

Founders' Day, November 2019

Welcome and Introduction

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and a very warm welcome to our 25th anniversary Founders' Day celebrations. We meet also on the eve of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Velvet Revolution. These events are not unconnected, as we shall see.

First may I say how delighted we are to welcome as guest of honour our Patron Karel Schwarzenberg. Mr Schwarzenberg was a close associate of our Founder-Patron Vaclav Havel, and kindly agreed to take over as Patron following the death of President Havel. Mr S has sent us a message to mark the anniversary, which I will read out. "..."

We did try to get our other Founder-Patron, the Prince of Wales, to visit us again in this anniversary year, but it seems it could not be fitted into his schedule. We do however have a message from him too, as follows: "..."

The Prince of Wales has also this year agreed to the creation of a Prince of Wales Scholarship, a highly prestigious scholarship to set alongside the Vaclav Havel scholarship, and to be awarded to an exceptionally gifted and promising student who could not otherwise attend the school. The first Prince of Wales Scholar, Kryštof Folbrecht, should have been here this evening, but he has unfortunately fallen ill. But congratulations, Kryštof, wherever you may be.

We have with us this evening many people who have played a major part in the creation and development of the English College. I should like to point out some of them.

First there is Martyn Bond, one of the prime mover of the whole endeavour. He and I have been working on this project for nearly 30 years, and I think I can say we are more than happy with what has been achieved. Martyn will speak more about this shortly as our Guest Speaker. He is accompanied by his wife Dinah, who has also played an active role as coordinator of the activities of the London-based English College Foundation.

But a school is nothing of course without its staff. We are delighted to have here the first Headmaster, Hubert Ward, whose job it was to get and keep the school afloat in its earliest years. It was useful that Hubert was a mathematician, and able to get and keep a tight grip on the school's somewhat uncertain finances. Hubert was accompanied by his wife Elizabeth, who worked as a volunteer teacher throughout their years in Prague. With the Wards we really did get two for the price of one! Elizabeth sadly died some years ago but we are glad to welcome her close friend and Hubert's now wife, Judy.

Hubert was not of course acting alone, but for a considerable time he had only one other member of staff. Jana Kloudová did everything else: PA, assistant, administrator, Czech translator and interpreter, and later a shoulder to cry on for any nervous new students. Jana's husband Vladimír subsequently joined us as the first Bursar, and the couple formed the bedrock of the early school

But there is no school without teachers, of course. Hubert's first recruits were Nigel and Jane Hayward, Nigel as Deputy Head and Jane as librarian. It is good to see them here tonight.

Also present we have Ladislav Venyš, whom we have to thank for finding this historic building in which we still find ourselves today – though much improved on its then dilapidated state.

Hubert's successor was a very different personality – Albert Hudspeth, relaxed, laid-back, he came from an international school in Cyprus and introduced some international elements to the school

such as international debating. He and Val chose to live in a village outside Prague. A few other staff also settled there, and for a while there was a little ECP colony in the countryside.

Next came Peter de Voil, the educator's educator, for whom teaching always came first. He and Anne are remembered also for their generous hospitality - Peter a great wine-buff and Anne a brilliant cook.

The next two Headmasters are not here tonight, for the very good reason that they are busy with events at the schools they are running in the UK. Mark Waldron brought in some of the more traditional features of British independent schools, and Simon Marshall applied his considerable intellect to long-standing complications in our relations with Czech bureaucracy and legal requirements, solving issues previously declared insoluble.

This paved the way for our current Headmaster, Nigel Brown, who has been able to focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning, so central to the school's mission.

For the parents and student here tonight, the history is of course less important than the future. If I may speak to the new parents for a moment, we are very conscious that you have chosen to entrust us with the education of your children. Thank you for your trust, and in return I promise that we will do our very best to ensure that your sons and daughters leave this school not only academically equipped to do whatever they wish to do in the future, but also thoughtful, creative and public-spirited young people who can make a positive contribution to the society around them.