



# JOE PEAKE 1995-2016

## FAREWELL ALL AND THANK YOU SO MUCH

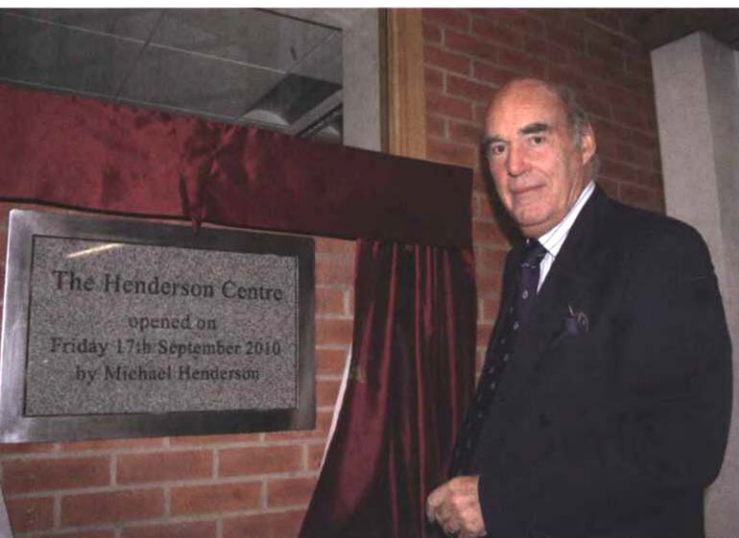
A little over 20 years ago, when Take That topped the charts, Austria & Sweden were looking to join the EU and Bolton Wanderers were in the 1st Division, Joe Peake took on the headship of St George's College. So much was different to what we know today and Joe's stated objective, shared at his first Prize Giving ceremony, was "to create confidence and self-belief in our school which I think is much better than others believe". In more detail Joe talked about elevating academic attainment; about each pupil realising their own potential; about achieving sporting and other extra-curricular successes; of the need to sustain high standards of pastoral care; to provide support to staff; and to perpetuate the Josephite ethos. Numerically the school was about 2/3 of today's size and there were scant financial resources available for change or improvement.

The school we know and love today is very much changed from that of the 1990's and history will rightly credit Mr Peake with responsibility for the extraordinary transformation, and huge success at St George's. Joe has been an exemplary leader – improving our grounds and facilities; focusing on value-added to ensure our students deliver their evident potential and gently tightening academic standards; growing the school and adroitly balancing the many associated challenges that brings; and taking tough decisions along the way, often quietly but always with respect and dignity. Most importantly he has preserved and promoted the Josephite ethos, an intangible spirit which sets our schools and students apart, and is as relevant in SGC today as it has been for the last 148 years.

On behalf of the Board, the parents, the Old Georgians and his many students, I'd like to offer huge thanks to Joe Peake and his wife Julie, and our best wishes for a long and fulfilled retirement. They've dedicated much of their lives to St George's, and we are very much the better for it.

*Michael Davie, Chairman of Governors*

I was on the Governing Body and the selection panel when I first met Joe in 1994 who was in a strong group of candidates to be the Headmaster of St George's College. Joe was I believe the youngest in the field and when he was appointed he became the third Lay Headmaster as he succeeded Peter McLoughlin the Acting Headmaster



following the departure of Paul Johnson in 1993. St George's was at a very low ebb at that stage and Joe together with Peter McLoughlin and the new Bursar Philip Fletcher were instrumental in continuing the reconstruction of St George's from a failing boarding school to a strong Boy's day school with a continuing co-ed 6th Form in combination with St Maurs.

In his first five years Joe led the gradual change in the profile of the Academic Staff to one that was younger, brighter, more hardworking and with loyalty to him. Contact times were improved dramatically and with Joe's leadership a much higher priority was given to pupils' academic achievement so that it stood equally at least with Sport and he put a lot of emphasis on building up and revitalising the Music Department. During these early years of Joe's Headship there was also a transformation taking place in converting and renovating what had been a boarding school for over a 100 years into the requirements of a modern day school.

The Governors' decision, fully supported by Joe, in 1999 to merge with St Maur's was the single largest challenge during Joe's early years at St George's. He was determined that the merger with St Maur's would lead to a genuine co-ed School and not a boys school with the addition of girls. The detailed level of planning that went into this merger was phenomenal and resulted in the huge success that most girls from St Maur's joined the merged school. The enlarged St George's from 2000 grew in strength both academically and financially which allowed an ambitious development programme to be planned and constructed. During this period much emphasis and support by Joe was given into creating and building up a Development Team which reunited with past pupils, parents and the whole Georgian family and which today is one of the most successful and admired programmes of its kind. Fund-raising by the Development team has not only helped the construction of new buildings but also a generous and well respected assisted places scheme.

Joe in his earlier years showed great leadership qualities with his staff and was respected by parents who entrusted their children to St George's. His relationships with governors was always positive and in his first ten years Joe gradually turned around St George's with the help of a mature and hard working Senior Management Team and strong talented and dedicated staff. Joe was also determined that St George's would become a pre-eminent Catholic school and was very concerned by the closing down of Catholic schools around the country. His involvement with CISC was considered by many as critical and he played an important role on the CISC Council and as its Chairman over many years. Joe confided in me a decade ago that has always considered he had the best job in Catholic Independent education and I am sure his 22 year term as Headmaster of St George's College would be a testimony to that claim.

*Mike Henderson*





# STUDENT INTERVIEW

After 21.5 years as Headmaster at St George's College Weybridge, Mr Joseph Peake is retiring after the summer term. Mr Peake joined the college in January 1995, having previously been the Director of Curriculum at Millfield School in Somerset.

On 15th April, I had the pleasure of interviewing Mr Peake on his upcoming retirement and his wonderful years as Head at one of the leading schools in the country.

'In 1994, I saw the post of Headmaster advertised, and I jumped at the chance to get the job! Whilst at Oxford University, studying Chemistry, I met an Old-Georgian who always spoke well of St George's. I therefore grabbed the opportunity with open arms!'

He added that 'In today's world; university is not always necessary. But, you would be a fool not to go! I had the most wonderful time of my life at Oxford; and I am sure that the majority of people would agree with me.'

The college has changed greatly since the arrival of Mr Peake in 1995. Previously, the school was around half the size, and until 1998, there were no girls aged 11–16. Academically, the college has got stronger and stronger, with 68% of GCSE grades A\* or A in 2015. Mr Peake added that the college generally looks better, but

it is important to remember, the ethos has remained the same.

'In 1998 we made the decision to change the college to a co-educational school for a number of reasons. We had girls in the Junior school, and girls in the sixth form; so it just didn't make sense not to have them in the college. Additionally, I don't like single sex education; and I feel our decision has been really successful.'

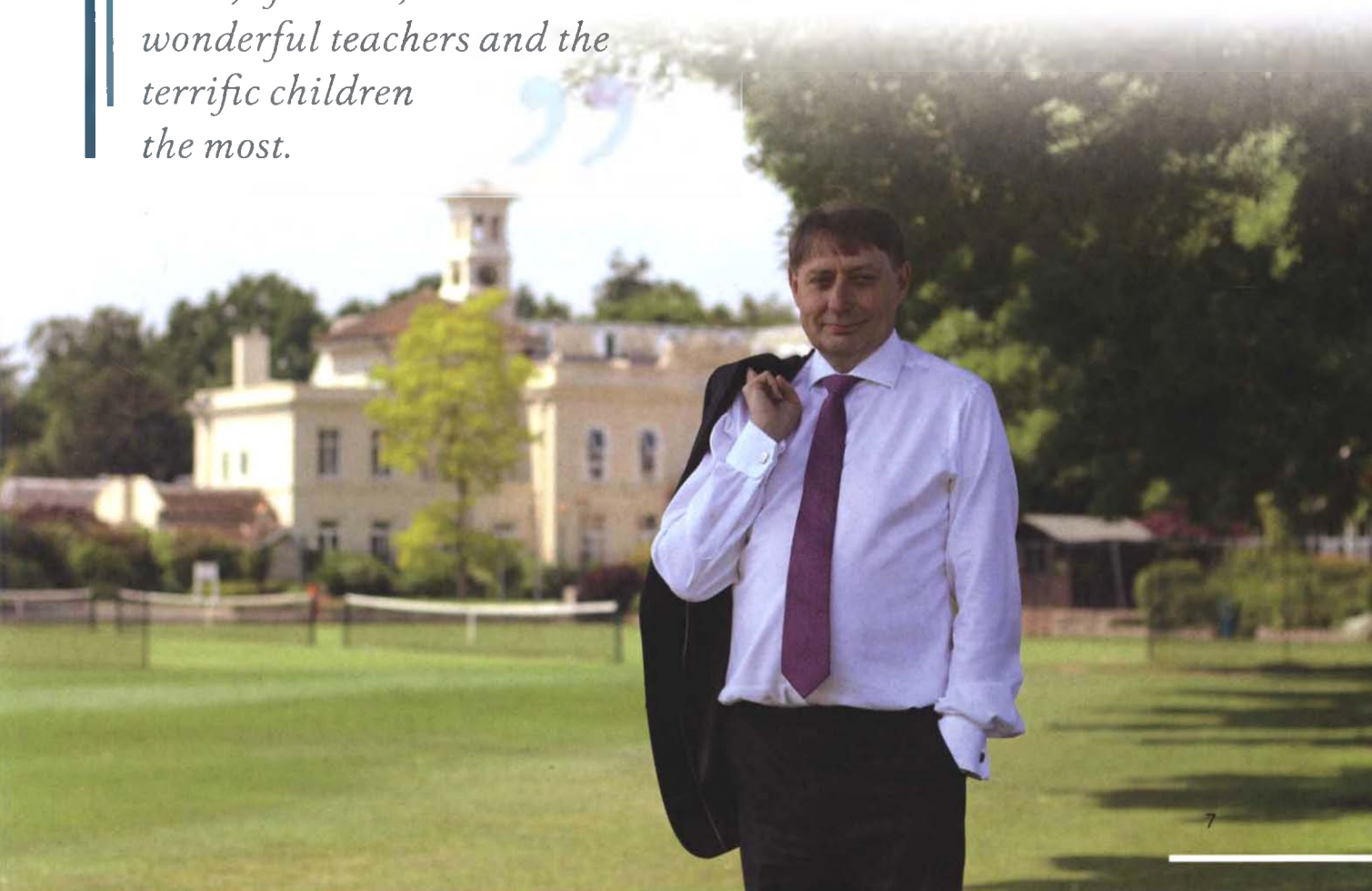
The most difficult situation to handle since he has been Headmaster was in 2000, when the College integrated with St Maur's School; now the Junior School. The acquisition of the St Maur's site resulted in another phase of expansion; but it took a lot of hard effort to ensure the new school worked well.

'Teachers come and leave all the time; so ensuring the children get the best education possible is essential. I interview the teachers, and see all their references. We then see them teach, and then I ask 6th formers to take them around the campus, and we ask them what they think. My final test is to think to myself 'Would I want this person to teach my child?' and if the answer is 'No', they don't get the job!'

In 2019, St George's College will be celebrating 150 years; and to mark the anniversary, the college is planning to build a new



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architectural development, which will transform the College's current activity facilities. The proposed plans are sure to be a tremendous addition to the college; adding to the current sporting facilities. But, Mr Peake ensured me that he was not tempted to stay on; saying that there comes a time for everything.

'In June 2015, Mrs Rachel Owens was appointed as the new Headmistress. Ultimately, the decision was made by the governing body, and I had very little input in choosing her. However, I have known Mrs Owens for some years; and I like her a great deal. I hope that she will be a superb addition to our already marvellous team.

I am extremely sad about leaving the college, and I will miss a lot about it. I will, of course, miss the wonderful teachers and the terrific children the most but, I will certainly not miss the students

chewing gum!'

Mr Peake stated that his advice to the new Headmistress would be to enjoy every day she is here, as the time goes so fast.

'In my retirement, I am planning to move to the wonderful county of Suffolk and become a governor at a school. Furthermore, I hope to help the government to ensure that the training of teachers remains at a high standard. I also wish to help the Catholic Diocese in East Anglia, and buy a dog! Additionally, I wish to learn the piano; and be nice to my wonderful wife.

'Overall, my time at St George's College has been exceptionally gratifying; I wouldn't have changed anything for the world!'

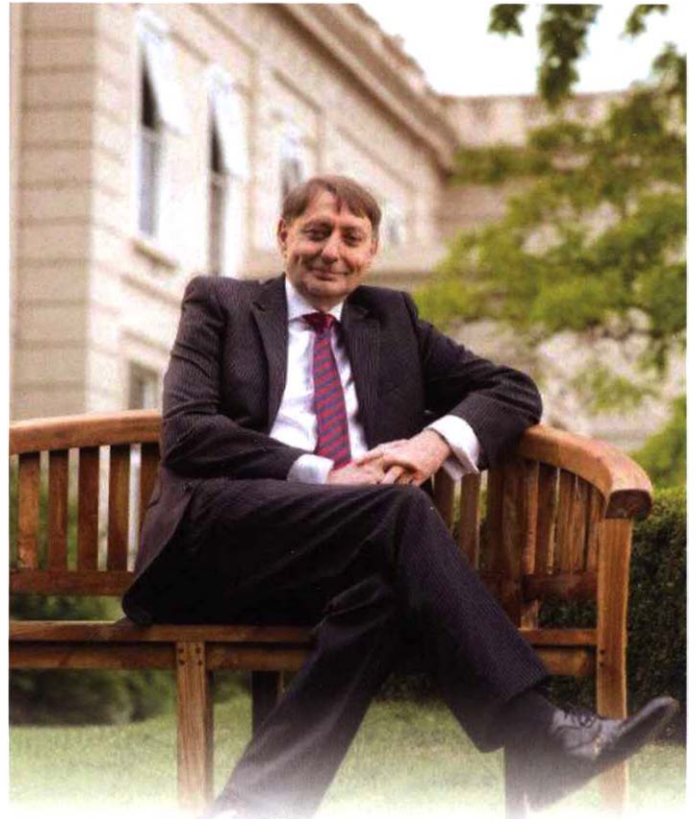
*James Stonehouse*

## GOVERNORS' MUSINGS

**W**hen invited to write about Joe Peake's tenure at St George's College, I was left with the dilemma – where do I begin? As a Governor since 2000, chair of the Academic Sub-Committee and Chair of the Governing Body from 2005 – 2011, my interaction with Joe was frequent and memorable.

Joe inherited a school which required leadership, diplomacy and re-structuring. The infrastructure of the school needed modernisation to meet constantly changing health and safety standards and a recommitment to academic rigour in order to remain competitive and viable in the changing market of private education. Joe met these challenges with conviction.

Under Joe's headship, myriad projects were undertaken and brought to fruition. Capital expenditure encompassed the renovation of the refectory and kitchens; refurbishment of the College Chapel; construction of a second astro-turf; renovation of the Red House offering improved staff facilities; and conversion of the Hall into the Amanda Smith Theatre. The new Sixth Form Centre and Humanities block, the Henderson Centre, is a legacy in its own right – a modern, eco-friendly structure – improving Sixth Form education. During this ongoing renovation, investment in IT



continued as well as investment in scholarships and bursaries.

Under Joe's leadership, the number of students attending the College increased considerably – a direct correlation to the improved infrastructure and rising academic standards of the College. Not only did exam results improve each year, but over eighty percent of the College students attended university of first choice. Joe restructured his Senior Management Team and focused on academic standards in the classroom, preparing the College well for its last inspection in 2011. That Independent School Inspectorate Report awarded St. George's College "Excellent" in all categories measuring the Quality of Academic and Other Achievement, the Quality of Pupils' Personal Development and the Effectiveness of Governance Leadership and Management.



In 2006 the Memorandum and Articles of Association of St. George's were revised. Although a number of changes were adopted, the objects remained the same: the advancement of education in a Roman Catholic school within the Josephite ethos.

A year later, the Mission Statement was reviewed with Governors challenging how achievements within the school could be measured against the Mission Statement. From his arrival at St George's College, Joe embraced and exhibited the idealism of the Josephite ethos. He has lived the Catholic faith and encouraged a spiritual foundation to flourish within the school, as evidenced by his own commitment to family – both personal and Collegiate.

My association with St. George's College began in 1986 when the first of my two sons joined the Junior School. Since those early years through my role as a Governor, I witnessed the school go from strength to strength under his guidance and tutelage. We have been most fortunate to have had Joe, the support of his wife, Julie, and his children, Nicholas, Alexandra and Ben. St George's College is the success it is today because of Joe; and for that we owe him a lasting debt of gratitude

*Kathy Quint*

## DEPUTY HEAD MUSINGS

During my 13 years of working with Joe on the SMT, he was very much like a paternal figure – allowing us to develop and implement initiatives – but under a watchful eye. He encouraged us to be autonomous and to explore new ideas. His guidance and advice was always wise and informed by his extensive participation and indeed leadership of many professional bodies including: CISC, HMC, The Society of Heads. We could always count on Joe as knowing the answer to everything regarding Catholic Independent education, thus felt a sense of security in what we were doing. He led our team with authority yet collegiality; with a sense of humour and respect for our views.

Joe spoke with conviction when addressing parents, instilling them with confidence that their children were in safe hands. His pride in all aspects of the school of today that he nurtured and created, was tangible for all to feel – never more so than when

talking to an audience at Open Morning or at forums. His legacy of a Co-educational Catholic Independent school, bursting with applicants, achieving excellence in all fields, has been realised, as evident in our last Inspection report. We look forward to Joe's dream of a state of the arts Activities Centre being built to further enhance this impressive institution.

FMM

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# GOOD BYE AND THANK YOU

Can still picture you, Joe, standing in front of that Governors' Selection Panel way back in 1994. Short on experience of headship; but with a pedigree that exuded potential. Change was needed at SGC. Would you be able to bring it about? Were you the person to whom the future of St George's should be entrusted?

Twenty odd years later the answer is an unequivocal "yes". It is not so much "change" that you have wrought but a veritable transformation. The one constant thread that has rightly remained is the Josephite educational ethos but beyond that your insistence on raising academic expectations, your leadership in encouraging a broader spectrum of activities on offer, and the remarkable upgrading and expansion of the College's facilities that happened during your tenure, are all part of that transformation. Not bad for half a lifetime's work, Joe; not bad at all. In fact, A\*, sir.

It wasn't easy, was it? There were plenty of dark clouds in those early days. Julie must have wondered at times what you had got yourselves into. You met resistance. That was inevitable. Most of us resist change when it affects us. But you have a happy knack of persuading key colleagues – a word you are fond of using – to your way of thinking. Slowly the tide turned and then began to flood.



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Sometime in those early years I remember we spent an afternoon exploring the campus, walking the grounds and poking our noses into the unused nooks and crannies of the College's buildings. What could this area be used for? Where should new sports facilities be located? What does a long-term vision for SGC look like? Now, many years later, I imagine you retracing those steps and reflecting on the enormous changes you have seen in the face of the College during your time here. And thinking of those 3 full cohorts of students who have passed through SGC in your time with their myriad of successes

(and some disappointments), particular individuals (or their parents!) who are etched in your memory, and those school events which have a special significance for you.

It's a long way back in time now but you'll never forget the months that followed the closure of St Maur's and its rebirth as part of St George's. You'd only been a handful of years in headship and you were asked to carry out one of the more difficult of management tasks; the integration of two organisations. You'll remember public meetings when you had to take unjustified flak from parents worried for their children's future. You'll recall having to cope with staff unsettled by the impact of the changes on them. Indeed, you could have been forgiven for musing that the life of a chemistry teacher was much to be preferred! But you pulled it off very successfully, showing a great deal of skill and determination in doing so.

When you closed the door of your study for the last time as Head there'll undoubtedly have been sadness (and perhaps relief as well?) but I hope you had a final look across the grounds towards the cricket pavilion – such a wonderful view on a sunny summer's evening – and allowed yourself to reflect with justifiable pride on what you were handing on to your successor.

Neil Twist