

SPEECH DAY 2018

Chairman of the Board of Trustees' address – Howard Stack

Headmaster, guest speaker Simon Fenwick, special guests, teachers, parents and boys of Brisbane Grammar School. Welcome.

We have a lot to be proud of as we celebrate our first 150 years as a school. And a lot to be thankful for as the beneficiaries of the hard work and sacrifice of so many past Grammar generations. Pride in past contributions underscores our commitment to continue to add to what has been achieved.

As with life in general, our first 150 years have not always been easy. Wars, depressions, and lack of financial capacity have slowed the grand visions of great men to realize their dreams of what they believed the school should be.

And of course, there have been failures, and it is appropriate to continue to recognise the courage and dignity of the Lynch victims who have come forward and joined with us in the very difficult processes we have implemented to ease their hurt, and their loss. We are a better place for their courage in coming forward to us, and to the Royal Commission.

We cannot erase their hurt, but we will continue to support them, and promise them that this monumental failure of governance is properly recorded in the new 150-year history of the School which will be published early next year.

The quality of our educational outcomes at BGS is not accidental. The professionalism and commitment of our teachers in readying our boys for life is outstanding. In a digital world, the ways boys learn, and the way we teach them, is changing significantly, and our dedicated teachers are engaged at the centre of this change.

The support we must give to our teachers includes, of course, the provision of infrastructure to optimise teaching and learning, and this continues to have special focus as we finalize the detailed planning of our well-publicised STEAM project. Our preparation has been typically painstaking, which is a trademark here at Grammar, but an architectural competition, to implement the requirements of what is an exciting educational brief, will be decided next month. Construction still targeted to commence in 2020, subject to successful fundraising, financing and planning approval in 2019.

The sciences and mathematics have always been at the core of what we provide at BGS. Indeed, in 1911 the School sold what became the Kelvin Grove Army Barracks for eight thousand pounds in order to pay back four thousand pounds of government debt, and to build its first dedicated science block.

This critical project will bring the teaching of sciences and mathematics to the forefront of best practice. It will blend the teaching of the sciences and mathematics with the teaching of design, technology and art, break down silos, and foster creativity. The science fiction of yesterday is frequently today's reality. It will also provide much-needed space for our important middle school, as well as significantly improving the Gregory Terrace traffic problem which we share with BGGs. It will be our biggest project ever, and it will be transformative.

As with all our major projects, your support will again be important, and an active fund-raising programme will commence next year.

May I turn to our other major initiative for 2019, our 20/20 endowment campaign. It is our goal to raise our endowment fund from \$11M where it now stands, to \$20M by 2020.

While I think Sir Charles Lilley would be proud of what he gave birth to 150 years ago, he would, I think, be

concerned about the limitation which the level of our fees today necessarily place upon access to BGS from a broad socio-economic cross-section of society.

Lilley's dream, enshrined in the Grammar school's Act of 1860, was for BGS to be non-denominational, and funded by government scholarships so that the school would be open to all classes without distinction.

However, the finances of the then colony of Queensland were not adequate to realize this dream, and so the school opened with a mix of both government scholarship holders, and fee-paying students. This socio-economic diversity, forged by Lilley and the State, has been a key element of Grammar culture ever since.

However, with the removal of State Government scholarships in the 1960's, this mix was, of necessity, diminished because the school could not afford to fund the same number of scholarships which had until then been provided by the Government.

The Board has now made a decision to take steps to reverse this trend with the 20/20 endowment campaign. The income from the School's endowment fund presently supports about 60 boys in the school, and our initial target is to increase the endowment fund to facilitate 10% of the school student body being so supported. This is what the top international schools and universities do, and our aspirations should be no less. Indeed, we must not fail if we are to stay true to the ideals forged by Lilley and the State 150 years ago.

Our guest speaker has supported this mission, his transformative donation to BGS established the Fenwick Bursary to support well-rounded and outstanding regional boys who are keen to learn but lack the financial means to attend the school.

We are progressively working our way through to every living Old Boy year group, and requesting them to create their separate endowment sub-fund, and to grow it over time as their financial circumstances allow. The responses are encouraging, from as far back as the year of 1943, represented by Jim Truesdale here today. A year group who left BGS and went straight to war!

We are particularly excited by the willingness of the departing Year 12s to create their own fund as they leave, also with a commitment to grow it when their vocational and family circumstances allow. The cohort of 2018 is joining those of 2016 and 2017 in the beginnings of what will become an embedded tradition. Pleasingly, a number of Year 12 parents are supporting this philanthropic commitment by their boys as they leave.

The Board of Trustees and our Senior management team have likewise committed to this campaign, and as I move into the twilight of my chairmanship, I have committed to lead this key cultural project so that endowment becomes firmly embedded in the DNA of all Old Boy year groups.

As we celebrate our first 150 years, I think we can proudly say that we continue to stand tall as a key institution in our community, and one whose standing has not been diminished, as has the standing of our major corporations, media, Church and State. Relying our boys to lead in the face of increasing societal decay has never been more important, and we must ensure that our support remains steadfast. Schools like Grammar provide reasons for us to be optimistic. They are an investment in our future.

So we have long-term plans at Grammar which reflect our optimism in the future.

Following STEAM, the extension and modification of our Centenary Hall into an effective performing arts centre is scheduled for 2026, and entry into co-educational primary schooling, either at Northgate, or as part of the Brisbane Live Project adjacent to our campus in College Road, is scheduled for 2030. The gaps between these major projects is, of course, necessitated by the need to pay down debt, and maintain a strong balance sheet.

And of course, there are many more “stay in business” projects. Projects such as the tennis centre completed last year, our Moogerah acquisitions, and the Northgate upgrade now underway, fall into this category. There is always plenty in between the “majors” to keep us focused.

It is important that the dedication of our P&F in their support our projects, large and small, is again acknowledged, with the P&F Auxiliary leading from the front. It is a unique part of our Grammar culture. We are deeply in your debt.

My wife Hilary, who has patiently supported me through my 28 years as Chairman, is greatly relieved that I am content for these plans to be implemented by future Boards, and that this is the last speech day address she will have to endure. I am not leaving tomorrow, there are some things to put in place next year, but it is time to say thank you to everyone for your support. It has been a great privilege.

To the boys who are leaving, I trust you can see that there is much still to be done to keep your school great. In an era where pessimism has almost become fashionable in the media, academia, and politics, you must remain positive about your future. Your lives will inevitably take twists and turns, and will not follow a straight-line upward trend, but as Old Boy Matthew McLennan observed here two years ago, with the BGS motto front of mind, opportunities will present for you. You are ready to take them.

Do not forget where it all began, and come back when you are ready. Your school will still need you.

Thank you.