



# Blundell's

Mr Baxter, Chairman of Governors, Governors, Vice Lord Lieutenant for Cornwall, Chairman of Mid Devon Council, Madam Mayor, Mrs Johnston, Mr Challacombe, Ladies and Gentlemen, Blundellians.

2018 is rather a special year, in many different ways. As a History teacher, there have been some pretty important historical anniversaries that have all aligned in the last 12 months. Few will not be aware of the centenary of the ending of the First World War and the 100<sup>th</sup> Year anniversary of women gaining the right to vote. 90 years ago Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin and it is 50 years since the first colour television was sold in the UK. It cost £10. It is 50 years since the death of Martin Luther King, and 25 years since the Channel Tunnel opened and it is an incredible 30 years since the movie Grease was released. So now most of us are probably feeling pretty old.

Yet for those in the Upper 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018 is going to have its very own significance. It is their final year of school. The time when 'real life' begins and it is a pleasure to share that with you today. It is of course a special and also a bittersweet year for me too in that regard.

We are delighted today to have Rob Baxter here with us. I have approached Rob several times to be our guest of honour, and not surprisingly, his Exeter Chiefs commitments have always clashed in the past. He is a very busy man. However, I am really grateful to Rob for agreeing to be with us today. I know that we are all looking forward to the words of wisdom that he has for our leavers as we begin another historic anniversary year, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of rugby at Blundell's, I could think of no one better to share in our celebration of all that we have achieved, in rugby and in so many other areas of school life.

It has been said that 'A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots'. This afternoon, at the end of another full academic year, it is our chance to look down at our roots, by reflecting on the successes of the year and to enjoy looking forward to all that the future will bring for Blundell's.

Academically this year has been one of both achievement in terms of grades, but perhaps more exciting than that, is the change in academic culture that we are seeing through our thriving academic enrichment programmes and the plans we have for our school routine going forward.

We were delighted to see our Upper 6<sup>th</sup> pupils of last year gain another very good set of A level grades. For the fifth year running, over 40% of all grades were at A\* and A, with a higher number of A\*-B grades than last year. The top half of the year group (50 pupils) achieved outstanding results, with their A\*/A percentages at over 70%, and 95% of their grades were A\*-B. This led to some excellent university offers being achieved and it was wonderful to see over 95% of pupils heading off to their chosen universities.

This year we saw 14 members of the Upper 6<sup>th</sup> apply to Oxford and Cambridge. In my first year here we had 6 pupils apply, and now we regularly see double figures, with 21 offers gained in the last 5 years. Offers were gained this year

for the most rigorous of courses; English, Medicine and Mathematics. All our Medicine and Veterinary Medicine applicants this year have at least one offer.

Our younger pupils too have been busy academically with a record number of gold awards in the Olympiad competitions for Chemistry, Physics, Biology and Maths. One of our Year 10 pupils came in the top 50 of the Intermediate UK Maths Challenge, from a field of well over 10,000 pupils. Two members of Year 11 were awarded Arkwright Engineering Scholarships. There have been many other academic and creative achievements that are listed in your programme. I make my annual plea for clemency if we have left anything or anyone out.

In the week after their GCSE exams finished, Year 11 were still not enjoying a well-earned lie-in as they undertook a wide array of work experience placements. This year these have included: Aardvarkem, Yeo Valley, Rolls Royce, Heathcoats, Deloitte, Supacat, HSBC, Exeter Chiefs, and Moorgates Vets. Thank you to all our parents, OB's and local companies for offering these and other placements.

Both the senior and junior elements of the School now have a bigger range of academic enrichment than they have ever had before. This year, School House have had Wednesday afternoons turned over to our 'Roots and Wings' programme. We have had a visit from a TV special effects expert and have learned how to cook a meal on a small camping stove in preparation for the Source to Sea adventure. Code breakers spoke to us with their Enigma machine from Bletchley Park and the Year 8 STEM project has involved designing an eco hotel and sports facility.

This term, for the second year running, the Year 8's set sail for their very own Islands through the cross-curricular Island Project. They formed governments, allocated natural resources, battled environmental destruction, managed their own economies and dealt with the media. I am absolutely sure they made a better go of their negotiations than our government seem to be doing at the moment!

As I walked away from watching the display of their national anthems, I chatted to one Islander. I asked him how he felt it had gone, doing something totally different like this for a week. "I've really enjoyed it", he said. "The only bad thing was that it had to end."

Our English department are now two years into their new reading programme for Years 7-9, and we have been awarded Beacon status within the Devon Local Authority for our extensive use of Accelerated Reader. The Millionaire readers from the Prep School joined us this week for our Millionaires lunch.

As all parents will know, we are changing the structure of our timetable next year, to accommodate longer lessons and to allow time to travel between them. We have moved the senior games practice on Fridays from the after school slot to allow for a new 6<sup>th</sup> form academic enrichment programme. This will offer everything from university talks to mindfulness, from Physics for creatives to Photography for scientists. There are talks on subjects as diverse as mental health, first aid and understanding the vagaries of tax, pensions, mortgages and student finance. This time will be very well spent as we try to prepare our Blundellians for the world beyond school, which becomes ever more complex.

Our musicians have had a great year, with some exciting concerts taking place throughout. In the autumn, in addition to House Music which is always a chance for us to let our hair down, the choir and orchestra worked towards our very moving Remembrance Service and of course the wonderful carol service we held for the second time in Exeter cathedral.

During the Spring term, we took 'Blundell's to the Zoo' in Exeter University's Great Hall, alongside pupils from St Peter's Lypstone, Exeter Cathedral School and Blundell's Prep. The four Head Teachers; Charlotte Johnston, who I am delighted to say has been able to join us today, Andy Southgate, James Featherstone and I really enjoyed being able to take to the stage as narrators of Prokofiev's 'Peter and the Wolf'. We were probably more tricky to coordinate than the pupils of all four schools.

The Spring term musical focus was the 'Concert for Peace'. The act of remembrance, in this important centenary year, was Karl Jenkins' mass, 'The Armed man'. The choir and orchestra performed it alongside moving poetry about the futility of war which was written by our Year 9 pupils in their English and History lessons. Forty five Year 9 pupils also travelled to the WW1 battlefields over the May half term to see for themselves the memorials made to many Old Blundellians. Whilst the choir are touring Budapest and Bratislava this summer, next year's choir tour will be a little further afield, as we have been invited to perform in a major concert in Carnegie Hall in New York. Thirty pupils will take part in this in February 2019.

The Art department has hosted a number of masterclasses which included a Year 10 Artist workshop at RHS Rosemoor (with artist, Caroline Preston), a Royal Academy Life Drawing class and workshops with Artist Belinda Reynell. We have also recently become involved in an interesting partnership with the Tiverton Hospital where we shall be providing framed art work for their wards and other public areas.

Also in the arena of creative arts, many of you will have seen at least one of the major productions this year, as all our plays sold out very quickly. The senior play this year was *The Crucible*. We were then treated to the far more light-hearted Year 7 and 8 production of 'The School of Rock' and the summer term ended with our invitation to an Edwardian house party with a murderous theme, as the Year 9's and 10's hosted us for a delicious three course meal, while we tried in vain to work out the 'whodunit'. There have been some superb Speech and Drama results this year and the Ondaatje Hall theatre continues to draw much acclaim from all those who regularly attend our productions.

Of course at Blundell's you are never far from a sports pitch of one description or another. There have been some real triumphs by teams of all ages and in summary some of the most special moments are as follows.

In cricket the U12's won the Devon Cup final this term which was a great achievement, and we have got five county age group players in the school at the moment and a few who represent East Devon. Of course our combined excitement about recent OB, Dom Bess making his England debut has been terrific.

From the excellent season for girls' hockey, the U14A's made it through to the National Playoff of the England Schools competition. The U15A boasted an impressive win ratio of 75%. Of the twelve games played they only lost two and drew one, and the U16 girls reached the final of the National Indoor Hockey competition.

The U13 boys' hockey performed brilliantly in the Independent Schools Cup. They beat Kingston Grammar School 6-4 in the quarter final which took them through to the National Finals Day at Birmingham University where they finished 4<sup>th</sup>.

After some hesitant games at the very beginning of the season a very young 1<sup>st</sup> VII netball squad went on to win every game from the middle of January showing much potential for the future. The whole U14 age group also deserve mention as they only lost five games all season between them and scored just short of 400 goals. The footballers have played with determination. The 1<sup>st</sup> XI match against the OB's was a great way to finish the season.

The Summer term is always busy with athletics. This season two of our athletics teams qualified for the Regional Final of the Track and Field Cup. Our Year 7 and 8 boys' team were County Champions and the Year 9 and 10 girls narrowly missed out on the title, finishing 2<sup>nd</sup>.

In tennis, the highlight has been both the U13 and U15 girls winning the Devon Finals of the LTA Team Tennis Schools Competition. The swimming teams have had a terrific season with great team work shown through all their galas and a new activity of water polo is emerging. Equestrian success continues at National level, including Hickstead and Addington Championship qualification. There were team and individual winners at the South West ODE. Fives players have also qualified for National honours.

The kayak racing squad's resilience was tested even more than usual, with paddlers regularly breaking ice as well as the gruelling distances to train this year, but it paid off: the School Team achieved 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the National Schools Championships, 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the South West Championships and an individual crew came 3<sup>rd</sup> in the shortened Devizes to Westminster race and won the GB Surfski Junior Championships.

As you might expect, I have saved the report of the rugby season to the end of this part of my speech. When I first took over as Head here, in 2013, a very kind parent, having chatted to me on the touch line all through the autumn term, dropped a Christmas present in to my office. It was a book and on the inside front cover, she had written "Dear Mrs Huggett, we thought this might help for next season." I thought to myself, OK, maybe I haven't been quite as convincing as I thought I was. The book was entitled 'Rugby Union for Dummies'. However, having realised that perhaps I did need a bit of advice, I want that parent to know, I actually did read quite a bit of your book, thank you, and it was very useful.

What a season it has been! The 1<sup>st</sup> XV achieved a brilliant performance in the National Champions Trophy final against Dulwich at Saracens home ground of Allianz Park. Although the result did not go our way the side produced some excellent rugby and entertained a noisy and appreciative crowd of supporters. The semi-final match at home against Kingswood Bath will certainly live long in the memory of spectators and players alike.

Following on from our successes in the winter term, the sevens season brought more plaudits and some actual silver ware, with our 1<sup>st</sup> Seven winning the U18 National Schools Sevens tournament at Rosslyn Park, which is the first time we've achieved this since the 1980s. To see our girls' team, in only their second season, reach the semi-final of their Rosslyn Sevens competition was also inspiring.

Outdoor pursuits, this year saw three teams take part in the challenging Ten Tors event. Our two 35 mile teams and one 45 mile team were all home after their trek across the wilds of Dartmoor well within the allotted time and most of us were heading home by lunchtime, albeit with some thoroughly exhausted and blistered adventurers on board. They all made it in to Latin Prayer the next day to collect their medals.

The Year 8's this year undertook a very challenging four day trek from the source of the River Dart, right up on Dartmoor to the sea. This involved wild camping, carrying and canoeing with their kit and walking the 50 miles without a shower, a bed or a pillow in sight. I received one particularly heart-warming email from a parent when she picked up her exhausted child from school on their return: "Dear Mrs Huggett, can I just take this opportunity to sincerely thank every single member of staff who got my son through the four days. He isn't awake yet so I can't ask him, but last night he hadn't decided if he enjoyed any part of the trip. It certainly cemented the fact that he isn't a camper, he hates chilli con carne and said that he'll "never ever canoe again", however he was over the moon that he got through it and stuck it out to the bitter end. It sounded gruelling, yet a great experience to learn about self-sufficiency, stamina and drive to reach the end goal." I know that her sentiments were shared by all who took part in this great opportunity which Year 8 will remember for ever I am sure.

Amongst the many CCF achievements of the year, a large group have just returned from camp. Our shooting team continues to go from strength to strength and two cadet teams got through to the second round of the Staniforth Challenge Cup, a competition for all cadets nationwide which Blundell's won four times in the 1950's and 60's.

We have all our Year 9 pupils making a start on their Duke of Edinburgh awards through CCF in the summer term, and this year pupils have completed 30 Bronze and 8 Silver awards. Eleven pupils have completed their Gold award which is a School record. It is rare to see pupils still at school being able to collect their awards from Buckingham Palace as we did this year.

Of course none of these achievements could happen without the wonderful staff who give their time, effort, patience and creativity to all areas of school life.

It is with sadness that we say a fond farewell to a number of colleagues today and we welcome our new members of staff.

Dr Daisy Gibbs joined us as musician in residence having completed her PHD in Music at Newcastle University last summer. Daisy has been a very good addition to the Music department as well as tutoring in North Close and playing the organ regularly in chapel.

We wish Daisy the best of luck with her move to Eltham College where she will begin teaching and taking a PGCE course.

We also bid farewell to our French Assistante, Mlls Manon Delrue who has been very supportive of both School House and the language department for two years. Our PE graduate assistant Mr George Bond will also move on to a teacher training course.

Ms Beth Lewis joined Blundell's three years ago from the internationally renowned Markham College in Peru. Beth is a dynamic English teacher and she has done a great deal to support the department, alongside her hugely successful running of the School Debating Club, the Public Speaking activity and also acting as Overseas University advisor. We are very sorry to see Beth leave Blundell's, but we appreciate the draw of living nearer to family as she will take up a post at Cheadle Hulme School.

Mr Jonny Clayton, former Head of Physics, is something of a legend in the fitness arena of school life, regularly running or cycling in to school and back from Exeter, without any evidence of it being a challenge. Jonny has been an inspirational teacher of Physics over the last four years and we all wish him every success as he takes up the post of Head of Year 11 at Colyton Grammar School.

From our Music department, we say a very fond farewell to Mrs Rosie Bruce. Rosie started teaching here over 30 years ago as a wonderfully inspiring singing teacher and she has been that way ever since. Rosie is, I am happy to say, continuing to work at Blundell's Prep, but she will be leaving us here at the senior school. She has been a calm, kind and determined teacher, always giving her time generously and expecting the highest of standards. There are probably few Blundellian singers here today who have not benefitted from her support over the years.

Mrs Jenni Olive has been a great contributor to so many areas of Blundell's life in the 10 years that she has been with us. During that time, she has been a superb teacher of Maths, Academic Head of Years 7 and 8, and latterly tutor in Old House where we have been so fortunate to have her playing a supporting role to husband and Housemaster Charlie Olive. Jenni has never given anything less than 100% to everything she has done, from coaching netball to leading the academic direction within Year 7 and 8. I have never met a pupil who has not loved being taught by her and having watched some of her lessons myself over the years, I know that she will be hugely missed by the Maths department. Jenni leaves with our congratulations to take up her new role as Head of Department the South Devon University Technical College in Newton Abbot.

Another longstanding colleague heading to pastures new this year is Mr Steve Dawson. Steve has been a teacher of English here for 17 years, and in latter years, he started up Film Studies as an A level subject very successfully. Steve loves theatre, film and literature and to enter his classroom is to step into a world of movie magic. Steve has been a terrific subject leader and a loyal and effective teacher.

If you want to see Steve really energised, you have to go to the touchline of the 2<sup>nd</sup> XI football pitch where he will be jumping up and down and shouting words of wisdom and encouragement to his team from the side-lines. He will be much missed by colleagues and pupils, as well as by his tutees in Old House. We wish him well with his new role at Shaftesbury School where he will relocate to join his wife in her new role.

I had promised Mr Peter Gordon that there would be no official farewell to him as he steps down from his role as Head of Maths to become a part-time teacher. Never one to want any kind of fuss, I am delighted that Peter will remain with us on the staff. However, tribute must be paid to him for the way in which he has selflessly given his time and commitment to this hugely important subject over the last 21 years. Peter has pushed, shoved, persuaded and cajoled thousands of reluctant mathematicians into gaining their essential grades and as he steps down, he can be proud of the truly excellent results that his experienced department have achieved. Much of this is down to Peter's conviction, high standards and belief in their ability.

There is no doubt that in addition to Peter's reduction to a part-time role, we shall be very sorry to see Jenni Gordon retire after 22 years leading the library. Jenni has overseen the most recent developments including the management of the new Accelerated Reader programme and last summer's full refurbishment of the library. It continues to be a place where pupils know they can focus, be quiet and be supported in their reading and their learning. We thank both Jenni and Peter for all their contributions over the years.

For both Sue Norman and Debbie Hosking, this summer term marks the end of a 20 year career at Blundell's. Sue Norman has been a wonderful Head of Careers for all my time here, and in fact she set up the department from scratch 20 years ago whilst also teaching PE and coaching games. Having been Senior Mistress at Maynard School for 7 years, she had finely tuned management experience. In the last 6 years, we have worked very closely together in some of the most pressurised situations you can have in education, working through the university application process on results days.

Sue is widely respected amongst her peers as knowing everything there is to know about university entry and I have found that what she doesn't know, she can always find out. Her calm and quiet handling of some really tricky situations has always impressed she is just never out of ideas and always has another option in her mind. She is endlessly patient, and will pick up the phone to anyone and more often than not, can encourage even the very top universities to see things our way.

It has been such a pleasure to work with Sue, and I know all her colleagues feel the same. We shall miss our supply of delicious home-baked treats but we wish Sue every happiness in her retirement which I am sure will be full of activity, including lots of tennis.

To conclude our farewells, I would like to thank Debbie Hosking for a wonderful 20 years' service to Blundell's. Debbie joined Blundell's as Head of PE and she was originally a resident tutor in Petergate. However, Debbie's pastoral instincts were quickly noticed and it was not long before she moved on to take up the post of Housemistress of Gorton House, succeeding Andrew and Heather Barlow.

It was no surprise to any of us that the girls of GH, past and present, turned out in force to wish her a happy retirement. Over 300 pupils, OB's and parents attended the GH BBQ this year. The true depth of her care and compassion for her pupils is very evident, and it was interesting that one of my colleagues noted that many of those returning had had quite tricky times through school. That in itself shows the depth of Debbie's pastoral instincts.

There is nothing easy about living with 70 teenage girls, and drawing up alongside the most challenging each and every day, holding your hand out to them even when they keep pushing you away. Never giving up on anyone, is the mark of a truly great House Parent. Debbie is indeed that and more.

It is obvious in the way she speaks to her girls, and it is even more obvious in the way that they speak about her. Debbie, we shall miss you very much, both as a Housemistress, a teacher, a sports coach, a colleague and as a friend. We wish you every happiness in this new chapter of your life.

I am sure you will approach this with positivity just as you have everything else. I know a little bit of that famous competitive spirit will linger on in the DNA of the House, which will now be in the very capable hands of Mrs Sarah Holman. Both she and husband Rob, who will be known to many of you, are looking forward to this exciting new challenge ahead.

Finally in my review of this great year, it has been wonderful once again to see Blundellians getting involved in so many different charity fund-raising events. Miss Grant and the athletics staff organised a wonderful 'Race for Life' event earlier this term in aid of Cancer Research, which saw several hundred Blundellians running 5km in blistering heat, clad mostly in pink, to raise £700 for this worthy charity. Other events have included the Christmas Shoebox

appeal, where we sent 88 shoeboxes of games, toys and other presents to disadvantaged children. In total, through the combined hard work of all involved, the School has raised an amazing £14,161 for charity this year.

So to conclude, may I offer a few thank you's. Those of us lucky enough to live and work here know how much support we have from those who don't get the benefit of school holidays.

On behalf of all at Blundell's I would like to thank, once again, the domestic and grounds staff, led by Bron Chmiel and Steve Willis for the beautiful surroundings both inside and out, that they maintain every day for our benefit. This year we have seen one of Blundell's true national treasures', William Lancelles, retire and I am delighted that William is here today, so that I can thank him in person for his incredible career of over 30 years, as Head Gardener.

The legendary flower display both here at the Senior School and the Prep School speech days were William's original creations. Our new Senior Gardener, the aptly named Harry Flower, has, I am sure you would agree, honoured his predecessor with this wonderful display today. William, we thank you for all your inspiration, hard work and friendship and wish you a very happy retirement.

Food at Blundell's is never far from our minds and Geoff Edwards, Craig Sampson and our catering team have made it their business to greet every one of us with a smile as we come to collect our delicious breakfast, lunch or supper. We must warmly recognise all that they do to produce quite spectacular food every day, in addition to the many celebration events they have catered to such a high standard.

Thank you to all the team in admissions and the school office, especially Helen Tucker, my amazing PA whom I will miss very much.

Thank you to all within the Bursary, led by our Bursar Annika Hedrich-Wiggans. We will be sorry to be losing our Estates Bursar, James Halton, at the end of July as he will move on to project manage a large team of building surveyors for an international company in Exeter. James has been instrumental in raising the standard of our systems and all the projects he has managed, most recently the building of the new Medical Centre, have added significantly to the support we can offer all pupils.

Jo Jeffrey, Director of Marketing and Communications also leaves us this summer, and Jo's expertise is very evident through the many new publications including House handbooks and the new termly Diary magazine that you will be aware of as parents.

I have been extremely fortunate to work with the Senior Leadership team who have given me endless support and friendship over the last six years. I thank Andy Southgate and all his team at Blundell's Prep. It has been a pleasure to work with you, Andy.

I have also been privileged to work for a dedicated group of Governors, who give their time and energy voluntarily to guide and monitor all that we do. I must thank the Chairman, Cedric Clapp in particular, for all his support.

I would like to thank our team of senior pupils, the School Monitors, for their hard work and assistance in the day to day running of this busy place. We are looking forward to hearing from Heads of School; Jack Watt and Samantha Unsworth-White later on, and it is with great pleasure that I have appointed the new Heads of School this morning in our final School chapel service: The new Heads of School are Luke Simpson and Tabby Vause, and the Deputy Heads of School are Greg Kitson and Millie Attwell.

The future will bring many exciting developments for Blundell's. All our parents will be aware that we are changing the timetable and structure of the week from September. The new Medical Centre has just opened, in the heart of the School, and the new reporting and assessment structures have now had a year to bed in and are ready for further development. We hope you have found the new appointments system for parents' meetings and the parent app and new portal a more efficient way to gain information. The most exciting development will of course be the appointment of Mr Bart Wielenga as the new Head of Blundell's.

I am absolutely delighted that Bart will be taking over the reins of the School that I have loved so much. I would not be willing to hand it over to anyone other than the very best, so this outcome is, in my opinion, great for the School and for us as parents going forward.

Bart Wielenga has been my Deputy throughout my time here, and we have worked closely in every decision that has been made. His own personal ethos is at the very heart of all he seeks to do for the boys and girls at Blundell's. As a dynamic and passionate man he works hard to maintain the School's moral compass whilst always keeping one eye on how to get the most out of his pupils and his team.

In his current role, almost all the many pastoral initiatives over the last four years have begun as ideas from him, and yet such is his generosity of spirit that many people would never have known that the ideas weren't their own. Through many individual successes, he has encouraged us all to look upwards and outwards. That is very much his own personal mantra for the pupils here – look to be the best you can be and do it with integrity. I wish Bart, Lara, Dominic and Reuben every happiness in their new home. I am sure they will enjoy it, just as Spencer and our family have.

So I shall finish where I began this address with a few anniversaries. It is 60 years since Sputnik 1, the world's first artificial satellite, re-entered Earth's atmosphere. 25 years ago the Queen announced that Buckingham Palace would open to the public for the first time. 10 years ago Heathrow Airport's Terminal 5 opened. But just one year ago the tragic Grenfell Tower fire killed 72 people, and it is less than a year since we lost two young OB's; Charlie Watson and Clarissa Slade, who are still very much missed.

But it is also 5 years since I stood here for the very first time, looking out at my audience of 1500, probably the largest group I had ever spoken in front of. I cannot believe how quickly the time has gone by. I want to thank you, the staff, governors, parents and friends for the incredible support you have given me over that time.

But most of all, I look at my school of 600 Blundellians, and I think about all those who have come and gone while I have been here and I thank you.

I have loved every minute of being alongside you on your journey through school and through the turbulent waters of growing up. I have known joy in seeing you achieve, and I have watched you triumph over adversity in so many

different ways. Each and every one of you sitting here today can be proud of what you have achieved. I have learned from you, more than you could ever be taught and I shall remember those many smiling greetings, those kind acts and those courageous battles, big and small, that you have fought, both those from within and those that are more obviously on show.

I shall continue to be so very proud of you and all that you do in the future, and you must live up to the faith that has been placed in you – the sacrifices that have been made for you – and make the most of the gifts that have been bestowed upon you.

Love learning and live life to the full. Treasure your roots and let your wings take you wherever you want to go.