

GAUDY 2009

“Only connect”: those are the two words that form the subtitle to EM Forster’s novel, *Howard’s End*. I have chosen these words as my starting point this morning because they take me right back to what I said to the staff when we met in the North Wall in August 2008 as we prepared for the coming school year. Many new teachers had joined and I wanted them to be speedily welcomed as part of the team. In addition, I wanted the School to strengthen the links with the community outside as well as to make greater efforts to connect with the children in our care.

The Drama Summer School, directed by our own Lucy Maycock, had produced an eerie, challenging play based on Geraldine McCaughrean’s, *The White Darkness*. The theatre in the North Wall had been transformed into an Antarctic wasteland, white and desolate, for a play about a young girl’s fantastical relationship with the polar explorer, Titus Oates.

I described the scene to my staff to explain how, as teachers, we give guidance, support and leadership to the young people to help them navigate through an emotional landscape which can seem to be without features or points of reference. I did not anticipate the challenging events of the year ahead. I want to begin by thanking staff for responding to my demands of them and for the comfort and support that the teaching and non-teaching staff have given, especially during this tumultuous term. The guidance given by our Chaplains and Counsellors to the School community as we grieved for Kristina Aves in the autumn gave us real strength. They have been of great comfort, too, this term as we faced the loss of Grace Hadman and the anxious wait for news of Joe Robinson.

Today, as we reflect on the school year that has passed and say farewell to our leavers, I want to share with you some thoughts about the milestones and beacons that we have passed together.

This year has been the centenary of Charles Darwin and the 40th anniversary last week of the first Apollo landing on the Moon. It was fitting that in science, last year's leaver, Sam Smith, added to his five A Grades at A level and one AS A grade, the Salters' Advance Science prize. He was the best out of a field of 7,000 candidates. The School hosted a lecture by Professor Steve Jones on Darwin and our pupils and staff took part in the launch of Oxford's Science Festival at Oxford Castle. Our musicians played George Fenton's music '*Angel Falls*' from his Blue Planet suite and Ele Lighter sang Julie Gold's song, '*From a Distance*'. They marked the opening of the '*Earth from the Air*' exhibition at the Castle – an exhibition of pictures taken from satellites which was seen by thousands of younger schoolchildren in Oxfordshire. Incidentally, we heard George Fenton's music on another occasion in the autumn term, when a Field House choir sang his arrangement of the Psalm, '*Except the Lord build the House*' when the Bishop of London kindly opened the new extension to Field House.

We opened our new Life Sciences Laboratories in March and marked the occasion by hosting a conference on stem cells which was attended by leading academics, medics and students including Professor Richard Gardiner, Baroness Ruth Deech and the team who first used stem cell technology to replace a patient's windpipe or trachea. The conference was in partnership with the Oxford Biomedical Centre and I am particularly grateful to Dr Kendall Williams for his co-ordination of the event.

We made a fresh start with our Lower Sixth this year. Not only did some pupils begin their preparation of the International Baccalaureate Diploma, but also the A level pupils began a two year course without public examinations in the Lower Sixth.

There has been some careful reflection about how the year has gone. There have been comments that it has been hard work. I say GOOD: we should praise academic endeavour and achievement and recognise the value of extra time and effort. I appeal to all members of the Lower Sixth to use this holiday not

only as a time for relaxation but also for consolidation, reading and preparation. Do not waste your talent – I want all pupils to get the message that working hard is cool. The Fourth Form, also, should prepare themselves for their busy year ahead. A new Sixth Form pupil, Faith Hammond, submitted an English Literature essay to Peterhouse, Cambridge for their Thomas Champion prize and was highly commended by the College from a large list of entries. The first five pupils to take the new A level Extended Project qualification did incredibly well. Miranda Weindling's essay on Dante's, '*Inferno*' and the influence on Rodin's Gates of Hell was awarded A★, the first St Edward's pupil to receive this new A level grade. I congratulate Mrs Hunter, our Head of Higher Education, who has given great encouragement to pupils and guidance to staff to take up this new academic challenge. Congratulations, also, to Nicola Mason, John Bethell and Joseph Barr who were winners in an essay and viva competition organised by the Senior Tutor. Other academic highlights included a design technology prize from Quincon and the Oxford Trust to Oceane Bonnet-Deravin and

Gad Shawcross and the Stephen Hart Memorial competition
victory by George Lloyd-Jones for his inspired landscape
painting: a prize given by the Campaign to protect Rural
England.

Two weeks ago, we maintained our connection with former
pupils when we held a Special Gaudy for those who left the
School before 1945. Among the guests were contemporaries of
the Dambuster, Guy Gibson and other military heroes. By an
amazing stroke of luck, we were treated to a flypast by the RAF
aircraft (including the Red Arrows) which had flown over
Buckingham Palace for Trooping the Colour. Their route took
them right over the marquee in the Quad to our great delight,
tinged with nostalgic memories. One former pupil was
Theodore Abrahamsen, a Norwegian who was captured and
taken to Buchenwald as a political prisoner. I asked him to come
as my guest to Special Gaudy, and to speak to some Sixth Form
historians during the morning. His description of the five day
journey in cattle trucks to Weimar and the routine cruelty at the

camp reminded me of the images of pain in Rodin's, '*Gates of Hell*'. He witnessed the systematic execution of many of the European gypsies who were imprisoned at Buchenwald and his account filled us with sheer horror. But, hearing him talk also of his will to survive and his hope, made us reflect on the nature of friendship and human dignity. When the United States President Obama visited Buchenwald earlier this month, he said "the camp teaches that we must be ever vigilant about the spread of evil in our time and guard against the cruelty in ourselves".

The capacity for cruelty in ourselves was the theme of the school play, '*Good*', in the autumn term. This was an ambitious production and an unsettling one: it traces the path of an intellectual as he becomes an influential Nazi. It demanded a great deal of the actors, musicians and designers. It was a huge success. So, too, was '*We Will Rock You*' which transported us to the glam rock era of the 1970s and 1980s in a celebration of the music of Queen.

May I congratulate all of those who took part in both major productions and thank the directors for their skill and leadership.

Another dramatic highlight for me was the Oakthorpe Shell Play, 'Speech and Grammar' - I think that it should be published as a youth drama project text. Two new musical ensembles were formed this year: Sinfonia for our younger instrumentalists and Vox, a junior choir. They have contributed to the musical life of the School in a significant way and have given an extra opportunity for some of our younger musicians to perform. Many of you will have enjoyed last night's Gaudy Concert at which the School's orchestras, bands and choirs performed so beautifully. Throughout the year, the choral concerts (two with the St Edward's Singers), Concerto Concert and recitals have been of a remarkable standard. This year's bands concert was particularly stunning and those of us there were thoroughly entertained in a most perfect atmosphere with music performed on three stage platforms. The music in School, under the guidance of Mr Neville Creed, has gone from strength to strength. I want to thank him for all that he has done as he

hands over the Music Department to Mr Alex Tester and takes over as Director of Cultural Activities.

To help the new Shells find their way, the whole year group spent 24 hours together at the Scout Camp on Boar's Hill, under the guidance of Miss Wethey as the new Head of Shells. This was the first of a number of opportunities for the year group to work cooperatively together. In May, just after half term, they were given an introduction to the CCF and enabled to begin their Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award at an outdoor activity camp in Snowdonia. I was able to spend a few days with them all under canvas and came away thinking not only how well the Shells worked together and supported each other's efforts, but also feeling very proud of my staff. This gives me a chance to thank our Graduate Assistants who gave excellent support in Snowdonia and throughout the year. I wish them well in their chosen careers. I doubt that they will attempt what one of last year's assistants is doing. Sarah Outen is rowing single-handed

across the Indian Ocean and today completes day 96. You can track her progress on her website.

I am glad that we can add the Bronze award to our already hugely successful Silver and Gold Duke of Edinburgh programme. CCF deserved the praise given by Brigadier Wade when he was our Inspecting Officer in May. He has kindly given a trophy for leadership that will be awarded today for the first time.

Last summer, I reported on the findings of the School Inspectors on the educational standards in the School. We were inspected again in November and May but by two very different organisations. The boarding and pastoral provision was subject to an inspection by OFSTED. Their report is on their website and can be compared with other schools. It is full of praise for the Houses, the Health Centre and the pastoral support in the School. Mr James, the Sub-Warden, should take credit here for

his thorough preparation for the OFSTED inspection and his careful management of the School.

In May, Oxford City Council inspected the catering facilities at the 1400 hotels, restaurants, colleges and schools in our locality.

I am proud to say that for the cleanliness, the attention to detail and the level of care shown by our catering team, St Edward's was awarded the maximum five stars for quality – along with only 5% of the establishments inspected. Go on their website and see how many famous institutions did not score top marks!

May I thank all those in catering who have shown such commitment to improving the quality and variety of food for all at St Edward's.

Just before the end of this term, I was invited to a Sports Dinner at which the Captains of School teams were able to give reports on the season. The Director of Sports and Activities gave a polished summary of the many achievements of the year before giving out awards explaining how they were closely contested.

It was an excellent evening for parents, pupils and staff. The guest speaker, England scrum half Andy Gommersall, encouraged dedication and commitment to sport and the lasting friendships that it brings. The awards given on the evening included Rupert Shipperley for ‘up and coming youngster’, Grade Hadman as most improved hockey and netball player, Matthew Holyland as all-round sportsman and Elizabeth Jackson as all-round sportswoman; Grace Pigott was awarded sportswoman of the year for her outstanding performance in matches and training and Stewart Innes (who represented Great Britain as an oarsman last season and this summer) was made sportsman of the year. For the team of the year, a great deal of praise was given to the Girls’ 4 who won a Bronze medal at the National Schools’ Regatta. The award went, however, to the Cricket First XI who followed on from last summer’s record-breaking season to play again this year with such brilliance, confidence and dedication. They have set the highest standard for all teams in all sports to follow.

Among the many expeditions and tours this year have been the Choir tour to Vienna, the Christmas tour to Peru, the summer expedition to Malawi which included the renovation of a primary school there (on a project with the charity, Malawi Dream), a History visit to Russia and a delegation to the 33rd United Nations junior forum in New York. This summer, a group depart for Namibia and I wish them every success. School visits require a great deal of detailed preparation and tireless supervision by my colleagues. Please join me in thanking them for their effort.

We say farewell to some highly esteemed colleagues this term. I am sure, however, that we will not lose our connexion with them. Mr Bament leaves to return to Australia and will be missed as a highly effective teacher of Mathematics, a valuable member of our sports coaching staff and our first 'teacher in charge of overseas pupils' helping to guide the School in looking after those so far from home.

We say goodbye also today to our Director of Development, Jane Rogers. She was a driving force behind the formation of the Friends of St Edward's, and she has had considerable success in reaching out to former pupils, former and current parents and Educational trusts in support of St Edward's. I wish her success at Cheltenham Ladies' College.

Mrs Susan Norton stands down as Housemistress of Corfe this summer. I want to thank her for her leadership of Corfe and her support for the girls in her care.

Our Examinations Officer, Michael Boswell retires this summer. He taught Modern Languages here for many years but, since 2000 has planned and managed our public exams with a calm diligence that has been appreciated by countless GCSE, AS and A Level candidates.

Mrs Sarah Kerr-Dineen leaves this summer to become Warden of Forest School in London. She is, quite simply, an excellent

teacher and has been an inspiration to her pupils. She was warmly appreciated as Housemistress of Corfe before becoming our Director of Studies five years ago. She has taken the School through a significant time of change which has greatly improved the quality of teaching and learning in the School. I am grateful to her for her creative approach, her eye for detail and her total dedication to the staff and pupils. She joins an elite group of six head teachers within HMC – the Wardens of Glenalmond, Llandovery, St Colomba's Dublin, Radley, Forest and St Edward's.

Anthony Kerr-Dineen, our director of Cultural Activities leaves, too. He is a gifted teacher of music and, as Director of Music, set the School higher and higher standards of achievement and encouraged greater participation. A first-rate choir master and accompanist, he masterminded, too, the introduction and growth of Dance in the School. Under his leadership numerous productions including *Les Miserables*, *Carmen*, *Chorus Line*, *West Side Story* and *We Will Rock You* flourished. He is also a

brilliant coach of Cricket and Hockey, but his legacy must be the North Wall which would never have happened without his vision and energy. In recognition of his dedicated service to St Edward's, I have asked him to present the prizes today.

Before I turn to our leavers from the Upper Sixth, may I wish the few pupils from other years who move on to other schools and colleges next year the very best of luck on behalf of the whole school. I have a special affection for the Upper Sixth.

We started here as newcomers in September 2004 and I remember teaching you as new Shells. We have grown a little older together but it is only me who has started turning grey. I remember Grace Hadman as a member of the first Shell class that I taught. She will always be in our thoughts as we reflect not just on the torment of the past term but the happy years together.

You have been led by a particularly strong group of prefects. They have shown real initiative over the year to connect with

pupils. They have helped at our weekly Open Mornings for prospective parents and have given constructive feedback on the interview candidates for teaching posts. You would not be surprised to learn that their finishing order always matched the conclusions reached by my senior colleagues!

The Heads of School have been exceptional. They were conscientious in their duties and thoroughly dedicated to serving St Edward's. The heads of School and their Prefects hand over to a new team who are determined to follow your example.

In '*Howard's End*', Forster wrote, "only connect the prose and the passion and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer".

May I wish you all a happy and restful holiday and before I finish, join me in good wishes to Nick Coram-Wright and Zannah Jarvis for their wedding latter this month. May God bless you all.