

## Speech Day 2024

Thank you, Chair of Governors; a very warm welcome to John Gleasure and his family and friends; High Sheriff; Deputy Mayor; distinguished guests; governors, staff, parents, Old Lancastrians; and especially the pupils of Lancaster Royal Grammar School.

Great stories start right here: That's the message of the New Building stairs which we decorated this year to celebrate some of our extraordinary alumni – one step per former pupil. They tell us that great stories start right here. Because there isn't another room in some other city today more bursting with talent and possibility than this one.

Although some of those former pupils are alarmingly accomplished, such as the name right at the base of those stairs, the oldest name. Christopher Urswick's story started as a boarder at our school in the 1450s. He became a household name during the Wars of the Roses. He was chaplain to the mother of Henry VII, the first Tudor king; Master of King's Hall which became Trinity College, Cambridge.

He was Dean of Windsor, Dean of York, Canon of St Paul's Cathedral, Archdeacon of Oxford, Henry VII's ambassador in Europe, and he arranged the first marriage of Catherine of Aragon. Perhaps you'll match all that, but one thing you'll never do. Urswick will remain forever the only Old Lancastrian with a speaking part in one of Shakespeare's plays. And dear to my heart because he left money in his will for "repairs of my school at Lancaster." By Speech Day next year perhaps I'll be able to report that diggers have arrived to finish those repairs. The School Rebuilding Programme is a major project but a story for another day.

It is a joy to celebrate the school's achievements this morning. But our school motto at LRGS isn't just "work hard for your exams" – it is also about leadership, and service – so it's about courage and initiative.

And I want to mark this morning the untimely death of Michael Davies, our former History teacher who very sadly died in July, and who certainly embodied that motto. Michael was an inspiring teacher and his legacy is the brilliant educational charity, Parallel Histories, which helps schools to teach sensitive topics around the globe. We remember him today.

And like other LRGS staff, Michael also knew that great teachers – and great schools – are three-dimensional. Firstly Academic – of course. The second dimension is extracurricular, beyond the walls of our classrooms and labs. And pastoral care is our third dimension. Our mission is distinctive. Academic, extracurricular, pastoral. Work, play, friendship. Head, heart and hand. Those are the LRGS dimensions of purpose and success. And our pupils show it too.

Well done to the class of 2024 – and lovely to see lots of OLs back today! Academically this was an excellent year. A-level students achieved As and A\*s in more than 40% of exams, 14 with straight A\*s. Twelve have gone to study Medicine, 9 to Oxbridge, but even more exciting are the roads less travelled – conservatoires, drone development, musical theatre; and especially degree apprenticeships.

And well done to our GCSE students. More than 40% of all exams were graded 8 or 9 (the old A\*s) and with lots of success five got 10 grade 9s. Exams open doors. But the real point is get-up-and-go, intellectual curiosity and exploration. And there's plenty of that in our Sixth Form extended projects, ranging from cockney London to music as medicine, the 1936 Olympics to Rwandan development – and our first Cyber EPQs as well.

There were Gold Medals in Biology, Chemistry and Physics Olympiads, at senior and Intermediate level, and in the Cambridge Chemistry Challenge. 48 Junior and Senior Golds in the UKMT Maths Challenge, with distinctions for Karl Westerman (playing the organ today) and Mark Douglas; Maths Feast success and Maths team challenge regional champions. Kyden Waite qualified for the Senior Olympiad, in the top 100 in the country while still in Year 9 – and won the Oxford University Computing Challenge for the second successive year. Fifty pupils achieved Inspiring Digital Enterprise Awards, like a digital DofE, Freddie Fenwick was awarded an Arkwright Engineering Scholarship, and our lower school team won Best Robot in the regional Lego League.

Hudson Arber was Best in County in Poetry by Heart. Senul Uduwa Vidanalage won third place in a national writing competition And Elijah O'Neill's reward from our letter writing competition was a handwritten reply from Sir David Attenborough!

Junior Quiz Teams made it to the Schools' Challenge final – we think the first time any school's A and B teams have both made the national finals; with success for our senior Quizzers too. Senior Debaters were regional champions and went to the national finals of the ESU Mace in London

We're a rainforest not a plantation, with at least 53 clubs – from Pokémon to Politics; Climbing Club to Chess, who have just won the northwest grammar schools tournament; from STEM to Stamp Club, winning competitions from York to Paris. And big up the Bee Club who have harvested their very first honey.

And diversity runs through our Careers Insight programme too – it is Green Careers focus next week – with many thanks to parents who have contributed; and to OLs including actor Joel Phillimore who appeared in George Clooney's film *Boys in the Boat* and came back to speak to pupils.

Which brings us on to Sport, in an amazing sporting year. 160 rugby fixtures, with coaching from Sale Sharks Women for the girls, who played in Kendal last night; and a scattering of matches for the mighty third and fourth teams; but the highlight was our best ever performance in the Rosslyn Park Sevens with nine straight wins before narrow defeat in the live streamed final. The U16As had a superb season, unbeaten except for the County semis; U14s were finalists and U15s semi-finalists in the Lancashire Cup; Under 12s and 13s won silverware at Macclesfield; and U12s won the Lancashire Festival.

140 years ago, our school magazine wrote that: "*Cricket is naturally the first word that comes into the mind apropos the summer term.*" Plus ça change – our First XI cricketers won every match at the Royal Grammar Schools festival, with Matthew Wood Player of the Festival; while Joe Pearson (now playing in Australia) was the season's top scorer. Congratulations to Robin Lee, Evan Yates, Elliott Hewison, Dylan Jackson and Matthew Wood who made the Honours Board with five wickets in a game. U12s, U13s and U14s all made either the County semis or the final. Charlie Parkinson played for the senior Lancashire Second XI; Durham Cricket Club headhunted Faizan Ghumman;

All eyes are on Sri Lanka in February for our first joint netball and cricket tour. And the rise of girls' sport has been one of the great joys of recent years, with girls competing in numerous sports. Even their portacabins have gone. Well done to the netball team, in the top division of the Lancaster Ladies League, senior district winners, with Lucy Hood player of the season; and they have the County Schools on Monday.

Rowing is full to bursting and is such a distinctive opportunity: five quads raced at Eton Dorney; J15s were second best quad in the North West; our J14s won the Chester Regatta; at least one crew won medals in every regional regatta; good luck in the Head of the Lune tomorrow!

Swimmers won Bronze, Silver and Golds in the Northwest relays; juniors went to the National Finals; and we retained our title at the QEGS Blackburn gala. Orienteers are National champions at Year 9 and Upper Sixth, and are defending those titles this weekend. We won *almost* all the age groups in the District Athletics, and Kyran Kyracou qualified for the English Schools Triple Jump final; Fabian Schiller, Ben Robinson and Jack Eccles ran for Lancashire.

Our junior tennis team were second in Lancashire; Kjell Jendis won three county titles; Serban Salbaticu won the U18 doubles; Daniel Drinkall was county champion, and qualified for the U14 tournament at Wimbledon. In other individual achievements, Sophia McGhie was 12<sup>th</sup> in the National Schools golf final and plays in Dubai next week; in Judo, Tara-Nell Allen became both English and British champion, and was selected for the European championships in Bulgaria; Corin Maden was selected for the England squad at korfbal; Toby Hall represented England at curling; Sam Giles played in the North West Waterpolo team who are inter-regional champions; and James Cottrell is British champion at BMX racing, and just one crash from winning the World Championships in South Carolina.

And there's exploration and adventure too, because the great outdoors is every child's entitlement. All our Year 7 pupils climbed, canoed and camped. Pupils achieved dozens of Bronze and Silver Duke of Edinburgh Awards, and 61 are working towards their Gold Awards right now

The CCF is stronger than ever. The Army Section won the Altcar Cup on summer camp, and shot 24 000 rounds, John Fitzpatrick was best shot in the Brigade – and Colonel Rowe celebrated 30 years' service. The Navy has returned to regular night sailing, with cadets enrolled across the country in sailing, powerboats, leadership and canoeing. 24 cadets were airborne and flew with the RAF section; the Air Squadron Trophy team qualified for the national final, and Jonty Lentell was national aircraft recognition champion for the second year running.

And school trips are part of that entitlement. Many thanks to John Gleasure for his initiative with the Opportunities Fund to support those trips – and the further flung ones included French and German exchanges, the Normandy experience; Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme; Iceland where the volcanoes were excellent but the geographers lost their international football fixture 5-4; skiing in Austria, kayaking in Scotland – Music, Drama and Classics in London – English in Stratford – the West Highland Way and lots more mountains with DofE and the CCF.

Old Lancastrian travel grants helped students, from bird watching in Denmark to volunteering in Ghana, and applications will open again soon for our £500 Duchy of Lancaster Awards for Year 10s upwards. Those are 3D awards for any challenge, project or dream.

But again and again, it is the Arts that bring us together and set the school alight with music and imagination – thank you to the Big Band today! More than 150 pupils have music lessons in at least 10 different instruments, with dozens of successful grades including 12 distinctions, alongside all our ensembles, choirs and bands. Well done to everyone who took part in our new Young Musician of the Year Competition, with Alistair Lee and Blake Creeley overall winners. I loved it. Performance is powerful. Life shrinks or expands according to your courage. Find your voice! Well done to everyone with Merits and Distinctions in their LAMDA speech and Drama Awards. A brilliant thing to do. And the most powerful production was *Our Country's Good*, with the Hall transformed, with huge congratulations to directors, cast and crew.

And *Praesis ut Prosis* means that we have a special heart for the least, the last, the lost. Our Lenten Charity fundraising really is remarkable. Perhaps in the end that's what we'll be judged on. Not what we gained but what we gave away – and our pupils should take great pride in raising over £24000 for charities local, national and global; as well as their efforts for Morecambe Bay foodbank, St John's Hospice, Macmillan, and most topically Movember.

Great schools don't happen by accident. Pupils thrive, schools thrive, cities thrive because of great teachers. We are delighted to welcome new teachers. Sam Whittle in Geography, Sarah Taylor in Business, Lee Topping in Maths, with Chris Rudkin and Lydia Purvis. But we have also said farewells. To Richard Chadwick after three outstanding years as Head of PE, to Anthony McAlone, to Hayley Johns and Sofia Bruschi in boarding. To Georgie Introna – a wonderful colleague and brilliant teacher of Mathematics. To Nick Rafferty, second in English, but often first in charity fundraising, Quizzing and almost everything else. To Ian Ledward but there isn't time to tell his stories, from headstands on his desk to the time he may or may not have run away to join the French Foreign Legion. Any geographer would do the same. And to Tony Burns, after his Masters last year; decades of service, from Maths to the Memos, as Head of Lower School – every dimension to the full. Please will you join with me in thanking the support staff and teachers of LRGS for their efforts this year?

Great stories start right here. It is a privilege to be here, on our pupils' start line, which will take them, we know, from every street in Lancaster and Morecambe and beyond to write their script for many wonderful stories. We are on the edge of our seat to see what they will do. From Christopher Urswick all those years ago to celebrating our pupils' achievements of head heart and hand today: Thank you especially to parents for all your support. Thank you all for your partnership in our great and extraordinary school. Thank you.