



## St George's Celebrates its Golden Jubilee

At the end of June St George's British International School celebrated their Golden Jubilee Anniversary in spectacular style. Retired teacher Bryn Jenkins reports on the festivities

# in Style



Bryn Jenkins

The school was founded in 1958 under the name The English School but it is popularly referred to as St George's. The initiative and inspiration for ensuring that the celebrations should be appropriate for a school of St George's reputation, was Nicholas Johnson, Principal since 2004. Alas, he was not able to enjoy the festivities as he died suddenly of a heart attack in May. He had encouraged and participated in some of the preparatory events such as alumni reunions in June 2007 at the school and two winter reunions in New York and London. The key organizers were Peter Doyle, former Head of Chemistry, in the newly created role of alumni coordinator and Sara Brain, events organiser, a parent with children at the school. There was also considerable back-up support. The provisional programme was published at least six months before the celebrations and the response was so enthusiastic that all the events materialized as planned. The four days of celebrations, involving alumni from 38 countries, began on Thursday, with flights arriving from Accra, Bangkok, Buenos Aires, Melbourne, Rio de Janeiro, Singapore and Japan, to name a few.

### Celebrations kick off

The first reception was at Villa Wolkonsky,

the residence of the British Ambassador Edward Chaplin. In the evening the Casina Valadier on the Pincio, with its idyllic view of Rome, was the setting for cocktails and the first explosions of nostalgia as some friends were meeting for the first time for more than 30 years.

The picnic hosted by Casina Bianca in Trevignano, on Lake Bracciano, was particularly popular, especially for those who had been deprived of Italian cuisine for a while. A Car Treasure Hunt was also arranged with the picnic spot as the final destination.

### St George's emotional home

Bookings for the *Bulgari* showrooms on Via Condotti were quickly snapped up, while the visit to Villa Grazioli, Via Salaria 243 had particular appeal for alumni of the 1960s. Nigel Sunley, elder son of Geoffrey Sunley, the first pioneering headmaster, was the guide and gave a memorable keynote speech during Saturday night's Dinner. For this generation, Salaria still remains the ancestral home of St George's and for some it was probably the most emotional experience of



1&3: Fireworks display, at Gala dinner

2: "History of St Georges" exhibition

(Photos: Ruggero Passeri/St George's School)

their return to Rome.

The tours of the La Storta campus (celebrating its 40th anniversary!) were also extremely popular and the enthusiastic guides were from the present generation of Year 12 (11th Grade). For a brief period in the late 1960s there had been boarding facilities and some wanted to see their old dormitories, only to discover that they had become the Maths Department! The pre-millennium era alumni were impressed with the playing fields and the most recent improvement, the indoor Sports Complex. All were impressed by the colourful display of art on virtually every surface throughout the school. As Colin Niven, a former headmaster commented, *"It was super to see the school look so thriving"*.

### Vatican gardens, Palazzo Farnese in Caprarola

There was more to follow: on the Saturday morning there was a visit to the Vatican Gardens while another group travelled to Caprarola to visit Palazzo Farnese, for many years a popular school field trip. For several days the *History of St George's* exhibition, with photographs and memorabilia from every one of the 50 years, attracted considerable interest and attention. One particular item displayed, was a list of School Fees – Year 8 in 1962 – Lire 240,000 – present day €120!

### Climax comes at Jubilee Dinner

The Golden Jubilee Gala Dinner, the climax to the celebrations, was held on Saturday evening in the school grounds near the Oasis, and almost 400 guests attended. Among the alumni and teachers were also four former

headmasters – Brian Howes 1971-1975, Tom Jackson 1976-1980, Harry Deelman 1980-1987, Colin Niven 1987-1991 and the recently appointed Martyn Hales. There were several generations of teachers including Denise Scott who had not only taught at both Salaria and La Storta but also at the *New School*, a breakaway school in 1972. Lu Zarkovic, a teacher of many academic disciplines has been at the school since 1969 and Chris Warde-Jones enjoyed the experience of being a student from 1963-1975 and as an English teacher before becoming a freelance photographer, and now is a parent of two children at the school. Gerry Firth, a teacher 1962-1984 and Jawed Khan, former student 1959-1971, must have been delighted how their pioneering efforts organising reunions had culminated in such a spectacular celebration.

The lighting effects and the *"West Coast Lizzy"* music of the 60s transformed the setting, creating a kind of *son et lumière* atmosphere, while California Catering provided superb quality cuisine and service. The hours slipped by and, in addition to the speeches, the entertainment also included a fire-eating display, a dance of St George and the Dragon, and spectacular fireworks. The festive atmosphere continued until the early hours of the morning.

### An emotional time for all those involved

Sunday, for some, was a time of farewells, while several sporting buffs managed to enjoy a variety of activities, the most popular being the swimming pool. During the week

there had naturally been several spontaneous reunions, but the final official event of the celebrations was Sunday lunch at the *Fico d'India*, a local restaurant.

Within a week after the Jubilee over 100 complimentary messages had been received:

Libby Anderson 1979-1982, *"It was all too, too fantastic, worth a trip from Australia on the other side of the world."*

Olga Fernando 1962-1976, *"I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of this amazing adventure."*

Annamaria Merino 1972-1977, *"I had tears in my eyes as I flew off to Madrid. I have brought back all the warmth of my childhood memories, the wonderful feeling of having reunited with "old" teachers, headmasters and classmates – people with whom I shared several very special years of my life."*

These comments, and many more, fully justified Peter Doyle's final email, *"From the balmy evening on the Pincio to the final volleyball match on the Sunday... it was just FANTASTIC!"* ■

*Author note: Bryn Jenkins is a former History teacher at St. George's, Marymount and The New School, and an Experienced College Counsellor. He is also a tour guide: [www.walkin-rome.it](http://www.walkin-rome.it).*

*For more about St George's see their website: [www.stgeorge.school.it](http://www.stgeorge.school.it).*

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