

Mrs Galloway

Elaine Galloway leaves the school to work as a volunteer at Kisasa Secondary School in Dodoma, Tanzania



How long have you been at Eltham?

I joined in September 1989, so that's 22 years.

Describe yourself in four words.

Hmmm.... Nice, nice, nice and nice?

What is your favourite city?

London; if it has to be abroad - Istanbul.

Why Physics?

Take any everyday thing; there is always something behind it to do with Physics.

Who is your favourite Physicist and why?

Maybe Einstein as he was kind, modest and had a great sense of humour (and hairstyle).

What will you miss most about Eltham College?

The cake in the staff room at morning break.

What do you think you have brought to the school, that no one else has?

Coming to school on a bicycle even in the snow!

What are your plans for life after Eltham?

Voluntary work in Tanzania for two years, then I might try to sneak back to Eltham in some way or form, maybe the running club!

Will we be seeing you soon?

Well I'm not sure you will see me, but I will send messages in the bulletin, probably saying 'please send more money!'

Which is your favourite year group to teach and why?

Probably Year 10. By then the physics geeks have identified themselves so some really interesting ideas pop up for discussion.

Do you have a fear of anything?

Snakes... Isn't everyone frightened of snakes? However I like the feeling of conquering your fears.

Which three things would you choose to take with you if you were to be stranded on a desert island?

Mask and snorkel, a mongoose for killing snakes, and a big book, for example a Charles Dickens novel.

You have one million pounds: what would you do with the money?

Open a hospital or school in the Developing World.

Do you believe in God?

No... and I think it is important to say that for when I am going to Tanzania. It's not just religious people who try to do good things for less fortunate people around us!

If you could have any superpower, what would it be?

Telepathic powers; mind reading.

We understand you have travelled extensively, what is your favourite country and why?

Well each country I haven't been to is my favourite. I read or hear about something amazing somewhere and think "Wow, I'd love to see that." So, Tanzania is my favourite at the moment.

And finally, the classic question, if you were a fruit or vegetable what would you be?

A raspberry. I am English and don't take myself too seriously!

Henry Ghattak, Kaisun Raj (Yr 8)

Mrs Barsham-Rolfe



Mrs Barsham-Rolfe joined the school in September 2010, teaching Economics and Business Studies. She previously worked for News International and the accountancy firm Ernst and Young.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Derbyshire and Warwickshire. I was born in Warwickshire and lived in Leamington Spa, and I moved to Matlock in my teenage years.

How did you come to be at Eltham?

I trained as an accountant at Ernst and Young LLP and after that I worked in finance at News International. I found Finance really boring and realised that actually what I wanted to do was teach.

As I live in the area, Eltham College was the perfect job. I remember a thoroughly fascinating interview day. I was, however, completely terrified. In my practice lesson I had a picture of Rupert Murdoch, and I was going to spend a couple of minutes or so letting the students guess who it was. But there was this one pupil who seemed to know the answer to everything and got it on his first try, so a chunk of my planned lesson went out the window. Clearly, it didn't matter as Mr Walker and Mr Henderson were nice enough to give me the job.

Why economics?

Well I teach economics because I essentially ended up doing macroeconomics as part of social policy at university. I enjoy teaching economics to students because it equips them with skills to look at the world differently which they will keep for their whole life. I think business studies helps people to understand what needs to happen to make business work on a day to day basis.

How would you sum up your teaching style?

Fairly interactive with a lot of note taking to fix it in people's brains.

You do a fair amount in the sports department too, how seriously do you take your sport?

I do enjoy sport. I'm one of those people who is enthusiastic but not very good. If Mr Thomas were to write me a school report for sport it would say "tries hard but lacks any real ability or natural talent."

Surely there is better footwear for a charity rugby match than five inch stiletto heels?

More sensible footwear? Yes. Better footwear? No. Besides I was just helping to drain the pitch.

Tea or coffee?

Coffee.

If I said that the current financial crisis is due to the greed of bankers, would you agree?

No. I would say that it is down to the aspirations of individuals to live beyond their means. While the banks have been irresponsible with their lending policies, individuals have to take responsibility for their part as well. We live too much in a blame culture.

Is the government tackling the financial crisis in the manner that you would agree with?

No. I feel that the current government is rather randomly swinging the axe to make cuts and reduce the budget deficit. I think they are trying to improve the productivity of the economy to create an environment for long term sustainable growth rather than by trying to spend their way out of a recession. I think that this is a good approach but I think more consideration needs to be given to what they cut government spending on and the speed with which the deficit needs to be reduced.

If you could spend a day with one famous person who would it be and why?

For my job, I'd spent the day with Mervyn King at the Bank of England to see what he does and his opinion on contemporary monetary policy. For fun I would spend it with Prince Harry, as I find him roguishly charming.

Tell us a random fact about yourself.

I spent my 25th birthday being stretchered down Mt Kilimanjaro. It was on my honeymoon and as part of the trip we were going to climb up Kilimanjaro. Unfortunately, despite having a day to acclimatise I was struck down with altitude sickness at the last rest stop before the summit and had to be carried down the mountain. I was so disappointed.

What's the name of your son and each of your dogs?

My son is called Rufus but we call him Roo, my dogs are called George and Nelson.

Describe yourself, your son and your two dogs using three words each (that's three per dog.)

I'm chatty, organised and bubbly, Rufus is a ray of sunshine, Nelson is greedy, lazy and loving, and George is greedy, brave and loyal.

This, by the way, is the legendary Elthamian question: if you were a fruit or vegetable, which would you choose to be and why?

This is the question I put the most thought into, and I was torn. In the end I decided on being a lemon. It's probably the economist in me but I like its versatility which makes it efficient.

Though you can't eat them raw, you can cook with them, both savoury and sweet, they are bright coloured like many of my collection of shoes, they can clean silver, turn your hair blonde and go nicely in drinks.

Jamie Goddard (L6)

Mr Ross

Andrew Ross leaves the school after four years teaching in the biology department. He is taking up a post at Oakham School in Rutland.



What have you enjoyed most about teaching at Eltham College?

I have enjoyed being able to interact with pupils not only in the classroom but also through house events, school trips and tours.

What area of biology do you specialise in?

I specialise in evolution and speciation.

Tell us about your new school – how is it different to Eltham College?

The School I will be teaching at is a boarding school; it also has a lot more sports teams.

What is your best biology fact?

My best biology fact is that you can swim down the aorta of a Blue Whale.

What has been the most memorable moment at Eltham?

My most memorable moment at Eltham College would have to be watching the fireworks on Sydney Harbour Bridge at New Year, while on the cricket tour.

Tell us your best joke?

I'm not big on telling jokes, but the worst biology joke I have ever heard is:-

Q: Why did the mushroom have so many friends?

A: Because he was a fungi (fun guy).

What are your plans after leaving Eltham?

After Leaving Eltham I plan on getting involved in the boarding side of my new school and carrying on with coaching sport.

If you were an animal which would it be and why?

If I was an animal I would be a dolphin, as it is one of the only animals that play.

I heard your Nickname is "Swoosh"...Why?

Along with my other nicknames, Fraser Amott when talking about me at the Third Fifteen rugby dinner called me "The Swoosh" referring to my hair.

Now that you are a father how have you found the experience?

(Pause in silence)...It's been AMAZING!

What have you loved the most about being a housemaster (for the best house, Carey)?

Being the Housemaster has been fantastic experience, especially winning in the first year. I love the house spirit. A memorable moment for me would have to be getting a year Ten Pupil to prepare a debate five minutes before it started.

Now for the traditional Elthamian question: what fruit would you be and why?

Mangosteen, a fruit appreciated by those who know it!

What teacher have you enjoyed working with and will miss?

I have really enjoyed working with Mr Dunman, because of his interesting perspective on things, but I will miss too many other teachers as well.

Declan Murphy (Yr 8)

Mrs Head-Rapson



Christine Head-Rapson retires from the school after 12 years teaching in the Maths department.

What will you miss most about Eltham College?

The pupils and the surroundings.

What is your proudest Eltham memory?

I have two: Being instrumental in setting up the relationship with the Kisasa Secondary School and developing further the Community Service Programme with new initiatives.

What do you enjoy most about teaching?

Seeing someone, or a whole class, understand a new concept and watching their confidence in the subject grow.

What are your plans for life after Eltham?

Some of the time, I'm going to be looking after my two grandsons. I want to play more golf, and visit more places in the UK.

Can you describe yourself in four words?

Enthusiastic, hardworking, positive, and a bit loud.

What do you think has changed whilst you have been here?

The pastoral system, which has become much more formalised, while still being good.

Why did you originally come to Eltham College?

I wanted a change from my previous job, at Chis and Sid. It was the right decision.

If you were stuck on a desert island, which three things would you bring with you?

A very big puzzle book, maybe my golf clubs and probably Lord of the Rings (assuming I have all the necessities of life).

Have you been on any memorable school trips during your career in Eltham?

Yes. I went to Iceland and Greenland with Mr Hillary. It was an excellent experience, despite being snowed in while in Greenland.

Are there any teachers who you are scared of?

No.

When and how did you get involved with the school in Tanzania?

Through friends: I got involved with raising money for, and then building the primary school, and then realised that the children would move on and that the Secondary school was in very poor shape, so we have raised money for books and other necessities. It is also why we are taking pupils out there again to help with English.

What has been your best single achievement there?

Along with others, keeping the class sizes in the primary school to under 50.

Roughly how much money in total has been raised to help this school?

In Eltham College, it is in excess of £12000 for the secondary school.

Will you continue your work in Tanzania after your retirement?

Yes, I am leading the trip with the school in October. 18 Lower and Upper Sixth boys will be helping at the school.

What has been your most embarrassing experience at Eltham College?

I think that it must be when I was run over by a dog sleigh in Greenland. It caused much amusement for those who witnessed it.

What is your favourite area of maths to teach?

Up to GCSE, it is Algebra, and at A-Level, it is Mechanics.

Mrs Head-Rapson adds:

Although I am ready to retire, I will miss Eltham because I have been very happy here.

Richard Prior (Yr 10)

Mr Swaffield



Peter Swaffield joined the school as Chaplain and Head of RS in September. He previously taught English at the school, in the early 1980s, and is also a former pupil.

So, tell us about yourself.

I'm from the Midlands, from Market (not Meercat) Harborough, and I am 57. I have three children who are all grown up and I have taught English and RS and have been a Christian Minister leading a number of churches.

Do you have any pets?

I had to have my lovely Golden Retriever put to sleep about eighteen months ago, so no. Perhaps I ought to think about getting another dog?

What made you want to become a teacher?

Apart from the holidays, I enjoyed English originally as a subject and subsequently I have also come to enjoy teaching RS.

How did you end up teaching at Eltham College?

There was an advert for the job and I applied. After that you would have to ask those who appointed me.

What would you do if you won the Lottery?

You would have to be 'in it to win' and as I'm not 'in it' I wouldn't 'win it'!

Is that a Christian view or a personal view?

A personal point of view as a Christian, but it's not a big issue to me.

How do you think people see you?

You would have to ask them.

If you could describe yourself in a few words ...

I hope 'approachable and friendly'.

What is your favourite song or film?

Chariots of Fire...as to favourite song, anything by '50 cents' and everybody likes a bit of 'N Dubz' on a night out...but seriously, James Taylor and Carol King, who were singer songwriters in the 1960's and 70's, are two of my favourites.

Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

Anywhere would be fine at my age I suppose. I don't know. I hope I would be teaching somewhere, if not at Eltham, perhaps at another school; maybe in China or Africa, I don't know.

What changes have you noticed at Eltham College over the years?

There seem to be more sculptures here and the staff look very much younger than I remember from when I was here as a pupil. When I was a pupil here there were many boarders from Christian Missionary families so there was a different sense of a resident community here. Obviously that does make a difference, with the school being bigger and being a day school, so although there still is a sense of community here there isn't that sense of a boarding community having their home here that did make for a very distinctive atmosphere.

What is your fondest memory of Eltham College either as a pupil or a member of staff?

My fondest memory as a pupil was after my A levels a group of us got together and put on a play which we directed ourselves and I remember really enjoying that sense of teamwork. As a teacher, I was kidnapped in the middle of an English lesson by some rather paramilitary minded pupils at the time. It was all in a good cause to raise money for an earthquake appeal. They locked me up in the tower and demanded money to get me down again, except some people started to pay money to keep me up there, which was rather unfortunate.

What would be your ideal retirement plan?

To have season tickets at the Walker's Stadium; failing that, Satellite television wherever I was, with frequent programmes about Leicester City Football Club.

If you were a fruit or vegetable what would it be?

A kiwi fruit – hopefully there's at least some goodness on the inside.

What would you like to achieve before you leave Eltham College?

Well just to get to the end of each term is what I would like to do; but seriously, to value all those in the School community, to share the Christian narrative and to raise the profile of Religious Studies further.

Why do you support Leicester City?

As many people agree Leicester City are by far the greatest team the world has ever seen. I was brought up for many years near Leicester and they were the first team I ever

saw play, under floodlights, at the old Filbert Street ground, against Burnley.

Who is your favourite Superhero?

I am going to be really 'cheesy' and say Jesus.

If you were deported from the UK where would you move to?

Canada; it's a beautiful country.

What do you prefer to teach, RS or English?

I enjoy both of them, on balance I suppose I would choose RS since I have got to know the author of the central set text a little better.

What is your favourite year group to teach?

Each year group has its own special feature.

What do you think the role of Chaplain should be at Eltham College today?

To be a storyteller of the Christian faith, and to try to represent God's welcome offered to every member of the school community, whatever their faith or lack of faith.

How do you think the role of Chaplain has changed over the years?

Well I think the school has changed as I mentioned earlier, and I think society has changed as well, but I don't think the essential role of Chaplain needs to change in the sense of the school's Christian foundation, which is still very clear. So, to tell the Christian story in a way that is affirming to all of the school community and to seek to offer, with others, care to each pupil: I think that would be a constant feature of any Chaplain's role over the years.

And finally, why do you believe in God?

So you're saving the easy question until last! Apart from the fact that the existence of God for me explains the world, its order, the existence of humans, the existence of religious experience; the resurrection of Christ affirms his status as God and Saviour. Apart from those things, I suppose I believe in God because I think he believes in me.

Adam Broncz and Daniel Chen (Yr 10)

Mrs Bilsby

Mrs Bilsby has been teaching in the Maths department since September.

How is Eltham different to your last school?

I previously taught at Ravens Wood School. It was boys' school like Eltham, but there are fewer pupils here so there is a lot more space. It is also much easier to get to know pupils here.

What is your favourite fruit?

Strawberries and cream, like at Wimbledon.

If you were a mathematical equation what would you be?

I'd be a quadratic equation because some say I'm a bit square.

Are there any teachers you have particularly bonded with?

All the mathematics teachers have been really nice to me. I bonded well with Mrs Oldfield when we did a First Aid course together. Mrs Green has been really kind as well – we are neighbours in the Common Room. Also Cheryl and Terri have looked after me, just as they do everyone else.

Is there anything about Eltham that particularly stands out from other schools?

How many different things are going on really: inter-house competitions, sport, music, drama and all the other extra-curricular activities.

How much have you been involved in?

I have really enjoyed running the Maths club, with lots of help from the Lower Sixth. I have also taken a team of Sixth Form students to take part in the UKMT Senior Maths Challenge, and a team of Year Eight and Nine pupils to take part in the UKMT Team Challenge, in which we successfully qualified for the national final. I was able to take part in the Year Seven trip to Surrey Quays to take part in watersports activities, and really enjoyed the performance of Zimbel that included pupils from local primary schools as well as the Year Seven and College Choirs. I also ran in the Eltham Fun Run 2011 – on Mother's Day! It was really tough – but I enjoyed it and I am looking forward to running again next year! I will be getting into training soon!

Which year groups do you prefer to teach – and why?

I love the variety of teaching lots of different year groups. I have really enjoyed teaching Years 7, 8 and 9, as in my old school I mainly had Year 11 and Sixth Form classes. I have been lucky with the classes I have had this year and I have had lots of fun with my groups. I love teaching new topics to classes, such as trigonometry or Pythagoras' theorem, and I



have had the chance to do this with Years 8 and 9 this year. It is wonderful teaching lots of Sixth Form classes too. I have especially enjoyed teaching Mechanics to the Upper Sixth. It is great to do some challenging maths and A-level Mathematics gives a great opportunity to do this.

Who is the most famous Mathematician that has ever lived – and why?

I would choose Florence Nightingale – although she is probably not famous for being a mathematician so much as a nurse! However, in her work investigating the death rates of soldiers in hospitals during the Crimean War involved the development of techniques in statistics that we use now. Her achievements are all the more significant since as a woman, she faced even greater challenges to get her findings heard. Many pupils complain that the mathematics we do is not

relevant to real life. The work that Florence Nightingale did was really significant, and changed the way that soldiers were cared for in battlefield hospitals, subsequently saving the lives of many soldiers.

How have you found your first year Eltham overall?

Really enjoyable!

And finally...if you were a fruit, what fruit would you be?

Bananas!

James Selway (Yr 8)

Mr Tuck

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David Tuck joined the school in September 2010 teaching history and politics.

Could you tell us a bit about your upbringing and life before Eltham College?

I was born in Birmingham, but I lived in a place called Halesowen, which is about eight miles from Birmingham. I went to a comprehensive school and then I went to University. I studied at a few places – in Manchester, Essex, Hull and Nottingham, doing various degrees in History and Politics, and then Education. I've been teaching for over 10 years. I've taught in comprehensive schools but most of my career has been in the independent sector. I worked for eight years in a girls' private school in Sussex called Burgess Hill School for Girls, but I wanted to teach boys again. That's one of the reasons why I'm here.

Are there any differences between teaching girls and boys?

Girls do mature before boys, so they are much more organised, and they have longer attention spans at 11 and 12 than boys do in my opinion. By the time you get to middle teenage years boys and girls are much more similar.

What made you choose Eltham College?

I had heard of Eltham College by reputation. There was a vacancy in the Times Educational Supplement, and I just applied for it. At the time when I was joining Eltham College, I had another interview the next day for another school, and I told the Headmaster about this. Normally, when you do something like that, you get put under pressure to accept the job if they offer it to you, but the Headmaster was really very friendly and he said that I must go for the other interview. He tried not to put any

pressure on me at all. I liked the fact that he did that, and I rang up the next day and just accepted the job at Eltham. I didn't go to the other interview because I was impressed with Mr Henderson. I thought that if he cared about the people that worked for him like that, I would like to work at his school. That's what made Eltham College the place for me.

Do you think you have settled in well at Eltham College?

I think so, yes. On the teaching side, it's very, very friendly – all the teachers are supportive, and I've made a lot of friends. It helps having a fellow Midlands teacher here, in Mr Cotterill. He was born very near me, and we Brummies do stick together. Everyone's very nice.

What made you want to be a historian and teacher?

Well, they are two different things really. I wouldn't consider myself a historian because a historian spends his day investigating the past and trying to find new understanding and knowledge of it, and they do that in a university. A teacher's job is to help create an atmosphere where students can learn and become independent learners. It's an intensely social job and you need to enjoy communicating knowledge and working with young people. There is something intensely satisfying about helping students develop both academically and socially. I really enjoy doing it.



Would you recommend taking politics as an A Level choice?

I would recommend taking A Level Government and Politics, but I'm not one to push the subject. I don't like teachers putting pressure on students into taking their subjects. By the time people get to 16 years of age, they've got an idea of where their interests are and where their passions lie, and if you're interested in History or you're interested in Government and Politics, both are excellent A Levels to do. So, that's all I want to say, I don't want to use this as a propaganda piece!

Could you explain a bit about what Liberal Studies is about?

Well, Liberal Studies is something we do in the Upper Sixth, and it's designed as a kind of vocational skills-based program, where students can learn things that they might not have done in the curriculum. So, for example, I teach a course in financial markets and money, where I teach people how to invest their money, how to look after their money and things about pensions. This might not seem very important when you're a teenager, but will be very important in later life. Mrs Galloway teaches photography, and we've got film making courses, salsa dancing, creative writing, and all sorts of things. Mr Beattie runs a cinema option showing films students may not have heard of. The Headmaster uses the expression 'think outside the box' to describe the programme. It's trying to expose people to things that they might not have seen before and we offer a number of trips as well, to the theatre and to public events. It's designed to be informative and fun, really.

Who is your favourite historian?

I used to like reading A.J.P. Taylor because he's what I would call a great narrative historian: *The Origins of the Second World War*, for example, is a book in which it's almost like he's telling history as a story, and I found myself sucked into his narrative. By modern standards, A.J.P. Taylor wouldn't be considered great because he didn't really footnote things and his bibliography skills were nowhere near thorough enough. In terms of modern historians, I probably prefer Political Scientists writing about politics. So my favourite author would be Professor Anthony King who works for the University of Essex and writes for the *Daily Telegraph*. He was a student of A.J.P Taylor's, which I found out when I studied under him, but he's got that wonderful writing style that brings a topic to life. But he's also far more rigorous, shall we say, in his historical investigation skills. He's also one of the brightest people I've ever met.

What is your favourite era in history?

It used to be Twentieth Century history, and in many ways it still is. This period of history allows me to enjoy history and politics at the same time, so post-war Britain is probably my specialism. I also like nineteenth century British, European and American history. You can't always teach your favourite period because you have to fit in with the school's history syllabus. So, when I first became a teacher, I had to teach the Tudors at A Level, which I had never studied before. This sparked a real interest in early Modern History; I especially love the Wars of the Roses.

What is your favourite year to teach?

Oh dear. Diplomatically, all of them have different things that you enjoy about them. Year 7 and 8 have that energy that is great to see in the classroom, and when they're enjoying a task, they throw themselves into it. I've had a very nice Year 9 group this year, and they've really responded to the work that we've done, and it's been good to see them gain confidence in their ability over the year. My GCSE group, of which you [ie the interviewer] are one, has been small and intimate, I suppose. It's one of those groups which I've had such a good time teaching. It hasn't even seemed like work, it's been so effortless, and you don't always get that when you teach. I suppose I'm going to plump for the Sixth Form, and I don't want to offend anyone, but the reason why I enjoy teaching Sixth Form the most is because, if we've done our job properly, by the time you get to the end of Sixth Form, your students don't need you anymore. All the way through, your students need you to help them understand the work that they're doing. By the time they get to the end of Upper Sixth, you've taught them all the skills that they need to be autonomous students - you've taught them independent learning, you've taught them all the techniques about studying history and politics, and they're ready to go to University. So, I kind of enjoy the feeling of becoming redundant, in a way!

What would you take on a desert island?

Oh gosh. A desert island? I would take the complete *Flashman Papers*, written by George MacDonald Fraser, who is a historical novelist. I think he's absolutely fantastic. I would take a preloaded iPod, with all my favourite music on. My favourites are *They Might Be Giants* and *The Beatles*. I'd also have the *Pixies*, the *Strokes* and *Justin Bieber* (whose hairstyle many of our more trendy Sixth Formers have adopted).

Could you tell me a random fact about yourself?

I've shaken hands with Nelson Mandela.

Do you have any future aspirations?

I think my future ambition is to not want anything. Only when you are totally satisfied in your life can you be truly happy.

Lastly, if you could be any fruit or vegetable, what one would you be and why?

A big red tomato, because... they're nice, and so am I. (laughs).

Anthony Daly (Yr 10)

Miss Hardy



Emily Hardy taught in the English Department this year. She is a graduate of Cambridge University, previously worked in publishing and is leaving to teach at St Paul's Girls' School.

How would you describe yourself in three words?

Enthusiastic, independent, voluble.

What's your favourite book, and why?

For sheer pleasure, *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens' last complete novel. It has everything I adore in his writing, and it's hilarious. But my greatest companion is *Middlemarch* by George Eliot. It's the novel I've re-read most (including twice when I ought really to have been revising for finals at university...) It's very wise, and very sad. Dorothea's worst choices live with me – instructively, I hope.

What's your favourite play by Shakespeare?

King Lear. It unhinges you. Tolstoy famously couldn't abide it, citing the characters' lack of adequate motivation or completeness. But that seems to me to be the point. Lear depicts a world where emotion and language are excessive, arbitrary, slippery and fragmenting. And so the brief moments of kindness that occur recast sincerity into a form of terrifying cruelty. It is hard to see oneself, really see oneself. Lear describes that process of avoidance to harrowing effect.

If you could liken yourself to any character in literature, who would it be?

On my best days, I like to see myself in Beatrice from *Much Ado About Nothing*. Her no-nonsense wit and energy are definitely qualities I aspire to. But more likely I'm a toned-down version. I am especially moved by Anne Elliot in *Jane Austen's Persuasion*. We're the same age, and I identify with her persistence – a combination of useful regret and optimism.

What's your favourite film?

Either *Annie Hall* or *Hannah and Her Sisters*. Both by Woody Allen; both gorgeous films.

What's your favourite TV series?

The Wire. The final series is a miserable let down, but the first four are a gripping and tragic portrait of a failed community. Brilliant theme song, too.

What is your favourite place?

This is a great question. *Holkham Bay* on the North Norfolk coast is a very special place to me. I've been going there with family and friends since I was a young child. It always reminds me of the people I love.

Which person from history most inspires you?

Can I name, not a historical figure, but a historian? Tony Judt was a historian who died last year from motor neurone disease. His account of the history of post-1945 Europe is a stunning book, deeply humane and moving, about memory and collective consciousness. It genuinely changed the way I think about historical process. And the way in which he documented the decay of his own body – writing right up until his death – was, like all of his work, eloquent and unflinching, and certainly inspiring.

Which five guests would you invite to your fantasy dinner party?

I place a huge premium on laughter and heated argument at dinner parties, so in that spirit: Jonathan Swift, Elaine from *Seinfeld*, Hunter S. Thompson, Eleanor of Aquitaine and Christopher Hitchens.

If you could be any fruit, which would it be?

Be a fruit? I just don't understand what kind of information this question is designed to elicit!! Can I just name my favourite fruit? Okay. Mangoes and blueberries. I love mangoes and blueberries.

What's your favourite takeaway?

Thai. Green curry. Every time.

Why are you leaving Eltham College?

Living in North London, the commute to Eltham is very long and so I wanted to work somewhere nearer to home, as well as wanting to work full time. I've had an amazing time at Eltham though. Everyone – the staff and pupils – have been fantastic.

What will you miss most about your A2 class?

Well, there was a peculiarly brilliant weirdness about teaching Virginia Woolf in a physics lab. And I was unendingly impressed with one pupil's stoicism in the face of losing his bag practically every day. Mostly, however, I'll miss their ability to make me laugh, even if it wasn't always entirely appropriate...

Miss Hardy's Upper Sixth English Set