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Shrewsbury School

The Schools  
Shrewsbury  
SY3 7BA

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

It is a great pleasure to be able to write my penultimate missive to you after a week in which temperatures have soared, the school's batsmen (and women) have accumulated more runs than in any other week of Shrewsbury's history, a large number of candidates have had their heads down at the height of exam season pressure and I delivered a talk in Chapel, describing the maelstrom of emotions that those of us who are leaving at the end of term will be going through during the second half of term. There are some who feel they have outgrown Shrewsbury and its petty regulations and restrictions. They seek broader horizons, freedom to make mistakes and extra challenge. Others find the prospect of a move from a place, where they have developed strong relationships, close friendships and familiarity, extremely daunting. I tend to veer between the two extremes, with one face, like Janus, looking forward with excitement to new experiences and fresh horizons, and the other looking backwards, provoking bouts of nostalgia, triggered by sunsets, sounds and the fun that normally accompanies the busyness of our school.

Several times over the course of the last few weeks, I have visited the Moser Library, partly to observe first-hand how the new facility is being used and partly as a refuge from the hurly-burly of life. Whilst in the Library, I have allowed my imagination to wander, prompted by some of our most impressive watercolours and our world-renowned ancient texts. I have delighted in sinking into the inviting embrace of one of the leather armchairs set at strategic places to ensnare the casual visitor. The last time I did this I selected, almost at random, *'The Invention of Nature'*, a description of the adventures of Alexander von Humboldt, the lost scientist, written by Andrea Wulf. Ten minutes was enough to become hooked. It seems that von Humboldt is, in fact, one of the greatest and least recognised of all scientists. Thomas Jefferson called him *'one of the greatest ornaments of the age'*. Even our own Charles Darwin, who arrived at The Schools 200 years ago this term, wrote: *'nothing ever stimulated my zeal so much as reading Humboldt's personal narrative'*. Humboldt's great idea was the Web of Life, the theory that everything is interconnected in some direct or indirect way. Within the Web of Life are communities where the connections are so strong that a change to any one element will quickly require adjustment and have repercussions elsewhere.

In my own mind, I applied the Web of Life theory to our school community. Although, in many ways, the school seems hardly to have changed from term to term, or year to year, nevertheless, incremental adjustments mean that, steadily and inevitably, it's always reinventing itself.

There are some themes here we will pick up on Speech Day. We will be officially recognising the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of Charles Darwin. We will also be celebrating the completion of our first decade of co-education. To do this, we will be inviting back, as our Guest of Honour, Elle Gurden to award our prizes on Speech Day. I hope, by now, you will have received a copy of this year's Salopian Week brochure. Once again, it is bursting with attractive events some of which we hope you will be able to attend. In particular, the Eve of Speech Day Concert and Speech Day itself, with exhibitions, first-class cricket and the final of Bumpers looks, if we can have some half-decent weather, to be a sizzling climax to the academic year.

For now, as we head towards Exeat, may I take this opportunity to wish all our exam candidates continued stamina, and the Royal Shrewsbury School Boat Club every success as it heads down to Eton Dorney for the National Schools Regatta. It would be great to win a medal ... or two!

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. S.', written over a horizontal line.