



SACS

Signposting the Future



"Primus inter pares," was the classical tag schoolmasters used to give to their star pupils - "foremost amongst equals" So it is and has been with SACS.

Kenneth Ball, 9th headmaster of the South African College School in Newlands, Cape Town, is adamant about the position his school occupies and its future role. He comments, "as custodians of the oldest traditional boys' High School in the country, we at SACS undoubtedly carry a burden of history. But, as educational leaders, it is crucial that this wonderful old school remains at the cutting-edge of developments and change in this sphere."

Far from resting contentedly on its 180 year-old record of growth and excellence, SACS in the 1980s and early 90s, led the Open Schools' Movement, making it possible, without the formal sanction of the Nationalist Government, for the integration of South African schools. Boys 'of colour,' Muslim and Christian, had been enrolled at SACS throughout the 19th century but, segregated for 85 odd years by the Cape School Board's Act of 1905 and the subsequent blight of Apartheid, the school had the unusual satisfaction of re-opening its doors in 1992 to boys of all races.

As leader today of this flag-ship of Govern-

ment schools, Ball has a personal educational philosophy stemming from his own record as a marathon athlete of distinction. "Two Oceans, Comrades Marathons, whatever the race might be, there is only one competitor first across the finishing line. And why should it not be oneself?"

To this ethos of intense competitiveness, SACS has, historically, coupled a sense of community involvement and concern for the 'other.' Established in Cape Town's City Bowl in 1829, the old South African College provided the essence of SACS - 'die goeie ou Kaapse liberale tradisie.' This flowed from the school's English and Dutch founders combining harmoniously to provide a tradition of tolerance and understanding, one which has remained the school's chief characteristic.

With many headmasters and teachers of Scottish extraction, the school has enjoyed too, a reputation from its earliest days of academic rigour and thoroughness. This was undoubtedly a factor which attracted to the school Jewish immigrants settling in the Cape in the first decades of the 20th century, so many of whose sons went on to make huge contributions to the development of South Africa as well as gaining international renown. Justice Albie Sachs, Lord Solly Zuckerman and Lord

Leonard Hoffman have been a few of those who, in the words of the School Song, have 'swelled the fame...'

One of only four schools world-wide privileged enough to possess its own Rhodes Scholarship, SACS has attracted to itself pupils possessing the calibre, academically, culturally and in the sporting sphere to qualify for consideration for this, 'our greatest prize.'

SACS was forced to move from the Mother City in the 1950s and acquire a new home in the southern suburbs. It was a wrench to leave the beautiful Herbert Baker buildings at the top of Government Ave but pressure to offer sufficient fields and other sporting facilities had made it impossible to continue on in town. Foresight on the part of different SACS individuals had provided, however, the opportunity to take advantage of the ample space on the choice Montebello estate in Newlands.

The former home of the mining magnate Sir Max Michaelis, Montebello today gives SACS boys the privilege of studies and sport within the precincts of one of the loveliest properties at the Cape, if not the country. On it, by 1960, had arisen what the writer Alan Paton described as 'the grandest school buildings in South Africa.' His

larger point, however, being that, notwithstanding the magnificence of the school's amenities, the fact that SACS counted Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr as its most famous Old Boys, made it the grandest of all South African schools.

However much SACS may bask in the reflected glory of its past products - the Jack Cheethams, Percy Montgomerys and, Peter Kirstens of the sporting world - fundamental to Kenneth Ball's vision for the future is the continued investment in the sense of self-worth and capacity of each pupil presently at the school. Of them considerable demands are made and the highest expectations are assumed. Whether it be in the school's prestigious music department, in the continuing 100% academic success rate or the notable sporting achievements, reflected later provincially and nationally, SACS insists on the principle of a balanced education - which emphasises the concept of service to the wider community.

"You see,' comments Kenneth Ball," with a school as well endowed as SACS, and with South African society transforming as rapidly as it is, we cannot, dare not, neglect our historic role as an educational leader, nor indeed as a catalyst, through our products, for change and the betterment of the country as a whole."