Speech Day
LRGS
Saturday 14th November 2026

"The Right Worshipful the Mayor of the City of Lancaster, Councillor Colin Hartley and The Mayoress"

Welcome to Year 8 pupils to your first Speech Day.
Congratulations to the Prize winning Boys and Girls.
Trustees, Teachers
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wonder how many of you here today have heard of a pop group called Mott the Hoople. I suspect that will be parents rather than pupils. The reason I mention Mott the Hoople was because they were riding high in the pop charts with a number one song called "Roll away the Stone" and they were playing here in the Great Hall almost exactly to the day 53 years ago. It was the 16th November 1973. So why would I mention this? Well it was the first time that I came here to the Great Hall. There was also a little known group called Queen touring with them in the UK. I often wonder whatever happened to them?

When I left LRGS in 1975 the school was kind enough to award me the Singleton Prize and this is the book I bought, *Scott and Symons Dental Anatomy*. Despite its age and developments in the subject I still refer occasionally to this book when I give lectures to the dental students at the University of Lancashire.

As a new boy in 1968 at my first Speech Day, then held in the Lancaster Town Hall, I really never imagined that I would be asked to speak at this important occasion. When I asked the Headmaster what the speakers normally would say he replied that I could say anything at all. So if everyone is happy let's dim the lights and I will give you a 60 minute lecture on fractured jaws.

When I was considering what to say, I read a few chapters of a book by a distinguished OL called Athol Murray. Although the book about the history of the school was published in 1952, it contains some interesting observations about Speech Days. It seems that in the mid 19th century, there was no one speaker but all the guests on the platform were invited to speak. The proceedings went on for many hours as the guests took advantage of their opportunity to speak.

I hope you have all got your speeches prepared.

There was one occasion when the then headmaster Mr Pryke had a very public dispute on the platform with the Mayor, Sir Thomas Storey. The argument, about funding for the school, was conducted in a very Victorian gentlemanly way but the audience would have been left in no doubt that this was a very contentious issue and one that had been kept private until Speech Day.

Today, let me reassure you, there will be no open invitation to speak and no public disputes. And no lecture about fractured jaws.

November 1973 was an exciting time for me as it was my lower six form year (Year 12) having just completed my O-Levels as we called them and at last I felt I was on the way to my chosen career as a dentist studying A-levels most of which I was enjoying. Physics was a challenge for Biologists. Not the theory which I did understand and found fascinating, but all those numbers and equations which I did find difficult.

Now I don't want you to think that I'm going to reminisce for the whole of this speech although I will of course refer back to my time here at the school with passed memories and how they've influenced the future. We cannot write our life script exactly as we would like it to be and there will be times when we are set back. But I do believe that the experiences I had and you the pupils are having at this school helped me and will help you to face all those unexpected challenges.

A few years ago, my Father gave me a set of papers relating to my time at the school, amongst which were these *(hold up reports)*, the entire collection of my school reports. Whilst considering what I would say today, I thought it might be interesting to look at the comments made about me throughout the school years. It became apparent that I was perhaps not always the most focused person. *(read out comments).* However, I was struck by the perceptive nature of the comments, with the teachers showing a deep care and understanding for their pupils and their development. I will come back to this in a few minutes.

I left school in 1975 to go to the Royal Dental Hospital of London to embark on a dental degree. Despite being the oldest dental school in the UK and the second oldest in the world it closed in the early 1980's as it was thought that we were overproducing dentists, that there would be no

more dental disease and that there would be no need for so many dentists in the future. Well, health care planning has always been a challenge and indeed a few years later three new dental schools were opened, one of which is at Preston.

My interest was in children's dentistry and following graduation I worked in various London hospitals including Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, where I was involved in the treatment of children and young adults with facial anomalies, such as cleft lip and palate. It was here that I made the decision to undertake a medical degree at University College Hospital in London and train as an oral and maxillofacial surgeon. Surgical training took me to hospitals in London, Bristol and Birmingham before taking up a consultancy in Morecambe Bay, a post I held until retirement. I always consider it a great privilege to have had the opportunity to return to my home area to serve the people of Morecambe Bay, from Garstang round the Bay to Millom. During that time as well as the surgery I was part of the small team which successfully bid to have a new dental school in Lancashire.

During my training one consultant once said to me *always work in famous places with famous people"*. But he was not right about that. It might look good on a CV, but what I think was more important was that I was fortunate to work in places and in teams where the care of our patients was always our priority, where there were excellent examples of leadership and challenges were faced and solutions identified in a professional manner.

I much preferred some other advice that I was given, when I was told *there are two things I want you to remember. Firstly, never underestimate the influence of what you say or do".* When I asked what the second piece of advice was, I was told *never overestimate the influence your words and actions may have".*

When I reflect on the influence of the teachers at school there is no doubt that many of the necessary skills for life were taught here. Skills such as learning to listen to others and respecting their opinion whilst framing ones own views in a clear and concise manner.

As a dental student I became interested in issues beyond the degree and joined the professional student body known as British Dental

Students Association. This led to my representing the UK at several international conferences and after graduation for a number of years I chaired the annual meetings of the International Association of Dental Students. This association had student delegates from over 20 different countries and indeed many of the the people I met there have remained friends. In fact I met an Irish delegate called Vicky at one of these congresses and we eventually married.

This was during the time of the end of Apartheid in South Africa and the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the establishment of new countries. Although the international student association was not a political organisation, the world events did influence the proceedings of the meetings and throughout these times I was always impressed by the professional manner of the student delegates and their respect for each other. Many of those students who showed such diplomacy are now leaders of their profession in their own countries.

Nearer home, I was the secretary of the Old Lancastrian Club for thirteen years and now sit as an OL Trustee on the Board. As the chair of the Boarding Committee, I cannot emphasise enough how dedicated and caring the teachers and staff are in maintaining the welfare, and interests of the boarders, something that is reflected throughout the school. *[We have heard from the Head about the comments made by Ofsted]* and as a Trustee I see that dedicated approach to learning and the tremendous opportunities provided for everyone by the school. For example, I know that the school continues to focus on Adaptive Teaching giving each pupil the chance to progress at their own pace in a safe environment. The OL Club, thanks to the continuing generosity of its members, supports Year 12 and 13 students wishing to undertake projects during their summer vacation and other school activities.

Looking back at other comments in my own school report it seems that I was enthusiastic, interested and keen to learn. Probably at the time I didn’t think too much of what was being written but now over fifty years later, whilst I wasn’t the most academic of pupils, the school was providing me with many of the necessary tools in life.

The school motto, *‘Praesis ut Prosis’,* translated as *“Lead in order to serve”*, with its emphasis not on self glory but in working for the benefit

of others, is indeed something to which I would encourage all pupils to aspire.

I believe that everyone of you pupils here today has their own individual talents. You may not fully realise what they are but go out, join clubs, build up relationships, take an active part in your community, whether that is locally or when you are in college or university and beyond. Do not be concerned if something doesn't work out as expected –life is like that, but try something else. Like the students I met on the national and international stages, you are the future of your generation.

Finally, I have already mentioned some of the advice that I received during my training, and I would like to read out a quote from a physician and researcher, called Dennis Burkitt, who spent much of his professional life in Africa. I have carried this quote in my wallet for years and still refer to it. Any budding medics here today may have heard of Burkitts Lymphoma, an eponymously named disease caused by a virus and which commonly affects the jaw. He was also known for making the connection between the high fibre diet as seen in Africa, compared to the Western diet, and recognising the importance of fibre in the prevention of diverticular disease and colon cancer. He said:

Attitudes are more important than abilities

Motives are more important than methods

Character is more important than cleverness

Perseverance is more important than power

And the heart takes precedence over the head.

With that I wish you all the very best in your careers and of course, Headmaster, am happy to award a half day holiday to the School.

Thank you