



HEADMASTER FRANK POWELL

Ladies and gentlemen.

Last Wednesday marked the centenary of my father's birth.

It occurred to me, when preparing for today, that some of you may not know my father, founded Runnymede College.

My father, Arthur Powell, was born on June 5th, 1924, in New Malden, Surrey.

His father was a Metropolitan Police Magistrate and his mother a housewife. He had two older siblings.

He was educated at King's College, Wimbledon. During his last year at school, the Second World War broke out. Being too young to enlist, he went to Wimbledon College of Art to study painting and drawing for two years and studied the piano under the supervision of his uncle.

He enlisted in the Royal Air Force in 1939 and went on to serve in the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm. He was then sent for safe training in the USA, where he earned his third set of wings in USN.

After the war, he went to university at SSEES in London University, where he studied Russian and History.

During that time, he joined the Communist Party of Great Britain.

When war broke out in Korea in 1950, he sought to return to USN as a pilot, but was turned down. He always suspected that was a consequence of his time in the Communist Party.

In the 1950s my father worked as a language teacher for the British Council in Italy, France and, eventually, Spain, where he met my mother.

Arthur and Julia, my mother, were married in London at our Lady of Victories in April 1957. My father agreed to raise his children in the Catholic Faith, despite being agnostic, and my mother renounced her Spanish nationality, when made to choose between being Spanish and British.

They moved to Italy, where they lived for two years. I was born in Naples in 1958. Whether that had anything to do with my father's favourite place in the world being Naples, is something I have never known.

My parents returned to Spain in 1960. My father worked in a language institute where aspiring diplomats studied English in preparation for the "oposiciones".



Simultaneously, he worked as a teacher of English on Italian radio, spending much of most summers in Genoa recording lessons which were then broadcast over the year.

At that time, my brother and I were enrolled in a British primary school in Madrid called Numont. As I approached the end of my time there, my parents considered various options for my secondary education: boarding school in England; a liberal school in Spain (the Ramiro de Maeztu, was short listed, I seem to remember) and the British Council School.

Boarding school got the thumbs down from my mother; the Ramiro was only as liberal as any school in Spain could be at that time so I ended up at the British Council School in September 1966.

Because I was the only English-speaking pupil in my class, at the British Council School, my English deteriorated rapidly; boys and girls played in separate playgrounds and we were taught Formación del Espíritu Nacional and the words of a song called "Cara al Sol". By January 1967, I was back at Numont.

Runnymede opened in September 1967, with forty pupils in a charming but totally inadequate house near Plaza del Perú. Spaniards were not allowed to enrol in foreign schools so all the pupils were foreign.

My father was not an entrepreneur and Runnymede was not a startup.

He was an idealist who wanted to create a space presided over by the love of learning; where he could share his passion for art, music and sport.

He was driven by undying respect for the beliefs and values of others; this was one of the defining features of his personality, and it explains his visceral dislike of racism, xenophobia, chauvinism and distinctions based on social status.

In my father's mind, Runnymede was akin to an island where children would learn to reject the things he founds so loathsome but always subordinating judgement to knowledge and understanding.

My father was not particularly good at school; the idea that he had to accept things at face value, without understanding them, did not sit well with him.

He was more interested in abstract ideas than the content of a very academic curriculum. This lack of enthusiasm for school did not make him popular with his teachers, with whom he was frequently at odds; I trace his sympathy for the pupils at Runnymede who were habitually in trouble to this time.

His main interest was in the history of philosophical thought and religious beliefs. He was intrigued by the fact that religious beliefs have inspired much of the best music and architecture ever produced by man.



Arthur was a prolific writer of essays and articles throughout his life. During his time at LSE, he wrote under the Russified pseudonym “Arthur Paulus”. Several of his articles were published in the Daily Worker.

He had copious notes for the book he never wrote: “The Quest for the Historical Jesus”. Ortega y Gasset’s death in 1955 moved him to write an extensive critique of the liberal, republican thinker’s main works.

In time Arthur recognised he was not to be a writer but a teacher of English. Ironically, it was then that he started writing. He published a manual for English teachers and a course which became extensively used in Italy. The meagre fees he earned from this, he invested in setting up the school in 1967.

My father loved Spain.

He loved the blue skies of Madrid; swimming in the Mediterranean and skiing in Formigal, where his ashes were scattered.

He loved bull-fighting and, like with so many of the things he was interested in, his approach was scholarly and he became an expert. I have happy memories of afternoons in Las Ventas with my parents.

As a professional linguist, the variety of tongues spoken in Spain seemed a treasure trove to him. He always travelled to Genoa by ferry from Barcelona where he would deliberately stay overnight so he could buy local papers and speak Catalan.

He celebrated the Constitution of '78. He was moved seeing King Juan Carlos, bringing old foes like Manuel Fraga and Santiago Carrillo around the same table.

This year we have been prolific.

The Prep School opened in September with its twin objectives of raising academic standards through specialised teaching and protecting and prolonging child-hood by keeping pupils up to Year 8 in a school of their own. The school has its own Head, the famous Mr Ducan Bailey and, in due course will have its own dedicated staff. In the last eleven months we have put up a magnificent new building which will house the Prep School from September.

We have also put up a building which, I have to confess, is the apple of my eye: the library. A beautiful temple of scholarship and bookishness made of wood, glass and stone. The library will be dedicated to the memory of Frank Murphy, Deputy Headmaster of Runnymede for several decades who died suddenly last August.

This summer will see the disappearance of the prefabricated building which went up in 1997.

In the Summer of 2025 we will be adding the brooch to our refurbished facilities with sports facilities on what is now the top playground.



I have set up a charitable foundation, Fundación Runnymede College, the object of which is to take Anglo Saxon education to children whose parents cannot afford it. We have come to an agreement with the Ayuntamiento de Alcobendas, whereby we shall select a pupil on merit, from one of the IES in the municipality. The selected pupil will receive full support from the Fundación in applying to university in the UK. Fees will be paid by the Fundación.

Our guest speaker today does not need much introduction from me. In fact, I have noticed in the last few weeks, that if one says “Cayetana will be presiding over our prize giving this year”, everyone knows exactly who “Cayetana” is.

I am delighted Dr Alvarez de Toledo, accepted my invitation to be with us this morning and to give away our academic prizes.

Dr Alvarez de Toledo is cosmopolitan; she has a brilliant academic track record having studied history at Oxford and then done her doctorate at the same university; she is perfectly trilingual; she is highly principled and is rightly famous for expressing herself with clarity and robustness. She is courageous in a way very few people in her position are and, above all, she is a mother.