

# Ruthin School

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*Established 1284*

Principal: Mr T J Belfield MA (Cantab)

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## Founders' Day – 9<sup>th</sup> May 2015 Principal's Address

Welcome to our Service of Commemoration and Thanksgiving. Today is an important date in our School calendar, where we reflect and give thanks for our School.

This year the date has moved – from a date last year of early March, to this year's date; mid-May. The reason for this is so that we not only think about our history and our school's foundation – but we also give thanks for the work and commitment of our leaving students.

When we think about Ruthin School, we should not only think of a collection of buildings, or a historical institution – but we should think of our School as a collection of people with a common connection.

Our School is a community – it is made of, firstly and most importantly, current students. Without our students we have nothing – it is the success of current students that attracts new ones to want to join us. And, if we celebrate that success and promote it throughout the world, we will always continue to be attractive to students and their parents.

Secondly, the community of our School includes committed, hardworking, staff. Staff understand and support the need to provide a school environment that is educationally strong and where the good care and happiness of all students is an important priority. I believe our staff really enjoy working at our School – because they enjoy spending their time with our gifted young people.

Thirdly, we have many former students and staff that still remember their school days with fondness. Mostly, for the former pupils, their memories of their school days is deeply rooted in the life-long friendships that they make whilst at Ruthin School. This is true for recent leavers, middle-aged people and those of you who are much older (say, over 65). It is friendships that you make whilst being a student at Ruthin School that will last – even moreso than the friendships you make at university or in the workplace.

Our School is radically different to the one that we had 50 years ago – or 100 years ago – or 500 years ago – or even 5 years ago. The School has girls – a relatively recent addition to our student body – and the number of girls in our school is now greater than the number of boys. Ruthin School is truly coeducational – no longer a male dominated environment. We have over 20 different nationalities. With the change to include all female students, and many different cultures and nationalities, we mustn't forget that decisions made now – for today's School and tomorrow's School need to take our diversity into account. We have a very firm academic focus, and we try to ensure that we offer our young people an education that is both appropriate and important for their futures, today. I expect that the School we see today will be very different from the School that will be here in 50 years time. But, with all the change in our society, and consequent need to adapt school life to accommodate that change, we should never diminish the strong feelings of friendship and support for others.

That is the single common thread that I hope will last forever. The very positive connection of friendship we see now between our past pupils and between our current pupils, is something that I hope will exist between all generations of future pupils.

Our school is growing – at a very fast rate. This means that even more friendships can start, and even more pupils can enjoy the high quality education by coming to Ruthin School. Last year, when I prepared the speech for Founders’ Day, our school had 226 pupils – today we have 262 pupils and the current count for September 2015 is 307.

Next month we start the demolition of Orchard House – a house built in 1961 for a school caretaker. It now accommodates 4 students – but over the next two months we will knock it down to make space to build our new boarding house. This boarding house will accommodate girls, each with their own single room and ensuite bathroom. It will be built to a very high standard, and will be complete by this time next year.

It will be an impressive building, that will be the start of our 7-phase development of Ruthin School. In a recent assembly, given by Miss Foster’s tutor group, all pupils were introduced to some of the detail of this plan – and Form 1 pupils over their life-time at Ruthin School will be able to see the transformation of school facilities, as we build a new dining hall, replace nearly all the classrooms with a new modern classroom block and we increase and improve our sports and music facilities.

The new boarding house will mean that we can accommodate an additional 40 students – and it is our objective that by September 2016 (only 18 months away), Ruthin School will be a school of 350 Senior School pupils. In under 8 years, going from 104 to 350 is impressive – and this is only possible because of the hardwork and commitment of all our current students and staff, alongside the positive comments from former students and parents.

There has been some speculation regarding who the new boarding housemistress will be for the new boarding house. I am delighted to announce that Mrs Welsby will be the new housemistress. This means that Mr Welsby, our Vice-Principal will return to living in Ruthin School as he did many years ago, when he first started his work here. Mr & Mrs Welsby will remember living in an old boarding house, that used to be on the site where Kenyon House is. That was many years ago – even before their children were born. Now they return to live in Ruthin School, and I know that the students that live in our new boarding house will really enjoy Mrs Welsby’s kind heart, fairness and fun. Mr Welsby being on site more often is not, however, an opportunity for all those Biology pupils, like Lulu, Darren, Dolly etc to completely destroy his free-time by demanding non-stop tutorials. Mr Welsby is kind – works very hard, but will need some time with his family even though he will live on site.

The new boarding house is called “Trevor” – named after Sir John Trevor, whom you have heard something about today. Our boarding houses are named after famous people associated with Ruthin School – for example, Archbishop Williams, Dean Ellis, Sir John Trevor, Lord Kenyon, Gabriel Goodman, Bishop Wynne and Russell. Each year, at Founders’ Day, we will hear about one such famous alumni.

Alumni – the students who have been at Ruthin School and now left, are a vital part of our community. There are so many alumni all over the world now, and those alumni have much to offer us. I am very grateful to Mr Hamer for sharing with us some memories of his life at Ruthin School.

You might be interested to know that the architect responsible for our new boarding house, and our master plan – is Alfred Yeung. He is an Old Ruthinian from Hong Kong, whose Architect firm is based in Liverpool. Alfred is a partner in the firm he is responsible for the Hong Kong and China offices. I meet Alfred several times a year, and earlier this year we launched a new group in Hong Kong and Macau to unite the current and former students and parents of those countries together. The dinner, held in the Hong Kong Football Club, was a great success – and this is something that will become a regular event.

I said yesterday, at assembly, that I would talk a little bit today about our leaving students. It is always sad when students leave Ruthin School to start the next stage of their educational journey. We are a very close community, with our teachers and staff knowing our students very well. The end of formal teaching yesterday, for all students in Form 5, Lower Sixth and Upper Sixth was accompanied by some sadness on behalf of the teaching staff. Of course, the informal teaching can now begin in earnest – with many teachers offering tutorials to help their students gain an even deeper and better understanding of their subjects. The challenging examinations have started, and these examinations will determine the future path for all students

that sit them. The grades achieved in examinations are important – particularly as most students now choose Ruthin School as their gateway to further academic study at top universities.

In our Prize Giving celebration at the end of the month, I will highlight some particular successes – but, I think we all know, that this year is set to be our best year ever – not only for those all important University places, but also for the GCSE grades that are predicted from our Form 5. The University offers that have been received are phenomenal – with nearly every pupil receiving at least one offer from a university ranked in the top 20 in the UK. As an example, we have 6 Cambridge offers, 11 Imperial College offers, 22 UCL offers, 13 Durham offers and 12 Warwick offers. Even LSE has given 4 offers this year – including Economics and Law.

On a personal level, I take care in ensuring that the students that I choose for Ruthin School fit in – and that the School is the right school for them. Therefore, I have a great desire to see our young people be successful. Some former pupils and parents have become very special friends of mine – friendships, for me, that will last a lifetime. I am very lucky – as I get to visit all the parents around the world.

So – I will really miss not seeing the faces of our leaving students next year. But – of course – it is not difficult to keep in touch. We now have so many social networks, new ones growing all the time – that it is so easy to communicate. And I really hope that everyone leaving keeps in touch with us.

As I said before, our Alumni network is very strong. We enrol all leavers into our database of leavers. The Old Ruthinian Association, an organisation that has many former students as life-members – is keen to create events to unite former students. In countries around the world we are starting to see informal gatherings of former students, particularly as we have a very global student body.

As you look back at your time at Ruthin School, you should reflect on what this very special place has brought you. I imagine you will think about those wonderful friendships, that you hope will last forever. Maybe you will think about the education that has possibly given you opportunities that you would not have had if you had gone to a different school. Some of you, as you leave, will think about your teachers – those teachers that have given you extra help, or care, during your time at School. Or – even, those teachers that have been very strict and you might not always have liked because of the punishments you have received. I hope and believe, though, that all staff do want they truly believe is in your best interest. Maybe you will think about a fresh outlook on life – mixing with people from different countries and cultures certainly gives our community diversity and vibrancy that other schools will not have.

I hope that leaving students will look back with fondness on all of this.

So – we give thanks for our School, for the creation and the founders of Ruthin School, and the changes necessary to sustain our School into the future. We should all be grateful to be united by the single thing that everyone here today has in common – Ruthin School.

T J Belfield  
9<sup>th</sup> May 2015