



MILL HILL SCHOOL

Headmaster's Foundation Day Report September 2009

Sir Tony and Lady Brenton, Professor and Dr Proctor, Governors and Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, members of the School: good morning, and a very warm welcome to this year's Foundation Day.

I would like to begin by extending a particularly warm welcome to our Guest of Honour, Sir Tony Brenton and his wife, Lady Brenton. Sir Tony is a former diplomat who was, between 2004 and 2008, British Ambassador to Moscow. He thus represented Britain at a time when Anglo-Russian relations were often difficult. It has been said that 'to say nothing, especially when speaking, is half the art of diplomacy'. Sir Tony was clearly not that sort of diplomat and he became known as someone prepared to speak his mind and to stand up, when necessary, to Vladimir Putin. Clearly, he quite a brave man. Sir Tony, thank you so much for giving up the time to be with us today. We are all very much looking forward to hearing what you have to say later on.

The Estate

During the course of today, I hope that you will all be able to spend some time walking around the estate and enjoying the various matches, displays and exhibitions that are on view. Should you do so, I am sure you will agree with me that our grounds and facilities continue to impress, thanks, in no small measure, to the very substantial investment of time and money that has gone into them over recent years. This investment has continued over the past twelve months, with work having been undertaken to relocate the Physical Education department from School House to the Sports Hall complex; the creation of an Upper Sixth Form common room area; and further improvement of our day and boarding house accommodation, including the refurbishment of Murray and School houses, works which were only made possible through very substantial and generous donations to the Foundation Appeal.

Of course, one consequence of the economic downturn has been to make us more cautious about committing to any further major capital expenditure. Indeed, I firmly believe that prudence and circumspection should be our watchwords until we have clear evidence that the recession is lifting. That does not mean that we will not continue to invest in our facilities, and we are currently drawing up plans for a phased refurbishment of the science department and further development of our sports facilities. However, we will be taking care to ensure that we do not overstretch ourselves, intensely mindful as we are of the need to ensure that we maintain the

Foundation's financial health whilst also doing all we can to keep future fee increases to a minimum.

Achievements of the Year

And so on to the achievements of the past year. I shall try to be brief although, inevitably, that means that I shall not be able to mention all those who have chalked up particular achievements. However, I would like all of our pupils to know how proud I am of the enormous range of their successes which are recorded in detail in the new edition of the *Mill Hill Magazine*, which was published this week.

Academic Success

I shall start with our academic successes and make no apology for so doing. For every pupil in the School, academic endeavour rightly occupies more time than any other pursuit. Indeed, schools are, above all, places of learning. That does not mean that they are simply places where knowledge is imparted from teachers to pupils. Rather, they should be institutions within which young people are guided towards the joy and the excitement of learning for themselves. They should also be places where the process of learning, far from being a chore, has all the characteristics of an exciting journey of discovery. Like any voyage into unknown territory, there are likely to be times when the going is tough and when the route ahead is strewn with obstacles. But it is precisely by overcoming the hurdles and setbacks that the journey is made worthwhile and the skills and the appetite for future successes are acquired.

The absolute measurement of academic success is, of course, a difficult business (despite the government's curiously persistent and simplistic view that it can be done through the deeply flawed mechanism of league tables). However, there can be no doubt that the past year has seen many highly significant academic achievements. Among these was the award to Jonathan Bertulis-Fernandes of an extremely prestigious Comenius Scholarship, funded by the European Union, which allowed him to undertake a study trip to Germany over the summer. Meanwhile, Al Stubbs was named as one of the joint winners of the National Institute of Medical Research's 2009 Human Biology Essay Competition; Hugh Longley came second in the international Cicero classics competition; and Max Chamberlin's essay in the Young Economist of the Year Essay Competition was highly commended.

And then there were the summer's examination results. In 2008, our pupils obtained, by a very significant margin, the best public examination results in the School's history. I am pleased to say that this year's candidates showed similarly good form. At A level, over 70% of papers were graded A or B, slightly improving on the figure for last year and once more giving us the best results that the School has ever achieved. What I found particularly impressive was the fact that no fewer than twenty four candidates, or twenty percent of the year group, obtained three or more A grades, including Samantha Davis and Sayyid Said, both of whom secured their places at Cambridge University to read Veterinary Science and Economics respectively. At AS level, the results maintained the significant improvement in A and B grades recorded in 2008, whilst at GCSE, 54% of papers were awarded grades A* and A, compared to 51% last year and 45% in 2007. Among the top performers, Kunal Walia gained 10 A* grades and a further 25 pupils achieved nine A* and A grades. I was, naturally, delighted for all those who did well, including not only those who gained strings of top grades but all of those who, through hard work and

determination, secured results that did full justice to their potential and reflected the enormous amount of effort and dedication that they and their teachers showed throughout the year.

Of course, there are those who claim that A levels and GCSEs are no longer the gold standard qualification that they once were. And it is certainly the case that alternatives such as the International Baccalaureate and Pre-U qualification do have a certain amount to recommend them. However, I am firmly of the belief that A levels and GCSEs, if done well, remain of an extremely good standard. And let us not forget that the vast majority of those who secure places at Oxbridge and the country's other elite universities do so through good GCSE and A level results. Thus, it is my belief that, whilst not closing our minds to the possibility of change in the future, we must resist the temptation of unnecessary novelty and rather concentrate our energies upon continuing to improve the standards of our teaching and learning. For what matters most is the way in which teachers approach their lessons to stimulate and enthuse their classes, rather than the particular curriculum followed. That is why we remain committed to A levels and GCSEs and I hope that our results over the coming years will continue to improve, thereby equipping all our pupils with qualifications that will open the doors to their chosen vocations and careers.

Extra curricular

Alongside academic achievement, the School has also witnessed success in many other areas. When last I reported to you, our rugby 1st XV were just embarking upon what was to be the most successful season in over 50 years. Not only did they retain the county championship but they emerged from the season unbeaten, winning thirteen and drawing one of their fourteen fixtures. Such an outstanding run of results is a very rare occurrence. Highlights included a magnificent 41-6 victory over St Paul's, a 38-12 win against Sevenoaks and a desperately close battle against an unbeaten St Albans side which ended in a 7-6 win for Mill Hill. The final game of the season, against Merchant Taylors' (the only side to beat us in 2007), resulted in a wonderful 11-0 victory for the School.

But it was not just the results that were hugely impressive. So, too, was the way in which the team played, demonstrating great determination, spirit and, above all, pride in themselves and their School. To mark their achievement, I shall shortly be inviting the captain of the current 1st XV, Charlie O'Shea, to come and receive a framed shirt, accompanied by the names of all those who played alongside him in that wonderful and memorable campaign. As for the current season, the boys have got off to a great start, with two wins out of two against QE Boys and Stowe, and I hope that as many of you as possible will be able to join me on Top Field this afternoon to cheer on the XV in their encounter with the Leys.

At the same time as the 1sts were making history, the 2nd and 3rd XV's, the Colts and Junior Colts also enjoyed very good seasons, each securing some excellent results against tough opposition. In addition, there was a highly successful Junior Colts tour to Sicily in October. I am grateful to all those who helped bring about these results, particularly the coaches who have helped ensure that Mill Hill rugby has so emphatically confirmed its position at the centre of the sporting map.

There have also been many other sporting triumphs. Our Hockey teams have done exceptionally well. The girls' 1st XI had another outstanding season, building upon their success at the New Year tournament in Barcelona. They again won the county championship and went on to play superbly well at the South of England finals and at the St George's six-a-side tournament. Among the most significant personal achievements was that of Lucy Thayer who was appointed captain of the Wales under-18 side for the European Junior Championships in Madrid and has recently returned from playing in the UK games in Cardiff. Meanwhile, the under-15 girls defeated all local rivals and the under-14s lost only one game.

The boys' 1st XI hockey team also had an excellent season, the highlights of which were some outstanding performances against very strong opposition, including a 1-0 defeat of Dulwich College and a 5-1 win over Watford Grammar School. The under-15s boys were undefeated until the last week of the season and, although the under-14 boys had a rather tougher time in their first year of hockey, they did produce an excellent team performance to beat RGS High Wycombe 4-1.

In netball, the season saw many excellent performances with both the senior and under-14b teams winning the borough tournaments and qualifying for the league finals. Away from School, Amy Green was one of a large number of Mill Hill pupils to compete in the summer's Maccabiah games, her under-18 GB netball team returning with silver medals.

Our tennis players had a very successful trip to South Africa earlier in the year, competing in the Cape Town International Tennis Competition and the senior boys' team, captained by Charles Salmon, reached the last 16 of the National Senior Students Competition, losing to the eventual runners-up. Both the junior boys and the junior girls enjoyed unbeaten seasons. Meanwhile, Michael Cohen, Charles Salmon, Grant Goulden and Gabriella Kleimberg went on to represent Great Britain in the this year's Maccabiah games.

In golf, James Ellis was selected for the prestigious British Independent Schools Golf Tour to the USA and was also a member of the team, along with Sayyid Said and Chris Alexander, who beat Aldenham 3-0 in the regional final of the ISGA National Schools Tournament and thus qualified for the National Finals at St Andrew's. The team also finished second in the Shire Trophy In Fives, the school had a very successful season winning ten and losing only four of their eighteen matches. The under-16 and under-14 teams were particularly strong and represented the School extremely creditably in the national championships.

Our cricketers had a vintage year. After a successful pre-season tour to La Manga, the 1st XI won nine matches in a row, a truly remarkable achievement. Adam Rossington enjoyed a fabulous season, averaging over 100. In August, he scored 102 not out for the Middlesex under-19s, was selected for the Middlesex 2nd XI and has recently returned from a three day ECB training camp for future England prospects. Further afield, Miftah Ibrahim has been appointed captain of the Maldives under-19 team for the ACC challenge cup in Thailand in December. Among our junior cricketers, there was also much to celebrate, both in terms of some excellent results and some fine individual performances. These included, for the under-15s, George Selley's 84 not out against Latymer Upper, Alex Davies 76 against UCS and Joe

Wray's spectacular 5 for 2 against Highgate. Notable performances for the under-14s included Benedict Relf's 72 against UCS and James Kilbourn's three wickets in four balls against Merchant Taylors'.

In the pool, our swimming teams also had very good seasons and Emily Dean qualified for the Eastern Region National Swimming Championships. In Rounders, the girls excelled at all levels: the Fourth Formers barely lost a game, the Removes were victorious in all but one match and the senior squad won all their games.

The summer was also an exciting time for our athletes with teams being entered for the first time in the Barnet and Middlesex Championships. The Remove boys came third in the borough competition with some fine medal-winning performances from Andre Cotter, Charles Auterac, Woody Holding, David Penn and Oliver Simmons. For the girls, Priya Visavadia and Natalia Webster won silver medals in the hurdles and Naomi Kendall and Olivia Fisher were medallists in the javelin and 800 meters respectively. In the Middlesex Championships, Jack Perry-Williams took silver in the Steeplechase and Priya Visavadia bronze in the hurdles. Jack went on to take first place in the National Junior 2000 meter steeplechase final. He is now ranked second among the UK under 17s and will be representing England in the European Juniors in Russia later this year.

So, our sporting stars continue to shine. But I would like to make a mention of all those other boys and girls who play and compete. For Mill Hill sport is as much about the pleasure of participation as the glory of winning, and I would like to acknowledge all those who have represented the School, at whatever level. Their contribution to our sporting life is just as valuable as that of anyone else. I would also like to thank the coaching staff, led by Mr David Woodrow, who put in so many hours of hard work so that our pupils can enjoy sport and the very many benefits that it brings.

Music, Art and Drama

Alongside our athletic successes, the year has also been one of great cultural achievement. The choir have been extraordinarily busy and have again shown their quality at a large number of School events. In November, they also sang at St Paul's Cathedral, in the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the premiere of *The Cry*, a work commemorating children who have died as a result of war and conflict. There have also been some superb School concerts and we have, throughout the year, hosted an outstanding series of Friday lunchtime recitals. In addition, the exceptional standard of this year's entrants for the Farrow Singing Competition provided yet another example of the range of talent within the School and our guest adjudicator, Lady Digby, was fulsome in her praise for the pupils and their musical achievements. Among our elite musicians, Ralph Warman and Benedict Kearns have both joined the National Youth Choir; Abraham Wallfisch-Jacobs joined the National Youth String Academy; and Ben Glassberg has been appointed percussionist of the Barbican Youth Orchestra.

In Drama, following on from *Aladdin*, the highly successful staff pantomime, February saw some exceptional performances in the year's major musical, *The Boyfriend*, which provided a wonderful showcase for the tremendous range of musical and dramatic ability within the School. The drama department also

demonstrated its strength and range through another marvellous collection of GCSE, AS and A level performances. Among those carving out their careers on stage and screen, Gilles Geary of the Remove has been filming for a major BBC series, various Old Millhillians have appeared in *Eastenders*, *Holby City*, *The Bill* and *Doctors*, whilst Harry Melling is starring in the new production of *Mother Courage* at the National Theatre. The summer term also saw magnificent Art and Design Technology exhibitions, the very high standards of previous years being maintained if not surpassed.

Elsewhere, the CCF, ably commanded by Major Jamie Monaghan, continued to impress, engaging in a wide range of military and adventurous pursuits, including three highly successful camps at Bisley, Wathgill and Portsmouth. A number of cadets achieved places on gliding courses with the RAF and some of our Navy cadets achieved qualifications in power boating and sailing. The Corps of Drums has again been busy, being once more invited to perform at a wide range of events outside the School, including the Barnet remembrance parade, displays at local schools, Annual General Inspections and the St. George's Parade at the Cenotaph. This year also saw the formation of a CCF partnership with Mill Hill County High School and we have welcomed 25 of their pupils and three staff into our Army section this term. The Remove Sports leaders, meanwhile, had an outstanding year, including running sporting events for the children from Grimsdell and other local schools.

Away from School, there have been some highly successful trips and tours, including a Sixth Form Art trip to New York at Easter; a highly successful February half-term ski trip to Serre Chevalier; and sports tours to Spain and Sicily. The annual Sixth Form expeditions to our partners in Nicaragua and Tamil Nadu were as successful as ever and once more served to highlight the extent to which Millhillians remain committed to helping others. The altruistic side of our pupils was also seen in a wide variety of charitable fund-raising activity, with our overseas partnership schools and a large number of local and national charities benefitting from their selflessness and generosity. In addition, a programme of events to mark environmental awareness month culminated in a highly successful cross-Foundation Recycled Fashion Show.

The Future

Even from this necessarily incomplete summary it should be clear that the past year has been yet another impressively successful one for the School. But what of the future? The coming years will not, I am sure, be easy ones for independent schools, just as they will doubtless be testing times for many parents. The economic woes of the past year have taken, and will continue to take, their toll and we clearly need to exercise great care in the management of our finances. At the same time, whilst we hope that the potential dangers posed by pandemic swine 'flu will soon subside, we need to be prepared for the disruption and dangers that the disease could visit upon us as the winter sets in.

A further challenge to schools such as Mill Hill comes from the fact that we are currently being subject to an unprecedented barrage of additional regulation and bureaucracy emanating from a government never known for its fondness for independent education. In addition, you will, I am sure, all have read in the press about the activities of the Charity Commissioners who have been charged with determining whether independent schools warrant the charitable status that the

majority, including Mill Hill, enjoy. In fact, the financial benefits that we derive from being a charity are rather modest. However, we are now being told that we must do more to justify that status (which we cannot relinquish), particularly with regard to raising our level of funding for bursaries.

Speaking personally, it is not with the greater provision of bursary assistance that I take issue. Mill Hill has a long tradition of providing fee support to those who would not otherwise be able to afford to come here. This is something that we passionately believe in and have significantly extended in recent years, using both a significant proportion of our fee income and many of the proceeds of the Foundation Appeal.

What I object to is the creeping government interference in the management of schools that are supposed to be independent. It is through running their own affairs in the interests of their pupils, relatively unhampered by government meddling, that schools such as Mill Hill have long set and maintained the educational standards of this country. To undermine that independence could have very grave consequences for us all. And let us not forget that, far from being a drain on the public purse, independent schools save the government many hundreds of millions of pounds each year by educating children who would otherwise have to take up places in the state sector. With an election on the horizon, I would urge you all to question candidates of every political hue about their attitude to independent schools. We owe it to our children to do all that we can to ensure that the next government adopts a supportive and non-interventionist attitude towards schools such as Mill Hill.

Despite these challenges, I remain extremely confident, such is the quality of the education that we offer, that Mill Hill will continue to thrive and prosper. Our focus must, of course, be to maintain that quality and to continue exploring ways of giving our young people the best possible educational opportunities. Central to that mission is the fostering of high expectations among all of our pupils, expectations supported by teaching of the very highest quality. At the same time, we remain committed to providing the widest range of quality extra-curricular opportunities and to making the School a place where every child can explore and develop the full range of their abilities and interests.

But, as much as anything, I want to make sure that we do not overlook the importance of helping our children develop a sense of morality and of decency. The world is a wonderful place and our children can look forward to much that is exciting and inspiring. But there are also many dangers out there. The risks to our young people of drink, drugs, knives, guns, and the excesses of celebrity culture that we read about in the media are all too real and show no signs of abating. That does not mean that we should despair at the prospects for our children. But it does make it all the more important that we encourage in them a sense of right and wrong, a respect for decency, the strength to resist temptation and to stand up against the things that they know to be harmful, dangerous, immoral or unjust.

And, of course, it is up to us as parents and as teachers to do everything we can to encourage our children to make correct choices and to do the things that they know to be right rather than those which are simply expedient or easy. For success, happiness and contentment are not merely products of what we achieve or what we earn. They are also fundamentally linked to the sort of people we are, the values that

we uphold and our own inner conviction that we have done the right thing and lived lives that do us credit. As much as anything, therefore, I am committed to making sure that all our children become the sort of people who do live by a moral code and who help to make the world a better place. I shall look forward to working with you all over the coming years in pursuit of this and the other goals which I know, for the sake of our children, we share.

Dr Dominic Lockett,
September 2009