

*Cylchlythyr Cymdeithas Ysgolion Ramadeg Aberhonddu  
Mawrth 2024*

*Brecon Grammar Schools' Association Newsletter March 2024*



It is with profound sadness that we share the news of Dad's (Glyn's) passing. He died peacefully at the Princess of Wales Hospital in Bridgend with his family at his bedside. No words can express what he meant to us and to his wider family and friends. His loss will be felt by those who loved him and by the countless individuals and communities whose lives he enriched and often changed. Teacher, headmaster, scholar, author, bard, farmer, leader, mediator, champion for justice and Cymro i'r carn. A giant of a man but, above all else, Glyn was the most beloved husband, father and Gampa.

**Bethan (Glyn's daughter)**

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The year 2023 has been a dramatic and sad one. It began with the unveiling of Glyn Powell's portrait at the High School in the afternoon of our Annual Reunion. Then, at the AGM important decisions about the future of the Old Boys' Association were made, the main ones being a change in our constitution to include Old Girls and a change of name of the Association. This was followed by our first reunion dinner at Cradoc Golf Club. It was encouraging to see an increased number at the reunion including several Old Girls who were attending for the first time.

Then, at the end of the year came the sad news that Glyn had passed away. Andrew Thomas has written a heart felt tribute to Glyn.

This is the first newsletter of the Brecon Grammar Schools' Association (BGSA). At our September committee meeting we welcomed Elizabeth Poraj-Wilczynska as a representative of the Girls' Alumni.

Articles of interest to Old Girls are shown in colour.

Since Glyn contributed so many article to the newsletter I will need more articles next year and hope to receive some from Old Girls.

Mae'r flwyddyn 2023 wedi bod yn un ddramatig a thrist. Dechreuodd gyda dadorchuddio portread Glyn Powell yn yr Ysgol Uwchradd ar brynhawn ein Haduniad Blynnyddol. Wedyn, yn y cyfarfod cyffredinol blynnyddol gwnaethpwyd penderfyniadau pwysig am ddyfodol cymdeithas yr hen fechgyn, y prif un oedd newid ein cyfansoddiad i gynnwys Hen Ferched a newid enw'r gymdeithas.

Dilynwyd hyn gan ein cinio aduniad cyntaf yng nglwb Golff Cradoc. Roedd yn galonogol gweld cynnydd yn nifer yn yr aduniad, gan gynnwys sawl Hen Ferched a oedd yn mynychu am y tro cyntaf.

Hwn yw cylchlythyr cyntaf y Gymdeithas Ysgolion Ramadeg Aberhonddu. Yn ein cyfarfod pwyllgor ym mis Medi, croesawyd Elizabeth Poraj-Wilczynska fel cynrychiolydd cyn-fyfyrwyr y merched.

Mae erthyglau o ddiddordeb i gyn-fyfyrwyr y merched yn cael eu dangos mewn lliw.

Gan fod Glyn wedi cyfrannu cymaint o erthyglau i'r cylchlythyr bydd angen mwy o erthyglau arnaf y flwyddyn nesaf ac rwy'n gobeithio derbyn rhai o'r Hen Ferched.

## **Thomas Glenville Powell - Glyn - Gambo 1932-2023**

Thomas Glenville Powell was a Crai boy who left this small village in Breconshire to stamp his mark far and wide across the globe. With Glyn there are so many achievements and highlights that it is essential to precis his achievements and try to ensure that you do not filter out too many of the memorable achievements from the 91 years of his life.

**Glyn's heritage** was based in the Epynt and Crai. Glyn's mother was from the Epynt. The family farm was part of its clearing in 1940 so that the army could have a firing range. His ancestors had farmed the land for many decades. Glyn's father was born near Builth Wells. The family later moved to Llwynhir Farm on the outskirts of the village of Crai.

**Glyn's education** started at Crai County Primary School and then Brecon Boys' Grammar School where he had weekday lodgings with Mrs Hatton. After the Grammar School he studied at the University College of North Wales, Bangor. There he studied History and Political Philosophy. I am sure that you would not have seen Glyn copying Rodin's statue pose but instead actively repelling the invasions from the other colleges of Aberystwyth, Cardiff and Swansea during the various inter varsity cultural and sporting activities.

When Glyn left University, the dreaded National Service loomed. True to his character he obtained a commission in the King's Own Royal Regiment serving in Korea, then a period liaising with Japanese Defence forces. He signed on again for a further 3 years and he was stationed in Malaya attached to the Gurkhas. His final rank was substantive Captain and Acting Major. These varied experiences greatly enhanced his understanding and importance of respecting different cultures and languages.

**After** the army and becoming a civilian he took up teaching in Bridgend and finally Brecon. He maintained his links with the army where he was Officer in charge of the Brecon and Monmouth Territorial Army.

**The TA** had a competition where teams had to get from Hay on Wye to Maesteg, **The Cambrian March**. The challenge wasn't quite that easy. He and his team had to cross bits of the Black Mountains and the Brecon Beacons with 70 kg packs on their backs. In 1961 Glyn led his handpicked team to victory. On the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March Glyn was invited back to address the competing teams in what is now an international competition. His address to the competitors was described as inspirational.

### **Moving on**

Whilst Glyn's education was firmly in the Arts with language and history the key components, the reality is that his education was much broader when you add in his Rural Community and farming background and his Army experiences. In the army he met different cultures, showed leadership, and enhanced his ability to both solve problems and work effectively with a wide range of people. Many people have most of the skills and knowledge that I have just mentioned but only the exceptional can implement them in real life. Glyn was exceptional as illustrated briefly in the following activities and achievements.

### **We start in Cwm Senni – The Senni Valley**

In 1963 Glyn had just returned from the army and the Usk River Authority wanted to flood the Senni Valley. Glyn was from the Cray Valley, the next-door valley. It is a very long story but to be brief, Glyn swung into action. One of the descriptions of him that I read was that he was a tactful and articulate man with a facility for writing and a chapel deacon. He was the secretary of the defence committee. The emphasis of the campaign was that it had to be neutral and exude nonviolence in everything that was done. Glyn showed all his leadership skills. I am sure that the authorities thought that overcoming the farmers from this very scattered farming community would be a doddle. They had not met Glyn. He united and led this farming community ensuring that they survived the 7 years long campaign and saved the valley. There is a superb picture of Glyn in his hat cradling a shepherd's crook emphasising that he was exerting a significant influence across the valley. A style icon of the sixties.

In 2001 there was major outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in many areas of the United Kingdom. The Welsh government initially decided to bury the carcasses but after problems they were burnt in the Epynt. The two most severe problems were transporting the dead animals throughout the surrounding area and, after the burial, the leaching of spoil into the numerous streams and ground water in the Epynt. Glyn was the Deputy President of the Farmers Union of Wales and it was his role to discuss the urgent issues for agriculture with the media. Another skirmish where Glyn led the defence using all his skills to ensure that the authorities reacted effectively to the concerns of the farming community.

He was a life member of the Farmers Union of Wales having been Vice President from 1995 to 2000 and then Deputy President from 2000 to 2002. In addition to the national FUW he was also very active in the Young Farmers Club helping the future generations of farmers.

Glyn was Head of Middle School at the High School. He was a superb teacher who strived to ensure that every student achieved his or her full potential. The testament to his skills and the rapport that he developed with his students can be seen on the Memories of Old Brecon Facebook page. He made an amazing impression on the students he taught. Never forgotten and always respected.

Glyn was a Historian. When he wrote a paper it was researched, expertly written and interesting to read. His writings were far and wide including the historical magazine Brycheiniog, the Old Boys' Newsletter, and Crai news. The one distinguishing factor is that at whatever 'level' he wrote the research and due diligence was always at the highest level. With a colleague he published a book about Crai and it is in its second print. Again, diligently researched and a superb read.

Glyn was a stalwart of the Old Boys' Association. A member for nearly 50 years, Chairman for 5 years and President in 1995. In 1996 he wrote a well-researched history of Brecon Secondary Schools, 1896 – 1996. His extensive knowledge of the school system has been well documented in the many articles he has written for the Newsletter.

Language, and the Welsh language in particular, is the core element of Glyn's life. I need say no more as it permeates everything he believed in and his Gorsedd recognition highlights this.

#### **Finally, we come to his greatest honour.**

As a true Cymro nothing beats recognition at the National Eisteddfod and admission to the Gorsedd.

The Gorsedd was created to emphasise the fact that the heritage and culture of the Celts belonged to the Welsh. Watching the Gorsedd ceremonies either on Television or at the Eisteddfod you see the importance of the Gorsedd to the Welsh language and culture. The members are dressed in three different colour robes. **White** – Winners of the Eisteddfods main prizes. **Green** – members who specialise in the world of the arts. **Blue** – Reserved for those who have rendered special service to their locale or to the nation in Law, Science, Sport, Journalism, or Media.

Glyn was obviously a member of the blue order or deity for his contribution to both his locality and to the nation. His contribution has been exceptional and nobody deserve the honour more. The citation published by the eisteddfod stated:

**Glyn Powell, Sennybridge**, (*it should be Crai*) is a scholar, writer, teacher, farmer, leader and recorder of his people's history. He spent his career in education, and campaigned for Welsh-medium education in an area where the number of Welsh speakers was low, successfully gaining the support of the community as a whole and regaining respect for the language. He contributed extensively to agriculture, leading the campaign for Epynt during the challenging times of foot and mouth disease, and when the Senni Valley was under threat of drowning. His contribution, both locally and nationally, has been substantial for many years, and we are delighted to honour him this year.

Glyn's Gorsedd name is Glyn ap Cillieni - back to his Epynt roots.

Finally, here is a quotation made when he addressed the Farmers Union of Wales as a Vice President. He finished a memorable speech by quoting Saunders Lewis. The quote in Welsh is:

**Gwinllan a roddwyd i'm gofal yw Cymru fy Ngwald i'w thraddod i'm plant ac i blant fy mhlant yn dreftadaeth dragwyddol.**

**My country of Wales is a vineyard, given into my keeping: to be handed down to my children and to my children's children, as an inheritance for all time.**

**Glyn was a person who epitomised this vision as a man of the people for the people.**

**“Andrew Waterworks”  
Andrew Thomas**



## Events of 2023

On a lovely sunny day on Saturday, 15th April, over 100 people gathered in the High School for the long awaited **unveiling of Glyn's Portrait**. Chairman David Gittins welcomed everyone, including the Mayor, Councillor David Meredith, representatives of the Farmers Union of Wales, the Brecon Arts Trust and the artist Joseph Galvin. President Andrew Thomas then presented a tribute to Glyn. He began by saying it was a challenge to cover Glyn's immense contribution to our society in a ten minute address. Crai boy Glyn, after his education at the Grammar School, went to university in Bangor to study History and Political Science. His National Service involved a commission in the King's Own Royal Regiment serving in Korea followed by 3 years in Malaya. After leaving the army he embarked on a teaching career in Brecon but maintained his links with the army where he was Officer in charge of the Brecon and Monmouth Territorial Army. His leadership skills were demonstrated by the success of his team in the 1961 Cambrian march organised by the TA. This involved a journey across parts of the Black Mountains and the Brecon Beacons with 70 kg packs on their backs.

Some of Glyn's major achievements include leading the campaign against the plan by the Usk River Authority to flood the Senni Valley in the 1960s. This nonviolent campaign lasted 7 years and saved the valley. Glyn, as Deputy President of the Farmers Union of Wales, was also active during the Foot and Mouth crisis when the Welsh government decided to burn the carcasses in the Epynt. There was concern about possible leaching of spoil into streams and ground water in the area and Glyn ensured that these concerns were addressed. He was also active in the Young Farmers Club.

At the High School Glyn had a reputation as a superb teacher. As a historian he wrote many articles for the Brycheiniog magazine and of course for the Old Boys' newsletter. He campaigned for Welsh-medium education in an area where the number of Welsh speakers was low.



Glyn's greatest honour was his admission to the Gorsedd at the National Eisteddfod for his work as a scholar, writer, teacher, farmer, leader and recorder of his people's history. He wore the Blue robe which is reserved for those who have rendered special service to their locale or to the nation.

Turning to the portrait, Andrew referred to the significant contributions made by the Farmers Union of Wales and Brecon Arts Trust, but 85% of the money raised came from 68 Old Boys. He concluded with a quotation from a speech made by Glyn (in Welsh) on becoming a Vice President of the Farmers Union of Wales:

*"My country of Wales is a vineyard, given into my keeping; to be handed down to my children and to my children's' children, as an inheritance for all time."*

We were then invited to gather on the staircase overlooking the site of the portrait for the unveiling by the Mayor.

Later in the afternoon 42 Old Boys, Girls and partners assembled for the **74th Annual Reunion** at Cradoc Golf Club (photo below), a new venue because the Castle Hotel was planning a refurbishment. After the meal Professor Andrew Thomas was invited to give his Presidential address. He began by asking the question "did I get a good education?" He referred to his home in rural Crai which meant he required a bus to Brecon to join the Grammar School and lodging with Mrs Hatton for the duration of the week. His memories of the school were very much about the teachers. Doug Inglis was in charge of the under 14 football team and his advice was: attack is the best form of defence and a man on the ground is a man out.



Gwyn Angel was the biggest influence on him; one of his recommendations was “always take a decision, it will never be wrong but you could have taken a better one.”

He enjoyed sport, rugby, cricket and athletics.

After school came university at Cardiff where he began studying Pure Maths but after one term realised he was more interested in Applied Maths and switched course. In his third year he began studying Electrical Engineering and was keen to continue with this subject but the head advised him to get a job. During his last year he learned about computers and these were a major part of his subsequent career. After a period in industry he joined Enfield College

of Technology. When two colleges merged he was involved in the reorganisation and played a major role in offering courses such as computing and Italian and Spanish. An EU initiative provided the opportunity to extend his interaction with several other countries in Europe. In visiting some of these countries he found his Welsh background was useful in countries such as the Basque and Hungary.

At age 60 Andrew quit his job to found a company called Teleregan using Objective 2 funding from the EU.

After retiring he was a founder member of the St Albans Welsh Society and became an enthusiastic member of the local bowls club, serving as President of the Association. Andrew concluded that his school education did serve him well in preparing him for life’s challenges. He then proposed a toast to the Old Boys’ Association.

Vice President Allan Lloyd was then invited to propose a vote of thanks. Before doing so he said he was honoured to be nominated for the post of President, which he didn’t think he merited. He highlighted the



contributions of Glyn for his considerable contributions to the newsletter, Michael for producing a much appreciated newsletter, David for his sterling guidance as Chairman, and especially Tom for his work as secretary and treasurer. He then proposed a vote of thanks to the President for his address, to the committee, and to the staff of the Golf Club. He received the chain of office from Andrew Thomas (on left in photo; retiring Chairman David Gittins is on the right).

At the **AGM**, which preceded the reunion dinner, two important decisions were made. The invitation to this year’s reunion included a question about members’ preferences for the timing of the reunion: lunch versus evening. Whilst many had no preference there was a clear majority in favour of lunch, so it was resolved to try a lunch reunion for 2024. The other important decision concerned the future of the Old Boys’ Association, a subject that had been debated many times. After discussion it was agreed to alter the constitution to include former pupils of the Girls’ Grammar School.

The **Stars’ Award Ceremony** at Brecon High School was held on 18th July 2023, and for the first time since the opening of the school it was held in the sports hall with the usual Bafta type format where the prize

winning pupils were seated at tables decorated with balloons etc. President Allan Lloyd attended with three other Old Boys, Charles Lewis, David Gittins and Michael Williams. The Old Boys' prizes were presented by Allan. The awards were interspaced by several musical interludes by two female soloists, one male soloist and one guitarist. There was no interval as in previous ceremonies, and the evening concluded with the award by the headmaster, Mr Jenkins, of a large bouquet of flowers to Miss Gibbs, who was retiring after 35 years. He thanked Miss Gibbs for her huge contributions to the school over her long career. Miss Gibbs, in a short address, recalled how she had applied for a job in Merthyr Tydfil, but while waiting for the decision of the panel, she read an advertisement for a post in Brecon High School. So, when she was offered the job she turned it down because Brecon was where she wanted to be. She has been the guiding, helpful, supportive liaison person for the Old Boys over many years and we will miss her efficient collaboration.

The prize winners are listed below:

Subject Winners	Special Awards	Pupil Name
Most Improved Business Studies	The D.J. Powell Cup	Craig Corcoran
Most Improved History	The Evans Most Improved History Prize	Jack Doe
Year 10 Art	The Evans Art Prize	Lilwen Banning
Year 10 Business Studies	The Evans Business prize	Henry Stephens
Year 10 Geography	The Evans KS4 Geography Prize	Lilly Prosser
Year 10 Mathematics	The Evans KS4 Maths Prize	Michael Croppier
Year 10 Physical Education	The Letton Shield	Jac Kenchington
Year 12 English	Senior Geoffrey Meredith Powell Prize	Olivia Thompson-R
Year 12 Mathematics	The Evans KS5 Maths Prize	Jayden Wilkinson
Year 12 PE	Cliff Carr Memorial Prize	Dan Pitt
Year 12 Welsh Baccalaureate	The Evans Intercultural understanding Prize	Abi Davies
Year 8 Modern Foreign Languages	The Evans KS3 Languages Prize	Robin Irwin
Year 9 English	Junior Geoffrey Meredith Powell Prize	Florence Cherrington
Year 9 Mathematics	The Evans KS3 Maths Prize	Malachi Fiveash
Year 9 Modern Foreign Languages	The Evans KS3/4 Languages Prize	Sam Standing

Ceiron Bradley also received the Cadet of the Year prize.

Photos of the prize winners for whom we have permission to include follow (the Head presented Ceiron Bradley's prize):

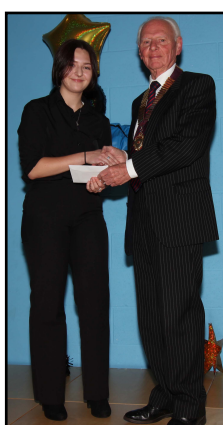
Daniel Pitt

OliviaThompsonR

Florence Cherrington

Jayden Wilkinson

Ceiron Bradley



As usual Old Boys and Old Girls (see photo below) supported **the Memorial Service at the High School** on 10th November 2023. It differed this year in that it was held for the first time in the Sports Hall, which





accommodated the whole school. The readings included reference to Hedd Wyn, the man who famously submitted a poem to the National Eisteddfod in 1917 and was posthumously awarded the Chair after he was killed at the battle of Paschendaele. The Headmaster played a video clip from the Royal British Legion which included a poem reminding us of the importance of silence in our act of remembrance. The names of those who fell in World War I were read by Major Donna Greaves and, in the absence of Vice President Win Griffiths, Tom Protheroe read the names of those who fell in WW II. After the service light refreshments were provided for the guests who were able to meet some of the school cadets and senior pupils.

### Biographical Notes

#### Winston (Win) James Griffiths OBE (1954-62) - President Elect

After graduating in History followed by a Diploma in Education, Win married Ceri Gravell and took up a post at Mzumbo School for two years. He then taught in Birmingham, Barry and Cowbridge schools before election to the European Parliament in 1979 where he served as Vice-President (1984-87). He was MP for Bridgend from 1987 to 2005. In opposition he held a number of front bench roles and was Labour Minister in the Welsh Office in 1997-98. He later chaired two NHS Trusts, Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board and Wales Council for Voluntary Action. He was awarded the OBE in 2012 for services to the NHS.

### Observations on Jacob Morgan

“Leave school?” repeated Jacob Morgan, looking serious and concerned. My last two words hung in the air between us. “You are sitting your Higher School Certificate this year, and I expect you to do well and go on to university,” my headmaster went on matter-of-factly. He paused, obviously waiting for my explanation. That was always his way. He was a calm, self-contained gentleman of a much older generation. Little upset him, but one always had the feeling that behind his piercing eyes, inside his dome-shaped head, there was a mind whirring and calculating with frightening speed. Indeed we had all used his mathematics textbooks for School Certificate, each of which bore the legend of his name and his Masters degree at Oxford. Scholarship was his life. And yet I had always suspected a more human side to him. In my early days at the school, a number of my fellow ‘townies’ and I stayed each afternoon after school playing football with a tennis ball in the playground until the winter darkness came down on us. And always, at that point, Jacob, the last to leave the school, would come out and tell us, in no uncertain terms, but usually with a smile, to go home.

He listened now in silence while I told him, hesitantly, my reasons for wishing to leave school at this point in my life. Money, pride, guilt - all can be traced in the confusion of the time. I lived with the feeling that going on and on with my education was utter selfishness, and that, like many an older son, I should be making a needed contribution to family finances. Yet I cannot recall any pressure on me from anyone at all to give up my plans of going to university and then on to teaching.

Jacob thanked me courteously and assured me that he would consider what I said very carefully. The next day he had a proposition to discuss. Would I be interested in becoming his secretary? I had no idea that such a post existed! He explained further. He had always been greatly in need of someone to do the simple, routine, office tasks. It was so straightforward that he didn't see why I shouldn't attend any classes I wanted to. And if I did that I might as well be entered for Higher School Certificate. I would have to be replaced as



Head Boy of course, but could still play sport and remain captain of the school football team. It all seemed very fair - and fortunate - to me.

Even now I grimace at my naivety. A 17 year old schoolboy. No office experience. No typing ability. Strangely simple, repetitive work which revolved around writing up lists, opening mail and noting telephone messages. Eventually I felt guilty for being paid for such easy work; I resigned and reverted to being a full-time student. It seems strange but I've always had an odd feeling of being outmanoeuvred. The image of slack rope being paid out to me down a steep precipice stayed for a long time. Jacob passed on many years ago, but on the times I've visited him I think I hear a dry chuckle in the air. "It wasn't that funny," I say, but I can't help but smile, nor sometimes shed a small tear.

**Bill Gallagher (1942-49)**

### **The Silurian Magazines**

After a suggestion by David Jones last year that copies of the Silurian magazines might be placed on the Old Boys' website ([www.brecongrammar.org](http://www.brecongrammar.org)), scanned copies of the magazines were placed on the website. They contain much information about all aspects of school life and include miscellaneous articles on trips abroad, poems, reports from universities and activities of the Old Boys.

One intriguing change was made in the 1966 issue; the cover was changed to red. Could it be that the new head, Aneurin Rees, wanted to make his mark in some way? Can the assistant editors, R. Samuel and R. Leonard (if they are still alive) enlighten us? I think this was a mistake because the original cover included the school logo with a **red** dragon. Interestingly, in 1970 the white cover reappeared with the resplendent red dragon. The section on the Old Boys' Association referred to the election of Prosser-Roberts as President. With the impending switch to comprehensive education, the suggestion was made that a union with the Girls' Association should be considered to create a Former Pupils' Association. That has now happened 53 years later! The 1971 issue retained the white cover but the dragon was not red, how remiss of the editor!

One interesting feature of the 1966 issue is an article by History teacher, Hugh Thomas, on the history of the school from 1896 to 1958. It includes a lovely photo of the old school and photos of the staff and pupils at Dr Coke's (circa 1901) and the 18 staff in 1957-58.

From 1967 onwards much detail was omitted, for example there are no lists of pupils who sat the O- and A-level examinations, no details of the school sports day, and no details of the eisteddfod competitions. There is always plenty of detail on the sports teams, especially rugby.

The editor, David Williams, of the last issue in 1971 said "we aimed at making the *Silurian* '71 a bumper edition. At 72 pages it was significantly larger than previous issues and continued numerous advertisements many of which were scattered throughout the magazine. As usual there was much emphasis on rugby with reports on the 1st Fifteen, the 2nd Fifteen, the Under 15 Fifteen, the Under 14 Fifteen, the Under 13 Fifteen and the Under 12 Fifteen.

**Michael Williams**

### **I passed the Scholarship**

#### **Part 2**

There had been advocates of secondary education for all and this was finally implemented, along with the abolition of payment of fees, by the 1944 Education Act introduced by R.A. Butler. What is not fully appreciated by many of our members is that before that, most of the pupils in my form had to pay either a £5 or £7.50 fee. I recall witnessing them lining up outside the headmaster's office at the beginning of term to pay their fees. A number of us had free scholarships on the basis of means testing. As one of five children, with my father employed as a shepherd and farm worker, £5 represented more than a fortnight's wages. Without this concession it is doubtful whether I and a few others would have been able to take up our places at the County School.

The Education Act was as radical and revolutionary a change as our educational system is ever likely to experience. It's sought to guarantee an education appropriate to the pupil's age, aptitude and ability throughout the period of full time compulsory schooling. Secondary education was to be organised in a tripartite system - grammar, technical and secondary modern. Political pressure ensured that the imposition of the changes was neither compulsory nor time limited. Actually, not all the principles were ever fully implemented.

In 1947 I was a member of Brecon Boys' County School but in 1948 it was Brecon Boys' Grammar/Technical school. The technical nomenclature was tagged on as there were insufficient numbers and resources to establish a separate technical school in Brecon. A similar change applied to the Girls' School although I doubt whether there was any additional technical element in the curriculum of either school. Reservations about the changes were expressed by the grammar school lobby, who maintained a commitment to segregational practices. Parents still clamoured for their children to gain admission by selective means. The Professor of Education at Bangor, writing in 1944, stated "yr hen snobyddiaeth academic a wna fynedfa i'r ysgol ramadeg nid yn fater o allu a thuedd y plentyn ond yn fater o urddas y teulu." Grammar schools were heirs of tradition with prestige figuring prominently in their response to the changes enshrined in the '44 Act.

Under the tripartite structure all types of secondary education were to be of equal status and worth, which meant that secondary modern schools should have had parity of esteem. However, in the Brecon area the establishment of such a school was initially put on the back burner. Eventually makeshift arrangements were implemented until a secondary modern school could be established in its own right. In 1954 an interim stopgap was introduced in Brecon town with the setting up of a Senior Boys' Department under the supervision of the headteacher of Mount St CP School and accommodated at the Plough Central Hall. Similarly, a Senior Girls' Department at Llanfaes came under the headteacher there. The girls also had use of the facilities at the Plough and Dr Coke's school room. Such a hodgepodge arrangement could hardly be considered a fulfilment of the precept of the 1944 Act of free secondary education for all which was now up to the age of 15. The delay was to some extent due to the administrative problem of housing the large number of qualifying pupils in the non-selective sector. However, with time a solution emerged when the former Grammar School building in Cradoc Road was vacated in 1958. So a building considered "not fit for purpose" for grammar school pupils was now thought to be ideal for the newly constituted Secondary Modern/Technical School! At least it facilitated the implementation of a practical rather than academic curriculum with appropriate content and method for all non-selected pupils in the Brecon Education District. Yet one is led to question whether the arrangement fulfilled the concept of equal worth and equally deserving. Actually, from the very outset, with a school role larger than that of the boys grammar school, additional accommodation had to be utilised. The biology laboratory, metal workshop, and two classrooms were located in the Plough Central Hall. Craft was based at Dr Coke's school room with woodwork and house-craft at Mount Street. The former Pendre primary school building had to be taken over for school meal purposes and for some classwork. In crude terms, it was a bit of a dog's dinner and hardly conducive to the development of a corporate ethos within a new school. In comparison with the Grammar School, the Secondary Modern had larger classes and was restricted to a mere two posts of special responsibility. In the process of evolving a more practical form of education within the Secondary Modern school, was it not perverse that the three successive headmasters Hugh Thomas, Harvey Williams and Dr Ken Thomas were from the academic tradition of the Boys Grammar School! A Secondary Modern School was established in Crickhowell in 1947 (amalgamated with Brecon in 1966) and another at Gwernyfed in 1950. It was not until March 1964 that Brecon Secondary Modern Technical School was provided with its new purpose-built premises in Penlan.

Implementation of the tripartite system was not compulsory on educational authorities. Consequently, there was diversification with variations of organisation. There were Bilateral schools which had two distinct sides

usually grammar/modern and Multilateral schools with the three distinct sides. From the outset there was a certain dissatisfaction with the 1944 act from a number of standpoints, especially since it seemed to sustain the selective principle. There was, therefore, a powerful lobby with passions stirred, values touched and a belief in a great transformative project for secondary education along comprehensive lines. Politically there was no hope of plumping for a root and branch reorganisation in this manner. Leading administrators were in general committed to segregationist practice and the reluctance to entertain the possibility that they were wrong. The opposition to the comprehensive idea confused equality with uniformity, believing that you could not have both. However, the concept of equality in education is in fact entirely opposite to the notion of sameness and uniformity.

Comprehensive schools emerged in Wales as early as the 1940s but conversion to the comprehensive pattern was piecemeal in Breconshire at Vaynor, Penderyn and Builth Wells in 1949, Maesydderwen in 1954 and Brynmawr in 1955. Even though Anthony Crossland's Circular 10/65 sought to expedite the spread of comprehensive schools, there was still a lukewarm response in the Brecon Education District. It was not until 1971 that Brecon High School was eventually established. In conclusion, one cannot but be aware of the continuing grammar school debate even within the ranks of our OBA membership.

## **The Late Glyn Powell**

### **My Experience of Learning Welsh**

I decided to learn Welsh after I retired. My reason was I wanted to be able to read Welsh books after acquiring a copy of "*Hanes Pedair Ysgol*" in connection with my genealogical research. This book referred to three primary schools in rural Carmarthenshire, two of which were attended by my ancestors in the 19th century. Although I had passed O-level Welsh (with oral proficiency) at school, I started with the lowest level course, "Dosbarth Nos," a three year course which was taught at the local College of Further Education. The class included several men, one of whom, Richard, suggested that we met once a week in a pub to practice the language. We met regularly for several years and it was a nice social occasion. John, a retired rep, frequently had us laughing with his endless supply of jokes; his father in law, Mal, had interesting stories of his life as a miner. Richard was a medic who worked at the new Department of Medicine at Swansea University, and was the best Welsh speaker among us. His dad John, who ran a haulage company, also had good Welsh. The sixth member of our group was Tony, a plumber who was a self taught guitarist. As news spread about our group others joined us from time to time including a young man who was one of the applicants for "Learner of the Year" at the National Eisteddfod.

The next course was "Pellach" for one year; this was followed by three years at level "Uwch." The final course was "Graenus" which I enjoyed so much that I repeated it twice. Two of my courses were taught by Robat Powell who was the best teacher. He famously was the first Welsh learner to win the bardic Chair at the National Eisteddfod in 1985.

Our informal group meetings initiated by Richard eventually came to an end when the pressure of Richard's work and a family of 5 children became too demanding. However, another informal group which I joined was "Siawns am Sgrws" (Chance to talk), which met in various venues such as church halls or Ty Tawe, the Welsh centre in Swansea. The leaders of these meetings suggested topics for discussion, and in one such meeting we were asked to talk about our hobby and bring any equipment that we could demonstrate. I chose to talk about photography and demonstrated the kit, inherited from my father, used to develop film (in a black bag) and included the enlarger used to make prints.

In another meeting the tutor asked us to state what our favourite activity was and, as members of the group gave their answers, I thought to myself they were not being truthful! When it came to my turn I chickened out and said "eating." Had I been truthful what I should have said was my favourite activity was making love to my gorgeous wife. Afterwards, I wished I had been truthful. It would have been interesting to see the reaction of the others!

To elaborate on my second favourite activity of eating, I've always had a sweet tooth and in my youth and middle age I always had two portions of dessert. Now I only have one portion! My favourite dessert was originally chocolate mousse but then, to avoid food containing uncooked eggs, I switched to M&S "tarte au citron," the best lemon tart. As I became more health conscious, I gave the tart up and my favourite is now Bakewell tart. There is a cafe on Gower which makes the best Bakewell tart I've ever tasted. I'm a regular visitor!

So dear reader, I invite you to write about your second favourite activity for next year's newsletter.

**Michael Williams**

### **Margaret Evans - a Centenarian**

At the first meeting of the reconstituted Brecon Grammar Schools' Association we were delighted to be able to acknowledge Margaret Evans achievement in attaining her hundredth birthday, and in such excellent form physically and with her customary lucidity of speech and mental facility. During her 40 years in the teaching profession she endeared herself to successive generations of pupils, earned the admiration of colleagues and made lifelong friends.

She was born in Tynycoed, Coedely, a small town between Tonyrefail and Llantrisant, and at the age of six months she and her family moved to Clydach Vale. Five years later the family moved to Ferndale in Rhondda Fach where her father was general manager of the Maerdy, Ferndale and Tyerstown collieries. After leaving the local primary school she attended Rhondda County School for Girls in Porth. Throughout her life memories of her Rhondda youth invoked a tender nostalgia and reminiscences of happy camaraderie.

In 1940 Margaret went to University College of Wales Cardiff to read Music, Welsh and English, music under Professor John Morgan and Welsh under eminent Welsh scholar and poet W. J. Gruffydd. She graduated with Honours Music and Final Welsh, completing her teaching certificate the following year.

Margaret began her teaching career at Totnes in Devon teaching music generally and Welsh to a single Welsh speaking girl, whose strong North Walian accent she found difficult to understand at times. Enjoyable and satisfying though her four years in Totnes may have been, there were moments of "hiraeth." Eventually, the call of her homeland prevailed and on returning to Wales she was appointed to a post in Caerphilly to teach Music and Welsh.

Margaret remained in post for 18 months until she married Islwyn and moved to Brecon where her two daughters, Janet and Liz, were born. Whilst residing in Brecon she was approached by Miss A. B. Jones and offered a part-time post as an assistant teacher of Welsh in the Girls' Grammar School. Soon afterwards she was appointed to a full time post in the department working alongside Miss Dilys Price, the highly respected and universally popular Senior Teacher. Margaret was initially timetabled to teach some English as well.

With secondary reorganisation in 1971 Margaret was for the first time in her career obliged to teach boys in mixed sex classes. She was now a member of an extended Welsh Department of five teachers with the scholarly Arwyn Evans as its head. It must surely have been something of a culture shock having boys in the class having been accustomed to teaching girls, who according to Jane Austin were "young ladies who are delicate plants who should take care of their hearts and complexion." However, from the outset it became evident that she soon adapted to the changed circumstances and came to terms with teaching mixed classes, according to the motto "intrigue paratus" she was "ready for anything." In her approach to the pupils she understood the mood of their generation and their contemporary culture. Margaret had the ability to motivate even the most disinterested in her subject. She managed difficult male pupils with a remarkable generosity and had no evident disciplinary problems. She cannot be recalled having had to refer miscreants to higher authority for punishment. When she retired in 1983 the school lost a teacher of unswerving commitment to her vocation and who had enriched the lives of her appreciative former pupils.

If retirement was intended to be a process of winding down Margaret elected otherwise by undertaking voluntary work with the Red Cross. Conscientiously and in order to fulfil her duties more effectively she followed the necessary training course and subsequently obtained the first aid certificate. Assisting at Brecon



Hospital she would take the “comforts” trolley around the wards on set Mondays and then the book trolley on Fridays. She also served in the Red Cross charity shop in Lion Street for 30 years. Post Covid, Margaret decided to call it a day as she progressed to the pivotal date of her hundredth birthday. Now that she has reached that wonderful status of centenarian one is sure that when she holds her memories up to the light she would wonder did it really happen.

As members of the Brecon Grammar Schools’ Association it gives us the greatest pleasure to extend to Margaret our most sincere congratulations and admiration. In conclusion one reflects on the Japanese saying "to know the future you must first journey to the past", a philosophy to which Margaret's career would seem to subscribe.

**The Late Glyn Powell**

## **BALLS and BOOKS**

### **Part 1**

In the summer holidays of 1943, when I was eight years old, I was taken seriously ill having contracted diphtheria, and I was taken to an isolation hospital at Blackwood in Monmouthshire where I was to spend the next six months being treated for the disease.

In the early weeks I was kept flat on my back in bed and was not allowed to sit up (even necessary functions were performed lying down). During that time I recall that the nurses were very attentive to me but there was one drawback! Every morning I was awakened by a doctor brandishing a loaded syringe full of a liquid which she would then proceed to inject into my backside. Despite this procedure I was still not allowed to sit up and was kept lying on my back for the following few weeks.

I also recall not wanting to eat and was tempted to do so with delicious egg sandwiches which I found very tasty! Remember this was in the middle of the 2nd World War when eggs were rationed!

I suppose I was gradually recovering because the injections were coming less often until eventually they stopped and I was allowed to sit up in my bed. This being the case I was moved to another large ward in which there was only one occupant - a young girl about my age. I was also told that I could receive visitors and that my parents had been informed. This cheered me up a lot until I was told that visitors were not allowed into the hospital but could only look through large windows behind the beds.

A few days later I was told that the next day I would be able to get out of bed. The following morning the doctor was there again and he asked me to get out of bed which I did and fell flat on my face! My legs had let me down! The doctor assured me that this was quite usual after such a long period on my back, and that I would soon be back to normal but would have to take things very slowly.

Thus began a time when I was allowed to get out of bed every day, short periods at first became longer as my strength returned. I became friends with the young girl in the ward who was named Marie. She would hold my hand and that way I began to regain my confidence until after a few days I was able to go solo!

During this time my parents came to see me several times and they were thrilled to see the progress I was making even though they could only watch me through the window.

Sometime afterwards Marie was discharged and went home. I shall always be grateful to her for the help she gave me. Sometimes I wonder if she remembers me. I was left on my own for a while and until the great day when I too was discharged and my parents came to take me home.

So after seven months in hospital I returned to my home in Brecon where my parents told me that they had been advised to ensure that I take matters steadily and that I would not be returning to school any time soon. This being the case my mother arrange for me to have private home tutoring by the teacher whose class I was to enter on my return to Pendre Primary School, to enable me to catch up on what I had lost during my illness. To help with my reading my mother had gathered a selection of children's books. As I remember they were about country life, Romany tales and such like. So my life of study was initiated.

In September 1944 I returned to Pendre Primary School. By this time I had regained a lot of my strength mainly due to my father who was a keen walker. He would take me on short walks in the evenings when he returned from work as manager in the Co-op in Brecon and at weekends, often accompanied by my mother and brother Brian, we would go longer distances into the countryside surrounding Brecon.

One day when my father came home from work he gave me a small paper packet. When I opened it I found a rubber ball. I don't recall what I thought of it at the time but it was not long before I realised that the opportunities for play it would afford me were endless.

Fortunately for me, close to home was a tall, smooth bare wall which meant that when on my own, using the rubber ball, I could play for hours! I could throw it at the wall, catch it on the rebound or kick it back, or headed back or use my hands to bat it back, or my feet or head to keep the ball moving. How those hours of solitary play must have improved my hand-eye, and foot-eye coordination whilst the constant movement helped regain my body strength which had been sorely affected by the disease.

I returned to Pendre in September 1945 but only for the autumn term as my parents were not satisfied with the progress I was making and they had no confidence in the teacher of the senior class there. So January 1946 saw me enrolled at Mount Street in class 4 from where I took my Entrance Exam for the Brecon Boys' Grammar School. I did not score highly enough to gain entrance to the school. So I remained at Mount Street and in September 1946 I entered class 5 to be taught by Mrs Bassett who, I was to learn, was a wonderful teacher and under whose guidance during the following year I would blossom as a pupil to the extent that when I took the Grammar School Entrance Exam again I came third out of the whole county. In September 1947 I took my place in form 2 at Cradoc Road with 30 other fellow pupils from around the county.

For the next seven years Brecon Grammar School provided me with an educational and sporting life for which I am immensely grateful. The interest and encouragement from the staff to do my best in both fields - sporting and academic, enabled me to be accepted at Loughborough Teachers' Training College, where I spent two years studying English and PE and a third year following a PE specialist course. So the life theme of Balls and Books continued.

Whilst at Loughborough I found the standard of soccer to be very high. The college first XI were British Universities Champions practically every year. I made many appearances in the team and travelled most of the country playing in matches against other universities or colleges. It was a time that I thoroughly enjoyed playing with such talented team mates, one played for Blackpool, goal keeper Tony Waiters, who later played for England, another was Mike Smith who was to become coach to the Welsh National Team. Whilst there I also met and played with Barry Hines, the author of Kess.

So, having qualified in September 1961 I began my teaching career at Gwernyfed Secondary Modern School in Three Cocks, a village 5 miles from Hay on Wye, which was to become famous as a book town. I remained at Gwernyfed for the next 30 years teaching PE and English. When the school became a High School in 1971 I gave up PE and taught English full-time until I retired in 1991.

On the domestic front life was not so straightforward. Having left Loughborough in May 1961, the August of that year brought my wedding to my wife Hilda and we came to live in a flat in Brecon. Later in the summer of 1963 we moved to a staff house on Gwernyfed Estate, which backed onto the school playing fields. In 1965 my daughter Ruth was born and life was good until January 1969 Hilda was expecting a second child and was taken to Brecon Hospital for the birth. Sadly things went badly awry. Hilda suffered from Eclampsia during the birth and was rushed to Newport Hospital, but the baby, another girl, died a week after birth. Whilst Hilda was in Newport there was a disastrous fire in my mother's shop, which was part of my parents home, in which my father Henry Richards died. Fortunately my mother survived and my parents-in-law gave her a temporary home. As can be imagined this was a very difficult time for me and the Brecon

Education Department were very understanding in allowing me time away from school to care for my daughter and mother, and to visit my wife in Newport hospital.

Hilda remained in hospital until the late spring of 1969 but was convalescing for sometime afterwards before she regained full strength. In the April 1970 my son Parri was born and happily there were no serious complications with the birth after which life settled down.

**Parry Richards**

### **The Girls' County Grammar School - "We feel we've done our bit."**

As one of the diminishing number of wartime pupils I never cease to appreciate the contribution of the Girls' County School to the home front during World War II within the school context, in contrast to any distinctive effort within the Boys' County School. The war signalled the end to guaranteed supplies of overseas food which energised the agriculture and horticulture industries. The campaign for home produced food was encapsulated in the phrase "Dig for Victory," to which the girls responded by leasing a substantial plot alongside Camden Road for a school garden. Mary Richards recalled her form making the trek from the school to undertake seasonal duties. From 1940 until 1945 the allotment provided vegetables and fruit for midday meals with any surplus being distributed to various needy causes. The boys' corresponding effort was an insignificant plot to the rear of the gymnasium, verging on the Maendu housing estate, where pupils seem to do little more than scratch the surface like chickens.

The girls' war effort also took the form of knitting comforts for the troops and making hospital supplies. In the autumn term, 1939, the girls were provided with wool for knitting stockings and bedsocks. They were also given unbleached calico which was torn up into 6 yard long bandages of various widths. The younger girls cut up sacks of scraps into small pieces for filling pillows and small mattresses. Gwyneth Morris records that the 1940 total included 182 bandages, 44 helmets and 37 scarves. In addition there is an account of 25 pairs of operation stockings, 35 pairs of bedsocks, 34 pairs of mittens, seven pairs of wristlets, 10 pullovers for POWS (with sleeves), 20 pairs of socks, two pairs of gloves, one sleeveless pullover, one bed cover and many bags of scraps. The staff assisted with the knitting and undertook the collection of contributions towards the purchase of the necessary raw materials.

In October 1940 staff and girls "adopted" the crew of the minesweeper the "King Sol". The recipients amongst the crew of food and comfort parcels corresponded with individual donors, but with war time security and censorship they were not permitted to disclose their location. Major undertakings were contributions to 'War Weapons Week' in 1941, "Warships Week" in March 1942 and "Salute the Soldier Week" in May 1944, towards which nearly £800 was contributed. In the last "National Savings Week" in November 1945 £1331 was collected. I cannot recall similar fundraising schemes in the Boys' School independent of the local community targets

Probably the most significant wartime experience for the Girls' School was the evacuation to Brecon of St Ursula's High School of Greenwich on the 24th of June, 1940. The school had been initially evacuated to Hastings but with the collapse of France the coastal threat was such that the pupils had to be re-evacuated to Brecon. It was recognised that they should share the buildings with the pupils of the Girls' School. On the day following their arrival in Brecon the upper fifth and sixth forms began their studies with the rest of the school on Wednesday, the next day. After nine months experience of half day school sessions and out of school activities at Hastings this was a welcome change. They worked side-by-side with the host school. Each school lived its own life but there were always friendly relations and frequent interchanges. The Boys' School was not burdened in the same way although they were individual evacuees on the school role. In some quarters there was resentment to the admission of evacuees on the basis of the 11+ at the expense of local candidates. In retrospect it has to be admitted that the seamless housing of the visiting school within already limited accommodation was a remarkable feat of organisation.

The late June Perkins (née Powell) credited Miss Jarvis with superb organisational ability so that "life went on as usual and girls were hardly aware of the presence of the other school." June was head girl and was subsequently to become a teacher at the Secondary Modern and Brecon High Schools. A friendly

arrangement was also made with the Czechoslovak school at Llanwrtyd through the good offices of Miss Dilys Price. It would be appropriate at this point to note that two feeder schools hosted evacuated schools, namely Halstow Senior Girls' School, London, at Sennybridge Senior School and Maze Hill Primary School, London, at Defynnog Primary School.

After two years the evacuees returned to London after a very successful and happy evacuation. The majority of the pupils returned to London in July 1942 with the exception of about 30 girls and the headmistress, who returned in December. Some eight St Ursula pupils stayed behind to complete their exams along with girls evacuated from other areas. The headmistress, Mary Angela Dunlee OSU, wrote in appreciation "and now there remains but the memory. That memory will be for St Ursula's a treasured one. We shall not easily forget the peace and plenty we found during two years of war amid the beautiful surroundings of Brecon, in the homes and friendly atmosphere of the Girls' County School ("the Daisy" Vol XXXI, 1942). They provided the school with a very fine copy of Raphael's Sistine Madonna. This was hung outside the school hall in the new building at the head of the stairs. Whatever happened to it and other framed artworks from the Girls' Grammar School remains a mystery!

Unlike my experience of the practices of the Boys' School, the Girls' School abided meticulously to all the wartime regulations. They responded to the requirements of the Air Raid Precautions by conducting gas mask drills and evacuation procedures. Girls remember having to walk in twos in an orderly fashion away from the school building either up Slwch Lane or up the lane by Nythfa or out onto the little field.

In reviewing the contribution of the girls school to the war effort one is reminded of Henry Ford's words that "coming together is the beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success." The title to this article is a quote taken from a poem called "Helter Skelter for the Shelter" by Rachel Noble (Head Girl, 1941-42), ("The Daisy" 1942). In the poem she recalls the response to an air raid warning and ends with the couplet:

"By keeping calm and carrying on  
We felt we'd done our bit."

[Sources: "The Daisy" 1934-45  
"Memories of Brecon Girls County Grammar School, 1886-1956", Gwyneth Morris MA  
MEd, Deputy Head Girl 1951-1952.  
Oral evidence from Mary Richards (1940-47) and the late Mrs June Perkins (née Powell),  
Head Girl 1945-46  
Various editions of the Brecon and Radnor Express 1939-45]

## **The Late Glyn Powell**

### **Gwyneth Ann Lewis Woodall (née Owen)**

Deputy Headmistress at Girls' Grammar School, Acting Head at Brecon High School

Following the incorporation of former pupils of the Girls' Grammar School into the new Brecon Grammar Schools' Association, it is justifiable that we should reserve a column in our newsletter for articles of special interest to them. So as a starting point I thought perhaps an extended obituary and testament to the career of Gwyneth Woodall would be of interest. This would undoubtedly be more appropriate than recalling memorable but dubious anecdotes.

Gwyneth was a native of the Rhayader area, born on a farm in Cwm Elan. She was educated at Llandrindod Wells Grammar School (1951-1958) and UCNW Bangor (1960-1964), where as a student of the eminent Professor Bleddyn Roberts she graduated with an Honours degree in Biblical Studies. After an initial teaching period at Grove Park, Wrexham (1964-1966) she was appointed to the staff of Brecon Girls' Grammar School (1967-1971) and then Brecon High School (1971-1995). She succeeded Mairwen Morgan as Deputy Headmistress in 1958, playing a vital complementary role with the Deputy Headmaster. She herself was then to fill the top post as Acting Headteacher in a temporary capacity for the autumn term in 1994, when the school was subjected to the ultimate in teaching's traumatic experience, namely a full inspection. The resulting highly complementary report earned Gwyneth the plaudits of staff, governors and



parents for her singular contribution to this outcome. At the end of that academic year she took early retirement with Miss Tracy Gibbs and Miss Lynfa Hatton taking over as her successors in 1995.

After retirement Gwyneth entered marriage status as Mrs Gwyneth Woodall. However, to all her former pupils she was Miss Owens, their dedicated and exceptionally diligent PE teacher. Working alongside D.R. (Ray) Morris, she was instrumental in expanding RE into a GCE subject of choice. She could be very firm but measured in her discipline and cared passionately about her role as a teacher. Thorough in her preparation, she provided a store of backup material for her students, a system that suited the girl pupils more than the boys.

A lay preacher who, through contact with pupils from a wide area, acquired first-hand knowledge of virtually every community in the school's catchment area. She was deeply committed to the cause of the Christian Education Movement within the school, and several former pupils were to become pastors and ministers of religion. Gwyneth was the one who took the lead in the introduction and development of the Personal and Sexual Education programmes within the school. However, of all her many charitable works priority was given to Christian Aid, with her taking part in successive sponsored walks. After her retirement she was to devote much of her time to the Samaritans as well as being a schools' inspector and GCSE RE examiner.

### **The Late Glyn Powell**

#### **My Life - Barry Hicks (Theo, 1955 - 1961)**

##### Education

I was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1944 and brought up in Llanfaes, Brecon and went to Llanfaes Primary School until, having passed my 11plus, I went to Brecon Grammar School in September 1955. My first year was very challenging and whether it was due to lack of effort or ability, I suspect the former, I was bottom of the class for the 3 terms. My parents wanted to take me out of the Grammar School and send me to the Secondary Modern School, but thankfully following a meeting with all parties concerned and due to the recommendation of the Headmaster Mr Aneurin Rees, I remained in the Grammar School but stayed in Class 1 and progressed with them through the rest of my time in school. Sport was not my favourite subject although I did manage to get my name in the Silurian for throwing the cricket ball the furthest during sports day. It was the first time that throwing the cricket ball was included. I played rugby and whilst in the 5<sup>th</sup> form was selected for the School Second team. Academically I did not expect to achieve very much as I failed all the 'mock' exams leading up to 'O' levels but fortunately I was allowed to sit the exams and I managed to pass 5 'O' levels in the summer of 1961! Whilst in School I joined the local Scout Troop being run by Poj Rolands, and still is, and I was awarded my Queen Scout and Duke of Edinburgh's Silver. After my 'O' Levels I decided to leave school as I was accepted as a Police Cadet in the Mid Wales Constabulary and worked in Brecon. Whilst a Police Cadet I played rugby for Brecon regularly.

##### Mid Wales Constabulary, 1961 to 1969

I served as a Police Cadet in Brecon and gained work experience in traffic accident investigation, criminal investigation, scenes of crime, but mainly I worked on the beat most of the time accompanied by a qualified Police Officer. At the age of 19 I was old enough to join the Police Force as a Police Constable and after training for 16 weeks in Bridgend I was posted to Newtown in 1964 where I remained for 12 months. 1964 was the year of the severe floods in Newtown and the Police Station with most of the town centre was flooded with at least 6 foot of water. Postings to Brynmawr and Llandrindod Wells followed during which time I managed to pass all my promotion to Sergeant and Inspector examinations, attended a Criminal Investigation Course in Birmingham, a Scenes of Crime Course in Bridgend and a Crime Prevention Course in Stafford, and was appointed Crime Prevention Officer in Llandrindod Wells in 1968.

##### Royal Air Force, 1969 to 1991

On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1968 the Mid Wales Constabulary joined with the Pembrokeshire, and Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire Constabularies to form the Dyfed Powys Constabulary. Later in the year the Royal Air Force advertised for Police Officers to apply for a Commission and join the Provost Branch of the Royal Air Force. It was at the time where I could not see promotion for me within the Police occurring very soon so I applied and was accepted. I had various postings over my 22 years of service which included RAF High Wycombe, RAF Rheindahlen in Germany, RAF Northolt, RAF Newton, RAF Rudloe Manor, RAF Leuchars in Scotland as a Squadron Leader, RAF Laarbruch in Germany. It was whilst at RAF Laarbruch in 1986 I was awarded the MBE which was presented to me by HM Queen Elizabeth at Buckingham Palace later that year. Further posting included MOD as a Wing Commander and the NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), Mons, Belgium, in 1988 as the SHAPE Security Officer, which was to be my last posting in the RAF.

#### Chevron USA Oil and Gas Company, 1991 to 1996

My first employment after retiring from the RAF was to be the Security Adviser for the above Company for Europe, Africa and the Middle East.. My main role was to advise those company employees working in the countries on their and their families safety and security and also the security protection of the oil fields, terminals and refineries including the Chevron and Gulf assets in the North Sea. I visited Zaire (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Nigeria, Angola, Republic of the Congo, Bahrain, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Moscow, Hungary, and made occasional visits to the oil platforms in the North Sea. When Chevron owned Gulf oil in the UK I was also responsible for the security of the Gulf, Telegraph and Action Service/Petrol stations and employees responding to burglaries, assaults, thefts internal and external etc.

#### John Lewis Partnership 1996 to 2004

All good things must come to an end at some time as in 1996 Chevron sold all its Gulf Oil assets, on shore and off shore, which reduced my responsibilities significantly so I was made redundant. After a period of a few weeks I applied and was accepted for the position of Head of Security for the John Lewis Partnership based in Victoria Street, London and responsible for asset protection for the Department Stores in the UK, a post which I held until my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2004 at which time I retired.. Duties included designing the alarm and CCTV systems in the shops, training store detectives to catch shoplifters, and advising the John Lewis Board on general crime prevention measures to reduce theft of merchandise, protect staff and ensure good liaison with other crime prevention and detection agencies including the Police.

I retired to Llandrindod Wells in 2006 and have taken up part time voluntary work with the Royal Voluntary Service; I am Licensee of the Outdoor Bowling Club, Trustee of a Cancer Support Centre and keep fit by playing lawn bowls during the summer months.

**Wing Commander Barry Hicks MBE RAF (Retd)**

### **Vive la Difference - Three of the Many**

#### **Twm Morris, Malcolm Morrison and Martyn Farr**

In the words of John Morley “I do not in the least want to know what happened in the past except as it enables me to see my way more clearly through that which is happening today.” As one who tends to wrap the 1940s in sweet nostalgia and wittingly surveys eight subsequent decades of social and educational change, reminiscences of school and pupils vary from sardonic comedy to moments of piercing poignancy. Although, in introducing present values into the narrative and the interpretation of the past, one senses that young people today are not that different from those of other generations except that they just have more “toys”. All too often we allow memories of school and of our contemporaries to be relegated into the shadow of our own virtual bubble, rarely encapsulating the mood of the generation or chronicling the achievements of fellow pupils. The Latin phrase “fugit irreparabile tempus” warns us of time that flies away and cannot be recalled. My purpose in planning this article is to draw attention to 3 former pupils, so

different in many ways who are credited with numerous publications which are worthy of wider publicity amongst our membership. As a footnote could we invite others to provide updates on the careers and achievements of interesting contemporaries.

### **Twm Morris**

As a pupil Twm belongs to that cusp period when former grammar school boys and girls were also High School pupils. Twm is the son of John Morris, the recently deceased world renowned literary figure whose main genre was non-fiction and travel writer. In 1953 as “The Times” correspondent accompanying a British Mount Everest Expedition, a coded message was passed to the newspaper enabling the news of the ascent to be released on the morning of the coronation.

To subscribers to Welsh language media, in all of its forms, the name Twm Morris is amongst the most popular and familiar in its numerous genres. Born in Oxford, he was brought up in Llanystumdwy which has remained the family home. After a period in Shrewsbury School he transferred to Brecon to undertake his A-level Welsh studies with Arwyn Evans, head of Welsh (1960-81). During this time Twm lived in the Forest Coalpit area of the Black Mountains, an area which he was to highlight later in a feature S4C program, “Twm Morris a’r Fenni”, in the Grwyne Valley at the time of the National Eisteddfod at Abergavenny, 2016. The program contained a recording made in the 1930s of the voice of John Williams, said to have been “the last Welshman in the Grwyne Valley”. As well as reminiscing about his teenage years Twm also traced the history of the Welsh language in the area.

Twm proceeded to Aberystwyth University College graduating with a degree in Celtic studies and whilst there he won the intercollegiate chair. He has worked for BBC Radio Cymru as a researcher and later as a poet and singer. Twm later moved to Brittany for ten years being a Breton scholar, and worked as a lecturer at the University of Rennes.

Twm has emerged as a distinctive personality on the Welsh literary scene and in the world of Welsh pop music. He has published two volumes of poetry and written articles for literary magazines and book reviews. In a lighter, but no more serious vein, he writes for radio and television as well as lyrics, which he sings with the folk rock group “Bob Delyn a’r Ebillion”. For the 2009-2010 term he fulfilled the role of Bardd Plant Cymru - Welsh Children’s poet laureate - and in 2011 he became editor of the Welsh poetry magazine “Barddas”, possibly the pre-eminent of literary magazines. His premiere accolade came when he won the chair of the National Eisteddfod in Meifod in 2003 with his “awdl” (ode) on the subject “Drysiau” (Doors). Even though he had established an early proficiency with “cynghanedd” and was subsequently to become an acknowledged master of the art he still had the good grace to thank Arwyn Evans for his assistance and inspiration along the way.

#### Publications

Poetry “Ofn fy Het” 1995

“Mymryn bach o Hon”. 1998

Prose “Grwyne Fawr” (“Y Man a’r Lle” Series)

Essays for Literary Reviews

Collaboration with Jan Morris

“Wales, the First Place”. 1982, Random House

“A Machynlleth Triad”/“Triawd Machynlleth”. 1994 Penguin

“Ein Llyw Cyntaf” 2001 Gomer (his Welsh adaptation of Jan Morris’ novel “Our First Leader”)

### **Martyn Farr**

Martyn was somewhat unique in his sporting instincts as a pupil at Brecon Grammar School where team sports were traditional. The Farr family in the main were of sporting inclinations in general, especially soccer. A contemporary of mine, Vernon Farr (1942-43), played both soccer and cricket at a comparatively young age for the respective school teams. Interestingly, after completing his National Service he joined the Meteorological Service and was the first to read the weather forecast for Wales on independent television. Tony Farr, however, played at scrum half for the 1st XV in the sixties. Martyn was of a different ilk who

followed an entirely different line of interest as a caver. He was to become one of Britain's foremost cave divers and cave diving photographers. He soon established an international reputation for his record-breaking cave diving exploits. It was he who explored Ogof-y-Darren, Cilian and Noon's Caves and many other previously undiscovered underground passages. At one stage he held the world record for under-water penetration in the Bahamas. Equally impressive were his ventures into the subterranean wilderness in Brazil and his explorations in the main regions from Iran and Mexico to Turkey. Martyn gained world recognition as an instructor and photographer working as a technical adviser on numerous film productions throughout the world. The spell of potholing and speleology is difficult for the non-caver to understand. A contemporary of Martyn was a virtual female troglodyte, namely Eileen Davies, a native of Crai and former pupil of the Girls' Grammar School, to whom he paid tribute for her exploratory discoveries at Dan-yr-Ogof in 1966. She negotiated the so-called "endless crawl" and "squeeze" and thereby opened up the new subterranean world. She had to swim three arctic-cold subterranean lakes, squeeze through a passage and crawl 500 feet with gaps 18 cm in height and little more than double in width. Eileen had succeeded in negotiating a passage into an unknown world that had defied all previous attempts. Martyn was to cooperate with her in follow-up investigations at Dan-yr-Ogof. In conclusion, one is also reminded of Martyn's contribution to the realm of caving as the author of several books and a range of regular articles to magazines.

#### Publications

- "Dan-yr-Ogof, the Jewel of Wales"
- "The Secret World of Porth-yr-Ogof"
- "Darken Beckons"
- "Underground Wales"
- "The Great Cave Adventures"

#### **Malcolm Morrison (1959-63)**

Brecon born Malcolm ("Mal") has a special interest in local history and his eight published books reflect this. Mal claims that his deep interest was probably inspired by his late uncle, local historian Albert Tilly, who was the verger at Brecon Cathedral, and highlighted by the inspired teaching of Dr Thomas. History had always been a passion of his but he mostly wrote and researched his books as a hobby in his spare time from his full-time employment. Mal undertakes much of his research in Brecon library, hidden in the corner with the microfilm trawling through old newspapers. With extensive local personal knowledge and family connections, through cousins Phil Brown and John Davies (Life Vice President), Malcolm has been able to draw on additional resources for his documentary researches.

Mal entered the grammar school in 1959 and at the School Sports in his first year he distinguished himself on the running track, captaining Vaughan Minor team to victory. He won both the 100 yards and 220 yards sprints, establishing a new record in the latter. He also led his relay team to a record-breaking win. Rather than continuing with his sprinting talents Mal converted to cross country running.

Mal has admitted that although he found his years at the Grammar School to have had a positive influence generally, strangely he had very few happy memories and left at the earliest opportunity. What initially seemed to him to have been a near idyll with benign teachers was subsequently soured when he was punished for what he considered was a false accusation. The corporal punishment and cynical humiliation in front of the entire school he admits left an indelible impression on his record of his school experience.

On leaving school Mal was to proceed on a path of self education, spending most of his working life in the paramedical world with the Welsh Ambulance Service. He studied and obtained teaching and assessing qualifications via the University of Wales College, Newport. For many years he taught at Coleg Powys, Brecon, Llandrindod and Newton. He also taught medical skills to the military at CTC Frimley Park, which I have visited, where he led a small expert team. Mal has also been heavily involved with training for staff of the Welsh Government and advance training for the fisheries protection crews. Having completed a challenging and successful career, Mal has now retired, but has further writing commissions under consideration.



## Publications

- “A Pictorial History of Builth Wells” 1989
- “Photographs of old Builth Wells” (co-author) 2009
- “Builth Wells through time” 2010
- “A War of Memories” (co-author) 2012
- “Brecon through time” 2012
- “Secret Brecon” 2018
- “Brecon History Tour” 2019
- “A - Z of Brecon” 2020
- “Builth Wells Mystery Tour” 2023 (co-author)
- “Fifty Gems of Bannau Brycheiniog” (Commissioned)

## Published Research

“Outcome of asymptomatic electric shock victims requesting an emergency ambulance,” co-authored with Prof Malcom Woollard, Pre-hospital Emergency care, 2004, Vol 8, Issue 4, 400-404.

## **The Late Glyn Powell**

### **Y Gaer Cafe**

Last May when I visited Brecon I was looking forward to visiting the Gaer cafe which was finally open after a long delay. I was disappointed to find it was a small place with a very limited menu (see photo). The large area on the south side of the building is empty and unused, and I was expecting the cafe to be located in this space. However, it is under the control of the NPTC Group of Colleges which was formed in 2013 by the merger of of Neath Port Talbot College and Coleg Powys. It is one of the largest Further Education providers in Wales with over 270,000 students on nine campuses.

According to the [storipowys.org.uk](http://storipowys.org.uk) website, “work is ongoing to fit out some of the rooms in Y Gaer to create teaching space and a library for Brecon Beacons College lecturers and students, who will move from their current location into Y Gaer in phases in 2023. Once completed it is anticipated that Y Gaer will become a major educational and cultural destination for Powys residents and visitors to the county.”

## **Michael Williams**



### **Back to Square One - some amusing recollections**

Back in the day we chosen few were dragged into the joys of a post-war Grammar School education and somehow, despite the violence and intimidation, we managed to retain an invincibility known only to the young. We quickly learned to loathe the horrors bequeathed upon us by Bill of the Shaking spear, as portrayed by our unbeloved and unforgiving master Robson, an overweight one-time airborne warrior who looked as though he had landed upon his face more often than his feet.

‘To be, or not to be’ coughed our chain-smoking master; I call him master rather than teacher as we learned little from him apart from his opinionated take on life. Non-believers were converted by humiliation and violence. But, as my Gran used to say, ‘a woman convinced against her will is of the same opinion still.’ Fine words Gordon, and they work equally well for males. My train of thought was rudely disturbed by . .

‘Morrison, stop scratching your arse and try to follow the lesson.’

He rummaged through his grubby pocket, producing some nicotine stained linen into which he coughed something volatile.

‘Come on Morrison, even you can't bugger this up.’

I stood and delivered my finest theatrical interpretation directly towards my pal T B Jones, ‘Tubby or not Tubby! - that is the question.’

The class were pissing themselves, but Robson didn't get it, too busy expunging his bulbous snout into the dripping rag. Tubby alone did not laugh; he wasn't fond of the soubriquet, but Robson's emphysema overcame him much to our curious amusement, and he collapsed blue and gasping into his chair until the bell saved him. To the staffroom he staggered where a cigarette awaited.

‘Was that blood he was coffin up?’ enquired ‘Moose’, as we shivered through mud and rain to the sports field where Testaclese, our sports master, snarled and sneered at our attempts to emulate George Best. In truth his name was Cleese, but he talked such bollocks.

‘Youse is worse than useless’ was the closest he came to encouragement.

Maths was much more interesting.

‘Square root!’ She bellowed, stamping her feet at our much confused faces.

They say redheads are feisty and even if her hair colour was from a bottle, she became apoplectic when poor TomTom dropped his pencil and she thought he was looking up her skirt. He suffered an anxiety stammer and was generally clumsy but never pervy.

‘What’s your name boy?’ Clumping him around the ear and almost knocking him senseless.

‘Tom - Tom - Thomas, Miss.’

So he became TomTom from then on, and we never did fathom square roots, but what memories to sustain us into our dotage. I avoided Sport and English Literature thereafter, spending those periods in the library playing Three Card Brag. On a good day I could double my pocket money and during the Spurs-Leicester cup final I ran a book. Now that was useful mathematics and steered me towards a life of profit and respect.

One bright morning many years later I returned. She was greying now but still looked remarkably well for her age. ‘Welcome to Honddu High School, Headmaster.’

‘Good day Miss Truss’ I replied, noting the panic of recognition in her eyes.

‘It’s Miss T - Thomas nowadays,’ she stammered, ‘your deputy. I married one of your former classmates.’

Miss TomTom! I giggled to myself. Where will it end?

**Submitted by the Late Glyn Powell; author - Mal Morrison (1969-74)**

### **“Diferion Dyfri - Llên a Llun” by Handel Jones, 1955-61**

This is a volume that contains work of nearly 150 bards and rhymesters of Llanymddyfri and the neighbouring communities over the centuries. It includes potted biographies of each together with examples of the poetry and related photographs of the areas with which they were associated and of significant works of art. Produced in colour under a striking cover it represents the product of two years of research by Handel, the proceeds of the sale of which he is donating to the Urdd National Eisteddfod Fund for the delayed Carmarthen Eisteddfod at Llanymddyfri.

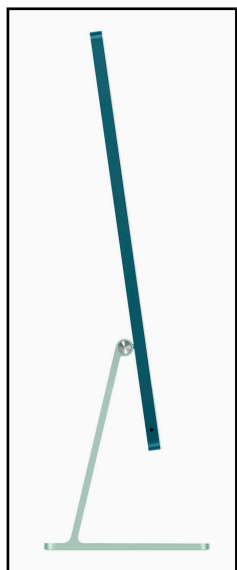
Handel is a native of Cwmwysg where he was educated at the local Aberpedwar Primary School before proceeding to Brecon Boys’ Grammar School in 1955. Unlike the majority of university bound A-level students he became a journalist on the “Carmarthen Times” before joining the BBC in Cardiff. Initially a studio manager, he subsequently became a regular contributor to radio and television programmes. With Welsh as his linguistic matrix he became a program presenter and news reader. Subsequently as a freelance agricultural journalist he presented farming programmes and the iconic “Cefn Gwlad” about rural life. In 1983 he moved to Llech Du, Rhandirmwyn, earning a living as a writer and translator. During his school days Handel was a regular contributor to the “Silurian” in both verse and prose. The author of a steady flow

of articles he writes regularly for a whole range of mainly Welsh publications. These are well researched on subjects of historical, biographical and literary appeal. A Magnum Opus is his bilingual history of the Farmers' Union of Wales entitled "Teulu'r Tir" ("A Family Affair.")

### **The Late Glyn Powell**

#### **My Second Eisteddfod Success!**

In a "Snippet" in last year's newsletter I reported my first success in a competition at the National Eisteddfod, namely my winning the Science & Technology Prize for an article entitled "The Problem of Antibiotic Resistance." I am delighted to report another success in last year's Eisteddfod. For the second time I won the Science & Technology Prize for an article entitled "Beth yw dyfeis bwysigaf y can mlynedd diwethaf?" (What is the most important invention of the last hundred years?)



iMAC



Apple II

I wonder how you, dear reader, would answer that question. I'll give you a clue about my choice. It was to do with technology. When you have decided what your choice would be, to see whether your choice was the same as mine you can find my answer at the end of the newsletter. If you would like a copy of my article (in Welsh or English) let me know. One illustration of the amazing advances in technology that have occurred over the last 100 years is computers. My article includes a comparison of the Apple iMAC M1 Ultra desk top computer, **which is only 11.5mm thick** (see photo on left), and the 1977 Apple II computer. The memory in the iMAC is over 10 million times larger than that of the Apple II.

I've submitted two articles again for this year's competition and am hoping for a hat trick!

### **Michael Williams**

#### **The Massochi Brothers - Welsh evacuees**

Stephen David Massochi was born in London in 1929 to an Italian father and Welsh mother, a native of Llangetho. At the outbreak of WW II he and his brother and sister were evacuated from London to relatives in Wales. His father at this time was interned along with his Italian compatriots on the Isle of Man. Eventually the family were united in Sennybridge where they set up in the catering business.

Stephen was accepted into Brecon Boys' County school in 1940, sitting his School Certificate and completing a fifth-year in form 5S in 1945. He subsequently served as a radio operator in the RAF before attending Normal College, Bangor. I recall his being there when I was a fresher at Bangor University. Steve qualified as a science teacher working in a teaching capacity in a number of roles in various places including Coventry, Warwick and Leamington Spa. During this time he travelled to Normandy when he taught English at a school in St Lô. On his return he decided to leave classroom teaching and, following further training at Sussex University, he became a lecturer at Poulton Le Fylde Training College. After two years he was appointed Head of Education Technology at De La Salle College, Manchester. He was eventually appointed as an advisor in Sheffield Education Department, then as an OFSTED school inspector which took him all over the country. He gained an MA from York University.

Steve was a perpetual student with many interests and was always keen on learning new skills, including welding, cooking and languages. He was a gadget person and when doing a job he always had to have the right tools. He was always ready to help young people, taking extra steps to help young offenders and starting a youth club in Coventry. Although keen on photography his special interest was music, playing the piano and being the organist at the Holy Family Catholic Church in Finningley for over 30 years.

Steve's younger brother Peter was one of the 1943 intake into the County School and, therefore, a contemporary of mine. Claiming to be a Welsh cockney, he struck a chord with the staff especially the female members. He left school prematurely when he joined the nationally acclaimed Stephani's Silver Songsters. Two other former pupils, Brychan Davies and Hywel Jones, also passed the audition but did not take up the offer because of the pull of farming. Following National Service in the army, mainly in Germany, he joined the Wales National Opera Company as a soloist and member of the chorus. Interestingly, at one stage, three of the bass section came from Sennybridge, namely Peter himself, Ken Pugh and Huw Morgan. In the school eisteddfod and at local eisteddfodau Peter and I were competitors as boy sopranos when I usually had to concede.

The Massochi family were a highly talented musical family over several generations. Apart from Steve and Peter, their sister Jeanette was a leading accompanist nationwide as well as being a tutor of many top soloists. Their nephews, David and Derek, will be recalled by former pupils as talented instrumentalists in the school choir orchestra.

### **The Late Glyn Powell**

#### **Old Boys' Data Base**

In 2023 a start was made to assemble a data base of Old Boys who attended the Grammar School. It was hoped this would help our search for those who attended in the 1960s. There are few members of the Association from that decade. David Jones created spreadsheets of members from the lists of those who sat O-level/GCE exams as reported in the Silurian magazines. This had the disadvantage that Old Boys who left school before the exams, often to join a family business or farm, were excluded. However, the exam results were not included in the Silurians after 1966. No results were reported in 1963 and in the 1964-66 editions lists of pupils who passed O-level and A-level exams were included without the subjects passed.

Another source of information was the Brecon & Radnor Express newspaper archives, but these were disappointing in that the exam results were often not reported especially for later years. So I started searching for the results of the 11+ exams, which have the advantage that they provide a complete list. This has been partially successful.

The other unknown of course is who has died; we've removed those listed in the newsletter obituary columns but there will be deaths of which we are unaware. When the list is completed it will be placed on the website.

The reason for the omission of exam results from the Silurians is interesting. Could it be that someone, e.g. the Headmaster, decided that it would spare the feelings of those who had done badly. I believe exam results are not the most important thing in a person's life. What is important is the person's character and personality and I would hope that an empathetic Head would convey that message to his pupils. However, I suspect that most Heads probably wanted the best exam results to enhance the reputation of the school!

I have one good example of someone who failed his exams but had a very successful career. David ("Ginger") Jones was my best friend in Brecon. He took Arts subjects in the 6th form and planned to go to Lampeter College and become a clergyman. He was a lovely man, a charmer with a great personality. He failed his A-levels in 1953 but was admitted to Lampeter College. Whilst there he decided to abandon his plan to become a clergyman and after completing his degree he began his Military Service at Aldershot. During his service he was moved to the Army Apprentices College at Chepstow as an instructor with the rank of sergeant. He then joined a comprehensive school as a teacher and his experience in that sector served

him well because after the introduction of Comprehensive Education in 1971 he was appointed head of Wellingborough Comprehensive School.

**Michael Williams**

### **The Scethrog Explosion – an early lesson for Mike.**

Last year's newsletter tale of the lorry load of explosives detonating at Scethrog brought back memories of my early start in journalism with the Brecon & Radnor Express, writes former OBA President Mike Peters.

As a junior reporter I got a very early tip off from my contacts and with the blessing of John "Fruity" Morgan, the editor, I borrowed my father's motorcycle and raced as fast as a 197cc Francis Barnett could manage to the scene of the action.

First lesson: stopped by the police security perimeter I hesitantly flashed my National Union of Journalists press card and I was waived through. My first real experience of the power of the fourth estate. It worked many times over the years and even got me past the bruisers protecting that curious phenomenon of the British music scene, Screaming Lord Sutch. And that was all as the result of a bet with a certain young lady in a south coast seaside town who refused to believe I could quickly obtain her the singer's autograph.

I was to latch on to the tailcoats of The Press in a few more dangerous situations in later life – the streets of Belfast, the sands of the Sinai desert separating Israelis and Arabs, and on the war torn streets of Beirut, where even a diplomatic passport could not always stop you ending up chained to a radiator for years.

At Scethrog I found a large hole in the road but hardly a soul else to be seen apart from a beat bobby who knew little more than I did. Casting around for the lorry driver and others I failed to interview anyone of consequence.

Second lesson in journalism: the on the spot reporters can usually only supply colour, sometimes hyperbole and often misleading eye witness accounts, but little factual evidence. Back on my bike and returning to the police station in Brecon, I got more of the facts and then dashed to the Bulwark offices of the B&R and produced my copy for the editor.

Third lesson: in the years afterwards when I told the story to my scribbling colleagues the reaction was always the same - the repetition of an old headline "Small earthquake in Chile. No one hurt." Young reporters were also often told: Large dog bites man is not a story. Small man bites large dog, is!

The fourth, and most important lesson: my Editor, who sold news stories for what in those days was called lineage rates had taken my hole-in-the-road story and with a quick re-edit got coverage in the South Wales Echo and the Swansea Evening Post and on BBC news. How had he taken a factual report and achieved a money spinning story. Simple really. Villagers escape death in massive lorry explosion was his headline. The lesson stuck in my memory and forever after I was able to turn simple reports into newspaper speak.

The real lesson was not the explosion, but that death, or escaping the grim reaper, is the strongest story - always. The postscript to this little tale of parish pump news and lessons in life is that occasionally this does not apply. Remember the frustrated reporter who said to Liverpool FC manager, Bill Shankly, "Somebody once said that football is matter of life and death to you."

Shankly, often misquoted in real life, did actually reply: "Listen! It's more important than that."

I rest my case.....

**Mike Peters**



## Four Falls Walk

This is yet another attempt by me to persuade Old Boys and Old Girls to come to the Annual Reunion in April and combine it with some walks in the area. You will all know about the wonderful waterfalls in the area between Ystradgynlais and Pontneathvaughan, and Kieran has described the Four Waterfalls Walk in his blog.\* He describes an alternative route from the official one, but it is narrow in places with steep drops (see map below). Kieren's walk starts from the Gwaun Hepste car park. The falls provide great opportunities

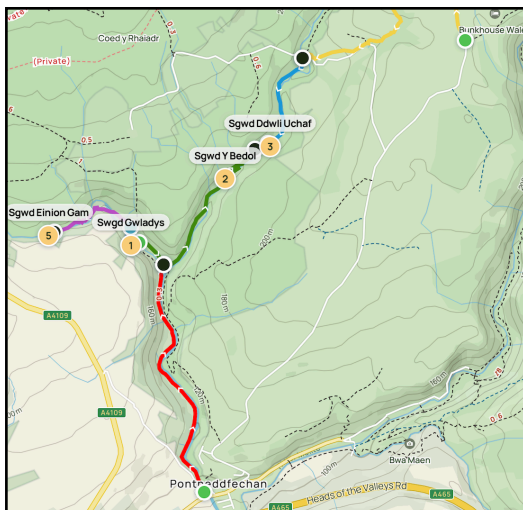
to experiment with your camera, for example by freezing the water with a short exposure, or using a long exposure (with a tripod) to produce the silky result shown in the photo below of Sgwd yr Eira.



As the starting point for the walk I suggest you use the Cwm Porth car park about 1 kilometre south of Ystradfellte, and the first waterfall (Sgwd Clun-Gwyn) is a 3 km walk. An alternative shorter walk will get you to the lower Clun-Gwyn waterfall from the Clyngwyn Farm Bunkhouse where you can park if the small car park (Comin y Rhos) nearby is full. See map below.

In Kieren's Wales Guide Book (<https://tinyurl.com/npchntmz>) the Waterfalls section lists the 12 waterfalls in the area south of Ystradfellte, and refers to the "four epic waterfalls located along one easy-to-follow path, three along the Afon Mellte and the fourth, Sgwd yr Eira which is the most impressive, on the Afon Hepste.

Kieren also includes detailed advice on the Elidir Trail, which can be accessed from Pontneathvaughan (see map below). This is quieter than the Four Falls Trail in the summer.



Excellent photos of some of the falls can be seen on the visit Wales website.\*\*



\*<https://tinyurl.com/4dtzxspc>

\*\*<https://tinyurl.com/msser5sb>

**Michael Williams**

### The Lower 6th Form - Girls' Grammar School, 1952-53

Margaret James (nèe Evans) submitted this photo and is able to name every girl. Does anyone else have a year photo, or better still, a whole school photo, if possible with names?



**Back row:** Paddy Crewe, Carol Davies, Margaret Herring, Margaret Gardner

**Middle row:** Anne Leonard, Margaret Evans, Georgina Ratcliffe, Eileen Davies, Doreen Smith, Doris Price

**Seated:** Jean Thomas, Ettorie Adami, Verley Clarke, Mr Williams, Jennifer Brookes, Angela Abbot, Margery Davies and Anne Richards

### My Nipponese Adventure

#### Part 1

My initial response to the editor's appeal for personal contributions about one's career and experiences that could be of some interest to other members was a concern that the past was not to be played with. Some consider that too much looking back is wearisome to the soul. It was St Francis who said "if you want to make something of your life you must keep your eyes on the horizon. Never be deflected. Don't look down or you may stumble. Above all don't look back." In seeking to trace the past one is well advised to note R.L. Stevenson's comment in "Kidnapped;" "I have a good memory for forgetting." If so, one has to be aware that the image that one creates of the past bears scant relation to reality.

Bearing this pitfall in mind and in meeting the editor's request, I have sought to respect authenticity in recording my account of my Nipponese Adventure. This saga began rather unexpectedly at the end of a pre-Staff College course for some 15 of us as lieutenants when our War Office postings were announced. I expected a home posting like the others but to my amazement mine was the British Commonwealth forces, Korea (BCFK).

However, before I could embark on this mission I was required to spend a month's intensive training with the Paras in Aldershot, and then the remaining period before sailing at the Barracks, Brecon, shadowing two



SAS officers training on the Epynt and Beacons. Interestingly, I was to meet up with the two en route to the jungle base at Kluang, Malaya. Even today as I pass the open gates to the Barracks I cast a glance across to the room which I occupied during my stay there. However, what seems strange is that the hallowed Square is now a common car park.

After a period on embarkation leave, during which my battery of jabs were updated including tetanus, yellow fever, etc, I boarded the Neath and Brecon train at Crai, saying goodbye to my home for the next three years. After reporting to Eltham Palace, London for a final briefing I headed for Southampton where I boarded the HMS "Orwell" (her Majesty's troopship) on Saturday 15th October, 1955. The troopship "Orwell" displaced 18,000 tons and was formally the German ship "Pretoria" surrendered as part reparations. So began a sea journey that was to take a month calling in Port Said on 23rd October, Aden on 28th October, Colombo on 3rd November, Singapore on 8th, Hong Kong on 12th and finally Kure on Wednesday 16th November. Although it was a long journey we were kept active training-wise as well as educationally and socially. Despite the limited accommodation for the numbers on board officers were fortunate to have double cabins with bunkbeds. Apart from being well fed we could buy necessities at favourable prices. For smokers 50 Players were available for 2/3, woodbines for 41/2p and, for pipe smokers, a lb of St Bruno tobacco for 13/-. Imbibers were equally fortunate being able to have a pint of Worthington ale for 10p and tots of whisky and gin for 6p and 4p respectively.

As the journey neared its end, sailing up the inland sea was an exciting experience preparing for the wonderment of the strange land ahead. We disembarked at Kure, the one-time major Japanese naval base, now the HQ of the BGFK. After an initial briefing we drew her cold weather kit at the British Bae Depot before crossing over to Pusan on the Korean Peninsula. Pusan was the staging post for the deployment of reinforcements for the units of the British Brigade. What remains imprinted on my mind about Pusan was the British Military Cemetery with the graves of over 1000 British troops. My stay in Korea was however foreshortened as I was obliged to return to Kure to fill a post at HQ.

In Kure I was billeted in what was formally a Japanese naval officers' mess which had been comfortably appointed. The mess was occupied in the main by Australian officers many of whom had actually been in Japan since the early days of the Occupation. The whole atmosphere of the mess was typically "Aussie," especially in the messing with the rations being provided by the Australian authorities, with sheep's brains and tripe being a familiar dish! The customary alcoholic brew was Melbourne bitter rather than Japanese Kirin beer. For a tippie it was mainly rum with the occasional glass of "sake" Japanese rice wine. Apart from the regular range of makes of cigarettes there was the alternative of a free issue of substandard Australian "Turf", popularly referred to as "bush-fires" in tins of 50. All in all one could never have experienced greater camaraderie and, with the provision of a personal house civilian mother, a Japanese widow, life was made exceptionally comfortable. My habit of singing in the shower was to cause the embarrassing consequence of being directed from above to sing popular songs at the Kure Prefecture's musical festival.

As a staff officer at HQ I was responsible for briefing incoming troops on current affairs and acting as liaison officer to the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force. Following Japan's surrender in 1945 a new constitution was imposed which included a celebrated article forbidding Japan to possess any armed forces. However, the rise to power of Mao Tse-tung and the new Communist China, the deteriorating relations with the USSR and then the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 necessitated the partial rearmament of Japan. In 1952 Japan became an independent nation once more by the Treaty of San Fransisco and was allowed to establish both a Land and Naval Defence Force but not an air force.

As a liaison officer I was provided with the services of Akemi Togo as an interpreter. I was fortunate to have her to accompany me on a visit to Hiroshima during the Cherry Blossom Season at the end of April. Cherry tree flowers represent the transient nature of life to the Japanese. It was on the 6th of August 1945 that Hiroshima was devastated by the first of the atom bombs dropped from the superfortress "Enola Gay" piloted by Col Paul Tibbet. As a result to all intents and purposes Hiroshima ceased to exist. Still standing was the Atomic Dome, one of the few structures to survive within a half mile radius. As I stood alongside the commemorative shrine which indicated the approximate explosion point, I could not but reflect on the poignant events of Hiroshima and its sister city of Nagasaki. It was on the 9th of August that a second atom

bomb was released over Nagasaki on the island of Kyushu. According to my guide Nagasaki was left as “a city with not a tombstone standing.” As a fourth former in 1945 I had been horrified by the newsreels of these atomic explosions and their consequences. Little did I realise then that I would visit the sites and tread the very soil.

**The Late Glyn Powell**

### **Dame Olive Annie Wheeler - “Top Old Girl” (1886-1963)**

Born in Brecon in 1886 Olive was the daughter of Henry Burford Wheeler. She attended Brecon County School for Girls and the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. It was here that she was elected president of the students Representative Council (SRC). She held degrees of BSc (1907) MSc (1911) and DSc (1916), and established a reputation as an educationalist, psychologist and university lecturer.

Initially she was a lecturer in mental and moral science at Cheltenham Ladies' College. She was later appointed to a lectureship in education at the University of Manchester and served as Dean of the Faculty of Education. She subsequently moved to the University College in Cardiff where she served as a Professor of Education as well as Dean of the Faculty of Education. In 1947 she became chairman of the Welsh Advisory Council on youth employment and chairman of the South Wales District of the Workers' Education Association (WEA). As a crown on her achievements, in 1950 she was created a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire for her services to education. It is recorded in “The Daisy” that she was the guest speaker at the so-called joint girls and boys prize giving at the Guildhall in 1927.

**The Late Glyn Powell**

## **Obituaries**

### **David Idwal Lewis Jones (1956-?)**

Libanus boy Idwal enjoyed sport at the Grammar School and played rugby for the school team. He was a keen farmer and over 40 years he became a breeder and judge of Blue Face Leicester and Welsh Mules, culminating in becoming President elect for 2023 of the Blue Face Leicester Society. He was a member of the Aberhonddu & District Male Voice Choir and Libanus, Sennybridge and Brecon Agricultural Shows.

### **Oliver Vivian (“Viv”) Parry (1941-46)**

“Viv” was born in Capel Uchaf and joined the Boys' County School in 1941. On leaving school his first job was with the Breconshire County Council before his National Service with the RAF. On leaving the RAF he worked for the Gloucester County Council. He later worked for Northampton County Council before retiring to Pwllgloyw in 1991. In retirement he researched his family history and local history generally,

### **David Jeffrey (Jeff) Davies (1941-45)**

Jeff was a member of the Honey Cafe, Bronllys, family and brother of the recently deceased Gareth Davies. He was a master of his craft of bakery and confectionary. After working for many years in the Talgarth bakery he set up his own bakehouse and shop in Abergavenny. Jeff was a loyal and regular supporter of the OBA and it was he who provided the remarkable cake for the 70th anniversary dinner in 2019.

### **Derek Haydn Davies (1944-47)**

Derek was in the same form as his brother Ernest (1944-50). On leaving school before completing his School Certificate examination he worked on a number of different farms mustering a whole range of rural skills. He subsequently became a farm Bailiff before retiring to Bwlch. An avid reader throughout his life he concentrated on gardening in his retirement.

### **Dewi Jeffrey Jones (1955-63)**

A native of Cwmwysg he was known as “Dewi Pentwyn.” He left school prematurely to return to the home farm and subsequently became a successful farmer in his own right. An active member in his community, he was particularly supportive of the YFC movement. A proud Old Boy, he attended the annual dinner for many years as well as being a member of the Family History Society.

**Leslie Ronald Williams (1930-32)**

Formerly of Abercrynig Mill, Leslie had attained the remarkable age of 103 at the time of his death. A brief resume of his life and achievements were published in the 2023 issue of the newsletter. He distinguished himself as a farmer, broadcaster and magistrate, and had a remarkable record as a flight-lieutenant navigator in Bomber Command, completing over 30 operations.

**Raymond Parry (1952-60)**

A Brecon boy, Ray was brought up by an aunt on Pen-llwyn-yr-hendy farm in the Senni Valley. He studied the three heavy weight subjects of Pure and Applied Maths, Physics and Chemistry at A-level before proceeding to Aberystwyth University to read Mathematics. He followed up with a Masters degree before taking a post as lecturer at Stafford College.

**Douglas (“Doug”) J Parry (1952-60)**

After passing his A-level Maths in 1960, Doug joined the RAF and specialised in Traffic Control. On leaving the RAF he took a security job with British Nuclear Fuels, subsequently transferring to the Atomic Energy Authority.

**D.R. (Ray) Morris - Staff**

An Aberdare boy and product of Cardiff University, Ray, known to pupils as “Elvis,” was a member of staff from 1957 to 1992. He was appointed to head the RE department. On secondary reorganisation he headed the enlarged RE department. He gave valuable service to the school and Welsh Sunday school in numerous capacities, not least in the field of athletics but more so as a Welsh Rugby Schools rugby selector.

**William (Billy) Devereux (1947-50)**

Billy was an outstanding soccer player, earning his colours in the senior side when still a junior. He trained as a psychiatric nurse at Talgarth Hospital and became senior Charge nurse. In retirement he indulged his passion for wildlife and local history, creating around his home in the foothills of the Black Mountains a large pool which became a haven for birds and wild animals, and planted 30 species of rare trees.

**Elaine Kirkham - Staff**

Elaine joined the staff on comprehensive reorganisation to teach Mathematics and Pure Science. With her husband’s appointment as a Ministry of Agriculture regional Veterinary Surgeon she was obliged to move to Preston and subsequently to Bristol.

**Gerald L. Williams (1949-55)**

Gerald’s parents kept a sweet and general stores in Ship Street which was popular with farmhands as it was open until late in the evening. He passed elements of his O-level exams in 1954 and 1955. A keen footballer, he played for the first XI during the seasons 1953-54 and 1954-55. On leaving school he was employed in the Highways Department of the County Council where he stayed for the whole of his working career.

**Marion Newman (née Pettican) (1955-1960)**

After school Marion went to Barry Training College but then changed direction and joined the Civil Service in London, returning to Wales in 1964 to work in the Welsh Office. In 1973 when her daughter was born she gave up work for a while and then returned to work in the Outpatients Department at the University of Wales Hospital, Cardiff. She loved gardening and holidays abroad and taught sewing in Night Classes.

**Alan Protheroe (1956-58)**

Alan did not want the academic life although all his reports through Mount Street and the Grammar School said what a bright lad he was. He left to be a mechanic at Central Garage in Brecon. A long spell with the Western Welsh was followed by a move to Knighton where he continued driving taxis, busses and hospital cars for the remainder of his life only finishing through ill health when he was 75.

**Contact details**

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[The most important invention of the last 100 years was “**The Transistor**”]