

Rugby School 450th Anniversary Dinner

If music be the food of love, play on;.....

And so it was that 12th Night opened in 1602 in this very hall.

That was just 35 years after the founding of Rugby and, in a happy coincidence, the construction of this great building.

Rugby was founded by an Elizabethan philanthropist – I want in the next few minutes to remind you of this school's great tradition of service and charity, explain why this ethos matters and encourage every one of you to be an Elizabethan philanthropist in your own individual way.

Our setting this evening is a fitting reminder of the great lawyers who had their schooldays at Rugby. We have many with us today. They follow in distinguished footsteps.

Amongst Rugbeians I can count a Lord Chancellor, an Attorney General, at least three law lords, two benches-worth of Court of Appeal judges and, more exotically, Chief Justices of India and of Bengal.

In this context a brief moment a few years ago summed up for me the very best of Rugby, of understated achievement. I was sitting next to a quiet man I hadn't met before at dinner and turning to him as we started the main course asked : "And so what do you do"? "Oh, I am a Supreme Court Judge." It was the delightful, but unassuming, Rugbeian, David, Lord Hope.

We have just had the pleasure of listening to Lord Thomas, Lord Chief Justice, the second Rugbeian to hold that very highest judicial post, and there is a distinguished trio of lawyers from the Rugby vintage of the late 50s: Sir John Chadwick, Giles Forrester and Michael Blair, who had the idea for this dinner.

It is Michael who, as a bencher of this Inn, we should thank for inviting us into his modest dining room – so Michael, many thanks from all of for allowing us to share this wonderful Elizabethan Hall to celebrate our Elizabethan beginnings.

And in a nod to the best spirit of plagiarism let me borrow from another distinguished Rugbeian Judge, the beautifully named Sir William Stabb, who liked to open a speech with these words:

"Now we both have jobs to do this evening ...I have to speak and you have to listen ...I just hope you don't finish your job before I finish mine!"

This is probably the moment to confess that this august company reminds me of my profound academic inadequacies. I left Rugby with A levels that have remained

shrouded in deepest mystery to this day.

I didn't go to university, choosing instead to become a committed left wing revolutionary in France in 1968, those tumultuous days of De Gaulle's downfall, Vietnam and violent student riots ...

Then, for reasons too bizarre to recall, I turned 180 degrees and struggled through as a chartered accountant before becoming a barrister.

Sadly, far from joining the ranks of distinguished lawyers sitting here tonight, my only significant income at the Bar came from the sale of my good-as-new wig and gown...and so I left swiftly for more productive pastures in investment banking.

But in a lifetime in business I have learned that, happily for me at least, academic ability is just one of the talents required in life. Other talents are every bit as important... determination, resilience, reliability, curiosity, even a dash of charm. And we all need a dollop of good luck and, I believe strongly, some clear values to guide the journey.

Just as, as individuals, we need something more than academic ability, so too businesses need more than just the profit motive to succeed. They too need to have values and a purpose, a notion recently emphasised by our prime minister...and not before time.

And a school is no different.....

Rugbeians have understood service and purpose for centuries.

Service was at the heart of Thomas Arnold's ethos and tradition. As he put it: "First religious and moral principle, second gentlemanly conduct, third academic ability."

By the way, on the subject of religious and moral principle I think our Rugbeian clerics have outdone even our lawyers over the centuries – I counted 30 bishops and three Archbishops of Canterbury, if you include former teachers.

And of course we are blessed to have had Bishop David Urquhart on our Governing Body for many years. I vividly remember him fixing a steely look at Peter Green in the final interview for Head Master and asking him:

"So tell me, how would you know if the School had lost its moral compass?"

Happily Peter was up to that challenge. We are delighted to have him and Brenda here this evening.

When we speak of service we should also remember the school's contribution to our armed forces. I have often sat quietly in the memorial chapel and reflected on the 680 Rugbeians who gave their lives during the first war and 100s more in other conflicts.

They knew what service meant.

Now of course the School will continue to have academic excellence at the heart of its mission.

But, as Thomas Arnold knew, exam results are not an end in themselves.

I believe that for the school to be sustainable and successful for the next 450 years, it must have values that connect it to wider society; authentic values that inspire and unite pupils, parents, staff, neighbours and all who come into contact with Rugby.

Since its very foundation, the School has had charitable values and service at its heart and that is what I want to celebrate this evening.

Lawrence Sheriff's original bequest 450 years ago was to provide for the "poor boys of Rugby and Brownsover..."

He originally set aside £100 for this bequest. But, with the luck I referred to earlier, he changed his will two weeks before he died to substitute 1/3rd of an orchard called Conduit Close.

And, in an even bigger stroke of luck, successive governing bodies over the 450 years that have followed, have resisted the temptation to sell that land. They might have invested in something racier, like South American railways...guano mountains...tulips.....or south sea bubbles. Thank heavens they didn't have the imagination to do so!

Because of course Conduit Close was in Central London. That initial bequest now comprises a number of streets in Bloomsbury. It still funds the Foundation scholarships we award today and also a large annual payment to the excellent Lawrence Sherrif school, our neighbour in Rugby.

During the 19th Century, Dr Arnold imbued the school with a distinctive ethos that was about service, integrity and hard work, about strong Christian virtues of tolerance and understanding. These are values that we should cherish as much today as we did then.

That tradition of service and charity was reaffirmed in 2003 with the creation of the Arnold Foundation. The purpose was to add fully funded boarding places to those Foundation places that had been available for centuries.

Over our history we have been pioneers in education and, of course, sport.

I believe we should be equally proud of our pioneering work in advancing social mobility through the Arnold Foundation.

Well over 100 boys and girls have benefited from this program – that's many lives

genuinely transformed and many many more influenced for the good through those lives.

We can't change the inequalities of the world on our own, but we can all make a difference. That was the genesis of the Arnold Foundation. It is an expression of our values.

So, it is extraordinarily encouraging that, after 10 years successfully building the Arnold Foundation, the school was instrumental in 2012 in launching a new charity, SpringBoard.

SpringBoard has now taken Rugby's Arnold Foundation bursary model across the whole of the independent and state boarding sector. It has done that, in the Rugby way, by gentle encouragement rather than noisy grandstanding.

So small steps taken 15 years ago at Rugby are leading to potentially giant strides across the whole of the boarding school landscape.

Many of you here this evening have supported the Arnold Foundation extraordinarily generously over the years and allowed it to transform so many lives.

Although I am hoping it won't be any day soon, I have made provision in my will for a bequest - a bit more than £100, but sadly not an orchard in Bloomsbury - and hope you might consider this too.

Just imagine the effect if every single person here tonight took that step. It's difficult to imagine a more profound way to transform lives after ours end.

Fifty years ago I stood in the driving rain for a royal visit to Rugby. I watched as the Queen struggled with a golden key that became wedged in the new gates that led onto The Close.

I won't be here in another 50 years to celebrate the 500th anniversary, but I believe a new generation will look back at values that have endured and recognise the Arnold Foundation as an important element in securing those values.

So your support for the Arnold Foundation will not only transform the lives of many but will preserve the ethos and values of the school which gave many of us here tonight the skills to chart our way through life.

Let the last word be from a lawyer from our neighbour, Inner Temple ... Mahatma Gandhi. He said:

"You may never know what results come of your action but if you do nothing there will be no result"

So please. Take action. I promise there will be results.

And finally, let us raise our glasses and drink to the health of the School for the next century and beyond.

Floreat Rugbeia!