



The OLD JOHANNIAN ASSOCIATION

Autumn 2023
Newsletter

Editorial: (OJA Editor Stefan Bartkowiak)

Hello everyone and welcome to the autumn OJA newsletter.

As you can imagine, there is a lot of work going on in the background and I'll try to summarise it all in this newsletter. Work ranges from cataloguing the many archives that are coming to light at the college along with the extensive quantity that was transferred directly to Portsmouth Museum by the developers, developing our digital presence with the web site, Facebook and LinkedIn groups, and of course the perennial events of the Dinner and Golf. We also continue to review and revise the Association rules. All this whilst dealing with the day-to-day admin of the association.



Chairperson's Report: (Andy Valvona Chairperson / Treasurer / Membership Secretary)

Welcome to the September issue of the Old Johannian Association's newsletter.

2023 so far has seen a good deal of change, from the aftermath of the College closing, the passing away of 2 extremely hard working and long-standing committee members and Chairpersons, Charles Hoar, and Peter Cullinane, and the Committee needing to signpost a way forward for the Association.

A number of OJs have commented that they thought the Association would fold, with the closure of the College. This could not be further from the truth. Admittedly, this does present us with some challenges, namely where to store and display the OJA memorabilia we have amassed over the years, and a place for the committee to meet on a regular basis, in order to determine the strategy of the Association, and tasks required as a result. However, after a period of consolidation, the Association is now going from strength to strength.

The Committee:

- Stefan Bartkowiak is doing a magnificent job with this Newsletter, and getting our new the website up and running <https://www.old-johannian-association.com/>
However, if there are any OJs who can lend a hand to Stefan, as he is not a Web designer by trade, please contact the association on oldjohannianassociation@gmail.com
- Steve Bedingham is doing a sterling job in implementing a strategy for archiving any SJC or OJA material.
- Stephen Davies is busy pulling together the Annual Dinner and Reunion function.
- Dr Dominic Fontana is looking after our digital presence on LinkedIn and so on, and is always the calm and collected voice on all Committee matters.
- Brian Saunders is, as always, doing a magnificent job in arranging the annual golf tournament.

The question of OJA memorabilia is ongoing, with Steve Bedingham, as reported elsewhere in this publication, liaising with the developers of the SJC Southsea site to ensure that we secure whatever we can, to preserve for the future benefit of the OJ community. We also need to decide on a long-term storage solution, one that enables the memorabilia to be seen by interested OJs. If anyone has any ideas, please do not hesitate to contact the Association, on oldjohannianassociation@gmail.com.

A number of OJ events are taking shape – the annual Golf at Waterlooville Golf Club on Thursday 5th October 2023, with a 10:00am start, and the Annual Dinner and Reunion at Southsea's Queens Hotel, on the evening of Saturday, April 20th 2024. I am delighted to announce that the OJA will be implementing a dual pricing structure for dinners going forward. Paid up Members and Life Members will be able to purchase tickets for themselves and one guest at a reduced rate than that will be charged to OJs and their guests who are not members of the OJA. Due to the OJA currently building the website, and administrative surrounding this, this facility will not be in place for the April 2024 Dinner, but is planned for future Dinners

Anyone interested in the Golf, please go to <https://www.old-johannian-association.com/s-projects-basic> for more information.

Ticketing information for the annual dinner will be announced nearer the time.

Finally, a welcome to the latest members of the OJA:

Jonathan Draper (1994-2001)

James Teague (1994-2001)

Miles Osborne (1980-1985)

Peter Dorey (1967-1974)

Melvyn Harries (1962-1973)

If any members wish to get in touch with Jonathan, James, Miles, Peter or Melvyn, please email the Association on oldjohannianassociation@gmail.com, and we will put you in touch.

St. John's College (OJA Editor Stefan Bartkowiak)

Following on from the last newsletter, the relationship between our Association and then developers continue to remain constructive and cordial. Steve Bedingham is currently our main liaison through his archive work. The developers are currently focusing on the houses first to completely renew the interiors whilst retaining the external character. Steve has been invited to see the finished article when work is complete. What is interesting is that none of the site, owned by the developers is expected to be sold, all of the properties becoming rental. It is a massive amount of work and no time-scales have been shared with us so far.

We have contacted the on-site manager and asked him to investigate the disappearance of the St. John Baptiste De LaSalle statue. There is some hope that it is languishing somewhere on-site.

Many of you will remember Graham Best, who was a past headteacher at SJC.

Head teachers

- Mrs Mary Maguire, 2019–2022, acting Head 2018–2019, final head teacher
- Mr Tim Bayley, 2016-2018
- Mr Graham Best, 2010–2016
- Mr Nigel Thorne, 2001-2010
- Mrs S. Bell, 1998-2001
- Mr G. Morgan, 1996-1998
- Mr J. Davies, 1994-1996
- Brother Cyril, 1983-1994
- Brother Benet, 1981-1983
- Brother Anthony, 1976-1981
- Brother Geoffrey, 1976-1977
- Brother Damian,^[who?] 1969–1976
- Brother Swithun, 1963-1969
- Brother Edwin,^[who?] 1957–1963
- Brother Alan Maurice, 1951–1957
- Brother Augustine, 1947-1951
- Brother Leo Barrington, 1944–1947 ^[90]
- Brother David, 1937-1944
- Brother Celsus, 1935-1937
- Brother Simon 1918–1935, (*longest serving headmaster*)
- Brother Christantian 1914–1918, (*headmaster during the Great War*)
- Brother Firme of Quievy, 1908–1914, (*founding headmaster*)

Graham has always maintained an interest in SJC and is an honorary OJA life-member. Having read the last newsletter, he has responded with this informed perspective on the closing of the college. I am very grateful for this useful and informative insight into this era and include it here in its unedited form.

The closure of St John's College. (Graham Best SJC head 2010-16)

In response to the article in the OJ Summer newsletter, I wanted to give a more detailed and, perhaps, a better explanation as to why the College had to close. Mine is, of course, a personal perspective, but I was intimately involved with the life of the College from 2010 to 2016 and thereafter working with De La Salle as they tried to support the College through immensely difficult times. The decision to close, taken by the College Trustees and Governors, was very painful to many and, though no longer directly responsible, caused the Brothers of De La Salle a good deal of sadness, not only for the demise of a school they had founded and owned for 107 years, but because they had tried all they could realistically do to help the College survive even after they no longer owned the College.



The closure of any school is a sad event, particularly when it is your old school with all its memories of past deeds and old school mates. It can be just as sad for former staff, too, especially when they have devoted so much time and energy to their pupils. No one can be happy that St John's has closed, but, for those of us who worked there in the last decade or so, its demise has been enormously disappointing, even if it was not a complete surprise.

I arrived as Headmaster in 2010, excited by the opportunity afforded me, but also very aware of the challenges that lay ahead. Sadly, the College's glory days were already in the past; a past when it was probably the foremost secondary school in Portsmouth.

For many years from its foundation in 1908, the College had prospered and offered a distinctive education; the only boarding school with a very special and valuable ethos and tradition. But by 2010, both the educational environment and the College's own internal difficulties were increasingly apparent.

The school I took over had – and did have until its very end – a wonderful ethos and atmosphere; a dedicated staff and many excellent students. But financially, it was facing very difficult times with eye watering amounts of parental debt –

fees not paid – along with large numbers of bursaries and discounts. On one level these were a good thing as the school was full and many pupils whose parents could not afford a full fee were able to attend. But on another level, the College's income was nothing like it was imagined to be. Under the Brothers, the College had prospered but in later years little ongoing investment meant that facilities and accommodation were in desperate need of renovation and replacement. Boarding facilities in particular were no longer competitive and, as the domestic boarding market declined and parents became more demanding in terms of facilities, so dependence on overseas pupils became more obvious.

St John's was not alone in this, of course, but this lack of investment made it hard to respond to the new standards. Meanwhile, local competition was already becoming greater and more challenging for while St John's had been quietly carrying on, other schools were developing and modernising; investing in new facilities in particular. It is arguable that a city like Portsmouth could not afford to support four independent schools and St John's was losing out to one of the best schools in the south of England and another with the support of a national groups of schools to help fund it. Despite these challenges, we kept the school moving forward, developing the teaching and opportunities for pupils, recovering many of the outstanding debts and beginning some renovations and small investment in the buildings. In 2015 we finally became independent of De La Salle, a process first begun a decade earlier. This move which undoubtedly troubled some OJs was never about losing the Lasallian ethos and, right to the end, the College worked hard to maintain that. But there were several key reasons behind this decision: by now, none of the brothers in the UK were actively involved in schools; the growing 'abuse' scandals and litigation encompassing many catholic schools – including De La Salle schools - seemed a potential threat to the College's reputation and, perhaps the prime reason: independence would enable us to raise and borrow money for future development. The link with De La Salle was never broken, however. Not only did the College continue to keep in touch with the Christian activities of the order, the Brothers bent over backwards to help by providing the College with a very generous 'severance deal' at the outset and then, acting as a more than understanding 'banker' as the College paid off the 'mortgage' it had taken out (From De La Salle) and regularly allowing periods of grace over repayments.

When I retired in 2016, the College had 600 pupils, of whom some 100+ were boarders. There was no immediate reason to believe that the College would collapse, though management and Governors knew they were in for a fight to enable it to flourish.

Several things then happened to make the situation even more challenging. The political (and financial) situation in Hong Kong – the source of most of our overseas boarders – became difficult and numbers began to dry up. Attempts at recruitment in other countries – China, Nigeria, Germany, South America etc (all sending pupils to other UK school) had limited success. At home, the armed services, on whom the school had relied for many UK boarders over the years, were cutting back on the grants they offered to serving parents. Meanwhile, despite constant work to improve and upgrade, our boarding facilities seemed increasingly inadequate to many visiting parents looking for a modern boarding environment. A lack of investment over many decades was now coming home to roost.

Add to this increasingly assertive and attractive – even predatory – other Portsmouth schools in what seemed a diminishing market, St John's was in a fight for survival. We had built up a bit of a 'war chest' for some development, but the money we had to spend to keep the College safe and useable (a million pounds on renovating the De la Salle block, for example) seriously undermined the opportunity to develop. Financial constraints on potential parents led to fewer pupils and thus started a slow decline. The pandemic did not help matters either.

It is not fair to suggest that management was not taking the situation of the College's fabric seriously as suggested in the OJ's Summer newsletter. I cannot answer for what the management of the College said in 2008/9 and I was no longer working at the College by 2018/19 but, thoughtful and generous though it no doubt was, unless the OJs were offering some serious refurbishment work, a bit of painting and decorating would not have made much difference. The *"inability of the college management to rectify"* the dilapidation of the fabric will have been predicated on the lack of funds available and escalating overheads. In maintaining a high-quality staff to offer a full curriculum, little was left for building and refurbishment despite the generosity of De La Salle in the loan agreed between College and the brothers at time of Independence.

I am sure that many things could have been done differently - and probably better: management and governance may have been lacking at times. But while I was involved, I can assure OJs that we looked to every means possible to raise money and move the College forward. We would have like to start a development fund for scholarships and bursaries for disadvantaged youngsters as I explained to the OJs on several occasions, for example, but unfortunately, we were never able to take this further and these things always had to be paid for out of the fees of others.

OJs need to appreciate the financial situation in which the College found itself - even by 2008, the College's centenary and no doubt in the years before. A lack of investment dating back over several decades allowed the College to fall behind its competitors in a city which, in most opinions, could not sustain four independent schools indefinitely. It was a tragedy that the one to fall was St John's with its unique and very special ethos and tradition, but we can be proud of what was achieved and the tremendous education the vast majority of its pupils had over 114 years.

Footnote:

For the record, the site eventually sold for a figure way in excess of the valuation put on it both 20 years ago and the guide figure advertised by the estate agent in 2023.



The College Archives (Steve Bedingham OJA Archivist)

Various items had been gathered from the earliest days of the College. Many of these would have been stored in Oakcote, a small cottage situated behind St Catherine's, that was added to the school site in 1929. After its demolition later, this material (together with an ever-growing number of photos, documents etc.), seem to have been scattered around the site in various locations. A good deal ended up in St Donat's, stored there during the period when it was mothballed in the late 1990s. Unfortunately, some of this was lost forever when a new Head, effectively, had it dumped. However, a good deal of what remained was carefully gathered up by Mrs Craise, the librarian and she very carefully catalogued what she found.

Following the closure of the College, the Portsmouth Museum Service was able to take and store most of the items that had been on display to visitors on the "Last Day." That, however, is not the end of the story.

The development company, Nicholas James, have been very sympathetic to the history of the College and I have had very positive discussions with various people now on the site. Since they took ownership, various additional items have been discovered and have been very carefully (and securely) stored. I have been allowed in a few times to assess what is there and have started, with Stefan, to catalogue these items prior to storage.

There seems little doubt that more items of interest to the OJA will be discovered in the coming weeks and months, so that the process now started, will continue for some time. I will keep members informed of ongoing progress!

UPDATE SEPTEMBER 27th 2023

I have now completed a catalogue of items that have been stored at the College, and all items are being photographed by Stefan. We should finish this work shortly, after which these items will be securely stored. Meanwhile, I have been in touch with the Portsmouth Museums Service that reports slow, but steady progress in cataloguing and storing the items already stored there.



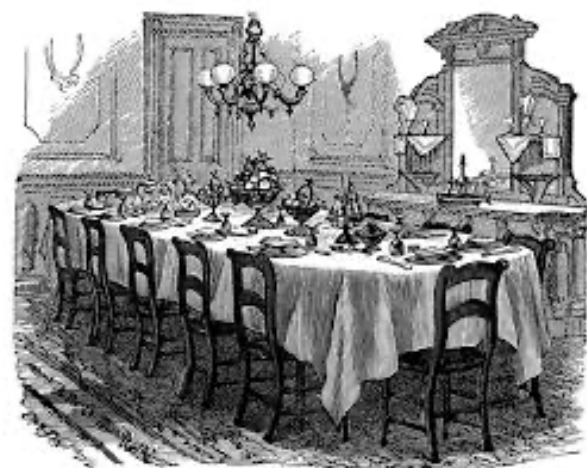
EVENTS (Stephen Davies OJA Events)

The OJA Golf (OJA Editor Stefan Bartkowiak)

The OJA golf took place on Thursday 5th October 2023 at the Waterlooville golf club (WGC.) The WGC has been a venue used by the OJA golf for several years. Initially started by Bro David and carried on by David Harris (long-term OJA committee member.) A few years ago, the OJA recognised the importance of golf as a sport, but also as a social interface in the business world and other groups. We thought that introducing SJC pupils to the sport to give them vital experience in this social activity. Brian Saunders (Deputy SJC head and head of sport) has greatly supported this venture and it remains an important element of the OJA annual calendar to this day. As with many other OJA activities this event is being strengthened and adapted to contemporary demands.

One initiative is the proposed golfing weekend at the Old Thorns hotel between Liss and Liphook. We could well benefit from a connection to this hotel through an OJ and the weekend is currently planned for May 2024. It isn't supposed to be purely for golfers, but an opportunity for OJ's to gather at a shared venue. So, depending on the response we receive and demand, this may well prove to be another event that will be offered in the annual OJA calendar.

Our gratitude to Brian for his past support and continued support cannot be overstated, and his energy and insights continue to be a resource we rely on.



The OJA 2024 Annual Dinner (OJA Editor Stefan Bartkowiak)

The annual dinner will take place at the Queen's hotel, Southsea on 20th April 2024. The date has been changed from the weekend after Easter to the 3rd weekend after Easter. This is to avoid any potential conflicts with holidays and also to avoid premium dates when travel could be more problematic and the cost of travel and accommodation is likely to be more affordable. After the disruption of the Coronavirus pandemic, the continuity of the dinners has been diluted and we will hope to generate increasing numbers in the future. For this year, ticket numbers are limited and will be offered to members in advance of OJ's in general.

We also intend to make the 3rd weekend after Easter a regular date so that members will become used to this timing and mark off their diaries accordingly.

Tickets will be available for purchase when the booking window opens (Notification in the winter newsletter and Facebook/LinkedIn

OJA groups.)

The price of a ticket will be £50 (meal only, drinks purchased separately.) We have managed to contain costs and tickets are offered at the same price as the last dinner in 2022. We cannot offer member beneficial rates this year for administrative reasons, but intend to introduce this member benefit from 2025.

The venue continues to be the Queen's hotel, Southsea. It has the advantage of being close to the SJC campus which is seen as a point of interest alongside being a useful geographical centre. We have continuity there, and our ongoing discussions with the hotel management are securing benefits from this arrangement. There is on-site accommodation and for this year we have a secured a 10% discount attaching to the event.

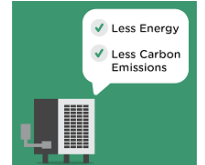


The OJA web site (OJA Editor Stefan Bartkowiak)

<https://www.old-johannian-association.com/>

The development of this vital asset to the OJA is a slow process as we currently have limited expertise in this field. Nevertheless, the site continues to be refined and resources added to it. Ultimately, we intend that this site should be the primary means of conducting OJA business with the SJC diaspora as a valuable search target for those OJ's who wish to 're-connect' via the Association. Also, it will become the main platform for conducting business between the Association and individual members. This means that there will be a 'members only' section of the web site to add value to membership status. Membership will give access to the archives we wish to make available on site along with preferential booking for events.

As we migrate our activities towards a totally digital operation, the web site will become increasingly pivotal in the OJA existence.



The OJA Facebook page (OJA Editor Stefan Bartkowiak)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/OJASJC>

The development of the Facebook page has had a few twists and turns. The first being the revelation that we actually have 4 OJA Facebook accounts. The history was that when Facebook first came onto the scene, we grabbed the group names OldJohannian, OJA and derivatives before they went elsewhere. Nothing much happened to them for a while, and then one in particular took off. These were early days in Facebook's history and as they revised their rules, terms & conditions, our group was found not to be a group but a person, but at the same time not a person. Andy Valvona became involved at this stage as Facebook was about to close the account. Andy persuaded them to allow us to re-designate the account to preserve it, and the only way was to put it into an identifiable person's name. That became Andy's, and that is why it is called OJAVolvona (1200+). We can't sensibly continue with this name ad-infinitum and so we started to focus on an OJA named Facebook group. The preferred option would have been "The OldJohannian Association" but as it turned out "OldJohannianAssociation" took off and now, in a very short space of time it has over 170 members and an active turnover of 'chats.'

Membership (OJA Editor Stefan Bartkowiak)

All correspondence should go to our Association email address:
OldJohannianAssociation@gmail.com

Our current membership figures are 142 paying members and 27 honorary life-members. The demography is largely 60 years and older. The membership represents a group of loyal OJ's who have supported the OJA continuously over the years with their annual membership fees and attendance at OJA events.

The provision of a service to the alumni of SJC was solely by the OJA until the inception of the SJC Alumni group which automatically included pupils as they left the college. In the past, several attempts were made to amalgamate the OJA and the SJC Alumni groups. Progress was made but no final conclusion was achieved largely due to the difficulties of complying with GDPR. As a consequence, all records of past pupils and potential new OJA members were lost when the college closed. We do recognise that we have a 'window of opportunity' since we have brought the OJA into a more digital state with the Web-site, Facebook and LinkedIn. These are in their early stages at present, but we have already had limited success in acquiring new members from a younger age group. This is mainly through an initial contact via the social media gateways.



Finances (OJA Editor Stefan Bartkowiak)

OJA finances are healthy. Andy Valvona, our treasurer has shared the bank account statements with the whole of the committee during the last committee meeting. As we migrate over to a digital presence, we calculate that our fixed annual costs are in the region of £800 pa and our income is around £2500 pa. We do need capital to service our current discretionary expenditure and further capital to future proof against our fixed costs. We also need capital to 'seed' events as many venues require up front deposits, the amounts increasing year-on-year.

In the proposed new rules draft, we seek to make the OJA accounts available to any member upon request and we always publish annual accounts in printed form at the AGM. We are keen to maintain and ensure full transparency of our financial activities for now and into the future.

At the last meeting we agreed formally to ensure that all OJA events and activities attempt to remain cost-neutral wherever and whenever possible. The question of subsidised tickets will inevitably arise, but the issue of subsidised Annual Dinner tickets has largely disappeared.

Another aspect of OJA financial decision-making is the question of charities and charitable giving. Many of you will remember Peter Cullinane's impassioned support of the Bro Raj charity we have supported for many years, especially at the annual dinners. This has also thrown up an anomaly that needs addressing, namely making clear what raffle funds are supporting and how they are distributed. We do believe that continued charitable giving should remain an essential

part of our activity. It does beg the question, where should we direct these funds? And, should there necessarily be a LaSallian connection given that the LaSallian order is presumed to be a wealthy institution?



OJA revised Rules (OJA Editor Stefan Bartkowiak)

I'm fairly sure that this subject isn't high on anyone's reading list, so I'll summarise the changes here. The full revised rules will be posted on the web site for membership scrutiny and a vote to adopt them will take place at the next AGM that is scheduled to precede the next Annual Dinner.

The purpose of the revision falls into several categories. Firstly, it is simple house-keeping where we remove all redundant references to items such as the Association bar in the Castle. We then seek to define the purpose and aims of the Association. We define how we

comply with current law and its changes, specifically the legal liabilities such as accounting, insurance, and GDPR. Then we aim to define more of the detail of the running of the Association, and to do this we seek to ensure the transparency and inclusivity for the members along with a mechanism that allows the committee to function in its day-to-day business without any onerous consultative procedures.

The rules themselves have been split into 2 sections.

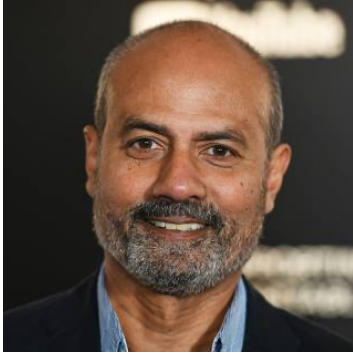
The rules

The rules are in numbered sections and each rule defines the limitations that it imposes. These rules can only be changed by a vote at a general meeting (AGM or Extraordinary.)

Annexes to the rules

The annexes are numbered and referenced to a particular rule. The rule themselves make reference to their respective annex. The annexes may be changed by the committee without reference to the membership to avoid unnecessarily limiting the committee's ability to conduct its business throughout the year.

A copy of the current rules will be posted on the OJA web site and a copy of the latest draft will also be posted alongside them for ease of comparison. Because these current changes are so large it will be for the members to make their own comparisons, however future proposed changes will be summarised as they arise and posted on the rules' web site page.



George Alagiah OBE (OJA Editor Stefan Bartkowiak)

22 November 1955 - 24 July 2023

It would be a serious omission if the sad passing of George Alagiah (OJ) were not mentioned. Particularly as he was a contemporary of mine.

In 1966 George arrived at SJC as a boarder in Woodleigh house. He settled in to college life with apparent great ease and was popular, not only with his fellow pupils, but also with all the teaching staff. He would often be the centre of a group of boarders languishing in a dorm on a Saturday morning or a weekday evening (*outside of study period of course*) planning the next escape from the tedium of captivity. He was taller than average and that would be obvious when we all crowded into the TV room to watch Top of the Pops. (*In reality it was really to watch Pan's People.*) George was also a good all-round sportsman representing his team house and the college. George's father worked with the UN and

was posted to Ghana, but his family originated in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka.) He would proudly announce that Ceylonese food was the world's hottest and calmly ladle a whole pot of Colman's mustard on a couple of sausages and nonchalantly munch his way through them. He eventually was awarded the post of 'Head Boy' which came as no surprise to any of us. George could be serious and yet light-hearted which conferred a great sense of trust in him and was a powerful combination that would serve him well into his future. It was with great surprise that I learned from his auto-biography that he found life at SJC difficult and challenging. He hid this well and I doubt if any of us would have guessed this. When he left SJC he won a place at the much-vaunted Durham university (Van Mildert college.) Even so soon after leaving SJC, it was clear that he valued the friendships he had made at Southsea, and we all frequently met up and kept in touch (as we continue to do to this day.) We attended weddings and OJA dinners or just the occasional unscripted gathering, and George would always endeavour to attend.

We all know how his career blossomed at the BBC and we are all aware of how much in high esteem his BBC colleagues held George, not only as a professional presenter and correspondent, but also simply as a quality fellow human being. Evidence of all this all started before joining the BBC in 2007. He was a correspondent/reporter for South magazine, focusing mainly on Africa, and his human and sympathetic attitude to humanity won him recognition as Amnesty International, man-of-the-year award.

In this recent challenge to his life after being diagnosed with stage 4 bowel cancer in 2014, his response did not diminish him in any way. In fact, it gives further insight into the quality of the man and his determination to face whatever came his way with determination and courage. The 9 years (17 rounds of chemo) he fought this terrible disease from the first diagnosis to its final conclusion, he bounced back so many times, coming back to read the news again and again. He grew a thin beard to hide the effects the chemo had on his skin. He turned out to attend the OJA centenary dinner along with many of our contemporaries.

He was a dedicated family man. His wife, Frances (married 1984,) two sons Adam and Matthew, and siblings were the centre of his life. If you knew George, it would be impossible to separate the man from his family. They were close, and undoubtedly feel the loss so keenly.

A simple web search for his name will reveal so many plaudits to his personal qualities and humanity, he has a posterity that most would envy and is well-deserved.

Our sympathies go out to the whole of the Alagiah family and our prayers go out for George.

I know I speak for all of us that knew George, it was a privilege to have known him.