

# Inventing the future

Celebrating the contribution that Gresham's School has made to Design, Engineering and the Arts in the 20th Century

From early vacuums designed by inventor James Dyson to rare first editions; from *The Liberal Fascist*, a 1934 original manuscript about his thoughts on education at Gresham's by the poet W H Auden, to actress Olivia Colman's Golden Globe statuette; work by an extraordinary array of artists, performers and scientists featured in a unique exhibition celebrating the remarkable artistic and design accomplishments of 20th Century students from Gresham's School in Norfolk. *The Gresham's Designers, Artists & Writers Who Changed Our World* ran from September 29th to October 14th 2018.

Key examples of their work and previously unseen documents and artefacts were drawn from private and public collections, ranging from boat, plane, architectural, engineering and graphic designs & products, to literary and musical manuscripts, books, films, paintings & ephemera.

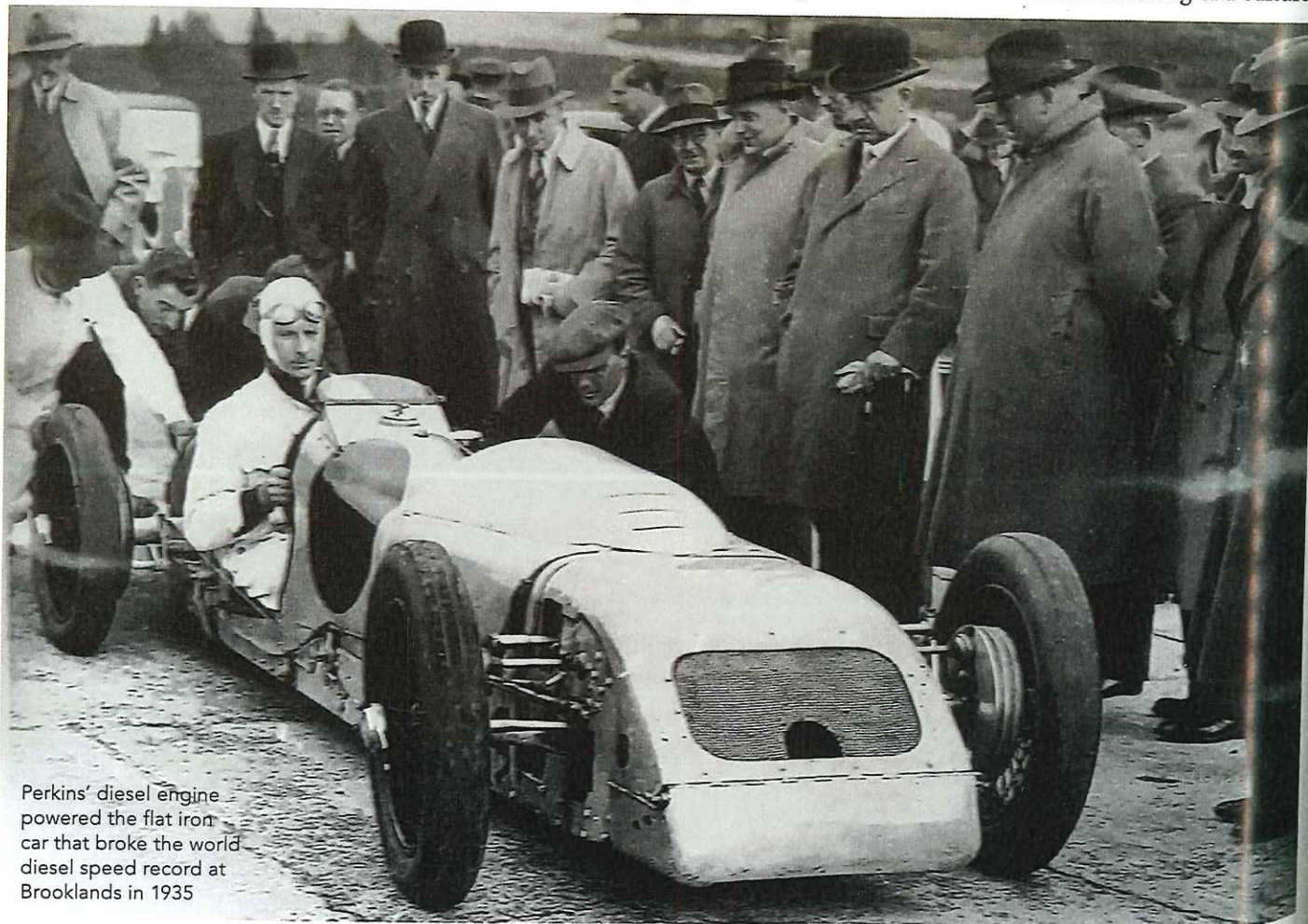
Works from prominent 'Greshamians' such as poet Stephen Spender and his artist/photographer brother Humphrey, artist Ben Nicholson, composer Benjamin Britten, and Gerald Holtom, the artist who created the famous symbol of international peace, were also on display. The exhibition featured film excerpts from the work of Nigel Dick, the musician and writer who famously

directed the Britney Spears video *Baby one more time* and the Band Aid video *Do they know it's Christmas?* as well as making over five hundred music videos with many others, including Paul McCartney, Elton John, Oasis and Tina Turner.

Gresham's educated Christopher Cockerell, who invented the hovercraft using two empty coffee tins and a vacuum cleaner fan, was represented in the exhibition by his vital work on radio direction finders for the RAF in World War II; as well the designers of several innovative planes and Frank Perkins, who developed the diesel engine, producing more than 20 million and transforming world agriculture from horse to mechanical power. More than 15 key artworks by the leading British painter Ben Nicholson were also on show.

The exhibition also featured Philip Dowson, co-founder and chief architect at Arup Associates the global design business, prolific boat designer Ian Proctor and Gerald Holtom, the designer of the International Peace Symbol which started as the logo for CND, which he gave to the world without copyright.

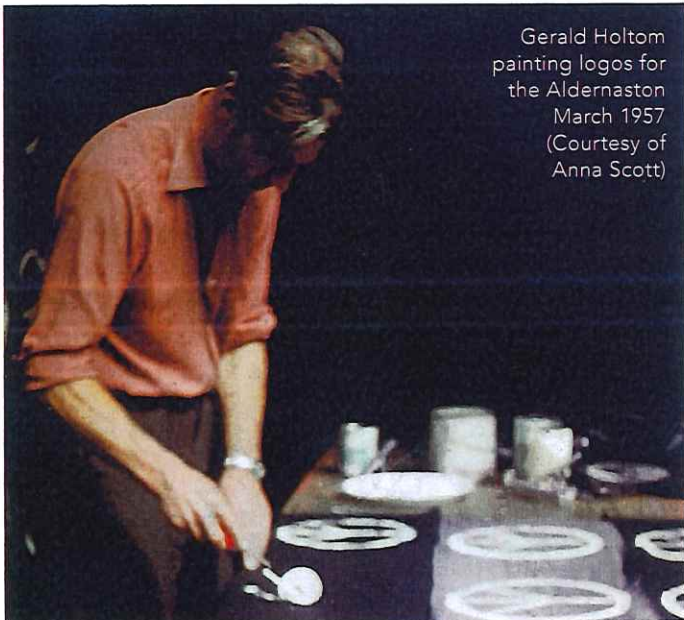
Gresham's School in Holt, North Norfolk, was founded in 1555. In the early decades of the 20th Century, the small provincial grammar school underwent something of a cultural



Perkins' diesel engine powered the flat iron car that broke the world diesel speed record at Brooklands in 1935



'Gresham's is an historic and vibrant co-educational school. We pride ourselves that a Gresham's education enables young people to develop in a huge variety of areas: the school has a tradition of producing outstanding achievers in all walks of life, including architects, diplomats, engineers, musicians, actors and sports men and women and much more.



Gerald Holtom  
painting logos for  
the Aldernaston  
March 1957  
(Courtesy of  
Anna Scott)

revolution, tripling the number of pupils it would send to Oxford and Cambridge, while championing modern languages, literature and science in a progressive and nurturing rural environment. In 1903, Gresham's school moved from its ageing premises at the Old School House in the centre of Holt, Norfolk, to a greenfield location on the outskirts of the town with state of the art science labs and purpose-built boarding houses.

Over two decades of 'cultural revolution', the school roll went from 40 pupils to 240, though more than 100 pupils and staff lost their lives in World War I. While the school's two headmasters from 1900-1935 were Oxbridge scientists, there was a strong emphasis on modern languages and literature. 'The small provincial grammar school emerged at the dawn of the 20th Century as one of the most progressive, creative and innovative public schools in Britain and it was within this vibrant educational crucible that the pupils who were to go on to invent the future were to be shaped,' said the school's head of history, Simon Kinder.

In the field of arts and culture, the school provided the spring board for Auden, Spender, Britten and Nicholson. In

the design and engineering world there were luminaries too, down whose footpath, decades later, former pupil James Dyson would follow, going on to revolutionise domestic appliances with a series of famous inventions and founding a company that employs nearly 5,000 people in Britain alone. Sir James contributed an essay to the booklet published alongside the exhibition.

In the world of journalism and broadcasting the school boasts the BBC's first Director General, John Reith, and Cecil Graves, also Director General for a year during World War Two; the broadcaster and former head of the BBC World Service and CEO of the Barbican Centre in London, Sir John Tusa; Peter Pooley, the founder and first editor of BBC's Radio Newsreel, which was to become the most ambitious and longest sustained news programme mounted anywhere in the world; and journalist and BBC broadcaster, Paddy O'Connell. Notable figures from print journalism include Harry Hodgson (editor Sunday Times), Alistair Hetherington (editor Guardian), Cedric Belfrage (journalist, writer and double agent), Philip Pembroke-Stevens (foreign correspondent for Express and Telegraph, expelled by Nazis in 1934 and later shot reporting on the Japanese invasion of China in 1937). The spy and Russian agent Donald Maclean, whose life has been explored in two recent biographies, was also at the school, along with a number of other spies.

Film and stage luminaries include Peter Brook, Britain's greatest living theatre director, Stephen Frears, Julian Jarrold, Shakespearian actor Sebastian Shaw (later Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader), and actor Miranda Raison. Olivia Colman, who attended the school from 1990-1992, won the Golden Globe in 2017 as best supporting actress in *The Night Manager*.

The headmaster of Gresham's, Douglas Robb said: 'Gresham's is an historic and vibrant co-educational school. We pride ourselves that a Gresham's education enables young people to develop in a huge variety of areas: the school has a tradition of producing outstanding achievers in all walks of life, including architects, diplomats, engineers, musicians, actors and sports men and women and much more. We believe that this celebration of some of our greatest alumni will inspire future generations to come to study and thrive here.'