

Alumni Pupils Come Back to Visit

Sam Thomas

THOMAS'S FULHAM
2008-2013

Head of Thomas's Fulham, Annette Dobson, was absolutely thrilled when 'old boy' Sam Thomas accepted her invitation to return to his alma mater as the guest speaker at the end of year Leavers' Ceremony. During his talk, Sam looked back on his time at Thomas's, reflected on what, with the benefit of experience, he would have said to his 11-year-old self and had some pertinent advice for the Year 6 leavers...

"SAM THOMAS – (NOT VERY) OLD BOY" THOMAS'S FULHAM 2008-2013

Good afternoon everyone. It's a real privilege to come and talk to you all today, nearly eleven years to the day after I left Thomas's today. Who knows, in 11 years' time, some of you guys might well be giving a similar talk to the one I'm giving today.

WHO AM I?

First, I thought I would begin by telling you a little bit about myself. My name is Sam Thomas and though I am no relation to Mr and Mrs Thomas who founded these schools, maybe, just maybe, they might name a house after me following my talk today!

I arrived at Thomas's in Year 1 in 2008 and my little brother started in Reception in 2010, although most of you might remember him as a certain gappy called Mr Josh and he's definitely not so little any more. I went onto Ibstock Place School in Roehampton and in 2020 I was accepted to read History at the University of Oxford. In the summer of my last year at Oxford, I was offered a Training Contract by a law firm in the City of London and I am now in my second year of training to be a lawyer. So by adult standards, I am really only just beginning.

I remember being extremely happy at Thomas's and I look back at my time here with the most wonderful memories. This school, I now realise, played a very important part in laying the foundations of the person I am today. My love of acting, for example, began soon after I joined in Year 1, and I was given the role of the Gingerbread Man in the Year 1 play – 'the Gingerbread Man' – likely because my teachers at the time thought that the new boy who was a bit behind academically could do with a confidence boost. I think it's fair to say, as a few people in here might still be able to remember, that my confidence was sufficiently boosted. Looking back now, I am not sure that wearing a brown onesie with painted bright rosy red cheeks and a little hat with a liquorice string pony tail was exactly the coolest, but I remember feeling like an absolute filmstar up on that stage. It would eventually take me to performing at the National Theatre and the Oxford Playhouse in Oxford's main production, as well as, of course, the Royal Albert Hall where I performed in the Thomas's 50th anniversary celebrations.

Thomas's also instilled in me a love for being outside. Thanks to having South Park nearby and trips further afield, I remember lots of picnics and lessons outside as well as PE and Games. For me,



Rugby was always my favourite sport and continues to be to this day, although I would say I was a bit of a late bloomer. I remember so clearly feeling on top of the world receiving a Golden Unicorn – when they were a seriously special currency – from Mr Wild after one Rugby session in Year 4. Yet I also remember the devastation of being pulled from class with my friend Jamie Innes in Year 6 and being told by Mr Walters – in the most kind, gentle way – that we were not picked to go to the Rugby Nationals, but how proud and impressed he was of us by our effort and determination. It must have been a particularly good year that year, right Mr Walters?!

It's interesting that many of my standout memories of Thomas's are of the extracurricular things I did. It is fair to say that when I was eleven, I was not the highest academic achiever and in fact I got rejected from quite a few schools at 11 plus. Moreover, I was hugely disorganised and remember constantly losing things and dropping stuff up the Hardy and More stairs.

This was complicated by the fact that I am a Type 1 Diabetic and used to have Miss Chesworth tearing her hair out on a daily basis as she'd find my blood sugar meter and insulin scattered around school as if they were rubbish.

Part of the reason for this was because I was always distracted by what other people were doing and would forget about the important diabetes stuff I was meant to be focusing on. I think that's why I eventually studied History at university, because I was so curious about people's stories and loved finding out about why the world is as it is today. Looking back, maybe I was just nosy.

When I was in Year 6, I was definitely curious about what future Sam would get up to. While I was pretty certain I would become a famous actor, I would have taken any chance to chat to the 22-year-old version of myself. I think my biggest concern was that I would become extraordinarily boring, which you may have to judge for yourselves! So, following Miss Dobson's question: 'What would I tell my 11-year-old self if I could travel back in time?' There are five things I would say to that boy: The first thing I would tell 11-year old Sam now that I am double his age is that after Year 6, you never have to do High Jump at Sports Day ever again. While I really enjoyed running around outside and didn't mind Athletics, I hated High Jump. One year, I remember my Dad offering me £10 to pull a sickie as he knew how much I felt humiliated by it. However, every year, I would grit

my teeth, put on a big smile and give my absolute best shot at clearing the bar, even though it never happened. So to you, Year 6, what I would say is there will always be things which we don't want to do and things in which it feels like everyone is better than we are. Sometimes, all that's needed is to put on a big smile, a brave face and realise that often, people are paying far less attention to you than you think they are.

The second thing I would tell my 11-year old self is that sadly, you have not become a famous actor. However, after leaving Thomas's you did perform for six months at the National Theatre in a professional production and throughout your teens worked in multiple professional projects, culminating in playing Prince Ferdinand in the Tempest at the Oxford Playhouse – Oxford University's main production in 2023. So to you Year 6, I would say make sure you do what you really love to do. While my love of acting did not take me to Hollywood, it has given me experiences I could not have dreamt of when I was eleven and had been incredibly enriching.

So the third thing I would tell 11-year-old Sam is to keep developing the other strings to your bow – while English, Maths, 11+ and 13+ are important, doing what you love



creates balance, will make you satisfied and ultimately a more interesting person! In my first year at Oxford, I really struggled with Imposter Syndrome. This is basically the false belief that I did not deserve to be at Oxford, not only because I was not clever enough, but also because many people seemed to have another string to their bow – as high-level violinists, or cross-country runners, black-belt taekwondo, or even trained ballet dancers. It took me a while to realise that I also had other strings to my bow in my acting, and my love of team sports. I think there were so many of these people at Oxford because they were able to talk passionately about something in an interview that wasn't just academics and their excellence in these fields made them into more confident characters. So to you, Year 6, I would say absolutely make the most of the massive head start that Thomas's has given you in extracurricular activities and make sure you continue them in your next schools.

Point Four that I'd tell my 11-year-old self is to continue being as interested as you are interesting. Why is this important? This is how you connect with people. When I went up for my interview at my Oxford college, I sat in front of two very scary professors and one of them even told me that I was 'going round in circles and confusing myself'. However,

as they told me afterwards when they became my tutors, they were more interested in whether I was curious, enquiring and teachable rather than whether I knew all the answers. I remember telling them how fascinated I was by a particular person and saying how "I don't know much about this, but I really want to find out more". That was far more appealing than someone who pretends they know all the answers – no one really does! Being interested in people means being a good listener, asking meaningful questions and caring about others around you. Everyone has something interesting about them. You just have to dig harder for some than for others. Keep being curious and asking questions! There might come a stage in the next few years where it might seem uncool to seem interested in your subjects in class for example, but it is the curious people who leave their mark on the world!

The fifth and final thing I would tell my 11-year-old self relates to my ORGANISATION. While being so disorganised might be overwhelming I would tell my 11-year-old self to look at the progress he has made in the past year and how much he has grown up in Year 6 alone.

Miss Chesworth might not be there to remind me to do my injections or help you find your pencil case at your

next school, but you WILL get better at remembering your things and being on time! Well, maybe the being on time thing is still something I am working on...But that's it! I remember leaving Thomas's feeling so grown-up and in many ways you are! However we are ALL on a journey, of ups and downs, battles and blessings, and there will always be something to work on, to get better at, even when you are the same age as Mr Wild!

So overall, then, if I could sum up these five things I would tell my 11-year-old self, it would be: Work hard, but with a smile on your face, even at those things you find a struggle – like the Sports Day High Jump. Play hard – whatever it is you play – sport, a musical instrument, or performing in actual plays – do these things outside of school as much as you can. I cannot tell you how valuable they have been for me in my life. And finally: Be kind – keep being interested, engaging, and acknowledging that everyone has things they are working on; but it's when we can be kind, listen well and work on those things together, with friends, that we can make the most out of it all.

Thank you.



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