

OB Day President's Speech

15th June 2019

Your Worship, Mayoress, President, Chairman, Headmaster, Old Blundellians, Friends and family, who I hope won't heckle, but as they have provided the wine today, I fear that is a forlorn hope.

Being President of OB Day was something I neither expected nor ever contemplated. I emailed Paddy to ask him what was involved and received this message by return:

"Thanks J. Struggling through a couple of weeks in Mauritius. Will write properly when I get back.
Px"

How very Paddy. So I am still unsure what I am doing, but hope that I haven't messed up yet. What I can say, is that it is a very great honour and a privilege to be President for the day, only the second OB girl to fill the role. The first was Commander Katherine Armstrong, or Kate Babbington as she was known at school, who was President exactly 10 years ago, so you might say that I am Theresa May to her Margaret Thatcher, although I hope to fare a little better.

It is also very daunting following as President the colossus that is RNS, and it was in thinking about Paddy and Mr Swarbrick, these two men who had loomed so large during my own time at the school, that I began to realize that there is something extraordinary about Blundell's and the considerable cohort of masters (as indeed they will have been, women teachers only joining the school in the later part of the century) that have dedicated their lives to the school. It is clearly a very special place indeed.

I think I first noticed it thirty something years ago when I joined the VIth form, and the woodwork master, (DT I think now), Mr Fisher, had arrived at the school in 1949 just after the war when my own father was only in the Vth form.

To go back even further, there is the legendary Bundy Thomas, housemaster of FH, who arrived at Blundell's in 1926 and stayed for 41 years. And those masters of that era whose time at the school was interrupted by a war they thankfully survived; they went away in 1940, and then came back having served their country: TRK Jones; AWU Roberts; DA Rickards; and PJ MacElwee.

There are other names that will be very familiar to many of you:

From the 1940's: Ned Clayton – whose daughter Judith was here with me; and Ted Chanter; in the 1950's we have Colin Beale; Stan Munday; DJ Park; the sixties saw the arrival of RB Richards; Chris Reichwald; Brian Jenkins (who never seemed to age after his retirement); Mr Dickinson – here today; Derek Denner – also a father to an

early Blundellian girl; Mr Japes; Robert Julier who like Nick Swarbrick also served as a governor; Douglas Rice; Mr Salter; in the 70's came David Hamer; Geoff Clarke; Charles Noon; and Paul Rivett who after 41 years is still teaching Blundellians today.

When I first became a governor 10 years ago, two masters who joined the school the same term as I did, were still teaching – Alastair Deighton-Gibson and Tim Dyke, both of whom have only recently retired.

While I could have added a large number of others, this list would be incomplete without highlighting Ted Crowe: pupil, master, housemaster, Honorary secretary of the OB Club, who corralled us all together for so many years. He fulfilled all of these roles over a period of 65 years, broken only by university and national service. These men, between them all, have given more than 900 years of service to Blundell's and generations of Blundellians. There are 10 teachers in the School today who between them have amassed 246 years between them. I leave you to calculate that average.

This long-time involvement is prevalent among the OB community too, and it can be seen just by looking around this room. As an example, I will point out my father, Martyn Grose, or Charlie as he was known at school. He was a pupil, an OB, then a parent, member of the OB Club committee, Chairman of the OB Club, governor, and finally President of the OB Club. Then there is Cedric Clapp, former head boy who is now Chairman of Governors; and another Chairman of Governors here today, Frank Grenier – or Peter as he will be known by his contemporaries; and Jonny Ison, pupil, parent and grandparent of Blundellians, who has been treasurer of the OB Club and a trustee of the Peter Blundell Society for more years than I can remember.

The school draws us back, particularly on OB Day, but many of us have made new connections with the School as we go through our lives – it is a great joy and incredibly rewarding to be a governor of the School, and to be involved through the OB Club. And I think this draw goes beyond the lifelong friendships that we made here.

Our former headmaster, Ian Davenport, articulated what I believe is the foundation of this energy that brings us back: "There are two gifts that we can give our children: the first is roots and the second is wings." Although this was only written latterly, I think we would all recognize it as being true of our own experience at Blundell's. However far our wings have taken us, the roots that we laid during our years at the school pull us back. It may take years after leaving, but at some point we return.

Those roots might be on the stage in Big School, reading the Latin Prayer; they could be on the rifle range – the Magpies still get together every year; they could be on Big Field, whether in cricket or rugby mode; up on Athletics, or down by Parry Woods – sadly no longer there; perhaps it's the Russell Course of your day; or the physics labs; the fives courts; or your House common room or patch, or in the Music School. I don't think that anyone would necessarily have laid their roots in the dining room, but there's no accounting for taste. However, as we have seen by the wonderful

spread today, the food now is excellent, and Blundell's has become renowned for the quality of food it provides for the pupils.

There is a spot in this school that is special to each of us, and that is where we laid our roots.

The wings the School gave us have carried us all on the individual paths of our lives. They have helped us soar, enabled us to glide, and ultimately flown us here today.

This ethos of the school, though only put into words recently, has been carried through the years and kept true by the teachers who have provided that continuity in their dedication to Blundell's, and by which we have all benefited. And for that I am immensely grateful to them.

Ladies and gentlemen, will you raise you glasses to Blundell's, and the men and women who make this school so very special.