

Edmund Craston Exhibition Speech 23 May 2026

Pupils, members of staff, parents

It's my pleasure as Chair of Governors to welcome you all here to Exhibition this morning.

I calculated that this is roughly my 25th Exhibition and one thing I've learned from those 25 Exhibitions is that the speech of the Chair of Governors is not what you've come for.

I've also learned that the difference between poor weather and fine weather at Exhibition makes the difference between a good one and a truly excellent one and I'm delighted that I think we'll see the valley and the College at its best today.

I'm not going to talk to you now about the Governors' ambitions for the College – though of course rest assured that it's that we keep striving for excellence in all that we do here. Instead, because it's my first speech as Chair of Governors, I wanted to make a few more personal reflections as a way of introducing myself.

A number of people have asked me – in fact I've asked myself - why take on the responsibility as Chair of Governors of a school. In my case ultimately it's because of my great love for and belief in this place. And that comes I suppose from a long family connection. I am an Old Amplefordian -although actually I've decided I don't really like the term 'old' Amplefordian; I think Amplefordian is a much better one. I'm the brother of Amplefordians, the grandson of an Amplefordian, nephew of Amplefordians, father of Amplefordians, uncle of Amplefordians, and even (I'm not sure I ever expected to say this) the father in law of an Amplefordian. And maybe one day I hope to be a grandfather of Amplefordians.

So that is obviously one reason why I took on this role. But I think actually on reflection the greatest reason I did it was a strange sense of duty to my late mother. Out of all those people I've mentioned she obviously was not an Amplefordian because in the 1940's the school did not accept girls. But I don't think there is a single member of my family more committed to this place than her. She absolutely lived and breathed Ampleforth. She ran the parents association here for 10 years, tirelessly really. And I'm sure all the mothers

here will be delighted to know when I say that my mother died 30 years ago, and still now I am striving to do what would make her happy.

Now some of you may have been here last year and heard Lord Fellowes' excellent speech. I'm afraid I can't match Lord Fellowes' eloquence - and I have one fewer Oscars than him and two fewer Emmy awards as well.

He said that there isn't really an Ampleforth type – and he was contrasting that with Etonians and Wykehamists and said you can spot them a mile off. And he rightly pointed out that the great strength of Ampleforth is that it allows all pupils here to find their own talents and flourish in a whole range of different areas and fit in together - or (to use a more modern expression which I'm sure he didn't use) to develop into the best version of themselves. And I can tell you that I know so many Amplefordians of all generations who are proof of that.

But I don't entirely agree with Lord Fellowes. There may not be an Ampleforth *type* but there is definitely an Ampleforth *quality*. The school has changed enormously and evolved over the years I've known it and I strongly believe - I have seen it - that most Amplefordians of all generations have a sort of decency, a charm, a kindness, and a set of VALUES centred on respect and care for others. And believe me also when you meet non Amplefordians who encounter Amplefordians it's amazing how often they comment on that.

And I perceive that precious quality is manifested in a sense of Community - not a sense of entitlement or a sense of self centredness that could, let's face it, easily accompany a privileged education. I think it is an ability to live with and respect your fellows in the community with you - and I think experiencing that creates a lasting ability to fit in with people and circumstances of all sorts

If you'll just indulge me for a couple more minutes, there is a reason why being here today reminds me forcefully of a really major example of this and the power of the Ampleforth community at work.

Three years ago during Exhibition my youngest daughter was critically ill in hospital in Bali. This was just a year after leaving Shac at an Exhibition just like this. The prayers and the moral support which my family received from everyone within the school, and from the vast network of people we knew who had a connection with the school – it was palpable and a massive comfort.

She was travelling in Bali with a group of OAs and that group with her were amazing – I went out there and I saw them at work. And then there were three so called ‘grown ups’. They were introduced to us and provided selfless and really unbelievable practical support at that dreadful time. All three of those people were mobilised and found by the wider Ampleforth community even though they were complete strangers to us.

Now happily my daughter recovered – she’s actually here today – and has just completed her studies at Durham. Believe me she’s not here today to hear me. She’s here today because she values this place, and an opportunity to come and visit again means so much to her.

So I want to thank you and all the other parents for choosing Ampleforth ahead of other schools; and we the Governors appreciate the commitment and the sacrifice that is needed to pay for an independent education today. So thank you.

In addition to supporting us in that way you can be huge advocates for us. And that is what I ask of you: please spread the word about the differentiated – in fact I would say special - education that is offered here, today, in this Valley.

So that’s enough of that - back to today. Let’s now celebrate the vast range of talents and achievements that today’s Amplefordians are delivering in so many fields.

Thank you very much.