

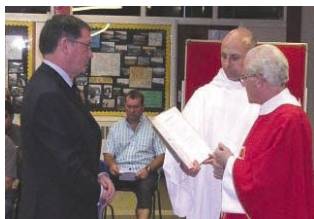


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THE ST. THOMAS MORE OLD BOYS' ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

MEMORIAL MASS

A slightly larger than usual group of Old Boys were present at this year's Memorial Mass to both remember the deceased of the school and to say goodbye to one of its longest serving servants. Rev Richard Rowe from



Leigh-on-Sea stood in for our Chaplain and presided at the Mass during which Paul Hutchinson was inaugurated as President for the second time. As is now the custom, Paul then immediately led the Prayers of the Faithful and read the ever-growing list of deceased. Sadly, as in recent years, the list has grown a little since last year!

The Mass had commenced with Frank Keenan reading the Execution Account of



DINNER TIME!

This year's Old Boys Dinner will be held at the school on **SATURDAY 29th OCTOBER** at 7.30pm for 8.00pm and the speaker will be Paul Driscoll who has been caajoled, press-ganged or simply trapped into agreeing to talk about working with the celebs in the theatre.

But all is not lost! The rest of the evening can be enjoyed with good company, plenty of drink and a superb 4-course meal. The exact contents of this delectable culinary



St. Thomas More for the last time as Headmaster.

After the Mass had ended and buffets were open Paul then gave the traditional address from the new President setting out his aims for the coming year. However this year he also took the opportunity to thank Frank for all his contributions to the school and presented him with a gift from the



experience have yet to be finalised, but I am reliably informed that it will continue the much-admired tradition of being built around something beefy!!

The event is open to members only and costs £16.50. Cheques made payable to *St. Thomas More Old Boys' Association* should be sent to the address below asap to secure your place.

Old Boys' Association of the boxed sets of *The World at War* and *The American Civil War* DVDs. Abridged extracts from Paul's speech recalling various episodes in



Frank's tenure can be seen on page 4 of this esteemed publication.

The evening then contin-



ued in the traditional manner of eating and drinking with Frank manfully trying to ensure that he got around to everyone at some point. After a total of about 29 years of service to the school everyone present was delighted to be able to thank Frank in person and we wish him the very best for a long and happy retirement.

RETIRING AFTER FOUR TERMS

After what might be considered four terms of office Frank Keenan is finally being dragged away kicking and screaming from his beloved St Thomas More High School!

At least it almost feels like that when you talk to him. His keenness and enthusiasm for the old place remain undiminished and you almost feel that he either wishes he was twenty years younger or that retirement wasn't until he reaches 80.

Frank, of course, began his numerous associations with the school in 1964 when he spent some time there in a student capacity. This was followed by a slightly longer stint between 1970-71 and an even longer stretch as Head of Languages from 1972-83. And like an habitual offender he was once more incarcerated in 1990 for a 15 year stretch this time as Headmaster.

He remembers his interview with a mixture of humour and amazement. He faced an interview panel in November 1989 of 25 people made up of governors and other worthies and the first question put to him was from Rev. George Stokes (Diocesan Director of Education) who asked what he thought about the sentiment prevalent amongst a number of clergy that Catholic Secondary schools were unnecessary. Frank's typically urbane



Frank in his early days at STM

and dry reply was that the only place kids get their religion nowadays is in the Catholic schools!

"I told him that it's time you priests took a look at what you're doing," he smiles, adding that he and Father Stokes were old friends.

"I didn't really expect to get the job," Frank continues, *[and after that opening salvo we can see why -Ed]*, "but as the second day of interviews wore on it became obvious that I was going to be offered it. I was, of course, delighted."

The outgoing Headmaster Dominick Fanning then invited Frank to attend a meeting at Southend Civic Centre for the launch of the Local Management of Schools scheme at which they were told that there wouldn't be enough money in the school's new budget and that Frank's first action as Headmaster would be to get rid of 5 teachers!

"I told them to get stuffed," Frank says in his laconic way, "and, to be honest, that's been my

whole approach."

He has, indeed, proved to be something of a maverick when it comes to dealing with today's increasingly bureaucratic and PC culture. Frank re-inforces this impression when he tells me, "On my last day as Headmaster I phoned the LEA Finance offices and my contact there told me *'I look forward to crossing swords with you again in the future'*"

The list of developments at the school under Frank's Headship is lengthy and impressive and, of course, includes the opening of a now-thriving 6th Form.

"We actually opened discussions with St. Bernards about a joint 6th Form way back in 1992, but unfortunately that initiative died on the beaches."

Not to be deterred Frank led the school into Grant Maintained status in 1993. "We got a lot of flack from around the Diocese (both church and other schools), but the benefit of this change in status was that the bit of our

budget that the LEA controlled became ours. All assets were also transferred to the governors (subsequent changes in status mean that the governors retain control over the playing fields with the buildings being the responsibility of the Diocese)."

This change gave the school the chance of obtaining a 6th Form and permission was finally given in 1995. "I received a 'phone call from our then MP Paul Channon at the Houses of Parliament, who had been very helpful all along. He told me to expect another 'phone call in about 10 minutes from a senior official at the DFES. He would be asking me 2 questions and if I answered yes to both of them he would get us our 6th Form."

The expected 'phone call duly arrived. "The caller asked me if I would like a 6th Form (to which I answered "yes") and whether I thought it would deliver value for money (to which I also answered "yes"). I asked him if he wanted me to confirm this in writing and he replied *'Good Heavens no old boy'*"

The 6th Form finally opened in 1996 (at least 20 years after the concept was originally raised) with 55 students, 54 of whom were boys.

"In September this year there will be 200 students, 50 of whom will be girls," Frank says proudly. 1995 also saw the school's first OFSTED inspection under Frank and the place

won a national award! As a result Frank was invited together with the Heads of other successful schools, to meet John Major in Downing Street.

"It was the day that he faced a vote of confidence in Parliament and, to be honest, I didn't expect him to actually be there. But he was. He popped out for the vote and then returned to give a very funny, polished and urbane speech."

In 1998 Southend Council regained control of the Local Education Authority. "It's been chaotic ever since," he adds.

2000 saw the building of a new entrance, an extension to the hall, and a new 1st Floor above the entrance. Frank's final building project of the new Technology block was completed in 2004. Over all more than £5 million of building work has been completed under Frank's Headship!

After 15 years at the helm Frank feels that the establishment of the 6th Form would certainly be one of his top achievements.

"It has certainly changed the atmosphere within the school," he enthuses. "The younger boys see the older ones getting top GCSE and A-Level results and going on to university. They see the 6th Formers as role models.

"Students from other schools join our 6th Form because of the high academic standards and excellent university en-

trance rates. We particularly attract students for Media Studies, Sports Science, Law and Psychology.

"The atmosphere is very different from the 6th Forms in the grammar schools. There is a warmth and friendliness between the teachers and the students that is certainly helped by the school's Catholic ethos."

That atmosphere and ethos also pervade the whole school, another fact of which Frank is justifiably proud, as he is with the general standards and reputation that the school enjoys amongst the general public.

He is also extremely pleased with the rich extra-curricula life of the whole school. "In the old days it was mainly sport, but I wanted the students to have the same opportunities as those attending fee-paying schools. We now regularly operate, in addition to skiing and other sporting trips, visits to New York, France and Germany, an extremely varied Activities Week every year and actually offer much more variety than any of the other local schools."

All of this has helped to make the school extremely popular with parents and boys alike. Frank estimates that when he first became Headmaster the school was losing about 40 boys each year to the grammar schools, whereas this year that figure has dropped to only 15!

So, after all these years and changes at the school how would Frank like his tenure to be viewed for posterity?

"Boys of whatever ability can come to STM at eleven and leave after 7 years to go to work or university as really nice, mature, confident and friendly young men (and women). That is the thing that pleases me the most!"

Frank officially retires on 31st August, but his last day with the full school was, of course, the last day of the summer term. During the final assembly that afternoon he handed over a specially inscribed bible to his successor (Peter Travis) as a symbolic passing over of the job and told the boys that the school would be going on to new successes and greater heights under the new leadership.

And what of the immediate future for Frank?

"The next 6 months will be taken up with family plans as our youngest son is getting married in September and our daughter (who lives in California) will be producing our first grandchild in October. We shall also be visiting our eldest son who lives in Melbourne in January and I shall take the opportunity whilst over there to visit the 3 ex-STM staff and the 2 who are on the exchange programme at our twinned school over there. Perhaps we'll even hold a staff meeting!"
The future may see him working for the Diocese

where he has already been in discussion about an advisory capacity to assist Secondary Headteachers. One thing's for certain he won't (or can't) put the baton down completely and we wish him the best



A somewhat more up-to-date pic!

of luck in whatever he decides to do with a well-earned retirement.

Frank was not the only member of staff to be retiring in July as two other long-standing members of staff were put out to pasture. Malcolm Phillips who had been in the Science Department for 30 years and Graham Eastgate who had been at the school for 16 years retired, as did Christine Chesterman who had spent the last 5 years at STM. We wish them all a happy and enjoyable retirement.

PRESIDENT'S PRAISE



In his speech at the Memorial Mass, our President Paul Hutchinson paid the following tribute to Frank ...

... No one here is unaware that Frank Keenan retires as Headmaster at the end of this term - just four or five weeks away. I am sure that over the next few weeks there will be many "good byes"

to Frank and warm and sincere wishes for his long and healthy retirement.

But this evening gives us the Old Boys - all of whom of course are much younger than Frank - the opportunity to pay our own tribute to him. Speaking to other Old Boys, it is clear that Frank is universally held in the very highest regard. ... St. Thomas More High School for Boys enjoys an enviable reputation in Southend and beyond; Frank I am sure would attribute that to all his colleagues and the boys themselves, but as Headmaster Frank has been the inspiration, the leader, the motivator, the standard-bearer, and his exceptional stewardship of our school has been second to none.

Of course, Frank's time with the school goes back almost to its inception, as a junior teacher, form master, head of languages, and for the past ten years Headmaster. And many, if not most, Old Boys will have encountered him in one or more of those roles. I have it on very good authority that he once remarked, "This is a good Catholic school, full of good Catholic boys and you can't trust a single one of them!"

Well, the good Catholic boys can't have been too bad because it was Frank's drive that saw the formation of the Old Boys' Association. At the Reunion Mass (as it was then known) in 1997 he announced that he would gather a group together early in the next school year to investigate the

possibility of such a group being formed. Together with David Finnigan he met with Paul McArdle and Paul Driscoll and as a team they worked throughout the winter and spring and formally launched the Old Boys' Association at the Reunion Mass in 1998. And he has been a tower of strength to the Association over the subsequent seven years. Indeed our success is as due to him as to anyone of us.

Frank in wishing you well for the future and saying a fervent "Thank You" for all you have done for the Old Boys Association, I speak for all Old Boys in expressing deep gratitude for all you have done for the school, for our association and for many of us individually over the years.

ARISE SIR DAVID!



We are delighted to report that David Finnigan, for so many years a teacher at STM (1962-1989) and then a Governor for twelve years, has recently had bestowed upon him no-less an honour than a papal knighthood (Knight of St Gregory)!

As members might suspect, he did not achieve this high recognition for his services to education (worthy though they

were), but for his services to the Diocese of Brentwood where he has, for the best part of 25 years, been Diocesan Master of Ceremonies.

This has involved planning, organising and being in-charge of countless numbers of liturgies from the wilds of north Essex to the even wilder east London, ranging from low-key simple ceremonies right up to ordinations and the dedications of churches (including the Cathedral itself).

The effect of all this is that Brentwood has an enviable reputation throughout the country for its high standard of liturgy and its application

of the ethos of the Second Vatican Council. Only recently David MC'd the Bishop's Silver Jubilee Mass at Brentwood Cathedral which was highly praised by a number of other bishops from around the country.

With his usual humility David has insisted that we continue to just call him "sir" and won't be trading in his Renault for a trusty steed just yet!

ROCHESTER AHOY!

David Milne (*Cruises to the Gentry*) tells me that he still has a few berths left for his cruise aboard the well-appointed MV Pocahontas to Rochester on **SATURDAY 17th SEPTEMBER**, departing at 9.00am from the pier head. Berths cost a mere £12.00 per person.

Contact him at the school on 01702 606763.

HATCHES, MATCHES & DESPATCHES

It is with sadness that we note here the recent death of former Chairman of Governors John Hardy who died suddenly in July aged 70

May he Rest in Peace.

Please don't forget that this column is also for happy announcements of marriage and births. Please do let us know of any!