

Cylchlythyr Cymdeithas Ysgolion Ramadeg Aberhonddu Mawrth 2026

Brecon Grammar Schools Association Newsletter March 2026

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As reported in the Brecon & Radnor Express last May the annual reunion dinner “marked a historic milestone for the association; for the first time in its 76 year history, both the President and Vice President positions are held by former pupils of the Girls’ Grammar School.” Kathryn Easton was installed as President and Liz Poraj-Wilczynska was appointed Vice President. This followed the merger of the Brecon Boys Grammar School Association with former pupils of the Girls’ School.

The late Glyn Powell is still contributing to the newsletter, and his article on page 8 gives a lovely insight into his early years at the school.

I still need contributions for next year’s newsletter, so please report your news or news of colleagues with whom you are still in touch.

Fel yr adroddwyd yn y Brecon & Radnor Express fis Mai diwethaf, roedd cinio aduniad blynyddol “yn garreg filltir hanesyddol i’r gymdeithas; am y tro cyntaf yn ei hanes 76 mlynedd, mae swyddi’r Llywydd a’r Is-Lywydd yn cael eu dal gan gyn-ddysgyblion Ysgol Rammadeg y Merched.” Penodwyd Kathryn Easton yn Llywydd a phenodwyd Liz Poraj-Wilczynska yn Is-Lywydd. Dilynodd hyn uno Cymdeithas Ysgol Ramadeg Bechgyn a Chyn-ddisgyblion Ysgol y Merched.

Mae angen cyfraniadau arnaf o hyd ar gyfer cychlythyr y flwyddyn nesaf, felly rhowch wybod am eich newyddion neu newyddion gydwethwyr rydych chi’n dal mewn cysylltiad â nhw.

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Events 2025



Former pupils of the Boys' and Girls' Grammar Schools gathered at the Cradoc Golf Club on Saturday, 26th April for the **Annual Reunion**. President Win Griffiths gave the chain of the President's office to Kathryn Easton and history was made. This was the first time the BGSA has been led by an ex pupil of the Girls' Grammar School. To add to the occasion Liz Poraj-Wilcznska became Vice President. As there were other diners in the restaurant it was deemed inappropriate to give speeches although with his best Headmaster's voice Chairman Allan Lloyd silenced the restaurant as he welcomed the two ladies and members on this historic occasion. The photo shows Kathryn after receiving the chain of office from Win.

At the **Awards Evening** on 15th July President Kathryn Easton was accompanied by Allan Lloyd, Charles Lewis, Liz-Poraj-Wilcznska and Michael Williams. We were welcomed by interim Head Mr Rob Edwards and the large hall was full of prize winners,

who didn't know what they were going to receive, and parents and some grandparents. The opening interlude was a Welsh poem entitled "Y Llyfrgell" (The Library) delivered by Georgia Dudley. She spoke of her pleasure at meeting her friends there and sometimes to revise. It was clearly a favourite place.

The awards were announced by the teachers and BGSA prizes were presented by Kathryn. Two other interludes included a piano piece and a performance of "The Climb" by a Drama group from years 7-9. This was a complex movement with song.

The BGSA prize winners are listed on the left.

Prize	2025	£	Prize Winner
Most Improved Business Studies	The D.J. Powell Cup	25	Evie Cavanagh
Most Improved History	The BGSA History Prize	25	Martha Dunn Rees
Year 10 Business Studies	The BGSA Business prize	25	Anne Gallan
Year 10 Geography	The BGSA KS4 Geography Prize	25	Elin Griffiths
Year 10 Mathematics	The BGSA KS4 Maths Prize	25	Robin Irwin
Year 10 Physical Education	The BGSA Letton Shield	50	Ruby Wilson
Year 12 English	Senior Geoffrey Meredith Powell Prize	50	Henry Stephens
Year 12 Mathematics	The BGSA KS5 Maths Prize	25	Jac Kenchington
Year 12 PE	The BGSA Cliff Carr Memorial Prize	100	<i>Not awarded</i>
Year 12 Welsh Baccalaureate	BGSA Intercultural understanding Prize	25	Lilly Prosser
Year 8 Modern Foreign Languages	The BGSA KS3 Languages Prize	25	Adi Mudhoo
Year 9 English	Junior Geoffrey Meredith Powell Prize	50	<i>Not awarded</i>
Year 9 Mathematics	The BGSA KS3 Maths Prize	25	Yawen Chen
Year 9 Modern Foreign Languages	The BGSA KS3/4 Languages Prize	25	Sophia Jones
Year 9 Art Prize Most potential	Shirley Jones Art Prize	n/a	Tabitha Sheddon
Best cadet contributor	Mike Peters Silver bugle	n/a	<i>Not awarded</i>
All years. Best academic achievement	BGSA Lewis/Dr Price Award	25	Lewis Falvey
All years. Greatest contribution community/school	Glyn Powell Prize	100	Rhydian Woodland



The photo shows the members who attended the Awards Evening. From left are: Vice Chairman Charles Lewis, Vice President Liz-Poraj-Wilczynska, Chairman Allan Lloyd, President Kathryn Easton and Michael Williams

Members of the Association attended the **Remembrance Memorial Service** at the High School on 11th November, 2025. We were escorted into the hall by the young police cadets. The Headteacher, Mr R. Edwards, newly promoted, welcomed everyone and the readings were sensitively done by several pupils. These were followed by the Last Post, two minutes silence and Reveille. The names of the fallen from WW1 were read by Major Donna Greaves who has associations with the BGSA and Brecon High. WW2 names were read by BGSA Chair Allan Lloyd who movingly dropped a poppy for each of the fallen which helped visualise the number of Brecon men and women who had given their lives. Several wreaths were laid, by Kathryn Easton, President of the Brecon Grammar Schools Association, and the oldest boy and youngest girl. The Head introduced army cadet Rhydian Woodland who spoke about what it meant to be a cadet. Singing *Calon Lan* and prayers by the Reverend David Thomas (an old boy of the Grammar school) then concluded the service. The BGSA attendees were complimented on their contribution to the singing of *Calon Lan* -we were told we could form a BGSA choir!

A generous selection of cakes, tea and coffee was kindly provided following the service.

Biographical Notes

Liz Poraj-Wilczynska - President Elect

Liz (née) Powell was born in Brecon and attended the Girls Grammar from 1964 to 1971. Liz was the School Netball and Athletics Captain and her love of sport resulted in her following a career as a specialist teacher of Physical Education. Her first teaching post was at Brecon High School in 1974. After marrying in 1977 Liz became an “Army Wife” which resulted in many postings in the UK and overseas. Later Liz gained an MSc in Sociology and her final 12 years of teaching was as Head of PSHE at Sherborne Girls School, Dorset. Now back in Brecon she is involved with several Community organisations.

A Sucker for Punishment & Crisis Tourism

Part 2

The rules of journalism in which I was steeped were plain in my early days of work in 1956, and still are to me. First find the facts, then explain them clearly. There was no room in my early training for some of today's journalists who snatch at unconfirmed facts just to be first with the story. Or, to add opinion to news when that really belongs not on the front page but in a different section of the media.

I have worked in regional, evening, and daily newspapers. I have covered defence, motoring and crime as well as picking the story from hum drum daily events. Later as a sub editor I was to specialise in the re-write of other reporters' efforts. I recall the dejected lady reporter sent to cover a Devon upper crust wedding who failed to file her copy. When I asked why she said there's no story the groom failed to turn up! That was a rush to make the front page.

I went on to edit sports and features pages and be specially mentioned in the winning entry of the Hereford Evening news in the national design awards.

My journalism did not end but changed as I moved into the aerospace and defence industry. I was to edit publications for Bristol Siddeley, Rolls Royce, the Tarmac Group before my transfer into the world of public affairs. Here I would manage and direct corporate media relations and edit industrial and corporate magazines and newspapers for the Westland Group, Lucas Industries, Rolls Royce, British Aerospace and Akzo Nobel – all international giants.

Somehow my career took a sharp turn. From the independence of commerce, I was to take a drop in salary and lose the company car when I was encouraged to enter the Civil Service. It was a major step but one of my best and biggest. I was soon at the forefront, indeed the spearhead of defence communications, and working at the heart of the Cold War with the British Army of the Rhine. The experience was profound. In those days, the army fielded four armoured divisions and 1st British Corps was a potent force on the inner German Border separating NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

It was here my service in Reserve Army uniform was to play a major role in my future. Having turned down the chance for a Regular Commission in the Royal Military Police to stay a Territorial, my experience presented a new opportunity as senior officers, and politicians realised my unique understanding of the military and the media. I was to have a second career and was chosen to develop and run the Army's Media Operations Group and rise to the rank of Colonel.

This is where crisis communications and the appetite for risks really emerged. It also was a cathartic change of direction that was to lead me to more influential and interesting – in the Chinese proverb definition – times in Government circles.

I was to serve as an unusual combination of civil servant and military man in many of Britain's conflicts. For me that included the Northern Ireland Troubles and the Bobby Sands' hunger strike riots, the Falklands War and the British Army's tiny but incredibly effective contribution to Operation Hyperion in war-torn Beirut in 1983. Indeed, I could add that only 18 months or so earlier I was also standing between the Israelis and the Egyptians in the Sinai Desert with the Multi-National Force & Observers. I certainly got my knees brown and sand in my socks.

For many years after the end of World War 2 the Army, and, incidentally, the Navy and Air Force, sometimes mislaid one of the rules of war. To win you need the support of the tax-paying public. There was no social media or 24-hour rolling news in those years and it was the might and influence of the Fourth Estate, the British Press, which kept everyone informed and on-side.

At least that is what we aimed for. The targets were often missed due to old fashioned attitudes towards co-operating with the Press, but the situation was rapidly improving, and I was at the heart of the training of Unit Press Officers to manage the run of the mill everyday interests.

But and it was the inevitable big but, when the cookie crumbles or when the proverbial hits the fan it is not evenly distributed, and suddenly the MoD's press team was in full operational mode and thrust into action.

I have travelled extensively - north to Alaska, south to the bleak Falklands, west to the golden grass of California and east to the foot of Japan's Mount Fuji, and many places in between. I have a series of awards for journalism and newspaper design – and I consider it a shame the regional press of Britain has fallen before the dreadful mutterings of social media.

I have worked for blue chip companies like Rolls Royce in three different guises, I have explained the blacktops of Britain's motorways and roads and the completion of some of its largest buildings with Tarmac Group. I have co-operated with international aviation in the publicity of record-breaking helicopters, explored the depths of industrial pollution and its remediation, and the delights of colour with Akzo Nobel, the world's largest coatings company. I have stood at the scenes of massacres, at places of great historical interest, and battled through to find the news.

My 12 years working in the often misunderstood and even reviled ranks of the so-called Whitehall pen pushers was to take me to the ends of earth, as my annual report in 1983 succinctly put it, at some not inconsiderable risks. Or so it seemed standing at the sea's edge in Port Stanley in the Falklands Islands a few days after the Argentines surrendered. I was repeating to myself, yet again what the bloody hell am I doing here? I already knew the answer.

Despite having been an officer in the Reserve Army for long enough to know the age-old idiom – never volunteer, I was a sucker for punishment...sorry, I mean the rush of adrenalin. Some say I still am!

It has been a great life; it has now become what my children now call Dad's Wars. To me it is more than memories. It was real life. I lived it, I hope well. I hope too there is much more to come. But I will not forget my first days in work nor my friends and teachers at Cradoc Road, and especially the camaraderie and help of that little newsroom on The Bulwark.

Mike Peters (1951-56)

Recollections of Barbara Dawn Chilcott (née Jackson)

Brecon Girls' Grammar School 1967-1971 and Brecon High School 1971-1974

I was born in Crickhowell War Memorial Hospital in 1956 and attended Crickhowell Primary School before passing the Eleven Plus Exam in 1967 to start at Brecon Girls' Grammar School. At the time I attributed my success at passing to the fact that I had found a four-leaf clover while walking up the Table Mountain the day before on a family walk. (I have never ever found one since but admit I still look!)



I was so excited to start at Brecon Girls' Grammar School and especially enjoyed the 14 mile bus journey with my friend, Kay Russell. (Photo 1 shows me on my first day leaving for school, so proud in my new school uniform!)

Every day my father gave us polo mints for the trip which we shared and loved! We had time to chat and laugh together and when we were older it allowed us an extra half-hour for a final chance of revision before the exams. Most winters the bad weather over Bwlch mountain meant the bus had to be cancelled, so we usually enjoyed a few days off school and went sledging on the hill behind our house in Llangenny Lane. Wonderful times!

Despite feeling quite overwhelmed and nervous starting at Brecon School I loved

it there and have such fond memories of the staff and fellow pupils, as well as all the buildings. I still remember all the sounds and smells, especially when we were attempting to cook rock cakes or apple crumble for Home Economics, or trying to sew an apron or bag (not very successfully) on the sewing machine, and even dissecting a rat in biology! Yuck!

Some teachers were particularly inspirational in school, especially Miss Owen who taught RE, a subject I loved so much I think my mother thought I may enter the church; as well as GG (forget his name) who patiently tried to teach me Latin, but I admit I could never get to grips with stories about soldiers and chariots, so I really didn't do too well.

Art was another favourite subject of mine but unfortunately I was sent to see Miss A B Jones, Headmistress, in disgrace due to my choice of music for the art room. We were allowed to bring a 45 rpm record to play during lessons and I cheekily took "*Je t'aime, moi non plus*". To this day I still don't know if my parents were informed about this!

In 1971 the Girls' Grammar School merged with the Boys' School to become Brecon High School, so lessons were held on both campuses. It was very strange initially but it was a good time and we were such a lovely group of people. I have very fond memories of this time.

I was Head Prefect and Head of Bryn House at one stage, a role I enjoyed apart from the fact I had to participate in Sports Day events to show willing. I think I am still traumatised by my attempts in the hurdle race; it was very difficult doing this when you are less than 5 feet tall!!

Photo 2 shows us together in Year 5 or Lower 6 in the school grounds, before some new classrooms were built on the slope. I had always wanted to become a Social Worker or Almoner when young so my father,

who was an Environmental Health Inspector and Surveyor in Crickhowell Council, arranged for me to meet Miss Fudge, an Almoner in Neville Hall Hospital, Abergavenny. Miss Fudge wore a cape in the Hospital and did home visits on a 3-wheeled bike; imagine that now!

The Careers Teacher at school also arranged for a group of us to stay in a Youth Hostel in London where we had the

opportunity to visit Great Ormond Street Hospital, the Samaritans, as well as many other places. We were so lucky to have this support and experience when so young.

In 1974 we all finished at Brecon High School to pursue different careers or university courses.

I moved to study a BA in Social Administration at Nottingham University, followed by the CQSW Diploma in Social Work at Swansea University. I initially held a generic social work post in Neath Social Services in 1978 before moving to become a Social Worker in Morrision Hospital and subsequently Singleton Hospital. I really enjoyed my career and prior to retiring I managed an Adult Social Care Team in Swansea as well as working in a community palliative health care team.



Since retiring in 2011 I have enjoyed a variety of voluntary jobs in the Care Sector as well as taking up new hobbies, including learning to play Bridge through the U3A. In fact I only learnt of the School Association through Michael Williams, who edits the newsletter, as we regularly play Bridge together in Swansea. Following discussion we realised we both had Brecon Grammar School in common, albeit at different times.



Since 2014 I have been regularly visiting Care Homes, Hospitals, libraries and Schools with my therapy dog for the Charity, "Pets As Therapy." In 2018 Myfanwy and I were at Crufts where she was runner-up in the Pets as Therapy section (as seen in photo on left). This was particularly useful during and after Covid, when I used to chat to primary school children twice weekly on "Team" chats on the computer to provide them support, as it was such a challenging time for them. Sadly this has ended now as Myfanwy, my cocker spaniel, is 14 and has had to retire.

I have also enjoyed lots of travelling with family and friends since retiring and hope this will continue yet for many years to come.

I wish everyone well who may remember me from those happy days.

My XI form contemporaries

The photo below shows some of my contemporaries in the sixth form in 1953. They were all in my Chemistry class which was taught at the Girls' School by Mr Rees, an excellent teacher who was a heavy smoker with nicotine stained fingers.



From left: Margaret James (née Evans) behind Peter Twist, Michael Williams behind Jean Willis (née Thomas), Tony Hepton behind David George, Roland Jenkins, and Tony Went. Sadly four are no longer with us: Peter Twist, Jean Willis, Roland Jenkins (who died in 2025) and Tony Went.

I met David George in 1963 while I was working in Bristol University. He had completed his dentistry degree and was working at the Bristol Dental Hospital. He later emigrated to Australia and some years later

suffered the trauma of losing his wife in a swimming accident. In my last contact with him several years ago he told me he had met a Thai lady and was planning to move to Thailand.

Tony Hepton lives in California and has contributed articles for the newsletter in 2012 and 2014.

Margaret James lives in Bronllys and is a frequent attendee at our reunions.

Have you, dear reader, got a school photo that you could submit for the newsletter?

Michael Williams

“The Hatton Boys” 1940-1960

In the 2011 issue of the newsletter Dennis Morgan (1940-45), the one time doyen of the OBA, wrote of the Pansnett House boys. Pansnett House was in Bridge Street, Aberystwyth and was a well known lodgings for students at the University College of Aberystwyth where, from the early 1930s, former pupils of Brecon Boys' County School shared in the “digs”. Among Dennis's fellow lodgers were a number of eminent former pupils. These included Dr Owen Tom Price (1937-43) subsequently a leading agricultural economist with the World Bank, Dr Dyfed Lewis (1937-43) who became Professor of Biochemistry at Nottingham and a noted expert on the “rumen”, and Walter Price (1936-42), who after a career as a leading Agricultural Engineer was to become deputy principal of Coleg Howell Harris at Penlan, Brecon.

Of more relevance to the actual pupils at the school was Monmouth House in Maendu Street, Brecon which provided “digs” for a succession of boys over a period of some two decades. Monmouth House was located within striking distance of the school adjacent to the Cwm Inn and in the shadow of the railway bridge. The landlady was Mrs Rose Hatton, hence the reference to the Hatton Boys. The elderly widow of a former engine driver, she had in late 1939 been obliged to provide accommodation for an evacuated mother and daughter. Under the false impression that the threatened blitz had not transpired the family returned to London. Mrs Hatton was then approached by Jacob Morgan to see if she would consider providing “digs” for his pupils. Having agreed this she was to take three who were already established pupils.

Among the initial three were Brinley Powell, Gelli Cottage, Crai whose family subsequently moved to Upper Wenallt, Talybont on Wye. On a journey to visit his sister at Crickhowell he was killed in a motor cycle accident. The second to join Monmouth House was Goronwy Williams (1938-42) of Tymawr (formerly of Garnwen, Heol Senni), who on leaving school took up employment in the Food Office in Castle Street. After National Service with the SWB (South Wales Borderers) he returned to his previous civilian occupation only to re-enlist in H.M. Forces. Working through the ranks he was subsequently gazetted and eventually attained the rank of Major. In this capacity he was put in charge of Ghurka recruitment . The third of the initial trio was R.W. (Ron) Jones (1939-44) of Rhydybarry Cottage, Merthyr Cynog, who during his final year shared his studies with duties as a secretary for Jacob Morgan. After completing his national service in the RAF, he worked in the Council Offices before transferring to the employ of the South Wales Water Board in Peppercorn Lane, Brecon.

Next in line was G.R.(Ron) Gough (1941-45) from Gelliau-Meirch, Heol Senni, who on leaving school worked locally before completing his National Service in the RAF. On demob he joined the Hereford Constabulary reaching the rank of Sergeant before retiring to become a security guard at the SAS (Special Air Service) camp in Hereford. Ron was credited with establishing the Hereford Police male voice choir. Then came Elwyn Davies (1942-43) of Pentre, Merthyr Cynog, who left after a year on moving to another of the family's farms in Cilmari. Years later Elwyn was to return to Pentre establishing a reputation as one of the prominent farmers in the area and as a breeder of the internationally renowned Epynt Stud of Section “A” Welsh Mountain Ponies. It was fortuitous that Elwyn released a vacancy at Monmouth House for me. I remained there for seven years (1943-50). Initially I shared the “digs” with Goronwy, Ron Jones and Ron Gough who were very much more senior.

In September 1944 the two brothers Gwyn (1942-45) and Alun Harries (1944-45) joined us at Monmouth House. They lived at Waun-newydd, the uppermost farm in the Crai valley which they were obliged to vacate on the termination of their tenancy lease. The family moved to Cefarall farm in the Llanymddyfri area with the boys transferring to Ysgol Uwch Pentycelyn. Gwyn subsequently farmed at Gellifelen whilst Alun became an Aeronautical Engineer in the Midlands.

Their departure left a vacancy for Alan Thomas (1945-52) from the Reservoir House, Crai. A former Head Boy and graduate of Aberystwyth University with a Master's Degree, he was to have a distinguished academic career holding a personal chair as Professor of Linguistics at the University College of North Wales, Bangor. Alan's death was marked by an international seminar on linguistics at Cardiff University.

The next school admission to find "digs" with Mrs Hatton was Victor Hales (1948-52) who lived in one of the holdings in the middle of Glasfynydd Forest. Victor eventually set up a haulage business at their new home at Callwen. In 1949 R.F. Willband (1949-53) from Pengefnffordd joined us and on leaving school returned to the family farm. Whilst Victor was still in the "digs" he was joined by his brother David Hales (1951-57) who, after a bright school career, joined the Civil Service working in the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Andrew Thomas (1951-58), Alan's brother also entered in 1951 and was the last pupil to lodge at Monmouth House. Like his brother he gained Professorial status as Professor of Telematics at Middlesex University and Honorary Professor of Engineering of Miskola, Hungary.

The last pupil to be taken in by Mrs Hatton was David ("Biffa") Davies (1952-Dec.1955) of the Rectory, Cwmysg. The family later acquired another farm, Blaentwrch in Carmarthenshire. David left at Christmas time 1955 and is still a regular attendee at our Annual Dinner.

With the establishment of an extended school transport network providing links connecting with isolated rural communities the provision of lodging for pupils in Brecon was no longer necessary. The Education Authority had had the responsibility for paying most of the lodging costs with only an element born by the families. Monmouth House provided a home from home for a succession of so-called "country boys" most of whom came from Crai and Senni. To those of us who were "Hatton Boys", feeling quite warmly nostalgic, the story still shines and leaves one forever warmed by its afterglow.

For each and everyone of us there was the common factor of our venturing into "*terra incognita*". It was a strange experience adapting to town life. Although Monmouth House was not a particularly prestigious dwelling it introduced us to electric lighting, heated water and flush toilets. In the countryside for our lighting, we depended on oil lamps and candles whilst outdoors we used a storm or stable lamp. In my case there was no indoor water facility so for our drinking water we depended on a well whilst for other uses we resorted to a strong flowing spout on the farmyard. More primitive was our toilet facility, initially a semi ruined building with no roof or door positioned over a stream for natural flushing. A replacement was subsequently built, this time at the top of the garden access to which meant vaulting a stream. The only other drawback from our point of view was that instead of being 50 yards from the house the new toilet was an additional 20 yards away. Is there any wonder that without an indoor toilet a chamberpot under each bed was an essential prerequisite. Pulling the toilet chain, turning on the water tap and switching on an electric light at Monmouth House were novel experiences.

Another common factor was our being subject to the rationing system implemented on 8th January 1940. Food rationing was introduced to ensure a fair share for everyone at a time of national shortage. All citizens had been given a ration book with people having had to register with their chosen retailers. First products to be rationed were bacon, ham, butter and sugar. Other foods that entered the ration books included eggs, cheese, milk, tea, coffee, chocolates, and sweets. This meant that we had to bring our individual supplies every week sufficient for one's breakfast, dinner, tea and supper.

Every Sunday night after chapel it was necessary for me to pack my week's provisions as well as my clothing, sports bag, toiletries etc in a sizeable case of no small weight when packed with its contents. Vegetables such as potatoes, swedes etc were quite bulky but fortunately it was possible to collect one's ration of milk from Johnny the Court and likewise bread until it became rationed from August 1946 until July 1948 after a failed wheat harvest.

Compared with the general discomfort of the draughty unheated country homes, Monmouth House was considerably more comfortable. We all lived in one room with a kitchen table and a coal fireplace which was reduced to minimal size with a brick because of the shortage of fuel. When not doing one's homework at the table we sat around the fire. Should no coal be available we would collect coke from the gasworks in the Watton. When Mrs Hatton was satisfied that we had spent sufficient time on our homework we were allowed to tune in at 6:45 pm to the radio thriller serial "Dick Barton - Special Agent" with Dick and his associates Snowy White and Jock Anderson. As a matter of routine we would be permitted to listen in the to the evening news before being obliged to retire to bed.

In recasting any fragmented reminiscences it is not particularly easy to establish a clear narrative. Yet when suppressed memories do surface, they usually focus on familiar faces. Generally, somehow, each one of us seems to have vibrated on a similar wavelength. One's sentiments are neatly summed up in the verse.:

“There is a deepness in remembering that is far beyond recalling
of happenings and people.
It is a kind of tender, pervasive feeling.
It gathers together the lingering affection of times and places”

The late Glyn Powell

My Hobbies

You know you are in an important discussion when you are asked what your hobbies are.

The person on the other side really wants to know about you, and it is often encountered in professional interviews

Hobbies are an important definition of a person and can lead to many interesting contacts in life.

What stimulates an interest, in a subject or activity, is also very interesting, and can obviously be by chance or circumstance, but also from awareness and sensitivity. Education can play a very important part in this stimulation.

When I was a pupil at Brecon Boys' Grammar School my hobbies included stamp collecting. I had relatives who lived in Barry and I often went there on extended visits, which led to some shopping in St Mary's Street in Cardiff. There I found a stamp shop that took my breath away, as stamps from every corner of the Globe were on display, and really fired my imagination.

At school, my interest in Geography became intensified by what I had brought back from St Mary's Street. Capital cities, coloured maps of countries and continents, atlases, languages and much more absorbed my attention, stimulated by stamps and their origins.

This translated into some good marks in Lou (Lousy) Lewis' geography class in Form 2a. He made the subject interesting and had a character and style of his own. A short, assured, gentleman who commanded the class with a long map pointer, he was Deputy Headmaster with a very dignified manner, and had the respect and attention of we pupils.

I always looked forward to these classes and even enjoyed the tests, after the homework he had set for us.

Map reading became a pastime that fed an enquiring mind.

I have had the good fortune to travel around the world, to some most interesting places, largely stimulated by the interests formed in those early years.

As a youngster, whilst staying in Barry I first saw my uncle's collection of birds, particularly budgerigars.

The fact that they came from Australia, was interesting, but the challenge of learning about their feeding and captive living conditions and management, engaged me, and I was captivated by their character, cheekiness, and amazing colours. As a Christmas present an aunt bought me a book named the 'Cult of the Budgerigar'. This elevated my knowledge considerably, and by now I was hooked onto a journey of discovery with my interest.

It included breeding these birds in captivity, after building an aviary, with the help of a friend, in our garden. I was able to study their different colours, and their genetics, in particular, the complicated inheritance characteristics associated with their multitude of colours.

This led me to biology, which we were not fortunate to have as an option at school.

However, fast forward to adulthood and, my fascination with livestock breeding engaged me in my later working life. I bought a farm.

Another passion of my childhood was birds' nesting. I was fortunate enough to have school pals who were similarly interested. One of these was John Meredith who was a classmate at Hay and Brecon.

He was a brilliant birds' nester, discovering the whereabouts of birds nesting in many different locations and environments.

Curlews, buzzards, garden warblers, sandpipers as well as many more common species were all on his list of introductions. We had quite interesting birds' egg collections between us.

Looking back, it was a charmed experience being with John, and I celebrate the times we spent together within a small group of lads. We had great fun. The outdoor pursuits were on bicycles and walking, and we travelled many miles together in our searches.

A group of us ended up in the local court for taking Black Headed Gulls eggs which were used instead of hen eggs. The case was dismissed, but we were fined with 4 shillings costs.

A more sensitive approach to the environment hopefully prevails nowadays.

Nevertheless, we learned a lot about the countryside and the environment from our experiences.

I was always interested in drawing and clay modelling as an infant and horses were my passion.

My grandparents had a farm nearby so that I spent a lot of time around animals, especially the milking cows, which I herded to and from their grazing, from an early age, alongside the young man in charge of the job.

My interest in drawing and modelling animals seemed to be natural extension of my interest in the farm.

Later, when I was in the grammar school, I was disappointed that there was no availability to continue my interest, as there was no art class available.

However, after completing a very modest first year in the fifth form, I was encouraged to stay on another year to retake subjects, but it left a gap in the timetable.

I seized on the opportunity to go to the Girls' Grammar School to take an Art Course.

It included architecture, which was my grandfather's profession.

My passion was very well rewarded with some good exam results.

I have carried my interest in art to adulthood and have attended many courses throughout my life following the start which the Girls' Grammar School gave me.

I will be eternally grateful for that turn of events, which has led me into visiting many of the major art galleries in the world. I still paint and attend art classes at 88 years of age.

Football was another passion. During the Second World War the only team playing locally was a junior side, as most of the men were serving in the Armed Forces.

Local lads were organised into playing matches against villages in the surrounding area.

As small children we went to watch the games and our interest in organised sport was slowly developed.

The important matches were when Hay played against Brecon Boys' Grammar School.

They usually lost, and this taught us a level of respect and appreciation for the school, especially as, one of the favourite sons of Hay, 'Slim' Pritchard, was compelled to play for Brecon. The man who organised the Hay St Mary's Football Club at the time was Bert Breeze. All his children went to either the Boys' or Girls' Grammar

Schools in Brecon, his youngest son was Bobby Breeze, who was a recent President of the OBA. He also organised trips to international matches at Ninian Park, Cardiff, on behalf of the club, immediately after the War when international football recommenced.

We youngsters, enthusiastically, joined the crowd who supported these events, supporting Wales with fervour. The fact that we lived adjoining the English border only seemed to intensify our support.

When we went to Cradoc Road the opportunity to exercise our passions and fantasies created in this environment were realised. House groups of course created the competition to which we had become accustomed, my house together with many Hay boys was Gam.

We all hoped to be selected for the first team, the alternative was to go to the Rec, which was really frowned upon by enthusiasts. Luckily, I was selected to play in the first team from the start, at least until I reached the 4th form, when the competition intensified. I didn't play in the firsts again until I got to the 5th form.

Many lasting contacts were established in playing football together and it formed a very good bonding process.

I carried on playing in later life, at a very modest level, until I finally gave up in my mid 30's.

I have been a lifelong supporter of Coventry City F C, which has been a challenge in itself.

How important are hobbies in forming the man?

I would propose that they have a very important roll in establishing relationships, confidence and character in people.

Awareness and mental health are stimulated by participation in group activity and friendships are established with people of like mind and enthusiasm.

The tribal security and welfare elements are extremely important, and the memories of people and events form a large part of security in old age.

I can personally testify to this

A.(Tony) J. Crook (1948 - 53)

The Last Jump

They were tank traps, left over from the Second World War.

Each one stood at least eight feet out of the ground and measured at least six feet by six feet square. Straddling the mountain pass in a crooked line, these massive concrete blocks, in all their brutal ugliness, could never be mistaken for Easter Island gods or Aztec altars of sacrifice, but they too carried a message, and a stark message it was. As they stood, shoulder to sharp, angled shoulder, their huge squatness declared a warrior's cry of defiance. You will not pass. As much as Arthur's gleaming sword, they declared a glorious will to battle. Only when viewed against the backdrop of the mountain flanks surrounding them, did they seem pitifully puny, but the Churchillian spirit that infused them rose up as high as the peak of Pen y Fan itself.

It was these relics, from perilous days, that had become the platform for the annual challenge facing me and Douglas.

The aim was to leap from one block to another, along the row of four. There was no opportunity for any sort of run-up; two tiny steps, and away. They were standing jumps, virtually. The landing area each time was not only limited, but lethal. There was no smooth top on which to alight. Instead there was a jagged mass of flints set into the central portion of each block. Dozens of tiny spears were waiting - to receive and to impale. Finally, just to make it a real challenge, the fourth block, which stood on the other side of the mountain stream, was set considerably higher than the other three.

In the early years our athletic bodies made short work of what became known as The Jump. In those days in fact it might fairly have been called The Leap.

Eventually of course Father Time began tapping us on the shoulder. We began to wonder how long it would be, before we failed. We knew that the consequences would not be pretty. In recent years we had taken to changing from our mountain boots to light trainers. We would divest ourselves of most of our outdoor

clothing, regardless of the weather, in an effort to carry as little weight as possible whilst making The Jump. It must be admitted, also, that a tenseness in the air had become undeniable, inevitable perhaps, as each of us took our turn to mount that first block.

This particular year it was my turn to jump first. The usual febrile banter was absent. When I coped with the first two leaps I sensed Douglas relaxing a little. I did too. For weeks I had jumped over carefully-measured, imaginary chasms in my garden. I had imagined failing, perhaps only getting a toe on to one of the landing areas, so that my leading leg slipped, and my knee took a fearful knock, and my body slid down the roughcast concrete, leaving me hanging on by bloodied fingertips to the needle-sharp edges of the block, pain and ignominy sweeping through me in equal measure.

It would be no great fall to the soft, marshy ground, but I knew that that would not be how either of us saw it. We would see a fall, by either of us, as a mortal marker on a downward path, as the end of something very, very precious.

I did not fall, however. The adrenaline, produced by those first two jumps, powered the third, carrying me to safety. Just. I knew then that I had reached my limit. My legs and my heartbeat were telling me that enough was enough; another year hence and it would be too much. As I dropped down off that fourth block, bent double and taking in lungfuls of air, I said a quiet prayer for Douglas. It was vital now that he should not fail. That must not be how our youthful pretences ended, not hanging bruised and battered on what we had so often skipped over as lightly as if we were managing the stepping stones across the stream beneath us.

Douglas clambered up onto the first block. Since his rugby days had ceased, his large frame had put on significant weight. He contemplated what was before him. He looked grey and drawn. He looked more like a bull than an antelope. I wondered where the spring was going to come from.

Not a word was spoken. I didn't know what to say. Was that black crow, gliding over us, an omen? We both looked up at it, as it looked down on us. Of course it is not an omen I thought. Crows inhabit the Beacons, patrol the mountainside, all the time; this is their territory; this is their home; they were here before us and they will be here long after we have gone. We must look like little dots to them - specks of irrelevance. Of **course** it is not an omen.

Douglas's jaw muscles were working overtime.

Come on Doug you can do it.

That was all I managed to shout, before he started The Jump.

Arms swinging furiously, he landed on the second block with a thud. His knees buckled and he stumbled. He managed a smile and a wave as he righted himself. His second jump was equally clumsy. His momentum on landing threatened to carry him over the edge of block number three and into the stream below. This was not how it was supposed to be. Our jumps of casual, youthful grace had become ungainly, desperate, dangerous.

Douglas took a deep breath. He moved to the very backward edge of the third block, to give himself as much of a run-up as possible for the jump on to elevated block four. He was supposed to be capable, an athlete - he berated himself with these and other pricking thoughts. He knew it would have to be his brute strength alone which would get him over the final jump.

Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,

Some in their wealth, some in their body's force ...

Recalling the lines of sonnet 91 made our desperate Douglas feel 91. His body's force - would it be enough? Hands on knees, he looked down at the flint-crowned block from which he had to leap. He saw how the afternoon light was making the jagged facets of the flint sparkle. This artificial, self-imposed challenge, entered into in all the exuberance of youth, performed by two friends in the clear air of their beloved mountains, witnessed by nobody save themselves, had suddenly, for Douglas, become imbued with huge significance. The annual challenge was not supposed to end in failure and injury. Blood was not

supposed to be spilled. Bones were not supposed to be cracked open. It's only a game. So come on Douglas. One more time. Jump.

Both Douglas's hands were badly skinned and throbbing with pain. In hauling himself up on to the fourth block he had bloodied himself, and the block, in a number of places. But he had not fallen. He had not failed. His blood made our Last Jump into a sacrifice the Aztecs would have recognised and applauded.

Peter Holt

Old Railways

When I received news of the death of John Kiely last year I was intrigued to learn from his son Julian that John, who was born in March 1932, travelled to Brecon from Sennybridge by train! I recall Glyn Powell writing of travelling from Cray by lorry. I was unaware that there was a train service from Sennybridge to Brecon. According to Wikipedia the “Devynock and Sennybridge station” at Defynnog was opened in 1867. After 1948, when the GWR and LMS were taken into national ownership, the residual passenger use on the line fell considerably.

This discovery of the Defynnog Brecon train service was a reminder of what a remarkable train network was created throughout the whole country in the second half of the 19th Century. It's decline came in the 1960s with the Beeching cuts which were inevitable as more people used cars. However some lines have been reopened by local enthusiasts, one example being the Gwili Railway in Carmarthen. My brother, Peter, helped cut down trees when the Carmarthen end of the line was being developed.

In other cases the closed lines, after the track was removed, were used for walking or cycling. The old line which used to end in Blackpill near Mumbles, is now a lovely walk which is very popular with runners and cyclists. Before I gave up cycling I used this path as a short cut to Upper Killay where one of my daughters lives. Sadly the line north of Brecon is not very accessible with much of it being privately owned.

We also had in Swansea the famous Mumbles railway which was initially a horse-drawn tramway in 1804-5, and became the first railway in the world to regularly carry passengers in 1807. The first steam locomotives came into use in 1877; then in 1929 the electric tramcars took over until closure in 1960. The site is now a lovely promenade from Swansea to Mumbles (see photo).



I've previously written about my motor cycling days in an article in 2020. I didn't mention one occasion when the railway rescued me after my motor bike broke down. I was on my way home from Birmingham University to Brecon in 1956 when my bike broke down in Worcester. What on earth was I going to do so far from home? I pushed the bike to Worcester station and discovered that I was able to put the bike in the guard's van and travel to Brecon! It was hard work pushing the bike from the station to my home in Pendre, especially up Priory Hill. I don't think such a rescue would be possible today.

Do any of you readers have interesting stories to tell about your experiences on trains?

Michael Williams

Jungle Green

On the termination of my tour of duty with the BCFK I sailed away from Japan on board the troopship Asturias on my posting to Malaya. The sea journey was uneventful apart from the occasion off Matsu islands when evident Chinese activity obliged a full stand to with arms. What lay ahead in Malaya was Operation Firedog, which the British involvement was mystically called. In Singapore we were fitted out in jungle green, with bush hat and canvas jungle footwear laced to above the calf. I was scheduled to be posted

to a hot spot of guerrilla activity, my destination was changed at the last minute and I was diverted to HQ Command at Kuala Lumpur.

The Japanese invaded Malaya in August 1945. During the period of occupation a strong anti-Japanese movement grew up with the communists prominent. Later the British colonial administration returned the Communist controlled guerrilla organisation, which took to the jungle during the Japanese occupation and came into the open in many parts of the peninsula claiming that the victory was their doing. Britain had lost its credibility having forsaken the colony at the time of its greatest threat. The Japanese occupation gave the national independence movement a new lease of life and after the end of the war they flourished. To secure their ends they undertook a campaign of social and economic disruption especially in the industries of mining and rubber.

After the murders of three European planters, a state of emergency was proclaimed throughout Malaya on the 18th of June 1948. As a result, the Malayan Communist party took to the jungle where there were hidden stocks of arms and equipment from British and Japanese sources. Chin Peng (his nom de guerre), the political activist and Communist leader in his early 20s became the guerrilla leader. For his exploits against the Japanese during the occupation he was appointed by the British an OBE (later rescinded) and received two mentions in dispatches for undertaking dangerous assignments. The emergency developed into long protracted campaigns of jungle warfare. Thousands of British servicemen, many of whom were young national servicemen, combatted a terrorist organisation operating guerrilla and ambush tactics. At the outset there were some 12,000 terrorists under arms with a host of fellow travellers providing support from outside in the form of arms, finance, food and valuable undercover informers. The campaign required a formidable military force amounting to 40,000 troops with British forces supported by consignments of Commonwealth troops from Australia, New Zealand, Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Fiji. There were also a considerable number of Gurkha troops, the Malay regiment and the multi racial Federation Regiment.

When I arrived in Malay there were some 3000 terrorists still under arms maintained in the field by the activities of a communist supply organisation. Because of my other commitments elsewhere my requirements to go on jungle patrols were fortunately limited. I was billeted in a hut within a compound on the fringes of the HQ of Malaya command. My neighbour, a British officer kept a snake in the hut to deter rats. My hut was on the end of the road fringing the landing strip for the Austers. The Air Observation Pilots enjoyed buzzing us by flying low on takeoff and landing. Their function was to spot any terrorists activity deeper in the jungle and to search for any cultivated plots. Flights involved no small measure of danger and required great skill flying at tree top level.

Jungle warfare was tough going especially for the often very young, being physically testing and mentally trying for us, losing sweat and often having to hack a path through the bush. It was essential that one maintained constant vigilance throughout the patrol. What I learnt was that when one was delegated to lead a patrol, it was vital that one was accompanied by very experienced NCOs. On their first patrols the young soldiers found jungle sounds disconcerting and noises extremely disturbing. Mosquitoes and leeches were a constant irritation. No matter how tightly one's boots were laced leeches always seem to find access to legs as well as to the lower body. Their removal was a process delayed until the boys return to base, the effective method being the application of a lighted cigarette end. Mosquitoes were always a nuisance to combat. We took an anti-malaria tablet religiously every morning. We also took a salt tablet daily to counteract sweat loss. Probably the most persistent condition was "tinea" which could affect any part of the body and resembled ringworm. In extreme cases it could result in septic feet reminiscent of trench foot. The caring in such cases was a period in the cool temperature of the Cameron Highlands. As a consequence of the antiseptic spray my underwear remained permanently stained purple.

The threat from terrorist activity was considerably reduced by the policy of resettling the Chinese squatters who lived primitively on clearings on the edges of the jungle and near tin mines and rubber plantations.

They were collected together into settlements, fenced, floodlight and under constant surveillance. Sources of supply and concealment for terrorists could be reduced. Some 600 such new villages were created the length of the country. With increasing pressure on the terrorists they withdrew deeper into the jungle. To counteract this move it was necessary to air drop troops to operate for longer periods in the jungle necessitating resupply from our dispatch. "Sycamore" helicopters of 194 Squadron flying out of Kuala Lumpur gave vital support to the ground forces. They were introduced at a crucial point in the campaign and marked a turning point in the fortunes of the security forces. They allowed rapid reinforcements to be delivered into remote and inaccessible locations. It enabled the forces to make surprise attacks providing troop lifts and evacuation flights. The aged helicopters were later replaced by 110 Squadron Westland Whirlwinds operating from the RAF base at Butterworth, Penang. Rather than being involved in any but low-key patrols my alternative commitment was leading a squad of Gurkhas riding shotgun on the trains from Kuala Lumpur and back and from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore and return to protect the railway lines from terrorist attacks.

Circumstances changed in August 1957 when the Federation of Malaya became an independent state within the Commonwealth (MERDEKA). It was an interesting experience to have taken part in the parade and ceremony. Britain gave up overall responsibility for the direction of the anti-terrorist campaign and gave up their HQ at Kuala Lumpur and transferred to Seremban as Overseas Commonwealth Land Forces (OCLF). From Seremban I was required to visit the outlying units at Alor Setar, near the Thai border, Kota Bharu, Taiping, Ipoh and Malacca. After a period with OCLF I was to terminate my tour of duty in Malaya with the 15th Gurkha Division with a posting to Khuang where I was initially supposed to have been posted.

After Malaya gained independence from Britain in 1957 Chin Peng continued his struggle for communist control of the new state being forced to do so subsequently from exile. Eventually, a peace agreement was signed in 1989 but the Malaysian government flatly refused to allow him to return. He had led the abortive communist campaign to take over Malay. Chin was the last of the major guerrilla commanders who fought colonisation in Asia after 1945, a group including Sukarno in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, Norodom Simanouk in Cambodia and Aung San in Burma. Chin died in Bangkok on 16th September aged 88.

The so called "Emergency" took its toll on troops returning after months in the jungle much thinner and covered in tinea, jungle sores and mosquito and leach bites. Some 600 British soldiers were fatalities during the campaign.

The late Glyn Powell

My Musical Associations

Many people, on hearing a certain piece of music, are reminded of a happy memory. I have several such associations. My earliest was in the late 1940s when my family used to visit Mamgu Williams, who lived on a small farm in rural Carmarthenshire. On one such visit Mamgu gave me an old His Masters Voice record player with a large horn and several records. On one of the records was a funny song called "*When father papered the parlour*". I can still remember the words:

"When Father papered the parlour you couldn't see him for paint.
Dabbing here it dabbing it there, paste and paper everywhere.
Mother was stuck to the ceiling, the kids were stuck to the floor.
I've never seen a bloomi' family so stuck up before."

Whilst I'm not likely to hear this song today I did hear it some years ago on the radio and it brought back happy memories of visiting my lovely Mamgu. Welsh was her first language and I think hearing her conversations in Welsh with my father helped my pronunciation when I spoke Welsh as a learner.

Another musical association from the 1950s is the music of Glen Miller. Hearing songs such as "*In the mood*" or "*Moonlight Serenade*" or "*Chattanooga Choo Choo*" or "*Pennsylvania 6-5000*" brings back vivid memories of dancing with Jill Bray in the Church Youth Club in Brecon.

In 1962 during our big trip around the USA, which I wrote about in my article “My experience of America” in the 2023 newsletter, Bert Kaempfert’s catchy tune “*Swinging Safari*” was often played on the radio, and ever since then hearing it played brings back memories of driving along a dead straight road through the corn fields of Iowa.

Theme songs associated with TV programmes or films also trigger nice memories. The theme song sung by the great Shirley Bassey for the Goldfinger film reminds me of the first James Bond film I saw with my wife in Bristol in the 1960s. It featured Sean Connery who is my favourite James Bond character.

The theme song of the Inspector Morse TV programme reminds me of many hours of watching these programmes with my lovely wife when the kids were tucked up in bed.

In the 1970s when we holidayed in France I used to play songs of the Carpenters, one of my favourite groups, during our car journeys. Songs such as “*Rainy Days and Mondays*”, “*Yesterday Once More*”, “*Close to You*”, “*Top of the World*” and “*I need to be in Love*”, remind me of those holidays in a small caravan with our four children.

Do you dear reader have any musical associations you could write about?

Michael Williams

Bid Ben, Bid Bont – have we at last bridged the gap: A welcome to BGSA

Cradoc Road building never won any awards for architectural elegance, but for generations of Brecon boys it stood like a citadel. From its scuffed corridors and echoing stairwells, there was a constant view of the Brecon Beacons, whose grandeur seemed both to supervise and to inspire. Even in the wettest months - and there were many - a glance beyond the school’s weathered windows could lift the spirits and stir the imagination.

This was Brecon County Grammar School for Boys, and for those who passed the 11-plus exam, it was both an honour and a weight. Grammar school places were few and hard-won, and they marked a clean and often uncomfortable break with primary school classmates who went on to the Secondary Moderns. Many of the boys came from small farms and villages where Welsh remained strong and natural, though the school itself taught almost exclusively through English - a lingering oddity in a sometimes not so Welsh part of Wales.

Life at Cradoc Road was far from luxurious. The facilities were plain, the heating erratic, and the teachers stern. But there was purpose in the air. This was a place that meant business.

A Grammar School Education – With Strings Attached

The 11-plus had opened doors, but it also imposed discipline. Boys were expected to take subjects seriously: Latin, algebra, physics, poetry...and conduct. School uniform was required, and so too was a respect for the system - at least until one had learned how to dodge it.

Many of the masters had served in the war. Their expectations were exacting. They believed in clarity of thought, neatness of handwriting, and - above all - resilience. There was a world where detention meant staying behind to copy out parts of Caesar’s *De Bello Gallico*, and reporting late to Assembly could earn you a glare capable of piercing concrete.

Yet for all that, there was warmth. It was hidden, perhaps, behind mortar boards and wartime moustaches, but it was there. Especially in the House system, which gave structure, camaraderie, and identity. Gam, Siddons, Theophilus, and Vaughan - four names, four characters, four ways of being a Brecon boy.

School Divided by the Road – and by the Times

The boys had their school; the girls had theirs. Just across town, Brecon Girls’ Grammar School operated under equally watchful eyes, with its own magazine - *The Daisy*, a daintier counterpart to the boys’ braver-

sounding Silurian. Though the two schools rarely met under official circumstances, all manner of unofficial communication persisted via church halls, dances, and joint school plays (strictly supervised, of course).

In a quiet but significant shift, 2025 marks the year when the Old Pupils Associations of the two schools finally merged, recognising that time has made allies of us all. Boys and girls who once exchanged nods across separate corridors now share Facebook photographs, newsletters, and memories—bridging the great divide that once kept them apart.

Hard Times and Harder Futures

It's important to remember that the 1950s were not cosy years. The war had ended, yes—but the ration books were still around, and the shadow of National Service hung over most of the older boys. The newsreels spoke of the Korean War, then of the Malayan Emergency, and later still of Kenya and Cyprus.

For some boys who left Cradoc Road at 17 or 18, their next uniform was khaki. “Rose of Malaya” wasn't just a sentimental tune—it was a lived refrain for those who served in jungle operations far from home. Many never spoke of it. Others returned changed, their laughter quieter but no less kind. And yet, the school remained a steadying post. The sound of Latin verbs, the weight of a House point badge, the smell of wet football boots in the cloakroom - all these things stitched boys together into something lasting.

The school magazine, *The Silurian*, was more than just a record of fixtures and prizes. Its name harked back to the Silures, the Celtic tribe of southeast Wales who gave the Romans a run for their denarii and later the Normans some bruises too. It was a proud name, and no mistake. Every edition, from the primly typed editorials to the wildly optimistic poetry submissions, carried the voice of a school that knew exactly where it stood: on the border of mountain and memory.

Boys wrote about school trips, local politics, books, and war. Some of it was overwrought. Some of it was quite brilliant. All of it was us.

What the Houses Really Meant

Those House names—Gam, Siddons, Theophilus, Vaughan—weren't just names on noticeboards. They were living ideas. So, tongue in cheek, I muse....

- Gam boys were the tough-and-ready types, loyal and blunt, likely to tackle first and apologise later.
- Siddons boys brought style and expression, sometimes to the horror of the Games Master.
- Theophilus boys won prizes, corrected spelling, and rarely lost House quizzes.
- Vaughan boys watched the weather and wrote about it beautifully.

But of course, the borders were porous. A boy might win a cup for Gam while a poetry prize went to Vaughan. Boys might sing in the choir, another could debate for Siddons, we all could still retreat to the gym with the Theophilus crowd when it all got too noisy. That was the genius of it.

Bridges Beyond the School Gate

“Bid Ben, Bid Bont” wasn't merely a motto carved into the fabric of school life. It was a call to connect - to reach across the divides of class, geography, even gender. In time, the boys and girls from Cradoc Road and Cerrigochion Lane would grow into teachers, soldiers, farmers, doctors, clergy, civil servants, and poets. Many left Brecon. Many stayed. A few did both.

But they all carried something of that view across the playing field, the sound of the bell, and the steady sense that being a leader wasn't about standing above—it was about linking arms.

Now, as old pupils meet not as Gam or Siddons, not as Daisy or Silurian, but as one, the bridge is fully built. And there's something very Welsh - and very right - about the new Brecon Grammar Schools Association.

Mike Peters (GAM) 1951-56

1954 Photo of Boys' School

Below are three sections of the panoramic photo of the school pupils that was taken in 1954, my last year. The senior pupils and the teachers are seated and I can name most of them. Some sadly are no longer with us.

The junior pupils are in the front row and they would now be in their early 80s if still alive. We'd like to hear from those who are still alive. Where do you live and what are you doing in retirement?

There is one famous story about a boy who one year was at the end of the row where the photographer began filming and ran to the other end so that he appeared in the photo twice. That was not in 1954. Does anyone know when that happened and who the boy was?



Seated: from left: ?, WP Roderick, WEP Price*, H Moses*, AW Lloyd, Tony Hepton, David George, Parry Richards, ?, Peter Twist*, Tony Ottewell*, Garfield Powell*, Michael Williams

*Signifies deceased Old Boys.



Seated from left: Mr Taylor, Cliff Giles, HC Jones, JE Davies, JH Williams, L Lewis, Jacob Morgan, Dr G Price, HP Roberts, LC Moses, WH Williams, Mrs M Timothy, TH Harvard



Seated from left: AC Went*, L Pritchard, GL Davies*, D Davies, POEvans*, R Lucas, RM Howell, ?, RG Tucker, ?, B Pritchard, ?, DJ Chatfield, ?

I've identified 8 who have died but there may be others of whom I'm unaware. Please let me know if there are any errors.

Michael Williams

Soccer and Cricket Snapshots

Even when the pull of the past has been relegated into the shadows and lost in the mists of nostalgia there are reminiscences which are embellished with flights of fancy. By raking over the smouldering coals of the past and hoovering up memories the sobering reality check would suggest that much energy was challenged into sport, particularly soccer and cricket. In pre-rugby days soccer was a virtual obsession and the school had traditionally nurtured and produced talented players who played at a high level. Although there was organised coaching or training, enthusiastic wildly excited pupils would cut their supposed footballing skills on the rather confined playground at Cradoc Road and possibly with more elbow room at Penlan. During breaks and lunchtime there was mass participation when a screaming melee would kick the living lights of a tiny tennis ball and each other. One is reminded of Dylan Thomas' phrase "the headless" when the horde fizzed with pumped up adrenaline and triumphal bestiality reminiscent of Hogwarts on steroids. In the more civilised environment out of school one tended to take on the role of a self dramatising poser featuring as the star in one's own football match.

Representing one's house was generally considered to be the first step on the road to the football stardom in the school team. Often as players we have an exaggerated opinion of our talents just as "hedgehogs think that they have curls" (Bohemian proverb). Every playing generation tends to think somewhat arrogantly that their team was the best school XI ever and superior to their antecedents.

A number of successful teams have, however, featured in earlier editions of the newsletter. The present generation without a school team cannot visualise what life was like in those heady days. It is self evident that in sport as in all spheres of life preparation and planning prevent poor performance. However, tapping into nostalgia, these deficiencies were compensated for in Henry Ford's words: "coming together is the beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success". Playing together in the school XI did generate a closeness and teamwork which though vivid then is now a faded fragment in a corner of a highly detailed tapestry of our lives.

The earliest record we have is of the 1925 XI captained by OT Lewis with C Rogers as vice. In that season they played 14 games of which they won 10 drew 2 and lost 2. Amongst our opponents were the schools at

Builth and Abergavenny and interestingly the ministerial students at the Memorial College, Brecon. The latter students did not show either Christian charity or the milk of human kindness when they were armed with football boots. More significant, perhaps, was the performance of the cricket XI for that season, playing 16 games winning 14 of them. Captaining the team was TJ Pugh with two members of staff, Lewis Lewis and Dr Costigan in their ranks. The star performer was IR Lewis who scored two not-out centuries as well as on one occasion taking six wickets for six runs. No wonder that he was presented with a bat signed by Jack Hobbs by the South Wales News.

Not being a particularly effective performer I did eventually after years in the shadows squeeze into the 1949-50 1st XI, which played 19 games (with several cancelled because of weather conditions) with 11 wins, five draws and three defeats towards the end of the season. Impressive results included the 7-0 defeat of Talgarth with the school striker DT Pritchard scoring six goals and then the defeat of a Brecon Boys' XI by 9-2 with Pritchard scoring another six goals. The most satisfying result was the 7-2 win over the Old Boys' XI on the wet mud-soaked school field in December 1945. Those of the Cradoc Road vintage will recall only too well what it was like to try and play football on the soggy slope with a heavy leather ball. In the words of FH Jones, the eminent Builth poet, players left after the game "bedraggled with grass and stained with sheep droppings". If I may be permitted a personal reference to my performance in the Old Boys' game, according to a post match reprise by Jacob Morgan, "Powell ploughed through mud and opposition alike". I don't know whether I should have taken his comment as a compliment. There was no mention of ball skills, passing ability, positioning, etc. Generally my play resembled that of a dog listening to several whistles. The Old Boys took that defeat to heart so for the return match they assembled a formidable cohort of former school stars but we still defeated them 1-0.

Of all performances by any school team the most apocryphal was the cricket match against the staff in 1955 recorded in poetic form by OJ Wallis.

THE STAFF CRICKET MATCH

Can we forget that Fatal Day
When Staff the Scholars had to play?
These learned men who teach us all
Just could not handle bat and ball.

Biceps creak and stomachs rumble;
Catches come and wickets tumble.
In and out like Shôn and Shan
Our hapless band of masters ran.

In fairness to their case, we add
Ten men and true were all they had.
What would have happened, who can tell,
But for the lion hearted Bell?

The ducks were flying on that day,
And to complete our roundelay,
Staff - three runs, twelve their total score!
So - three from twelve? We say no more.

The late Glyn Powell

My Experience as a Film Extra

Dandelion Dead

Having retired from teaching in 1991 I was 54 years of age and still fit and active as my previous article has indicated, in 1994 a new experience raised its head - that of the opportunity to appear in a film!

That year the peaceful existence of Hay-on-Wye was disturbed when a film company descended upon the town for the purpose of making a film entitled “Dandelion Dead” about the famous Herbert Armstrong’s poisoning of his wife Katherine in the 1920s. There was much excitement when it was made known that the producers of the film were in need of many extras to play background characters, and interviews were advertised for those wishing to take part. Even though I was busy I could not let that opportunity pass so I put my name forward and was called for an interview. In the interview I emphasised the fact that I was physically able, played all sports including having coached tennis. To my surprise I was accepted and having left my contact information I was told they would be in touch when they would need me.

Over the time that it took to complete the film I was called quite a few times - in a tennis match with the star Michael Kitchen; at a wedding reception, at a funeral, in a Masonic Lodge, in a cemetery as a gravedigger in a coffin lifting scene during which I was soaked in a fake rainstorm, in several street scenes, and as a reporter at the famous trial.

It was a time of great excitement in the town but having completed the filming the company disappeared and the town returned to normal and I returned to the routine of golf and books!

The Feast of July

In 1995 I again saw an advert asking for extras to play background characters in the film entitled “The Feast of July”, and adaptation of the novel by H.E. Bates. Having had some experience, I decided to put my name forward again. I was lucky to be accepted. This time however the filming was to be in Monmouth which was 25 miles away, but I thought it would be another experience and waited to be called.

On the first day that I was called I was taken to the costume department and dressed as a labourer in jodhpur like trousers, rough shirt, untidy waistcoat and old leather boots, and was told to go to the make-up department where over a period of an hour a huge grey furry beard was glued to my face! When this was completed I was taken onto the set which that day was a lane somewhere in the town. To my surprise I was led towards a huge cart horse and told to hold the reins. When shooting started a girl, the star, would be seen walking towards me and as she neared me I was to get the horse to walk past her. Everything then went quiet and along came the girl; when she reached the mark I urged the horse forward but he refused to move!

This scene was then attempted twice more but with the same result whereupon filming for the day was suspended. Was my face red!

Next day we tried again and this time it worked for poor old dobbie behaved beautifully. Strangely enough when I watched the film later that scene did not appear! I wonder why!

Parry Richards

My Experience of Competition in Academic Research

In my article “My Career in Academia” in last year’s newsletter I explained my plan to use a simple reaction, deamination, as an aid to studying the structure of glycoproteins. When I was in the USA during 1960-1962 I visited a biochemistry Professor in Boston and told him about my plan. This was a big mistake because I later discovered that he had told a French research group, with whom he collaborated, about my plan. This large well funded group then developed the method to study glycoprotein structure and published several papers on the subject. There was one problem with the method. The amino sugar, glucosamine, that was often linked to the protein moiety had an acetyl group attached to the nitrogen atom ($R-NHCOCH_3$) and this had to be removed before the deamination with nitrous acid could be used. My plan was to use hydrazine to remove the acetyl group. However the French group made a mistake by using an unsuitable control compound to test the hydrazine reaction. I pointed this error out and they and others eventually established conditions for the successful use of hydrazine followed by deamination.

By 1975 I had studied the deamination of several amino sugars and in two cases the results were unexpected. I provided explanations for the results. One of these was challenged by a Professor in the USA.

He argued that the hydroxyl group (OH) in the product had come from water. When I attended an International Conference in the States I met one of his students who told me that she had been instructed by her supervisor not to talk to me about her research! I eventually proved my explanation by repeating the reaction using water labelled with the oxygen-18 isotope ($H_2^{18}O$). Analysis of the product by mass spectrometry showed that the product did not contain ^{18}O .

I hope this has given you a flavour of the competition that occurs in academic research.

Can you, dear reader write about challenges you have met in your career?

Michael Williams

Rugby Team - 1956

The photo below is from the collection of the late Bill Leonard. Rugby was introduced to the school by the new headmaster Aneurin Rees, and according to Andrew Thomas this was the first rugby match played by the school. The opponents were Cyfarthfa Boys' Grammar School and the match was played on the South



Wales Borderers' pitch in the Watton. The 1956 issue of the Silurian reports that the match was played on 26th March and was lost 17-11.

Andrew has identified the players below.

Brynmore Like did not play; he was the reserve. He appeared in the photo in place of Alan (DA) Thomas who was unavailable for the photo.

Back row: Ron Arthur, John (JF) Stroud, Twynog (IT) Williams, Roger (RB) Williams, Hywel David, Andrew (GAH) Thomas, Brynmore (CB) Like, Aneurin Rees

Middle row: Stephen (SJ) Pritchard, Bernard Bell, Bernard Pritchard, Robert Pritchard, Windsor Griffiths, John Taylor, Arwel (JA) Edwards

Front row: Geraint Jones, Lyndsey (TL) Powell

How many of these players are still alive? We would like to hear from the survivors!

Michael Williams

Memories from the Era of Miss A. B. Jones, the fourth Headmistress of the Girls' Grammar School

(Excerpts from "Memories of Brecon Girls County Grammar School" by the late Gwyneth Morris)

Miss A. B. Jones, a first class Honours History graduate with an MA degree at UCW Aberystwyth, was appointed in 1953 and served until 1971. Mrs Mariane Morgan (née Price, 1952-1959) recalls that high standards were demanded. Girls were not expected to argue or answer back. Eating ice cream in the street was forbidden. Mrs Hilary Evans (née Like, 1966-1973) remembers that girls were not allowed to roll their sleeves above the elbows. Arms were to be covered if boys came to share lessons.

After the Boys' School was relocated to Penlan Mrs Anne Evans (née Griffiths, 1962-1969) recalls "official contact was limited. In fact a fence was erected outside rooms 6 and 7 and the Geography room on top of the school wall to prevent the passing boys and lorry drivers from disturbing our lessons."

In September 1962 there were 420 pupils and Mrs Evans writes "there was nowhere for us to have needlework lessons with Mrs Jones so we had to be escorted down to Bethel Chapel Schoolroom by two prefects - crocodile fashion - and in full school uniform. In our second year our form room was on the stage (due to lack of space) but by the third or fourth form three "prefabs" had been erected on the top tennis courts. This was convenient for waving to the boys".

Miss Jones was a strong supporter of Physical Training having been responsible for it at Presteigne County School in 1937-1939. Mrs Jennifer Conway (née Brookes, 1947-1954), who taught Physical Education from 1957 to 1967, recalls "The school teams benefitted from access to the excellent games facilities at Penlan." With her encouragement and dedication high standards were achieved.

Upon the introduction of Comprehensive Schools in 1971 Gwyneth Morris observed "in retrospect it seems ironic that, 75 years after so much effort was expended on securing secondary education for girls, the loss of single sex status and a secure structure for women teachers passed largely unremarked. Supporters quote evidence that many high achieving women were educated in single sex schools.

The vivid accounts of school life illustrate features often criticised by the system's opponents. They claim that, by enforcing large numbers of petty rules about dress, deportment and conduct, the staff had become trapped by the notion of 'double conformity', which had become an end in itself. The emphasis on restrained, ladylike behaviour, which would now be considered sexist, originally prepared girls for the superior occupations to be attained by academic success. As well as being a relic of the Victorian chaperonage rules, the school's attitude to boys indicates a fear of distraction from academic work. Girls grammar schools are alleged to have equated an interest in the opposite sex with a lack of serious commitment to study. Advocates of co-education claim that they lacked the reality of the bi-sexual world.

Does anyone have recollections of Mrs Jones?

[Gwyneth Morris entered UCW Aberystwyth in 1952 with a State Scholarship. After gaining a BA Honours degree in Latin in 1955 and a Diploma in Education in 1956, she began her teaching career at West Bridgford Grammar School, Nottingham. From 1957 to 1965 she was Senior Classics Mistress at Queen Elizabeth Grammar School for Girls, Carmarthen. She died on 29th March, 2025]

Eleven and Out!

By Mike Peters, Llanfaes CP School - and proud to wear the green colours of Gam and the Light Infantry.

At just 11 years old, we sat in silence, in classrooms scattered across Breconshire, clutching pencils, papers, and the weight of expectation. The exam arrived in a sealed envelope from the Welsh Joint Education Council, and its effect was swift; it sorted us, not by name or nature, but by how we performed on one particular day.

Pass - and for the boys, it meant a place at Brecon County Grammar School, up on the town's Cradoc Road, where the masters wore gowns, football was played on a sloped pitch that rivalled Yeovil's, and Latin verbs loomed larger than the Brecon Beacons, which stretched out in front of the playground in all their splendour – and a beauty and fascination that haunts me still in leafy Surrey.

For the girls, it meant a daily trek to location a good mile away on Cerrigochion Road - a school equally proud, equally academic, and perched on a hill every bit as steep as the boys' own.

We seldom mixed. Separate schools. Separate staff rooms. Separate corridors, cultures, and chalk. But we shared something just as strong: the experience of having passed, of having been told, at eleven plus, that we were “grammar school material.”

But not all of us were told that.

Those who didn't pass the 11-plus were sent instead to the Secondary Moderns, or to technical schools. There were fine teachers there, and good pupils, and worthy lives built without Latin or logarithms. But make no mistake - the system didn't treat them as equals. Their curriculum was different, their opportunities narrower, and too often their potential was underestimated.

At the grammar schools, meanwhile, the aim was unapologetically academic. We were trained not just to sit exams but to think seriously. To argue. To speak up. To aspire. The boys had Mr Giles on the cricket pitch, issuing calm commands like “That's enough wickets for you - don't batter the opposition,” while the girls had their own version of discipline and ambition, delivered, we're told, with slightly better handwriting and vastly neater exercise books.

And with the authority of an outstanding headmistress Miss A B Jones, rejoiced in the nickname of Annie Be Joyful. I can remember my sister, Yvonne being in some awe of her school leader but like Jake Morgan, our own head, she was dedicated to her charges.

Ah! Another memory slips in. All the laughter as in our first month in school we learned that we all had other names. Nicknames abounded. Which do you recall? My great friend John James Price started as JJ, but the maths master christened him J Squared, and it stayed with him for the rest of his marvellously successful life.

Norman became Ed; Gareth became Andrew and so on. So, we were melded in a sea of names our parents might find bewildering. We started a journey of a life time. Yes, I had a special name too, not one I am consciously proud of. I was handed it by the same maths teacher who did not take kindly to a large ink blob on the front page of my homework. So for my years at Cradoc Road I endured the reputation of Mucky Mickey.

Some of us stayed on for sixth form. Others left early for apprenticeships, jobs, or the looming spectre of National Service. A few, like me, had the tempting offer of a job at the local newspaper, and I took it - beginning a life in words, rather than further exams.

Over time, the grammar school system faded - not because it failed, but because it was seen to divide. Dividing children by perceived ability became unfashionable. Equality of access replaced selection. And the 11-plus - once a national moment - became a historical footnote.

Today the Cradoc Road building stands forlorn and empty and the Cerrigochion Road site is long gone, now being occupied by housing. But the ghosts linger in the minds of all who walked those corridors, wore those caps, recited “amo, amas, amat,” and waited for their O-Level results with dry mouths and pounding hearts.

The new Brecon Grammar Schools' Association now unites us - Old Boys and Old Girls—whose paths once ran parallel and now converge. When we meet, when we read our annual journal, we share more than memories. We share a legacy.

The grammar schools were not perfect. But they were serious places that took us seriously. And for that, we remain grateful. For the lucky, the 11-plus opened a door. But we also remember those it kept out - and the quiet truth that at eleven, no one is fully formed.

And yet, somehow, on a hill in Brecon, we were given a chance. And we made something of it.

Sic transit gloria mundi!

Correction of “Memories from Brecon in the 1950s”

In the article by Gwyneth Morris in last year’s newsletter there is one error which has been pointed out by Elizabeth Barlow. In the photo below the girl circled in the front row is not Gillian Richards but Rhiannon Pennar Davies. Gillian Richards, Janet’s sister is holding the balloon.



Gwyneth died on 29th March 2025.

Michael Williams

SHAUN J. GALLAGHER (1940 – 2025)

Shaun was born and grew up in Hay-on-Wye. Between 1945 and 1952 he attended Hay County Primary School. In 1952 he passed the 11+ exam and went to Brecon Boys Grammar School.

At the Grammar School he soon made his presence felt as a top-class footballer and athlete. He captained the school junior and senior soccer teams and during the summer term he was an outstanding athlete, particularly as a sprinter and long jumper.

He left the grammar school in 1959 and in 1960 went to Cardiff College of Education, an establishment renowned for producing top-class teachers of physical education. At Cardiff he studied Physical Education (PE) and English.

After qualifying in 1963 his first teaching post was in Hornchurch, Essex, But after a short spell in Essex he was successful in obtaining a similar post, nearer home, in Herefordshire at Canon Frome School. After about 4 years at Canon Frome he moved to a newly formed and larger school in Hereford itself - Haywood High School, where he spent the remainder of his teaching career.

During this period his soccer skills were put to good effect – he played for Hay St. Marys FC in the Hereford league, Kington Town FC in the Mid-Wales league and finally (a much higher standard this) Cinderford Town FC in the West Midland league where he was Player/Manager.

He retired from the permanent staff at Haywood in 1995 but spent periods as a supply teacher at Haywood and other Herefordshire schools

After his retirement he and I spent many happy days (and weeks) country walking, something which had always been one of his passions and something which he and I had vowed to do.

Sometimes these were “shortish” walks in Herefordshire or Powys, sometimes much longer treks embracing Offa's Dyke Path, Pembrokeshire Coast Path, the Ridgeway Path, the Lake District, the Wye Valley Walk (not all at once!) and many others too numerous to mention.

He and I joined the Old Boys Association at a time when Cliff Carr was Chairman. We became regulars at the Annual Dinner as well as committee members. In 2011 Shaun was appointed President of the Association.

Finally, he was a keen admirer of poetry, particularly the “romantics”, Dylan Thomas amongst them.

“Do not go gentle into that good night

Old age should burn and rave at close day

Rage, rage against the dying of the light

Do not go gentle into that good night”

David Gittins

Obituaries

Roland Jenkins (1947-1954)

Hay boy, Roland, left school after his A-levels and began work as an apprentice at the South Wales Switchgear Factory in Blackwood. He worked his way up to become an electrical draftsman, completing 40 years service with the company. He was interested in motor cycle racing and Formula 1, attending many events. He also had a passion for music, going to Elton John and Billy Joel concerts over many years.

John Kiely

John joined the Grammar School in about 1944 when he travelled to school by train from Sennybridge. He was a conscientious pupil who won a place at Bangor to study Maths and then went to Kings College, London where he specialised in set theory. He then taught at several universities and ended up as Head of the Maths and Computing Department at Leeds Polytechnic. He died in March 2025 aged 93.

Gwyneth Morris

After gaining a BA Honours degree in Latin and a Diploma in Education from UCW Aberystwyth, Gwyneth taught at Nottingham for one year, Carmarthen from 1957 to 1965 and then in Surrey and Wiltshire Primary schools. In 1993 she was awarded an MA in Historical Studies after part time study at Oxford Brookes University. In 1996 she gained an M Ed degree after part time study at Bath College of Higher Education.

Andrew John Malham (1957-?)

Andrew left school to follow a carpentry apprenticeship with Walters Builders locally. He went to work in London for a period but then returned to Brecon and joined the Civil Service in the Property Services Department. His job entailed supervision and management of the army ranges around Sennybridge. During this time he took a twelve month secondment to work in Gibraltar.

Alan Richard Dawkins (1956-1972)

Past head of Crickhowell High School

Shaun Gallagher (1952-1959)

Hay boy Shaun joined the Grammar School in 1952 and soon made his presence felt as a top class footballer and athlete. He captained the school junior and senior soccer teams. After school he graduated from Cardiff College of Education having studied PE and English. After teaching in a few schools he ended his career at Haywood High School, Hereford. He was President of the OBA in 2011-2012. For more see page 26.

Ron Tucker (1949-1955)

After good academic results at school Ron attended U.C.W. Bangor to study Latin and Greek. After graduating he completed his teaching diploma at Bangor. His first teaching post was at Bishop's Castle High School in Shropshire where he taught Latin and English. He later taught at Bridgewater in Dr Morgan's Grammar School and then Haygrove High School where he became Head of English.

Would anyone who has news of former pupils who have died please let Tom Protheroe or Michael Williams know.

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