

## PRIZEGIVING SPEECH 2015

Governors, staff, ladies and gentlemen, students past and present, parents, guests, his worshipful the mayor of Harrogate Cllr and Mrs Simms, Deputy Mayor of Ripon, Cllr Morgan and Councillor Arthur Barker, Executive Member for Schools for NYCC, welcome to Ripon Grammar School's Speech Day 2015.

A particularly warm welcome to our special guest today, Dr Mark Hills, Old Riponian and son of a former member of staff, Mrs Hills. Mark left RGS around the turn of the millennium before getting a first in computer science and a PhD also in computer science. Having spoken to Mark on the 'phone he enjoyed his time at RGS and appreciated what the school had done for him. He works for Framestore, a visual effects and computer graphics company based in London, New York, Los Angeles and Montreal which has won an Oscar for their work in films.

If I am honest I did not understand much of Mark's CV since he is in clearly incredibly knowledgeable about computer science and I am not. He was gracious enough to say don't worry; the audience for the CV is very ICT orientated. But Mark's company have worked on the special effects in films such as the Harry Potter films, Paddington, the Avengers and Guardians of the Galaxy as well as the fully computer generated film Gravity with Sandra Bullock and George Clooney, for which Mark's team won an Oscar, so I do now understand what Mark does and how incredibly skilled he must be at his job. He also enjoyed doing university radio, is a club DJ as well as being credited by Adobe for the discovery of a critical security vulnerability in Flash Player. And I struggle to install an upgrade! I wonder what Mark did at school to set himself off in this direction for a career path. He is also keen on close-up magic, particularly sleight of hand card tricks. So of he asks you to play a game of poker, beware! Mark, I am very much looking forward to what you have to say to us today.

It is great to see so many students back from university or taking some time off work and I am very grateful to them all for taking time to come back and celebrate another excellent year, not only in academic terms, but in **every** respect. I know they are immersed in the next phase of their lives and I hope it is going well for them. It is, as ever, a privilege to see students develop so much from the age of 11 through to 18 into people who have such a well-balanced view of life and a determination to make the world a better place. The contribution they have made to the RGS community in their time has been immense and the fondness for the school that is manifest in their actions is very touching. I am sure that they will be very successful in their chosen fields given their excellent interpersonal skills. Not all students get everything right all the time but it is how they learn from their mistakes that matters. As head, I am always at pains to point out that it is a student's behaviour that I don't like rather than disliking the student. I believe the students here know that. I was very touched to receive a thank you card from one of the departing upper sixth who is in this hall today: 'thank you for everything you have done for me, sir. I could not have wished for a better 7 years of secondary education. The environment you have created is truly special and I will miss it dearly (I am almost jealous of Tom Stringer!). I would love to give back to a place that has given me so much and made me the person I am today'.

We shared in a wonderful results day in August where there were many joyous students who had realised their ambition. But as a year group, the North is proving enduringly popular for university destinations and I am sure it will last. Of course it may be their Yorkshire roots; it is a difficult county to move too far away from. As the Yorkshireman's motto goes; 'Ear all, see all, say nowt. Eat all, sup all, pay nowt. And if ever thou does owt fer nowt – allus do it fer thissen.

A rough translation:

"Hear all, see all, say nothing. Eat all, drink all, pay nothing. And if you ever do anything for nothing—always do it for yourself."

I don't think our students subscribe to the Yorkshire philosophy thankfully judging by the tremendous contribution they have made through their charity fundraising for the Batonga Foundation which helps African women to receive an education. Silifa, a Batonga Scholar, is 15 years old, in her third year of secondary school in Nikki, Benin. In her class of 42 students, only 13 are girls. Silifa is able to attend secondary school through Batonga's support. Silifa comes from a polygamous family, where her mother was one of three wives. When she was 5 years old, Silifa's father died. Her mother remarried, and now Silifa is one of six children. While her brothers attend school, Silifa's sisters have never had the chance to attend school. Silifa's best subjects are Biology and Mathematics. She wants to become a member of the Benin Police Force. She says "I am very interested in tutoring activities and sessions on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health organized by Batonga. With Batonga's guidance, I became determined to not marry at the first opportunity and drop out of school. In my village there are many girls who have dropped out because they became pregnant...if I am able to stay in school, it is thanks to the Batonga program, and I am grateful."

In fact I would like to remind you of the words uttered by Barack Obama on his election of the presidency of the United States in 2008, the year he was elected and the same year that our leavers today joined RGS:

"If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer."

Perhaps the RGS version should be along these lines:

"If there is anyone out there who still doubts that Ripon Grammar School is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the strength of our school community, today is your answer."

The Upper Sixth started as bright eyed and bushy tailed first formers in 2008; the year group ran from India Abbott to Harry Yates. In 2008, Barack Obama **was** elected President of USA, the Beijing Olympics were held, the recession started, Boris Johnson became Mayor of London and John Serjeant proved that only being able to dance like your dad doesn't preclude you from staying on Strictly Come Dancing.

But I want to reflect on the 2015 leavers and what memories they have left behind and how they have made Ripon Grammar School a better place. And particular congratulations to James Riley; I don't believe the rumour that James started at RGS in 1555 but I am delighted that you are now where you want to be. The School Officers excelled as ever exemplified by Nick's determination to drag himself into school and carry out his Head Boy function even when he was recovering from an operation on his leg. I am glad he has made it back today. I am also glad he has chosen not to wear his toga today! Lauren's calm and unflappable demeanour will ensure that she is a tremendous doctor as well as Head Girl I have no doubt. The team was always upbeat and Sophie was always positive, Hannah thinking ahead, Joe and Melody's calm and measured approach (another excellent doctor and vet in the making for sure) and Tom wondering if the meeting was on Wednesday or Tuesday this week. They have learnt much about leadership especially through the organisation of Charity Week. Organising Charity Week is no laughing matter especially if your name is Michael-shame we couldn't get Michael McIntyre. And a particular well done to Mary who, when I looked at her UMS totals for her A2

exams in the summer, finally made me understand why she went by the name of full marks Mary but I am pleased to say that there was plenty of competition with some tremendous exam performances from many students. Bently played a pretty mean conch which is not a comment on his role in House Drama but his musical contribution to Charity Week. Don't give up the day job just yet, Bently, as I have never heard of a professional conch player.

So what mysteries does this year group hold? It's Friday but where is Daniel? Does Emma Lee have a surname? Can **you** tell the difference between Charlie and Harry? Who is the tallest out of Andrew, Ed, Alex or Aidan? Did Aaron Fincham leave at the end of the fifth form to play cricket for Australia? Did Jamie Bowker leave at the end of the fifth form to play Bowser, the greedy nemesis of Mario in the video game? Is it dangerous to take George Foster on holiday in case he loses his passport? Is it just dangerous to take George Foster on holiday full stop? Why could nobody beat Tong Yi at table tennis? How can Jess make a cello sound that good? Who won the Churchillian Speech of the Year Award-Rebecca Baldwin on women's' rights or Aiden Johnstone on the attributes of Mr Fell?

I would like to pay tribute to the students who joined us in the Sixth Form; almost 40 of you. You have made a superb contribution to RGS in such a short time in so many ways. As role models, contributions to the boarding community, to sport, music, drama, to the academic life of the school through your involvement in lessons, as prefects, school officers sixth form council, charity week. I hope you have enjoyed being part of the school as much as we have enjoyed having you here. Thank you for the richness and energy you have brought to the sixth form. It certainly did Fossie a world of good.

The Old Rips Day on Saturday, December 19th will feature sports fixtures in hockey, netball and soccer with indoor competition in the sports hall and outdoor competition on the Astroturf. I hope many of you will be able to attend and join in with the fixtures or simply meet up for a chat before Christmas. The event is proving to be incredibly popular and I hope that many of you will be able to return and enjoy the occasion. It will be recorded in the Clocktower for posterity.

The **Johnson House extension** is now completed, occupied and looks fabulous and we enjoyed the opening ceremony in October. There has been very good demand for boarding places particularly in the sixth form and the numbers for boarding have never been higher. We have 80 boarders currently but want to be around 100. The new hall curtains, funded by the **PA**, have lifted the environment of the hall significantly and I am grateful to them for all their excellent work not only in fundraising but also in the social occasions organised over the year such as Burns' Night, Christmas Fair (November 14 between 4-7 pm) and the Cookery Demonstration. Thank you to Alison and her team. The boys' washroom in School House has been completed to a very high standard and will improve the facilities for boy boarders significantly.

The disabled access in the admin corridor was completed in the summer holiday. This will improve accessibility significantly in this part of the school. The next phase is to improve access at the clock tower entrance as well as the end of North Corridor; planning permission has been secured with work to commence as soon as possible.

At **A level**, there was almost 100% pass rate with almost 72% A\*/B grades (exc. General Studies). Compared to local schools, the students of RGS have performed very well when compared to other grammar schools in Yorkshire. RGS was 99<sup>th</sup> in the Telegraph league tables

of all state schools and is one of the highest performing schools in North Yorkshire, which is a tremendous achievement.

All the students who applied for medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine were successful in gaining places at university. Overall, a very high proportion got their first choice even when missing the odd grade. There were many very happy students who gained places at their first choice university, and it was wonderful to share in their success following all their hard work.

Rebecca Baldwin, Max Crompton, Ellie Fielding, Mary Kumarendran, Melody Swiers secured at least 3 A\* grades including EPQs and there were many more with 2 or more A\* grades and there were 37 students with 3 grade A's or better. With regard to the **EPQ**, 17 students out of 21 got A\*/A.

In this year's 132 **UCAS** application cohort as a whole, 114 students will go to university this year or next year with a deferral, of which 66 are attending Russell Group universities; additionally, 1 student will attend university in America and 1 student will begin a college course.

We even had a student being successful on gaining a place in a Bulgarian University to study medicine. I hope Amith enjoys his time at Sunny Beach Hospital Casualty Department on the Black Sea.

In terms of university choices, the majority of our students once again selected northern universities with Newcastle, Northumbria, Sheffield and Durham as the favourites. 8 students have opted for London Universities, and 12 for Scottish universities, with Edinburgh the overwhelming favourite this year. RGS students clearly enjoy the North.

At **AS level**, 61% of the grades were A/B which higher than last year. This year group have great potential and I am sure they will work hard to fulfil their undoubted potential at A2. There were straight A grades in 4(or more) subjects for 23 (20 last year) students plus many with 3 A grades: Leanne Anderson, Julia Atherley, Jack Baker, David Bates, Emma Beaumont, Tom Beaumont, Annabelle Blyton, Donna Castle Ward, James Donaldson, Vicky Frost, Matt Griffiths, Flo Hall, Elle Lamb, Alannah Mansfield, David Owens, Ben Pease, Emily Peirson, Ben Pilling, Matt Pimley, Hannah Scholes, Max Vesty, Tom Willis, Ryan Wood.

At **GCSE**, there were some very pleasing results, with almost 63% of the grades being at A\*/A. This is a tremendous outcome for this year group and reflects the hard work of both students and staff. There were 9 students with 10 A\* or better; Lorna Aspinall, Mary Cox, Emily Evans, Gemma Felton, Lydia Poole, Will Stobbs, Georgia Stuart-Mills, Katie Veitch, Emma Wilkinson following full centre remarks in English Literature and remarks in many other subjects.

There were 42 students with 10 A\*/A or better: Lorna Aspinall, John Ashton, Grace Branch, Olivia Brooksbank-Laing, Alec Cavell-Taylor, Mary Cox, Katherine Cussons, Tamsin Cutmore, Saffy Dean-Stone, Susie Dinning, Emily Evans, Gabriella Feingold, Gemma Felton, Katie Fraser, Andrew Garner, Francesca Haldane, Alex Halshaw, Tom Hooper, Molly Ireland, Zoe Langham, Alicia Micklefield, Patrick Moon, Jack Newby, Lydia Poole, Sophie Ryan, Roscoe Savage, Christina Scullion, Alice Shanahan, Oliver Simenacsz, Sophie Spick, Poppy Stanton, Will Stobbs, Georgia Stuart-Mills, Joy Sutcliffe, Jonathan Tanner, Dana Turner, Katie Veitch, Emily Watson, Ben Wayne, Lucy Wicks, Emma Wilkinson, Meghan Williamson. Particular

congratulations to Georgia Stuart-Mills who secured the highest mark in the country at GCSE astronomy. John Ashton and Patrick Moon were both awarded prestigious Arkwright Scholarships.

When RGS is ranked on A/A\* percentage, we are ahead of our local competitors and other grammar schools in the county except Ermysted's where our results for A\*/A are virtually identical. Academic standards are incredibly high and the results achieved at RGS were recognised by the Sunday Times Parent Power where RGS was the highest ranked state school in the North following on from the highest value added measure at A level in 2013 by any school in the whole country.

I received a very nice e mail from a parent of a student in the fifth form:

"Well done to you and all your staff on another set of impressive results, both at A and GCSE levels. Obviously having a child involved this year gives me a particular insight to all the hard work that goes on behind the scenes, along with the joy and happiness so many of the students experience when all that effort - both from students and staff - pays off.

I was particularly moved by the story about Monty Merchie (which I see has appeared in the Daily Mirror and ITV news online, as well as in the Yorkshire Post, Northern Echo, Evening Post etc). He displays great strength of character and determination - quite an inspiration.

The story also reveals, of course, just how supportive RGS staff have been in enabling this student to achieve such commendable results in difficult circumstances, illustrating, yet again, that RGS is about so much more than simply churning out A\*s and As!

I know this has been a particularly challenging year and that staff have worked extremely hard to provide all the additional support and encouragement necessary to enable all students at RGS to achieve the very best they can.

Again, well done to all involved."

I am very concerned about the on-going issues of marking quality. As a school, we must remain vigilant hence we pursued a number of remarks in GCSE English Literature resulting in a full centre remark for the second successive year. There have been 13 grade changes at GCSE in English Language. There have been over 100 grade changes following remarks this year alone and this situation cannot be allowed to go on.

I am indebted to so many staff for providing such a wide range of opportunities outside the classroom, whether it be sport, music, drama, field trips, theatre visits or trips abroad. The trips are not only about success but enriching the education of the students to make them rounded people. I know the parents thoroughly appreciate the incredible richness of the education on offer beyond the classroom and I would like you to thank the staff for all that they do to enhance the experience and therefore the education of the students.

My sincere thanks to Mr Walker, who continues to provide a wide variety of business and enterprise opportunities for budding young apprentices which was recognised in his award of the North Yorkshire Enterprise Teacher of the Year ; the Prince's Trust Challenge team from RGS were declared North Yorkshire joint winners this year for the second year in succession and the lower sixth team of Josh Finkill, James Muscroft-Paylor, Ed Lyons, David Bates, Kaitlin

Christensen Joe Brown, Olly Pond, Matt Pimley and Lucy Mumford were the winners of North Yorkshire Enterprise Challenge. A level ICT students, Jacob Turner, Matthew Ford and Patrick Lindley have designed the website for the National Monument to the Women in World War 2 which is the official government website with support from the Minister for Education.

Congratulations go to Ellie Lamb, David Owens, Ben Maddison and Ben Pease who successfully completed the Engineering Development Trust's Engineering Education Scheme gaining a Gold Crest Award in recognition of the quality of project to re-engineer Selby Swing Bridge in preparation for the electrification of this line by Network Rail.

In July, the lower sixth German group spent a week teaching students in a grammar school near Hamburg whilst staying with German families as part of an Exchange programme. The usual French Exchange has just taken place with our sister school in Pont l' Abbe near La Rochelle in Charente Maritime region of France. The Big Band played at the Northern Aldborough Festival and we enjoyed an excellent Autumn Concert in October. The 3 choirs at RGS have continued to go from strength to strength with the newly established Chamber Choir due to make their debut at the Carol Service this year. Full Colours have been awarded to Tilly Fallows, Danielle Sargeant, Tim Pope, Tom Lonsdale and Christie Hall for their significant contribution and dedication to music ensembles over a sustained period of time. And we are already looking forward to this year's musical in March where 'Anything Goes'.

Rugby has enjoyed unprecedented success this year; in the White Rose Rugby Series, the U14 and U15 teams both won with the U18 coming second. The Under 15s lost narrowly in the final of the Yorkshire Cup. In Sevens, the U14 were second in the St Peter's Sevens Tournament losing to RGS Newcastle in the final. The U18s won the Austin Friars Invitational Tournament. Tom Newby played for Yorkshire U17s as did Harry Cleary. Tom Stringer played for Yorkshire Under 18s. Tom Beaumont, Jack Baker and Jack Burton played for North Yorkshire U17s. Ted Wainwright captain of the U14s has played for Yorkshire U16s. James Willis, Ben Borchard, Henry Calvert, Jake Robinson and Rick Castle Ward have all been selected for the Yorkshire Development Squads in their respective year groups.

The U16 hockey team was crowned area champions clearly being a very talented team; they were area champions last year too along with the U18 and U14. Lucy Williams has been selected to represent the U16 North of England team (The Pennine Pumas) at the England Hockey Futures Cup which took place over 3 days at the end of October. The EHFC aims to give players in the U16 and U18 age groups first-hand experience of an international tournament environment, in preparation for potential future involvement in a National Age Group Squad (NAGS). We wish both Lucy and the team well in the next stage of their endeavors.

Alice Foster, Georgina Watkiss, Anna Durkin, Eliza Dwyer, Fran Houseman and Ben Pimley have all been selected to play hockey for Yorkshire. The U14s were mixed hockey champions in 2014 whilst the team of Tamsin Cutmore, Lucy Wicks, Mary Cox and Meghan Williamson were winners of the area and county badminton tournaments. Both Tamsin and Lucy now represent Yorkshire at badminton. Both Georgina Walker and Lucy Kettlewell play cricket for Yorkshire whilst Lucy Wicks represents North Yorkshire. Laura Bosomworth represents Yorkshire at cross country and Amy Gatford is ranked third in Yorkshire and 7<sup>th</sup> in the UK in her age group in tennis. Both the U16 and U15 netballers won their respective area tournaments and have progressed to the County round. Amy Mackenzie has been selected for the U19 national performance league. Anika Schwarze Chintapatla has been selected for the England

Orienteering team whilst Sophie Richardson was part of the Yorkshire County Cricket team which are national champions defeating Hampshire in the final.

It is good to see football featuring more strongly in the school; teams have been entered for the National Cup at all ages and the first XI defeated local rivals Outwood in their first outing of the season. Victories over local schools affirms the footballing talent in school but more importantly, it is good to see even more students representing RGS in different sports. In cross country, there was success for the Inter boys and girls as well as junior girls. Much promise for the future.

Congratulations to Matt Clare, a full England international who became the European doubles badminton champion in Turkey and has received the Da Costa Award for male sporting excellence this year. Matt's enduring modesty reflects well on him as do his A level grades which are superb. Matt is currently in Peru competing in the World Junior Championships.

The most recent Kirkland Rowell survey gave an overall performance score of 87.4% which was 'excellent' and is the second highest since these surveys were undertaken. Amongst the students who had attended the school for over a year, 52% thought the school's performance had improved. The most pleasing aspect to this survey was that 94% of students would recommend this school to other students, with second form students giving the highest positive response in this criterion.

The school is extremely fortunate in having a very talented teaching staff which has become even stronger with some excellent new appointments; their commitment and dedication to their role is outstanding. The students, as ever, are a credit to the school and help to make it such a vibrant community. A recent visitor to the school commented on the vibrancy, independence and sheer love of learning in the school which is something we all contribute to and of which we should be proud.

I would like to thank Fiona, my wife, without whose support I could not undertake the very demanding job of headmaster in the leading state schools in the North of England.

I would now like to welcome our guest for today, Dr Mark Hills, Old Riponian.; thank you for coming today to celebrate another outstanding year of achievement at Ripon Grammar School; we look forward to what you have to say to us, and to hear something about your reminiscences of your time here after a musical interlude from Joy Sutcliffe and the distribution of prizes.

**M L Pearman**  
**Headmaster**