

## OB 2024 Day President Speech

Headmaster, I have seen very dark days on far too many occasions during decades of policing. I have seen them in all types of communities – neighbourhoods, villages, school, cities. And the character of a community is displayed in how it handles its darkest times – and, under your leadership, the Blundells community has demonstrated exemplary character over the past year.

Katharine, it is an honour to be President for today. Thankyou for continuing the invitation of my dear friend, your predecessor as Chair, Richard Swarbrick.

The joy of days such as these are that the years fall away. We see one another as we were at 18, we are mildly interested in each other's jobs and relationships and families – yes – but we really just want to laugh at shared memories, scrapes and stories. And there will be plenty of that today.

And all of that is fun. And there is a great place and need for fun. But being an OB – being here, being connected, goes much deeper than that.

**This place is special.** It is a bit extra special for me because I was christened in the chapel in 1970; moved to SH with my father Bryan Richards in 1971 (my mum Beryl sends her best wishes but cannot be here today); came here as a pupil in the late 80s; Julian and I were married in the chapel 30 years ago (thankyou, Tim, for choosing two of our wedding hymns in our uplifting Chapel Service this morning) and held my father's funeral here in the early noughties. I have two god-mothers here today, a great group from 1988 at the back, a few very dear and special friends OB friends scattered around the UK and the world. The connections are close, loving, unconditionally supportive and absolutely essential to my path through life.

In November 2018 one of the better organized in our year group organized a full weekend's reunion. People came from across the globe and we laughed and laughed. The women – the girls of 1988 – hadn't changed a bit. The men – some were harder to decipher - but we had about half the whole year group there. We enjoyed an afternoon and evening in the Beale Centre and old friendships were rekindled and new ones formed.

**Next year, we will celebrate 50 years of girls** at Blundells, and many of my contemporaries at that reunion are the mothers of the next generation of girls here too. It would be good to find those mothers and daughters, perhaps even grandmothers, daughters and granddaughters? I remember the first girl arriving when I was a very small child in SH.

What struck me at that reunion weekend, and has struck me today and amongst my many years and strands of OB connections, is **the breadth of the OB reach and experience**. So, let me dwell on what I mean by that:

## **Global and Local**

### **Privileged**

### **Enabling**

### **Rooted in history**

**It truly is global** – the school itself is good at making and keeping networks in many major countries. I was amazed by the international reach of my peer group and know that is replicated. And that means people in public service, in economically enabling business, in education and the arts.....

**But it is also very much Devon.** Of the communities and of the land that we are in here. As a proud Devonian - we had a Devon wing of Hampshire Constabulary when I was Chief Constable as there were so many of us, many of whom had moved to the Navy as younger women and men, and stayed - I know what that means. And the connection with generations of Devonians is tangible in the school's roll-list today.

In this year of D-Day 80<sup>th</sup>, it is also worth remembering the very strong links this school has with all our armed forces, those who have served and continue to serve our country, around the world.

**And it is privileged.** By using that word I don't mean in any way to make anyone uncomfortable. We are privileged by our education here. Privileged by access to health and security. By freedom of religion. Privileged by access to sport and the arts. Freedom of gender and sexuality. Privileged to choose our next steps. And these are wonderful things. But not everyone has that same privilege – and the humility of OBs means that we hold the ladder for those who have a longer climb to make. The fact that Blundellians work for local charities and community groups is testament to that.

**It is enabling not exclusionary** – we read a lot about closed shops. About cronyism. About favours for friends, I cannot abide that. One of the reasons I joined policing after university is its commitment to equality: Policing operates 'without fear or favour' to any person, which often makes policing unpopular but absolutely helps keep our democracy safe. One of the reasons we all know so much about policing – the good and the ill – is that it is the most transparent of any public service. Which, considering the powers which policing has to deny liberty, to surveil, to protect, is a very good thing. So Blundells and OBs have a shared connection – we enable not exclude others, we are supporters, cheerleaders for one another and delight in each other's success and hold one another when life bumps into us. Which it does to all of us from time to time.

**And it is rooted in history** – which brings stability and a strong platform from which to leap. It brings the long view. In this year of major elections across the globe, it is our values which hold us steady. One of my privileges as a Deputy Lieutenant in West Sussex is to represent the Lord Lieutenant at the Ceremony for new UK Citizens, who make two promises:

To affirm allegiance to HM King Charles III and his heirs, and to uphold the rights freedoms, democratic values and laws of the UK, and fulfil the duties of citizenship. These are active, doing promises.

The values of duty through time and the decades and centuries has currency. These are turbulent times across the world, and playing the long game is wise, smoothing out the lumps and bumps of short-term goals (Andrew made this point when he preached to us in Chapel earlier). There have been OBs since 1604 (someone must have come and gone that year, I am sure!) and there will be for hundreds of years to come. And OBs will do great things, will build great businesses, give great service, nurture great families and stay connected just as we are all doing. I like being part of that history, just a little bit.

**But for now:**

I also like the fun. The laughs. The ‘do you remember?’ and ‘whatever happened to?’ conversations. And intend having a great deal more of them throughout this afternoon.

So, I leave you with optimism for the future. For this fine school. For our OBs here and elsewhere. As I gaze out of this window where I learnt to drive (I did collide with that wall); where I nurtured by lifelong love of participating in sport; where my musical highlight was achieved with the piano here in Big School and the Chapel Choir; where my love of maths was nurtured by Paul Rivett and which I went on to study; and where my lifelong sense of Service was created. Thanks Blundell’s and thanks OBs for being alongside me at every step.

Olivia Pinkney CBE QPM DL