

## Headmaster's Founder's Day Speech 2019

25 years. We love to mark out time, we love to measure it out, birthdays, anniversaries, counting out the individual numbers, celebrating the round numbers and in our case today a nice neat fraction of 100.

And we live in this time machine that takes us forward one day every day. A time machine we can't turn off. Time, and the march of time, both fascinates and scares us. Our theme for this year is technology, which we often see through the lens of time. We hope it will deliver us safely to tomorrow but often fear what it might bring upon us as well.

Thank you Anežka and Tereza for sharing part of Karel Capek's play Rossum's Universal Robots. You did it very well. It is a story rooted in fear of our destruction through technology. For those of you who don't know the story, Domin is the General Manager of R.U.R and Helena is from the League of Humanity who wants to save, or free, or at least pay the robots. She is largely thwarted and also ridiculed for her belief that robots have a soul. As the robots become more and more human-like Helena destroys the blueprint for their future manufacture, but events soon sweep all but one of the humans to their destruction in an orgy of violence. The formula for their manufacture is forever lost, although two of the conquering robots fall in love and we are left to speculate on the future of robotkind without humans.

Later on we will hear from Angelina reading from Vaclav Havel's play Memorandum in which her character talks about the inexorable progress of technology somehow leaving behind our human side. Her character quotes Hamlet in saying that "time is out of joint" and quite poignantly that just "as we are reaching for the moon, it is increasingly hard to reach ourselves."

I personally don't share this pessimism. I was born in late September, I am Libran, I see balance. For every new weapon that technology delivers us, it also delivers a machine that spots and halts the spread of cancer. For every hour Fortnite or Instagram steals away our children it gives us back an hour of high quality news, documentaries, sport and funny cat videos. For every carbon heavy journey we make, we can see and touch and be with our loved ones in a way that was never possible before. For every teacher's worry about kids being forced by technology into growing up too quickly, we see the same innocent, joyous family celebrations at our graduation ball.

Now, I spoke earlier of a time machine we can't turn off, although I think there might be a small malfunction here in Prague 9 ... Our building in Vysocany has been surprisingly resistant to the passage of time, or in fact modernisation of any kind! Well that's not quite fair on our IT guys, 300 students can now simultaneously message each other on their phones at break while sitting side-by-side. But because our building does seem to be defying the march of time, it should not be too difficult to sit and listen, to imagine you were here 25 years ago as a young student barely out of the shadow of communism . You haven't got a food court in Fenix, you haven't got an iphone, and wi-fi is just a spelling mistake. But you do have your life ahead of you. And you have pioneering parents supporting you as you enter

through the (freshly painted) blue door into this untried, untested English education in this slightly run-down industrial suburb of Prague. As you sit and listen now, the voice and words you are going to hear are exactly those that were spoken 25 years ago to our very first cohort of students starting their journey here at ECP. You are, of course, going to hear from Hubert Ward OBE, our very first Headmaster - a voice more important and distinguished than mine will ever be.