

School Birthday Assembly Monday 25th September 2022

Good morning and welcome to our School Birthday Assembly.

This year we are celebrating an incredible 145 years of Kendrick, 145 years of girls' education!

For a number of you, this is your first experience of our school birthday, but for the rest of us we have been doing this every year since 2012.

Kendrick School, came into existence in 1877. It is named after its founder, John Kendrick, whose painting is in this Hall.

John Kendrick was a 17th century merchant and clothier who left a bequest, a sum of money – some £12,000 to the towns of Reading and Newbury to provide employment and education for girls and boys. So started Kendrick Girls' School and Kendrick Boys' School. The boys' school eventually merged with Reading school, leaving Kendrick Girls' School, which became Kendrick School.

In 1877, our school first opened in Watlington House, in Watlington Street, half a mile away from here. The school stayed in Watlington Street until 1927, when it moved to this site.

When I introduced this event 10 years ago, I wanted to do so in order to celebrate and value, who we are and what our purpose is. For me and I hope you, this day is about celebrating our school, our history, the history of women's education and the history of women's emancipation. I strongly believe, it is through education that people, women in particular, can become truly free.

In 1877, our school started with 46 students, whose families had to pay a small fee to come here. They were taught a gendered curriculum, that is a curriculum that was considered appropriate for girls which was very different to the education for boys.

At this time, women did not have the vote, could not go to university on the same basis as men, could not enter certain careers and professions and had to fit in to the view and position that society at that time dictated. A very different education and life to that you have now.

Today, the education you receive at Kendrick enables you to do anything you want to do. There should be no barriers to what you choose to do, other than the limitations you put on yourself and how you see yourself. For this reason, I want us to celebrate our school and the education at Kendrick.

There is the fun side of celebrations. Like most birthdays, we celebrate by having a cake and each form has made a celebration cake for the occasion, which I am looking forward to judging!

In celebrating our birthday and Kendrick, I want you also to remember the millions of girls and women worldwide who still do not have access to education because of where they have been born, because of the politics, poverty, war or any other reason that prevents them from being able to go to school.

In previous birthdays we have sung our school song, Floreat Kendricka, let Kendrick flourish. We have marked this occasion with special projects: the creation of the school emblem in the gallery here in the Hall, the vital quotation written next to it about the importance of education, we have invited former students back to school and musicians etc.

This year our special project to mark 145 years is to celebrate significant women who have lived during our 145-year history and had lasting impact on our world and find something they have said that shows what they did and or stood for.

An individual I often like to mention and quote, is Vice President Kamala Harris who when she was appointed Vice President of the US, in the autumn of 2020 said:

While I may be the first woman in this office, I will not be the last...

something that has been said by so many women when they break barriers and enter a world where women have been absent.

I am sure that you will think and find someone who sums up for you a significant contribution to the growth of education and the impact women have had on our society in the last 145 years.

To mark this occasion will celebrate by having a whole school photograph, something we do every five years.

Tribute to Queen Elizabeth II

A woman who I think would fall into this category and has had an impact during our 145-year history, in fact 96 years of it, is of course the late Queen, Elizabeth II.

For a few moments I want us to acknowledge and pay tribute to this woman, who in her role, like her predecessors, navigated a path in which she, by her gender challenged

stereotypes, broke down barriers, and made the establishment confront the fact that she was a female Head of State.

In the two weeks leading up to the State Funeral of Queen Elizabeth last Monday, so much has been written and said about this person, so many expressions of love, sorrow and grief which has been quite extraordinary. There were comments about the Queen's acts of kindness, her tolerance of others, her discretion, her service and duty, the respect she showed to others and people showed to her, her constancy, her commitment to the enormous role she took on 70 years ago as a very young woman. Suffice to say she lived a long and a well lived life, she was much loved and has left a legacy to the country and world that will never be surpassed in length or significance.

To end our tribute to the Queen, I have asked a member of the KSL of the Curriculum and Current Affairs Committee to read a poem written by the poet Laureate, Simon Armitage, after the Queen died.

Floral Tribute

Evening will come, however determined the late afternoon,

Limes and oaks in their last green flush, pearly in September mist.

I have conjured a lily to light these hours, a token of thanks,

Zones and auras of soft glare framing the brilliant globes.

A promise made and kept for life – that was your gift –

Because of which, here is a gift in return, glovewort to some,

Each shining bonnet guarded by stern lance-like leaves.

The country loaded its whole self into your slender hands,

Hands that can rest, now, relieved of a century's weight.

Evening has come. Rain on the black lochs and dark Munros.

Lily of the Valley, a namesake almost, a favourite flower

Interlaced with your famous bouquets, the restrained

Zeal and forceful grace of its lanterns, each inflorescence

A silent bell disguising a singular voice. A blurred new day

Breaks uncrowned on remote peaks and public parks, and
Everything turns on these luminous petals and deep roots,
This lily that thrives between spire and tree, whose brightness
Holds and glows beyond the life and border of its bloom.

SIMON ARMITAGE

Poet Laureate

Reflection: Let us think about today as we remember the history of our school and the people and their lives in previous times. We are fortunate to be able to come together as a community and celebrate our school, in this safe and secure environment. At this time, let us think of those who were here before us and those who have still to come. Also, people who do not have the right to a good education at this moment.

Kendrick School is a place where students can focus on their studies, where they can flourish and grow, where they achieve and accomplish great things, where lifetime friendships are made and where there are opportunities to succeed and have a good start in life.

Floreat Kendricka! May our school continue to flourish.

We also remember Queen Elizabeth II whose life and times spanned much of our history.

Thank you.