



WINCHESTER  
COLLEGE

## DOMUM ADDRESS

1 July 2023

Concinamus ad penates. Domum is a song about a Wiccamental spirit and traditions.: let us celebrate the penates, those spirits who protected each Roman house. They are not described: as insiders we are expected to know them already. Only celebration is required.

But celebration of what? In the College Prayer the saintly Bishop Ken expounds godliness and good learning. Good learning: well, we have recently had inspectors, who, thank goodness, said that they had evidence and therefore no doubt. But godliness – now, there is a greater challenge.

It would be wrong to pretend that godliness meant – or means – orthodox religious belief. ‘Public-school religion, in my time’, a pupil of the late 1850s recalled, ‘was a queer business that I cannot claim to analyse. Christianity was primarily a kind of instinct mixed up with a lot of other instincts, such as patriotism, love of home and loyalty to Winchester.’

Fidelity to tradition is all important for the Wykehamist. A Wykehamist is not an isolated phenomenon, but an individual enabled by his school and its curation by previous generations.

That school I suggest has four principal qualities. Beauty is the easiest of the four to define. ‘One of the cardinal monuments of English architecture’ is how one historian describes Wykeham’s original College: it is ‘the perfected example of the perpendicular style’. The poet John Keats describes the river as beautifully clear and the air as worth ‘sixpence a pint’ – that’s about £1.50 per breath, based on usual volumes of in- and ex-halation, and today’s Queen’s Inn prices.

Quality comes next. This is not just educational but moral and philosophical, the outer beauty being a sign of the inner spiritual strength. According to Abbot Suger of St Denis, Gothic architecture represented man’s striving after something higher. Our curriculum refuses to deliver only exam results, but safeguards that final relic of Renaissance humanism called Div.

Winchester’s past, my third quality, is of course distinguished. We all know it. We all experience it at Medal Speaking or Founder’s Obit, or in Moberly Library or in Treasury, or on the daily walk through War Cloister. The reading from Roundell Palmer gives Winchester past to us full on.

Which brings us to the fourth and final point: a sense of obligation about the future. *‘The past is not sufficient’* said the school’s second founder George Ridding. ‘The question for each of us is not are we enrolled in the traditions of this place, but have we the spirit of it.’ Harry Altham makes the same point:

So, each generation passes, as a shadow o’er the grasses,  
But leaves something sure abiding amid all life’s shifting sands,  
For those who follow after, of their hearts, their hopes, their laughter,  
The foundation of the spirit, in a house not made with hands.

Ridding was quite clear on the resultant imperative. ‘Great names and venerated histories have their enabling powers so long as they are examples saying “Go thou and do likewise”’.

So do not be taken in by the flummery of the occasion called Domum. Do not be overtaken by celebration, like the Don found at Domum in the 1960s, complaining about the food and holding a bottle of red wine in one hand and white in the other and pouring them in to the same glass as though they were coffee and milk, explaining that he hoped that they would neutralise each other.

Don’t be taken in either by the bizarrely sugary text of the song called Domum. Ironically it is not about the joys of school but the delights of getting home. So, as the satellite is wrenched from its orbit, spare a thought for home, for the parental emotions described by Day Lewis and the financial investment complained of by Charles Dickens. ‘I can’t get my hat on in consequence of the extent to which my hair stands on end at the thought of the costs of these children’, Dickens wrote to a friend. ‘Why was I ever a parent?’

At the end of the day no one can succeed in defining or analysing the spirit of Winchester – a spirit which cannot be neutralised. People have tried comparing it to the writings of Abelard, the celestial city of Augustine. The most idealistic of Headmasters, Spencer Leeson, believed Winchester the ideal school described in Plato’s *Republic*. ‘Our youth will dwell in the land of health, amid fair sights and sounds, and receive the good in everything; and beauty shall flow into the eye and ear, like a health-giving breeze from a purer region, and insensibly draw the soul into sympathy with the beauty of reason.’

‘Excuse me, Sir’, asked one of our Quiristers, at the end of a recent Evensong: ‘what is Zion?’ There are some things which it is easier to experience or to grasp than to express. Domum is surely one of them. So please enjoy today and tonight. I shall. But please reflect on it long after tonight, its content but also its consequences. *Concinamus ad penates*. The past is not sufficient. Great names and venerated histories have their enabling powers so long as they are examples saying ‘Go thou and do likewise’.