

Ladies and Gentlemen and boys of the school,

Welcome to you all to Speech Day and to our prizegiving ceremony. May I extend a particular welcome to our guest of honour, Mr John Witherow, and to the rest of the platform party. From your right: Mr Colin Baker, the Vice Master; Reverend Paula Vennells, Governor; Mr Charles Allen, Governor; Dr Anne Egan, Governor and Trustee; Mr John Witherow, our guest of honour; Professor Stephen Mayson, Chairman of Governors and Trustee; Mr Phil Wallace, Governor and Trustee, Mr Simon Briggs, Governor; and Mr Richard Miller, staff elected Governor. To these, and to you all, welcome.

This year's special guest came to us in a rather unusual way. I go to a lot of long meetings these days and just very occasionally, I must admit (I am only human), the mind wanders. I was at one such meeting in the Cricket Pavilion last year when I looked up and saw staring back at me from the honours boards the name JM Witherow, cricket 1st XI 1969 and 1970. I wonder what he is up to, I thought...well, rather a lot as it turns out and here he is today, with his brother, Ross, revisiting his old school to pass on some wisdom from his years in journalism, which currently see him as Editor of the Times. At school, John was in the first teams for both rugby and cricket, was Head of Redburn House and Secretary of the Photographic Society. Since then, he has become one of the longest serving Editors in Britain, first at the Sunday Times and now at the Times. In a long tradition of family contrasts, his brother Ross was a corporal in the CCF, won the English Literature prize and became a leading surgeon! We are very grateful to you, both, for coming back to be with us today and to you, John, for coming to present the prizes and to say a few words to us.

Typically wittily, but extremely unfairly, Oscar Wilde said that the difference between literature and journalism is that journalism is unreadable and literature is not read. Well, it just so happens that two of my favourite authors also happen to be journalists, William Dalrymple and Ryszard Kapuscinski, and before I say a few words about the year and about the staff, I'd like to refer to Kapuscinski in relation to the boys leaving the school today. I first came across his writing in a dusty classics office about ten years ago, when looking for something to read, and I found a new book by Kapuscinski called Travels with Herodotus. The blurb on the back described its author as the greatest travel-reporter of all time and someone who had won an award as Polish journalist of the century for the 20th Century. Not a bad write up, I thought. It turned out that in 1952, having never been out of Poland, but having an itch to travel, he was sent by a forward-looking editor to India. On the day of his departure, his editor called him in and handed him a copy of Herodotus' Histories, written in the 5th Century BC, telling him that he might find a few tips in it. What an interesting gift! A 2,500-year old book to accompany his travels. Well, it turned out that Herodotus himself had had itchy feet; he was curious about the world in a way that Kapuscinski also was; he was interested in conflict, particularly between East and West, in a way that Kapuscinski also was; and he was a natural raconteur in the way that Kapuscinski was. It was a fine match.

Here is an extract from Kapuscinski's first visit abroad to India:

“India was my first encounter with otherness, the discovery of a new world. It was at the same time a great lesson in humility. I returned from this journey embarrassed by my own ignorance, at how ill read I was. I realized then what now seems obvious: a culture would not reveal its mysteries to me at a mere wave of the hand: one has to prepare oneself thoroughly and at length for such an encounter”.

I want to make a few points to the boys about this short passage. We have put much emphasis this year on our careers programme. Part of the effort has been to broaden your outlook, because sometimes we can be a bit narrow in our options. My youngest daughter the other day told me, aged 13, that she had already made some career decisions: “Dad, I want one of those jobs where you get paid a lot and do very little” she said “.....like being a child”. It made me realise that (so far, at least) I had undoubtedly failed as a father! But sometimes the narrowness of this ambition persists and it is today that the world is opening up to you, and there are very many possibilities. Secondly, make the most of your networks. You should by now have made friends here from all over the world – and if you are in the lower years, please work hard on this together. Use each other and the OB club to make friends and contacts. Visit each other and learn about each other's cultures. Boarding school contacts are not exactly top of the politically correct agenda these days, and heaven knows our independent school educated MPs are doing their best to disassociate themselves from any such talk, but their existence is reality and your good fortune has given you a great opportunity. And finally, nothing very worthwhile comes to you quickly; it requires endless curiosity and hard work, two of Bedford School's core values. It also requires that you make your own luck and seize every available opportunity – say yes to things. Kapuscinski made his own luck by pestering his editor to travel; he then immersed himself in culture, read books, learnt languages; and, by always saying yes, he ended up reporting on (amongst other things) no fewer than 27 revolutions and coups in the 50 different countries he was responsible for. What a life! And if you need proof of similar virtues leading to similar outcomes, look no further than our guest speaker today. This is the entry in the 1972 Ousel, a year after he left school:

John Witherow (65-70), who went to South West Africa recently, was involved when the Bishop of Ovomboland was deported. He could not take up his original plan of teaching there, and instead took the place of one of the Bishop's staff who had been deported, and carried out many interesting duties connected with teaching and organization. He has gained a wealth of experience.

In other words, boys, a little bit of opportunism went a long way! So to all of you, go into whatever career you like; but stay curious, work hard, and say yes – and when you travel, do so with eyes and ears open and, just perhaps, with a thumbed copy of Herodotus at your side.

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. Logan Jones, at the end of his Lower Sixth year, is going to sing the piece which won him the Bedfordshire Festival of Music, followed by one other special piece for today.

The Head of School, Aidan Swain, has an extraordinary range of qualities, not the least of which is kindness (which people will know that I consider a bottom line) and inclusivity. To prove what sort of person he is, I am going to read an extract from one of his tutor reports from earlier in the year. It goes like this:

There is nothing average about Aidan's involvement in extra-curricular commitments this half term. He has shown this in his involvement in the Corum Boy production in the Theatre, by continuing as president of the English Society, leading the chapel choir, taking his grade 8 singing and entering the Fowles writing prize. His involvement in the tutor group has been noted this term through the tutor quiz ... and in his contributions to the tutor group's photo. He was very insistent to include the art department's pigeons and taxidermy in this. I am pleased to announce that Aidan's team also won the House quiz.

Aidan has a place to read English Literature at Durham University. When I was at Durham, the College Presidents were elected democratically; one college presidency was won by a gerbil. Aidan should be very much at home. Ladies and Gentlemen, the Head of School, Aidan Swain.

Just before Aidan disappears back to his seat, I have a small something for him. This is usually given out in an assembly, but I thought I would do it today in recognition of the wonderful way he has led the school this past year. Ladies and Gentlemen, a Head Master's scarf.

And so, to the staff leavers....

What I think is distinctive about the Bedford School teacher is that teaching, to him or her, does not just mean teaching a subject. It means teaching a child. You will get a flavour of this as I thank our leavers this year; the amount that these people have given to the school cannot remotely be measured in the hours they have spent in the classroom – they have inspired generations of Bedfordians in how to enjoy their lives.

It is one of the traditions of this school that each year for the Founders and Benefactors Service, the longest serving staff member leads the rest of the staff into Chapel. **Bob Eadie** today retires after a remarkable 45 years teaching at Bedford School. I do hope, Bob, that you have had enough years at

the front of the line to train up your successor! For most of his time at the school, Bob has taught Maths and been central to the development of computing and our IT systems. The latter is particularly interesting, given that he arrived in 1971, one term before Bedford School took delivery of its first ever computer! He is still giving conferences on the latest computer advances, recently presenting on a backup software in Las Vegas. To give an indication of his wider talents, Bob took an exhibition to read Maths at Cambridge, and earned Half Blues in Swimming, Water Polo, Small Bore and Full Bore Shooting, and Modern Pentathlon. When he got here, he also played Saxophone in the Dance Band for many years and founded something called the Bottle Band. He was a Housemaster of Paulopontine. He tells me that he thinks he may have taught over 40,000 lessons at Bedford.

Bob – not many reach 45 years in their place of work; you have seen this as a place of community and family. We wish you well.

Hard on his heels, and desperate for the front slot at the Founders and Benefactors service, has been **Colin Baker**. Alas, Colin has only managed 37 years. He has had a remarkable Bedford career and I know that it gives him immense pleasure to reflect on the fact that he joined the school when this building was burnt rubble in 1979 and he leaves it in rather better condition. There was a story behind the fire. Colin tells me that he was interviewed in the Old Great Hall; he was the youngest interviewed, and definitely the only one from Wolverhampton, and, he tells me, a controversial appointment. A few months later, his father phoned and said “Are you watching a fire on the news? What was the name of that school you are going to work for?”

A basic Bedford CV would include Housemaster of St Peters, Head of Chemistry and Science, Director of IB, Director of Studies, coach of rugby and football, taker of numerous trips abroad and currently Vice Master. But he is a teacher to the core. I give you this from the internet:

Colin Baker, Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry, was awarded the Salter’s Institute Medal in a competition to find the country’s best Chemistry teachers. He has lectured at the Universities of Cambridge, Birmingham and St Andrews and has shared the stage with a Nobel Laureate at London University. In January 2006 he was awarded the prestigious Shaw Medal for maintaining the tradition of the demonstration Lecture.

The reason I tell you all this is that he has never told me himself. Colin is a remarkable man; friendly, wise, learned, good fun and yet wonderfully modest. How lucky I have been to have him as Vice Master in my first two years here; I, and we all, will miss him hugely.

Peter Brough joined the school as a Physics teacher a mere 31 years ago, after taking a first in Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering and having a stint as a research aerodynamicist at Westland Helicopters. He has not been one to take his commitments lightly; he was housemaster of Paulopontine for nine years, had 17 years in charge of Badminton, and – most appropriately for today –

spent no less than 26 years in charge of cups and prizes. That is a lot of years spent standing on this stage preparing cups for other people. So in recognition of that remarkable achievement, and his many years as a fine Physics teacher, and in anticipation of a happy retirement, it seems appropriate that he himself receives a cup – so here we are, Peter; please come forward as the only ever recipient of Brough's Cup!

There's a tradition here that staff leavers who have served more than ten years at the school are awarded a valet dinner, an evening with a few friends at the Head Master's house; it is probably why so many leave after only nine years – and then so few leave between 9 and 30! **Peter Davis** has been here for 14 years; not only did he brave the dinner, but he embraced it with one of the more hilarious evenings we have had. We think he may have booked himself in for future such occasions! He is a wonderful character, full of generosity. He has worked in the Maths department, been in charge of computing and most recently run the exams – a role which requires precision, a level head and definitely a sense of humour.

Elida Rubio has been with us since she left university 11 years ago. She has been a wonderful teacher of Spanish, one of those whose care for pupils manifests itself in their getting away with nothing other than their very best attention. It was no surprise to us that she got a Head of Department post, happily not too far from here at Stamford School, so we hope to stay closely in touch.

Dr Brian Johnson took an emergency call to come out of retirement to help out our Chemistry Department for four months back in 2007. Nine years later, he retires for a second time, having graced our school – and also our Chapel as a marvelous Chapel Warden - with charm, intelligence and extreme modesty.

Sam Adams has been an outstanding Head of English; one only has to listen to his boys speak about their essays at a Fowles Essay evening to know that Sam not only has a wonderful facility with words himself, but transfers his talents in the most effective way to them. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then his charges have said all they need to.

Florence Markham joined us in 2011 to teach Classics straight out of Cambridge, where, in her own words, she

“sought out a pretty broad spectrum of topics: ancient attitudes to death and sex in Rome, medicine in Greece, maths in Iraq, natural history in China and religion in Persia. I translated all of Virgil's *Aeneid*. I skipped lectures on a Friday and went to Pompeii for the weekend.”

It's now public, Florence. Whilst here she has been similarly busy, including time with the rowing squads, on Duke of Edinburgh, the IB committee, as Treasurer of the Common Room and leader of

team Classics on Twitter. She leaves to do a Master's at UCL and spend some more time with her family and we wish her every happiness.

Anna Garrett is another whose departure almost requires a whole team to replace her. In 4 years in the English Department, her first four as a teacher, she has led the English Society, edited the new school magazine MDLII, run the RAF section of CCF, been master in charge of fencing (something she says she knows absolutely nothing about) and Common Room Secretary.

She leaves us to further her career at the Leys in Cambridge, where one suspects they may need to introduce a longer day.

When I spoke to the Head Master at KCS Wimbledon about his potential new Maths teacher, **Lauren Owens**, who has been here for four years, he said he rather liked the feisty types. Well, he has got one. Lauren has been brilliant in the Maths department and on the river; she has genuine passion for teaching and wants nothing more than the boys to do well. We wish her the luck of the Irish at KCS.

Finally, I say thank you to our three language assistants who have been here for two years each, **Nina Fritz**, **Rebecca Poinot** and **Africa Ferrero Albero** and wish them well as they return to their home countries.

To all of these staff members, and indeed to the whole staff for their outstanding work this year, we as a school owe a very great debt of thanks.

The achievements of the boys have not unnaturally mirrored the varied talents of their teachers. Last year, I spoke about the amazing sense of community we have here at Bedford; this year, I have also been struck by the sheer range of successful activity. The choir kicked off the year by being invited to sing at the Albert Hall in the Royal Festival of Remembrance in front of the Queen – many of you will have heard them this morning and can see why they were asked; the rugby players followed suit by winning England Rugby's Champions trophy and then being runners up in the National Sevens at Rosslyn Park. No fewer than four Old Bedfordians played for Cambridge in the Varsity Match at Twickenham. Our fundraisers were once again the top Movember fundraising team in the country and have now raised over a quarter of a million pounds for charity since Mrs Medley took over eight years ago. Our catering team have won a major national catering award; our careers provision has received a national gold award; our theatre has received national architectural recognition. This, I hope you will agree, is a remarkable variety of activity achieving at a national level. Individuals have performed at the very highest levels, too: we have eight Oxbridge offers this year, which is our highest for several years; Jim Cooper has won an organ scholarship to Sydney Sussex Cambridge; Jack Murphy won the national design museum's Young Designer of the Year (he designed a hollow container in the shape of a breeze block which could transport food and water out to disaster zones and then itself be used as building material for shelter); Alex Papp, aged 14, was runner-up in the Royal Philharmonic's

Under 18 Young Composer of the Year – his first orchestral piece has already been performed. Joshua Garret and Jonathan Hosking have been accepted into the National Youth Theatre. These are all stellar performances, by anybody's measure. However, I also want to mention a few more personal favourites. The J14b crew, all in their first year of rowing, are officially the best Under 14B crew in the country having won their event at the National Schools Regatta. The Under 14D cricket team won most of their games this term – possibly nothing too amazing about that, until you know that not only was there an Englishman and Irishman and a Scotsman in the side, but also a Chinese boy, an Indian, a Nigerian, two Russians and a Libyan. And what a great group of boys they are! Although Sohaib does not know it, it is my ambition that he opens the bowling for Libya in the 2025 ICC Trophy. And finally, my favourite academic statistic of the year is this: last year, our Academic Deputy introduced something called the BSIP, the “Bedford School Independent Project”. The idea is that all Lower Sixth boys do a project in their first term in the Sixth Form on any subject they choose. At the end of the first term, they can choose to give up and take a lecture course instead, or carry on and potentially turn it into a nationally recognised extended project qualification. This year, in only its second year of operation, 90% of the boys chose to continue with their projects. I mentioned curiosity earlier, one of our four core values – this was as good a demonstration of it as we have seen all year.

We are almost there, you will be glad to hear. Just before the prizes, 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 shared a trip to the battlefields with our boys this year; they have hosted receptions all over the world; and they have been good to us financially as well. Sandy Gray, the President, retires from his post this year and I thank him and his wife, Jane, for all they have done in their time in charge.

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 last, 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 are 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.

And on that note, Alastair Tighe will take my place at the lectern as I ask John Witherow to step forward to present the prizes.

Prizes

John Witherow's speech to the School.

After John Witherow:

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 up here to receive a handover from Aidan, and to lead us all from the stage.

Next year's senior four are:

- Harry Guthrie
- Logan Jones
- Ted Hicks (who will be Deputy Head of School)
- And the Head of School for 2016/7 will be Fraser Dingwall. Please come on up, Fraser.

Thank you and have a great summer.