

GTS pupils pen letters to Hatchmoor Nursing Home

In these uncertain and unprecedented times the Big History Project at Great Torrington School has shifted from looking back to looking now in the form of the Big Citizenship Project. The focus of the Project is to encourage our Year 7 pupils to stay connected with their families and the communities around them, whilst staying safe and staying at home.

One of the most successful tasks that they Year 7's have been completing is writing a letter to the residents at Hatchmoor Nursing Home. With the excellent support of Jayne Hill, the matron at the nursing home, GTS pupils have been sending letters in huge numbers to residents, full of stories, jokes, pictures and well-wishes, and they have been getting some equally brilliant responses.

One of the main pen-pals from Hatchmoor is Ron Tudge. Ron is a new resident and his witty and insightful replies have bought smiles to the faces of all of those who have read it. Ron provided us with a brief history of his interesting life.

I am the person responsible for the replies you received to your very kind letters to the residents of Hatchmoor Nursing Home. I was impressed by the sincere way some of you approached your task of dealing with elderly folk.

How does one squash 91 years into a few lines? I was born in Birmingham inner city, in my maternal grandmother's home. Quite a different environment from Hatchmoor, sheep, pigs and cattle could be seen when they rushed along the road on the way from railway yard to the nearby slaughterhouse. We soon moved to a brand new council house on the edge of the city, surrounded by fields and hedges with the corresponding wildlife. My mother was a real inner city lady but father was a real country boy who came from his home to the city to get work. He had been employed as a garden trainee at Eastnor Castle near Ledbury. At the time I was born there was a financial crisis, much as we have now.

Between 1929 and 1939 there was much internal strife in the politics of this and other European countries and at the same time countries were jockeying for positions in what was to be the Second World War.

In 1939 the UK declared war on Germany and the one thing affecting children of your age living in the large conurbations, and my age too, was evacuation. By now I was a pupil at King Edward VI's Grammar School, Camp Hill and we were prepared for evacuation to the City of Lichfield. My Dad had been called up for service in the Army and mother decided my sisters and I would be evacuated to live with our father's parents at Upper Colwall on the Malvern Hills. We had many adventures at Malvern on the hills with gander, what a teacher he was.... I could fill a book with his stories. We returned to our proper schools after a while. My mother made a decision that I should leave school when I was sixteen. Jobs were very difficult to get because servicemen were coming home to their former employers and many women and girls did not want to leave jobs they had been doing until end of the war. I wanted to go to higher education but it was too expensive in the days.

I eventually found a job with the City of Birmingham, Veterinary and Food Inspection Department as a clerk and then as Inspector in training. Again a book to tell of our adventures is necessary but after about two years i was called to do my National Service. I was supposed to do two years but it was a

few months longer and I was released just in time to start a two year part time day course at the College. After several examinations I was appointed as a District Inspector and moved to work for Northampton, Sutton Coldfield, Solihull, Meriden Rural District, Leamington Spa and Warwick District. I did 42 years as a local government officer and retired as Chief Environmental Health Officer.



Ron reading letters from GTS pupils

Dear Hatchmoor Nursing Home,

Hello, my name is Aidan. I am a student at Great Torrington School in Year 7, aged 11. Today is my 1st day of home schooling, I think my mum is a bit bossier than the teachers though.

I know there are restrictions because of Coronavirus, to your life, but it is for your safety. This is because over 70's are more vulnerable than people under 70. But like my mum says, there is always a silver lining in every cloud.

I hope you will be safe from Covid-19 and not catch it. I'm sure you will adapt to self-isolation and be able to get on with life as usual. Well, you are in a very good place to be during these weird times.

I would like to ask you two questions about how you are. 1: Are you happy about where you are? 2: Are you thanking all the people that are helping you in Hatchmoor Nursing Home? I hope you will be happy in the safest place you could be.

From,

Aidan

Dear Aidan

Thank you for your letter to Matron and she has asked me to reply on behalf of the residents of the Nursing Home. I am pleased to read in your first paragraph that you think your mother is bossier than the teachers, this will help you to sprint ahead in future tests and exams compared to your contemporaries.

The virus has made a difference to the residents in many ways; to name a few we could not have visits from family or friends and necessary things like visits from the chiropodist and hairdresser caused problems for many, the doctor too was restricted on visits. Your mother sounds very wise saying that every cloud has a silver lining and perhaps these visiting restrictions will make us realise how lucky we are to have these facilities readily available.

I think I should tell you now that I am 91 years of age and the school has not yet been able to find a year I fit into!! I was an environmental health officer for over 50 years and was exposed to lots of diseases, both human and animal and here I am still interested in sport and lots of practical things. I have no fears for the future.

You ask two Questions (1) Am I happy here? Yes, I am but happiness is mostly inside us, I try to bring mine out every day so that I may share with the other residents.(2)My mother was possibly bossier than yours and I remember having many a slap for missing the please and thank you's! The staff here are so keen and clean and interested in us as people. Thank you for your letter, if you want to follow anything up.....here I am.

Sincerely, Ron Tudge.

Dear Residents at Hatchmoor Nursing Home,

My name is Lucy. I am 12 years old. I am in year 7 and go to Great Torrington School. We are writing to you to socialise with the outside world. How are you? I am a very talkative and I do mean very, I am also a very enthusiastic person. Did you know- I can mind read when people first see me? I know the first thing they think is: wow I so want her hair. It's because it's so big and frizzy. It's like when I walk into the shop or somewhere else and you get someone come up to you and say I love your hair, is it natural? Can I have it? I hope you are alright in the nursing home and are finding activity's to entertain you. All schools are shut down so we are at home as well, except for the children of keyworkers. But I am sure you don't want to hear all about this as you have probably have heard enough about it. I know I have. Despite it being horrible it's nicer to stay positive. Most of the news is about it but there is a lot of stuff to do with how to stay positive. I hope that you are well and are managing.

Kind regards

Lucy

Dear Lucy, It is so kind of you to take time to write to us during this lockdown. Matron has received a pile of letters and she has asked me to reply on behalf the staff and residents to some of them. To introduce myself, I am Ron Tudge and I had my 91st birthday in January, I have been a resident here for about the last ten weeks so I suppose you could consider me to be a new boy. You talk about having big hair! I am jealous because my hair is very thin now and my daughter suggests I should tie the two into a knot to restrain them from blowing away.

We are managing well here in the home. Of course we miss seeing those we love and having the derision about receding hair but from time to time we get together to chat by video and swap family scandal. The exclusion of visitors has meant that we have lost the folk who gave us lessons in Tai chi but we have rallied and have a poetry group and sing together now and then.

To conclude, thank you again for your letter and encouragement, it was interesting and I really did not mind you boasting about your hair.....I bet your beard is not as good as mine!

Sincerely, Ron Tudge.

Dear residents,

My name is Charlotte and I am writing this letter to give you some news because I know that you have less contact with your families due to coronavirus (Covid-19).

I am a year seven student and I attend Great Torrington school. I live in Torrington near the Puffing Billy. I live near a bridge called Rothern bridge and last weekend men were clearing the wood that had accumulated there following the rainy season.

As schools are closed, I have been doing work at home in school times and I play outside in my big garden with my siblings after my school day has supposedly finished. Yesterday, I baked a cake originated from Britany with the recipe that was written by my French great grandmother. It is a lot different having to work at home and a lot harder. I miss seeing my friends. All teachers still have to give homework through internet and some of them have to go to school to look after children whose parents are key workers. This means that their parents do not need to take time off of their work job to take care of their children and can carry on supplying our communities with necessities.

It is really nice to have some fresh air after you have been working inside a long time. I have 4 guinea pigs and they are really cute.

These are strange time that happened very suddenly and quickly spread. I am sure all the NHS are doing their best to help this situation and end it. All teachers, shop workers and all helper are helpful as they can. I hope you found my letter interesting.

Charlotte

Dear Charlotte, Matron has received many emails from Year 7 and she has asked me to answer some of them on behalf of the residents. My name is Ron Tudge and I am 91 years old. I have been a resident for about 10 weeks so I am quite a new boy yet and I hope I will be able to answer your note effectively.

You are correct in assuming that having less contact with our relatives makes life a little more tedious due to the interference of Covid19. With our I phones we are better off than our predecessors. I was able to have a group chat on Sunday with my daughter and son and catch up on family gossip. It was lovely to see them both and I think they were pleased to see me safe and sound.

I remember the Puffing Billy and we have been on cycle rides from there and we have enjoyed walks from there when I was more agile. I have lived very close to Dartmoor since I retired, always good for a walk and particularly loved by my old dog. I read that you have 4 guinea pigs, we had two and the children named them Starsky and Hutch after the two famous detectives on TV at the time. We have had dogs and hamsters at various times. We even looked after a frog who had badly injured one leg. We found him making a noise at the bottom of the chamber of the main stop cock into the bungalow. He stayed with us in the garden for ages.

I was very interested in your baking experience because I baked for myself and one or two neighbours until I came into the home. And how much better my own tasted, is that being a bighead or do you feel the same way? You are lucky to have access to your great-grandmother's book, I wish I had written down all the recipes my gran used but I was away in the Navy when she was ill and died. I did find a book of old farmhouse meals though and that has proved very useful over the years. These are very strange times and I have been out just a couple of times since I was ill, and those were trips to the hospital in Exeter for treatment to my eyes. I shall be pleased to get my hands dirty again. Your letter has been most interesting, Sincerely, Ron Tudge

Dear Residents of Hatchmoor,

My name is Holly, and I go to Great Torrington School, I am in Year 7. It is a very strange time now, and I am writing to cheer you up and see how you are doing.

As the schools are closed, I have been working from home, with my brother, who goes to St Mary's School in Bideford. We have had lots of Homework set and have been doing it every day (except from the weekend). We also go on walks every day. We live near the beach, so we usually go there every day.

When we visit the beach, I take my bike and my brother takes his scooter. My parents walk behind us. There are a few hills which go from our house to the beach. They are very fun to go down but much harder to go back up.

From,

Holly 😊

Dear Holly, your email of 13/4/20 addressed to the residents of Hatchmoor Nursing Home has been passed to me for reply. I am Ron Tudge and I have been a resident for about 12 weeks, a new boy really! The school have not found a year group for me yet, that may be because I am 91 years of age, pretty ancient I suppose. These are very strange times indeed but when I look back over my life we seem to have gone through lots of strange times and some really trying ones. During and after the Second World War we had some very trying times. We were hungry and tired most of the time. Getting into Birmingham to go to school was hard and very often we had to get off the bus and walk past the remains of buildings hit by bombing. I was about 10, 11, 12 years old, I was perpetually hungry and I know my poor mother often went without so that we could have a dinner. I was punished severely for eating two slices of bread left in the pantry for my sisters, how did I know it was the last bread for the week? So, they are strange times but keep a smiling face and we will all come out of trouble together. After all I have managed to last a long time, there is hope for us all.

You are lucky to be so near the beach. I have always loved the sea and in fact I have painted a few watercolour landscapes but I am beginning to find it difficult now I am losing my sight. I must close and rest my eyes for a while. If you have any more questions, send them to Matron and I am sure she will pass them on to me.

Kindest regards, Ron Tudge.