



Ladies and Gentlemen and boys of the school,

Welcome to you all to Speech Day and to our prize giving ceremony. May I extend a particular welcome to our guest of honour, Mr John Holland-Kaye, and to the rest of the platform party. From your right: *Dr Daniel Koch, the Vice Master; Mr Mark Slater, Governor; Dr Anne Egan, Governor and Trustee; Mr John Holland-Kaye, our guest of honour; Professor Stephen Mayson, Chairman of Governors and Trustee; Mr Phil Wallace, Deputy Chairman of Governors and Trustee, Mr Simon Briggs, Governor; and Mr Richard Miller, Governor.* To these, and to you all, welcome.

There's something wonderfully reassuring about this Great Hall we gather in today and indeed its special guest. The Hall itself bears some striking similarities to an Ancient Greek Amphitheatre, shaped as it is in a semicircular way, with seats arranged in segments with walkways in between. Two thousand five hundred years ago, the Athenians organised themselves into ten tribes, each of whom sat in a different wedge of the theatre; today we organise ourselves in year groups, each taking their own section. In classical times, the Greeks would have adorned the back of the theatre with statues of local deities; our somewhat hubristic equivalent these days, certainly from where I am standing, is portraits of Head Masters. Both buildings aimed to merge hierarchy and authority with democracy (up to a point); and both modern and ancient buildings serve community by acting as the centrepiece of festival days.

When our guest of honour came to school, *his* Hall initially stretched *three* whole floors to the ceiling; by the time he had left, the building had burnt down and been reconstructed (*I am not suggesting there's a link, by the way, John!*), with the Great Hall, on two floors only now and realigned, still at the very centre of the school. The Greeks did this with their religious buildings; one temple looks very much like the next, out of respect for religious conservatism and tradition. In the way in which *this* building was rebuilt in the direct image of its predecessor, there is, perhaps, something almost sacred to the school about this very room.

Last week, the Governors and Core Management Team met for an 'away day' focusing on the future of the world of employment, in an attempt to grapple with what skills and knowledge young men will need to leave school with in the coming years. There was, of course, much talk of the continuing relevance of values and skills which go back as far as the Classical World, but there was also talk of the meteoric advance of technology, of robots, of dramatic societal change, of unknown possibilities. How we respond to all this will affect the next generation of young men. Our guest of honour embodies the challenges. John Holland-Kaye was a Classics Scholar at school, winning both the Latin prose and the Greek verse composition prizes in his final year, together with a place to read Classics at Peterhouse College,

Cambridge. Indeed, he organised the first ever Classical Society lecture, drawing no fewer than 30 schools to come to listen to the great Sir Kenneth Dover speak on 'The relation between morality and religion among the Greeks'. More recently, he has been the Development Director at Heathrow in charge of delivering a £1 billion annual investment to transform the airport, including the new Terminal 2, the Queen's Terminal, which opened on 4 June 2014. It must have gone well, because four weeks later he was appointed CEO! The UK government recently announced its support for Heathrow's £16bn third runway programme, which will make Britain the best connected country in the world. You do not run such programmes without a strong understanding and feeling for the latest technological advances, all modern possibilities and an eye to the future. Not bad for a Classics graduate, and especially perhaps one who played the part of Trachalio in Plautus' *The Rope* when he was at school. Trachalio's forte is being able to predict exactly what is going to happen about three hours after the event: something which John has presumably cured!

The pace of change in our world can seem quite bewildering. Politics A-Level was sat on the eve of a snap general election this year – how on earth do you set a Politics A-Level paper in advance these days? Only this time last year, we had a majority government running our country (and before anyone quibbles, I wrote that line *last week!*), we were not obviously contemplating a withdrawal from Europe, we had an articulate, intelligent and generous spirited man in the White House. What on earth has happened since? Well, I am mindful of a story I heard just before the last election from a man of the cloth in North London. A man in the community dies and immediately makes his way up to the Pearly Gates, where an angel is ticking off the newcomers on his celestial clipboard. As he approaches, the angel looks up and says, 'heaven or hell, sir?' 'I am sorry,' says the man. 'Heaven or hell, sir?' 'Well, I think that's rather obvious – of course, I'd like to go to heaven please.' 'Have you had a tour yet, sir?' 'Well, no, but really, I would rather choose heaven.' 'Well, sir, you have to have a tour first.' So off he went. He went to hell first – and well, to be honest, it was extremely good fun! A little on the warm side, admittedly, but some great beaches, plenty of partying, some wonderful places to eat, lots of laughter and energy. Heaven came next, and when all was said and done, it was perfectly nice but really rather boring. People were endlessly pleasant; they looked relaxed and transcendental; about half way round he met a family he knew from Biddenham and was asked to join their bridge four. He remembered how dispiriting that had felt in his previous life. So it was with genuine surprise that he found himself going back to the Pearly Gates and saying to the angel, 'I never thought I'd say this, but I really rather liked hell. Hell it is for me, please.' Almost instantly, his ankles were clamped in irons, a pickaxe was thrust into his hands and he found himself at the rock face of an open mine in searing heat with hundreds of exhausted labourers. Eventually, and in despair, he found one of the supervisors. 'Excuse me,' he said, 'what happened to the beaches; where are the great restaurants?' 'Oh!' says the supervisor, 'that was when we were campaigning; now you have voted.'

The problem, it seems to me, with the elections of the past year is that few have been built upon truth and integrity. I think, ironically, that our current Prime Minister was right to say that the country would like some strength and stability; but unfortunately for her, things were not quite as stable as they had initially seemed.

Today, we say farewell to another fine year group from Bedford School; this is the 464th time we have done this in our history. That strikes me as being pretty stable. It is easier, of course, to draw conclusions on the past, than to promise the future, but what I think your parents have given you is the strongest possible start in life. This is a school which I hope you have found does not overpromise, but delivers an education which gives you the most solid of groundings; a confidence in yourself; friendships which will last a lifetime; and a network which you can tap into forever. The world *outside* may be fragile, but you have built your own foundations on timeless rock and you have the strength now to be able to face that fragility. You have been brought up with strong values in an intelligent, compassionate and safe setting; and I do not think, as your life goes on, you will be able to thank your parents more for anything else.

Now I am going to introduce the Head of School to you in a moment, and he will speak to us, but before he does, we have a short musical interlude. One of the things I love about this school is the ease with which older boys, younger boys and staff mix. This little ensemble has just got together and ranges from the Fourth Form to adulthood. I saw one of the boys earlier in the week and congratulated him on being asked to play on Speech Day; he was beaming. I then asked him how it was going and he said 'We haven't had a practice yet!' You have to love Bedford boys! The pieces have been arranged especially for today by Mrs Iles, and we hope they bring a smile to our special guest's face.

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I have to admit that I thought particularly hard about my choice for Head of School last year; to appoint the Captain of Rugby as Head of School in a traditional boys' boarding school risks reviving all kinds of old fashioned connotations from the days when these sorts of schools were not quite as humane and compassionate as they are nowadays. But I am afraid I could not resist Fraser! He is as far from the Public School Captain of Rugby stereotype as you can imagine (*NB for the Ousel, I have been asked to stress the difference between stereotype and Bedford School historical reality! JSH*) – softly spoken, articulate, intelligent and, most importantly for me, endlessly kind and thoughtful of others. He is also so modest that he did not even tell me he had secured a contract to play for Northampton Saints next year, having been picked for both England and Scotland at U18 level in the past 12 months. He has been a delightful Head of School and I invite him to speak to us now.

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Last year, our top three staff leavers had 114 years' service between them. Our longest serving staff leaver had 45 to himself! This year, we say farewell to eight teachers who have 43 years' service between them. This is very much a case of quality not quantity! They have all been wonderful for Bedford in their individual ways and we wish them well. But before I say a word or two about each, I'd like just to remember briefly **Guy Bennett**, who died earlier in the academic year and about whom much has been said and written. His loss stunned us all and as a community we have missed him greatly. This is the first school prize giving without Guy since 1986, so we particularly remember him today.

And so to the current leavers:

Libby di Niro retires after 14 years in the English Department. Quietly and strongly, she has been at the heart of that department's stability in those years, contributing hours of her time to Harpur Trust English society and debating and to the development of public speaking skills amongst a range of boys, not least the winning Bedford team in the English Speaking Union's competition of 2005. She has taken great care over the education of the boys in her classes, the best sort of teacher whom pupils come to appreciate over years rather than too quickly and thoughtlessly.

Emma Murray moves to be on the management team at Aldenham as Assistant Head (co-curricular). An Oxford history graduate, teaching Maths here, with an actuarial background, she has been perfectly placed to run the multi-faceted International Baccalaureate after taking charge of St Peter's House for three years. She used the overlap between her Housemastership and the impending position as Director of IB to let as many boys as possible know that IB was perfect for them and the IB has, rightly, grown under her caring and dynamic stewardship. A Bedford lass through and through, the move is in many ways a wrench for her; but we are delighted that she has gained a greatly deserved promotional move right next to where her husband works; she and her lovely family will be missed here, but brilliant there.

Dr Alex Calverley's PhD from Cambridge was entitled '*Probing the Intergalactic Medium with High-Redshift Quasars*'. I am not altogether sure what that means, but I think it is fair to say that he has carried on in a probing vein! A searing academic, involved amongst other things in training the UK astronomy team, he has thrown himself into so many areas of school life since he started here as an unqualified teacher out of Cambridge in 2011. Since then, he has taken his teaching qualifications with the support of the school, taught Oxbridge Physics, written schemes of work for the IB course and sat on the ICT Education Committee. He has coached J14 rowing, single-handedly coordinated and delivered the Fourth Form ICT mornings, played in the school band, and developed provision for student film-making. He has also, somehow, found time to take on the notoriously arcane role of Master in Charge of Cups and Prizes, so thank you to him for today! He has had a wonderful six years and we wish him well as he furthers his career at RGS Guildford.

A third with an exciting career move is **Michael Mitchell**, who takes up a post as Head of Chemistry at King's Rochester in September. Mr Mitchell joined from Magdalen College School in 2012, before I myself took the same route, having taken a degree from Oxford. He will be missed as much by the rowers as the chemists; indeed so dedicated has he been to the rowing club that he baptised himself in the club quite early on in by stumbling into the river when pushing off a crew, receiving from his Head of Department a child's inflatable ring as a prize. Enjoy the Medway, Michael!

Will Peters and **James Wills** both leave us to take PhDs. **Mr Peters** has been here for 3 almost unfeasibly busy years, in which he has taught RE, been Assistant Housemaster in Redburn, coached all sports to a high level, including the Hockey 1st XI and run several tours. He has also slept in a tent in remote bear infested parts of Canada and lived through what he describes as the Great Flood of Redburn, as two of his more surreal moments. He leaves us to take a PhD in Education (Curriculum and Instruction) at Boston College, Massachusetts. He says all visitors are welcome (though I am not sure he expected me to announce that to a full Great Hall)!

Mr Wills joined us straight from Brasenose College Oxford and in his two years with us, he has been a Pemberley tutor, played the organ, helped with badminton, fencing and cricket, learned Chinese, sang in the choir, taken Duke of Edinburgh, Mitre Club lectures and a wonderful full school assembly, where he castigated any boy who misses out on any opportunity. He has been remarkable; and now leaves us to complete something he always knew he had to do: a PhD in the Philosophy of Physics at LSE.

Helen Hudson has been with us for three years in the Geography department. She has been a wonderful teacher and mentor for many boys. Running a farm locally with her husband has been her other passion and this year they upsize and move to the West Country. Part of their business has been to make cheese, giving her a niche knowledge which the boys' new Cheese Society recognised quickly and tapped into most keenly! We wish her well for her move.

Madame Brigitte Bousquet leaves us this term to be Head of French at the King's School, Ely. In her two years here in charge of Modern Languages, following on from her time on the Bedford staff a decade ago, she has expanded cross-curricular links, started a wonderfully named French Club for Fourth Form boys ('the Froglets'), organised Foreign Language evenings, run national cuisine days, and introduced language oral exchanges with the Girls' School and French debating at the Perse. We wish her well in her new post.

Oriane Pages, Marlene Ranner, Dario Hoyos and **Jules Crossley** all leave after one or two years in the languages and drama departments. We thank them all for their contributions to the school in their short times with us.

And indeed, to all of these staff members, we as a school owe a very great debt of thanks.

In further thanks, I'd like to mention briefly three more groups of people. The Old Bedfordians are hugely supportive of the school. OBs help out here with careers events, advice, talks on academic subjects; they have hosted receptions all over the world, not least in their 125th year; and they have been good to us financially as well. I'd like to thank David Murray and Chris Williams in particular in their new roles as President and Chairman for all their support of the school.

The Governors are an extraordinarily talented and committed group of men and women, who give up a huge amount of their own time and expertise to support and guide the school. Much of their excellent work goes unseen by most of the community, but I see a lot of it close up, and I would like us to just pause to give them a round of applause in thanks for all they do.

And lastly, but by no means least, to you parents. You are never quite sure what to expect next when you are bringing up teenagers. You will know that I have four. Yet, it works so much better when school and home is aligned and I thank you all for your support this year and the trust you have shown in us. We, for our part, are well aware that we have the most responsible of jobs, as well as the most wonderful.

So before I draw to a close, a bit about the year gone by, if I may. We have spoken at many Governors' meetings about how we know if we are doing well. Measures of success are notoriously hard to define, if what you are measuring is largely personal happiness and development, a values-based education and individual self-worth. Is it possible to reduce what really counts to numbers? However, I do enjoy stats, even if they do not necessarily measure the most important things in life. Here are a few wonderful ones from the year gone by:

- If you add together the number of concerts, choral services, competitions and musicals at school, there have been no fewer than 104 school music events this academic year!
- By strange coincidence, The Quarry Theatre also saw 104 performances this year – though are claiming supremacy because they are about to host 122 more in the Bedfringe later this month.
- 359 boys played rugby in 189 matches for 18 teams this year in the Upper School. (I'd like to apologise now to these 369 for holding Speech Day on the day of a Lions' match!)
- For the whole school, the catering staff prepared and served 352,404 individual meals. They have made 33,100 brownies and battered 8,000 portions of fish.
- Combining food with exercise is perhaps the most bizarre stat of all - the chefs, in preparing our food with fitbits on their wrist, have each, in the preparation of our food, on average, walked 369.3 miles – the equivalent of 14 marathons. The Chairman should know that I am trying to find a way to link that stat to the school measures of success for next year!
- It is probably worth my remembering today of all days that the boys did some work, too! You probably know the most prominent figures here, namely that 77% of our applicants went to a

Russell Group university last year; and this year 10 boys have conditional places at Oxford or Cambridge, as part of what will be a similar statistic. We have also had three school inspections – a full school educational inspection, a CCF inspection and an exams inspection, all of which went well.

However, my favourite moment of the year was provided a few weeks ago by a letter from a prospective parent after her first visit to the school. She wrote that the most impressive thing about the school was that she did not see a single boy or staff member in her day here who did not have a smile on their face. This, for me, is the baseline for success. I take, as you know, a very pastoral view of education; I insist that we aim for boys to be happy and successful, but in that order. And I do hope, boys, that as you leave your school today, not for the last time I sincerely hope, that you can look back upon your time as being happy and successful, in that order.

And on that note, Alastair Tighe will take my place at the lectern as I ask John Holland-Kaye to step forward to present the prizes to some happy and successful boys. Thank you.

Prizes

After John Holland-Kaye:

Ladies and Gentlemen; thank you all so much for coming. I do hope that you will stay to join us afterwards for a drink outside to help celebrate the year. I have one more ceremonial duty to perform before we all go outside for a drink. Could the current Head of School please come to the stage. I will now announce next year's senior four, and invite next year's Head of School to the stage to receive a handover from Fraser, and to lead us all from the stage.

Next year's senior four are:

- Matthew Fordham
- Sachin Chambers
- Conor Hillard (who will be Deputy Head of School)
- And the Head of School for 2017/8 will be Frankie Hearnshaw. Please come on up, Frankie.

Thank you and have a great summer.