**DAVID MAXWELL: 1951-2023**

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Erick Curzon, and my friendship with David, like that of several others here today, goes back a very long way; to our first term at boarding school when we were both eight years old.

The school in question was King’s Mead, a prep school situated just down the coast from here in Seaford. At that time, rather extraordinarily, Seaford was a town where there were at least a dozen prep schools within a radius of about two miles of each other. Brimming over, as it was, with all those boys’ schools, Seaford was the only town in the country where it was said you could walk to Away matches.

King’s Mead, though, had something indefinably special about it. It was civilised. The school buildings – purpose-built – were light and elegant. In front of them, there were spacious playing fields – which, importantly in that part of the world, were level. The chapel, which had been built in the 1930s from the timbers of an old barn, had an unmistakable feeling of sanctity and ancientness. The headmaster, Peter Barrett, ably assisted by his wife Jane, made sure that every boy felt happy and settled. This was evidenced not least by the standard of food, which on the whole was excellent. But there were wonderful facilities, enjoyed by many of us including David – a shooting range; a carpentry workshop; an O-gauge railway layout; and in the front hall, a very popular feature, a full sized billiard table. On Wednesday evenings in the carpeted library we learned ballroom dancing – and sometimes the twist. On Saturday evenings in winter – to our perennial delight – we would watch a feature film. Peter Barrett himself was very musical, having sung in the choir at Kings Cambridge. In consequence, on Sunday mornings, when we were allowed a bit longer in bed, a wide range of classical music was piped into the dormitories through a system of speakers – for David, the start of a lifelong passion.

And with one or two exceptions – thankfully short-lived – we liked the masters. Claude Selwyn was probably one of the finest classics masters to be found in any prep school in the country. John Welchman brought the French language alive. John Hayley was an inspiring mathematician. It was perhaps not surprising that Kings Mead was disproportionately successful in fielding scholarship candidates to the major public schools.

And David, always very modest about his achievements, was one of them. His face, sometimes a little earnest but usually smiling, features ubiquitously in team photographs of Kings Mead second elevens, first elevens and first fifteens from 1963 and 64. He won medals for shooting. In the swimming relay he was someone you definitely wanted on your team. In the chapel choir, he was a pitch-perfect treble. As an all-rounder, he outshone just about all of us.

And his qualities as an all-rounder, as you might guess, extended to the classroom, where he excelled most of all in mathematics – his only real rival in that area being his younger brother Charles, whom we all regarded fondly as a bit of a prodigy.

The five years that David spent in Seaford were formative. However, it was because King’s Mead was the school it was that at the age of eleven, having been hit by the news of his father’s untimely death, he derived emotional support from the people around him, the comfort that came from being in a happy, active community with those he liked and who equally liked him. One thing this did was enable David to take on the mantle of responsibility for his widowed mother and his younger siblings – something he took very seriously.

After Kings Mead, David’s academic and sporting achievements rose to even greater heights at Eton, where he became a King’s scholar, Keeper of the Wall, a member of the Shooting VIII and – the shape of things to come – Head of Boats.

These were all a source of enjoyment for David and attainments in which, in adulthood, he took continuing pride. But in the latter third of his life – bafflingly to some, but not to us as his contemporaries – it was King’s Mead which occupied his thoughts and much of his leisure time.

Kings Mead, as a school, closed in the late 60s, when so many schools did, and the school buildings were converted to become a nursing home. But then, in 2001, the nursing home too was closed, and the entire site was earmarked for redevelopment. Included in the demolition plans was the lovely chapel, whose window frames commemorated the names of the former Kings Mead boys killed during the war. David and a number of contemporaries, including in particular Peter Ingram, went to enormous lengths to try to get the building listed. Sadly, these attempts failed; but David was not defeated!

He locked horns with the developers and got them to agree that he could relieve them of all the chapel’s interior features including the beautiful stained glass, the window frames, the memorials and, crucially, the chairs, many of which bore the names of the old boys who had once donated them. From the dining room he rescued some of the panelling, in particular, the one on which his own name, as a scholar, was highlighted in gold. He then managed to contact – how I do not know – a large number of the original donors of the chapel chairs, many by that time very old men. At least 30 of them leapt at the chance of reclaiming their chair - one man in his 90s travelling all the way from America. A host of other items were accepted for display by the Seaford Museum. At the same time, David made it his business to track down as many of the school’s former pupils as he could and on the back of those contacts, he built a Kings Mead website, populated by photographs, names, statistics and memorabilia going back to the school’s earliest days at the time of the first World War. Meanwhile, the property developers were persuaded to reserve a small area of the Kings Mead site as a memorial garden, in which an obelisk bearing the names of the school’s war dead was placed at their expense.

What were these Herculean efforts of David’s all about? If you ask many people about their time at prep school, they often say that they have practically no memory of them. For David, though, there is no doubt that his prep school days held an abiding significance, and an abiding relevance. The imprint left on him by Kings Mead was a product of people and place and something intangible that bound the two together; and, if the place was no longer to be seen, the people were ones whose company he could again seek out. In 2002 there was a well-attended reunion of former Kings Mead pupils – the first of three. And for David, as for many of his contemporaries, including me, it has been these renewed links, and friendships reborn, which have counted more than anything else.

In thinking of David, as we all do, with love, we can reflect in our several ways on what we owe to him; and in doing so, remember him always, with gratitude.