

The Headmaster's Review

What follows is the text of the Headmaster's Speech Day Address, delivered virtually on the morning of Founder's Day, Saturday 27 June 2020.

It is my very great pleasure to report for the 10th, most unusual and sadly final time as Headmaster at the Alleyn's School Annual Speech Day.

In ordinary times we would be gathered together at St Barnabas, suited and booted and probably boiling. But these are not ordinary times, and so this year our Virtual Speech Day will be a mixture of live and recorded material streamed direct into your homes over the next 60 minutes. The arts of concision and compression have never been my strengths, but I have done my best to give a true flavour of the year, mindful that brevity is the soul of wit or, as we Germans say, the spice lies in the brevity. So do try to have a glass of water on hand as I proceed through two roughly 10-minute segments, punctuated by a break or two to enjoy some of the highlights of this year's visual and performing arts.

The academic year began auspiciously enough, with the hard work of staff and students once again rewarded with excellent public exam results. At GCSE, almost a quarter of pupils gained at least ten grade 8s or better; while at A Level 77 students gained at least 3 A*A grades, enabling 90% to secure places at their first or second choice university in the UK, Europe or North America. They went on to read everything from Medicine to Fine Art

and from Mathematics to Drama, as befits a truly liberal and holistic school. That culture of academic excellence and enquiry has been broadened and deepened via the Alleyn's Learners' Programme and Upper School Enrichment as well as by the efforts of our academic teaching departments both in class and via Teams!

As well as the discrete subject work which characterises any rigorous academic education, there have been inter-disciplinary collaborations for the students to enjoy, including an Art-led trip to hear Ai Wei Wei discuss human rights and the Satellite sensor programme developed by our CANSAT team uniting DT, Physics and Computing. In the annual RV Jones Science Lecture (part of an inter-disciplinary Science Fortnight which saw S0 converted into a zoo replete with python, skunk and meercat!) ex-Scientist-in-Residence Dr Adam Rutherford helped us see how science might shape our demolition of racist ideologies. Our Model United Nations debaters organised a conference at Alleyn's and won further honours in Bilbao; while our MfL debaters performed superbly in both Spanish and French competitions. We also held a 'mock' general election with some entertaining hustings and a 71% turnout: the Lib Dems won with 43% of the vote. A career in politics is one possible outcome from our National Careers Week programme, when parents and alumni generously offered their insights and encouragement to pupils via video talks and workshops in a virtual "Experience of Work" week.

In response to our Year 13s and 11s obvious appetite to continue their learning in lieu of public exams, we also developed the Alleyn's Diploma

and Portfolio, with staff offering courses in Law, Social Enterprise, Comfort Cooking, Digital Photography, Portuguese, British Wildlife & Conservation, C21st Century Classics and An Introduction to Cosmic Mining. Little wonder then that we have seen such enthusiasm for the GRPP – which this year was won by Eve Freeman on “How far do translations shape our understanding of ancient literature?” The Headmaster’s Review Prize, meanwhile, was won by Eloise Hamilton in Year 10 with her critical review of the 2019 film production of The Lion King.

Just as the life of the mind has continued to flourish, so too has the Alleyn’s co-curriculum. The CCF has overcome all obstacles (including the second biennial Arctic Survival Expedition to Northern Sweden), ably led by Cadet Regimental Sergeant Major Jeremiah Brennan (also appointed the Deputy Lord Lieutenants Cadet). In another honour for the contingent, SSI Colour Sergeant Granger bore the standard for the Royal British Legion at the FA Cup Remembrance Service. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme also continues to flourish, with 173 participants including 17 Year 13s who have completed the Gold programme and will be royally celebrated at Buckingham Palace next year.

In Sport, Alleyn’s fielded 163 teams in almost 950 matches before March, with a remarkable 66% of pupils representing the School. The 1st team Netball had unprecedented success beating Millfield in the national semis only to lose the final against the holders. (Special mention to Cassandra Howard who is playing in the women’s National Premier League and the U19 Superleague.) In Water Polo, we reached no fewer than four national

finals, with the U18 girls taking silver. (Earlier in the year Emily Campbell-Lamerton was selected to represent Great Britain.) In Cross Country and Athletics; Ailbhe Barnes, Zac Juty-Tabram and Gabriella Thoburn were all selected for English Schools. In Football, the 1st XI reached the final of the Elgin Capital league and the U14 boys won their Elgin competition defeating Whitgift. In further footballing honours, the U15 girls are national 6-a-side champions and the U13 boys were national cup semi-finalists. National representative honours went to Henry Swann, Luc Rollet de Fougerolles and Zeb Buckeridge, with Harvey Walker captaining the England ISFA U18. In Fives, Martha Nugent won the girls' national U18 title while Gwydion Wiseman and Pruthik Puvanendiran are senior open doubles national champions. In Basketball the U15s won the London independent schools league, while in Hockey; the U15 girls won the national plate and the U13 girls made the plate final. In total, Alleyn's played a record 385 hockey fixtures this year despite the season being cut short, which has been devastating for cricket, tennis and athletics. Nevertheless, the Sports Department ran a Virtual Sports Day for LS pupils (including wall-sitting and shoe-lace tying) which was a great success.

The performing arts have also been phenomenal this year, as Ned Alleyn would rightly expect. In Drama, the Bear Pit Company toured the Edinburgh Fringe for the ninth year with an original piece of verbatim theatre, 35,000. The Upper School production of Macbeth marked the conclusion of an entire year of Jacobean theatre with a striking interpretation full of rich verse-speaking featuring three Macbeths across

three time periods. The Year 11 Bear Pit presented five shows including Lily Robinson's adaptation of Fleabag and Izzy Bainbridge's Derry Girls; and the Upper School met this challenge with typically bold work including a stunningly mature production of Pinter's Betrayal and a fabulous reworking of The Graduate. The Middle School brought us the Wardrobe Ensemble's Education, Education, Education, an hilarious and moving vision of 90s school life featuring high production values and a nostalgic playlist.

It was such a shame that the Lower School play couldn't happen because of the lockdown, and a huge disappointment for the 155 pupils who were due to perform in the annual Dance Show, featuring Year 11 choreographies which were innovative, polished and engaging. Undaunted, pupils have been creating their own dance films based on their experiences of enforced isolation which they have choreographed in and around their own homes. One example of this was devised and recorded by Alex Johnston in Year 9.

The lockdown also put paid to our "big four" musical events (Jazz Night, Chamber Concert, St John's Smith Square and A Lot of Hot Air) and to the inaugural Community Choir concert. As with Dance and Drama, this was a terrible shame for all those who had worked so hard over so many months. Pre-closure, the 400th anniversary service in Christ's Chapel was a beautiful way to start the year; House Music – won by Cribb's - was expertly organised by the House teams; the Christmas Concerts and Carol Service were suitably festive; and the St Cecilia's Concert featured the voices of

Olivia Colman, Pip Torrens and Richard Ayoade narrating Symphony Orchestra's Peter and the Wolf. Since lockdown we have launched the Jack Lanchbery Composition Competition, adjudicated by Dobrinka Tabakova AOG who composed the Anthem for our Westminster Abbey Service; while the Corona Choir and Orchestra have been making music remotely.

Over 100 members of the School community have also contributed to a virtual recording of Jerusalem - a musical monument to our community spirit in the face of adversity! You will hear that at the very end of this Virtual Speech Day, just as you heard the Corona Orchestra's rendition of Somewhere Over The Rainbow at the start. Right now though, I'd like to invite you to listen to excerpts from the two winning compositions chosen by Dobrinka: Orla Wyatt's Before you break my heart and David Wynn-Evans' El brillo de las estrallas. Their music will be accompanied by some highlights of this year's virtual summer exhibition, including work by Clive Burgess who won the Painter-Stainer's Prize and produced the beautiful Alleyn's Christmas card. All these artists are part of a generation who have come of age amidst greater global disruption than at any time since 1945, and it's fascinating as well as heartening to see how they have used their impressive creativity to navigate and process these uncertain times.

I am very proud that our pupils work so hard to achieve such amazing things inside and outside the classroom, on-site and online. I am also very proud of how they engage with the world through volunteering, outreach and charitable activities, including via organisations like the Dulwich Almshouses, Southwark Community Education Charity, Southwark Schools

Learning Partnership and London Academy of Excellent in Tottenham. Our brilliant Houses have raised money for a multitude of good causes again this year, while our School Charity Committee have raised almost £9k for Sparrow Schools in South Africa and Lambeth & Southwark Mind. Our Eco-committee have also been working hard to promote and embed sustainability in all that we do. Whether helping the young or the elderly, locally, in London or overseas, our pupils continue to open their hearts to the wider world and strive to make a lasting difference.

Among many highlights, I was touched by a message from Castlebar Care Home who wrote to thank our Year 8 pupils who sent them personal messages of hope and love at this difficult time. I was also pleased that in early April we were able to open the top fields so the public could enjoy some space and fresh air during the lockdown; and I was humbled by the efforts of our DT staff and students (and indeed parents) who designed and made a variety of face masks and shields for NHS hospitals and Care homes, and for local charities, underlining the wellspring of care and compassion which lies at the heart of the Alleyn's community.

That community has been here for over 400 years, of course, and a highlight of this year (and of my 10 years as Headmaster) was the Jacobean Day and Patently Alleyn's in September. Pupils were off timetable and enjoyed a carousel of activities like sampling the 17th-century schoolroom, discovering Galileo and his telescope, and Jacobean sporting activities. The day culminated with the whole community gathering in the Quad to witness a tree-planting ceremony as the Junior School children sang their

new hymn, *Our Amazing School*. In the evening, parents were entertained with fine food, fireworks and Jacobean revelry, from 'Just a Jacobean Minute' to a magical masque in the MCT. Soon afterwards, the Art and Development departments held a Secret Postcard exhibition with works from students, staff, parents and friends as part of our 400th Anniversary Campaign. I am delighted to say that the fruits of this and other initiatives across the year mean we can endow a 400th anniversary bursary to enable another student who would not otherwise be able to come to Alleyn's to do so. The fact that we have doubled the number of such places in the past ten years, with 109 students here with means-tested support averaging 90% of the fees, is obviously one of the things I am most proud of. None of this would have been possible without the extraordinary investment of time, talent and money from so many people, including all our generous donors, major benefactors, and Campaign Ambassadors, alumni, parents, governors and staff. Growing bursaries for the future is absolutely critical to the purpose, ethos and well-being of the School and I am so grateful to everyone for having the confidence to invest in this long-term mission which goes to the very heart of our identity as Alleyn's School.

That sense of enduring legacy was underlined in December, when we planted a foxglove donated by the Dulwich Estate - one of seven commemorative trees presented to the beneficiary schools with a historical connection to the original foundation. The tree was planted at the front of the School at a brief ceremony attended by current and former Governors, the Chair of the Estate Trustees and the Captains and Vice

Captains of the Junior and Senior School. Little did we know then what the next few months would entail, as the School entered lockdown and pupils of all ages had to adjust to “Virtually Alleyn’s”. I hope you agree that much of the life, joy and essence of Alleyn’s has endured despite the new medium of delivery. I hope, too, that you will take comfort from what that tells us about the indomitability and resourcefulness of the human spirit, our inherent appetite for learning, and the transformative power of education. By the same token, I have taken great comfort from – and been hugely impressed by – the thoughtful, impassioned reactions of the entire community to the issues highlighted by the death of George Floyd, which pose important challenges to individuals and institutions alike. I would like to pay special tribute to Giselle Francis and Earnest Selvadurai who set up our very first Minority Student Union, along with Jonny Wanyanga and Esther Akinyomi who will lead MSU and the Diversity Council next year. As I have written elsewhere, we take these challenges extremely seriously, acknowledge that more needs to be done to meet them meaningfully, and will continue this vital and collaborative work next year.

Turning to some valedictories, I should like to start by paying tribute to two former colleagues who passed away this year, and whom we remember with great respect and affection. Campbell Pulley represented the Saddlers’ Company on the Governing Board from 1995 to 2005 and was always a passionate friend and supporter of the School. Philip Barlow taught Classics from 1974 until his retirement in 2011 and is remembered as a superb Classicist and unforgettable character who was esteemed by

colleagues and students alike. Both would have been delighted by all the achievements I have adumbrated here today (and Philip would have approved the use of the verb to adumbrate, and no doubt shared with me its Latin etymology.) We honour their memory and their legacy as we think also of their families and friends and all those in the Alleyn's community who have suffered distress and bereavement over the past very difficult year.

It is always very difficult to say goodbye to colleagues who must leave for pastures new as part of the great scholastic cycle of renewal and regrowth. Mrs Eliza Healey (English) and Miss Philippa Hill (PE & Games) leave after excellent temporary spells, while several long-standing colleagues also depart this term. Mr Nicolas Allan (Art) joins Queen's College in Marylebone; Mr Adam Lea joins Pocklington School as Head of Drama; Mrs Sarah Rutherford leaves the English department to bring up her young family; Mr Jason Thompson leaves the Music department to concentrate on his own music and other projects; and Mr Mark Williams leaves London to become a Teacher of Mathematics at Bedford School. We have also said goodbye to support staff colleagues this year, including Lucie Demeillier and Helen Collins (our brilliant Events team), Marylène Lanari-Boisclair (our Finance Manager who now works at the Bank of England), Masoom Tavakoli and Matt Hall from the IT team; and Cami Bortz, Paul Schneider, Karolina Raczynski, and Neil Philips. Finally, two colleagues with astonishingly long service are Pam Sylvester (who left the Library in January after 19 years) and Peter Edwards (Cricket Coach for 28 years). We thank

all these superb colleagues for their efforts and wish them all the very best for the future; as we do Christina Hughes-Onslow, brilliant Chief Administration Officer who was supposed to retire in May, has stayed on to help throughout the lockdown, and will finally put her feet up in September after 17 wonderful years as a colleague and parent.

Two members of the teaching staff are also taking retirement this year. Mr David Adkins joined the Music Department in 2004 and has been a dedicated teacher and gifted organist in assemblies and end-of-term services ever since. Mrs Paloma Hall joined in 1998 as a Teacher of Modern Foreign Languages, specifically Spanish, and I know both colleagues and students will miss her energy, warmth and ferocious appetite for sharing enthusiasms. While we cannot present David and Paloma with departing gifts, we shall assuredly do so in due course, and in the meantime offer our sincere thanks and best wishes.

I should also like to thank to a number of people for their sterling support of the School this year. First the Chairman, Mr Iain Barbour, and to the Governing Board for all their encouragement and guidance, not least across the past three months of high-speed innovation and significant personal and professional challenge, as well as the trifling matter of selecting my successor! In particular, I should like to thank Ms Tania Tribius, Alleyn's first-ever Music Scholar, who stepped down as a Governor in December; and Mr Kevin Douglas, who leaves in August after five years of outstanding service. Kevin's replacement as Junior School link Governor is

Mrs Dianne Barratt, former Head of Prospect House School in Putney, an ISI inspector and the mother of two Alleyn Old Girls.

My thanks to the Dulwich Estate, its outgoing Chair Nicola Meredith, incoming Chair Andreas Köttering and Chief Executive Simone Crofton. We remain indebted to the Wardens and Court of the Worshipful Company of Saddlers, particularly the Prime Warden, Mr Nicholas Mason, and the Clerk, Brigadier Philip Napier. My grateful thanks, too, to the Alleyn's Parents Association, its Committee and Co-Chairs, Shannon Fairchild and Sarah McCourt, with whom I've been Zooming regularly since March, as well as Treasurer Mark Bennett and Secretary Alex Brooke; and to all our alumni in the Edward Alleyn Club, led by Chairman Paul Barber and current President, Lizzy Frost. I have enjoyed working with different constellations of governors, Estate, Saddlers, parents and alumni over the years, and it has always been a pleasure and a privilege to do so.

By the same token, I am personally grateful not only to the brilliant staff who have worked so hard to move from Actually Alleyn's to Virtually Alleyn's (and increasingly back again) this year, but to all those staff with whom I've worked since 2010. By the same token, I pay tribute to all those students whose company I have enjoyed in those ten years, represented today by all those tuning into this broadcast. For a school is nothing without its pupils, and Alleyn's pupils are a mighty fine bunch. Particular thanks to the House Captains, Senior Prefects and LS Prefects, to Vice-Captains Elena Ahjem and Romy Kemp, and to School Captain Ore Bakre. They have been an exceptional and lovely cohort, and I am truly sorry that they are missing

out on all those rites of passage that School Leavers rightly look forward to at this time of year. I hope we can make amends in the autumn.

These are undoubtedly strange circumstances to be a Leaver, whether a student, member of staff or a Headmaster! I was appointed at a relatively callow thirty-eight and leave as an increasingly wizened near fifty-something. That sounds like a long time, and indeed it has been: and I have enjoyed it all enormously. Oddly, on my very first day at Alleyn's I had to order the evacuation of the entire School and send everyone home early because of a suspected electrical fault; and now, at the end of my tenure, we are trying to find ways not to get the children safely out of the building, but to get them back again after three months' enforced absence. In the intervening years, we have been able to build on the excellent work of all our predecessors to enhance teaching and learning at the School; markedly improve means-tested access; expand our local and international partnerships; strengthen the School's finances, systems and procedures; develop trips and the co-curriculum; improve the site, its buildings and infrastructure (both analogue and digital); welcome some wonderful pupils, parents and staff to our community, and say goodbye to them in turn. It has been virtuous cycle of reform and renewal, while remaining true to the fundamental values of co-educational excellence in a caring, welcoming community that I think makes Alleyn's what it is: a simply fantastic place to work and to study. I hope that you all, like me, will cherish the experience and the memories. Not that anyone ever really leaves a place like Alleyn's, it's neither possible nor necessary: the School remains

a place of fond memory and future welcome for all who spend time here, and I hope all those leaving this term will take that to heart and come back to visit before too long. I shall certainly hope to do so, while cheering you on from across the river. Good luck to you all, to Mr Skinnard for his glorious autumnal interregnum, and thence to Mrs Lunnon whom I know will guide the School to ever greater achievements in the decade ahead.

Thank you and farewell!