

Introducing Professor Emerita in Experimental Physics and Master of Churchill College, Athene Donald at the Cambridge Literary Festival April 2023, by Emmi B, Head Girl at St Mary's, Cambridge

“Ladies and gentlemen, and fellow literary enthusiasts, I am deeply honoured to stand before you today as a sixth-form student representing St Mary's School Cambridge. In today's fast-paced world, it's essential to honour women's scientific contributions and recognize all-girls schools' role in fostering the next generation. By examining trailblazing women's inspiring stories and the impact of specialized education, we can better understand how to cultivate resilience, ambition, and confidence in young women to excel in diverse fields, that have traditionally been male preserves.

“Throughout history, women have made remarkable strides in science, often overcoming tremendous obstacles. From Marie Curie's pioneering work in radioactivity to Rosalind Franklin's vital contributions to unveiling DNA's structure, women have consistently demonstrated their immense value in the realm of scientific discovery. However, achieving equal representation and opportunities for women in STEM fields remains a work in progress. We must persist in empowering and inspiring women to chase their dreams, defy stereotypes, and dismantle barriers.

“A potent catalyst for such empowerment is the all-girls school system. In these environments, female students can flourish academically and personally, unencumbered by gender-based distractions and expectations.

“At St Marys, I have been exposed to remarkable female role models, who have sparked my newly found passion, which is aerospace engineering. The idea of contributing and being a part of the future of human space exploration and deepening our understanding of the cosmos is something that gets me up in the mornings.

“Shattering the glass ceiling is a collective endeavour that seeks to dismantle the invisible barriers hindering women from achieving their full potential. St Mary's effectively contributes to this mission by cultivating an environment specifically designed to empower young women and instil them with a "yes, she can" mindset. By providing the essential skills, knowledge, and confidence, my school ensures that young females excel in both vocational and academic fields.

“In summary, all-girls schools provide a vital foundation for empowering young

women to pursue their passions, overcome societal barriers, and confidently navigate the landscape of STEM fields and beyond. By fostering a “can-do” attitude and championing gender equality, we pave the way for future generations of female leaders to break through the glass ceiling and contribute to a more inclusive, diverse, and innovative world.

“It is my great pleasure to introduce our next speaker, Professor Emerita in Experimental Physics and Master of Churchill College, Athene Donald. With her invaluable insights and expertise, Athene will shed light on the importance of promoting gender diversity in scientific research and dispel some common misconceptions surrounding the field of science.”