

## OSA President's Address 2020

The first thing that will strike any reader of *Past and Present*, either now or at some point in the future, is that this has been, by all accounts, a very unusual year. I fully expected to have handed over the reins to a new President at this stage, but the Old Scholars' Association has not been in a position to go about its normal business this year, and like many organisations, was unable to hold its AGM. So this is not the kind of address that normally appears in this publication: things are very much on hold until we emerge from the current crisis into something approaching normality.

The Old Scholars' Association exists to keep people in touch with one another, to reunite old acquaintances and to ensure that Friends' remains part of the lives of its former pupils. All this involves bringing people together, and it goes without saying that in a world where social distancing is *de rigueur* and where large gatherings are prohibited, it is very difficult to organise anything meaningful. We had high hopes for our events last year but, one by one, they fell away. Our annual quiz was a casualty; as was the dinner we had planned for the end of May in the magnificent setting of Riddel Hall. This was particularly disappointing, as we saw it as an opportunity to assemble a large crowd of Old Scholars, including some who had recently celebrated their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary since leaving school, for a fine evening's entertainment. But, as the Germans say, *aufgeschoben ist nicht aufgehoben*: while we might have had to postpone, we will not abandon hope just yet and, as soon as we can, we will revisit our plans. So all of the Old Scholars out there can be on standby and ready to sign up as soon as we are in a position to issue invitations.

I want us to spare a thought for our most recent cohort of Old Scholars, the class of 2020 as they are the first year group in living memory to have had their time at school cut short. It would have been unthinkable this time last year that exams would be cancelled and that pupils who would normally have been working towards the pinnacle of their achievements at school would suddenly have nothing left. It was a pity that they could not have enjoyed what turned out to be the long, sunny days of the summer term, the final assemblies and farewells, and Bible Sunday. Results day was peculiar, to say the least, and Speech Day was one of the early casualties of the new term. However, we haven't forgotten this year group, who made an enormous contribution to Friends' during their time here, and we look forward to having them back. Our Friends for Life database will allow us to keep in touch, and to invite them to Old Scholars events in the future.

Even if this is something of a hiatus, the need for a thriving Old Scholars network has never been more apparent. As we approach the milestone of our 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which will be celebrated in 2024-25, we want to strengthen our bonds with everyone for whom this is a special place and who has affection for their old school. I believe that Friends' School stays with people and becomes part of who they are, just as those who have left become part of the identity of the school. When face-to-face meetings and joyous gatherings once again feature in our lives, I hope that we can welcome back as many of you as possible and that Friends' pupils past and present can build a bright future together.

I hope that you enjoy perusing this year's edition of *Past and Present* and, when circumstances allow, you will always be assured of a warm welcome here.