

## PAUL HEWAT'S SPEECH AT HEADMASTER'S ASSEMBLY – 2 JULY 2009

For those of you that don't know me, I'm Paul Hewat from Michaelhouse in South Africa and have been at Merchiston in the Lower Sixth for the past term on an exchange. Standing here with my time drawing to a close is slightly saddening to me but I just thought that it wasn't right to leave this great school without showing my appreciation. So I will give you a glimpse into my Merchi journey and say a couple of thanks.

Let me first of all say that this has been an unforgettable experience from which I have learnt so much. One of my main aims for this exchange was to truly experience the differences of school, country and the people. So I'm just going to mention a few things that I have found to be different and special about Merchiston, about Scotland and about you guys – the people. I had heard before coming over that the Scottish people were friendly, but never did I expect the people that I have met and got to know throughout this journey. Feeling at home has been the easiest part of this experience and for that I have everyone to thank. It's things like the proud and positive attitude of the Scottish people, the humour – especially of you boys, that has produced so many laughs, and the kindness – it's these things that have stood out for me and that I will hang on to. On that note it's the people that have taught me the most important things - that football is football not soccer, that crisps are crisps not chips, that pants are pants not trousers and most importantly that England and Scotland are by no means the same thing.

The 'taking in' of Scotland and Scottish culture has been fascinating to me. I have gotten to experience and know the country that I have heard so much about – watching Braveheart a few days before leaving added to my great excitement. Things like:

- eating haggis – and I have been asked countless times if I had been Haggis hunting or not,
- irn bru – which is now a definite favourite and space is reserved in my suitcase for a 6 pack,
- hearing Bag pipes and having the tunes stuck in my head for days.
- hearing so many different accents – the most challenging being the Glasgow accent especially when trying to buy a train ticket.

Playing cricket for the 1<sup>st</sup> XI has been a definite highlight of my Merchiston experience. Playing the sport I love most with a good bunch of lads around me is just about all I could have asked for. It has been a chance for me to grow as a player and make some good friends.

Perhaps the more challenging sporting task has been the supporting of my country in sport. The Murrayfield sevens, the 20twenty cricket world cup and of course the Lions tour to South Africa (which I am sorry to bring up) have taken place during my stay. Jumping for joy at the semi-final at Murrayfield while surrounded by some big Scottish men giving death stares was nothing compared to the Lower Sixth day room. Even immediately after victory in the Lions tour (which I am again sorry to bring up) these words were said–“Well you didn't win the Boer war did you?”

Before coming over I had heard countless warnings of how the time would pass quickly (and indeed it has) and that I should do everything I could. Requesting to get involved in the 10km run through

Edinburgh is something I have to mention. Just the atmosphere of the day was enough to astonish me. The chanting of songs in the bus and the roaring of the school song at the starting line made me feel a part of something special. This spirit and drive is something that I believe Merchiston and Michaelhouse have in common; the boys are proud of the school and will work together for success. The relationship between the schools is a special one and I hope it will continue for many years to come. To the guys in the lower years I strongly suggest that you take the chance to go on exchange (to South Africa or not) because it is an incredible opportunity.

I don't think words can quite express how grateful I am to everyone who has made this experience possible and so enjoyable. Thanks must go to Mr Horrocks and Mr Thompson – the exchange coordinators, The Moynihan Family for being the most amazing, helpful and kind host family to me, My housemaster – Mr Heathcote, Mr Swan for tough coaching and support, all the guys in the Lower Sixth for a great term and good few laughs (I'll miss you guys!) and the entire Merchiston Community. This is a great school guys so don't take one day for granted. So thank you so so much. Enjoy the holidays and God bless.

Paul Hewat

