

PETER HOMBURGER

A LOYAL AND GENEROUS EASTBOURNIAN

The College was delighted to welcome back Peter Homburger (School 1942–47) and his family from Denver, Colorado, when they visited in the autumn. For nearly 75 years Peter has been one of the school's most loyal and generous supporters, having donated on a number of occasions to the Foundation. He was also one of the longest-serving OE overseas reps, having taken on this role from 1961 until he stood down last year.

On Thursday 10 October Peter toured the new buildings which make up the Project 150 development and visited the economics classroom which bears his name, following his donation to the P150 appeal. There is also a Homburger room in the Birley Centre, in

honour of Peter and his two brothers.

Later that afternoon he took part in a 45-minute question-and-answer session with boys and girls from across the year groups. Twentieth century history was brought alive as Peter answered questions about escaping from Germany on the Kindertransport



Peter sitting by the Cloisters with his four sons, Dave, Phil, Steve and Drew

Peter chats with Head of Economics Jon Bathard-Smith in the Homburger Room, one of the new classrooms in the Winn Building

programme with his two brothers, Walter and Wolfgang, who also attended the College. His parents were taken away to be interned in a concentration camp, before they managed to escape to America. Peter's story of how he survived and then coped with being separated from his parents for eight years from the age of eleven onwards before subsequently going on to have a successful career and life in the USA, is compelling.

One inspirational moment came when Peter was asked by a pupil if, having seen the worst excesses of Nazi rule in Germany, he still had faith in human nature. Gesturing towards his four sons and their wives at the side of the room, he explained that he did have faith, because of his loving and supportive family. Peter clearly holds no bitterness, despite all that he has

lived through.

Peter also talked about life at the College, part of which was spent at Radley during the wartime evacuation, and partly in Eastbourne. He remembered that he had not been made a prefect at school, something that was put right by Headmaster Tom Lawson, who duly presented him with a prefect's tie, albeit nearly 75 years late.

On Thursday evening Peter and his family hosted a dinner at his hotel for the headmaster and his wife Jess, along with other members of staff from the Eastbourne Society. The next day the family set off to visit Devon, where Peter had spent his summer holidays while at the College. Everybody who met Peter during his visit was honoured to have done so and inspired by his story, his wisdom and his compassion.

Here, in Peter's own words, is his life story

I was born into a Jewish family 91 years ago. We were shot at and thrown out of our school and finally, on Kristallnacht, my father's bank was destroyed and he was sent to Dachau, because he would not sign the bank over to the Nazis. When he had stood naked in snow and rain, he finally signed and was released.

In England, the Red Cross with some rich families decided to rescue the Jewish children on the continent. It was called the Kindertransport and in May 1939 my two older brothers and I were transported to England. A distant relative who was not married said he would take care of us. So after one night at his home in London we all went to Eastbourne where my oldest brother Walter was enrolled in Eastbourne College and brother Wolf (Wolfgang) and I were at a prep school. The reason our guardian chose Eastbourne I never found out. One guess is that he met the College's headmaster John Nugee in the military.

My parents were interned in a camp in the Pyrenees and finally bought their way through to relatives in New York - on the last ship to leave Europe for the USA. During holidays in England I

was boarded at a home in South Devon.

After the war, under the rules of the Kindertransport, I had to join my parents in New York. I had fallen in love with a girl in Devon and had asked her to marry me. But the prospect of living in New York did not appeal to her. However the one thing she accomplished was my conversion to Christianity. In fact, the first time I saw her I followed her and she went to church.

Fast forward - I stayed in New York where I rented a room and by Christmas 1947 decided to move to Denver where I had won a scholarship to the University of Denver and also got a job. I got my bachelor and master's degree from DU and became a CPA.

In September 1950 I received my draft notice and was assigned to the 45th Infantry Division. I passed all the officer tests but had not lived in the country the required five years to become a citizen. So I spent my whole two years as a chaplain's assistant. We were sent to Japan as occupation troops over Christmas 1951. The chaplain and I were assigned to a camp at Yong Dong Po [in Korea]. At this time, this town was about ten miles from Seoul

and the only paved road I ever saw was from Incheon to Seoul. The chaplain and I were assigned to our base, but we served 23 smaller units and tried to hold services in all of them at least every ten days. I also had many other duties such as securing supplies for all 15 chaplains in the division. I came home in 1952, got married and raised four boys. I retired from the electric utility in 1984 after 33 years' service. On 21 May I celebrated my 91st birthday.



The three Homburger brothers shortly after they arrived in England in 1939: Peter, Walter (School 1939-40) and Wolf (School 1941-44)