

## SPEECH DAY SPEECH JULY 2011

*Our Member of Parliament, Mr Marks, Chairman of Governors, Governors, Chairman of Mid Devon Council, Mr Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen, Blundellians*

I am not usually lost for things to say, but I always have difficulties thinking how to start this speech; my fellow headmasters offered plenty of advice (surely not), some start with a random joke, this is a suggestion from the HM of a school in Taunton, “A man takes his Alsatian to the vet. ‘My dog is cross eyed.’ ‘Well,’ said the vet, ‘let us take a look at him.’ He picks the dog up and examines his eyes, then checks his teeth. Finally he says, ‘I am going to have to put him down.’ ‘What, because he is cross eyed?’ ‘No, because he is very heavy.’” Some start with an anecdote about the most famous former pupil, but I can’t do this because he is sat on the stage next to me, some an anecdote about the most infamous, well ours is probably the double murderer we heard about on OB Day or the OB convicted of running the largest cannabis importation scam in recent years, and less said about these the better. Some have true stories from exam scripts; I was offered, “JS Bach wrote a great many compositions and had a large number of children. In between he practiced on an old spinster he kept in the attic.” I quite like “Socrates was a famous Greek teacher who went around giving advice. He died of an overdose of wedlock” – this is my opportunity to thank Kate for her unstinting support. Some, mainly those without spark or imagination dwell on former themes, in the belief that no one listens to the speech, and I confirmed this to be true with Aiden in my Lower Sixth class yesterday, which brings me on to Dubya. I know I have been a wee bit Dubya-centric over the years and you will be relieved to know that I will be drawing upon the wise words of many other presidents, but not this year. As with all great leaders his reflections stand the test of time, particularly as I am an economist.

“If terriers and bariffs are torn down, this economy will grow.”

“Our enemies are innovative and resourceful, and so are we. They never stop thinking about new ways to harm our country and our people, and neither do we.”

I thought I would start in an unconventional way by talking about some members of Common Room. When I started head mastering, I was given all sorts of advice, never make a decision in a corridor was helpful but unfortunately it was ten minutes too late, beware the first five members of staff who enter your study smiling, but the most important piece was a good speech is about the pupils and about five minutes. The Ofsted report, about which more later said; “Relationships between staff and students are excellent”.

We have had a super year, record numbers in the school, record exam results, with the current Upper Sixth leading the way, huge amounts of success across so many different areas. Please take time to read the Speech Day programme, partly because it is an astonishing testament to the success of the pupils, and partly because you will realise that unless I were to talk from now until results day in August I could not do justice to the pupils’ achievements and the commitment and enthusiasm of the staff, and whilst I know the pupils would relish the opportunity to listen to me for many hours, I suspect Common Room might not. In highlighting some, I in no way wish to undermine, diminish, upset or downplay the success of so many.

People ask, “What is the secret of running a school?” The answer is very simple; find the best people possible and get them to do it and there is no better manifestation of this philosophy than Eve Jardine-Young and John Brigden. Indeed I would argue that in Eve and John we see the manifestation of the very finest teachers. Whilst they might differ in appearance, dare I say it age, and personal interests, subject enthusiasm, and I am not going to claim that Eve has a deep ambition to master the interstices of the front row, and unless I have missed the covert software programming sessions, John is not as sophisticated in his use of information technology as some, both have an intuitive understanding of how schools work and what motivates pupils, both have a deep rooted belief that kindness is at the heart of their relationships with the school community; they are both optimists, both remain resolute that personal qualities of tolerance, selflessness and integrity are what will drive pupils to success. No task is too small for them, both have risen to great heights in this school because they are humble, thus they draw out the best in those around them. As Director of Studies, Eve has seen much further than many before her, but as she would be the first to admit she has stood on the shoulders of giants, most notably her predecessor Paul Rivett, who is a quite phenomenal exams officer. She moves on to be the Principal of the Cheltenham Ladies College,

what a wonderful accolade for us. Peter Johnson told us about his attendance at a well known girls' school speech day, the headmistress peered down at her charges in an imposing and regal manner and said, "Girls you will meet three types of men; the handsome, the caring and... the majority".

Whilst John is outstanding, he is not perfect and can present certain difficulties for a headmaster. My lack of willpower was evident during a Chapel service when I opened the hymn book to see 13 verses, John was within eye sight; through each successive verse the giggles got worse and worse and in trying to conceal them more and more painful. His work with the Charities Committee has been an example to us all. He sends me quotations. "Tradition is not a dead load which we drag along with us... it is the soil in which the seeds of coming harvest are to be sown, and from which future harvests will be garnered." (T.S.Eliot). He finished his note with "I am sure you could use the quotation above at a suitable moment", and there is no better moment because it represents what is remarkable about this school.

On dwelling on John and Eve I, in no way, wish to belittle the significant achievements of our other leavers. James Postle, Eve's husband, has been a strong and effective Head of School House. I am very grateful to James for his excellent stewardship of the pupils, his impressive History teaching and his contribution to so many other aspects of school life, not least his mercurial effect on the school's shooting team. We shall also miss Johnny Nelmes who leaves us after three years to move to St Edward's Oxford. He has a powerful intellect and a deep compassion. We shall miss the two graduate assistants, Leah Doak and Alfie Flatters, both have worked tirelessly on behalf of the pupils.

Paddy Armstrong has probably had more influence on this school than just about any other member of staff; Physics teacher, two spells as housemaster, Director of Studies and Sport concurrently, Bursar, Development Director and latterly as overseas marketing supremo. How can we ever thank him? After 44 years he now retires; however we will see him around the school because he will continue as the OB Secretary.

By common consent Nick Folland, the Head Master of the Prep School who is moving on to run St John's Chepstow, was one of the best cricketers in the country. He would also say he is a cyclist rivalled only by Bradley Wiggins. I quote from the blog, "Now at the head of Loch Lomond after 35 mile climb.

Richard and I are struggling, not with the ride but with Nick's laboured humour... he thinks he is a cross between Lance Armstrong and Ken Dodd... unfortunately it is the cycling talent of Ken and the wit of Lance." But there is no doubt he always put the team first, when days were dull he would brighten them up by being run over. What cannot be disputed though is that he is a quite superb Headmaster. The prep school is a wonderful school indeed, and in large part this is due to his inspirational leadership. He would be the first to thank the staff, and the outstanding Elaine Filmer-Bennet, the Head of the Pre Prep. They have just received a cracking good report from the inspectors.

David Fursdon has a deep aversion to overt, sustained and effusive praise, well since he is retiring as Chairman of Governors and my career can only improve thereafter, tough. He has been a governor for twenty seven years, the last eleven years as Chairman, three with my superb predecessor Jonathan Leigh and the remaining time with me. To horribly misquote a Johnny Cash song, I may have met more impressive men but I can't remember when. He has steered the school through many changes with purpose and charm. I am very grateful to him for his patience, kindness, tolerance, strategic awareness and his friendship. Without David the school would certainly not be where it is today. The governors are wonderful; they are erudite, thoughtful, wise in the extreme and hugely supportive.

In many ways I would like to read the OFSTED report to you because it rated us as Outstanding in every category, but I am sure you are quivering with anticipation for my own words rather than those of the inspectors, although rarely have I met cleverer, more thoughtful and perceptive people. I would like to thank Randall Thane, simply the best Second Master a headmaster could wish for. Andrew Berrow, as Head of Boarding, was also hugely influential in the preparation. The Senior Leadership team was praised by the inspectors and rightly so. I will, if I may, quote from various aspects of the report.

In their overall summary they wrote, "Although the school is particularly renowned for excellence in sport, music and drama all individual achievements are celebrated equally. Blundell's offers a caring environment with a wide range of constructive activities and opportunities for all students". The activities programme coordinated by Ed Saunders and latterly led by Tom Candler was suitably praised because it adds balance and depth to the pupils' careers here, the Speech Day programme details just this breadth, as indeed does the PSHCE course led by Rachael Crease, which is consistently held up as a model of

excellence by all inspecting bodies who have visited. “The purpose of an education is to replace an empty mind with an open one.” (Malcolm Forbes) The report goes on, “Almost everyone interviewed at Blundell’s during the inspection commented they were warmly welcomed into the Blundell’s family.” “The school excels at helping students achieve their potential, one pupil said, ‘It has afforded me great opportunities, helped me a lot in my academic work and the sense of community is great.’” Indeed one of the more remarkable sights for me this year was the Head Boy taking his pastoral role very seriously and hugging eight or nine Year 10 boys from his former House.

They wrote, “The management of the boarding is excellent with clear guidelines to staff and continued training to support them in their roles”. Here the Houseparents have been powerful and compassionate supporters of their charges and their matrons too add significantly to the pastoral heartbeat. We are incredibly fortunate to have such an impressive body. And whilst I am talking of the houses, I am very grateful indeed to FH for providing humour and warm entertainment after the Gut this year, I suspect a houseparent’s worst nightmare is to have the headmaster invite himself to this event. GH is my target for next year. I shall not forget the final shot in the FH pupil video; Ben Wonnacott, a 1st XV prop and not a natural doppelganger for the excellent Mr Hamilton, wearing a miniature policemen’s helmet, was seen lovingly putting a pair of Crocs to bed in a drawer complete with mini duvet, followed by him tucking up a bicycle in the bottom of a bunk bed... quite what the inspectors would have made of this... And Michael Bennett’s impression with two modelling balloons, well...

Pastoral care comes from so many different areas, the San is so highly regarded by all, Mrs Deuchar and all the nurses provide so much more than medical treatment, as do the two school doctors, Dr O’Kelly and Dr Seymour. The Chaplain provides us with an excellent opportunity to reflect on spiritual matters in his frequent morning pieces. The new Chapel groups will be a significant support to him. After the SH “It’s a Knockout” afternoon we shall not see him in the same light again. I have enjoyed being part of the OH choir throughout the year.

The introduction of Pupil Consultation Groups chaired by Richard Paxton and Lydia Ferris, the Heads of School (who have been brilliant this year as have the Deputies Sam Anderson and Cat Swarbrick – indeed, I would like to thank all the Monitors), has significantly contributed to the running of the school. The

main priority for the pupils is a new fitness centre, which I am pleased to announce will be built over the summer.

We are developing greater leadership opportunities for the pupils; the CCF, run superbly by Yan Yates, has always done this to a high standard; Chris Boddington, ably assisted by Cat Swarbrick and Freddie Evans, have been powerful role models here; we have also developed the Duke of Edinburgh scheme by bringing it into the CCF. A recent survey carried out by the United Learning Trust focussed on methods major employers used for selection of new employees; apart from academic qualifications the highest rated qualification/experience bar none was the D of E award. Tom Candler has arrived and added to the structure taken forward by Isobel Scott.

We see pupils' leadership on the stage, with some robust and energetic house plays and but also in their willingness to engage with those directing the plays. Miss Baddeley, Miss Fordham and Mrs Corden have certainly raised the bar even higher; few will forget the Year 9 and 10 play, *The Crucible*, or the Year 8 play, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. Where would we be without Mr Winwood, the theatre technician; simply put, nowhere, and whilst I dwell on unsung heroes I would like to thank Mr Dyke for his work with the *Blundellian*. The academic Devised Plays were as always demanding and challenging, *Metamorphoses* and *4:48 Psychosis* particularly so. The School Play was a particular favourite of mine, *The Ghost Train* by Arnold Ridley. It was superb; Elliott Keefe, Indiana Murphy and Ed Carlton were tremendous in their roles.

The final quotation and the one of which I am perhaps most proud is "All students are treated as equals irrespective of their background, academic level, gender or personal circumstances. Achievement at all levels is rewarded." The word outstanding is perhaps over used, but the *Blundell's Common Room* is truly so. I don't often nick stories from the prep school speech day but I simply loved this true story told by Nick Folland: one pupil was heard to say to another, "you're really lucky because your Mum is a teacher, mine is only a judge."

I make no apologies for quoting Lee Iacocca again, "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 civilisation along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honour and the highest responsibility anyone could have."

We have worked hard over the past seven years to develop the academic focus here at Blundell's. The staff have been untiring in their determination to draw out the very best from each pupil; when I started I felt this was an area which needed more attention, an environment whereby the gifted, talented and intellectually curious could thrive. The page in the programme gives you a detailed breakdown of all the academic achievements; it is an extremely full list, and one which grows each year. There are vibrant academic societies now led by the pupils, and here Hugo Trevelyan-Thomas has drawn much praise from my colleagues for his infectious enthusiasm of the Biology and Chemistry societies. One of the highlights for me was the Year 8 team which won the "Top of the Bench" Chemistry competition. Bruce Wheatley has done a wonderful job as the Gifted and Talented Coordinator, which he now hands over to Kate Wright. We were delighted for the four who have been made offers at Oxford or Cambridge (Laura MacBean, Natural Sciences, Sidney Sussex, Cambridge; Alex MacBean, Law and Spanish, Wadham, Oxford; Will McBarnett, History, Pembroke; and Ed Crawford, Archaeology and Anthropology at Keble).

Laura has also been at the heart of the music here; the end of term concert featured a first half performance which exceeded in quality anything I have heard here or at other schools before. Laura and Alex MacBean, Amy Young, Steph McKelvey, Alex Williams, Monica Zhang, Alex Everett and Vicky Cox in particular stunned us with their musicality, their talent and their obvious enthusiasm, for this and indeed all other musical performances this year. Mr Barlow must take the credit; his infectious desire to see the best in the pupils, whether this be the choir, Big Band, Choral concert or SH events filters down to all. We had 101 individual music exams taken, including eight pupils being successful in their Grade 8 exams. And, of course, we had various school musicals, Alice by Year 7 and Joseph by the Senior School.

You will remember last year we were delighted with the astonishing news that we had two pupils' art in the final 20 of the Saatchi international art prize. Well this year we have three pupils' work in the sculpture equivalent; Christopher Hamilton, William Scott and Saskia Simonson. Bertie Matthew leads a creatively stimulating department. The art exhibitions have been rewarding and stimulating experiences for me.

Under the academic leadership of Eve the enrichment process has expanded quite considerably; I have lost count of the number of university essay prizes entered for. Learning Support strongly led by Alix Rhodes touches everything we do here. In order to drive forward Eve's academic developments, I have created a new Academic Leadership structure. The new Director of Studies, Mrs Clare Sherwood, who joins us from Wycombe Abbey, will lead a team comprising Duncan Rhodes, the Assistant Director of Studies, Matthew Hawkins, Bruce Wheatley and Amy Candler, the Academic Heads of the Sixth Form, Middle School and School House respectively. It will provide an opportunity to evaluate and reflect, thus ensuring that our pupils are ready to welcome change, ready to embrace it, to tackle it head on and to be stimulated and excited by the prospect, because the world is going to be a very different place.

As always boys and girls sport has been very successful at whatever level; we are a true coeducational school. Incidentally, this is a sentiment close to Dubya's heart, "I want to thank my friend, Senator Bill Frist, for joining us today. He married a Texas girl, I want you to know. Karyn is with us. A West Texas girl, just like me." We celebrate the number of Blundellians who have been selected for great honours (and here we are rather proud of Matthew Kvesic who captained the England U20 team in the semi final of the World Cup against New Zealand), and those who tirelessly turn out for the B and Cs, and the House sports terms. One of the many teams of the year is the U12B cricket team who were unbeaten until the last ball of the last game, which they lost by one run. Such enthusiasm for the thrill of competing is a powerful quality shown by all teams, and in this case in Mr Morrison I doubt whether we have ever seen a coach more in tune with his team. The girls Hockey Club had a phenomenal season; they were Devon Champions at U13, U14, U16 and U18 level, and all qualified for the West tournament. Nicky Klinkenberg remains the preeminent hockey coach on the circuit. The Netball teams are stronger than they have ever been. Amy Candler has led the club with determination and enthusiasm. The girls' sport has been coordinated by Sarah Burnett who has done an excellent job. The boys' sport has also been very successful; the rugby club is set fair for many more successful seasons – there were a number of unbeaten teams. Three boys from School House represented England in the prep school Barbarians team; Finn Neusinger, Cameron Seymour and Ben Steer. The boys' hockey club and cricket club have moved on such a pace under Guy Bucknell and Rob Turner respectively, and the football club had some terrific

results indeed, as always superbly led by Dr Balsdon. Rob Holman has developed School House sport. We have a number of representative honours. The Speech Day programme will give you a comprehensive analysis, but the fact that we can boast success at representational level in rugby, cricket (both boys and girls) hockey (again both boys and girls) squash, athletics (with Michael Peper and Ben Clarke being selected for the Nationals), Fives (Sam Wyatt-Haines won the U16 championship as an U15, he is the reason why I have retired from Fives...) rifle shooting and in the equestrian arena (with Lola Watt being a star here at the Nationals at Stonar) demonstrates the depth and diversity of talent. Memories are still fresh of two innings in the Festival here at the end of term against Eton, Marlborough and Uppingham. Sam Wyatt-Haines and Jack Maunder scored 169 and 141 n.o. respectively against Marlborough. All clubs, whether tennis, squash or Fives, provide discipline and an opportunity to compete. Ed Saunders has done a terrific job as Director of Sport but he would be the first to thank all the sports coaches.

I have consistently tried to ensure that we do not become Devon-centric at Blundell's, wonderful place that it is. George Bush offers us yet more sanguine and sensible advice, "I will have a foreign-handed foreign policy". "The ambassador and the general were briefing me on the – the vast majority of Iraqis want to live in a peaceful, free world. And we will find these people and we will bring them to justice."

Many trips have been undertaken, the choir to Venice and the cricketers to Sri Lanka for example. Mr Dyke took a team to the Model United Nations last term, and we fared very well indeed, with Alex Everett being nominated as Most Distinguished delegate. Sue Norman and Eve have produced an excellent Futures programme which runs through the year groups, thus ensuring the pupils have a strong understanding of what lies beyond the boundaries of Devon, and the West Country.

Adrian Guy has masterminded the Ten Tors programme; we had a team in each of the three categories this year. Their enthusiasm was evident for all to see. Yan Yates led the preparation for the DW with great distinction; we even had a Common Room team. The TESOL department works closely with the international pupils, who bring us experiences of different cultures and ideas. Leigh Menheneott has been quite excellent in driving forward our partnership arrangements – with the help of others we hosted a really interesting Maths day for a number of local primary schools, for example.

We have been blessed this year with over thirty wonderful speakers; Freddie Knoller returned to us, he is one of the last surviving Auschwitz internees. He is a vibrant, energetic, lively and rather cheeky (if a ninety year old can be cheeky) individual who leaves an indelible mark on all who hear him. A pin dropping could have been heard when he unpeeled his shirt sleeve and revealed the widely understood tattooed serial number on his arm. What did we take from this? A sense that life can be pretty awful but it will be less so with enthusiasm, humour, generosity of spirit and optimism.

The Development Office has come on leaps and bounds under Amber Oliver, ably assisted by Emily Cairns. Her remit is to raise awareness of the school and in so doing encourage kind and generous people to help us with the Peter Blundell Foundation scholars fund, which is fundamental to the future of this school.

This school would simply not function without the superb support staff, although they are clearly much more than this. David Chambers is simply brilliant as a Bursar, as is his newly appointed Assistant Becci Lamacraft, he leads a team which has Blundell's at its very heart. John Smith, the Head Groundsman, retires after seventeen tireless and successful years; my gratitude goes to him. Bron Chmiel, the school porter, is wonderful as is his staff. Mr Edwards, the Catering Manager, does an excellent job, and some would say his karaoke singing is equally impressive (some would not); we are all grateful to his team.

The gardens always look quite fantastic and for this we must thank William Lancelles and his team; he too is very much a part of the warp and weft of the school. As usual flowers will be on sale at the back after the proceedings. Dick Clarke, the maintenance manager, and his team are magnificent, and I could not function without the cheerful and engaging presence of those in the school office; Sharon Stones, Carole Francis and Sarah Emery, nor my own office, Jenni Gale and Jo Cuthbert. We wish Rob Holman and Sarah Burnett much happiness together; they are marrying in the summer, as are Yan Yates and Silvia, Louisa Mimmack and Nathan, and Henry Roffe-Silvester and Emily. Congratulations to all of you.

This vibrant environment makes us attractive as a school, and this year we have seen record numbers of pupils, some 575, and next year we will push us above

this figure, whilst this is good news reflecting the efforts of the superb Common Room, can I reassure you it does not mean we shall be cramming them in; Blundell's is a special school for many reasons, one of which is its size. The registrars, Liz Thane and Peter Klinkenberg have done a great job.

If I may conclude by offering some words of advice to the leavers, I hope that you will be brave and independent in your thinking but remember though the qualities of tolerance, humility, kindness and a sense of gratitude for what others have done for you.

Mr Thane gave us an excellent chapel on Randy Pausch; his theme being, 'What would you say in your last lecture?' This is not my last speech day, although when people keep asking am I sitting for a portrait, I begin to wonder. Well, the truth is that I am nearing the end of my time; I have only 46 terms to go.

He offered the following advice:

A bad apology is worse than no apology.

Whether you think you can or can't, you're right.

Look for the best in everyone.

Make a decision: Tigger or Eeyore.

No job is beneath you.

He finishes his book by writing, "it is not about how to achieve your dreams. It's about how to lead your life. If you lead your life the right way, the dreams will come to you."