

THIS WEEK:

JON WHYBROW, HEAD

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I've had many roles in life in so far, as well as a headmaster I've also been; a Royal Marines officer, a dustman and I've met the Queen. I was brought up above a pub in Kew until I was 14, it taught me to mix with anyone and set me up for the very diverse life ahead teaching and leading schools. The top qualities for being a successful head are you must enjoy the company of people of all ages, you have also got to enjoy seeing a child grow as a whole person. If you are only interested in exam results, you won't make a good head. When that young person leaves your school, then walks back in three years later as a consummate adult, you have got to relish that transformation and the role your school played in it. You must also like dogs!e



I was born in Ilford, Essex, in 1960 that's why I'm an infuriated and infatuated West Ham fan. Soon after we moved to Seven Kings in East London, then Ealing, then to Kew in South West London to run and live above a pub. It was the Coach and Horses on Kew Green, a very popular place. I was working as soon as I was big enough, polishing glasses, cleaning, bottling up, then serving customers. I loved the place, and it was a brilliant way to learn how to deal with people.



The first school I attended was a pre-prep. My parents were told if I wanted to go to St. Benedict's afterwards, we would have to convert to Catholicism so I went to St. Pauls in Barnes instead. It was and is a fantastic school. I was able to indulge my love of rowing and rugby, I worked very hard and eventually I became captain of both. Despite the great education I had, I achieved poor A-level results because all my energies went into sport. I went through clearing and got a place to do teacher training in PE at St Luke's, Exeter. It had just become part of Exeter University, so I ended up with a very good quality degree. The place wasn't very academic, the craic was fun, but I felt somewhat unfulfilled. I was sponsored by the Marines, maybe that is why I didn't really immerse myself fully in university life.

After uni I joined the forces, which I wanted to do from age 14. My Dad was in the Fleet Air Arm and I just had it in my veins. I was posted to Arbroath and, disappointingly, during my tenure I wasn't deployed as a Marine anywhere. It was post the Falklands conflict and in that phase of NATO peace keeping which was low 'action' for a Marine. Life in Arbroath was very dull, so I resigned my commission. I wish on balance I had stayed longer but I wanted more. I did see some action as I was involved in the 1988 Clapham Junction train crash when four trains collided. There were nearly 500 people injured, 34 deaths. I was teaching at Emanuel School at the time which was adjacent to the crash, I was able to help pull people out of the wreckage. It was a terrible experience but I felt pleased that I was able to help some people at the very worst moment in their lives.

After the Royal Marines it was time to take a teaching job. There was a gap between leaving the Marines and term starting in September for my first teaching job at Latymer Upper School in 1985. I had responsibilities and a mortgage, so I took an interim job as a dustman!



As a teacher you are important every day, and I thrived on the responsibility. At Latymer Upper School I taught games and Geography and I got to indulge in my passion for rowing. I stayed there for two years before joining Edgeborough as a PE teacher. These were golden times, my best friend was there, I had two brilliant years. Then I was headhunted to teach at Emanuel School, which allowed me to develop my classroom teaching. I still taught games, coached rugby, and rowing as well as cricket. The school was at the height of its power, it was an assisted places school, which also gave it a great socio-economic mix.



In 2005 I took my first standalone headship, at Beachborough, set in 30 acres of countryside, it offered great accommodation too, it was a glorious life. The school was very popular with the nearby American community, which made it very interesting culturally. We really enjoyed our friends and this aspect of life at this time. I also got to scratch the farming itch, we had sheep, pigs and runner ducks. We had both of our girls educated at the school.

We left because I wanted to work in one of England's great schools, and I was appointed to the headship of Cheltenham College Preparatory School. I loved every minute of it. I had a great working relationship with Alex Peterken in charge at the time. I worked incredibly hard for five years, then Alex left and I was getting tired, I thought it was time to retire a little early. In reality, I just needed a rest ... and the pandemic ensured just that!

From Emanuel I took a job to advance my career – to Deputy Head, at Devonshire House School. I was not a fan. It was a career move to get me where I wanted to be. Here I met my wife Julie, and we married in 1996. After marriage I correspondingly found I got a lot more job interviews for senior roles, moving to my first headship at the City of London Freeman's School. Our daughter Ellie was born in 1998 and then Abbie in 2002. Over time I didn't get on with the senior head there, and the longer I was there, the more ambitious I became. Unfortunately, this made it less feasible for me to remain. Through all these ups and downs France has been our retreat, it's really where we call home, we love the culture and the skiing!



Once rested up I got revved up and ready to go again. I came to Amesbury, this is my fourth term and I am thrilled to be leading a school where the parents are so engaged and so connected to their child's lives and education. Similarly, the staff here are incredibly passionate about their role in young people's education. The compound effect of parents and teachers working together will bring powerful gains through the fullness of a school year.



When young teachers ask for advice as their careers, I tell them to stay grounded in their core subject, and in what they love. If you are games teacher, get in your tracksuit, take part, make sure you referee. If you are a singer, make sure you get up and perform. Learn to sift through the range of 'noise' that will get thrown at you that can knock you off course, and always admit your mistakes.

