

**Good evening lords, ladies, gentlemen and Rugby School alumni**

**We are here to celebrate the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rugby School. Rugby school and this building – and what goes on inside them – are part of England’s rich institutional history.**

**All of you will remember your time at Rugby with great affection, but I am also sure you remember the mistakes you made and of course we expect all of us to learn from these, making us stronger both individually and as a community. Learning how to deal with emotions such as sadness, disappointment and even injustice, helps us when we encounter them again later in life. I am reminded of a story of two Rugby boys who were always feuding, they grew up to become the bitterest of enemies. One went to the Royal Navy and went on to become an Admiral, the other entered the Church and eventually became a Bishop. One day the bishop was waiting on the station platform looking portly but splendid in his full regalia when he spied the familiar figure of his boyhood enemy standing at the other end of the platform dressed in full admiral’s uniform, gleaming with decorations and all. The bishop thought for a moment and then went along the platform and approached the admiral and said, ‘I say, station master, what time does the next train leave for Canterbury?’ The admiral bowed and replied, ‘Any minute now madam but in your condition you really shouldn’t be travelling!’ It is good to see them both here this evening.**

**It has been observed that 'education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school'.**

**On holiday last summer I got chatting with a gentleman who gradually worked out that I was a teacher. As the net of our conversation tightened, it turned out, remarkably, that he was a former Rugby parent. He was from Yorkshire. "Great school, is that Rugby," he said. "Had a lad there."**

**"Did you now," I said. "How old is he now?" "He'd be 32," was the answer.**

**Phew, whatever happened was not on my watch. Time for some informal market research I thought. "So, how do you rate a Rugby education?" I asked. He gave me a long Yorkshire look and said "It's a bit early to tell."**

**My thoughts often turn to our founder, Lawrence Sheriff, grocer to Queen Elizabeth the First, and what he would make of the School today. His will instructed that a school be built in his home town of Rugby. It was to be a free grammar school for local boys. Today it is a co-educational day and boarding school with more than 800 pupils. The gender divide is now just about 50/50 which is as it should be.**

**Some schools are older than Rugby. But few have had such a lasting influence on the principles of an all-round education. We still follow the aims of Dr Thomas Arnold, my predecessor from 1828 to 1841, and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that code of good behaviour, hard work and recognition of the needs of one's neighbour, as well as the wider community, is still important to us.**

**The charitable ethos of Rugby School is central to our daily routine and to all our decisions. Many of our pupils benefit from fee awards and scholarships that are made possible by our London estate income and we are forever grateful to Mr Sheriff for his generosity. The Arnold Foundation is a fundamental part of the type of school we wish to be and I am pleased that Robert Swannell is going to talk about it in greater detail.**

**When I was appointed Head Master, I was determined to improve the School's academic performance and I'm happy to say that we are doing so. Nearly 90% of our A level and Pre-U exams are marked A star to B, and more than 50% of all IGCSEs and GCSE entries receive A stars. Almost all our students progress to good universities, with a good number winning places at Oxford or Cambridge and Edinburgh. (mention Rory Farquharson – Head Boy and Harvard)**

**But academic success is not achieved at the expense of sport and the arts. The whole point of an education, we believe, is the development of the whole person. This means encouraging every child with us to have a go at everything on offer – and there is a great deal – to find the activities that excite and challenge them. We expect our staff to have the same approach to an enriched and enriching life. A maths teacher does not just teach maths; he or she will have tutor responsibilities, be expected to coach a sport, and have an interest in music or drama – and a desire to share it.**

**As well as perhaps muttering about hundreds of girls milling about the School grounds, Lawrence Sheriff would also be astonished at the sheer size of the place. We are well into a seven-year plan to increase and improve the Schools' facilities for both boarders and day pupils, including the building of a brand-new boarding house – the first since Sheriff in 1930.**

**You wouldn't expect me to leave you without telling you about our sports achievements. I firmly believe that sport is an integral part of school life. Not just for the fresh air and exercise. But to teach leadership, team spirit, healthy competition, and how to deal graciously with success and failure. (Take in hockey, cricket results) And in December last year, our 1<sup>st</sup> XV rugby union team had its first unbroken season of wins since 1978. (perhaps use Radley story)**

**I would like to mention one significant development that took place last year and that is the establishment of Rugby School Thailand.**

**Over the years, we have been approached by several organisations with a view to entering into a franchise.**

**However, Wisdom Enterprises, owned and run by the Teepsuwan family, was different. They were keen on establishing a genuine partnership. They wanted to replicate what we do in England. To give Thai children and those of other nationalities an authentic Rugby education – the real thing, not just a badge of Englishness. We said we would not sign a contract and leave them to it, so we have been involved in the specifications for the school campus, classroom design, the curriculum and public examination courses, the recruitment and training of the senior management team.**

**At Rugby when we speak of the three Rs we mean restlessness, reflection and rigour. (Mention St Augustine and loving arms of God) Encouraging a restlessness within our pupils and staff is a desirable pursuit. When I talk about restlessness, I don't mean impatience or frustration, I mean the restlessness that extends us intellectually, keeps us vigilant, dynamic and open to growth. Rigour is integral to such restlessness, as we seek the greater good, the deeper reflection. Our duty goes beyond imparting knowledge and coaching children to pass exams. It lies instead in helping them to use the potential they have been given wisely, adventurously, kindly and carefully.**

**The term “...*fine disregard*” at Rugby in reference to William Webb Ellis catching the ball and running with it, with a fine disregard for the rules. Perhaps ‘fine disregard’ is a relevant phrase for us. We should have a disregard for political pressure. It’s about time that professionals ran the education department, not politicians. For the yo-yo antics of competing exam bodies and squabbling political parties. In fact, for everything except the creation of the best possible environment in which our children can become adults. If Rugby can maintain that commitment, it will keep its credibility and relevance. Rugby is a school of obligation, not a school of privilege. In short it means we want to be the best and continue to be the best and we will not rest until we are. That is not a hollow aim that is the vision for the future and it is based securely on all that is good about Rugby today and all that was good about Rugby in the past. High achievement in every aspect of school life and as I say to the boys and girls a genuine lust for life it is a gift. Finally firm lasting friendships that is probably the greatest gift we can give the children of the school based of course on mutual respect.**

**At Rugby, we continue to believe that the whole point of education is the encouragement of the whole person.**

**THANK YOU!**