The Association annual dinner was held on Friday 10th March in the Stamford Hall at the School. The number of guests attending was similar to the previous year - circa 70 in total - a mixture of staff, current prefects, recent Old Boys and some not-so-recent Old Boys.

Pre-dinner drinks were held from 6:30 in the 6th-form common room (there was a general feeling that this slightly earlier start time gave a greater opportunity to meet old friends and possibly have a mooch around the school to marvel on the changes made over the years).

Guests were treated to music from the school jazz band - and most excellent entertainment it was too - many thanks go to the boys and supporting staff for providing such first-rate music. Drinks were served by our friends from Ashley Cricket Club.
Dinner commenced at 7:30 with grace and the loyal toast, led this year by Christian James as stand-in for Association Chairman, Colin Bamford, who is recovering from illness. Christian ‘lighted’ the Reggie Thompson ceremonial candle (very slickly-done - no naked flame was involved!). How does he do that?) as a cue for those gathered to raise their glasses to toast the Association.

Dinner was served very efficiently by Sodexo and comprised: Starter - Feta mushroom and sundried tomato terrine. Main - Lamb with vegetables (or vegetarian option) followed by chocolate torte, coffee and mints. Very nice it was too.

During the meal Christian introduced the raffle prizes, comprising one or two interesting football items and an enviable selection of cheap booze. Accordingly as guests ate, the Sixth-formers fleeced cash from distracted diners in the name of raffle ticket purchases. Having inspected the takings, Christian declared them “interim” before entreating a further plundering of the rapidly-dwindling guest finances with another round of raffle sales. All told, the raffle raised a total of £600. The Association aims for break-even on dinner ticket sales (and often makes a slight loss, due to last-minute non-attendees), so sales of raffle tickets are an important fund-raiser for the Association. Thanks go to all those who were able to contribute raffle prizes.
Eating concluded, it was time for speeches. Arrangements had been made for Anthony Taylor - top-flight football referee and Old Boy of the school - to attend as guest speaker. However Anthony was unfortunately put in last-minute detention and therefore unable to join us. Maybe in a future year. However, reluctant though he can often seem to speak in public, Christian once again took to the microphone with a hybrid ‘guest-speaker-cum-stand-in-Chairman’ slot.

Apparently, as a result of an earlier school renovation, Christian had recently been presented with a piece of the school infrastructure as a souvenir. The school property in question bore graffiti mentioning Christian by name and also referred to certain biological details that defied accepted anatomical teaching. The graffiti referred specifically to Mr James’ nether regions and their unconventional attachment point. The souvenir was duly circulated for the non-squeamish guests to inspect.

Last year the Association donated funds to the School to acquire some new microscope equipment to support the excellent science teaching already achieved by the School. Christian presented the high-tech equipment to an unsuspecting Andrea Wesley, Head of Biology, who regained her composure in the face of the James charm-offensive.

The perfect after-dinner speech: short, semi-witty and not too pornographic.

Responding on behalf of the school, the Headmaster updated the Association on the main events of the preceding 12 months. A very successful year on many fronts: ‘A’ level results were excellent (albeit a slight drop the the previous year’s record results) but very pleasing considering the record-breaking numbers sitting exams. High-fliers have always done well at ABGS, but of particular note were those students who had just scraped into the 6th-form, but who really caught the work ethic and managed to achieve good grades.

GCSE results were almost identical to the previous year, in spite of the tightening of standards by the exam board. From 2017 there are new syllabuses and exam grades to look out for, which
represent the most comprehensive re-engineering of GCSEs for many years.

AGBS also had a stellar sporting year. Overall the school is rated as the 7th-strongest in the country, consistently in the top-10. Specifically, hockey: AGSB are the North West champions for Under 18s and in indoor hockey National Finalists for the Under 16s. The U16s team are now also North West champions and Northern champions and going to the National Final in April. Badminton: AGSB are the second best U14 team in the country. Football: The First XI are National Finalists in the English Schools Football Cup. (Originally there were over 500 schools and now there are just two - AGSB and Millfield School - and on Wednesday 29th March AGSB will be playing at Doncaster Rovers' ground, kick off 12 noon.) Our First XI is also in the last round of the Greater Manchester Cup so there is a possibility of a memorable double.

Musically the school had further success this year with the Studio Band reaching the National Finals of the Concert Bank Festival for the 5th year in succession and the regional round they achieved the much-coveted (but rarely awarded) Platinum award for outstanding musical performance. The Music Department are also producing 'Jesus Christ Superstar' later in March.

The Headmaster has also been in the media spotlight recently, particularly with the issue of additional Grammar schools being under public debate at the moment. There is also the thorny issue of money. AGSB will soon suffer a cut in funding of around 2.9% in addition to the cuts already imposed. The school is making representation to mitigate the cuts, but there may well be consequences in terms of class sizes and school morale.

At the 2016 dinner, the Headmaster reported that North Cestrian School had joined our Trust – the Hamblin Education Trust – as it joined the state sector. In its first year as a state High School, North Cestrian had 126 pupils in Year 7 and this year it is likely that there will be greater demand next year, almost all being drawn from the WA14 and 15 area. This year Stretford Grammar School and Sale High School may join the Trust. We believe that as a group of four we will be stronger than as separate units in these uncertain times.

The Headmaster concluded by reminding the Association of the affection felt for it by the School and thanking the Association for its continued support.
The raffle was drawn and prizes collected, before the formal proceedings were brought to a close and the serious business of catching up with old chums could begin.

The awarding of raffle prizes - guests were clearly easily-pleased