PARRAMATTA HIGH SCHOOL
CENTENARY CELEBRATION DINNER
Saturday 28 September 2013
Grand Pavilion Rosehill Gardens

KEYNOTE SPEECH

‘A CENTURY TO REMEMBER’

Emeritus Professor Stephen Hill, AM

INTRODUCTION

Mr Steve Blander, Master of Ceremonies
Distinguished Invited Guests
Ms Pinar Akin, School Captain: my fellow speaker
Ms Domonique Splatt, Principal
Teachers, the heart and inspiration of the School
Fellow Graduates from Parramatta High School and friends from the Community
Ladies and Gentlemen

Our Foundation

‘Fax Mentis Incendium Gloriae’: The Torch of the Mind Lights the Path to Glory?

…… the motto for Parramatta High School chosen in 1915 by W.L. “Tommy” Atkins, Founder and first Principle of ‘The School on the Hill that Stands by the Great Highway’.

Atkins’ nickname, ‘Tommy’, was fondly assigned by the students from a Rudyard Kipling Poem, ‘Tommy’ – referring to the nickname that had become associated with Privates in the British Army since 1815:
“O it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Tommy, go away";
But it's "Thank you, Mister Atkins", when the band begins to play. ”

Whilst obviously descriptive of location, at the same time the image of our ‘school on the hill’ by the ‘great highway' is important. The ‘Hill’ represents vision – indeed in those days, right to the GPO in Central Sydney; the ‘Great Highway' can well represent the 'path to the future'?...in real terms, the path from the city out to the mountains and wider country of Australia.

The School opened its doors to 190 students in hired premises in Macquarie Street, Parramatta on 28\(^{th}\) January 2013. A year later construction commenced at the present site, then, a disused shale quarry.

The 'Phoenix' a bird flying out of the ashes, the symbol of the School Magazine, is entirely appropriate.

And, our Foundation Year, 1913, was also when Canberra, our nation's capital, was founded. They filled the city with politicians and road roundabouts. We focused in our School on progressive education and forward direction.

To introduce my Address, ‘A Century to Remember’ I will return first to our Foundation in 1913 and the wisdom contained in both the symbolism of what Parramatta High School represented, and the founding values of Tommy Atkins. For it is here that the character of the School and our future was forged to this day.

**Core Symbols: Our School Badge**

The School Badge, designed in 1915 at the same time as the motto, then tells even more, in this case about the School’s location in Parramatta – ‘rich in food’, ‘head of the waters’, or ‘the place where the eels lie down’ according to the Darug Indigenous Peoples’ name, ‘Barramatta’. The Badge shows an indigenous man fishing – presumably, at this head of river where salt and fresh waters mixed, for eels.

The City of Parramatta was established by Governor Arthur Phillip as the 'Garden for Sydney', on 2\(^{nd}\) November 1788, the same year as Sydney was founded. It is the oldest inland development of Australia. Appropriately, and in line with the Darug name, Parramatta is home to the National Football League 'Eels' today – though, it must be admitted that at our High School, soccer was the game of choice in our early days.
Already, direct association of our School with two of the most significant moments in Australian history – original settlement and foundation of our national capital.

What is perhaps more important is what else is there. A ‘badge’ is a collection of important symbols. The fisherman is accompanied by an indigenous woman in the canoe – gender equity – and the indigenous canoe is balanced against a white-person’s schooner on the horizon – admitting both immigrants and our indigenous legacy into Australia’s multiculturalism.

**Core Symbols: Our School Motto - The Flame of Inspiration**

Going back to the original Latin, ‘Tommy’s' particular teaching expertise, ‘fire’ can mean ‘passion’; and ‘glory’ equally means ‘ambition’, or ‘drive to achieve’. Inspiring words for right now, 100 years later, the year 2013.

Through a history of often difficult conditions, adversity and challenge the flame of our motto stayed alight – through World War I, the subsequent 1919 Spanish Influenza Epidemic, the 1930s Depression, World War II, the 1982 Fire that burnt out the main School Building ….. and, continuously inadequate resourcing – right up to today.

The flame stayed alive even in spite of the late 1950s exuberance and rule-testing adventures of my own Graduating Class of 1960 – 30 of whom are here tonight – very much due to the inspiring attention to bringing our group together and fostering our sharing of experiences by Bob Porter, School Captain of 1960 – also here tonight.

Eunice Davies, writing about the school in its earliest years characterized well the Parramatta High School values, and what the flame meant:

> "It is sometimes true, and I think in the case of Parramatta High School this was exemplified, that difficult conditions and adversity give a challenge which calls for more loyalty and co-operation than would softer conditions, where routine is already well ordered. Its goal was clouded by poor environment and diversity of material. Its staff and pupils were pioneering a new realm."

And the most important bit:

> "Its light was not one strong torch steadily lighting the way onward, to unity of purpose, but many small candles, striving to come together to create consciously
or not, a strong beam which would light the way to great achievement..."

**Tommy’s Vision**

As reflected in Eunice Davies’ observation, Tommy Atkins’ central vision was of the power of the individual – nurturing each individual flame of an inspired student.

Tommy was committed to developing the character of the students, not institutional ‘performance indicators’ or of ‘wins achieved’. He was often heard saying, “The result of the game is not important: It is playing in the right spirit that counts.”

‘Tommy’ Atkins remained as Headmaster until his retirement in 1933. Twenty years cementing Parramatta High School’s core values into place.

Atkins was a visionary in many ways.

He fought, whilst previously in charge of the Parramatta District School for the creation of the High School, seeing it as ‘The Oxford of Australia’, hence the Oxbridge shades of blue in the school uniform, in other words, a school committed to excellence.

He saw the need for a high school in Western Sydney – drawing students in from as far as the Blue Mountains, Mittagong and Richmond. He saw the need for equity in educational access – EGALITARIANISM.

Tommy’s vision saw gender equity.

Parramatta High School was the first Co-educational High School in NSW.

Whilst girls were Prefects, they did not become School Captains until after 1920. BUT, girls came Dux of the School for the first four years. Opportunity realized.

Of course, given that this was the early 20th Century, a number of subsequent Principles, and also, disciplinarian female teachers up until the 1950s, did wish to keep the sexes separated, and female uniforms particularly discouraging to male interest, for fear of what could happen.
Most notable was Acting Headmaster ‘Snakey’ Porter in the 1940s who, according to his Rule No. 3, ‘The females will not fraternize with the males’, segregated boys from girls across his imaginary 1943 ‘Porter Line’ down the middle of the Quadrangle. Students took appropriate revolutionary action and late at night painted the line with ‘does’ one side and ‘bucks’ the other – leading to media attention and a force for change. Under ‘Snakey’ even the gender-separated staff rooms were located at opposite ends of the school.

A sense of gender balance followed however after Snakey left for a continuing career at Katoomba High School, presumably carrying to the mountains his fear of teenage boys and girls consorting, and letting Parramatta get back to the core value set in place by Tommy, equal opportunity.

Tommy’s Vision saw the School not as a group of buildings, a few teachers and a place for the kids to spend time while the parents have a break. Instead it is a community, a central part of our whole society.

Based on an initiative under his leadership of the Parramatta District School in 1912, Tommy brought the State’s first Parents and Citizens Association into Parramatta High School in its first year, 1913.

This wider view of the interaction between school and wider community in education is very important.

One of my responsibilities in my previous role in the United Nations was to develop education throughout the Asian countries for which I was responsible as Regional Director and Ambassador of the UN Agency, UNESCO. In the midst of the 1997 economic crisis for Asia in general, and Indonesia in particular, I took a mission of other UN Heads of Agencies out to the very poorest villages in Indonesia to see what was happening and what mattered.

Again and again, the people told me that they wanted to keep their kids in school – and they were doing anything, anything ….. to keep them there. But ‘school’ for them was a strange ‘other’ world, perhaps like ‘universities’ are for many here who have not been there, and the ‘diplomatic world’ is for the majority. To cut a long story short, I developed a program to bring the community into schooling – not by inviting them to meetings, but training ’them to help, getting Principals to show the locals what was happening on a whiteboard, opening up the classroom to
creative engagement …. and, working with government to decentralize all basic education across the nation. My initial investment of $(US)150,000 grew from international donors to $(US)80 million with programs run through a variety of cooperating agencies, and secured a full commitment from government. I eventually had my own UN team working inside the Education Ministry, directly alongside and with the officials. The program spread as a grass fire because of community interest that demanded it. We decentralized and transformed the entire basic education for 42 million children in Indonesia, and then spread the idea to the war zones of Mindanao in the Southern Philippines.

At heart was the power of the wider school local community!

Tommy Atkins set this principle in motion 100 years ago.

Perhaps most importantly of all, as I observed earlier, Tommy Atkins’ concern was always with the interests of the individual pupil, not the ‘system’ or Tommy’s own career within it.

Tommy Atkins therefore laid an extraordinarily strong foundation stone of values for our entire 100 year history.

Our ‘School on the Hill’ really was a School on the Hill. It embodied VISION!

A HISTORY TO BE REMEMBERED

I clearly do not have time to honor the entire 100 year history of this School, for example, the extraordinary influence of a much loved teacher then Principle, Jack Freeman, during my own time – his son, Harry, a member of my own 1960s class, is here tonight.

Instead of presenting even a summary of our history, I refer you to the historic accounts of our School developed by Deputy Principle Paul Taylor – highly professional and totally accessible, both in his book, ‘A Goodly Company’, and the History Website he has established. I have drawn deeply from this pool tonight.

My point is to demonstrate that the essence of success of Parramatta High School is no accident. It derives from our founding values.
Those Who Inspired

Teachers stand at the threshold of young lives and place a firm stamp on the students’ future. We all remember this experience – even 50 years later.

I talked with my own ex-classmates a few months ago.

All remembered a few negative or ambiguous 'classics' usually accompanied through the ages by appropriate nicknames– ‘Soapy’, ‘Bruiser’, ‘Bullswool’, ‘Convict 99’, ‘Gargoyle’, ‘Squizzy’, …. 'Bugs’ – in this case, a Latin teacher in the 1920s who taught onomatopoeia through yodeling! Of course, from the 1940s to the 1960s, there was physical education teacher, 'Nicho’, fondly regarded by students in spite of his penchant for liberal use of the cane, who would ask a girl a question then cane a boy if she got it wrong! A unique face of cross-gender responsibility!

BUT, many of my ex-classmates said they had been inspired by a particular teacher's commitment to knowledge, compassion, or life enriching values. Particularly, ‘life-enriching values’.

Two examples from our history:

'Rose' Macauley, German Teacher in the 1930s had a blind student, George Best. She brailled George’s text books, read him his English and History texts, taught him to paint chairs, work in the garden, and even took him to the pictures!

Science teacher in the 1980s, Mr Adams, an Irishman, whose motto for field trips with a particular slant of Gaelic humor was, “always walk in front of your students, so that you can trample on any specimens you don't recognize”.

Not only the teachers, but from the community of the school itself, some outstanding individual students – not only in excellence in sports or the classroom, but in the way they were already constructing their lives
There are many. I will mention just one:

Jack Segal, Parramatta High School student from 1942 to 1944 – a time of tight war time rationing of meat, lived in and commuted every day from Wilton. At weekends he trapped rabbits, sold the skins to fur and hat manufacturers, and on Monday mornings took rabbit carcases to school. He had already soaked them overnight in salty water and vinegar to remove the gamey smell. He sold the
carcases to the tuck shop proprietor in return for ham rolls, chester cakes and fizzy drinks. Rabbits for lollies. A student with a firm entrepreneurial future!

**Some Famous Products**

We have had a rich collection of quite famous graduates over the years, people who have been inspired with the ‘passion' to ‘achieve'.

There are many, so I have to be highly selective. So, please forgive me for those who I miss out.

For example,

*1940s: Rod Taylor*: a great all rounder and athlete at school - went on to East Sydney Tech and became a commercial artist, but then was *inspired* by Sir Laurence Olivier in an Old Vic Touring Production and became a famous Hollywood actor. His schooling at Parramatta High *prepared* him to be inspired.

*1940s – 1950s: Richie Benaud* – who, but for arriving back *today* from Europe, would have been here tonight. Even in First Year he was playing 1st Grade cricket, as was his younger brother, John – a classmate of mine. Richie was playing in the NSW Second Eleven before he finished school. Richie’s (and John’s) cricket careers are legends.

Then we have Harry Hopman, tennis, Ted Noffs, founder of the Sydney inner city church mission for the homeless and troubled, Philip Chapman, the first Australian-born American Apollo Astronaut. Plus, many more, including Donald Horne, the author.

Perhaps the one person from the 1920s that you may not recognize, one of our greatest, was *John William Pilbean Gofpage*.

There is a clue in the nickname. The kids in the playground called him, ‘Chips’. Chips Rafferty became the living symbol of the typical Australian. After leaving school he became an opal miner, sheep shearer, drover, airman, pearl diver, and ended up managing a wine cellar in Bond Street, Sydney. Then, in 1938, he made his first movie, ‘Ants in His Pants’. Not memorable. But he moved on….. to *The Overlanders*, *Wake in Fright*, and many more

**Our Real Success – our Graduates**

These guys are only the most visible top of a heap.
Parramatta High School produced 4,000 graduates even before Tommy Atkins retired. Today, there are hundreds of thousands of Parramatta High School graduates who have contributed to every aspect of Australia’s life, values and development.

What is most important though is the role Parramatta High School played in their lives and ‘passion to achieve’….. the ‘flame’ of our motto.

An Unexpected Future

When I was offered the honor to give this Centenary Address I talked with my fellow graduates of 1960.

The first thing that emerged was that people ended up in places and careers they could not have envisaged as even possible when they left High School.

Engineer in Vietnam – caring for education of local street kids; Sports Car Rebuilder and Racer; Psychiatrist caring for East Timor victims of violence; International Financial Executive based in the US; Anglican Priest looking after indigenous people in Northern Queensland; Author. The list goes on.

In my own case, after Parramatta High School I headed on to Sydney University to become a Research Chemist – whilst working as a laborer to pay the bills, but then moved sideways to do Australia’s first MBA and PhD in Business Administration at Melbourne University. Subsequently, after a period in Chicago and Sussex, I became a Sociology Professor at age 30, founded the odd Research Institute …… and then joined the United Nations. None of these life choices was even remotely glimpsed when I left Parramatta High in 1960.

In the late 1990s I found myself with two very ‘unusual’ UN responsibilities.

The first was ‘Flying Pigs’ to the Highland Tribes of Mapnduma in Indonesia’s Province of Irian Jaya, now, Papua.

The second was ‘Signing an International Ocean Charter Underwater in Lipstick with the President of the Philippines.

A brief moment on these two rather unusual experiences from my own life.

I flew 108 pigs to Mapnduma after we had finally managed to arrange for the escape of a group of hostages including two of my own UN staff captured by the
OPM rebel movement of Indonesia's Papua and held in the jungle for 5 months. I was responsible for the UN role in negotiations and strategy for release. The pigs, basic social and food capital of the local village community, had all been killed in the fighting. I replaced them. ‘Packaging’ then flying 108 pigs through the dawn mists via 4,000 metre mountains to Mapnduma was a hell of a challenge.

A self-interested ad. I finished my latest book, an account of this whole saga, just a month ago. ‘Merdeka’ or ‘freedom/independence’ in Indonesian, it should be out before long.

In the second case, I had to get each of the Presidents of the countries for which I was responsible to sign an International Ocean Treaty – no binding legal requirements, but a signal to the world that the nation cared. I knew President Ramos of the Philippines was committed to ocean conservation and was also a diver. I suggested (foolishly) to the Palace that perhaps we might therefore sign the Charter underwater for the sake of media attention. Unfortunately Fidel Ramos agreed. I was a qualified diver, but new at it, having only qualified shortly before I joined the UN in a team building exercise with my own Research Institute staff at age 51.

I had the Charter printed on ‘dive board’ material – as I had marine scientists working for me. But, Ramos’s Palace said a week before our ceremony that they insisted on a large board because CNN, American ABC and the other international press were very interested and would be there. I commissioned the UNDP Office in Manila to make it. The problem was that they printed the Charter on a large plastic board. When we got into the water, nothing would sign it. We finally acquired a stick of lipstick from the female CNN reporter. The International Ocean Charter was then signed by President Ramos in Lipstick. I suggest, as one of the more unique products of my own career, that this is the only International Charter ever signed in lipstick by a President underwater. I stand to be corrected.

For those in the audience who may wish to check it out, the Charter is now located in a plasticized cover 20 metres underwater in Batangas Bay just north of Manila – next to a Christian Cross previously placed there also by President Ramos …… another story!

These are dramatic experiences, as others from Parramatta High have had as well.

On the other hand, many have moved into quite 'normal' lives without such drama.
BUT, they have carried with them the values that experience in Parramatta High School formed. And they have perhaps raised a strongly values-centred family whilst meanwhile excelling in art, singing and international choral contests, or coping very effectively with the most traumatic of life drama …. or, being committed and caring citizens.

The main point is that when students leave School – even back in 1960 – they could end up anywhere. Today, their future is even more uncertain. But what matters is being prepared for life …. one that may well be confronted with radical change. An issue of character and attention to the individual within an acceptance of all others. Tommy’s vision.

Back to 1913, the majority of employment was available as farmers, chandlers, coopers, olers, blacksmiths, dress makers, sawyers and woodchippers, or as Australia’s early industrialism developed, machinists, locomotive engineers or manufacturing managers.

Today, 100 years later, these occupations hardly exist.

The weight of national economic value, ie: tonnes of product per dollar value, is decreasing day by day as intangible assets – all based on knowledge – take over. Today, compared with 1913, graduates are more likely to become business operation specialists, computer software engineers, or enter the services sector – becoming health care professionals or aides, social or community services managers, teachers or assistants, computer software engineers or information managers, financial advisers …..or, even ‘child play consultants’. The ‘weighty’ stuff, the physical production required to sustain industrial life, now requires high knowledge content, robotized systems and few employees, and is a decreasing proportion of what adds value to our economy.

Taking on this challenge is exciting and ultimately what living a good life is about today.

Technical expertise, passing exams is a platform for the future. But what School must provide in these early teenage years of life is far more. It is about being prepared. As in 1913, so in 1960, so today! This is most certainly NOT about academic achievement alone.

**Preparation for Life**

Indeed, my 1960s colleagues said that what mattered was learning to live with difference, to understand and be with others, no matter from where they came. Learning to understand and embrace cultural diversity and social justice.

Parramatta has been a location of first entry for each wave of people joining our national enterprise from other countries. In my time, the 1950s, it was primarily people from ex-
Soviet States of Middle Europe, the 'Bolts', then Asian immigrants particularly from Vietnam, and today, people from Iraq and Afghanistan. Though a selective school – targeting ‘excellence’ over these years, our High School reflects our local and changing demography.

The School’s contribution has been to ‘egalitarianism’, a reflection of the way that the School’s founding values intersected with the moving character and demographics of Western Sydney.

Paul Taylor’s summary observation from exploring our 100 year history was:

_The children walk into the School and everybody is equal!_

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

We are now preparing the way, as did Tommy Atkins' founding values in 1913, for our next 100 years.

The platform for any successful career is intellectual excellence - Tommy's vision of Parramatta High as the 'Oxford of the South'

But, there is so much more. Most of it in Tommy's vision 100 years ago.

Our graduates must deal with and succeed in the 21st Century globalized multicultural world we now inhabit. They therefore benefit enormously from the school absorbing our Parramatta demographic environment into our shared _School Community_, learning to pay attention to equity, acceptance of diversity, social justice … learning to _be_ in Australia’s contemporary world. We have so much of an advantage over the elite private schools whose students remain wrapped in privileged separation from the world they must later engage.

And, as our motto reminds us, having the _passion_ and _drive to achieve_ are basic ingredients in the recipe for success. But, not necessarily to 'achieve' according to ‘status achieved’, wealth possessed’ … ‘external’ indicators’ of success. Instead, achieving in terms of a _life well lived, caring for and engaging with others, no matter from where they come or where they are situated within the social hierarchy._
In the 21st Century we confront extraordinarily uncertain times. Global warming, population explosion, environmental degradation, hovering nuclear destruction of the planet, major political and social unrest. Some say that if we can survive this Century humanity will survive for ever.

This requires our graduates learning to command the uncertainties of change that they will inevitably confront, questioning, not simply obeying, the established doctrines of 'progress', learning to find opportunity in even the most extreme challenges, and having the courage to adventure.

Parramatta High graduates enter this world, must deal with it, and will hopefully change it so we can not only survive but thrive as a force of humanity!

The values behind Parramatta High School education are a recipe for humanity's survival. For they build character and social understanding by which our society can cooperate to deal with this uncertain future along with the passion and drive to achieve it.

At core is learning to engage with the human-centre of all existence.

Though, as Tommy saw clearly, learning lies not in systems or abstract values, but in attention to individuals and their personal needs and development.

This is the inheritance from 'Tommy Atkins', our founding father, values that will equip Parramatta High School to continue to succeed for the next 100 years!

Fax Mentis Incendium Gloriarum!

Thank you for your attention.

Stephen Hill
ADDENDUM: A Personal Note

Our Historic and Philosophic Context: The Person at the Centre

Based on all that I have seen over the last half-century - as sociologist, scientist, business administration consultant, researcher and policy advisor in the 3rd World, UN practitioner, whatever, globalisation and its commercial expression are increasingly sweeping away the core values of humanity itself. Creating a class of servants to the demands of progress, ie: commercial advantage for others and change, ever present change, that uproots and sweeps away the stability of core human values - all, for apparent but transient economic and status advantage of the individual within a global consumer-oriented world. The environmental, nuclear destruction, existential and societal threats that follow from blindingly continuing down this path are potentially terrifying ..... even, as to whether we will make it into the 22nd Century. Or, what compromised world we will leave behind for our grandkids.

I genuinely believe that the only security we have over our future is in returning to core values of humanity. This is the fundamental premise of a book I am currently completing, 'BASE Jump – Humanity’s 21st Century Leap into the Future.'

The Ancient Greeks had it right. All science, all knowledge, all architecture and indeed its mathematical foundation, referred back to the vantage point of the person, the observer. The Athens Parthenon is designed according to mathematics of proportion that put the human observer at the centre. Those who transferred the 'classics' into the Renaissance Buildings in Europe did not understand, and designed the buildings according to Baconian 'external' objective mathematics, not the original Greek system of mathematical observer-referenced proportion. (I spent a fair bit of time exploring this way back in 1988-89 in a book I published in London, 'The Tragedy of Technology'.) The 'appearance' was similar, but the human-centred essence had been lost.

I believe schooling today must address these challenges. Technical knowledge capacity is an important platform for dealing with the world. Schooling should seek excellence here. But this alone is nowhere near enough. Our schools HAVE to help kids understand and discover their own humanity. Our own 1960s colleagues focused on this issue when I sent a note around to ask what was important in what they learnt at PHS. And their current reflections on that experience referred to 50 years ago. It is more important now. As many of my own class mates have experienced, we could end up ANYWHERE! What matters is both a base technical set of skills plus, more importantly, the ability to command the confrontation of change that we will experience in life.

*Humanity* is at the core!