



THOMAS'S BATTERSEA

Arabella Hodgkinson

Class of 1999

I started at Thomas's Battersea in 1995 in Year 5 and left at the end of Year 8. It was a bit of an odd time to start in a new school but it didn't take me long to find my feet and to throw myself into all the sporting opportunities available. The Battersea Park astroturf pitches, Music lessons (and even the Latin classes) remain happy memories. I loved the Summer terms in particular, when I could play Cricket under the guidance of Mr Williams and Mr Scaife – a game I later carried on playing at junior county level. I have so many memories of the school but I think the overarching feeling is the sound of the school - constant chatter, feet in corridors, swinging doors, choir, orchestra, whistles in matches and the sound a Bunsen burner makes as the flame meets the gas.

From Thomas's I went on to Marlborough College and from there I went on to Leeds University, where I was offered the opportunity of extending my degree course with an ERASMUS year at Karlova University in Prague. This was a valuable experience and introduced me to a number of other Erasmus students from all over continental Europe who became firm friends and with whom I have since remained in touch. It also encouraged me to start using my schoolgirl French as a living language – something that proved useful later as French is the principal language in which I have been working for the last six years.

After leaving university I worked, for a short time, as a Teaching Assistant back at Thomas's. This reinforced my earlier happy memories of the school. Throughout my time there as a pupil or Teaching Assistant 'Be Kind' remained a central tenet and may have been part of what influenced me to work in the non-profit sector. I worked first, for over two years, in Bangalore, South India as Assistant Manager of a home for girls taken out of street living, child labour and domestic violence. This reinforced my belief in the need for and importance of girl and child rights in so many parts of the world. This recognition was a part of what lead me, whilst working in Bangalore, to complete a Masters degree at The Open University in International Development Management.

I next worked for a small charity in community Development in Sri Lanka for two years before, in 2019, I began working with Concern Worldwide (www.concern.net/), a charity with its HQ in Dublin and which operates in 25 countries around the world. I spent the first four years in Chad, one of the world's poorest countries, working on programmes on the border with Sudan and, sadly, in areas that are now facing high influxes of refugees due to the recent conflict.

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Since March 2023 I've been working for Concern in Goma, a city in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on the border with Rwanda, as the Programme Director for our Country Programme – DRC, which is a vast country, is one of Concern's largest fields of operation and provides a very challenging but often fulfilling environment in which to work. My current contract with Concern in DRC will come to an end in a few months and we will see what happens next! My job demands decision making in challenging situations and the humanitarian principle of 'do no harm' is at the core of any action and every decision I make. From Thomas's 'Be Kind' to doing no harm, these are central pillars around which I aim to live my life.



Where are they now?

thomas-s.co.uk