

Founders' Day 23rd May 2026

Peter Clucas, Chairman of Governor's

Your Excellency, Honourable Members of Tynwald, Lord Bishop, Fellow Council Members and Governors, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls.

I am pleased to welcome you all to King William Colleges' Founders Day for 2026.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome this year's Guest of Honour Judith Ley. Judith will be a familiar face – and a VERY familiar voice – to many of us here today. The theme of today's Founders' Day celebrations is 'Celebrating our Arts, Culture and Heritage' and Judith, with her long years of experience in this area on the Isle of Man, through her work at Manx Radio and involvement with the Cathedral, is the perfect person to have as our Guest of Honour. Judith has a particular interest in the Manx Music Festival or Guild – indeed some describe her knowledge of the Guild as encyclopaedic. If you have performed there, Judith will remember you! Judith recently compered the post-Guild concert and her role here today is similar: to comper the 'student talent' portion of the programme, putting the performers at their ease before they come up on stage, telling us about the acts, presenting the prizes and generally being fun in a way that neither the Principal nor I will probably manage in our speeches. Judith, you are very welcome.

I offer a special welcome to His Excellency and Lady Lorimer. His Excellency occupies an important position within the governance of the school, as he is the Chair of the governing council, the Bishop Barrow Foundation. The Foundation is in many respects in the position of being the school's ultimate shareholder as well as being the custodian of those funds, regrettable fairly modest, which have been donated or bequeathed to the school over many years.

The Foundation bears the name of Issac Barrow, Bishop of Sodor and Man between 1663 and 1671. It is fitting on Founders Day that we remind ourselves that it was in part a result of steps he took in the second half of the 17th century to establish funds and acquire lands (I will say more about this), that we can trace the school's ancestry back more than 350 years, and venerate him as our first founder.

Although we draw a direct line from the designs of Bishop Barrow through to the establishment of the opening of the school in 1833, the reality is that more than 150 years separated the actions of the Bishop and the opening of the school. Others less well remembered and certainly less

well commemorated in our school life played an equally crucial role in ensuring his dreams were ultimately made a reality; we should and do pay equal tribute to them.

In some respects, it is curious that the school places the memory of our founding Bishop in such unique high esteem, especially when you dig a little into the methods he employed. We are reminded of him daily whenever we gather in the Barrovian Hall or read the inspiring achievements of our current and past pupils in the annual Barrovian magazine. However, I sometimes reflect that had the delicacies of modern attitudes prevailed, it must be highly questionable whether he would have succeeded in his endeavours or whether we would choose to honour his memory by reference to his name in quite the same way.

It is more than an interesting anecdote to retell the actions of Bishop Barrow when acquiring the land which the school in part occupies, indeed the land on which you are now all seated. To establish the funds which were to become known as the Bishop Barrow Charity (as I have mentioned now the Foundation), Bishop Barrow wielded absolute authority – he acquired two farms, one being Hango Hill farm, which he leased to the Constable of Castle Rushen, thereby seeding an income in part to fund his vision. The problem was that Hango Hill was already tenanted and the sitting tenant objected. In the face of the Keys and law courts of the Island, Bishop Barrow confiscated his land, imprisoned his wife and children in Castle Rushen and placed the tenant himself in a dungeon at Peel Castle. Furthermore, he stripped the farm of its roof and doors and drove the livestock onto the beach. As Dr Michael Hoy's excellent history of King Williams' College reminds us, the estate was appropriated into Barrow's trust and Hango Hill's 45 acres became part of the land on which, 165 years later, King William's College was built. Welcome all to our Founder's Day celebration!

I have been the Chairman of the board of governors for almost 6 years. When I made my first Founder's Day address, I stated that I was deeply honoured and a little humbled to have been asked to be the Chairman of the governors of this great school.

What I did not know 6 years ago was quite how strong were to be the headwinds into which independent fee-paying education, and of course our school, would have to sail. We operate in a climate which if not a perfect storm, is certainly stormy, especially for schools of our size. I freely acknowledge that the school's finances are still in a state where we must justify and prioritise all lines of expenditure. This presents a constant challenge to the management of the school and, whilst I understand that the more constrained times in which we operate are a cause of frustration to some, the measures which the management and Governors of the school take are done in the best long-term interests of the school.

I am aware, as I stated in my recent letter to you, that steps taken by the school have created uncertainties for families. But as we have recently tried to explain, we have now announced why fees had to increase and have set out the final tranche of any fee increases arising from the unprecedented introduction of a tax on private education. I do not pretend that this would have been welcome news to most of my audience today but assure you that the Governors understand that it is becoming harder and harder to prioritise the cost of private education. I remain of the view that phasing in these tax charges was the right thing to do, even if it meant delaying other aspects of our future ambitions. I sympathise with all of us as we have to deal with the increasing cost of living, but I do not however resile from my statements that we need a realistic level of income to maintain the high quality of teaching and pastoral care, to support the development of the sport and co-curricular provision that parent expect and pupils want, to improve facilities, and to prepare for the long-term sustainability of the school.

And we are looking towards our future. We are nearly within touching distance of our 200th anniversary – I will shortly invite one of my fellow Governors to the podium to say a little more on this. As a board of governors, we are reviewing the strategic plan for KWC and the Buchan School and aim to share our positivity and plans for the continued success of the school with all stakeholders later this year. Your voice is important and whether it is through school surveys, or direct feedback, I assure you that your comments, good and bad, are being listened to.

As Governors, we rely on the hard work and dedication of the senior leaders across the school, led by Mr Henderson. They work tirelessly in seeking to implement necessary changes to sustain and improve school life and to attract new pupils. The recent work in introducing a new pathway for sixth form, offering an exciting blend between a wide choice of supervised online A level teaching and excellent on-site pastoral support whilst maintaining the opportunity to secure lifelong friendships, is at the vanguard of education and we are already seeing traction with parents. This initiative also highlights the need to maintain and improve our co-curricular activities. The success of the recent rugby scholarship programme, and the work being done to deliver future sports fixtures, and more frequent off-Island experiences reflect the importance of this side of school life. It is co-curricular life at KWC which is at the centre of a revised format for today's celebrations, as we highlight some of our artistic and musical talent. We have incredibly talented students, whether they perform individually or as collective, who are supported by dedicated and equally talented teachers. So, I am proud that we have the opportunity to showcase just a small part of that talent pool as part of our prize-giving programme this morning.

We have a small senior leadership team and by reason of this I acknowledge the incredible workload that they take on. I thank them today for all the work they undertake – it is deeply appreciated by all Governors. It is unfair to single out individual members of the team, so forgive me if I acknowledge each and every member of SLT, starting with Mr Henderson’s for his leadership and dedication to his role as Principal, our COO’s ability to get a quart out of a pint pot, and Mr Corrie for his outstanding work this year as he has taken on wider responsibilities as our deputy head. The final member of SLT, Mrs Billingsley-Evans, deserves special mention as she has continued to deliver to her normal the high standards in the course of year in which we moved the Buchan into its new home on the KWC campus. There is further work to be done in bedding the Buchan into its new home, but it is important that we welcome the Buchaneers and allow them to flourish within the full campus as part of a one-school culture across all age ranges. Janet’s ability to manage this transition with a constant smile on her face is amazing.

I also want to speak directly to all our wonderful members of staff. As a non-teacher, it is sometimes difficult for me to appreciate the challenges which the last year has presented as we have delivered or announced further changes to the school day and everyone’s working environment. Their priority throughout has been our pupils, their academic achievement and their wellbeing. Putting this another way, they have put others before themselves, I cannot thank you all enough.

The SLT and teaching staff cannot operate at their best with the efforts of all our non-teaching staff. Whether they are in the front line, or part of the inner working of the machine, I thank them for their continued commitment to school life.

I also express my sincerest thanks to you, our parental body. We must never take your support for granted and I assure you we do not. A school like ours operates on the support of all stakeholders, and volunteering to assist in any aspect of school life can bring enrichment to everyone. We have seen the benefits of the generous support of some of our parents in the last 12 months and thank them unreservedly for everything they have done for the school whether small or large. We want to work with all parents to deliver the best outcomes, and if anyone thinks they can make a positive contribution, whether that be ideas, special skills or simply time to volunteer, we want to hear from you.

I now turn to our students. I speak to them all and say you should be proud of what you have achieved in the last year. Whilst I congratulate those of you who will be awarded prizes today – all our pupils deserve special recognition for their achievements.

Lastly, I address our leavers. I thank you for your contribution to school life during your time at college. This is the day, or perhaps more accurately the night, for you to celebrate a culmination of many years hard work and you should be as proud of your achievements at college. As President of our alumni society, I also welcome you to the family of OKWs. If your time here has been only half as fulfilling and happy as my own, I am sure you will make great success of your futures, whatever and where that takes you.

It is your future success that we celebrate today, and you leave with our best wishes.

Finally, I thank all my fellow Governors (including those that have stepped down during the last 12 months) and member of the Bishop Barrow Foundation for all their hard work and their commitment towards the best outcomes for the school.

Before I sign off, I mentioned earlier that one of our Governors would step up to the podium. So, I would like to invite Jon McGowan to step up to say a few words.

Thank you.