

# *Cylchlythyr Cymdeithas Cyn-Ddisgyblion Ysgol Ramadeg y Bechgyn, Aberhonddu Mawrth 2022*

## *Brecon Grammar School Old Boys' Association Newsletter March 2022*

### Introduction

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Once again last year we were not able to hold our annual reunion dinner at the usual date because of the pandemic. However, we did have a Zoom meeting for the AGM in April 2021 as reported later, and we had a successful rearranged reunion dinner in September.

Other good news to report is that we succeeded in raising funds to commission the painting of a portrait of Glyn Powell. Thank you everyone who contributed to this fund.

Sadly, we have very disappointing news about Cymryd Rhan's attempt to develop the Cradoc Road school building for young people; see report on page 26.

Readers are asked to let Tom Protheroe know of any Old Boy deaths.

Unwaith eto y llynedd ni allen ni gynnal ein cinio aduniad blynyddol ar y dyddiad arferol oherwydd y pandemig. Fodd bynnag, fe gawsom

gyfarfod Zoom ar gyfer y Cyfarfod Cyffredinol Blynyddol ym mis Ebrill 2021 fel yr adroddwyd yn ddiweddarach, ac fe gawsom ginio aduniad llwyddiannus wedi'i aildrefnu ym mis Hydref. Newyddion da eraill i'w hadrodd yw ein bod wedi llwyddo i godi arain i gomisiynu paentio portread o Glyn Powell. Diolch i bawb a gyfrannodd at y gronfa hon.

Yn anffodus, mae gennym newyddion siomedig iawn am ymgais Cymryd Rhan i ddatblygu adeilad ysgol Heol Cradoc ar gyfer pobl ifanc; gweler adroddiad ar dudalen 26.

Gofynnir i ddarlennwyr roi gwybod i Tom Protheroe am unrhyw farwolaethau Hen Fechgyn.

### Events of 2021

The usual reunion a week after Easter had to be cancelled because of the pandemic. However, we were able to hold the **AGM** on Saturday, 10th April, 2021 on Zoom. Members present were: David Gittins, Michael

Williams, Allan Lloyd, Glyn Powell, Meredydd Jones, Les Bevan, Gwynne Giles (from Canada), Win Griffiths, Andrew Thomas, Colin Crook and Tom Protheroe. Items discussed were:

1. **Treasurer's report:** current account balance - £1959.10, Monmouthshire B.S. - £7742.05.
2. **Election of officers:** Meredydd Jones, before passing (virtually) the Chain of Office to Robert Breeze, gave a short address in which he thanked the OBA for the honour of making him President. He also thanked the officers, JMW for the newsletter, and GP for his learned articles for the newsletter. He added that he appreciated greatly the education he had received at the Grammar School. It had had prepared him well for the challenges of life. In turn members thanked Meredydd for his term of office during a year unlike any other during the OBA's history. The officers and committee were re-elected.
3. **Nominations for Life Vice President:** the three nominations, David Gittins, Shaun Gallagher and Lyn Roberts were approved
4. **Annual Reunion Dinner:** Tom confirmed that the Castle Hotel had been booked for the rearranged reunion on 18th September. Glyn Powell raised the issue of future membership of the OBA, and asked how we could encourage Old Girls, widows of Old Boys, old High School attendees, and Old Boys from the 1960s to join. This will be discussed further.
5. The **Annual Prize Giving** at the High School was confirmed for 13th July, 2021 (Miss Gibbs later informed Tom that Old Boys would not be able to attend).
6. **Reunion Lunch** was confirmed for 11th November.
7. **Remembrance Service** was confirmed for 11th November.
8. **Newsletter 2021** Comments implied this was amongst the best produced so far. JMW asked for more contributions for 2022. Glyn asked for a note to be included in the next newsletter to ask for Old Boy deaths to be reported
9. **Website update** JMW reported that the site was currently down, but would be operational the next day. News item were included to keep the site up to date.
10. **Update on Cymryd Rhan** Allan Lloyd reported that he had had several zoom meetings with the organisation, and had been invited to be a director. He was anticipating significant progress this year. Members congratulated Allan on his directorship.
11. **Any Other Business** No progress was reported on placing our first candidate for the Alumni section on the Brecon High School website.

A rearranged **Annual Reunion Dinner** was held at the Castle Hotel on Saturday, 18th September 2021 and attended by 35 Old Boys and partners. After a welcome by Chairman, David Gittins, we enjoyed an



excellent meal, and then the 2020-2021 President, Meredydd Jones (on left in photo), passed the chain of office to Robert Breeze, who gave his address. He began by referring to the restrictions he encountered on joining the Cradoc Road school - no school bus, and having to rely on Western Welsh; no school lunch, and having to rely on sandwiches. However he did escape the usual water treatment initiation ceremony because his brother was a prefect. After gaining his CWB certificate, he embarked on the Higher Certificate, but with National Service looming he wanted some work experience that would be useful. Someone recommended the Met Office, and he started training at the Met School in Bush House, the Strand, London in 1947. When judged proficient, he was transferred to the RAF Station at Brize Norton. Whilst there, he was selected for transfer to the group HQ at RAF Upavon. After National Service he remained at Upavon until his marriage in 1951, when

he resigned from the Met Office. He then trained as Banana Ripener and ended up as Director of Quality Assurance at Newport Docks. After retiring, he served as a consultant for five years.

Vice President Andrew Thomas then proposed a vote of thanks to the President and the Old Boys' Committee. He commended the school for the breadth of learning, which had led to so many varied careers. He also commented on how Welsh had been an ice breaker at many International conferences during his career.

Because of Covid restrictions Old Boys were unable to attend the **High School Awards Evening** in July. No photo was taken of the OBA prize winners, whose names follow:

<u>Prize</u>	<u>Name</u>
D.J. Powell Cup	Cerys Jones Y10
Evans most improved History	Rachelle Price Y9
Evans Art	Teagan Higgins
Evans KS4 Geography	Louis Rooza
Evans KS4 Maths	Jasmine Bovington Wood
Cliff Carr Memorial	Daniel Pitt
Evans Business	(Not awarded)
Senior Geoffrey Meredith Powell	Amy Pitt
Evans KS5 Maths	Freddie Hughes
Evans Intercultural Understanding	Chloe Jamieson
Evans KS3 Language	Zac Williams
Letton Shield	Ruby Herdman
Junior Geoffrey Meredith Powell	Ben Arrowsmith
Evans KS3 Maths	Henry Flynn
Evans KS3 Language	Caitlin Jones
Mike Peter's bugle	(Not awarded)
Lewis Price	Caitlin Jones

A limited number of Old Boys attended the **Memorial Service** on 11th November 2021. In the absence of the Vice President, David Gittins read the names of those who fell in WWII. President Bob Breeze laid the wreath as usual. As last year, in the absence of a PA system it was impossible to hear most of the readings. The Rev. David Thomas gave a short address in which he urged everyone to remember the fallen of all wars and to work for a "just peace" today. Having peace on its own is not enough if it leaves tensions and lingering distrust. He concluded the service with prayers. The Old Boys then enjoyed lunch at the Castle Hotel.

### **Biographical Notes**

#### **Andrew Thomas (1951-58) - Vice President**

Born in Swansea and brought up in Crai, where he lived by the reservoir, Andrew followed school with university in Cardiff where he got introduced to computers. These have dominated his working life. After Cardiff he went up to the 'smoke' to work in industry and education. He used his Welsh background as an effective tool in dealing with European cultures. He married Mary and has 2 sons Gethin and Huw. He now enjoys playing bowls, collecting things and extolling the virtues of Wales and the Welsh.

### **New High School Head**

Mr Richard Jenkins, who was brought in as interim Headteacher of the High School in 2019, was appointed to the permanent post with effect from 1st March 2020. His appointment was to add stability to the school, which was in the process of transferring to the new purpose-built £21 million campus, and which had



undergone a number of changes of head-ships in a short period of time. Mr Jenkins had originally been seconded from his post as senior deputy at Porth Community School at the end of January 2019 when inspectors Estyn, which had been monitoring Brecon High School following a critical report, declared it in need of "urgent improvement".

Richard Jenkins grew up in Treherbert in the Rhondda and attended Treorchy Comprehensive School. After completing his GCSEs and A-levels he proceeded to Cardiff University. After graduating he completed a postgraduate certificate in education at Exeter University. His first teaching post in September 2003 was at Tavistock College in Devon, a very large specialist languages college. He admitted to having spent several enjoyable years there before being promoted to lead a department at South Dartmoor Community College in Ashbourne where he was eventually elevated to a position of senior leadership. In 2013 he returned to Wales to become Deputy Headmaster at Porth Community School in the Rhondda. On completion of his NPQH qualification (National Professional Qualification for Headship) he was able to assume more responsibility as Acting Head teacher for two years, assisting with the transition of the school to an ALL-Through School model. It was during this period that he was delegated to work in Powys with specific reference to Brecon High School.

Mr Jenkins is very much a family man with two daughters aged eight and four, the former being born in England and the latter in Wales. With tongue in cheek he indicates that there is an element of conflicting support whenever there is rugby on the TV! He himself is an outdoor man who enjoys skiing, cycling and walking in particular, and who feels the pull of the beach whenever the weather allows.

On his appointment he said "I am absolutely delighted to be able to continue working at Brecon High School. This is a very proud moment for myself and my family". Since then he has found Brecon to be "a wonderful school full of very hard-working pupils and a very talented team of teaching staff. I hope to be able to help the school to reach its full potential".

The Old Boys' Association wishes to congratulate Mr Jenkins on his appointment as headmaster and we feel confident that he will succeed in his mission.

**Glyn Powell**

### **An old man and a new bike**

I have always been fascinated by people and places. People, because of their many differences, and also they all have their own stories; places, especially if they are beyond the hills, river or wood. I have been, in short, a wanderer from childhood to ancient manhood. I've covered much ground and in doing so have, however briefly, met many people with interesting stories and much wisdom.

On reflection I look to my years at Brecon Boys' Grammar School (1952-59), and particularly the latter years at Penlan, that provided my stimulus for larger more dramatic mountains. The view from Penlan over Brecon towards the Beacons was awesome, but not necessarily good for my studies. The mountains, and particularly Pen y Fan, called siren-like to me, and to this day still does. I think my curiosity about people and places really developed in those years, continued for the remainder of my life, and presented many interesting and amusing moments, not least of which was my encounter with the old man and his new bike.

As I grew from my 30's right up to retirement, I was fortunate to have a group of close friends who felt the same as me about the great outdoors, and we were 'let off the hook', by our loving wives for a week once a year to walk and explore those places in the U.K. which appealed to us. We progressed, through the decades, from back packing and 'wild camping' (as they call it now), to renting a cottage, or similar, as a base and walking from there each day. The rest of the year, once a week, we explored the more local area. On one such occasion just David (Dai to his friends) Gittins, OB chairman and lifelong friend, and myself did a circuit of Llanngorse Lake and mountain, starting and finishing at Llangasty Village Hall. Having completed the walk, we took our boots off on a bench beside the hall and close to the narrow road alongside.

I looked up and noticed an elderly gentleman cycling and struggling up the slight incline, against the wind. As he got nearer to me I realised that he was indeed a very elderly gentleman, on what appeared to be a brand new bike. I engaged him with a smile and commented that I liked his bike. He responded by getting off his bike though saying not a word. He walked across the road, placed his bike very carefully against the bench and still said not a word. I engaged him again, repeated that I liked his bike, and asked if it was new. He returned my gaze but again remained silent, though his eyes filled with sadness. I had the wisdom (I like to think) not to speak again but to leave the 'ball in his court'. A few minutes later, his eyes now clearing, he looked closely into my face and said sorrowfully, "Yes, it is new. I only bought it yesterday, in Brecon."

I prompted him gently, "What made you do that?"

He replied, sadly, "I've never had a new bike, though I've always wanted one. I'd only had hand-me-downs and second hand bikes, so I decided the time was right to buy a new one."

His eyes glazed and he seemed lost in a world of sadness, and again I left him to his thoughts. Minutes later his eyes cleared and he told me that very recently his wife and his dog had died. His faraway eyes, full of tears, told me that he was alone with his thoughts again. In my wise and caring imagination, I knew that once again he was walking across a sunny Llangorse meadow, hand in hand with his young bride and life companion. Clearly she had been his life, his world.

My instincts told me to leave him in that lovely, happy place for a while longer. As his eyes cleared, he brushed away the tears and said, firmly but quietly, "You'd never believe how much I miss that dog."

What do I know!!

**Shaun Gallagher**

### **Jacob Morgan: Headmaster 1929-1954**

#### **Part 2**

[This the fifth of a series of articles on Brecon headmasters]

In dealing with schoolboy misdemeanours Jacob Morgan would dispense corporal punishment but generally as a last resort. He did prefer a word of advice to a stroke with a cane. When he was obliged to take the ultimate step he would preface his action with an expression of regret for having to do so. He displayed a fatherly concern for his pupils and showed a particular concern for the welfare of the disadvantaged. He dispensed advice on what seemed to be very minor matters. After I was diagnosed as requiring spectacles I was obliged to report to his office to collect a wire-framed pair with round lenses similar to the ones which seemed to have become embedded in his eye sockets. Before handing them over he gave me a detailed briefing on their care, emphasising that I was never to place them lens down on a hard surface.

Writing in the *Silurian* (Vol XX, 1969), J H Williams ("Colonel") wrote "not only was he a kindly man who did many good deeds without advertising them, but he also had the happy gift of being able to control the school with the lightest of hands in such a way that everyone felt he was a member of a family", continuing "he was a mathematician of distinction and a very able teacher. He was also an enthusiast for outside activities and it is still easy to conjure up the past and see him guarding the goal in a Staff v Boys Soccer match, or batting and bowling with no little skill in a Staff v Boys Cricket match. Added to all this he was, throughout his life in Brecon, a pillar of his chapel and a faithful supporter of all good causes. All who knew him will remember him with affection and gratitude".

Lewis Lewis gives an extended tribute to his headmaster in the *"Silurian"* (Vol V, 1954), where he notes "As headmaster he is possessed of a kindly and generous disposition. He is human and sympathetic in his relations with pupils and staff and can readily be consulted for guidance and advice. Throughout the school there has existed an atmosphere of friendliness . . . His first concern as headmaster is the happiness, well being and progress of his pupils, and his reward has been a love and respect of the boys".

On the occasion of his retirement David Lewis CC MBE, Chairman of the LEA and a former pupil, declared that “Mr Morgan had done fine work, having produced boys who were a credit, not only to the county, but to the country. He had been a great headmaster, leading the rising generation with loving care and kindness.” Mr E B Powell MBE, President of the OBA, stated “this period of headship would be recalled with affection and gratitude”. The Rev Geoffrey Davies, another Old Boy, described him as “a Christian headmaster”.

Jacob Morgan was a deacon and financial secretary of the Plough Congregational Chapel, and was for many years a Sunday school teacher and its superintendent. It is indicative of his standing that it was he who delivered the tributes to the memory of the eminent centenarian Prof John Evans and Rev Evan Mathias, the grandfather of Glyn Mathias. He was co-opted member of various committees of the LEA for many years where his counsel was valued. I recall his directing me as a 6th former to give a talk to the chapel guild on “Williams Pantycelyn”, the eminent hymn writer of the Methodist Revival. He is credited with a joint translation of a Children’s Bible into Welsh.

Jacob Morgan was a supporter of a range of good causes and was active in the ranks of numerous community organisations. A feature of the period was the way in which other members of staff played their part in the social, cultural, religious and sporting life of the communities within the school’s catchment area. Elwyn Thomas (“Ceff”), Prosser Roberts, Harvey Williams and others were often found adjudicating at local eisteddfodau and conducting evening classes as well as delivering lectures. Jacob Morgan had been an examiner in mathematics for the Civil Service, Oxford and Cambridge Joint Board, Northern Universities, Cambridge Local and Breconshire Entrance Examinations.

Lewis Lewis listed his other interests as including the Brecon Little Theatre, of which he was one of the founders, and the Brecon Welsh Society, of which he was chairman in 1944. The Plough Augmented Choir and the Scout Movement had his whole hearted support. He was instrumental in the establishment of the OBA in 1950 and the launch of the School Magazine, “The Silurian” at the same time. A former President of the Association he was subsequently elected a Life Vice President. His sporting energies in his senior years were centred on his membership of the Brecon Golf and Badminton Clubs. He was also a keen and active member of the Brecon Bowling Club and in 1961 won the P S Williams Bowls Singles Cup.

Jacob Morgan was widowed early in his marriage leaving him with a very young daughter Elizabeth. Reference to “The Daisy” shows that she was a pupil at Brecon Girls’ County School until May 1946 when she won a scholarship to Malvern Girls’ College. In gratitude for her years at the Girls’ School her father presented the school with a sum of money with which to buy books for the library. Through the good offices of David (“Scitch” Morgan) Elizabeth (Elizabeth Stella Cook) was traced to a retirement home in Sudbury, Ontario. David had noticed a comment in the Minutes of the OBA’s committee referring to the fact that Jacob Morgan’s gravestone needed some attention. It transpired that David’s second cousin, Charlie Morgan, had married Olwen, daughter of Lewis Lewis, and through their daughters Elizabeth’s location was established. Charlie and Olwen had also emigrated to Canada where Olwen and Elizabeth maintained their Brecon friendship. As reported in the 2019 newsletter family members, including Elizabeth’s daughter, Nicola Sian Munro, contributed to the cost of the repair of the grave.

On his retirement in 1954 Jacob Morgan was presented with a television set and an album containing the signatures of the 273 Old Boys who had contributed to the gift. Prior to his retirement he had had a period of enforced absence through illness and was subsequently to experience continued ill health - “borne with typical optimism, cheerfulness and patience” (J H Williams, “The Silurian”, Vol XX). His memory is commemorated annually with the award of the prestigious Jacob Morgan Prize to the boy who has done most for the school both socially and academically.

**Glyn Powell**



### My Retirement Activities - Part 3

I inherited my interest in **photography** from my father who, from an early age, was a keen photographer, and he taught me the essentials of how to control the depth of field with the aperture setting, how to develop film, and how to use an enlarger when making prints. My first example of a special effect, creating a feathered outline, is shown below. This was achieved by placing a piece of cardboard containing a hole between the enlarger lens and the paper and moving it around during the exposure. Such feathering effects nowadays are easily achieved using software such as Photoshop Elements on a computer. My second example is the cube with images of three of my grandchildren on the faces; this was created using the aforementioned programme.

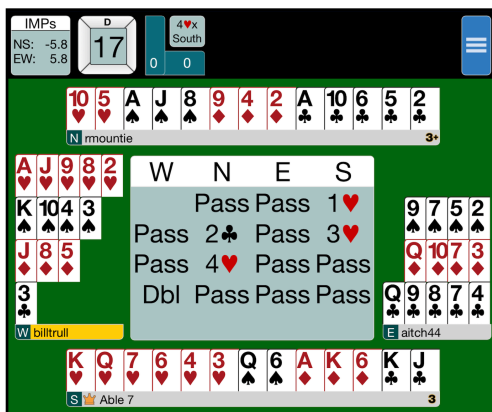


Many other software products are available to enhance images, e.g. Portrait

Pro and Landscape Pro sold by [anthropics.com](http://anthropics.com).

When my **Welsh** learners' courses finished I started attending a course on Welsh literature given by a retired lecturer, Heini Gruffudd, who has a remarkable knowledge of Welsh authors and their writings. After covering several centuries and many authors he is still going strong and attracting a good group of people, some of whom contribute much to the discussion. I started competing for the Prose Prize for learners in the National Eisteddfod many years ago, so far without success, though I have been successful in local Eisteddfod competitions. A few years ago I decided to start competing for the Science & Technology Prize. This has the advantage that I can choose my own topic, but the disadvantage that it is an open competition so I'm competing against native Welsh speakers. I spend many hours researching my topic and I thought I had done a tidy job on my first entry, which was entitled "Ynni Gwyrdd - y dyfodol?" (Green Energy - the future?), but was very disappointed to read the adjudicator's comments, which included the statement that the article lacked depth! I had reviewed all the methods of generating electricity and advanced that idea that future energy policy had to include nuclear power since back-up is required on a cold cloudy windless winter day. I argued that a thorium reactor is much safer than the traditional uranium reactor and has many other advantages which I listed.

I joined a local **bridge** club a few years ago and my life changed. I became a bridge addict! I gave up my French conversation class, which I'd attended for 18 years, so that I could spend more time on bridge, which



I now play 4 or 5 times a week. The game resembles whist in that there are four players, two pairs of partners, and a standard 52-deck of cards are dealt so that each player holds 13 cards. The object of play is to win tricks. The game differs from whist in that the players make bids to give their partner information about what cards they hold. There are conventions that can be used to give information about one's cards. For example an initial bid of 2C tells partner that you have a strong hand with 23 (or more) points (Ace=4, King=3, Queen=2, Jack=1). Since the virus closed the bridge club we have been playing on-line which works well. An example of a game where the bidding has just finished is shown on the left. After South opened the bidding with 1 heart his partner

responded by bidding 2 clubs. He could not bid 1C because the suit priority increases in the order C, D, H, S and no trump. I don't have the space to explain the scoring, which is a bit involved. South is going to try and make 10 tricks with Hearts as trumps. West has doubled the contract because she holds 5 trumps; this doubles the penalty if South makes less than 10 tricks.

Another activity which consumes quite a lot of time is my job as secretary and treasurer of the **Swansea U3A Dining Group** which has over 90 members. This involves deciding with the Convenor what and when the next venue will be, negotiating a fixed price menu, emailing the details to members, logging the replies and deposits etc.

Finally, my job as editor of the Old Boys' newsletter consumes a significant amount of time. Finding Old Boys who are prepared to submit contributions is hard work. As a result I'm always looking for ideas for articles that I can write myself. Without contributions from Old Boys the newsletter would not exist, so I again urge you, dear reader, to think of writing about an interesting experience or job that you've had.

Creating the text is also a challenge because sadly I have never learned to type. I frequently make mistakes when typing, such as misspelling words, missing characters, missing spaces and, most commonly, reversing letters, e.g. the word "and" appears as "nad". Another common error is when I hit the Cap Lock key which is next to A. When that happens the next text I type PPEARS IN CAPITALS AS SHOWN HERE, and because I look at the key board when typing I don't find the error until I look at the screen. I then have to delete the capitals and start again. I find that as I get older these errors are increasing, especially if I try to increase the speed of typing. I spend too much time correcting my errors. The spell checker is a great aid, but if a misspelled word is a genuine word, it would not be recognised as an error. However, last year I remembered that my Mac computer had a dictation facility, so I tried it and it worked. I can insert punctuation marks and start a new paragraph. However it is not without its flaws. For example, some words are misinterpreted, and I cannot insert a capital letter at the beginning of a word, although towns are automatically given a capital letter. At least I can now create text with no letter reversals or missing spaces, so this is an improvement.

That's enough about my retirement activities. Hopefully other Old Boys will now write about their activities.

**Michael Williams**

### **If Only**

It is not unusual for a person to regret a missed chance and lost opportunity. In retrospect I came to appreciate what I had by-passed when I failed to take advantage of incidental meetings with R T Jenkins, probably the most eminent of masters of our Alma Mater. Robert Thomas Jenkins (1881-1969) was born in Liverpool but brought up in Y Bala. A graduate of Aberystwyth and Trinity College, Cambridge, he was appointed to the staff of Brecon Boys' Grammar School in 1905 in a very temporary capacity to replace Thomas Butcher during his illness. On Thomas Butcher's death RT was granted the permanent post to teach History and Latin, remaining in that post until 1917 when he moved to Cardiff High School. During his period at Brecon Emeritus Professor R T Thomas BA (Wales), LLB MA (Cantab) LLD CBC must surely have been one of the most remarkable academics to have taught at the school - top of the roll call of academic heavyweights. In 1930 he was appointed Lecturer in Welsh History at Bangor and subsequently Professor there. His two volumes of articles published in 1930 followed his "*Hanes Cymru yn y Ddeunawfed Ganrif*" (1928) and preceded his equally highly acclaimed "*Hanes Cymru yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg*". Among his numerous other publications was the scholarly "*A History of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*" (1931) in conjunction with Helen M Ramage, a former teacher of Welsh at the Girls' School. RT's "magnus opus" was his editing of the "*Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig hyd 1940*" (1953), a vital resource for any student of Welsh history. However, it is from his autobiography "*Edrych yn ôl*" (1968) that we glean particularly interesting details of the school, staff and pupils during his twelve years on the staff.

Had I taken advantage afforded on two occasions I could have verified these details with him in person. I should have paid credence in the saying "*Carpe diem, quam minimum credulo postero*" - "seize the day, put



very little trust in tomorrow". It transpired that one afternoon during the Easter vacation of my first year at Bangor I was standing at the bus stop at Crai when a car carrying two gentlemen drew up alongside me to enquire of the way to Brychgoed Chapel. The occupants happened to be RT Jenkins and Alun Llewelyn Williams whom I did not know at the time. They had identified me as a Bangor student from the distinctive scarf which a fresher like myself had pride in sporting. It so happened that Alun Williams was researching for his volume "*Crwydro Brycheiniog*" in the series "*Crwydro Cymru*", and an account of this incident is included in the book. A year or so later I happened on several occasions to be studying in the library at the same time as RT, but the stringent rules imposed by Emyr Jones, a veritable Gauleiter of a librarian, banned conversation at any level within the hallowed hall. As a raw undergraduate it was unlikely that I would have been bold enough to impose myself on his privacy. What is more, not knowing that he had been on the Brecon staff meant such a prospect was a non-starter anyway.

During his period of schoolmastering at Brecon RT established an enviable reputation as a teacher remembered with affection if not, indeed, with something approaching hero worship. D Welstead Williams (1913-1917), writing in the "*Silurian*" 1953 stated that? "It is indeed of Mr R T Jenkins ("Jinks" to us) that my memory serves me best, and his personality and character were both deeply impressed upon my mind in those important informative years of long ago . . . he left on me the impress of a great teacher and profound scholar . . . ". Although he suffered from a distinctive speech impediment his effectiveness as a lecturer could not be questioned. His lessons and lectures were of a lucidity of presentation capable of sparking the most torpid imagination and were illustrated throughout by wit that was uniquely his. He also assumed for himself a niche in the pantheon of Welsh historians through his publications.

RT was appointed initially to teach History and Latin, two subjects which he developed to the highest CWB level of Hons within a very few years. But more remarkable was the fact that under circumstances of the non-availability of subject specialists he was at times obliged to teach English, Welsh and Scripture to Higher level, as well as teaching Greek and mastering French. His legacy was to tutor a number of exceptionally talented pupils who gained high academic distinction including Prof William Rees (History), Dr Griff Price (Classics) and Bishop W T Havard (Welsh). In conclusion, it is of some satisfaction that he counted pupils from the Crai and Sennybridge areas as amongst the best!

**Glyn Powell**

### **Doug Inglis: 1906-1967** **Eulogised and criticised in equal measure**

Entering Brecon Boys' County School in 1943 as a timorous and uncertain country lad, I was more than a little concerned about the prospects of facing a whole new set of masters and having to tackle strange new subjects. The names of certain masters had been whispered with a sense of trepidation, in particular Doug Inglis, whose reputation was enough to instil fear into the hearts of even the most brazen of the new intake. However, strangely, from the moment he first strode into the classroom I was impressed if somewhat fearful, and was to remain in awe of him throughout my years as his pupil. He was immaculately attired, and his highly polished brown shoes would have done justice to the smartest of guardsmen on parade. I was to become intrigued by his range of distinctive ties, which he sometimes changed before returning from lunch. I still recall his brisk stride and upright bearing which exuded an air of military correctness.

In my initial draft of this article there were glaring omissions about his life, but which, through the researches of Steve Rodrick, can now be rectified. Doug Inglis was born c.1906 at Camden Road, Liverpool, the son of Charles Inglis, a licensed victualler brewer, from Turiff, Aberdeenshire, which confirms our impression of his having Scottish inclinations. His mother Maggie was a native of Liverpool. The 1911 Census Return shows the family residing at 21, London Road, Liverpool with four sons, Alex (10), Norman (8), Douglas (6) and Wallace (1).

Doug Inglis took a first in History from Liverpool University, proceeding to take his MA in 1931. He joined the staff of Brecon Boys' County School in January, 1929 having previously held a temporary post at Taunton School where Jacob Morgan was also a staff member. Doug's initial salary was £234 per annum plus £15 for a good honours degree and £15 for training. He was obliged to teach his subject throughout the school which must at times have been intellectually frustrating.

To us he appeared to be a confirmed bachelor so it was with no small measure of surprise that we heard of his marriage, at the age of 44, on 16th August 1944, to divorcee Margaret Elizabeth ("Peggy") Diamond (39), formerly Prue. Doug resigned from his post at the Boys' School in 1954 to take up an appointment at Christ College. Whilst still in post he died suddenly on Wednesday, 5th July 1967 from coronary thrombosis at the age of 62. It is recorded that he collapsed and died whilst mowing the lawn at his house.

In seeking to recall one's personal impressions of Doug Inglis I find myself having to edit the difference between fantasy and reality as well as between the apocryphal and anecdotal. To me he was to become a mentor and a virtual Gamaliel, at whose feet I was to be inspired to study History through to Higher School Certificate and eventually on to an Honours degree in History. Yet to others his tendency to inflict hurt through ridicule and sarcasm was unjustified and offensive. One has to admit on reflection that his put-downs could be annihilating and that by using such abusive terms as "street Arabs" and "guttersnipes" he was really over-egging his insults.

In retrospect I have concluded that to Doug Inglis the classroom was his theatre in which he was the leading actor. He actually did have a deep interest in dramatic art, being one of the founders of Brecknock Little Theatre. His one liners, although often stinging and derogatory, had the touch of farce. One is led to suspect that his exclamations and diatribes were part of an act for dramatic effect. Less justifiable were his clichés about rural idiocy and demeaning attitude towards elements of Welsh culture as well as towards Welsh and local history.

Doug Inglis set high standards for himself and expected his pupils to perform to a similar level. Those who did not do so were subjected to acerbic denunciation and critical reproach. Failure to complete one's homework or low marks in the weekly one word answer tests made one a target for the full force of his satire and verbal vituperation. Yet, although a very firm disciplinarian, unlike the general run of Masters, he never resorted to actual corporal punishment. Masters adopted their own distinctive brand of punishment with Dr Price's "tweaks" and "slabs", Colonel's "black devil", Lewis Lewis' black board pointer and Charlie Price's three-by-two. However, in Doug Inglis's case pupils did over a period become inured of his histrionics and came to regard his barbed comments with sceptical amusement.

Doug Inglis was admired and respected by senior pupils who ventured into the sixth form where they found his teaching to be inspirational. When I entered the 6th he must have been amazed that this one time insignificant second former should have the audacity to expect him to work miracles for the Higher School Certificate challenge. Some five of the 1943 intake opted for History, an unusually large number compared with previous years. It was now that I came to appreciate the magnetism of his personality and the depth of his scholarship. He was indeed a veritable culture vulture whose milieu was the world of books. His was a passion not only for his subject but for the wider educational experience. At the outset of our course of study he set us to read A L Rowse's "The Spirit of English History" to get a feel for History as a subject. He emphasised the significance of ideas and their impact on historical events. Along the way he introduced us to Hobbes' "Leviathan", Thomas More's "Utopia" and Machiavelli's "The Prince" as a basis for understanding the renaissance and as a lead into history's draughty corridors.

Doug Inglis was obsessed with the purity of language and to him the ignoring of the rules of grammar and punctuation was a sign of cultural decadence, foreboding the decline and fall of real scholarship. On the occasion of his marriage his preferred choice of a wedding present from the school was a selection of books

of etymological nature. He despaired of the creeping cultural appropriation of the English language by Americanisms which he thought left us linguistically impaired.

For 6th form teaching Doug Inglis adopted a more tutorial method with minimal notes and detailed exposition. Revisiting my old notebooks I was struck by their brevity, so different from the reams of cyclostyled notes dished out at a later date. His use of the blackboard was also sparse merely to highlight certain operative words and phrases. For every separate topic he provided an extensive bibliography of titles which he expected us to use for reference to supplement our text books. I can still recall many of these reference books by such eminent historians as G M Trevelyan, Lord Acton, H W C Davis, J M Thompson, H A L Fisher, G Barraclough and J E Neale. These references were to be invaluable when I was subsequently to read History at university.

Doug Inglis would have been utterly dismayed by so much of today's teaching orthodoxy, of low expectations and equality of achievements - a culture in which no pupil can be seen to fail. His attitude was encompassed in one of his regular pronouncements: "If you are the cream where is the milk". He often displayed perpetual astonishment at pupils' ignorance, sometimes reducing them to inarticulate noises. He did not consider profound vulnerability an actual need.

One can only surmise how he would have adjusted to the internet and social media, but what is certain is that he would not have tolerated the decline in deference. He would also have been scandalised by the indiscipline on the playing field and the corrosive influence of player power. But then in all probability within today's educational set up he would have been a lecturer in a large Higher Educational institution free from the grind of classroom routine.

For 25 years he endeavoured to transmit the academic discipline and cultural impact of his subject to often unresponsive pupils. Yet it was not only in the classroom that he made an invaluable contribution to school life. From 1930 he took charge of library facilities. As pupils our contribution was a modest annual library fee. Interestingly there was quite a selection of volumes on soccer and cricket including skill manuals. He later became general factotum of school sports and athletics. Doug Inglis had several sporting interests; in his younger days he played hockey and represented several local teams. He never shirked his duties as a soccer referee for house and school matches however inclement the weather.

Doug Inglis had considerable impact on sporting and social circles outside school, especially operating as office holder and committee member of a number of local and county associations. From 1947 he acted as chairman of the Breconshire Schools AAA and from 1952 as chairman of the Breconshire Schools Cricket Association. An active member of Brecon Golf Club from its inception, he was its secretary from 1942 to 1951 and its Club Captain in 1952-54. In 1967 in recognition of the service he had rendered to the Club he was elected an honorary member. He was well known throughout Wales in the world of golf. An active badminton player he was for many years the Honorary Secretary of the Brecon Club. He was also closely associated with Brecon Sports Club.

An aspect of Doug's personality which pupils did not appreciate was his humour which, together with his charm, made him a popular after-dinner speaker. A typical classroom quip was "with this rationing I had to cut off the tail of my shirt to make an extra collar". Even if we thought that he was rather aloof, outside school he was evidently a popular social being. In recalling a selection of his classroom quips one wonders whether or not he was sharpening his tongue for his after-dinner speeches. Steve has reminded me of some of his more barbed comments and jibes, which indicated at times a lack of sympathy for Welsh rural society. In calling the register for the 1936 intake he called the name "Highwell Jones", to which there was no response until Glyn Jones asked whether it was the "Hywel" in his name. Doug then commented "last year's entry didn't know much but this year's are even worse - they don't even know their own name". "The reason there's so much fresh air in the countryside" he said, "is because the farmers keep their windows shut". Some could have taken exception to the overdone sarcasm and the insinuations implied in these remarks. In

his amusing ironic urban perception of rural life and its folk, he tended to view every local as a kind of troglodyte.

However there were occasions when he displayed a thoughtfulness and consideration for others such as when boys would help him with marking the cricket pitches or track for the school sports. When Gwyneth Evans was a replacement staff member during WWII she confided in her friends that it was Doug Inglis, above everyone else on the staff, who helped and guided her through some testing times as a young female teacher in a male staffroom and in front of classes of trying boys. My appreciation of his intellect and generosity of spirit was confirmed when I undertook part of my teaching practice under his guidance. It had been a unique experience to have witnessed many of his theatrical performances and memorable utterances. In conclusion I am reminded of his instruction to a class on how not to answer the question “Why did Alfred the Great deserve to be called the Great”. “Don’t let me have the essay I nearly always get - Alfred the Great was a great man was Alfred the Great. Alfred the Great did many great things did Alfred the Great. He was a great king was Alfred the Great. After all Alfred the Great did burn the cakes in the grate did Alfred the Great. Therefore Alfred the Great deserved to be called the Great”.

**Glyn Powell**

### **Staff and Prefects, 1954**



**STAFF 1954.**

Mr. H. C. Jones, Mr. W. H. Williams, Mr. A. J. Phippen, Mr. C. Giles, Mrs. M. Timothy, Mr. L. C. Moses, Mr. D. T. Havard, Mr. E. Morris, Mr. H. P. Roberts, Mr. J. H. Williams, Mr. L. Lewis, Mr. J. Morgan (Headmaster), Dr. G. Price, Mr. D. Inglis, Mr. J. E. Davies,



**PREFECTS.**

L. Pritchard, P. O. Evans, D. Davies, G. L. Davies, J. P. Davies, H. Evans, A. B. Ottewell, B. P. Richards, J. M. Williams, A. C. Went, E. G. Powell.

The photos show the staff and prefects for 1953-54. Sadly, several of the prefects are no longer with us; they are Phil Evans, Tony Ottewell, Tony Went and Gambo Powell.

Len Pritchard lives in New Zealand and I've lost contact with him since his email address stopped working, so if anyone has his address I would greatly appreciate receiving it. Gareth Davies (Bronllys) used to come to the reunions, but has not been seen for the last few years. John P. Davies used to be a regular attender at reunions until he moved to the North East of England. One prefect on whom I have no information is H. Evans, who according to the Silurian completed his A-levels in 1955. There is no mention of him in the Varsity Reports for 1956, so perhaps he didn't go to University. Does anyone have any information on him?

**Michael Williams (Photos submitted by Glyn Powell)**



## Talylllyn Junction and the “museum” in a phone box

In 2020 I came across a wonderful video clip about the Talylllyn Junction. This video was created by some railway enthusiasts - Whitewick's Abandoned Railways. It began with a meeting with two locals, both named Roger, who knew all about the history of the junction, where the Midland line from Hay met the Merthyr-Brecon line. Then the video showed a view of a splendid Edwardian house which overlooked the junction (photo below\*). This was built in 1910 by a retired local farmer, and the question was asked - why would he build such a house in such a rural location. The answer of course was its proximity to the junction



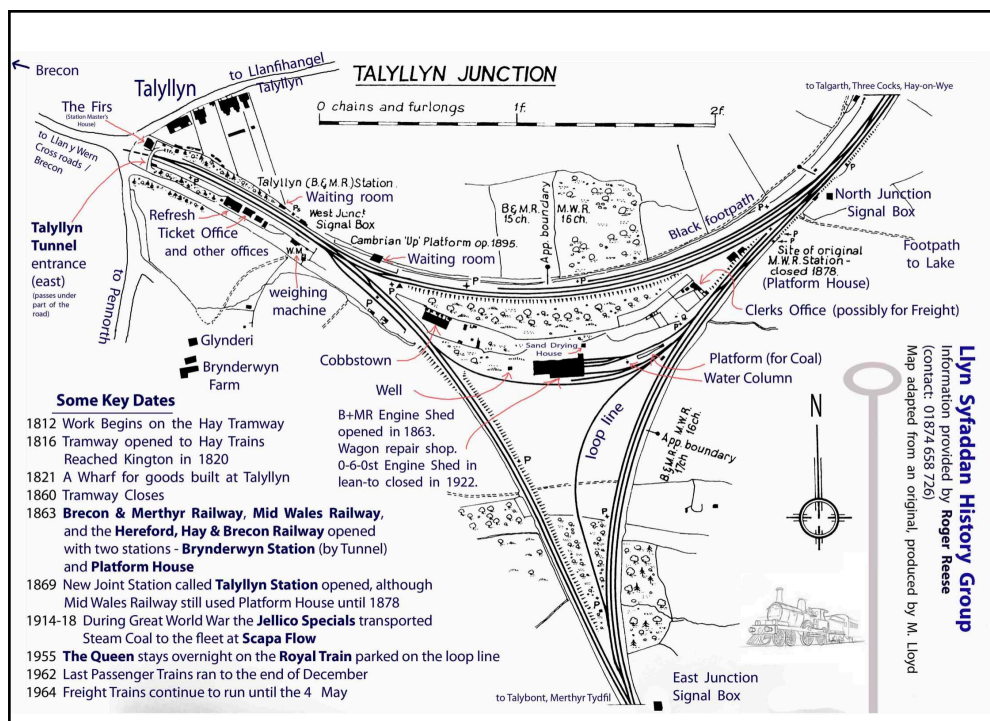
and Talylllyn Station, from where he could travel to nearest town Brecon, or Hay or Merthyr.

Then the video showed a wonderful “museum” in an old BT telephone box (photo on right) about the junction and the area.

The wonderful map (below)\*\* of The Talylllyn junction shows the small loop in which the Queen's train parked overnight in

1955 on the occasion of her visit to Brecon to open the Brecon Agricultural Show.

There are still visible remains of the old railway lines and footpaths along them. From one of these footpaths there is a great view of Talylllyn Lake. Many Brecon Old Boys and Old Girls from Hay, Talgarth etc would have travelled through Talylllyn during the 1950s before Beeching's axe fell. Do any of you have any interesting stories to tell about the journey, for example about any shenanigans in The Talylllyn tunnel?



tunnel, which was opened in 1816 for the Brecon to Hay tramway, is the oldest railway tunnel of any appreciable length in the country.

\*Reproduced with permission of Whitewick's Abandoned Railways.

**\*\*The map is based on the original by M. Lloyd and is reproduced with permission of Richard Rees, Administrator of the Llyn Syfaddan History Group on Facebook.**

**Michael Williams**

### **Dim Siarad Cymraeg !!**

A memorable recollection from my viewing of the Rugby World Cup was watching the young Japanese mascot joining enthusiastically in the singing of “Hen Wlad fy Nhadau”. His rendition contrasted starkly to the Redwood-like miming version which is the most many of the Welsh fans could manage. One has also become accustomed to the garbled version of “Calon Lân” at the Principality Stadium as opposed to the belting out of “Oggi Oggi”! It is on reflection therefore, that I am prompted to pen a modest iconograph of a personal kind, reminiscing about things Welsh in general and catching the peculiar atmosphere that permeated the school in my days towards the learning of Welsh. This undertaking tied up to some extent to a challenge with which I was recently presented, namely to tackle Marcel Proust’s “A la recherche du temps perdu”, in translation of course as “Remembrance of things past” - a thirteen volume novel exploring the power of memory and the unconscious!!

To the majority of my school contemporaries the language had only a marginal impact upon their careers and lives generally. However, even if the language was unspoken in the community at large it existed in many ways around us. The whole scene has undergone considerable change since then with the language having been given equal validity and appearing in more general usage. The oddity of the situation in those earlier times intrigued me as, even though Welsh is a phonetic language, place names were persistently pronounced in a rather cavalier fashion. Regrettably that habit persists today in certain quarters even by BBC traffic correspondents, so we have aberrations such as Llundrindod, Mirthur, Penwryn etc.

What also intrigues me is why the study of Welsh at our school should appear to have had such limited success. Despite all those Welsh lessons over four years at the school one doubts whether many of the learners could weave together the words learned and turn them into intelligible speech even though their CWB pass sported an asterisk of oral proficiency. Failure to achieve even a modest practical grasp of Welsh was due in part to the demeaning attitude towards what was in reality the oldest living Celtic language in Europe. It had been a deliberate policy over centuries to undermine coming to its apogee with the “Treason of the Blue Books” in 1847 - “Brad y Llyfrau Gleision”. Forster’s Act of 1870 and Balfour’s Act of 1902 also did nothing to elevate the language in the education process.

In this context I am reminded of the comment in the Monty Python sketch “People’s Front of Judea” - “What have the Romans done for us?” Is there an intimation here that this might well have been the attitude towards the Welsh language? There is also the well worn assertion that “Latin is a language that is as dead as dead can be. It killed the Romans and now is killing us”. How many, I wonder, thought likewise about Welsh! In having to take compulsory Welsh there is a possibility that they may have experienced what the Spaniards call “un camino sin salida” - “a road with no way out”.

From the outset in 1896 the subject was marginalised in the curriculum as “Welsh translation”. In that first year there were 47 pupils with two members of staff, headmaster and assistant, neither of whom would seem to have the requisite qualification to teach Welsh. However by 1897 Mr J T Morgan, the newly appointed Science master, undertook partial responsibility for the subject. At the first School Prize Day it was reported that they taught Scripture, English, Latin, French, History, Welsh, Maths, Geometrical and Freehand Drawing, Physiography, Chemistry, Principles of Agriculture, Shorthand, Book-keeping, Music, Drill and Physical Exercise. It was described as a “comprehensive and well balanced curriculum” - an under-statement to say the least! Covering all these subjects would have demanded multi-tasking on a major scale. As a matter of comparative interest there was no mention of Welsh in the Girls’ School Reports for several years after this. Welsh, a “bit” subject taught by a stop gap teacher with slack on his timetable was not treated on a par with French, for the teaching of which a full time Frenchman was to be employed. As his subject



teaching range was limited it put pressure on the other masters to cover the multiplicity of subjects on the curriculum.

Lack of success in pupil performance is traditionally blamed on inefficient teachers and ineffective teaching. However, a review of the masters who taught Welsh over the period up to reorganisation in 1971 shows a succession of highly qualified scholarly academics. On his appointment to teach History, Latin and Greek, R T Jenkins BA LLB MA LLD CBE also offered some Welsh cover. By 1908 he had succeeded in taking a number of pupils to CWB Honours level amongst whom were W T (“Bill”) Havard of Defynnog, who subsequently graduated in Welsh from Aberystwyth University. A Welsh rugby international, he was to become Bishop of St Asaph before being elevated to the bishopric of St David’s. Another of his successful pupils was Tom Rees of Defynnog, who was also to become the Red Baron’s first aerial victim in WWI. RT himself was to become an eminent historian, establishing himself as a leading authority on Welsh History.

At the outbreak of WWI John Ithel Philips Thomas enlisted as a captain in the Brecknocks necessitating the employment of a temporary replacement. In his place cover was to be provided by Roland Thomas BA PhD from 1915 to teach Welsh and Geography. He was to continue in post until 1925 because Ithel Thomas decided not to return, resigning on demobilisation before taking up an appointment on the staff of Carmarthen Trinity College. Roland Thomas was credited with the establishment of the Welsh Society in Brecon and, more significantly, the Summer School in Llanwrtyd Wells in 1919, which continued to 1933. The School was designed to enhance the place of Welsh in the education system and attracted top academics as well as school teachers for the fortnight during August. On leaving Brecon Roland Thomas became a schools’ inspector under Glamorgan Education Committee.

In 1919 several influential masters were appointed, namely Lewis Lewis, Dr Griff Price and Edgar H Thomas MA. Known as “Boiler”, Edgar Thomas was a first class Honours English graduate and a fine Welsh scholar. He assumed responsibility for the teaching of Welsh on the departure of Roland Thomas. He contributed regularly to learned publications and was later to win the crown with his ode “Peniel” at the Cardiff National Eisteddfod in 1938. On leaving in 1929 he became headmaster firstly of St David’s County School and subsequently of Llangefni County School, Ynys Môn. By this time Welsh had been established by Dr Woosnam as a stand-alone subject and the language choice was now between French and Latin. This change was not met with universal approval, and continued to niggle down to my days at the school during the 1940s, an attitude with which ‘TK’ will readily concur.

Elwyn Thomas (“Ceff”), a young teacher starting out on his career, joined the staff in 1930 to take charge of English and Welsh. A former pupil of Cyfarthfa with a top first in English, he replaced Evan Glyn Lewis, another first class Honours graduate who had spent but one year at the school. A forceful and able teacher, he possessed a confident personality and effective communication skills, and was highly regarded by his former pupils. During the war years he had been contributing to the nascent BBC Schools’ Service on a part time basis, but then in 1947 he was appointed as Education Officer, BBC Bangor. In this capacity he was to develop the service on a national basis providing extensive and imaginative resources for schools. During my days at Bangor University I was fortunate in enjoying his hospitality on numerous occasions.

Prosser Roberts, who joined the staff in 1931 to assist in part with Welsh, was to take over responsibility for the subject on his demobilisation from the RAF and remained in post until 1955. He was a man of many talents who contributed to a wide range of activities within and outside school. He was admirably qualified for his new post as Youth and Further Education Officer for Breconshire.

Harvey Williams, who had joined the staff in 1946, was to take over the teaching of Welsh, a position he held until 1960 when he was appointed headmaster of Brecon Secondary Modern School. Following war service in the RNVR in the North Sea he returned to his peripatetic Welsh post in Brecon’s primary schools. It was he who produced the first scheme of work for the teaching of Welsh as a second language. Harvey

Williams was well versed in Welsh literature and possessed an extensive library, a portion of which I was fortunate enough to acquire after his tragically early death.

Another addition to the Welsh department was J D (“Dewi”) Davies (1956-60), who left to become Youth and Further Education Officer with Pembrokeshire LEA and subsequently its Director of Education. Two new Welsh masters were appointed in 1960, namely William Owen (1960-61) and Arwyn Evans (1960-81). In the interim period Arwyn was assisted by Gareth Edwards (1960-62), later Schools’ HMI and Beti George (1962-63). Beti is a household name and is currently a radio and television programme presenter of international standing. Her recent TV programme based on the case of her partner, David Parry Jones, the rugby commentator, who was suffering from dementia, received universal accolade. Her regular programme, “Beti a’i Phobl”, where she interviews prominent personalities over an hour’s chat interspersed with record choices, continues to attract top listening figures. I was privileged to have been invited to participate in one of the series.

Arwyn Evans, fisherman extraordinary, was to continue in post following secondary reorganisation. A poet of some distinction, he has won poetic awards at the National Eisteddfod. A “cynghaneddwr”, his speciality is the “englyn” form. In 1969 he was joined by John Meurig Edwards, who was given the dual role of teaching Welsh at both grammar schools. John Meurig is also a poet and writer of considerable talent. Up to the present date, 2021, he has been a National Winner on nineteen occasions and has set his mind on reaching the twenty mark this year. He had the distinction of becoming the first headteacher of the newly established Ysgol y Bannau, the Welsh medium primary school in Brecon. The school now feeds pupils into the Welsh stream at the High School reflecting a complete change from those early days when Welsh was in the shadows and little respected.

An interesting project is the FAW’s undertaking to issue song sheets and to teach the words to spectators at home internationals. It is hoped that circumstances will change from the past predicament concerning the teaching of Welsh as reflected in the words of a popular folk song\* by Dafydd Iwan (currently heading iTunes with his “Yma o Hyd”) - “yn yr ysgol, lessons History, lessons Geography, lessons English o hyd ac o hyd, ac ambell i lesson yn Welsh chwarae teg, am mai Cymro bach oeddwn i”.

\*You can hear the song here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4eJNdyHpoU>

## **Glyn Powell**

### **Class of 1969 - Girls - The Sea**

My journey to the ‘Class of 1969’ commenced at St Josephs, the primary school in Brecon attached to the Convent. Being a small class at St Josephs we were very well guided by the Sisters, and looking back at a first communion picture, I can recall that 4 out of the 5 boys that took the 11 plus passed and made the journey up the hill to Penlan.

We lived in a tied cottage near Llyswen on the Llangoed Estate, and I started school at 5, a very young 5.

Being born in August, I was among the youngest in my school year. Getting to St Josephs could be viewed as something of an adventure for such a young boy, I can clearly remember walking the half mile up the lane to the Upper Llangoed farm. My father, after milking the herd took me the few miles over Pen Y Crug, past Brechfa Pond to Pontybat where I caught the bus. Those commutes to and from St Josephs gave me a love of the hills and the country side. Whilst serving in the Royal Navy I always found time to get into the mountains, once spending a week trekking through the Appalachians in West Virginia. We left the farm when I was 10 and moved into Brecon.

Having just cleared the bar on the 11 plus, I think I came 59<sup>th</sup>, I ended up with Mrs Nash in class 1A, and I did find the academics of a Grammar School something of a challenge. Though I recall being okay at Maths, Physics and Music, the foundation of those subjects laid down in the grammar school, most definitely helped in my electrical engineering career and musical interests. The process for selecting pupils

for the new world of the comprehensive system saw me in form 3-O, the middle tier, the correct choice given my struggles. However, sitting here later in life I do have some regrets about the decision made. I did find life in the middle tier of the Comprehensive rather easy and I know I took my foot off the gas. I left Penlan with a handful of CSE's, perhaps if I'd remained under the guidance of the Grammar system they might have been O-Level's, and my journey might have taken a different path.

Life in the High School saw my first encounter with 'Girls' in the education/work space. My first two years of education in an all boys environment were absolutely fine. Not being in the best of health as a youngster, I suffered bronchitis, and shied away from sports a bit, though I did play rugby and do the cross country around The Groves on sports afternoons. One of the best things that I took from school, and still enjoy to this day, is playing the Trumpet. I can clearly remember that afternoon in the dining hall being introduced by Stan Bedowes to Eddie Smith, the peripatetic music teacher. He thrust a Cornet in my hand and off I went, more to follow.

Mixing with the fairer sex both in the classroom, the music room, and school orchestra, must have been good for me as I bear no scars or grudges against the ladies. I've fond memories of playing in the orchestra for the morning assemblies, with the late Dr Thomas (Sparrow) presiding over the Middle School. The benefits of modern communication, in particular the Memories of Old Brecon Facebook page, have enabled me to connect with other Grammar/High School musicians. To name a few, Andrew (Fred) Howland on Trombone, Menna Bonsels (then Davies) on Violin, Kevin Griffiths and Steve Jones also Violinists, then Ian Ingram on Cornet. Also, but not in the class of 69, were Bob Moeller and Dai LLew (Jones son of Bert another former Old Boy, now past) both on Trumpet.

As mentioned, in the High School I eased back and did not put the effort in that I now believe I was capable of. I entered the CSE exam hall with barely any preparation. Possibly due to the first two years in the Grammar I had a good understanding of most subjects. I recall being near the top of the class most of the time with some ease. From a very early age I'd expressed an interest in 'The Sea', so much so that I got my Mother, when I was about 5 or 6, to respond to an advertisement in the paper for the Royal Navy. The career pamphlet came through and I first read about Artificers, more later.

Even before sitting my CSE exams, I'd taken the bus to Merthyr (without Mother or Father knowing) and started the process of my career in The Andrew (Royal Navy). Needless to say parental approval was given. I had rather long hair and on August 5<sup>th</sup> 1974 I went to the Barbers at the top of The Watton, explained I was joining the Navy, and got myself a decent haircut. A very shrewd move. On August 6<sup>th</sup> 1974, aged just 16 and 2 days, I hopped on the early morning bus to Abergavenny, leaving my poor upset Mum on the pavement outside the Café Royale. I did take the Artificers assessments but was not successful.

Being the first year of school leavers that had to stay in education till 16, I missed out on the full HMS *Ganges* experience. Our entry and those that followed were known as 'The Six Week Wonders'. After my basic training, where, after a Sunday Church Parade, I voluntarily attempted to climb that famous mast, I made a bid for the top but bottled it just before the button. I arrived at HMS *Collingwood* where my real education commenced.

I joined what was then the Electrical Branch as a Junior Radio Electrical Mechanic, and in my first few days at 'The City of the Green Empire' as *Collingwood* was known I was introduced to the Royal Marine Band Colour Sgt who ran the Volunteer Band and my alternative life in the RN commenced. I served mainly on big ships; the first draft in the summer of 1975 was HMS *Bulwark*. The ship had a Volunteer Band and I recall one gig at the British Embassy in Kingston Jamaica, as well as being on deck for many ceremonial harbour entries.

My career progressed with several returns to *Collingwood* over the years for promotional courses. After a slow start in the Grammar School with Mrs Nash in class 1A, I did end up with an HNC in Electronics, gained whilst doing the Artificers Course as a Petty Officer. If there are any Old Boys who were in my

Branch of the Navy, I did what was formerly called the Mechanics (Mechs) Course. My last seagoing draft was on HMS *Ark Royal* where I got my Chief's buttons. It was a fantastic ship where I was responsible for the Special Intelligence Satellite Communication Systems. I often had the Royal Signals lads from Hereford pop onboard and plug their kit into my systems. I did see a small bit of active service during the Bosnian conflict. After my Naval career I remained with technology working mainly as a Project Manager and became a Chartered Engineer.

It was on HMS *Ark Royal* during my draft that the women came to sea in the Royal Navy, and some of my era were not that impressed. I thought it was an excellent move by the Admiralty. I'd much rather be greeted in the Store's when ordering a replacement part for one of my defective systems by a smiling young lady than a hungover grumpy male member of the ship's company.

As on my previous aircraft carriers, there was a Volunteer Band on *Ark Royal*. When waiting for the tender boat to join her one morning whilst anchored in Portsmouth Harbour, I got chatting to the new Padre, an American on exchange from the USN. The band played every Sunday at Sea and I got to know Ted ('The Bish') very well. It transpired that he had played Trumpet in school, and with a little Welsh persuasion I soon had Ted (with Edwards as his surname he had Welsh ancestry) with a Cornet in hand and "Tune a Day Book One". His progression was so good that he even marched with the band when we did the Ceremonial Sunset for the obligatory first night cocktail party in Jacksonville, Ted's home port. Needless to say, he was rather chuffed and we did enjoy a few more beers after that particular gig.

After my 22 years in uniform, I retired in 1998. I've had a good run in my second career. I'm now a freelance Project Manager working in Defence still, though currently on Army projects. The Trumpet remains a big part of my life and I now play with Emsworth Concert Band.

So the 'Class of 1969 – Girls – The Sea' are part of me, and I must thank the Sisters at St Josephs, Mrs Nash in form 1A, Eddie Smith and Glyn Powell for putting me on a steady course.

**Jim Lewis (1969-74)**

### **Albert John Phippen**

In a popularity poll of former pupils John Phippen would rank very highly, earning a reputation as a gentleman and man of action during his eight years on the staff (1945-54). He was somewhat dashing and commanded respect with natural charm and consideration for the welfare of his charges. He had an instinctive empathy with the lesser beings among the pupil population.

A product of Barry, he started his teaching career at a local private prep school. At the outbreak of war in 1939 the school was evacuated from Barry, but with the loss of its day pupils John's job was terminated. Following a brief period as a civil servant with the MOD he enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps in an administrative capacity. En route with his unit to the Far East, the fall of Singapore resulted in his diversion to Syria to establish a field hospital. From the outset of his service his promotion through the ranks was accelerated to the rank of Colour Sergeant. In a call for volunteers for the Indian Army John took up the offer and was subsequently commissioned into the Royal India Service Corps. His main responsibilities were with transport companies. On his demobilisation with the rank of Captain, he took advantage of a resettlement course as a mature student at Cardiff University prior to entering the teaching profession. His first appointment was to the staff of Brecon Boys' Grammar School as a teacher of Maths with some Science, Singing and Gymnastics. During his period at the school he contributed enthusiastically to a range of extracurricular and sporting activities, taking over the running of the Annual Sports in 1950. However in 1954 John took an appointment as Head of Mathematics at Kington Grammar School. He subsequently became Maths lecturer at Barry Polytechnic and an examiner for several Examining Boards until his retirement.

During his single state at Brecon he lodged in a house in Camden Road, where the eminent Prof Rev John Evans occupied an adjoining room surrounded by a mountain of books. When the Professor was asked playfully why he had not married his response was that he could not afford both books and blouses! John eventually dispensed with his sports car and entered the married state but never forgot his days at Brecon Boys' Grammar School. This was reflected in his attendances at the OBA Annual Dinners, in the company of his charming wife, until their advanced age and failing health. Their home at St Athan afforded an open door welcome to any of his former pupils at all times. Although he was not one of my masters we established a very close personal relationship, engaging in extended telephone conversations on a regular basis. It was a worthy gesture by the OBA to have honoured him with an official presentation on his 90th birthday. He was the ultimate gentleman with a mildly authoritarian tone, commanding presence and imbued with a certain magnetism of personality. When asked why he had left Brecon his response was "Eco! E finito"; "but the thing's done".

**Glyn Powell**

### **Recognition of the Welsh name of Three Cocks as Aberllynfi**

Jack Pettican was a teacher at Gwernyfed Park School from 1950 to 1964. Whilst there, in the late 1950s, he campaigned, with little local support, to get the official name of the village of Aberllynfi recognised over that of Three Cocks. The latter name had come about through common usage from the coat of arms of the local landowner, Sir David Williams MP, who bought Gwernyfed in 1600. The coat of arms featuring three cocks was used by the alleged Welsh Prince, Eion Sais, who lived in Aberllynfi.

When the Williams family provided the land on which the railway junction was built, it was named Three Cocks Junction, presumably in the family's honour. The meaning of the Welsh name is "mouth of the river Llynfi", which enters the river Wye a mile from the village.

There was much controversy at the time, as reported in the Brecon & Radnor Express and the 'Tonight' programme on BBC Television in March 1963.

Mr Pettican felt at the time that much of the opposition by the local inhabitants was merely due to the fact that he was not a local. He was delighted to discover in later years that his mother's family originated from Llanigon, and many of his ancestors, the Watkins family of *Pen-yr-wrlodd*, are buried in the churchyard of Llanigon Parish Church. Old records show that the family are recorded as being considerable landowners as far back as the 13th century.

It would seem that Mr Pettican, although deemed an outsider in the district, had more claim to express an opinion on the name of the village in which he lived than most of the inhabitants.

The Highway Authority later recognised the name and included it on a sign on the main road through the village. The name Aberllynfi is recognised by Google Maps.

**Michael Williams** (Old Girl, **Marion Newman, née Pettican**, is thanked for providing information on this topic)

### **Len Moses**

On the retirement of Charles Price, Len Moses took his place initially as woodwork master before having his remit expanded into examination mode. Len, born 1905, was a native of Pontneddfechan who, after attending Glynneath County Primary School, proceeded to Aberdare County School. On leaving school he entered upon an engineering apprenticeship with a Briton Ferry firm and subsequently worked as an engineer and later as a draughtsman at the Morris Motors, London factory. Then following a two year course at Shoreditch Teachers' Training College specialising in handicraft, he undertook his first teaching appointment at Holland Road Central School.

In 1931 he returned to Wales and was appointed a peripatetic teacher of handicraft in the Hay, Talgarth and Crickhowell districts. From anecdotal evidence of former pupils he also taught at Sennybridge Senior School where there was a new fully equipped workshop. In 1946 he was appointed to the staff of Brecon Grammar School as a teacher of practical subjects. He was obliged to take woodwork lessons in the less felicitous facilities of Mount Street prior to the opening of the Penlan building. Through his persistence and vision he succeeded in elevating the practical subjects to a par with the traditional academic subjects within the curriculum.

Len Moses completed 24 years of loyal and dedicated service to the school before retiring in 1970 on the eve of secondary reorganisation. Unlike his predecessor he was accepted as a full member of the staff room where he became an extremely popular and highly respected member. He worked unsparingly both in and out of school hours taking on responsibilities beyond the call of duty. He was also extremely popular with the pupils, whom he treated in a kindly and considerate manner. He showed regard for both their academic work and general well-being. He always exuded an air of calm and civility often assuming the role of confidant and confessor.

It is said that in staff debates he kept the balance, often acting as a veritable advocate. His humorous slant to issues often diffused awkward situations. In his tribute to his former colleague, Aneurin Williams admitted “it is difficult to see how the staff will manage without the man who mended their children’s toys, repaired their ageing cars, advised them on construction of a greenhouse or a garage, the choice of a fishing rod or the best way to plant runner beans. There seemed to be nothing useful he didn’t know, and little that he would not do if he had the time”.

**Glyn Powell**

### **Yet More Chemistry**

Here’s another article in my campaign to convince you, dear reader, of the key importance of Chemistry!

Diabetes is an increasing problem in the world. In a survey reported in 2013 the UK had the fifth highest incidence of type 1 diabetes in children up to 14 years old. According to the World Health Organisation the number of people with diabetes rose from 108 million in 1980 to 422 million in 2014. According to the International Diabetics Federation just under half a billion people are living with diabetes world wide and the number is expected to have increased by 25% in 2030.

Diabetics are unable to control the blood sugar level and this can result in damage to heart, blood vessels, eyes, kidneys and nerves. Control of the blood sugar level is essential, and a diet with a low sugar content is recommended. I’ve referred to sucralose (Splenda) as an artificial sweetener in my article “My retirement activities” in 2020, but I want to tell you about a natural sweetener, xylitol, which can be used by diabetics.

The problem is that xylitol was expensive, until a Mexican student, Javier Larragoiti, who was 18 when his father was diagnosed with diabetes, started researching xylitol. He was studying for a degree in Chemical Engineering in Mexico City at the time, and he began searching for a cheaper source of xylitol. He developed a fermentation-based process to turn wasted corn cobs from Mexico’s 17.5 million tonne annual crop into xylitol. This also solved a second problem: what to do with all that agricultural waste that otherwise might be burned, adding to the greenhouse gas problem. He buys waste from local farmers and produces 1 tonne of xylitol per year. In May 2020 he received a venture prize which will enable him to industrialise production and scale up the process tenfold. That’s another triumph for Chemistry, this time aided by a microbe!

For anyone interested in diabetes the WHO website has an excellent summary here:

<https://tinyurl.com/yd9or3wl>

[Dog owners should note that xylitol is toxic to dogs]

**Michael Williams**



## **Recollections of Gwynne Giles, 1956-63**

In September 1956 I started in the first form and Theo House of the grammar school which was then located on Cradoc Road. I suppose that it was an old building even then but we kids didn't know it. Since the structure still stands you can look up to the first floor and you see the windows of the classroom of Form 1A. This is where Harvey Williams the Welsh language teacher tried his best. But Mr. Williams and my friend Keith Price didn't get along. One day after Keith caused irritation to him Mr. Williams lifted him up by the lapels of his blazer, opened the window, held him outside and shook out the "evil spirits." Two years after that we moved to the new Penlan campus.

After managing to get through "O-Levels" I went to the 6<sup>th</sup> Form. Let me be clear about one event that Tom Thirgood mentioned in a previous edition of this journal. Tom stated that I "liberated" some material from the chemistry lab and set off explosions in the school pond. As they say in court, "I HAVE NO PRESENT KNOWLEDGE OF ANY SUCH EVENT!" In the 6<sup>th</sup> Form I was made Head Boy. This was a privilege and an honour but also a bit of a pain. A teacher that I remember from those days was Len Moses who was always down to earth and good for a laugh.

I managed to get through "A-Levels" and headed to University at Swansea. Most of the time there was enjoyable and I managed to get both a degree and a wife. Then it was postgraduate study at the University of Rochester in upper New York State. I left with an M.Sc. and headed to Montreal, Canada to do a Ph.D. and be just in time for the Front de Liberation du Quebec crisis. Armed soldiers on the street were a bit off-putting but they didn't need to use their weapons and the incident didn't last for too long. We enjoyed our time in Montreal and I managed to get a summer job teaching at a small California university. Next was a postdoctoral fellowship in chemistry in London, Ontario and then another fellowship in the pharmacology department at the University of Toronto. This was followed by a job at the Addiction Research Foundation although I still kept contact with the university.

Toronto was good for us; we had three children there. After a couple of decades, I left the Addiction Research Foundation and the University of Toronto to work at Apotex Inc., a generic drug company again located in Toronto. In the 13 years that I was there I made friends with some West Indian colleagues who persuaded me to play and later umpire cricket. Passing the top umpire exam is one of two achievements in which I still take pride; the other is becoming a Queen Scout in Brecon with help from Scout Leader Peter Rowlands. I took early retirement at age sixty and continued to umpire and teach the Laws of Cricket for ten years.

At the age of seventy we left Toronto for Niagara-On-The-Lake (NOTL). The attractions were cricket, lawn bowls, history at Fort George, and three live theatres, although the COVID-19 pandemic put paid to most of them for a while. Old town NOTL has about the same population as Brecon. It is bounded to the north by Lake Ontario (1 mile), to the east by the Niagara river and United States (1 mile) and to the west by the St Lawrence Seaway canal (1 mile). Niagara Falls is about 15 miles to the south. There is a film on YouTube titled *Tripping the Niagara* that gives a view of the area "as seen by a red-tailed hawk." The main drawback in NOTL is the long winter. Still, when there isn't a pandemic, we can escape to our static caravan in Florida.

So, I've done a few things but I have never forgotten Brecon and some of the friends that I have there. We have had visitors in Canada and have made trips to the UK, especially to see my mother who died in 2013 and my father, who was a science teacher in the grammar school. He died in 2006. I've known some men and women from Brecon for more than 60 years. It makes me sound old but they have given me great joy.

## **Eileen Davies - Plunge into the Unknown**

The period 1964-67 witnessed a new phase in the deep exploration of the Dan-yr-Ogof complex of passages and hidden chambers, which led to spectacular new discoveries and the extension of the known cave system.

Instrumental in making one of the most remarkable breakthroughs was Eileen Davies, at that time a member of the South Wales Caving Club. A 24-year-old domestic science teacher at Bridgend Technical College, with four years' caving experience, it was she who was applauded on re-emergence from the caves as the heroine of the hour for negotiating the so-called "Endless Crawl" and "Squeeze" and thereby opening up a new subterranean world. The "Endless Crawl" necessitated passing through an 18 inch high 350 foot long meandering "tube" which had, despite many attempts, remained impassable until then. An added obstruction in the crawl was the tight double bend at its end called the "Squeeze", which made passage through even more challenging.

What has to be appreciated was the psychological barrier which the passage posed with even the most experienced cavers fearing that, once inside, they might not be able to turn around to effect exit. Previously, attempts have been made with hammer and chisel to start widening the crawl, but still no one could even contemplate getting through. However, not to be deterred Eileen indicated that she might be able to negotiate the passageway. She was very slim and lithe with the ability to squeeze through places too narrow to be contemplated by the other cavers. So, on the 3rd April 1966, she entered the narrow tube and, ignoring claustrophobic conditions, she wriggled her way along concentrating on the strong draft which was blowing through. With extraordinary bodily flexibility and contortion she managed to pass the "Squeeze", only to be confronted by a deep chimney which went vertically downwards to what appeared to be another chamber. A later report in the "Brecon & Radnor Express" of 21/7/1966 gave an even more dramatic account stating how she "had to swim three arctic-cold subterranean lakes, squeeze through a hole little more than a foot high, and crawl along a 500 foot passage much narrower in places and sprinkled with hairpin bends finding a cavern just like the Grand Canyon".

On Easter Tuesday, 12 April 1966, she led the way again with another young male caver, small of stature and modest build, following with a rope ladder with the intention of scaling down the shaft for further exploration. It turned out to be an extremely arduous crawl with conditions very tight and constricted, necessitating their having to chip away at the rock at various points for extra room for manoeuvrability. Even then, they could not avoid having their frogmen suits getting tagged and torn on sharp pieces of projecting rocks. To add to their dismay, having in stay away for 2 1/2 hours, they found that the ladder was too short to enable them to negotiate the chimney. Bruce Foster, Eileen's companion, was then obliged to shuffle back to the entrance and complete the tortuous journey all over again to collect the longer ladder, with which they then descended into the newly discovered cavern, the first of many that would radiate into a labyrinth of passages.

In no way daunted by her extraordinary exertions and, in order to keep the momentum going, Eileen and others returned on the 14th April to venture deeper into the bowels of the cave complex. Using dinghies they cross the challenging Green Canal into a new world of further discoveries, just opening up one of the most spectacular underground systems in Britain. Then, in May 1966, Eileen, now Mrs Eileen Inson, having married a fellow caver, was a member of the team planted underground in Bat Chamber for nearly a week to carry out a survey, which led to the acquisition of a mass of scientific data significant in determining the origins of the cave system. Returning on the 19th March 1967, Eileen was party to yet another major discovery which prompted further geological and hydrological studies and led to a series of further probes and sorties into the cave system by a succession of cavers, prominent among whom was the renowned expert cave diver, Martin Farr. Through her indomitable spirit and fearless courage Eileen had achieved a feat which even the bravest of men would have found daunting. Martin Farr paid tribute to her composure, cool calm confidence and firm resolve. She was imbued with a spirit of adventure and impelled by the lure of the unknown. The underworld is never short of surprises and is synonymous with mystery and challenge. Eileen's achievement was to persuade what she called "a subterranean paradise" to yield up some of its secrets.

Those of us who grew up with Eileen would hardly credit what this slender contemporary of ours had achieved in cracking the code to a fairyland of passages and chambers. She was the daughter of Johnny Davis, a shepherd on the Cnewr Estate, and Mary Ann Davies.

Eileen was rewarded for her achievement by being selected as one of a party of 25 on an expedition to Yugoslavia to investigate the unexplored Balinka Pit. She gained even greater distinction by being honoured in recognition of her spectacular find as one of Britain's most distinguished women of the year at the "Women of the Year Luncheon" at London's Savoy Hotel in October, 1966.

**Glyn Powell**

### **To be or not to be!**

The debate about maintaining the membership and safeguarding the long-term future of the Old Boys' Association was initiated by discussion in the committee in 2004, and subsequently highlighted by the Reverend Geraint Hughes and Les Bevan in their respective presidential addresses. The former pointed out it was inevitable that, with the secondary reorganisation in 1971, there would be no further recruiting ground from the ranks of former purely grammar school pupils. It was suggested, therefore, that consideration be given to the possibility of extending the Association's orbit to incorporate the former pupils of the state secondary schools in Brecon. To me personally this does not seem to be particularly revolutionary, even though I revel in those nostalgic feelings that reflect an abiding attachment to the Alma Mater.

My experiences may be termed multi-institutional since I have taken varying guises in the narrative. Initially a pupil at the county school, I subsequently returned when it was a grammar school to teach for a term on teacher training, being then appointed to the staff of the Secondary Modern, and finally at the High School. I appreciate, however, that there are purists who insist on protecting the honoured status quo. There is an admirable loyalty enshrined in the standpoint, and there are cogent arguments for this tradition. However, could I be presumptuous in suggesting that it is a conservative idealism that maintains that cause when one should be taking a more holistic approach to secondary education locally.

Does the newsletter reflect an ideological divide and persistence of the selective system enshrined in the 11+, the so-called "scholarship"? Actually, as a staff member at the Secondary School I found that the institutions were not hermetically sealed and their fortunes were inextricably bound up together. I was only too aware that my own Alma Mater was ever ready to poach our top scholars as well as artistic and sporting talents. There was also close cooperation in musical and dramatic productions, co-ventures which tend to have been relegated to the shadows of the forgetful past. The Girls' Grammar School was equally adept at this practice and, likewise, returned the "empties". The 1st Rugby XV's of the 1960s always contained a number of secondary modern pupils, with Dai Thomas one such pupil being the last of the school rugby team to gain a Secondary School cap. In this context it is interesting to pose the question as to whether the "purists" would accept such pupils as Old Boys per se! On the eve of secondary reorganisation, an outstanding cohort of boys was admitted to the sixth form, including Dr Philip Clark, Martyn Jones and Hugh Williams, the latter two being athletes and exceptional rugby players. Martyn also distinguished himself in other ways, being the school editor of the 1970 issue of the *Silurian*, for which he also provided the reports on the carol service, prize day, and armistice service, crowning his achievements by winning the Eisteddfod chair. Presumably these boys become honourable Old Boys although whenever asked about his education, Dr Philip Clark always professes publicly to be an ex-Secondary Modern pupil!

I am fully aware that I am tempting fate because even the most modest of compromises in the constitution represents heresy to the cadre of all OBA purists. I fear that as an "advocatus diaboli" I could be branded a "mumpsimus", someone who thinks that he is right despite clear reference to the contrary! Charles Lamb wrote "I'm a bundle of prejudices and made up of likes and dislikes", a sentiment which some might suggest applies to me in this instance. It may be argued that there is an absurdity in engaging in any debate on the issue, a "veritable argumentum ad absurdum." There will still be a hostile response from the some quarters

even though it is possible to embrace the future without jettisoning the past. As an Association we already work closely with the High School, as witnessed in the Armistice Service and the sponsoring of awards at the annual Prize Distribution.

A certain anachronism arose with secondary education reorganisation, whereby a number of year groups consisted of boys with dual status being both Grammar and High School pupils. Subsequent year groups at the High School, sort of F1 hybrid, are not considered for equivalent status, and are consequently outside the orbit of the OBA. However, there is already a certain flexibility with regard to the newsletter in that, column inches are being provided for contributions from ex-Girls' Grammar School pupils. Could we not now devote a page in the newsletter for articles of interest on High School staff and pupils?

**Glyn Powell**

### **Letters to the Editor**

I introduced the idea of a "Letters to the editor" column in 2010 in the hope of persuading Old Boys to contribute. Alas, I only received two letters, one in 2010 from Ron Tucker, and one in 2011 from the late Mike Balding. During my attempts to solicit articles from Old Boys for this year's newsletter, I sent an email to Peter Holt, who has contributed several fascinating articles about his post school life. I did not get an article in response, but Peter's email reply is worthy of publication, so I have included it here as an edited letter.

Hi Mike,

It was good to hear from you, but sad to know that you are short of material for the newsletter. I am not surprised. Our gone days gather themselves up into a huge ball of many colours and it rolls away, taking with it the masters we were boys to. So there is Kaiser Up There, wondering why his pupils failed to flourish at Latin despite his physical admonitions. There is Doug Inglis, no longer awaiting that *forest of hands* to shoot up to indicate that the *guttersnipes* before him have some answers for him. There is Phippen, no longer trying to squeeze his not inconsiderable frame into a reluctant sports car. There is Ewart Davies, no longer needing that Rover automobile he confided in us it was his ambition to get by the time he was fifty. And so with all the rest of that illustrious staff room. All gone. All rolled away, taking with them a warmth out of our lives few can now rekindle, to judge by the paucity of response to your literary soliciting. Maybe the Old Boys need to heed Tennyson:

*Old age hath yet his honour and his toll;  
Death closes all: but something ere the end,  
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,  
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.*

...

*Come, my friends,  
Tis not too late ...*

to send in copy for the next newsletter to be published.

I wish you better fortune for your next edition.

All good wishes,

**Peter**

### **Book Review: Standing on Abersycir Hill**

by Allan Lloyd (1954-54)

This is a fascinating autobiography of Allan, who is a member of the Old Boys' committee. Born in Pontypridd, Allan had attended eleven primary and junior schools by the time he was eleven because of his father's postings to different RAF camps. He describes vividly the wretched lives of the miners and the aftermath of German bombing. The family moved to *The Commin* near Abersycir, and his life changed after

he met Honor at Abersycir Hill. They became sweethearts and Abersycir Hill became their special place. Allan was a major prankster, examples being his accidentally killing a prize Rhode Island Red cockerel with a homemade bow and arrow, and breaking into the Queen's own privy at the annual Brecon Agricultural Show.

However the most striking feature of the book is Allan's achievements as a politician, entrepreneur, campaigner and author. After marrying Angela (his friendship with Honor had been discouraged because of the four year age difference), and securing a teaching post at Lady Hawkins' School, he became an active member of the Kington community. His many achievements include planning and campaigning for a town bypass, and leading a campaign for a cancer centre that included chemotherapy and radiotherapy at Hereford County Hospital. The latter campaign was prompted by Angela's cancer, which necessitated a gruelling long journey to Cheltenham for treatment for several weeks. Within five years a chemotherapy unit was established at Hereford, but getting approval for an £8 million Radiotherapy Centre was more challenging. Nine years after the start of the campaign, Allan was summoned to the Department of Health at Richmond House for disclosing to the press the contents of a highly confidential report by the National Radiotherapy Advisory Group. His performance before the "city-apparelled parliamentary host" was impressive, and the project was approved shortly afterwards.

The proceeds of the book (cost £10) are to be donated to St Michael's Hospice, Hereford in the name of daughter Katy, who died aged 50. If anyone is interested, contact Allan by phone 01544 2309408 or email: [allan.lloyd579@btinternet.com](mailto:allan.lloyd579@btinternet.com) .

**Michael Williams**

### **The World's Toughest Patrol, 1959-2019** **A one-off experience, 1961**

The obituary column of our newsletter shows that many of our ex-school colleagues undertook a period of military service yet, despite their many interesting and challenging experiences, they have not been prepared to share these in the newsletter. However, there are still a considerable number alive who have stories and anecdotes to relate. So, to tempt them to put pen to paper I thought that a personal monograph would prompt them to respond.

It transpired that, on completion of a three years' posting in the Far East from Korea to Japan and Malaysia, I was offered an extended appointment as an assistant adjutant with either the KAR (King's African Regiment) or the RWAFF (Royal West African Frontier Force). However, during my absence my younger brother Garfield ("Little Gambo") had died from leukaemia whilst at Bangor University, and I felt obliged to stay at home with my parents. Electing, therefore, to terminate my regular engagement I was placed on the Z Reserve list, liable for recall at 24 hours notice. I was provided with a sealed HMSO envelope containing the instructions for such recall, with rail passes and destination details, but the envelope was not to be opened until notified. In the meantime, I was to continue training with the territorial Army, in my case the Breconshire and Monmouthshire Regiment. It was in this capacity that I was delegated to lead the unit's eight man team in the Cambrian March 1961, which involved a 74 mile march from Hay-on-Wye to Maesteg, with full equipment including rifles. The teams were tested on endurance, teamwork, timings, field craft and shooting. The GOC at the time said that to undertake the march "men must have soldier qualities, courage, physical fitness, endurance, grit and guts - the very qualities for which Welshman throughout the years have been known." Initially, it was also a competition with teams being placed in order of merit.

The march has since taken various forms and is known today as the Cambrian Patrol, planned and executed annually by 160th (Welsh) Brigade. It takes place in mid Wales as a non-competitive exercise. Patrols are assessed on a number of tasks, based on the Military Annual Training Tests, and points are awarded according to the performance at each of them. According to the number of merit points awarded, patrol

members are presented with either a gold, silver or bronze medal. All who complete the exercise receive a certificate of achievement.

Classed as the worlds toughest patrolling test, it celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2019, at which I was privileged to have been involved in the award ceremonies. From the point of view of the test of military skills, it has upped the game since the raw slog of my day. Exercise Cambrian Patrol was carefully developed into a world class challenge that attracts the very best of what international armies across the globe have to offer. In 2019 over 130 teams entered from 34 countries. Some foreign entrants have to claim the right to take part in the UK by winning their own domestic competition. For example, the Australian Army runs an infantry skills competition called the Duke of Gloucester Cup, with the winning unit representing the country in Exercise Cambrian Patrol.

Looking back to 1961, I can recall arriving at the patrol base in Hay-on-Wye with a team of eight soldiers, and being subjected to a thorough check to ensure that we were all in possession of the correct kit, equipment and clothing as required for the exercises. With kit and weapons each man's load approximated 70 lbs. Then, in British Army footwear and newly issued combat kit we picked up our weapons, packs, tentage and bedding, and trudged our way on a march from Hay-on-Wye to Maesteg, a route that covered 74 miles taking in most of the peaks of the Black Mountains and Brecon Beacons. It was mind and muscle sapping, mentally and physically demanding to the virtual limit of man's endurance.

Training for the event had been rigorous, involving every weekend over three months. This had prepared us for carrying the weight and developing speed of march to meet the timings set for each checkpoint and the day's bivouac area. To survive the march we were obliged to carry our rations for the duration, sleeping bag and kit, and we bedded down at night under our makeshift bivis made from our ponchos. Fortunately, the weather conditions were generally favourable apart from the night that we suffered a downpour, when our flimsy bivis collapsed and we were soaked. The subsequent rain drenched day of the journey was a struggle with wet feet in ammo boots, a real trial of endurance. Completing the challenge as the winning team gave us all immense satisfaction as did the subsequent march-past on the Esplanade in Porthcawl.

**Glyn Powell**

### **Book Review: Crai - Atgffion Mebyd, Memories of Youth**

by Glyn Powell and Stephen Roderick

This book contains a collection of 31 essays, seven in Welsh, in which the authors reflect on their youth in Crai and some of the influential events and characters. One early character was Daniel Craionog Lewis (1841-1913), who wrote "Hanes Plwyf Defynog" in 1911, a "veritable treasure trove of local history", despite having had no formal education. Whilst many of the authors' reflections relate to the period of the Second World War and its aftermath, reference is also made to events as far back as Norman times. For example in the eleventh century, Sir John Skull was granted the manor of Crai and Bolgoed. Steve Roderick, whilst researching in the Powys County Archives in 2003, met an American couple and discovered that the man was descended from John Skull of Cray. His research had been aided by staff at Brecon Cathedral, where there was on one of the pews a carved wooden figure with the name Scull. There was an inscription that referred to "The gift of Williams Ellis Scull, Philadelphia, USA. In memory of Bernard Neumarch, Builder of the Second Priory; . . . and his companion Sir John Scull".

These are just two fascinating nuggets from this book, which also includes such intriguing essays as "A Possible Roman Crai By-pass" and "Crai - an Unlikely Hitler Target."

**Michael Williams**

### **The Future of the Cradoc Road Site**

Following the suggestion by Ken Jones in a committee meeting that we should try to preserve the Cradoc Road school building, the committee initiated an application to CADW to list the building in 2018. As



reported in the 2020 newsletter, CADW declined our request but the charity Cymryd Rhan stepped in with a proposal to develop the building. The charity provides home care for vulnerable people in Wales and is headed by Nicholas Evans, who addressed the committee, and in late 2020 presented the plans envisaged for the building.

As reported in the 2021 newsletter, initially, Powys Council wished to develop the rear of the site for a facility for disadvantaged children but dropped the idea when planning permission was refused. Meanwhile, Cynryd Rhan provided heating to maintain the building while negotiations with Powys were proceeding. Agreement of a contract would trigger a Lottery grant which had been provisionally approved.

Then, unexpectedly, Powys withdrew from the negotiations. An article headed “Extreme disappointment as partnership breaks down” in the Brecon & Radnor on 26th May 2021 highlighted the failure. The site has now been put up for sale.

**Michael Williams**

### **Obituaries**

#### **Michael Hicks (1944-47)**

A keen sportsman with a special interest in soccer, Michael later converted to rugby and held a regular place in the Brecon XV team. Following National Service in the RAF, he joined Breconshire County Council staff working in the Education Department. In 1974 he was deployed to the Shire County staff at Cambrian Way. He was an accomplished rock climber and snow skier.

#### **David Pulling (1950-56)**

After completing O- and A-level exams David obtained a first in Chemical Engineering at Swansea University. He worked all his life for ICI in paints and dyes at different sites in the UK. Finally living in Beaconsfield he was chair of the local National Trust and sidesman at his local church. He led the soccer lobby in a dispute with the Head against the over-emphasis on rugby at the school.

#### **Hywel Jones (1944-47)**

A naturally gifted sportsman, Hywel played for the soccer 1st XI from an early stage. He left school comparatively early to return home to the family farm. A member of a very musical family, he was a long-standing member of Côr Crai and Côr Meibion Aberhonddu. At school he passed an audition for Stephanie's Silver Songsters, the leading boys' concert party, but he elected to opt for farming.

#### **Eric David Abel (1941-45)**

Eric was an evacuee from the area of the Elephant and Castle, and was accommodated in Hay-on-Wye from where he gained admission to the Boys' County School. On completing his School Certificate he returned to London, but many years later he returned to set up the Doll's House, a business on the outskirts of Hay. In 1960 he was made an Associate Member of the Institute of Electrical Engineers.

#### **Eirina Gerrish (née Lewis) Staff**

After graduating from UC Aberystwyth Eirina taught in North Wales, and was then appointed to teach Welsh at the Secondary Modern school in 1961. On secondary reorganisation she became Year Tutor for the seven 4th year forms. She was responsible for the establishment and operation of a language lab, later removed to Coleg Powys. She assisted in Grammar School drama productions.

#### **Steven (“Steve”) Daniel Massochi (1940-46)**

London born Steve moved to Wales when his family was evacuated. After military service in the RAF, he trained as a teacher at Bangor College. After teaching in the Coventry area he became a lecturer at Poulton Le Fylde Training College, then Head of Education Technology at De la Salle, Manchester. He finally became Schools' Inspector. He was a keen photographer and church organist.

### **Arwyn Evans (1960-82) Staff**

Arwyn headed the Welsh Department with distinction over 20 years at both the Grammar and High schools. He attended Coleg Llanymddyfri, Lampeter College, then Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities where he spent a period as a lecturer in the Celtic Department before returning to Wales. A Celtic scholar and poet he was a master of “cynghanedd” and National Eisteddfod winner.

### **Philip Morgan (1954-59)**

On completing his secondary education Philip joined the family building firm which also acted as undertakers. A powerful, physically impressive schoolboy, he played at prop forward for the 1st XV from an early age, and later became a regular in the Brecon RFC 1st XV. He was active in the community being a community counsellor, and coach of the YFC tug-of-war team.

### **Peter Anthony James (1956-63)**

Hay boy, Peter, graduated from Swansea University in Geography and then gained an MSc at Saskatchewan University, during which he spent 3 months in the Arctic with the Inuit. Back in the UK, he studied for his PhD at Nottingham and then lectured on Soil Science at Liverpool University, his main interest being the soils of the Mediterranean. He was a keen walker and sailor.

### **Edward Thomas Paul Gerrish (?)**

Paul was born in Merthyr Tydfil, and when the family moved to Bwlch he joined the Brecon Boys' Grammar School. Following a period in the RAF on National Service, he joined the Bedford Police. After 30 years service he retired to Moss Park, Clifford, enjoying travel and world trips, and assisting with his partner's business in nearby Hay on Wye.

### **Elfed Lewis Hamer (1952-57)**

After taking his O-level examination in 1957, Elfed had to leave school to return home to assist his widowed mother on the family dairy farm, which provided the school with their supply. Elfed was a loyal and inspiring member of the YFC movement, which honoured him as an Honorary Vice President. A longstanding Community Councillor, he was also deacon in Capel Horeb, Crai.

### **James (“Jimmy”) D Evans (1954-60)**

Hay boy, Jimmy, was a studious rather than sporting pupil. He completed an impressive ‘O’ Level examination in 1959, adding Physics and Commercial Subjects in 1960. It is reported that he specialised in Special Needs education and Social work during his teaching career in the Birmingham area.

### **Idris Williams (1941)**

Idris, known to his contemporaries as “Cray Commando”, spent his final year in a fifth form called Upper Remove with Mr Barnes as its form master. After National Service he signed on as a regular, attaining the rank of Sgt and spending a period in Kenya. On demobilisation he worked for an auctioneer before joining the Electricity board. He enjoyed amateur dramatics. He was a choir member and sang as a bass soloist.

### **Contact details**

For contributions to the next newsletter: editor, Mr J M Williams, 4, Chestnut Avenue, West Cross, Swansea SA3 5NL; Email: [williamsjm@mail.com](mailto:williamsjm@mail.com); Tel: 01792 404232.

For enquiries re Old Boys' Association activities, etc.: secretary, Mr Tom Protheroe, 14, Rookery Drive, Nantwich, CW5 7DD; Email: [t.protheroe@talk21.com](mailto:t.protheroe@talk21.com); Tel: 01270 623525.