

## Speech Night 2017

High Sheriff, Honoured Guest, members of the Foundation, members of our trust, fellow governors, colleagues, friends, parents, grandparents and especially pupils of Liverpool College.

This is the moment in the year when we gather to celebrate our pupils, their talents and accomplishments. Behind every prize, behind speeches, orations, and performances is the story of pupils and staff working well together, forming learning relationships, the strengths of which are a hallmark of our school. Indeed these relationships of learning are the foundation of our examination success. Last year, our pupils achieved results which placed us in the top 100 non selective state schools for our achievement in the English Baccalaureate and in the top 5% of schools for achievement at GCSE and A level. In that sense all our pupils and teachers are prize winners.

I want to particularly thank my wonderful PA Ms Susan Bamber and Ms Wynne for organising this evening. I want to thank Dr McNamara who has once again brilliantly fulfilled the tricky task of writing a Latin oration and training our senior prefects to recite it. I want to thank Mr Bishop and Ms Clark whose constant work with our musicians adds the x factor to this and all our school celebrations.

I wish to thank, commend and pay tribute to my staff, my colleagues, who devote themselves with such energy and commitment to the excellence of our school and to the learning of their pupils. Their care, their attention, and their skills in teaching their pupils inspires our pupils, and it inspires me.

Behind this company of teaching and support staff heroes, there is an entire battalion of people behind the scenes, unpaid, and unrecognised without whom the school would not be celebrating very much. Mr Evans, the chair of governors and my colleague governors work many hours, make difficult decisions, deliberate, plan and challenge the future strategy of the College. But that invisible battalion does not stop or cease there: there are the members of the trust, and members of the foundation whose love and concern of the school drives us forward, I must pay particular thanks to John Robertson who has served a governor, chair of governors and chairman of the foundation, and the trustees of the Wilton Trust who have made possible the most extensive gifted and talented programme of any school in the area, and of course the parent teacher association. I want to pay particular tribute to Dina Sarsam who recently stepped aside from her role as chair of the committee and who, together with a small and intrepid band of parents, has made such a massive contribution through fundraising and the organisation of the social events which bind our community together. The PTA continues to amaze with its current committee led by Ms Lahorgue.

Tonight we have also invited many members of the Liverpool Collegiate Old Boys' Association to join us. They are in fact our lost brothers, members of the same foundation, at one time the same school. They were educated in the building in which Liverpool College began, on Shaw Street, now the apartment homes of the socially mobile, and after wandering in the desert like the ancient Israelites, their schooling having been destroyed by the privations inflicted by political ideology and parochial hatreds, they are united with us again, and this unity is symbolized by tonight's speaker Mr Stow who attended the Liverpool Collegiate School and who has been such a glittering example of the products of the

education boys received there.

Mr Stow began a charity called the Second World War Experience Centre, an archive of personal testimony of men and women who lived through the years of the Second World War and leads tours of World War I and World War 2 battlefields with young people.

Mr Stow's interest in teaching young people about the horrors of war and his presence with us is a link to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of our school's hero, Captain Noel Chavasse, VC and Bar, killed while repeatedly rescuing wounded men from no man's land, August 4, 1917 at Wieltje, a small Belgian hamlet turned into a sea of death and horror.

Chavasse is all around us at school. Later this year we will participate in remembrance services and exhibitions about him here in the Cathedral. His portrait stares down from the walls, his bust looks out over the dining room. Every Pre Pep pupil knows who this man was and in some ways still is, the example of selfless service, Olympian and Olympic achievement, one of the best and brightest killed for seemingly no very good reason, a man ready and able to make himself into a Christian sacrifice for his country and his fellow soldiers.

Chavasse was at school at the College for 4 years. It had just moved away from Shaw Street, the great divorce of the posh boys and the rest had happened, with the tiny College taking up new quarters at Lodge Lane while the mass of other boys stayed in Shaw Street. There were only a few hundred boys at Liverpool College, indeed across Liverpool, a city with then more than a million people, at its absolute prime in terms of power and influence, there were only 1300 boys receiving any kind of secondary education and almost all of these attended either Liverpool College, the Collegiate or the Institute. Fewer than 1000 girls were receiving a secondary education at the same time.

Chavasse, a member of a well to do, influential and very talented family achieved with the effortlessness of a God, or so it seemed. He was frighteningly fleet of foot, victor ludorum, his school record in the 400 and 200 stood for many decades, he gained entrance to Oxford, he achieved a first class science degree, competed in the Olympics, won a scholarship to study medicine at the University of Liverpool. His father was an influential clergyman who started the building of this Cathedral. Noel Chavasse appears to have been dutiful and clever, but he was more interested in his youth club on Grafton Street than any part of Liverpool College. He would be recognized and rewarded today with the Vice Presidents' prize for service to the community.

What should interest and amaze us is that Chavasse, like any young person, had no idea what was coming. This was an age where rumours of war were far away, and for a young man like him, the world lay open before him. The education he received could in no way anticipate the challenges he would face. From the perspective of speech night 1904, the last one Chavasse attended, the world was a smooth lake to be navigated with insouciant ease, a voyage for which his education had prepared him perfectly.

Except it is not what happened, and it never is what actually happens. Despite the efforts of schools to tell their pupils to get ready for the proverbial "world of work", or to anticipate the next big educational or societal trend, it turns out our perspicacity with regard to the future, is in the case of schools, their plans and their curricula actually utter blindness. I have no idea what challenges our Year 7s will face, whether they, like me and my generation, will

never be tested in war, whether they will see the world improved or not, whether climate change will force upon them choices no one foresaw, or whether technology will ultimately replace most human labour.

The key message for us was not that Chavasse could see the future but that Chavasse was a shaper, a leader, a forger of his destiny rather than a visionless pawn, trapped in whatever was happening historically. This quite simply put is the difference between education and training, and as such between a school which educates and a school which trains. An educated person can adapt and is able to read any situation and decide how she will contribute to the world. A trained person is not able to this.

Chavasse, we can read in his letters, and in his actions clearly saw what he needed to do. He established a narrative of his life, based around service, not his own interests. His was a richly moral vision, grounded in an ultimately moral education. In those moments as a doctor, his knowledge of chemistry and biology helped him help others, but it was the fact that he took responsibility for his part in shaping the world which made him a hero.

That is why the governors and I are committed to strengthening and to some extent rebuilding the demands and challenges of an education at Liverpool College, not only in the classroom but across everything we do on campus and beyond. GCSE's, the cliché goes are not enough, but neither is it enough to do the GCSEs and throw in a bit, or even a lot of sport and a debating society or two.

So when we give you a prize, ask you to solve the equation, give you a new homework assignment, when we put you in detention, when we take you on a trip, invite you to an intervention, when we teach you to kick or shoot at goal, or teach you to shoot your rifle, or work on your solo performance, or explain the genitive case, or talk about the difference between momentum and gravity, or walk with you to Chapel, we are talking to you and working for you for no other reason that we believe in the urgent and desperate necessity of making you aware of the responsibility to shape your life, and through that shaping to shape the world. Every educational step is a step on that journey of self-awareness and reflection. Everything else, important though it is, is training.

We swim against a tide in doing this. The reduction of the human person to a set of data points was not completed in the last days of a Soviet ten year plan but in the final inspection framework published by Ofsted. Our current national conversation about education does not mention the challenge which the example of Noel Chavasse places before us. And before we grow nostalgic, as our government seems to do from time to time, and harken back to a golden age of education, our national conversation never included that challenge of Noel Chavasse's example.

At the time of Chavasse's education at the College, in 1901 and 1902, the then government asked the great schools of England, the embryonic HMC conference of which our College was a founder, to help design a national system of education which would develop the intellectual talents and character of all the young people of the country. The schools, including our own, refused, uncertain and unsure that the education of the mind and of the character could ever be for everyone and anyone, and believing that they could not possibly contribute to such an egalitarian proposal. They said essentially that most people were only

fit to be trained, not educated.

History frequently proves headmasters wrong, and the headmasters of HMC were wrong in 1902. The current leaders of education have at least and at last agreed that everyone's intellect should be somewhat developed. But they have also consistently and over time devalued and defunded school activity which is not purely academic. In doing so they have tacitly endorsed the stern verdict delivered in 1902, that some deserve an education whilst others need only to be trained.

According to Ofsted, so much of what we do and are going to do, from CCF to hockey, from D of E to Archbishop of York leadership awards, from musicals to societies, from Chapel to speech night, is nice but not necessary. It is thought to matter only in so far as it is deemed to have an immediate impact. Chavasse's short life provides a single clear example that we will not know at 16 or 18 how our education impacted our life.

In doing things differently, in doubling down, as a gambler might say, in the other direction, we are swimming together now against the tide. And no one can swim for someone else. Each teacher, pupil, governor, and support staff member feels the strain and pressures which this noble purpose and ambition imposes on them, individually and collectively. You as pupils embrace the vision of education we are pursuing, and it needs to speak to you, make sense for you, motivate you and inspire you, just as it did Chavasse. Without you, and your wholehearted commitment which I witness so often during each day, our vision remains just that, you are the ones who can and who do make it real.

The school constantly evaluates whether it is succeeding in achieving this challenge for you, and what must change to make our invitation to you irresistible and unavoidable. Irresistible because what you are learning is and should be fascinating, accessible dynamic and challenging; Unavoidable because the programme of the school should demand your best not only in lessons but as a leader and a member of the community, in whatever setting or activity, at whatever age. Becoming educated rather than only trained should not be optional but mandatory at our school.

We are indeed swimming against a tide together, but tides do turn.

The changes and challenges we are introducing next year seek to address aggressively and ambitiously this modern deficit of engagement, this programmed passivity of the typical British school day, which is a far greater threat to you, our pupils' happiness and the country's prosperity than anything else.

Every tradition and every institution must refresh itself at the spring of its ideals and in the mirror of its heroes. The vision of the College for its pupils extends beyond training, beyond the reduction, predictability and mediocrity we see falsely promoted as education.

In 2017, just as in 1840 or 1904, we do not know what the future holds. But we know that we are duty bound to prepare you for the journey, giving you a truly demanding education not just training, and liberating you to adapt and respond with strength and resilience. In that way, we will be what we were for Noel Chavasse. We will be a true school of character.