

Good Morning and welcome to this special Morning Talk.

Today we celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday of our School and we come together this morning as a School along, with our visitors who are particularly welcome, to celebrate, reflect and look forward.

It is right that on our 100<sup>th</sup> birthday we *all* gather together – a rare event in itself. Being part of a community is important in that it helps us to make mistakes and correct them and celebrate our achievements - not in a conceited or arrogant way; but through developing our self-confidence for the service of others.

Some of what will happen during the next hour such as the singing of Jerusalem and the Readings are Traditions of the School. Some of what you will hear has been specifically prepared for this morning and words of the readings and for Jerusalem are all in your programme.

Once Morning Talk has concluded there will be refreshments and of course birthday cake for you all and Cliff will explain where and how once we have finished.

So, let us start our Morning Talk marking the start of the next 100 years with the Traditional start of Term Reading from St Paul's First letter to the Corinthians.

Reading

Pupil Presentations

Chairman of Governors Centenary Address

You will have heard in the earlier readings mention of the singing of Jerusalem and the School Song. We will sing Jerusalem in a while but before that the G Group (Year 3!) are going to sing the Traditional School Song. Following that the Junior School will sing '*Come on all children*'.

G Group

JS Song

Now, a birthday would just not be a birthday without a cake and so I'm going to ask the oldest girl in the School, Catherine Pullinger and the youngest boy, Bart Fynes-Clinton to come and cut the Birthday cake - and in case you're worried that it's not big enough for you all we do have more cakes!

## **The History**

On the 26 December 2012 a man named George Arundale gave a talk at the Theosophical Society in India. The title of his talk was 'Education as Service' which made reference to the book of the same name by Arundale's Tutee Jiddu Krishnamurti. The Theosophists believed that Krishnamurti was the future 'World Teacher'.

There were a number of people there who were very inspired by what he said about Education – He said that *"The keynote to the whole subject is that the teacher's job is not only to instil learning and knowledge into the pupil's mind, but also to evolve his character and awaken his inner nature to a wider understanding of men and things - through bonds of mutual affection and Trust."*

This inspired a group to come to Letchworth, a newly emerging Garden City to start a School and fundraising began in 1913. Initially just 8 guineas was raised but the subsequent personal support of Annie Besant, the great social reformer and George Arundale himself meant that the group could take on 28 and 30 Broadwater Avenue where the School started with 14 pupils and 5 staff.

The first Head was Dr John Horace Armstrong Smith, known simply as Armstrong Smith and he was a very

capable man. A surgeon as well as a teacher who was deeply dissatisfied with rote-learning and grim discipline that pervaded much of the British Schooling system in the early 20th century.

Armstrong Smith resigned in 1918 and the School went through rapid change. The Boarders were accommodated in the main building here in what was Arundale School and St Christopher School itself was built between the Broadway and Spring Road and is now St Francis'. In 1920 The Letchworth Rectory that was the childhood home of Laurence Olivier became the School's Montessori Nursery with Maria Montessori herself coming to visit and indeed providing some staff training.

There was a dramatic rise in numbers up to the mid 20's and then a pivotal moment in the school's history occurred in the spring of 1925 when Beatrice Ensor and Isabel King who together were the real drivers behind the School announced that they'd had a falling out with the Trust and would be leaving to set up their own School, Frensham Heights. When they departed 50% of the pupils and 19 staff went with them leaving the School in financial difficulty. This was almost the end of the School. This was exacerbated in 1927 when it was announced that a free Secondary School – a civic college – would be opening in Letchworth.

Lyn Harris took over the Headship, supported by his wife Eleanor and they became one of the greatest influences over the School's subsequent development. The Broadway site was sold and this site developed.

Against all predictions schools numbers grew and continued to do so throughout the Second World War.

In 1954 the Harris's decided that they would retire and that their son, Nicholas King Harris would take over the running of the School – which he did rather wonderfully until his tragic death in 1980. For 55 years the Harris's had run the School and by and large the School that we enjoy today is a testament to their vision, and indeed personal sacrifice.

Colin Reid took over the Headship and under his direction the School continued to flourish. The origin of many of the traditions that we share in this morning – the singing of Jerusalem and the readings may have become misted by time. But it matters not. Traditions are important and they seek to bind us stronger as a community.

The School has changed in many ways and continues to do so. In our last Inspection the Reporting Inspector commented that we would not let pride stifle innovation –

and we will not. You heard in the readings some of the expected etiquette and rules of the past. They missed out some of my favourites that would be unthinkable now including: 'No Girl is to go out after dark unless accompanied by a boy of Good Size'!

But some things do not change. Our healthy questioning of what schooling is *and should be* about continues. It was Albert Einstein – whose own theory of relativity was born in the same year as the School started, who said: *"One should guard against preaching to young people success in the customary form as the main aim in life. The most important motive for work in school and in life is pleasure in work, pleasure in its results, and the knowledge of the value of the result to the community."*

The past is important. St Chris has grown up and evolved with the Garden City and we are proud of our association with Letchworth as indeed we are proud of our Old Scholars and all of you.

And so now, as we come towards the end of this morning talk I ask that when we come to our silence you take a moment to reflect on how fortunate we are not just to be here celebrating today; but that we are able to be different and thrive in being so. After we have joined together in the traditional end of term singing of

Jerusalem The Head Girl and Head Boy will read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm which is always read at the end of term and this will be followed by our silence.

So, Please stand and join in the singing of Jerusalem.

23 Psalm

Silence

3 Cheers for St Chris

Richard Palmer

15 January 2015