

Speech Day Speech July 2009

Mr Morris, Chairman of Governors, Governors, Chairman of Mid Devon Council, Mr Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen, Blundellians

As many of you will know I have a deep interest in American politics. I have written a substantial part of a text book on the subject and failed to complete a PHD on American gun politics; I fear neither of these two projects will be completed. My interest perhaps, unlike many, has waned since George Bush has left Office; President Obama is an enormously impressive man and in so many ways sets a new agenda for America, few who heard Mr Hawkins give his excellent Chapel to the School can doubt the importance of the Democrats victory; however, as you will remember from last year I have a deep affection for the eloquence of George W Bush. You will remember some of his wise advice no doubt; “It is hard to put food on your family”; “I firmly believe that humans and fish can peacefully coexist” and of course my all time favourite “I make no apologies for putting my father up on that pedalo”. As you know the relationship between him and Congress became ever more strained and he became ever grumpier, which perhaps characterised the final years of his Presidency, despite the following show of unity. “I was proud the other day when both Republicans and Democrats stood with me in the Rose Garden to announce their support for a clear statement of purpose: you disarm, or we will.”

Grumpiness can add a refreshing outlook on occasion, the Eeyore quality. As many of you know I will be cycling with Nick Folland and Richard Cross from John O’Groats to Land’s End in just three days now; we are fully equipped with lycra and sundry other items of kit. I am looking forward to the cycle, and 1045 miles in the company of Richard and Nick; as part of my remit as Head Master of Blundell’s I am ultimately responsible for the Prep School, this is one of the

least arduous elements of my job since Nick Folland, the Headmaster, is not only a truly excellent leader but also a thoroughly nice chap. I know he would be the first to thank his Deputy Richard Cross, I hope he will forgive me but on occasion his grumpiness can know no limit on a bicycle, but it is the unpredictability which makes it so refreshing; we can alternate from seething incandescence at the futility of cycling to wild bonhomie and euphoria at being out in the beautiful Blackdown Hills, nothing has ever given him more pleasure, not even scoring a century against the Indian touring teams; both these emotions can run side by side. We were concerned how we would cope with the hours spent on the road. Richard came up with a word game which we practiced one training run, the idea being to combine two dissimilar categories, car makes with fish for example; I know it does not translate too well but it does occupy the mind, Richard started with Skoda Octopus (Octavia), then it was Mr Folland's turn; it transpires he only knows one car make and one fish... therefore we are going to be searching in vain for two weeks for a Volkswagen Trout. That said, his mind was clearly beavering away because at a dinner party some time later he astounded the assembled masses by shouting apropos of nothing "famous singer and herbs", promptly followed by Elaine Sage. The journey could be a very long one indeed. It is substantially in aid of the Devon Air Ambulance, it is not too late to sponsor us, please go to our web site. The Charities brief has been led by John Brigden in quite wonderful way. In his time we must now have raised somewhere in the region of £20,000 for a huge array of imaginative charities; his enthusiasm, exuberance and passion has rubbed off on the pupils. The Fashion Show organised by four 6th formers (Kristina Appleby, Ellie Frankpitt, Rosie le Page, Tamar Symons) was an extraordinarily impressive evening. A trade off, of course, is that we have to endure every now and again his predilection to dress up; something I had not realised was part of his character. We have experienced him as friar tuck and also wearing the most extraordinary garish, loud, flared, 1970's trousers.

Clearly although he has led the charities initiative he would be the first to acknowledge the pupils themselves are to be warmly congratulated on how selfless their approach is to helping others. I would also like to thank him for preparing Speech Day for us.

Last year's A level results were the second best the School has experienced; I was very pleased 24 pupils out of 80 achieved three A grades or better. This year the pupils have had such good responses from their chosen universities. Five of our pupils gained offers from Oxford or Cambridge. To achieve a place Natural Sciences (Matthew Cole), Law (Louise Youngman), Biology (Harriet Rix), Mathematics and Computation (Sev Zubov) and Medicine (Alice Woolley) shows the breadth of academic achievement here. That university offers are so strong is a compliment to the pupils and also to the university infrastructure which has been built around them in recent years by Miss Jardine-Young and Miss Norman in particular. The Sixth Form process now is very impressive; Miss Norman has done wonderful things.

This year Eve Jardine-Young, the excellent Director of Studies, and Bruce Wheatley, the Head of Design and Technology, have been leading a working party considering "How do we here continue to enrich, enhance and enlarge the educational environment inside and outside the classroom"; we are trying to extend and develop real curiosity and excitement, Isaac Newton wrote:

"I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

The purpose of education is to replace an empty mind with an open one.
Malcolm S Forbes

There is an active debate in the School concerning IGCSEs and GCSEs and also a working party examining the post-16 developments pre U A level and IB. I think it is extremely unlikely that in my time the School will move to the full IB; nevertheless there are some very interesting aspects to that exam, not least the theory of knowledge paper; therefore we are starting to pioneer parallel extended projects, which are accredited by the exam boards and count towards university entrance. This will give pupils the opportunity to extend, develop and deepen their intellectual interest in a given subject. Outside the classroom a considerable amount of other endeavours are being pioneered to draw out the potential in each child.

“Ask not how intelligent is this child: ask rather, how is this child intelligent?”

Harvard Professor, Howard Gardner

The Speech Day programme gives a full list of the most significant academic achievements; this year they nearly spill on to a second page which I think reveals how much is being done to stretch the able and engage those who are intellectually curious. There were over 130 medals won in various science and Maths competitions for instance. Eleven societies are fully functioning and providing real stimulation. George Bush ventured into the realms of science when he offered the following advice. “It would be a mistake for the United States Senate to allow any kind of human cloning to come out of that chamber.”

If I may highlight one event, On May 8th Tim Harford, the eminent academic delivered the Blundell Lecture. The inspiration for this lecture was the responsibility of the Business Club, led by a girl in the Upper Sixth, Sophie Anderson. She and her team took on the project and organised an outstanding evening, involving many from the local community and also many pupils from other schools.

The lecture programme has been masterminded by Matthew Hawkins with support from John Brigden, we have had many interesting speakers, in total twenty nine speakers have visited us, for example Dida Halaka who spoke to us about African politics and his colourful life with rather frightening African despots, John Harrison spoke about his unsatiated desire for canoeing up the unnavigated tributaries of the Amazon for six months at a time on his own with no backup of any form; contracting Malaria with such ferocity that his teeth chattered so fiercely that all his fillings fell out. For me the great privilege is to entertain these extraordinary people to supper afterwards. I must mention Ian Maxwell, the renowned big track tracker who lives in Cornwall, unfortunately he put the wrong post code into his sat nav and went to Bruton, a rich irony for such an eminent tracker. Each speaker delivered a separate theme but the message is surprisingly similar. Charles Dickens put it very eloquently indeed. It was a harder day's journey than yesterday's, for there were long and weary hills to climb; and in journeys, as in life, it is a great deal easier to go down hill than up. However, they kept on, with unabated perseverance, and the hill has not yet lifted its face to heaven that perseverance will not gain the summit of at last.

The social, spiritual, moral and cultural aspect of the School is indeed outstanding, as the last inspection report stated. This is best seen perhaps as the soul of the school. At the centre of this has been the Chapel, which is physically and metaphorically at the heart of the School. The Chaplain has taken the lead here. The Remembrance Day service remains one of the most poignant moments for all of us. I hope the Reverend will not mind an irreverence because I thought I might draw upon the following words which have at some stage appeared in either Church bulletins or the Church Times "Don't let worry kill you off let the Church help"; "Miss Charlene Mason sang 'I will not pass this way again' giving obvious pleasure to the congregation";

“For those of you who have children and don’t know it, we have a nursery downstairs”; “The evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be ‘What is hell’ come early and listen to our choir practise”; “The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon”; “The low self-esteem support group will meet on Thursday at 7:00 pm, please use the back door”; “This being Easter Sunday we will ask Mrs Lewis to come forward and lay an egg on the altar”.

The PSD programme was praised in the inspection report and under Mrs Crease and, whilst she was on maternity leave, Miss Burnett, we take a very imaginative approach to educating pupils about wider issues.

The Common Room has been wonderful. It has been a difficult year given many very complex staffing issues; their goodwill has been quite simply humbling. Not only have they worked hard with the pupils to achieve excellent results but The Speech Day programme will give you a very good idea of the volume and depth of activities undertaken during the year, and of course we must remember they are also fully engaged in the boarding houses. They have encouraged each and every pupil to fulfil their potential; they give pupils confidence and ambition.

In a completely rational society, the best of us would aspire to be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less, because passing civilization along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honour and the highest responsibility anyone could have.

-- Lee Iacocca

A considerable amount has been achieved over the past year. The second Astro Turf looks wonderful; it is an absolute necessity for us. Significant investment is happening this summer in Petergate; we shall continue this process through

all the other Houses. We have new outdoor, all-weather, state of the art cricket nets; the swimming pool and sports hall are on the horizon as is a hard play area for School House.

The Houseparents have been at the heart of the school's success which is of course important in what is primarily a boarding school. I am extremely grateful to Andrew Berrow as Head of Boarding who has maintained the momentum in so many areas not least Sunday activities. Leigh Menheneott brings his warm and open personality to bear in running a popular and successful House; Nicky Klinkenberg is also outstanding in her understanding of her charges, Peter Gordon has taken Westlake to new level; these four add strength and wisdom to the body. The three new Houseparents Charlie Hamilton, Debbie Hosking and James Postle have made a terrific start.

The Learning Support Department has undergone something of a roller-coaster ride this year. Simply put, the most difficult experience I have ever encountered as a Head Master or indeed in any other occupation was the tragedy of the death of Janet A'Lee. I will not dwell on this subject as it is still raw and emotional for most of us. Suffice to say she was a wonderful person who combined a compassionate, caring and humble approach with a strong professional dignity. She is looking down upon us now; I have no doubt, with a wry smile on her face feeling a mixture of embarrassment and modesty. Helen Youngs and Alix Rhodes have been absolute stars in the Learning Support Department.

You will know I have an inherent dislike of league tables and actually at the beginning of this year we would have done really rather well in them, but they simply cannot measure the richness of Blundell's life; W. B. Yeats wrote Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire.

The music here continues to thrive and develop apace. Andrew Barlow and Luke Wynell-Mayow have contributed in so many different ways. Each year, I find listening to the musical and dramatic performances of the pupils one of the real privileges of being Head Master. The quality has never been higher and the quantity is awe inspiring; the choral concert a real highlight. Don't take my word for it in a minute I have asked Rosamund and Suzana to play a flute duet for us. Musically the Soul Band has provide many fun moments for us all; but so has the orchestra, the jazz group, SH choir and the Big Band for example. There have been innumerable individual performances of the highest order. I am very grateful to the unsung (excuse the pun) heroes, the peripatetic music teachers. Rosamund and Suzana...

Miss Baddeley, Mr Winwood, Mr Lawrenson and Mrs Corden have done wonderful things this year in the theatre. I would also like to thank Mrs Steel, who willingly gives up her time to help with the makeup. They are the very embodiment of Anatole France's famous quotation "Nine tenths of education is encouragement."

The A2 and AS devised plays were quite outstanding; hopefully the examiner will agree with me. There have been Year group plays, and wonderfully entertaining House plays. To single out individual performances would be invidious, but that said I would like to mention Robin Hill who has been a tremendous performer over the past few years; his presence on stage has brought a real awareness of talent at the highest level. The Activities programme continues to grow under the wise and imaginative leadership of Georgina Batting and Lucy Chick.

Now is the time to say farewell and pay tribute to those members of staff who are leave us today. Mr Thomas will be sorely missed; Glenalmond's gain is definitely our loss; he has had a strong and powerful desire to involve himself more fully in the pastoral side of schools and it came as no surprise to me that

the headmaster of Glenalmond realised this strength; they have appointed him to run a House. I am sure he will keep in touch with us.

Tom Wilks leaves after one year; he has made quite an impression on the School. As with Matthew Lawrenson personal reasons have drawn his career here to a conclusion. Matt Lawrenson, as I mentioned, will also leave us at the end of this year. His contribution to the Drama Department has been most impressive. Tom will be replaced by Douglas Morrison who joins us from industry. Miss Claire Fordham who has recently graduated with a first class degree from Exeter University, will join the Drama department; Miss Aoife-Jane Murphy moves on after two bright years here. She has, this year, taken on responsibility as Head of Psychology. We wish her well; she has brought a charm and openness to us which will be missed. Her replacement is Miss Emma Langdon who joins us from Cardiff University. Antoine Uribe (the French Assistante) and Ruth Shorrocks will also leave us after two very productive and engaging years. They have both brought a degree of intelligence and energy to their respective roles. I would like to take this opportunity to thank very much all those who are leaving for their endeavour and commitment and to wish them much happiness and success. As many of you will know Phil Treseder had a stroke half way through the first half of term, he is sorely missed but the good news is he is making good progress and we all hope he will return to us in the future. In the meantime I have appointed Henry Roff-Sylvester, a graduate from Nottingham University.

At the end of term I heard that Mr Chapman has decided to move on from us after a very successful career including of course running the CCF. The CCF has powered on under his leadership and those of the Senior Cadets, James Evans and Bess Menheneott. I know this not only from my own observations but from those of successive inspecting officers, latterly by Brigadier Findlay

who much enjoyed his recent inspection. Peter will be the first to praise Yan Yates the school's SSI. He is simply outstanding; not only with the CCF but also with the Devizes to Westminster canoe challenge and so much else. We wish Peter happiness in whatever he chooses to do; Peter is hoping to finish his second novel.

The sport this year has been extremely successful.

In 1980, Daley Thompson, the decathlete, was at the height of his considerable powers. Having won gold in the Olympics of 1980 (Moscow) and 1984 (Los Angeles), he went to the 1988 Olympics in Seoul with the chance of a third gold. His spirit and his competitive ferocity were undiminished, but his body could no longer recover from injury and exertion the way it once had done. In the pole vault, his pole snapped and he aggravated an old thigh injury but carried on with the day's events.

At the beginning of the second day's events it was clear that Daley wasn't going to be able to amass enough points for gold. A BBC reporter interviewed him and suggested that it might be better to withdraw from the competition and be remembered as a winner rather than 'spoiling' his record. Daley rounded on the reporter, explained forcefully why he had no intention of withdrawing, and finished by saying "I'd have to be a pretty small man to give up just because I thought I was going to lose".

He went on to finish fourth, heavily bandaged, but still standing and smiling at the end. This to me embodies all that is important about sport here at Blundell's.

I am extremely grateful to Adrian Guy who took on the mantle of the Russell, including the practices, and by common consent did a terrific job. He also led

the Ten Tors teams working closely with Luke Wynell-Mayow. I am also extremely grateful to all the master and mistresses in charge of sport. I would particularly like to mention that at Christmas we said goodbye to the inspirational coaching of Norman Ridgway after a glowing career on the rugby pitch. We had two unbeaten teams; the girls U14 tennis team and the U15 rugby team. All the sports has success whether this be the hockey teams, girls particularly so, the football teams (under the excellent leadership of Dr John Balsdon), tennis, athletics, netball or cricket including the U15B cricket team, if I may quote from their coach when they beat Queen's Taunton, "a great day for the U15Bs, a great day for Blundell's, and frankly a great day for God's own game", I suspect however they did not win many. The Fives, swimming, Squash and Golf teams often forgotten have had some wonderful results; Jess Mudge has in Year 11 played No 1 in the 1st V Squash team and won many more than she lost – she is of course a nationally ranked player. I am extremely grateful to Mrs Nicky Klinkenberg for taking on responsibility running the sports for the past two terms. She has been excellent. I am also very grateful to Ali Menheneott who as Head of Girls' games works tirelessly on the pupils behalf.

Two pupils have embodied Blundell's sport this year: Bess Menheneott becomes the first girl Captain to win the famous White Jacket, I can think of no finer recipient not only for her performances but also her attitude. She also led the CCF with distinction and completed the arduous 125 mile Devizes to Westminster Canoe Challenge for the second time. Mr Yates partnered her in the boat. Well done to the others in the boats. Sam Smith achieved a rare hat trick; full colours in all three major sports. We shall miss them both.

Something like 60 of you have represented Devon or above; ten of you have been involved at the highest level.

Jonathan Reid and Toby Pilkington represented what was in effect the England Prep Schools' team (two prep school boys represented the U11s), Ellie Yard has played regularly for the England U 14 Rounders Team, Lizzie Wessley once again being selected for the National Athletics Championships, Cameron Grainger in Year 11 has been selected for the England Development squad, Tori Margesson ran in the National Cross Country Championships, Sam Wyatt-Haines is the National U13 Fives champion (and Sam and Jack Webber are the National Doubles champions) and our equestrian team of Rupert Batting, Emma Selby, Emily Wardle and Alex Batting are the National JAS Champions, Rupert is in his own right the ODE Intermediate National Champion and next week Lizzie Wessely competes in the National School's Athletic competition. As is evident from the programme we have a host of other Blundellians achieving success at Devon or Regional level.

I am particularly grateful to Randall Thane, who is a very fine Second Master indeed. The Senior Leadership Team has been very supportive and impressive. The School simply would not function without Cheryl Merriam, Sharron Stones and Carol Francis, who mastermind the school office. I am particularly grateful to Cheryl, who stepped in for my excellent secretary and enthusiastic Jenni Gale for a couple of months. She was super. Tim Dyke, the Head of English not only runs an impressive department but is also the official photographer, he makes these available to you through the website; in addition he produces one of the best school magazines I have seen. We would be lost without him.

Economy notwithstanding the School will be full in September and for this the Registrars Peter Klinkenberg and Liz Thane deserve huge plaudits. We are most fortunate to have a wonderful librarian, Mrs Gordon, ably assisted by Mrs Deighton-Gibson.

As always what we have been able to achieve at the School throughout the year would not have been possible without the very strong support and talent of the superb Bursar and his staff. They maybe slightly understated and they are certainly modest in their outlook; however, Mr Chambers, the Bursar, leads a very fine team indeed I am very grateful to all of his staff. Mr Edwards has worked tirelessly to provide strong fare for us in the kitchens. I suspect even as I stand here he is preparing his next rendition for the Gut. Mr Clark who runs the Maintenance Department is simply excellent; he is calm, understated but very committed to Blundell's. He works in a methodical yet enthusiastic way. Mr Chmiel, the Head Porter, leads a strong team and simply without their help the School would not function. Every year I express my gratitude and admiration of William Lancelles the Head Gardener; the flowers each year for Speech Day are fantastic they will as always be for sale at the back after my speech, that the School looks so beautiful is the function of his devotion to all thing to do with the School as it is indeed with John Smith the Head Groundsman and his team. We have a wonderful Sanatorium they are warm, open, generous with their time and tremendously caring about medical and pastoral issues within the School. Having run a boarding house for ten years I know how important Matrons are and in each House the pupils rely heavily on the framework and guidelines established by the Matrons. They are the unsung heroes.

I am immensely fortunate to have wonderful Governors; I am tempted to leave it there but I am not going to. They are supportive and in every way feel proud of and loyal to this rather special School. It would not be where it is now without their intuitive and imaginative desire to ensure Blundell's remains a fine School. David Fursdon is always embarrassed when I mention him by name nevertheless it will not prevent me from saying how grateful I am to him for his calm and detailed advice.

They have appointed an outstanding Development Director, Mrs Amber Oliver, who has made a terrific start in raising money for the new Peter Blundell Foundation; I am as twenty-ninth Head Master of Blundell's and I am acutely aware of the legacy I inherited; Peter Blundell wished Blundell's to be at the heart of the community, he would I think have approved of the fund set up in his name to raise money to help those who would not ordinarily afford to send their children here to apply for help in so doing.

I would most like to thank my wife who sees precious little of me; perhaps it would not be the appropriate time to give you the final quotation from the Church Bulletin, and I suppose a lesson to us all who are deep in wedlock. "Irvine Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24th in the Church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days".

I would particularly like to thank the Leavers, they have been really excellent in so many ways; the school monitors have been as good as I can remember. The Heads of School (James Evans and Louise Youngman) and their deputies (Alex Nicholson and Lizzie Clark) have been nothing less than exceptional. I would like to once again read to them my partings words from Chapel this morning:

I hope the ethos of the school will be deep within you; that you will feel confident in your own strengths and not need to curry favour from others, that you will always be positive about others strengths and understanding of their weaknesses. I hope you will be charitable, that you will always see the glass half full, that you will be kind, tolerant, compassionate and secure in your own personal qualities. I hope you will not be a critic... remember the wise words of *Theodore Roosevelt – 26th President of the United States* "It is not the critic who counts, not the person who points out how the strong person stumbles or where

the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again because there is no effort without error and short-coming, who knows great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the high achievement of triumph and who at worst, if they fail while daring greatly, knows their place shall never be with those souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”

Those of us who will be sat here in September wish you much good fortune in what lies ahead.

We shall miss you, each and every one of you have added to the unique and very special flavour of this fine old School. Thank you for your enthusiasm, energy, encouragement and your support.

If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put foundations under them. *Henry David Thoreau*