

JGLN AT SPEECH DAY 2003

Retirement seems to come more slowly to Stowe Headmasters than most. They do have a habit of hanging around a bit. I suspect it is because this is such a delightful place to run. In fact, I think there's only been six of us in eighty years at Stowe – so I've done about the average. And as a breed, headmasters certainly seem to have a little more stickability than other more glamorous professions, a little longer shelf life, shall we say, than football managers. We last a little longer than those synthetically manufactured Girl Bands or even contestants in that excruciating TV show, "I'm a celebrity. Get me out of here".

Certainly, with all the coming and going over the years, headmastering has changed. Radically. Fifty years ago Sir Winston Churchill, writing of his boyhood at Harrow, declared frighteningly: "Headmasters have powers at their disposal with which Prime Ministers have never yet been invested". Nota Bene Mr. Tony Blair. Today, I would like to think, Headmasters are no longer like the tinpot dictators of Churchill's youth but more like team managers. And just like Sven, Sir Alec, Arsène, Glenn, Martin O'Neill and poor old Howard Wilkinson, they're only as good or bad as the team around them.

And that, perhaps, is a good moment to pause and make a short diversion, to talk about this year's team. I will be passing on to my successor, Dr. Anthony Wallersteiner, who is himself a class act, a splendid class act in the School Management Team – soon to be bereft of Christopher Edwards after next year. I thank him wholeheartedly for his wise counsel and enthusiasm and for standing in so seamlessly before Christmas and I congratulate Bromsgrove on their wisdom and insight in appointing him as their new Headmaster in 2004. I salute, admire and applaud all of the Team – it's been control by delegation. Before I arrived I went on a Management Inset run by Bob Lohr, a Canadian, on the subject of delegation: "nor will it ever be". No such job-shy people here. It is reassuring when you are in awe of your close colleagues' work ethic, as I have been, and can even, and also, count them as friends. Amidst the mayhem we have had fun and laughter – the best antidote. I thank them one and all.

Amongst many of the highlights of our year have been – 93% of Stoics gaining places at their first choice university – the Senior Congreve production of Camelot – the All that Jazz event organised by Alexander Perry and Christian Roe which raised £20,000 – our Stars in Their Eyes gala organised by Alexandra Kennedy – much wonderful Music – the Rugby team getting to the last 16 of the Daily Mail Cup, the highest placing thus far – our unbeaten Tennis team this season – the Golfers in the Regional Final of the National Foursomes – the Swimming Squad having the highest placing in the Bath Cup for some 20 years. The Hockey squad have a tour to South Africa in August to look forward to – the best of luck to them. A visit from Old Stoics, Sir Nicholas Winton and his brother, Bobby – Bobby is with us today

– and the opportunity to present Sir Nicholas who, you will remember, rescued some 669 children from Prague before the Nazis came, with the first ever Distinguished Old Stoic Award. A memorable and sobering talk by Rudi Oppenheimer on the Holocaust.

We are all thrilled with the new facilities in the Drayson Hall extension – opened this morning by Simon Clegg, Old Stoic, and Chief Executive of the British Olympic Association. The new electronic Cricket scoreboard was also officially taken into commission this morning.

I'd like to conclude by concentrating on a birthday:, not my eldest daughter, Lucy's, significant number this very day, but Stowe's eightieth birthday which took place a couple of weeks ago, on May 11th. Whilst, in the margins, thanking the Stoics for their fine rendering of Happy Birthday to me just four days ago. It was a very touching moment and I thank you all. If Rochester Sneath's son is here today, could he see me afterwards? It would be excellent to share some reminiscences with Old Sneathers and to exchange some tips.

Now there are few of us here today who can go back as far as 1923. The younger ones among us may perhaps be thinking that some of us up on the platform go back even further, but I can assure you we don't.

So what was 1923 like? World War One had ended just five years before and the country was suffering not just from the loss of a whole generation of young men but the perception that a home fit for heroes was something of an illusion. Yet open an atlas and look at a map of the world and much of it was coloured red, the proud colours of the British Empire. In Germany in 1923 a certain Corporal Hitler made an attempted but failed bid for power. He would try again later. In 1923 the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic was officially established. The oppression of Stalin and the terrors of the cold war were still to come. In music Schoenberg was popularising the tuneless Twelve Tone method, in art Paul Klee was painting "At the mount of the Bull". In literature the buzz names were Lawrence, Eliot, Joyce and Galsworthy. In cricket Australia held the Ashes, having beaten England 5-0 in the last Test series, but a swashbuckling left-handed Englishman called Percy Chapman, a public school-boy of course, was about to win them back for us. In football the first Wembley F.A. Cup Winners were West Ham United (how are the mighty fallen!) in the famous 'white horse' final – what startlingly easy crowd control! The twin towers of the newly completed Wembley Stadium were themselves a symbol of British soccer supremacy. Wimbledon Champions, a year after the Challenge round was abandoned, were W.M. Johnston and Susanne Lenglen who was winning her fifth title in a row. It was the age of jazz, Louis Armstrong's Hot Five, gangsters and Al Capone, flappers dancing the Charleston, cocktails at the Savoy, the Great Gatsby, silent movies and wind-up gramophones, motor-racing at Brooklands and world land speed records, the engine and chassis of my red label 3-

litre Bentley were being crafted, Rudolph Valentino's romantic sheikh, Anna Pavlova's Dying Swan and Noel Coward's *The Vortex*.

Such was the exciting, dangerous age when, on 11th May, 1923, my predecessor five times removed, Stowe's founding headmaster, the great J.F. Roxburgh, stood on the steps of the North Front greeting the first 99 boys in the school – 44 in Bruce House, 55 in Temple – many of whom arrived by bus and taxi from the special steam train which had chugged its way north to Buckingham railway station. There were just ten members of staff.

And over the succeeding eighty years here one generation after another, both of staff and pupils, have come and gone in the natural ebb and flow of life. But there has, of course, in this long period of steady, and sometimes sudden, change – as one educational theory has succeeded another, one set of exams succeeded another, one list of rules replaced by another, one set of technologies swept away by another, one Secretary of State given way to yet more legions – there has been one thing of permanence, one constant, unifying link between the generations. The place itself, in all its inspiring historical and cultural glory.

And linked to the place come the ideals. Constant, unifying, permanent.

For the past ten years or so, our brochures have borne on the cover the latest marketing sound-bite, encapsulating the Stowe ideal, the determination that here is a place which encourages young people both to think, deeply, for themselves and about others.

To be honest, this is only a new way of dressing up an old Stowe ideal. And it's older even than Roxburgh, older than 1923.

In the grounds, not far away from us, the far side of the Elysian Fields, you will find the Temple of the British Worthies, with its array of inspirational personalities, the kind of people, according to the good Lord Cobham, who had made a big difference to life. The ideals offered by some of these are truly inspirational to a school, no matter if they were put there because they exemplified Cobham's own personal political ideals and agenda.

Among the worthies is John Milton, who said a number of interesting things about education. The reason Cobham chose him is probably because he wrote: "Let not England forget her precedence of teaching nations how to live". A base piece of imperialism, some would say dismissively. But most of us, as we have anguished this year over the rights and wrongs of the campaign to free Iraq, would feel it has some modern relevance. And education is surely all about preparing individuals to relate to each other, not just in this country but across the world, in the most productive, compassionate and harmonious manner possible.

Back in 1644 Milton also had this to say, as his definition of education: "I call therefore a complete and generous education one that fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously all the offices, both public and private, of peace and war." If we take out the sexist remark that education is just for men, the rest of it has a peculiarly modern ring about it. Milton, it seems, in talk-

ing of "a complete and generous" education means the same thing as we do today when we talk of a "fully rounded" one. I love the idea that education should produce the "Just, skilful and magnanimous". What wonderful qualities to take out into the world: Justice, Skilfulness (in our own particular fields, whatever they are) and Magnanimity. The first two qualities, justice and skilfulness can only come from thinking deeply, for oneself. For anyone in the third form struggling with the third quality 'magnanimity', let me explain it comes from 2 Latin words – 'magnus', big, and 'animus', heart or mind – so it really means big-heartedness, or compassion, or, as we express it, thinking of others.

Stowe's educational idea, therefore, from the early eighteenth century onwards has been this. A 'complete and generous', fully rounded education, which encourages young people to think for themselves and to think of others – with 'justice, skilfulness and magnanimity' – both in their private and public lives, in times of peace and times of war.

Shortly after the school was founded Roxburgh related Stowe's ideals even further back in time, well past the eighteenth century, back into the days of ancient Greece. Roxburgh based his book on education, *Eleutheros*, published in 1930, on Aristotle's dictum: "There is a form of education which should be given to our sons" – sorry sexist, again, I'm afraid! – 'not because it is useful and not because it is necessary, but because it benefits a free man and because it is noble'.

By being 'useful' I suppose Aristotle meant preparing people for their professional lives and by 'necessary' preparing people for exams. Two ideals which, of course, all fee-paying parents would certainly wish to see scrupulously pursued. But Aristotle, Roxburgh and the Stowe ideal believe that there is something even more important educationally, something encouraging freedom (a buzz word) and a much less well understood word today, nobility: freedom and nobility. In other words, thinking for oneself, perhaps, and thinking of others.

It used to be said of Stowe that it was a young school and therefore lucky enough to be uncluttered by stultifying traditions. It was still being said, I was quite surprised to find, when I arrived, and the school was in its late sixties! Now Stowe is an octogenarian it cannot possibly keep reiterating this claim. Stowe isn't a young school any more. it's definitely getting on a bit! Therefore my successor, whom we all warmly anticipate, Dr Wallersteiner, and all those future headmasters of Stowe, as yet undreamt of and unknown, will be able to say: Stowe is no longer a young school. It has lived in its inspiring historical setting for over eighty years. And, as such, it is lucky enough to be uncluttered by stultifying inexperience and inspired by time-honoured educational ideals. Tested and proven.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you will find time before the day is over to toast, first, Stowe's eightieth birthday, secondly, perhaps down at the Worthies, the qualities of justice, skilfulness and magnanimity which the bust of John Milton reminds us of, and thirdly Stowe's hugely exciting future. That sounds a lot of toasts.