



Chair's Dinner 2024

Chair, Aldermen, Masters, Honoured Guests, welcome to this wonderful summer evening. So lovely to be with you in this glorious space. I want to take you back first of all to another summer day in 1969. Anyone able to tell me what momentous global event took place in August 1969?

Yes, of course – you've got it! Absolutely right. Against all the odds in a miracle of technological and engineering ingenuity and industry.... City surveyors landed a building project on time!

And CLSG in the Barbican completed ready for the 1969 autumn term.

Yes, that giant leap for mankind occurred in August 1969: at the same time as the moon landing.

Perhaps lesser known is that at that very moment – I was taking one personal small step too – out of the womb (getting a bit crowded in there frankly – with my twin sister taking up all the room). As Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong did their thing my sister and I did ours and got born!

So I am exactly the same age as our beloved CLSG Barbican building ... we emerged into the world together and I am therefore well placed to know how in need of costly upkeep a creaky 54 year old can be!

But the need for continual maintenance is not where the similarity between us ends.

The moon landing, me, and CLSG in the Barbi. We're all creations of the 60s!

Because as the astronauts were finding they could pioneer in space, CLSG was 'finding space to pioneer' in the Barbican as it continues to do today. The building was indeed pioneering; it was the first building out of the rubble of the 2nd world war bombing – before the resident blocks grew up around it; and long before its beautiful neighbour: the Barbican Arts Centre

appeared, the CLSG building stood as a brave testament to the future, or specifically at the time the futures of about 500 or so girls.

It was a bold expression of the 60s not just in its flat-roofed, brutalist architecture, but in its internal design. Unlike nearly all schools then and many still, its learning was not separated by age groups, but by subjects so that year 7s (Upper 3rds as they were known then) mingled in the corridors freely with Sixth formers. In this radical 1960s flattening of hierarchy it said something important about values that CLSG has always held and still does; a commitment to unstuffiness and equality is part of what it means to be a City school.

The 60s were also all about championing aspiration and social mobility. Certainly the case for me. My siblings and I were children of first- generation university educated English teachers, and we all received bursaries to go to our independent schools. It had a profound impact on us – and significantly shaped our lives. Bursaries have been at the core of CLSG's ethos and education from the very start: the first bursary being awarded a year after its foundation. They are fundamental to what we are. We could not be prouder of the scope of our bursary programme, of the fact that 15% of our pupils receive a transformational bursary.

We will shortly hear from an alumna, Sarah O Keefe – now a barrister of Gray's Inn and Brick Court chambers to share with you her CLSG bursary experience. We are grateful that bursaries have been generously supported by the Corporation in the past and continue to be by our friends and partners in the livery companies, and by a committed and hugely generous community within the school: alumnae, staff, governors, pupils, and crucially parents. How amazing that over 30% of our parent body have given to the bursary fund last year! Many of you are here today – THANK YOU.

I am humbled by this level of engagement. Truly, to put it in perspective, many august and much grander public schools who have had development running for decades, if not centuries, cannot boast such a figure. CLSG parents in huge numbers are philanthropic according to their means. It says so much about the commonality of vision: they, we, understand the way in which the City has always had social mobility at its core.

Schools, one could argue, are intrinsically rooted in the belief that people can and should improve themselves; acquire learning that will enable them to move beyond whatever their starting limitations. It's an obvious point,

perhaps, but it bears repetition, how lucky we are to be supported by an institution- the Corporation –that has long been wedded to that notion. The City has been the landing point for refugees, or exiles, or those seeking a better life from time immemorial. It is full of resourceful people, starting again, reinventing themselves, building new lives. The school honours that now, as it did, when it emerged from the ashes of second world war rubble in 1969.

I have mentioned my twin sister, but I also, like the school, have a brother. At the risk of stretching this metaphor, CLSG and CLS enjoy the sibling fellowship and sometimes rivalry that my brother and I might recognise, but through it all, remain the best of friends: with shared values, shared ambitions, shared space!

With our 2024 musical in mind, the ‘guys and dolls’ of this part of London have the best of both worlds: the breadth of resources and projects that close educational union and philosophical alignment can provide. The genetic engineering competition, IGEM for example, the sponsored walk (or crazy sprint Thameside as the CLS year 7s might brand it as they bolt along the towpath trying to cross the line first!), our joint choir singing in the Salle Gaveau in Paris etc, but they also enjoy plenty of single-sex time and space where they can just be.

Closer than we have ever been, the schools’ respective senior teams are now working together to carve an entirely aligned timetable between the schools to enable the potential for shared learning more easily from September 2025. We’re also delighted that the shared professional services model where both schools benefit from sharing operations has proved so successful under John Hall’s skilled leadership.

As we know, so much of what that day in August 1969 was about, came down to teamwork – both in Florida NASA HQ and incidentally in Barnet General hospital – there was a large team of medics in the room for my birth, since Jane and I were in a hurry and 9 weeks early. Family anecdote had it though that the doctors kept nipping out of the room at key moments so they could keep up with the moon landing.

What we celebrate here comes down to learning with and from others. To sharing resources and building resourcefulness through the excitement of collaboration and partnership. To give just one recent example of our huge partnership programme: what a joy it was last term to host over 400 pupils

from across the family of schools in the guildhall for a conference titled: Re-imagining the future! Well they did and I'm delighted to report that the future's bright in their hands.

There are few things more powerful than a community working with joint purpose and behind vision and values that matter. This is what we are most proud of in the end at CLSG. The acts of kindness, of selflessness that typify the ways in which all our staff go about their daily working lives to help our pupils learn and grow and thrive. It's the All that makes it happen. I'm reminded of that great tale of JFK's visit to NASA when he met a janitor who was carrying a broom down the hallway. The President casually asked the janitor what he did for NASA, and the janitor replied, "I'm helping put a man on the moon." Mobilising the collective power of everyone in our school in all their different, vital roles make it all come together.

Finding ways to reach each and every one of our pupils takes imagination and care and I cannot tell you how lucky we are that we have staff so committed to doing just that. They show up and they serve – every single day..

So our past 130 years deserve the celebration they get today and I am so grateful to so many in this room for all they do to build this beautiful, exciting, kind school, which is accessible to so many through its ambitious bursary programme. But things don't stay still; as the ex Barbican Chair, Tom Sleigh, who gives sensational speeches by the way – I really recommend them to you, quoted from *The Leopard* in his address earlier this year;

'if we want everything to stay the same, everything must change'. To guard the spirit, the values, the fabric of CLSG requires agility and determination to change what we must!

Fortunately the school and the Corporation working together have that in spades! With something of the spirit that carved out a new residential, culture and education quarter in the Barbican in the most challenging of post-war moments, the school's governance continues to think with future-focused ambition.

We are so pleased that today's Eagle has finally landed – and the sixth form will move into the educational wing of the museum of London in September. Did you know that Neil Armstrong at the last minute had to take the manual controls on the final descent onto the moon's surface because the module

was heading for a boulder field? With only 30 seconds of fuel left they landed! There have been occasional City boulders but the quick thinking and courage of our Chair: Robert Howard, of Peter Bennett, of our Board and others:- Chris Hayward, Keith Bottomley, Paul Wilkinson and Peter Young, Michael Snyder, Shravan Joshi not to mention the vision and hospitality of Sharon Ament at the Museum – our very own NASA experts if you will, - their efforts meant our particular space mission has kept on track.

They do a great job. Often stepping up at very short notice, like the Chief Commoner, Ann Holmes, who looked after things so nobly as Chair last year. We thank her and all our governors for their able and thoughtful support and oversight. We also today remember governor and member for Aldgate, Mr Mark Bostock, who died in the autumn, for his very warm and thoughtful support of the school and his championing of our space requirements and of STEM in the school for which he was link governor.

He would have certainly approved of our recent breakthrough. And if the temporary acquisition of the unused museum of London building could be called magpie pragmatism by some, it is a matter of much pride that the Corporation recognised the desirability of such beautiful and accessible educational learning space, which is right on our doorstep. I promise you we will use that new space well; we will cherish and enjoy CLSG Museum wing for as long as we have it.

So just like the move of CLSG prep into its wonderful new co-educational home at Gray's Inn last year, the Museum of London sixth form refurbishment is future-focused in its sustainable re-use of existing assets. Another charming fact about Neil Armstrong's minutes on the moon is this: as the first human to view the Earth from the Moon, he held up his thumb and blocked the Earth from his view. He said afterwards that it made him realise how beautiful, precious and vulnerable his home planet was and how he wanted to do more to preserve it.

We know that finding ways to be sustainable and the drive to net zero is a way in which we must be pioneering. It is a driver that our pupils feel acutely and will be active in keeping at the forefront of all our thinking.

The borrowing of this vacant space also marks the beginning of the Corporation addressing the inequity which has grown up in the resourcing of the education of boys in the City, compared to girls. I make no apologies

for sharing again that startling statistic, which most of you have heard from me before: but take a moment with this: every pupil at CLS currently has 50% more space and nearly £1K more per annum from the Corporation than his peers at CLSG. Our joint mission will not end until this is no longer the case. And it is a matter of profound relief, to me personally, and I know to our whole community, that whatever might have been the feeling towards such gender inequality in 1969, the Corporation assuredly does not subscribe to it now. The work's not done, but they are on the case and we are grateful.

As Wittgenstein reminds us 'to teach is to work for a future you'll never see'. There are vast shifts on this planet: geo-political division, war and unrest, a climate crisis...; and the 'moon's untroubled dust' [as Heaney puts it] watches it all. Neither the lunar explorers, nor those City pioneers could possibly have foretold what the world would look like over 50 years later. There are challenges ahead for all schools, it's easy to get lost in VAT-laden, AI-looming chasms. Schools are going to be asked to do more with less. There are vast shifts challenging our thinking in almost all realms of life.

But whenever I am in the company of our amazing pupils (some of whom I am delighted are here tonight) I know it's going to be alright. We know who they are. They know who they are. They know how to value themselves. How to make a difference and how to stand in front of their values and fight for them. They will have an anchor here in the heart of the City all their lives.

So I am profoundly grateful that I was born on that hot, intensely exciting, day in August 1969 when two very different new frontiers opened. We honour the pioneering founders of CLSG who felt in 1894 that girls were as entitled to education as boys. We are thankful for the vision of those that allowed us to grow into the Barbican and just as grateful now for the vision of those who will allow us to grow beyond it.

Amid a lot of seismic change, some things hold true and steadfast. CLSG is one of them because of the fellowship, love and support of the people in this room.

May I therefore ask our CLSG staff and members to join me in a toast to 'our guests'.