

President's speech 2026

Thank you everyone for attending the AGM

This year I have had time to reflect whilst being laid up ill at home and having my three weeks stay in a hospital bed being administered to by many former pupils, petrified that it was pay-back time for all those detentions and tellings off. The surgeon did say that when I said that one of his team was taught by me there was a glint in the former pupil's eye. When you are given a choice of having an operation or possibly 2 months to live you quickly make your mind up. It is in these times and the frequent visits to the school that memories meet me like an old friend. Within the school there is the echo of the past generations of pupils and staff which lingers with you long after you leave. It was said that you know when you are going to like Baines when you first enter the building – and it was the same with me. The school is steeped with tradition and community. A community that has shaped both the lives and hearts of the pupils and the staff.

This year marks a milestone in the history of the Former Pupils Association; its 120th year. The Association was founded in 1906 by the 'Father' of the school Thomas Davies Whittington who did a great deal to shape the school that we see today. He created the name of the school, motto, the uniform, the school song, speech day, Poultonian and the FPA to name but a few. He had an image of school life that involved the pupils solving their own problems. He was the man that created the Family of Baines, possibly because the school then had the Headteacher and his family living here and the boarders. He was also the man that influenced education and created 'Outdoor Education' in its fullest form. His influence still reigns today not only in Baines but across the whole of education in the UK.

I was looking back in the Poultonians and in the report of the 6th AGM it was stated that the meeting discussed the Intelligence Bureau – where former pupils gave advice to school leavers on the careers they wanted. We still do this. Baines is a place where backgrounds may differ but where belonging is shared and where the pupils are all part of the same family.

I feel that the first 120 years is going to be easier to manage than the next few years. We are at a turning point in the Association, none of us is getting any younger and I feel that in order for the FPA to survive it needs to look closely at itself. We are now living in a society where social media is King, where physical socialising is frowned upon. I have battled for 2 years with Cambridge to have a face to face meeting with my staff – I have just got it.

When I became President I had two aims, both of which are ongoing. A president usually lasts one year and in that time little I feel can be achieved but having had several years I can make an influence and trial new ideas. The first aim was to allow members of the FPA, school and the newly formed Alumni to keep in touch, remember it was in Covid – this has been achieved with the help of the newsletter and the website but this year my aim is to develop this even more to match changes in society. Also the writing of the newsletter and adding to the website is a one man

job. When someone states that I have made a spelling mistake they are not keen on helping to spell check.

So what of the 2026/7 Presidency

This year has been a year of Family, achievement and history. When you walk into the school now you will see several displays of some of the archive that the FPA keep for the school. There is the James Baines last Will and testament back in place in the school and the designs for the old school. We need to preserve our history and pass it onto the next generation. This is a unique school it has been everything mixed, single sex, comprehensive, grant maintained, voluntary aided. A display set up by the FPA to show the school's history but there is no mention of the FPA. In fact there is no mention of the FPA in school.

For far too long the Association has quietly been a part of the school. Beavering away in the background, I feel that very few pupils and staff know of its existence or history. This could seal our fate and be our deathnell. We have increased the numbers with all the school leavers being admitted into the FPA but it is not enough. We need to be seen to be out there. We need to be part of the school – our presence needs to be felt. The school needs to see what the Former Pupils can do for them, not just in monetary terms but in skills. I live up to the old Yorkshire motto – Quantum?

A lot has been achieved in the background over the past few years. Did you know that every boy and member of staff that fought in WWI has had their history documented? Do you know where that document is? A document that could be used for history lessons, Remembrance day and even genealogy. This is the time when the family of Baines needs to come together as one. We need a higher profile in the school and the school needs to acknowledge the FPA.

This year my aim is to strengthen the ties between the school and the Association to ensure that the pupils and staff of today know of the Association and can draw kinship and strength from it. 120 years ago T D Whittington was the Headmaster of the school and therefore was part of the school on a daily basis, the FPA was therefore entrenched in the school. During the World Wars the former pupils kept in touch with the school and the school with them. Times have changed the FPA have changed and the FPA is a mere memory. We need to go back to first principles and raise its profile.

My second aim is to ensure the FPA survives. When I became President I was told the FPA had 5 years to survive – I want it to live longer than that. Therefore a lot of work needs to be done to ensure that the seeds can be sown for its survival.

This past year we have had a number of events, the Annual Gathering which will continue even though numbers are small. Years ago present staff of the school were invited to attend this event, but no one does now. Is that due to the fact that they are not invited by the school. We also had successful lunches at the Singleton Lodge,

one in Midsummer and one at Christmas – numbers are healthy for these. We also had a really good BBQ hosted by the Bambers. All these events will occur this year.

This year as in previous years the FPA have donated money to worthy causes in the school. Two pupils in the school received a donation from the FPA and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award in the school asked for and received money for camping equipment. I also know that former pupils have helped with career placements and members of the FPA attended the Speech Night.

I would like to thank a number of people that have helped over the past year. The committee members for their help and support. I would also like to thank Claire Docherty the headteacher of the school and her school staff. I would like to thank Paul Bamber for his great help and support.

An exciting year ahead

David