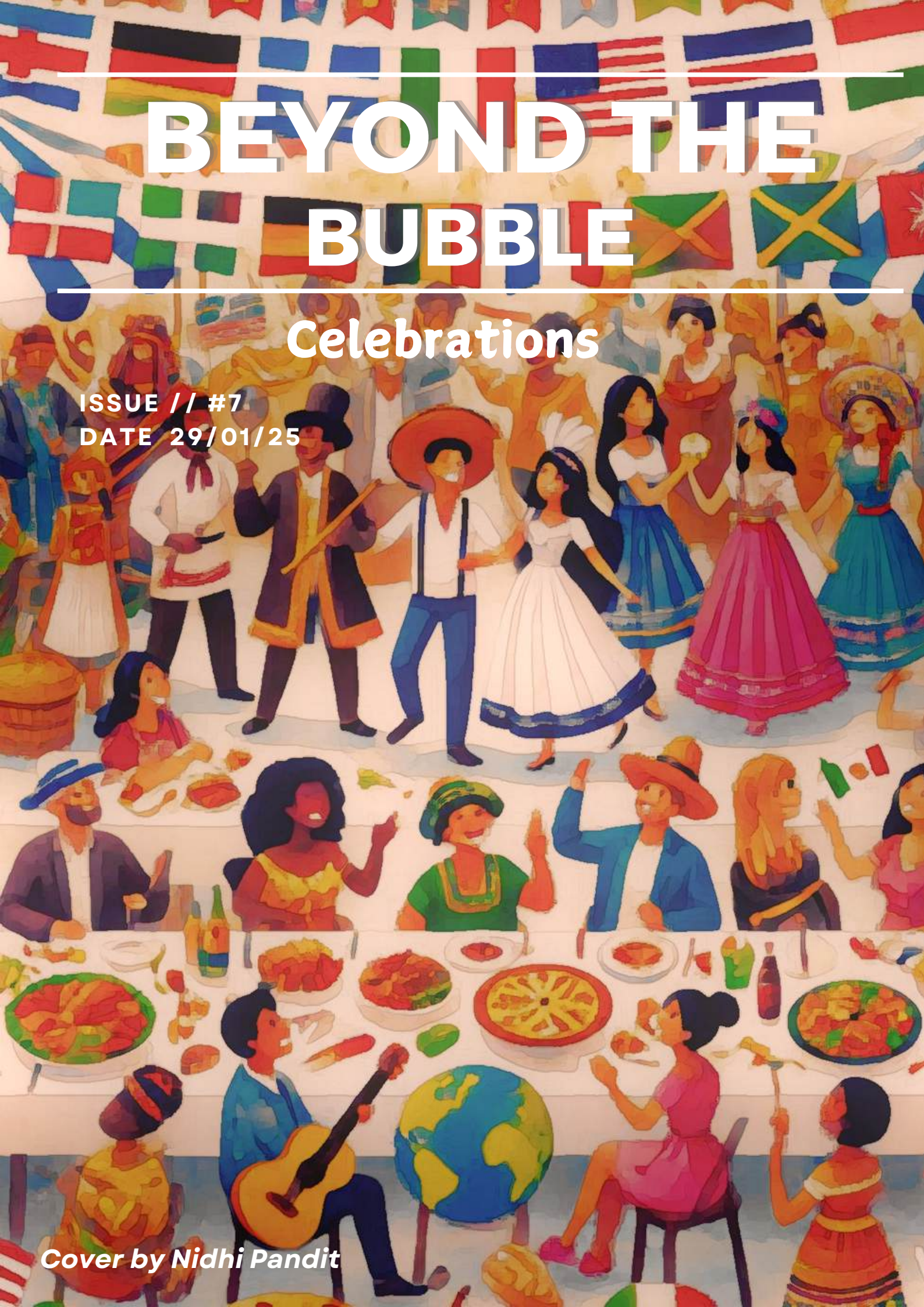




BEYOND THE BUBBLE

Celebrations

ISSUE // #7

DATE 29/01/25

Cover by Nidhi Pandit

FROM THE EDITOR

Hello and welcome to the first edition of Beyond the Bubble for this year!

As we turn the page to a new chapter, the team at Beyond the Bubble has chosen the theme of 'Celebration' as the foundation for this issue. Why, you ask? Because celebration is so much more than just parties and festivities—it's a way of moving through life. It's how we pause amidst the chaos, take stock of the beauty around us, and honour the resilience, achievements, and connections that make our lives meaningful.

In this edition, we explore the many ways celebration manifests in our world. From the timeless traditions of languages and cultural festivities to moments closer to home—like Herschel's unforgettable Diwali Night and Big Iftar—this issue is a tribute to the joy of togetherness. But we didn't stop there! We also uncovered stories of courage and triumph, celebrating the unwavering spirit of soldiers, sportspeople, and even the surfers of the Gaza Surf Club, who ride waves of resilience against all odds. And because no celebration is complete without a touch of fun, we've wrapped it all up with a must-read, hilarious 'Wicked' review by our lovely Mrs. Sahi.

This is my second edition as Editor, and I must say, working on this issue with the incredibly talented Beyond the Bubble team has been an absolute blast! From brainstorming ideas to diving into some thought-provoking conversations, every part of the process has been so fulfilling. I truly can't believe how quickly time has flown—it feels like we just wrapped up the last issue! I'm already looking forward to diving into the next one and seeing what exciting ideas the energy and creativity of our team will bring.

Celebration is not simply an event—it's a mindset. It's a reminder to find joy in small victories, honour big milestones, and embrace the moments that truly matter. We hope this edition inspires you to seek out and celebrate all the reasons to smile, laugh, and keep moving forward. Here's to starting the year with positivity, perspective, and plenty of joy!

Until the next issue!

Tanisha Shah



Table of Contents:

ARTICLES

- 4** **Christmas Markets: Embrace the Giving Season**
- 5** **Commemorating the Antibullying Ambassadors of the World**
- 6** **The Big Iftar: A Herschel Special**
- 7** **A Day of Celebration of the Efforts of Soldiers**
- 9** **Some of our Greatest Sportsmen Hidden**
- 11** **Celebrating the Festival of Lights**
- 13** **The Power of Inclusive Communication**
- 14** **Surf's On! The Gaza Surf Club**
- 15** **Forging Friendships through the Olympics**
- 16** **The Not-so 'Wicked' Witch of the West**

Happy Reading!



Christmas Markets: Embrace the Giving Season

By David Sedlacek

Christmas markets are a staple of Christmas celebrations worldwide, which aim to entice people together to enjoy a variety of festive treats and embrace the celebration to its fullest. The smell of sweet foods roasting over a fire, the jeer of toddlers in awe, metal being shaped into various ornaments, wood being carved into small toys or trinkets and a giant coniferous tree glistening with lights and shiny decorations. There are many famous ones you can visit, such as the one in Nuremburg (Germany), Vienna (Austria), or Strasbourg (France). If you are looking for something more local, there is one in Wiltshire too!

The History of the Beloved Markets

Christmas markets have a rich history that dates back to the Middle Ages in Europe, particularly in Germany. The tradition began in towns like Dresden and Nuremberg, where local vendors would gather in the weeks leading up to Christmas to sell handmade goods, seasonal foods, and festive decorations. These markets were originally intended to provide communities with essentials for the winter season, as well as to offer a place for social gatherings. Over time, they evolved into vibrant celebrations of the Christmas season, filled with holiday cheer, music, and food. Today, Christmas markets can be found in cities around the world, spreading warmth and joy during the festive season.



Did you know that some Christmas markets have been running for over 600 years, making them some of the oldest traditions in Europe? In Munich, there's a market dedicated entirely to medieval crafts, where vendors wear period costumes. In some markets across Germany, visitors can enjoy Christmas-themed escape rooms or ride vintage carousels for a truly unique holiday experience. Some markets even feature live nativity scenes with real animals, bringing the festive spirit to life in a magical way.



Exploring the Christmas Markets



But what exactly can you do to really utilise a market to its fullest, I mean, with the amount going on it can be overwhelming for a few, so where do you begin? Christmas market stalls can generally be divided into three different groups. Food stalls, which can sell general food/refreshments, or they could also sell more traditional foods such as hot mulled wine, roasted chestnuts or gingerbread creations. Clothing stalls, which sell any kind of warm woolly or climate-based clothing, maybe warm sheepskin shoes or a scarf with a snowman embroidered onto it. And last but definitely not least, accessory stalls, which can sell anything from snow globes, stained glass jewellery, wooden idols and even in some cases miniature metal knight helmets and small metal dragons.



That's not all the market has to offer however as there is usually also a band playing some music and if you visit the right one, there might also be an ice rink to allow for some ice skating, maybe even a carousel or a small Ferris Wheel. This collective sense of celebration is what can bring people from all different types of backgrounds and paths of life together. In essence that is what Christmas is about, and these markets can encapsulate that perfectly into a cherished, festive, timeless experience.

Commemorating the Antibullying Ambassadors of the World

By Sandeep Kota

Bullying, in all its forms, has plagued societies for generations, leaving lasting scars on individuals and communities. Yet, throughout history, there have been extraordinary figures who stood against such injustices, promoting compassion, understanding, and equality. These leaders have acted as shining examples of courage and empathy, embodying the principles of anti-bullying and inspiring countless others to follow in their footsteps. Here, we celebrate the contributions of a few remarkable individuals who have championed these ideals.

Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first Black president, dedicated his life to dismantling the apartheid regime and fostering reconciliation in a deeply divided nation. Imprisoned for 27 years, Mandela emerged not with a heart full of vengeance but with a mission to unite his country through forgiveness. His leadership demonstrated how understanding and mutual respect can heal even the deepest wounds, serving as a powerful example for those striving to counter bullying and discrimination in all forms.

Mandela's commitment to equality and human dignity remains a cornerstone of the global fight against oppression.



Desmond Tutu

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, another South African icon, worked tirelessly alongside Mandela to end apartheid, advocating for justice, peace, and human rights. Known for his infectious laughter and commitment to fairness, Tutu called out the "structures of sin" that center on inequality and harm. His efforts to bring communities together and address systemic bullying at both societal and individual levels have left an undeniable mark on the world. His activism began during the early years of Apartheid, when he became an outspoken advocate for racial equality, using his platform as a bishop to challenge discriminatory laws and practices. Through it all, Tutu's moral courage reminds us that tackling injustice requires both bold action and a compassionate heart.



The Dalai Lama

Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, has long been a symbol of compassion and nonviolence. Forced into exile after China's occupation of Tibet, he transformed his suffering into a message of universal love and understanding. The Dalai Lama's teachings emphasize the importance of empathy, urging people to address conflicts and bullying with patience and kindness. His vision of a harmonious world, where differences are celebrated rather than suppressed, continues to inspire global efforts to build more inclusive and respectful communities.

The world's greatest leaders have taught us that combating bullying requires more than just addressing individual incidents—it demands systemic change and a commitment to empathy and justice. Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and the Dalai Lama are just a few of the many figures who have illuminated the path forward, along with Malala Yousafzai, Mahatma Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King Jr. By learning from their examples, we can build a future rooted in kindness, respect, and dignity for all.

The Big Iftar: A Herschel Special

By Jannet Ali

Ramadan is a sacred month in Islam and one of the five pillars of the faith. During this month, Muslims fast daily from sunrise to sunset, refraining from all food and water during daylight hours. The day begins with a pre-dawn meal called Suhoor, which provides the energy needed for the fast, and at sunset, the fast is broken with a meal known as Iftar. This daily practice of fasting is not just about physical restraint but also about spiritual reflection and devotion.

In addition to fasting, Ramadan is a time to focus on avoiding bad deeds and striving to do good. Muslims are encouraged to practice kindness, generosity, and compassion, using this time to improve their character and strengthen their faith. It is a month of self-discipline and personal growth, with an emphasis on doing acts of goodness and seeking inner peace.



Community is an important part of Ramadan, and the spirit of togetherness is strongly encouraged. Many take the opportunity to help others, share meals, and organize events that reflect these values. For example, the sixth-formers planned a special event with the aim of fostering a sense of unity and harmony. Ramadan is not only a time for personal reflection but also for building stronger connections with others and promoting a sense of shared goodwill.



★ The History of Ramadan ★

The history of Ramadan dates back to the 7th century when the Quran, the holy book of Islam, was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad during this month. It is believed that the first verses of the Quran were revealed on a night known as Laylat al-Qadr, or the Night of Decree, which is considered the holiest night of Ramadan. The practice of fasting during this month was established as a way to commemorate this significant event, serving as a time for the Muslim community to become closer to God through self-discipline, worship, and reflection. The observance of Ramadan has since become a central pillar of Islam, rooted in its traditions and history.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ The Big Iftar ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Last year, on the 22nd March for the first time in Herschel history, an event called The Big Iftar was held at our school! This included over 60 students and approximately 13 staff members coming together to break their fast collectively, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

The lead organiser had commented: "We held the big Iftar for the first-time last year to bring the sixth form community together and show everyone how we spend our evening during Ramadan. There were a mix of games, quizzes, henna stalls, a recitation and then the most exciting part of the event- the meal! The run up to the Iftar was quite stressful, particularly for the lead organisers who were in year 13 and preparing for A-levels; nonetheless, it was an absolute joy to plan the event. We were told by the lead organisers of year 13 last year to make sure the big Iftar next year is bigger and better than this year - which is exactly our aim!"

One of the greatest things that came from this dinner, was simply the fact that everybody came together, celebrated and just enjoyed themselves. Whether it was taking part in or setting up the activities everyone had something to remember and keep. We look forward to this event being held in the future as we have heard such positive things about it from all.

A Day of Celebration of the Efforts of Soldiers

By Minyoung Modak-Chowdhury

The 11th hour on the 11th of November is when 2 minutes of silence are held for Remembrance Day to pause, remember and respect as well as celebrate those who fought and laid down their lives in World War I. This date is significant because this was the official time when the war ended, and the fighting ceased. Remembrance Day is also known as Poppy Day since poppies are often worn as a symbol of respect to the soldiers of WWI.

The Meaning Behind the Colours of the Poppies

The concept of poppies was inspired by the war poem "In Flanders Field" which was written by Canadian Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae during the war. These flowers grew in the battlefields that were left behind and were soon made a symbol for those who died in those fields.



The red poppy is the most famous poppy and is used to honour those who died in WW1 and the following conflicts.. And this coloured poppy is said to represent remembrance and hope.



However, some feel that the red poppy glorifies war and conflict and so instead wear a white poppy. This poppy is handed out by a peace promoting charity and focuses on achieving peace while commemorating those who died. The white poppy is a symbol of peace, hope and new beginnings and is also associated with faith and eternal life of the soul.

White poppies were first made in 1933 by the Women's Co-operative Guild. The Co-operative Wholesale Society had its own workers make the white poppies, and the money raised went to groups like War Resisters' International.



At the time, many people in the anti-war movement were worried that, even though the horrors of the First World War were still fresh in people's minds, governments were already planning for another war. In 1936, the Peace Pledge Union started making the white poppy, and they've been doing it ever since.



The black poppy is worn as a tribute to the contribution of the Black, African and Caribbean people, both as soldiers and civilians. The black poppies were launched by the BlackPoppyRose organisation. The BlackPoppyRose was launched in 2010 by Selena Carty and the black poppy is said to signify pride, honour and glory, while also highlighting the resilience and sacrifice of these communities throughout history.

The purple poppy is used to remember the animals that died during the war due to being used for several different purposes. Horses and donkeys, in particular, were mostly injured or killed during the war being first used as cavalry and officer's mounts and later used for pulling supply wagons, artillery guns and some small but sturdy horses carried shells and ammunition with ponies. Around 368,000 horses were deployed on the Western Front in the war. Dogs and pigeons were also used as messengers and to fill other roles such as companions.

The History Behind the Poppies

The poppies came into action as a result of the first World War. As the words "World War" suggest, most of the world did participate in one way or another in the war. While it was majorly a conflict between the European powers, their colonies also came into play during the war providing vital backup along the way. Other countries from all over also took part by either cutting ties or providing back up by sending supplies to either side. There were people from all continents, ethnicities, backgrounds and religions fighting at the battle front but also working and providing essential backup while leading their civilian lives.

Honouring Soldiers Through Other Tributes

There were many monuments built to honour the fallen soldiers from different religions that fought in the war such as the Muslim Burial Ground and Peace Gardens in Woking.

Originally serving as a burial place for 19 Muslim soldiers from WWI in 1915 and a further 8 from WWII later, this site was constructed so that the Muslim soldiers would be buried according to the religious rites. Although the soldier's bodies were later relocated to the Brookwood Military Cemetery, the site still remained a sacred place and was later restored as an Islamic-styled Peace Garden.



Another example is The Chattri located in Brighton. This memorial was built to honour the fallen Indian soldiers (Sikh and Hindu) who died in Brighton War hospitals during 1914-1915. They were cremated on the Downs and in 1921 The Chattri was constructed on the cremation site as a memorial. It stands as a symbol of gratitude and respect, reflecting the contributions of Indian soldiers during the First World War.

The Commonwealth Memorial Gates, located near Buckingham Palace in London, were built to honour the soldiers from Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia who fought for the British Empire during the two World Wars. The gates were inaugurated in 2002, and the pillars are inscribed with the names of the countries and territories that contributed to the war effort. The memorial serves as a lasting tribute to their bravery and sacrifices, ensuring their efforts are remembered and celebrated.

Each year, a remembrance ceremony is held at the site, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds to reflect on the shared history and sacrifices of Commonwealth soldiers. The gates also symbolize the unity and collaboration among nations during times of conflict, serving as a reminder of the importance of global solidarity.



The Neuve-Chapelle Indian Memorial, located in France, commemorates the 4,742 Indian soldiers and laborers who died in the First World War and have no known graves. It was unveiled in 1927 near the site of the Battle of Neuve-Chapelle, where Indian troops played an important role in helping the Allies. The memorial features a tall column with a Lotus capital and the Star of India.



Some of our Greatest Sportsmen Hidden

By Rajan Nainu

When you think achievements in sports this year, you probably think about Messi and Ronaldo carrying their teams to victory, Rodri winning the Ballon D'Or, Djokovic winning Olympic gold for the first time, and so on. However, there are so many achievements that perhaps went under the radar.

GOAL!  Football  **GOAL!**

Let's go back to 2004. It was a strange year for football. Tunisia beat Morocco to win their first African Cup of Nations. Middlesbrough beat Bolton to win the League Cup, their first ever trophy in the club's history. Arsenal won the Premier League, having gone unbeaten the entire season – 26 wins, 12 draws, no losses. San Marino recorded their first ever win. Werder Bremen won the Bundesliga. Valencia won La Liga and the Europa League. Porto beat Monaco to win the Champions League. Greece beat Portugal to win the Euros. I would argue that 2024 is the closest we have come to a year even remotely similar 2004. While not all the teams and players I am about to mention actually won trophies, they did come very close. But before I focus on certain teams and players, let me tell you about Euro 2024.



☆☆☆ Euro 2024 ☆☆☆

The competition was held in Germany from 14th June to 14th July. Georgia made their competitive European Championship debut. Albania, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia returned after missing previous editions. 6 players tied for top scorer – Kane for England, Mikautadze for Georgia, Musiala for Germany, Gakpo for Netherlands, Olmo for Spain, and Schranz for Slovakia. There was also an extraordinary amount of own goals – 10 – which led to a flurry of memes calling 'Own Goal' the true top scorer of the tournament. Spain claimed their spot in history by winning the championship four times, defeating England in a thrilling final with a 2-1 score.

The group stage featured 5 real surprise teams, the first being Albania. While they did not qualify for the knockout stages, Albania should be proud of their effort – in the 'group of death' which featured 3 great teams in Spain, Italy, and Croatia, Albania got a point against Croatia whilst unfortunately losing the other 2 games by slim 1 goal margins. Albania also scored the fastest goal in European Championship history when Nedim Bajrami scored against Italy after just 23 seconds.

The second team is former Manchester United manager Ralf Rangnick's Austria, who topped their group, which featured France, Netherlands, and Poland. They were praised for their attacking, high-intensity, entertaining football, with players like Marcel Sabitzer shining bright.

The third team is Romania, who topped their group featuring Belgium, Slovakia, and Ukraine. It was the tightest group of the tournament, with all 4 teams finished on 4 points, meaning that positions had to be decided by factors such as goal difference.

Romania edged out the competition with a superior goal difference of +2, marking their first knockout-stage appearance in over two decades, a remarkable achievement for them.



The fourth team is Türkiye, whose exciting, free-flowing team kept up with Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal in their group, thanks to players like starlet Arda Guler and Kerem Akturtoğlu.

The fifth team is Georgia, who finished 3rd in their group but still qualified due to being one of the best third-placed teams in the tournament, thanks to an historic win against Portugal.



Paris Olympics 2024:



The Paris Olympics 2024 were held in France from 24th July to 11th August. Two achievements had already been attained before the start – it was the first Olympics to reach full gender parity, with an equal number of male and female athletes, and it broke all-time records for ticket sales, with more than 9.5 million tickets sold. The USA topped the medal table for the 4th consecutive games and 19th time overall – 40 gold, 44 silver, 42 bronze. While China got less overall medals than the US, it had the same number of gold medals, which meant this was the first time a gold medal tie had occurred among the two most successful nations in history. Dominica, Saint Lucia, Cape Verde, Albania, and the Refugee Olympic Team won their first-ever Olympic medals. And Botswana and Guatemala won their first-ever gold medals.



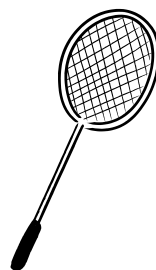
Paris Paralympics 2024:



The Paris Paralympics were held in France from 28th August to 8th September. Like the Olympics, it broke records for ticket sales, with 2.5 million tickets sold. China topped the medal table for the 6th consecutive games with 94 gold, 76 silver and 50 bronze. Mauritius, Nepal, and the Refugee Paralympic Team won their first-ever Paralympic medals. 3 countries made their debuts – Eritrea, Kiribati, and Kosovo – while 9 countries returned after a time of absence – Bangladesh, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, East Timor, Macau, Myanmar/Burma, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, and Turkmenistan. There were 3 podium sweeps – two for China (both in swimming) and one for the Netherlands in athletics.



Zakia Khuadadadi won the Refugee Paralympic Team's first medal with bronze in Taekwondo with Palesha Goverdhan who won bronze, gaining Nepal's first ever medal.

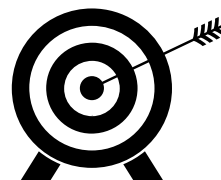


German athlete Thomas Wandschneider won bronze in para badminton at 60 years old, having spent 6 years living in his car as he pursued his Paralympic dream.

Japan's Ito Tomoya won bronze in men's 400m wheelchair racing at age 61. He took up the sport when he accidentally ordered a racing wheelchair and tried it.



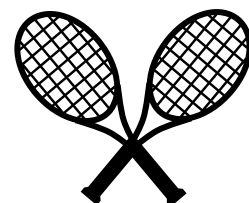
Para archer Jodie Grincham became the first pregnant athlete on a Paralympic podium – she won the women's individual compound and mixed team gold alongside Nathan Macqueen.



Tennis

This year also provided a massive shock as it was the first since 2002 where the 'Big 3' – Novak Djokovic, Roger Federer, and Rafael Nadal – did not win any Open. Jannik Sinner won the Australian and US Open, while Carlos Alcaraz won Wimbledon and the French Open.

Former US Open winner Emma Raducanu is getting back to her best at the Billie Jean King Cup in Spain. While she has had a long injury-hit spell, her performances are on such a level that it is almost like she was never injured. So far, she has not dropped a set in any of her games at the tournament.



Celebrating the Festival of Lights

The Significance of Diwali

By Nidhi Pandit

Diwali is one of the most vibrant festivals celebrated by Hindus around the world. The name 'Diwali' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Deepavali,' which means 'row of lamps.' This festive season symbolises the triumph of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance. The festival is a time for families to come together, clean their homes, decorate with rangoli, and light oil lamps (diyas) to welcome prosperity and happiness. Exchanging gifts, sharing sweets, and bursting fireworks, are all part of the celebration too!



The festival marks the return of Lord Rama, his wife Sita, and his brother Lakshmana to their kingdom after a 14-year exile and victory over the demon king Ravana. It also commemorates the victory of Lord Krishna over the demon Narakasura. In addition, it signifies the renewal of hope for devotees. Historically, Diwali has been celebrated for centuries, with its origins rooted in ancient Hindu scriptures like the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

The Five Days of Diwali

The five days of Diwali have cultural, mythological, and spiritual significance, each day dedicated to specific rituals and stories. The tradition of celebrating Diwali over five days is believed to have roots in ancient Agrarian societies, where each day marked the changing seasons and honoured different deities for blessings of prosperity and protection.

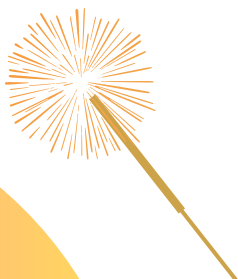


Dhanteras: The first day of Diwali, known as Dhanteras, is dedicated to the worship of Lord Dhanvantari and Goddess Lakshmi. People buy gold, silver, and new utensils on this day for good fortune.

Naraka Chaturdashi: The second day, also called Choti Diwali, marks the victory of Lord Krishna over the demon Narakasura. It is also a day for early morning rituals and cleansing to ward off negative energy.

Lakshmi Puja: The third day, often the most significant, is dedicated to worship Goddess Lakshmi, the deity of wealth and prosperity. Families perform elaborate pujas, light diya, and burst fireworks to welcome her blessings.

Govardhan Puja: The fourth day commemorates the lifting of Mount Govardhan by Lord Krishna, done to protect the people of Gokul from torrential rains. It is also a time for Annakut, where a large variety of vegetarian food is prepared and offered, to show gratitude towards nature.



Bhai Dooj: The fifth and final day celebrates the bond between brothers and sisters, with sisters praying for their brothers' well-being and prosperity while the brothers give gifts as tokens of love.



The Variations of Diwali

This festival is celebrated around the world and, as a result, has a multitude of traditions associated with it. These customs vary by region, yet all emphasize the themes of light, prosperity, and the triumph of good. Through its feasts, rituals and events, Diwali unites people globally in celebration.



While Diwali is predominantly celebrated by Hindus, it is also observed by Jains, Sikhs, and some Buddhists, each adding their own traditions to the festival. In India, Diwali is a public holiday, and the celebrations vary from region to region, reflecting the diverse culture of the country.



In countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, and Mauritius, Diwali celebrations often involve community events, feasts, cultural performances, and lighting of oil lamps. In the country of Nepal, Diwali is also celebrated as Tihar, with a special emphasis on honouring animals, including cows and dogs. In Mauritius, families decorate their homes with colourful lights and fireworks, and in Sri Lanka, temples are illuminated, and prayers are offered for prosperity and health. Meanwhile, in Singapore and Malaysia, the festival focuses on vibrant street processions, dance performances, and traditional food stalls, blending local and Indian cultural elements.

Traditional Delicacies Prepared and Savoured

During Diwali, a wide variety of delicious sweets and snacks are prepared to celebrate the occasion. Popular treats include ladoos, small round sweets made from flour, sugar, and ghee, often flavoured with cardamom or coconut. Barfi, a sweet made from condensed milk and sugar, is another Diwali favourite, with variations like kaju barfi made from cashews. Samosas, crispy pastry pockets filled with spiced potatoes and peas, are a savoury delight enjoyed by many during the festivities. Additionally, jalebi, a deep-fried, syrup-soaked dessert, is a must-have at Diwali feasts, offering a sweet and crispy crunch that's loved by all.



A Herschel Diwali



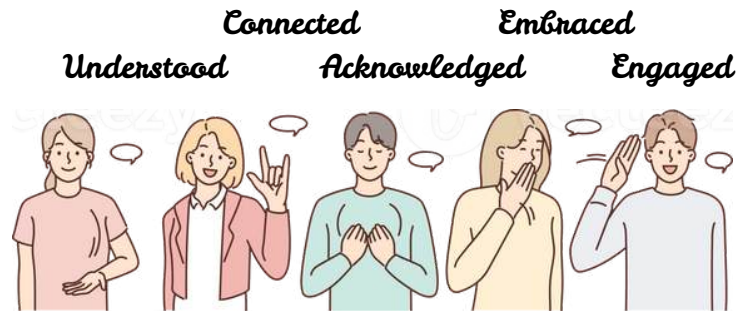
We recently hosted a vibrant Diwali celebration here at Herschel in November for the sixth form, with the hall beautifully decorated in orange garlands and Diya lights, creating a warm, festive atmosphere. Various stalls offered delicious treats like popcorn, candy floss, and a Chaat stand, featuring a popular selection of savoury South Asian snacks made with fried dough, boiled potatoes, chickpeas, and yoghurt. The entertainment included a live Dhol player (an ex-Herschel student) and music that had students dancing with excitement. The evening concluded with everyone gathering outside to light sparklers, bringing a joyful and memorable end to the night.

The Power of Inclusive Communication

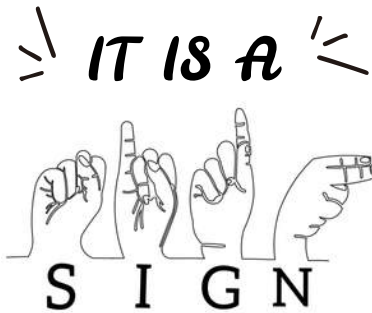
By Tanisha Shah

Imagine it's the 18th century, and a monk named Charles-Michel de l'Épée, frustrated that he couldn't preach to a group of deaf individuals, decides to literally talk with his hands. He cobbled together signs, gestures, and a bit of flair to create a system that evolved into French Sign Language (LSF). He probably didn't know he was about to open the doors to an entirely new mode of human expression.

Now fast-forward to today, where sign language is no longer a niche tool for communication but a vibrant, diverse, and global phenomenon. It's not just about "bridging the gap" between those who hear and those who don't. It's about culture, identity, and growth through the exploration of the world and the unity of communities.



Representation and Celebration



Take the example of Dr. Max Goodwin from the show *New Amsterdam*, a surgeon and hospital administrator who not only learns sign language but uses it as a tool for equity. His efforts to communicate with deaf oncologists and patients go beyond medical necessity; they're a statement about representation and respect. Watching him sign with fluency and compassion feels like a subtle mic drop, a reminder that inclusivity is more than just accessibility—it's about meeting people where they are.

Representation in media, as seen in *New Amsterdam* or the award-winning *CODA*, plays a huge role in bringing sign language into the spotlight. But the beauty of sign language goes deeper than Hollywood. It's about the community it creates and the shared experience it fosters. It's a reminder that language isn't just words; it's connection. In fact, researchers say sign language activates the same parts of the brain as spoken language, proving that communication isn't limited by sound but enriched by human ingenuity.

Of course, the world of inclusive communication isn't without its challenges. The lack of widespread knowledge about sign language still creates barriers. But there's hope. Schools are introducing sign language as part of the curriculum, businesses are embracing interpreters, and video platforms are adding sign-friendly features. Slowly but surely, society is realizing that sign language isn't just a tool for the deaf community; it's a language of empathy and understanding that everyone can benefit from.



And it's not just about inclusion in the moment—it's about legacy. Sign languages, like ASL, BSL, and ISL, carry centuries of history and culture. They remind us of the resilience and creativity of communities who've often been overlooked. Sign language is a vibrant representation of human adaptability, a way of saying, "Where there's a will, there's always a way to connect."

So here's to inclusive communication in all its forms—spoken, signed, written, or sung. Because in a world that's often divided, speaking with our hands might just be the ultimate way to touch hearts.



Surf's On! The Gaza Surf Club



By Angelo Gabriel Abejar

The Gaza Surf Club, founded in 2008 by Explore Corps, is more than just a surfing organisation—it's a lifeline for many in the Gaza Strip. Started as a small initiative to introduce surfing to Palestinian youth, it has grown into a hub for education, empowerment, and community building. Through its work, it provides hope in the region.



The Start of the Surf



The Gaza Surf Club was established during a time when opportunities for recreational and developmental activities in Gaza were scarce. Explore Corps recognised the potential of surfing not just as a sport, but as a means to inspire hope and unity. The founders worked to introduce local youth to surfing, equipping them with the necessary tools and knowledge to embrace the waves. It wasn't just about riding the surf; it was about creating a sanctuary where young people could escape the challenges of daily life and connect with each other through their shared passion.



Over the years, the Gaza Surf Club has grown into more than just a group of surfers. It has become a platform for educational programs and community initiatives. These include workshops on ocean safety, environmental awareness, and even technical training on maintaining and crafting surfboards—resources that are hard to come by in Gaza due to the blockade and limited access to materials.

The club's resilience was tested by the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has brought immense challenges, from damaged infrastructure to restricted movement and resources. Yet, the surfing community continued to persevere, garnering international recognition for its unwavering spirit. Documentaries like Gaza Surf Club have shone a spotlight on their story, capturing the hardships and triumphs of a group of young surfers determined to carve out moments of joy amidst adversity.



Growth and Impact



Surfing in Gaza represents freedom, resilience, and empowerment in a region where such concepts are often hard to grasp. For many of its members, the Gaza Surf Club is not just a sport—it's a lifeline. The waves offer a rare sense of liberation, providing a break from the constraints and pressures of life in the region.

The club also fosters cross-cultural connections. Its story has inspired solidarity among international surfers and humanitarian organizations, sparking donations, collaborations, and awareness campaigns to support its mission.

Looking forward, the Gaza Surf Club aims to expand its reach and impact. Plans include building more educational programs, enhancing facilities, and securing sustainable resources for its surfers. The organisation is also keen to involve more young girls in surfing, promoting inclusivity and breaking traditional gender norms. By investing in its youth and nurturing their talents, the club hopes to empower the next generation of leaders who can contribute positively to Gaza's future.



Forging Friendships Through the Olympics



By Visvajith Vishnu

The Paris 2024 Olympics were filled with unforgettable moments of triumph, resilience, and camaraderie. Among these stories, three athletes across two disciplines—javelin throwers Neeraj Chopra of India and Arshad Nadeem of Pakistan, and Türkiye's sharpshooter Yusuf Dikec—redefined the essence of sportsmanship, proving that competition can coexist with friendship, and in fact helps embrace it.



Rivals Turned Brothers



In the fiercely competitive javelin event, Neeraj Chopra, the reigning Olympic champion from India, faced Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem, who shattered records with a stunning throw of 92.97 meters, clinching Pakistan's first-ever Olympic gold in track and field. Meanwhile, Chopra secured silver, becoming only the fifth Indian to win two Olympic medals.



Beyond their athletic rivalry, Chopra and Nadeem share a deep bond that transcends their nations' historical and political tensions. Their friendship, rooted in mutual respect since 2016, blossomed further during the lead-up to Paris 2024. When Nadeem faced an unexpected challenge—a worn-out javelin that jeopardized his preparations—Chopra didn't hesitate to help. He publicly appealed for sponsors to support his friend, ensuring Nadeem had the equipment needed to compete at his best.



Their camaraderie captured global attention, symbolising that the Olympic spirit is not solely about winning but about uplifting each other and building bridges, even where diplomacy falters. This partnership was celebrated not just by the athletes but also by their families, with both mothers expressing pride and gratitude for the mutual respect and support their sons showed.



Defying Expectations



In the world of shooting, Türkiye's Yusuf Dikec stood out—not just for his skill but for his unassuming demeanor. With one hand casually tucked in his pocket and wearing standard glasses, Dikec made shooting look effortless, earning him the admiration of fans worldwide.



Did you know? Yusuf Dikec's signature "hand-in-pocket" pose started as a trick to steady his nerves during training. This habit eventually became his iconic style!

Despite his laid-back appearance, Dikec's performance was anything but casual. Competing in his fifth Olympics since 2008, he finally broke through to claim a silver medal, securing Türkiye's first-ever Olympic medal in shooting. His achievement resonated with athletes and fans alike, reminding everyone that persistence and dedication can lead to greatness, even after years of falling short.

The Paris 2024 Olympics showcased more than record-breaking performances. It celebrated the way sports unite people across boundaries. Chopra, Nadeem, and Dikec, each in their own way, reminded us that true victory lies in the relationships we build along the way. These athletes not only broke records but also redefined what it means to be a champion.

The Not-so 'Wicked' Witch of the West

By Mrs. Sahi

As someone who's watched 'Wicked' the Musical twice in the West End (the theatre show), I wasn't too sure how the film version of it would hold up. To be honest, I felt I'd be disappointed for sure, as more often than not the film versions of famous productions can fall short (scary flashbacks of 'Les Misérables' the 2012 film came to mind and don't even get me started on the ridiculous 'Cats' the Musical, the 2019 film). Needless to say, it surpassed all expectations - watching 'Wicked' was an absolutely mind-blowing experience, it was a cinematic production like no other!



Without giving away too many spoilers, the story of 'Wicked' is an alternative viewpoint of the events that occurred before and during the events from the famous classic film 'The Wizard of Oz'. Inspired by the novel 'Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West' by Gregory Maguire (1995), think of 'Wicked' as a prequel/back story from the perspective of Elphaba, a character that becomes the Wicked Witch of the West and was painted as an out-and-out villain in 'The Wizard of Oz'.

'Wicked' focuses on the backstories of Elphaba (Cynthia Erivo) and Glinda (Ariana Grande), who becomes Glinda the Good (the fairy in white in The Wizard of Oz) and in doing so, gives a voice to a character that otherwise would have been relegated to a stereotype.

Elphaba's journey challenges societal expectations, while Glinda's transformation shows the complexities of power and influence. Together, their differences allow them to find strength in one another.



As an English teacher I found it refreshing and inspiring that Maguire's story delves wholeheartedly into the fact that every story has two sides, no matter how things may be spun in the mainstream. I think for thinking, feeling and intelligent people, it will really resonate, encouraging viewers to become careful, critical thinkers. I don't want to put the rest of you off though, it is not all 'heavy' undertones and analytical messages - in fact there's so much to 'Wicked' that there really is something for everyone.

There are the astoundingly beautiful visuals in the film which are a credit to the production design, notably in the forest scene, not to mention the musical numbers themselves are so appealing (hello...Ariana Grande, anyone) that they had to create a separate sing-along viewing at many cinemas, just for the sheer number of audience members who wanted to join in the fun.

Just one word to the wise though - don't assume, like me, that all long films automatically have an interval (the film's running time is 2 hours and 40 minutes) - be sure to buy your popcorn before the show!

