

# OC OF THE MONTH

## December 2019



## Ed Thornton (EG 2000)

**A LEVELS:** English, History and Politics

**UNIVERSITY:** English Literature at the University of Leeds

1. Tell us about yourself – where do you currently work, and how did you get into that?

I work at the *Church Times* newspaper as Assistant Editor. It has been published weekly since 1863, and comprises news, opinion, features, and reviews. We report on what's happening in the Church of England and wider Anglican Communion, but also cover a wide range of topics, such as politics and international affairs. We also have a website, app, and podcast. My job mainly involves commissioning and editing articles, as well as some writing and podcasting.

I started working at *Church Times* in 2010, initially as a news reporter, having

worked as a business journalist and in an editorial role for a think-tank in Westminster. I saw a job advert and applied. It combined many of my interests, including theology and politics. I left the Church Times in 2013 to work in the Archbishop of Canterbury's press office at Lambeth Palace, but returned to the Church Times in 2016, after feeling an itch to return to journalism.

2. What are some of your proudest achievements since graduating?

It's not really my achievement, but seeing my son, Reuben, start in the Highgate Pre-Prep has made me very proud. And, again not my achievement, but watching my son Jem play in an under-7s football league. It's so rewarding seeing him doing something he absolutely loves, and learning to work as part of a team.

In terms of my career, I'm proud of the time I worked for Archbishop Justin Welby. It was a pressured job at times, but immensely interesting and rewarding.

3. What advice would you give someone who is looking to follow a similar career path?

Get as much work experience as you can – in the holidays, at university, in your spare time. It's a very competitive field. And be willing to do the boring jobs (and offer to make tea!) – it won't be long before you're trusted and given more responsibility. Also, specialising is no bad thing: generalist news outlets are generally struggling more than specialist ones, who produce content that people will pay for. And it's very rewarding getting to know a beat well. It's also a job that suits people who are motivated by deadlines (I always preferred exams to coursework), and who find people and ideas endlessly fascinating.

4. Which A Level subjects did you choose at Highgate, and do you have any advice for pupils currently choosing A Levels?

I chose to study English, History, and Politics. I had a fairly easy choice, because I wasn't very good at much else!

I would advise pupils to choose the subjects they find most fascinating, rather than simply the ones they think they'll achieve the best grades in (although often one leads to another).

5. Where did you go to University? What did you study? Do you have any advice for pupils currently thinking about University options?

I went to the University of Leeds to study English Literature. The course included a

year studying at the University of Murcia in southern Spain, which was one of the reasons I chose it. I also spent a lot of time working on the student newspaper, which was enormous fun and provided great experience, although something of a distraction from the degree! My best friend on the English course, Matt Seymour, went on to teach for 9 years at Highgate and become housemaster of Eastgate (my old house!).

I'd advise pupils thinking about university options to think carefully about the sort of course they want. For instance, the English degree at Leeds was very different to the course at, say, Oxford or Durham: we studied more 20<sup>th</sup> century literature and literature from around the world. And it's also important to think about the sort of place that you want to live in for three or four years – e.g. in a big city, or a campus in the middle of the countryside, a university with lots of history.

Sometimes parents or other family members pass on expectations about where you should go or what you should study (e.g. the same university that they attended), but you need to go for what feels right for you and where you'd be happiest. If you know of anyone currently studying at a university, especially on the same course, try to meet them or talk to them. There's nothing better than hearing what it's like from somebody who is currently there.

6. Did your time at Highgate help you? If so, how?

I was at Highgate from the age of 7 to 18, so it has probably shaped me in more ways than I realise. The teachers I had throughout the school helped me to develop an intellectual curiosity that went beyond simply achieving exam grades, I think. There was also a strong emphasis on kindness and treating people well, and the sense that we were part of a bigger community. I hope I've taken these values into the rest of my life.

7. In three words, how would you describe Highgate?

Character. Community. Curiosity.

8. What is your strongest memory of Highgate?

I have so many! One that stands out, because it's such a fond one, is playing guitar in the group that won the Instrumental House Music Competition (then held in Dyne House) when I was in Year 11, for a cover of the Radiohead song *Nice Dream*. We weren't the favourites to win, so it was a lovely surprise to do so.

9. What drives you?

Day to day, I'm largely driven by the need to juggle family life and work (getting the boys to school on time is a daily challenge!). I'm motivated to do things that I

find interesting, such as commissioning writers with something important to say or interviewing an interesting author. Family and friendships are the most important thing, and the older I get, the more I realise their importance. I've become more aware in recent years of the importance of mental health and well-being, and I'm really encouraged by the emphasis that Highgate is putting on this.

#### 10. What's next?

Watching my sons play increasing amounts of tennis and football. In terms of career, I'd like to play a part in helping the *Church Times* to expand its digital output and connect with more readers. It's a big challenge, but I'm really excited about it!