

**Foundation Service  
Principal's Address  
26 September 2025**

Back when I was a Music undergraduate in the 1990s, there was something of a craze for historic reconstructions. Historic reconstructions that is, in the form of concerts and recordings, putting music in its correct context and often for the occasion for which it was written. What did that look like? Well, music for the coronation of Charles 1 for example, music from the court of the sun king, Louis IV.

Something which really captured my eye and indeed my ear, was a very ancient ceremony in Venice, called - and you will have to forgive my Italian - *Sposalizio del Mare*.

On Ascension Day - from at least 1173 until the fall of the republic in 1797 in to the hands of Napoleon, the Doge of Venice - the doge being the elected head of state - would leave his palace in St Mark's Square, in full regalia, and step onto his ceremonial barge. He and his entourage would then be rowed into the lagoon, where the doge would drop a wedding ring into the water, symbolising the marriage of Venice to the sea.

Obviously, this was a day of critical importance to the city, a maritime state, where trade over water had brought the city extreme wealth.

How the importance and the wealth was demonstrated was through lavish feasting, lavish costume and theatre, and of course, lavish music. Indeed, the Doge when on ceremonial duties was accompanied by six silver trumpeters, presumably to provide spontaneous fanfares. Warwick fanfare team, take note! Whilst Mr Barker is not of a nervous disposition, I am sure advanced notice of any brass-related activity in his vicinity would be appreciated!

Here in Warwick, we are about as landlocked as it is possible to be in this country. But - and without stretching the analogy to breaking point - Warwick does like its civic ceremony. And as in renaissance Venice, it marks the connections within the town, speaking of civic pride and an acute awareness of a rich and proud history.

As a Foundation, we now have two important events which celebrate our links with the town.

In July, we welcomed the Mayor, Town Councillors and the Court Leet to Warwick School Chapel, inviting our civic representatives to join us on our patch of Warwick to mark our historic ties.

Today, we bring ourselves into the heart of our town, to say thank you to everyone here and in the local community who support us.

And we also give thanks today for all those who have gone before us and whose foresight and acts of generosity mean that we are the group of schools that we are today.

As with any longstanding organisation, our story is full of twists and turns.

As old as the castle, what we now know as Warwick School began life in 914. Over hundreds of years, the school was nomadic with no permanent home. Lord Leycester Hospital and here in St Mary's, played host to this pale shadow of the Warwick School of today. The late 19th century saw the founding of King's High with just 22 girls. The 1940s saw the passing of the Butler Education Act which no longer allowed all through-schools to operate. That meant that King's High had to be broken up, with the prep being separated from the seniors. Probably the only upside to this separation was the opportunity to celebrate Warwick Prep's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday last week – so happy birthday once again, Warwick Prep!

The late 1960s saw the burning down of St Mary's Hall situated at the back of the King's site, and which was home to Warwick Prep. This saw the relocation of prep to the Myton Road, which was the start of the perhaps inevitable migration of all our Warwick-based schools to that campus, with King's High joining in 2019.

Our family grew again when we welcomed The Kingsley School into the Foundation in 2021, and Kingsley is itself now serving its local community more powerfully than ever, by educating boys as well as girls.

And our family has grown again this year with the formation of Warwick Schools foundation Multi Academy Trust. The Trust is precisely 26 days, 14 hours and 40 minutes old!

It is wonderful to have this opportunity today to welcome Clapham Terrace, Evergreen, Westgate – our Trust's founding schools. To welcome you formally into our family. To welcome heads, staff and pupils and Trustees today to this service is such a privilege. Just to reassure you, we generally go about our business with the minimum of fuss...but sometimes a fuss is required, and today is one of those occasions!

In providing this brief overview of our history, there are three organisations for whom we here in the Foundation today, should be forever grateful.

I doubt very much that we would be here at all but for one person: Thomas Oken. Thomas lived here in Warwick through the reigns of Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I and Elizabeth I. He believed strongly in this town and knew the importance of education in a healthy society. His legacy on the educational landscape of the town is immense. In his will, he allowed for the payment of a school master. And the charity which bears his name gave our school a home when it was homeless. It also saved us from bankruptcy during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at no small financial risk to itself.

Had The King Henry VIII Endowed Trust, Warwick not gifted the land on which our Warwick schools sit today, I wonder if King's would exist. A new school requires buildings, and land on which to build them. Governors wouldn't have made Warwick School homeless – again - simply to found a new one.

Of course, without that great charity, hundreds of children would not have been able to access our education through the funds which are gifted to us each year, because through its charitable objects, we are one of the major beneficiaries of its annual income.

And we also share our name, because of course the King to which King's High refers and was indeed the name which Warwick School bore since its re-founding in 1545 until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, is Henry VIII.

To add further to the list of charities to whom we owe great debt, is the charity of Sir Thomas White, Warwick. Every year, this charity too enables children of the town to come to our schools at no cost.

So, to the trustees of The Charity of Thomas Oken and Nicholas Eyffler, The King Henry VIII Endowed Trust, Warwick, and The Charity of Sir Thomas White, Warwick who are here today, on behalf of our charity to yours: thank you.

Taking time to remember the key people and institutions in our story, is important for several reasons:

It is good to say thank you.

It is important to remember our past as it inevitably informs our future.

It connects us to our roots.

What the citizenry of Venice did quite brilliantly, was to take the situation in which they found themselves – which is to say, living in the middle of the sea on houses built on wooden stilts – and turn themselves into one of the greatest maritime trading powers the world has ever seen.

They connected with their immediate surroundings and found a way to turn a disadvantage into an advantage. And through their annual ceremony, they reminded themselves of what it was that made them great. Not they themselves, but their deep connection with their local environment.

In that, I think there is a modern-day lesson for us here, today.

The desire for connectivity is part of our human condition. We are a sociable species. But as with every relationship, the relationship with our geography, our place, and the people who live there, takes effort. It is also a two-way process. For our communities to get the best out of us, there have to be ways to be involved, and for everyone to feel as though they have a stake and agency in the future of the places where they live.

We all have to practice doing this. And it is in your hands as current pupils in our schools, to carry forward the values and ethos which we aim to instil. The world you inherit from us is complicated and fractious. It may feel overwhelming and impossible to make a difference.

This is not the case.

How can you, our pupils of today, make a better world for all of us in our tomorrows?

First, by being respectful.

By being compassionate.

By being kind.

And – I think most importantly of all – by being big hearted.

Big heartedness has created the Foundation we know today. Acts of generosity have allowed us to thrive. It has allowed us to grow and share our educational vision with more and more people.

As pupils, your big heartedness should match this. Your interaction with each other day after day, week after week, should exemplify all that is best in us. Getting on

with your neighbour is the root to a more contented society. Work at it. Be better at it. Every day.

And as examples of the big heartedness, you have the most wonderful role models. Not just drawn from our past, but also from our present.

They include:

My colleagues – all our staff - for their skill and dedication to the cause of education, whatever role in our Foundation you have.

Our Parents and our Parents' Associations, for such relentless support.

Our donors, who choose to give financially to us.

Our Governors and Trustees. You give of your time and expertise without any sort of fanfare – surprise or planned! I give you our collective heartfelt thanks, and especially pay tribute to our Chair, Sally Austin.

And so to you our pupils who live out our ethos and values every day. Practice doing it brilliantly, and commit to making you schools, your towns, your country, our world a better place.