

***Cylchlythyr Cymdeithas Cyn-Ddisgyblion Ysgol Ramadeg y
Bechgyn, Aberhonddu
Mawrth 2012***

Brecon Grammar School Old Boys' Association Newsletter March 2012

Last year's newsletter featured two articles that described some post-school experiences of Old Boys. It is good to read of successful careers of Old Boys, including those who had disappointing examination results. This year we have a fascinating account, "*Don't knock a Grammar School Education*," of Mike Peters' career and some interesting reflections on school life. There is also the first instalment, entitled "*Reflections on an Education*," of a contribution from Tony Hepton. Contributions are invited for the next newsletter; these can range from a short letter or paragraph to one or more pages about any topic you think might interest Old Boys.

Last year Harley Simpson's article "*Brecon School Days - a bitter sweet memoir*" ruffled a few feathers with critical comments about the Plough. In my discussions with Old Boys about his comments I found that the principle sentiment was that, despite the shortcomings of your situation, you just got on with life. Obviously not everyone enjoyed school; one of my contemporaries, who was an outstanding sportsman and became a Physical Education teacher, is not enthusiastic about his school days.

A few years ago the idea of a web site for the Association was floated in a committee meeting and it has finally come to fruition. The web site is at www.brecongrammar.org and readers are invited to provide feedback and comment via the "Contact Us" page. If you know any Old Boys who are not members of the Association, they might be interested in the web site which includes, inter alia, details of the current officers and committee members and an archive of all the newsletters published since 2003.

Cyhoeddwyd dwy erthygl yng nghylchlythyr llynedd yn disgrifio profiadau Cyn Ddisgyblion ar ôl gadael yr ysgol. Mae'n hyfryd cael darllen am yrfaedd llwyddiannus Hen Ddisgyblion, gan gynnwys y sawl a gafodd canlyniadau arholiadol siomedig. Eleni, mae gennym ddisgrifiad diddorol o yrfa Mike Peters a'i synfyfyriadau dwys ar fywyd ysgol. Hefyd ceir y rhan gyntaf o gyfraniad gan Tony Hepton yn dwyn y teitl "*Reflections on an Education*". Gwahoddir cyfraniadau ar gyfer y rhifyn nesaf; gall y rhain amrywio o lythyr byr i dudalen neu ddwy ar unrhyw destun a allai fod o ddiddordeb i'r Hen Ddisgyblion.

Cynhyrfwyd nifer o ddarllenwyr rhifyn llynedd gan sylwadau beirniadol am y Plough yn erthygl Harley Simpson, sef "*Brecon School Days - a bitter sweet memoir*". Wrth drafod ei sylwadau gyda nifer o'r Hen Fechgyn, cefais mai y prif deimlad oedd bod rhaid ichi fwrw ymlaen gyda'ch bywyd, beth bynnag eich amgylchiadau. Mae'n amlwg nad oedd yr ysgol at ddant pawb; nid yw un o'm cydoedolion yn frwd o gwbl am ei ddyddiau yn yr ysgol, er iddo fod yn gampwr ardderchog a aeth ymlaen i fod yn athro Ymarfer Corff.

Awgrymwyd gwefan newydd i'r Gymdeithas mewn cyfarfod pwyllgor nifer o flynyddoedd yn ôl, ac mae hynny wedi dwyn ffrwyth o'r diwedd. Ceir y wefan o dan www.brecongrammar.org ac erfynwn ar ddarllenwyr i roi olborth a sylwadau trwy gyfrwng y dudalen "*Contact Us*". Os ydych yn gwybod am unrhyw Hen Ddisgyblion sydd ddim yn aelodau, gall fod ganddynt ddiddordeb yn y wefan sydd yn cynnwys, ymhlith pethau eraill, manylion o'r swyddogion ac aelodau pwyllgor cyfredol ac archif o'r holl gylchlythyron a gyhoeddwyd ers 2003.

Events of 2011

On Saturday 30th April 72 members and guests attended the 62nd **Annual Reunion Dinner** at the George Hotel. This was a lower attendance than usual, possibly because of the clash with the May Bank Holiday weekend. It was also unfortunate that the reunion clashed with the Old Girls' Annual reunion lunch, something we must avoid in future. Our new chairman, Glyn Powell, warmly welcomed members and guests, and in his introductory remarks referred to the loss of several Old Boys in addition to those listed in the obituaries section of the newsletter. President David Gittins was then invited to give his address. He began by relating that he and David Price, who was a year older, were both placed 44th in the pass list for the 11+ examination; age was to prove important later. As a Plough boy David found the conditions there were poor and confirmed that the roof did leak, as reported by others. Consolations of being at the Plough were the proximity to the station and the Café Royal. One teacher who made a big impression was Harvey (Taffy) Williams, the Welsh teacher. He was very critical of boys' accents, and did not like pranksters. On one occasion he caned every member of the class when the miscreant did not own up. However whilst Taffy was regarded as a tyrant, he did achieve good examination results and David did have an affection for him. When David was promoted to an A class his age meant he had to enter 3A instead of 4A (others have had similar experiences, and even had to repeat years because they were too young to advance!). David especially enjoyed football and admits that his enthusiasm for soccer was at the expense of his academic work. As a Hay boy he travelled to school by train and witnessed much bad behaviour, especially when the train carrying pupils in the opposite direction to Gwernyfed School, stopped at



Trefeinon station. In his last year at school he was very inspired by the new Geography teacher Curtis Grove, but it was too late because he failed his A-level examinations. However he then entered the Civil Service where he enjoyed a successful career culminating in Whitehall.

Vice President Shaun Gallagher then proposed a vote of thanks to the President for his address, to his committee colleagues and the George Hotel staff for their excellent service. He then accepted the chain of office from President Gittins (on right in photo).

The **annual prize giving** was held at Brecon High School on 12 July 2011 when the Guest of Honour was Richard Griffiths. President Shaun Gallagher, Tom Protheroe,

Wyndham Jones and Michael Williams represented the Old Boys' Association. The evening was entitled "Celebration Evening" and it was indeed a wonderful celebration of the talents of the pupils who presented performances of choral and instrumental music, dance, recitations, drama and slapstick silent comedy which enthralled the audience. President Gallagher presented prizes to the winners of the Geoffrey Meredith Powell prizes, and the Keith and Marilyn Evans prizes (ten in all). Two recipients are



featured in the photos below, Daniel Abbott who received the senior Powell prize, and Bridie Jones who received the Evans Key Stage 4 Mathematics prize. The recipient, Darren Harris, of the Cliff Carr prize was absent; he was a member of the Rugby Academy. Guest Richard Griffiths gave a very inspiring talk in which he said that despite having left school early he had become a businessman with 17 businesses in 23 countries. The key to success was determination.

The **Memorial Service** was held at Brecon High School on Armistice Day, the first time it has been held on a date containing six identical digits (11/11/11). This dignified service, held to remember those who gave their lives in two world wars and later conflicts, was attended as usual by Old Boys and representatives of the school governors. After readings by senior pupils the names of those who had fallen in World Wars I and II were read out by Sergeant Gary Buchanan, representing the military and Vice President Wyndham Jones, representing the Old Boys' Association. After the



sounding of the Last Post, a minute's silence and the Reveille, wreaths were laid on the memorial plaque by President Shaun Gallagher and the senior prefect and the youngest pupil. This was followed by an address by the Rev. Michael

Hodgson, who began by referring to the first British soldier to die in 1914, one John Parr who was 16 years old, having lied about his age to gain admittance to the Army. Despite the hopes of the Treaty of Versailles, signed in 1919, we continue to lose members of the armed forces to this day. The Rev. Hodgson's prayers included a plea for the politicians to strive to find non violent solutions to current conflicts. The photo above, taken after the service, contains the Old Boys, senior pupils, the Rev. Hodgson and acting head teacher Miss Vikki Prosser.

Biographical Notes

Wyndham Jones (1949-55): Vice President

Wyndham, a Llangattock boy, was a member of Siddons although his three elder brothers were in Vaughan! Having won several solo competitions in school, it was not surprising that he met his wife in an Operatic Society. After starting work as a Laboratory Assistant, he eventually progressed to Management, whilst at the same time studying part time for professional qualifications in Chemistry and a Diploma in Management Studies. Extra curricular activities included squash, tennis, golf and the governorship of Breconhurost College. Wyndham returned to Wales to join his son and family in 2005 after the death of his wife Brenda.

Glenys Evans - remembered (1941-45)

I think that when we look back on our lives all of us can recollect certain critical moments, such as marriage, the birth of ones children and the death of loved ones. I know from many conversations with Glenys that the 9th of September 1941, three days after her 22nd birthday, was another of those days, for that is when she became a teacher in Brecon Boys' Grammar School.

She was a single, attractive young woman and this was her first job. It was also a memorable day for the school because no woman had ever entered that staff room before. It was a small school but its standards were high. However, she impressed everybody with her vitality and dedication to her responsibilities, which were threefold. As she expected, she taught English and Welsh to the Junior forms but she was surprised that her timetable included teaching gymnastics to the Junior and Senior boys. In the gym there was no problem but getting the boys to leave the showers was somewhat embarrassing, for as she told me, many times, 'Ken, there was no problem with you Juniors but some of the Seniors were young men!'

Her closest friend amongst the staff was the French teacher and through him his wife Olwen. After Glenys's and Olwen's husbands died they continued to attend the Old Boys' Reunion dinners. But the teacher with whom she had almost daily contact outside of the school premises could not have been more different. He was the History teacher, a 40 year old, scholarly, bachelor Englishman. Brecon has been a military centre almost for ever and during the war there were about 5,000 soldiers in the area so this teacher, who lived not far from her, escorted Glenys back to her lodgings after school every day and most mornings to school.

Butter, eggs and cheese were strictly rationed in Skewen but most people in Brecon, including the police, were able to obtain these products, illegally, from farmers. So

when Glenys returned home each Friday to Skewen her suitcase often carried more than clothes and books!

When the war ended the teacher she had been recruited to replace returned so Glenys left and moved to Cardiff, much to the regret of the boys and I think the staff. The boys



she taught remember her with affection and I know she felt that there couldn't have been a better start to her teaching career than her four years in Brecon.

When Glenys was 87, her son David brought her to the last of her very many Old Boys' Dinners when the then President of the Association described her as 'our Betty Grable' – which shows how old we are.

[The photo shown is dated 1941]

Ken Jones

Caerwyn Eifion Roderick (1954-57)

Caerwyn joined the staff of Brecon Grammar School in 1954 to teach Maths and Science after teaching posts in Surrey and the East End of London. One former pupil has written (in his account of "A country boy's reminiscences": <http://www.brecknocksociety.co.uk/translations.htm>) "Mr Roderick was more than tolerant when I failed to display any brilliance in Mathematics". He then worked as a Methods Engineer for the National Coal Board before returning to teaching at Hartridge Comprehensive School in Newport where he held the post of Head of Maths. He next joined the staff of the then Cyncoed College, later named University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC), to train teachers. He then became a Member of Parliament for Labour in 1970. He always considered it a great privilege to represent the people of Brecon and Radnor. He enjoyed the challenges and made many good friends. He retained a strong interest in education and finished his career as Wales Officer for the NUT, a perfect ending which gave him more time to pursue his love of cricket and rugby.

Reflections on an Education

After about six years at Talgarth Elementary School I made the big move to Brecon County Grammar School for Boys in the Autumn of 1947. For a 10 year old it was a dramatic change but fortunately I was not alone, and a number of us met at the Talgarth railway station where we were issued passes to ride the train to and from Brecon. We got to meet the teachers who demanded respect from the moment they entered the class room until they left; sometimes the respect was ensured by a variety of techniques that today would be considered illegal.

Not long into the first year I received an assessment from history teacher Doug Inglis, he said "Hepton, you are one of those Talgarth Gutter Snipes and you will never amount

to anything". That did not sit well with me and I never forgot his tone of voice and an attitude that was intended to make me feel worthless. It had just the opposite effect, but I never passed a single test in his classes as he was not worthy of my time or effort.

Fortunately there were many other teachers who inspired and nurtured me in areas I found to be of interest.

At the outset it was a challenge to attend to the daily requirements of study and home work. Not all of the other Talgarth boys in my class gave the same level of effort to their home work, so I was usually greeted on the train with "Heppy, let's see the answers". I already knew from observations that being uncooperative could have dire consequences. Every day we spent a few minutes in the tunnel as the train left Talylllyn station, and a with a twist of the light bulb and we were in the dark. At the other end of the tunnel many a boy was left looking for belongings, or missing items of clothing or getting stuffed under a seat! On one occasion a mistake in arithmetic led to four of us being marched into the headmasters office for the crime of cheating; some discipline was dispensed and the headmaster assured us that it hurt him so much more than us.

My life changed for ever once we were allowed to opt out of History and those other 'Arts' classes to focus on Physics, Chemistry and Maths. After O levels I became part of the Science group, a select company of friends who travelled to the Girls High School for Chemistry; the girls came to our school for Physics, and instead of Maths, I selected Botany. I was the only student in that class and I received instruction in the Biology classes given at the girls school, O level in the first year and A level in the second.

We developed in sports too. For me cricket was a passion; I played at home with my brothers, for the Mid Wales Hospital on the weekends, and during the summers and I was a steady pace bowler on the school team. The track and field sports allowed other personal development as we were taught techniques in shot put, javelin, high jump and race walking. The latter was a natural for me as I was already walking six miles a day to and from and between schools. Twice I won the event for the school in the Brecon and Radnor county meets and twice I represented the counties in the Welsh National events, not bad for a Gutter Snipe!

When the A levels were over, and yes I did pass all three, we started the interview process for University. I was accepted at the University of Nottingham and won a Ministry of Agriculture scholarship that covered all of my expenses to study Horticulture. In three years I was awarded my B Sc (Hons) in Horticulture, but learned so much more. This was a time of independence and learning personal responsibility, and I was fortunate in having fine professors who not only taught their subjects well, but also guided the students to prepare them for professional lives.

The quality of education in both high school and University made me confident that I could tackle a new style of education, that took me to Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, USA. My mother went with me to Southampton, put me on the SS Ryndam with the confident reminder that the family had done all they could for me and I was now on my own.

Education at Cornell was quite different. At first it was quite easy as the English University system is in many ways more demanding and more independent. My Bachelors thesis from Nottingham was accepted as equivalent to a Masters Thesis allowing me to focus on a PhD degree in Vegetable Crops with minors in Plant Physiology, Plant Anatomy and Morphology. I also took courses in Plant Biochemistry, Organic Chemistry and Calculus, with language requirements in French and German. The advanced courses were both challenging and enriching. Living away from home taught me frugality and developed a desire to succeed with scant resources.

In 1960 I got married to Estelle Young a student in Industrial and Labour Relations, from Hawaii. I had a soul mate with whom I could struggle through the latter years of my education. We were both from families of limited means, none of whom could attend our wedding, so during the following year we took out loans and travelled to see my family in England and Estelle's family in Hawaii. We won approval on both fronts. During my stay at Cornell, I captained their cricket team for four years, travelling over much of the Eastern US with a very international team. I was also elected Graduate Student Representative to the Student Council, and this turned out to be great training for many future community and business associations. In 1963 my mother and my youngest brother came to Cornell to witness my being awarded a PhD degree, so there Doug Inglis!

We all went to Hawaii for a much needed holiday. Estelle, mother and I all found employment there, and my young brother went to high school. So started a 40 year career working for Dole Food Company, but that is another story.

Tony Hepton (1946-1954)

Don't Knock a Grammar School Education

by

Mike Peters 1951-57

Was it relief, euphoria, disappointment or sadness to walk out of the old school in 1957? To tell the truth, then I was not sure, but now I think it was a mixture of all four. Though I must add my school years were not the bitter sweet experience of Harley Simpson as told in last year's newsletter.

I really sympathise with Harley and others who endured the second-hand existence of The Plough but I know several old boys who not only survived the leaking roofs and tortuous journeying, but came out to pursue successful careers

I also found it difficult to match up with Harley's tales of bullying teachers. It was not my experience. However, I do accept, because I have researched other old boys' comments on various social networking sites that a minority of our teachers were not among the best. Is that not the case today? Neither would I argue with tales I have heard of boys being used as blackboard cleaners. They may have happened but I never saw them. If they did then I deplore them.

None of those actions should detract from other teachers who, as well as coping with a post war, and sometimes challenging, breed of boys who were not as deferential as their predecessors, but who also struggled with inadequate school buildings, tight budgets and a rigid and ridiculous curriculum – more of that later.

There were some teachers whom I disliked intensely both during and after my school days - I also admit that in the following years when I had the power of the fourth estate behind me that I took editorial revenge - but the majority were nice guys doing a difficult job.

I knew "Lousy" Lewis and his primary school teacher wife as kind and gentle near neighbours. Latin master "Kaiser" had been a legend even in my father's time. Doug Inglis (who was to defect to Christ College and call himself *Engels* in the Scottish

manner) was idiosyncratic but his teaching style was much more successful than that of his successor. It took me only a few essays to work out that if you followed his somewhat unusual style of punctuation then your marks increased dramatically.

Some years later I met English teacher, Aneurin Williams in a golf club. His memory of class mates was phenomenal and my advancement in journalism owed much to his teaching style and his caring personality. I can recall too, Phippen and his MG sports car. He took a special interest in boys with his own brand of devil-may-care personality. His views on life were invaluable to me and I loved his whisper-in-the-ear pieces of advice that came my way.

For me, at least, if there was *systematic bullying* it came not from the loud but not too painful application of a tennis shoe to the rear end, as favoured by one master and his acolyte prefect, but from a few senior boys who thought dishing out punishment by the writing of ridiculous lines was big. It wasn't - but to be fair most prefects were pretty reasonable and helpful to mischievous youngsters. I, and many others, quickly learned how to avoid this problem. As my father – also an old boy would say: What did you learn from it: The answer was *never get caught*

The comments on Christ College I found interesting but surprising. My uncle had twice been head boy at Christ College; my cousin was an Old Breconian and, in the 50s, two close friends were also pupils. If you think it was hard in Brecon Grammar then they too existed under similar, indeed sometimes harsher disciplinary regimes. My weekends were spent with them so I heard all the tales.

Admittedly there, the best went very far and today I recognise the still extant power of the old school tie. Some others became great sportsmen but as elsewhere, the college boys were still only academically average. I could have gone that route but my father had refused to join his brother because he thought grammar school was best. I am pleased he thought that way.

I wonder too, if Harley considered the times in which we lived. Britain was on its knees after the war. Money was tight everywhere and education did not receive the funding, or pampering, that it does in the 21st century. If the Plough leaked then give a thought to the generations at Cradoc Road who knew the place did not fall down because of strategically placed “pit props” in the main hall. We were warned never to run en masse up the stairs to the chem. lab. Such a school would have been condemned today. Penlan, when it came, was a revelation.

My opinion, for what it is worth, is that on the whole, Headmaster Jacob Morgan and his staff made the best of a difficult job. It will be good to hear other opinions. I am sure that my grammar school education took me a long way. I would not criticise the staff for teaching social graces or aspiring to make better people out of their pupils. Their ideas of discipline may have been forged in the war years but there are many who would argue that if we had a stronger sense of duty and a caring and sharing idea of society among school leavers today then our country would be much improved.

I joined the school in 1951 with a good intake of Llanfaes boys. Our primary school, now a car park, was run with similar iron discipline by Headmaster “Stumpy” Powell

and he had produced a cream crop that year. Old Stumpy was a hard man, though gentle with it, if you tried hard. He did have a disturbing habit of thumping pupils on the arm with his leather bound wrist.

The old saying is that school days are the best of your life. I suspect that is because some leave to enter dull and boring jobs, others lack the fire of ambition and never look to move upwards and fill life with experience. But isn't that the way, even today?

My school life was a mixture. Early struggles with illness held me back in year one but by the fifth form I was revelling in school society. I was riding high in the cricket side and, admittedly, a bit-of-a-lad in the social life of the boys' and girls' grammar schools.

There is one mystery at the old school that I have never resolved. The curriculum was rubbish and Welsh centric. Boys who were not natural Welsh speakers should never have been held back by being forced to attend the language lessons. It was not natural justice for non-speakers to end up in the bottom placings of that subject and thus find their overall year end class position lowered simply by their inability to speak conversational Welsh. I wonder how many would have achieved more at school and in life if they experienced the boost to morale of being in the top ten each school year. We non Welsh speakers were the majority and, frankly, disinterested. This may be a view unacceptable to some who wanted the Welsh language to flourish. But that was not the way to achieve that aim.

For those whose later years were marred by the lack of opportunity to alternatively study a modern language, or even two that would be valuable to employers or an extra science subject it is pertinent. If I had been allowed to concentrate on extra maths or to add physics to my chemistry results I would probably be writing here today as a Royal Navy officer and not a Colonel of the Territorial Army.

Nevertheless, I believe the school was enlightened to emphasise life studies and good manners. To attend ballroom dancing classes and have meetings with the Girls Grammar School was an eye-opener for a teenager. Rigidly controlled, as those gatherings were, I still muse that the fears of boys and girls being just that were overplayed. Most of us spent our weekends socialising anyway.

How willing the teachers were to help in those days. Cricket and football trips to what then seemed far away places like Builth Wells and Hay on Wye were always with an accompanying master to watch over and guide us. Cliff Giles was a genius at coaching our cricket team though I never forgave him for an evening match at Hay when he took me off bowling as I skittled through the early batsmen and then halted my triumphal progress as I cracked a rapid set of boundaries as the school's opening batsman. He was, of course, right and we should never beat up the opposition. I particularly regretted his passing and think now of the sacrifices his family made so that he could be with us on those Saturday outings.

Academically I should have worked harder and was bitterly disappointed at my O level results and the subsequent failure at re-sit of maths. It stopped me in my chosen career tracks. I really fancied captaining a motor torpedo boat in the Royal Navy and dashing around the Channel. However, I got my opportunity on the water much later. The

Army put me to work to earn a Skipper's Ticket and then when I owned several power boats – one with two big turbo-charged diesels - I could imagine what might have been.

That disappointment was muted by my second life choice of journalism and the long career that followed in the communications profession. It all started with the dear old Brecon & Radnor Express. Old fashioned, yes! Adverts on the front page until recent years.

Life was not all funeral reporting and village fetes for a young reporter struggling with the intricacies of Pitman's shorthand – we had to reach 140 words per minute and our notebooks were never destroyed but kept as a legal record. There were council meetings at which I began to understand the deeper, if sometimes darker side, of local politics; the magistrates courts where my eyes were opened to another side of town life with all its pitfalls, failures and desperations; the social club annual meetings and dinners where I learned so much about human nature. I attended so many chicken dinners- a delicacy in those days - that I sometimes wondered if I would grow feathers.

I saw the best side of the spirit of volunteering and the charity that was then commonplace. No wonder the government of today wants to revive and encourage that spirit.

There was too, in Brecon, a lot of community sport. I played cricket for Brecon Sports Club with my editor, John "Fruity" Morgan as my team mate. It was great fun, especially playing in the Old Boys versus the School cricket match. I recall my indignation of hitting the school side around the sports ground only to be given a very dubious lbw decision by my next door neighbour of the time. How can an umpire wear bottle top spectacles?

I was a founding member of the Brecon Rugby Club in the days when we played near the Promenade. We changed in an old chicken shed. The club struggled to establish itself in a town where soccer and the Brecon Corries were the team to support. It's good to see it so successful these days.

Table tennis was a strong league game in town and county and my round arm smash was famous, if not notorious, in the YMCA. But it was tennis that I really took to. Mind I think that a lot of that had to do with my future wife Gloria Lewis – sadly deceased – who was my partner then and could nearly always, infuriatingly, beat me.

Brecon was growing too small for me. I realised in my third year at the local newspaper that I no longer had to ask the names of the ladies on the cake stall, the white elephant, or the jumble sale. They were the same as last year. So I was off to make my way in the wide world.

My arrival, and accent, in the small town of Exmouth on Devon's east coast was enlightening for me and the broad-burred locals. I played rugby on the wing for Exmouth Town on my very first Saturday, and as the half time and full time whistles blew I dashed to a phone to file copy to the local evening newspaper. I could guarantee an extra pint or two in the bar from the guys who got a mention from then on.

To report back stage from the bikini fashion shows on the summer beaches was stuff of a young reporter's dreams. I am now familiar with everyone of Agatha' Christie's plays because the local pier-end show did one a week throughout the holiday season. And I got to go to the opening show party. There I found out about cocktails.

I discovered my home town newspaper training had been first class. I moved up to become a news sub-editor on the Exeter evening paper. Sub-editors sort the wheat from the chaff written by young reporters and write those catchy headlines that have become so fashionable in The Sun. Such headlines were plastered on newsroom walls. Unfortunately a colleague headed the final of the local table tennis derby *as Din Dong Ping Pong* which did not go well with the editor. He liked my initiative in taking off to the Royal Marines Commando depot and completing the tree top Tarzan course. That feature was still being used in recruiting circles years later.

Suddenly I also found myself given the chance to complete my education. The Express & Echo sponsored me for a diploma in journalism. Not easy - as it was just a one day a week release from the grind of the subs-room. Intense home studies and examinations in English Language and Literature, Economics, Politics, Law and more shorthand followed. It was a great honour to win, every year for three, the prizes presented by my newspaper and the print trade unions of Exeter. And to become the first in the Westcountry to pass.

The world was now my oyster. I moved to the Midlands as Features and then Sports Editor for the Hereford Evening News. A mention in the winning team of the Evening Newspaper design awards followed and then.....the dreaded redundancy.

But before they could say here are your papers I was off to a new world of poacher turned gamekeeper in public relations – a significant phrase for a young man whose father was the doyen of River Usk anglers and who knew every trick of the poachers' business. I joined Bristol Siddeley as editor of their much praised employee newspaper and the public relations team for Concorde – which was just about to fly. This was the start of a long association with aerospace and defence industries.

I went to work for blue chip companies like Rolls-Royce; Lucas Aerospace, Augusta of Italy, Westland Helicopters and British Aerospace where I was Director of Media Relations..... and travelled the world.

In between all this was a spell in Kuwait running the English language newspaper of the Ahmadi oil town and a successful role in the construction industry with the world famous Tarmac Group. And ten years working for the Government as an information officer in the Ministry of Defence and Department of Employment.

An exciting career: but there is more to tell. Boundless ambition was still with me and the words of Cliff Giles and Jacob Morgan were ringing in my ears – don't stop achieving. I interviewed Jacob Morgan, one of nature's gentlemen, several times. He was a gracious and most sincere man – despite the fact that he gave me six of the best, with my trousers around my ankles for playing shove ha'penny with Geraint Jones.

Surprisingly for one who desperately wanted to join the Royal Navy I found myself drawn to the Territorial Army. It was to get away from the day time job. Charging around with boots and bayonet on Dartmoor and Salisbury Plain was exciting and there was also a conscience to be assuaged. At the height of the Cold War I wanted to play a part. I became a Cold War Warrior and exercised as a British Army of the Rhine soldier for many years. First as a Provost Operations Officer with the Royal Military Police and then as a Light Infantryman. I “came home” when I joined the 5th Battalion the Light Infantry Volunteers. It was my ideal of professionalism and camaraderie and the volunteer spirit. Not for nothing were Territorials given the accolade “Twice the Citizen.” I still wear The Rifles badge with pride.

As a champion pistol, rifle and light machine gun shot I was on the competition team straight away. As a Captain I was initially the MTO, which my wise Lance Corporal driver pointedly said, usually meant Mystery Tours Operator. NCOs usually thought an officer with a map was a bigger danger than the enemy.

I went for the top again. I made Major and then, as circumstances happen, moved my home. The only job available was a HQ Staff Officer and then another military change was upon me as a result of my new civilian role.

I joined the Government Information Service and served in Germany and Northern Ireland before becoming the Army’s Senior Press Officer in the Ministry of Defence at a most interesting time. Ideas from the Director of Army Public Relations gelled with my own and I was made the training major for the Army’s Media Operations Group and ideally placed to undertake some very special tasks.

I served in the Sinai desert with the Multi National Force & Observers standing between the Egyptian and Israeli armies; in the Falklands, where after running the UK based Press desk, I accompanied the Governor, Sir Rex Hunt, as he returned to the war torn islands. Then into the most dangerous place I have ever been – Beirut. As the British Army contingent press spokesman I was in the front line at a time when the wrong turn in a taxi meant the difference between going home after tour end or spending five years chained to a radiator or locked up in a hostage cupboard.

Soon I was to command Media Operations as a Lieutenant Colonel and seven years later to become Colonel Media Operations in the Ministry of Defence. I held that job until I retired from the Territorial Army in 1998 – a very long serving Volunteer. Not bad for a Grammar School boy who originally left with four O levels.

I am now past that magic mark of 70. But I cannot face retirement. I still have a responsible job covering corporate communications for AkzoNobel, one of the world’s largest industrial companies (ICI was taken over a few years ago) and I also run my own consultancy which teaches crisis communications. I am the National Chairman of the Pen & Sword Club – formed of serving and retired military press officers – and I continue my association with the Armed Forces by active service with the Reserve Forces & Cadets Association.

Will I ever step out of harness? I don’t know. From those days when as a young reporter I covered the Brecon Grammar School Old Boys Association annual meeting –

and was voted onto the committee at 17 years of age – I have wanted to be in the thick of it. I still am. Most weeks I am in Central London and visit the House of Commons or the Lords or speak with the media.

Since that day in 1957 when I walked out of Aneurin's Rees' office with a reference to become a journalist on the county newspaper I have gone forward..... but always looked back. School days, for me, were great. Should I have followed my family into Christ College? I don't think so.

The euphoria at leaving Cradoc Road was based on a good, if unbalanced, education in academic subjects but great lessons in the realities. The relief I felt the day I left school for the last time was just transient – I had, after all, got a job. Many hadn't. The disappointments I may have felt are just another reality. One door closes and another opens.

I am proud to say I went to Brecon County Grammar School for Boys. I only wish more of my class could be in contact in these days of electronic communications. The World Wide Web has put me back in touch with many former colleagues – and they are scattered around the globe. It would be good to learn more of the 49 others who passed the 11 plus back in 1951.

I am sure we all have a tale to tell and much to be thankful for. For me Bid Ben Bid Bont has always been a good motto. To that I would add my first Army salutation – Exemplo Ducemus: Lead By Example. I hope that's the way I may be remembered.



Caption: Mike Peters, once the Army's TV reporter in Germany, is pictured here on the frozen lake at St. Moritz. He was explaining the hopes of a four man bob sleigh gold medal for the Army and Wales in the Winter Olympics. All four troopers in the team were from Wales' cavalry regiment, The Queens Dragoon Guards.

All had worked in the same coal mine, two were brothers.

Brecon has changed

Any readers who have not visited Brecon in recent years may be interested in the changes that have taken place. A new inner relief road was opened in 2005 to route north bound through traffic entering Brecon from the west to the Struet hence avoiding the town centre. The photo below shows the relief road (Market Street) which runs parallel to the river Honddu past the bottom of the market. The road to the left is

Watergate leading to the Cradoc Road school and the one to the right leads up the hill to the cross roads where long lorries used to struggle to turn left during the 1950s when I lived in Brecon.

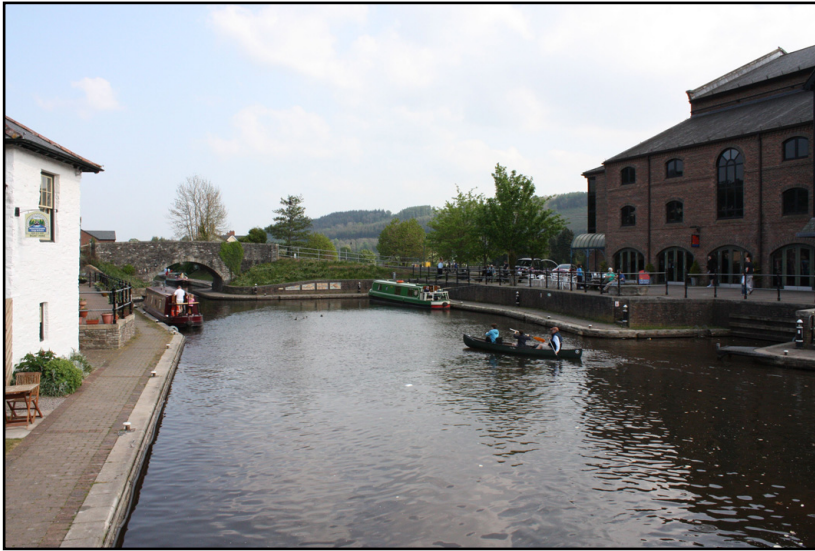


This work required the demolition of buildings in Market Street, and the bridge over the river in Castle Street was refurbished and pedestrianised. This five way (Watergate) junction can experience much congestion, and the local Council aims to direct traffic to enter Brecon via the Watton according to the 2008 Final Report of the Brecon Economic & Regeneration Strategy Development Framework.

Work on the inner relief road was temporarily suspended early in 2004 when exciting archeological discoveries were made. These included the remains of an ancient tower and a metre thick wall (see photo* on right which features an arrow slit at the centre) near the junction of Watergate and Market Street. The research report by Border Archeology states “the tower was probably built in the late 13th-early 14th century” and it is likely to be part of the town wall, which according to a 16th century report by the Tudor antiquarian, John Leland, contained four gates and ten mural towers. Artefacts discovered on the whole site included a silver 1710 Queen Anne fourpence, a George III ‘Cartwheel’ Penny, and pottery from the 13th century.



One of my favourite places in Brecon is the canal basin beside the theatre (see photo below). The path along the canal was the site of many courting walks in my youth!!



*Thanks to Border Archeology for permission to reproduce the photograph of the tower site.

J Michael Williams

Education and Politics

Nostradamus may have had the power of foretelling the future but even he would have been bemused by the recurring theme of secondary education. However the current visionary plans of our local politicians merely mirror issues that have punctuated the course of secondary education in Brecon from the outset. The initial County Intermediate Scheme envisaged a “dual” school for Brecon with two departments, one for boys and the other for girls, but in a common building. The sensitive idea of a co-ed school impinged on the sensibilities of a local community riddled with denominational and partisan dissension. But there was also an acute conflict of views over the plan for a new boys’ school because of the financial commitment in having to meet the cost through the rates. There was an influential lobby of considerable social clout which canvassed in favour of transforming Christ College into an Intermediate School thereby obviating the need for incurring the expense of a new building for a boys’ school. As an option it was a non-starter and the two intermediate schools came into existence in 1896, both being provided with new purpose built premises in 1901.

However the whole question of the sustainability of secondary education in the “dual” school form was subjected to acute debate again with the cheeseparating approach in the post World War I era of economic constraint between 1921 and 1924. In order to reduce running costs the joint governors proposed the amalgamation of the two schools into one co-educational unit under the headmaster rather than the headmistress. Phoenix-like, the issue raises its controversial head again in the Depression years of the 1930s. An extraordinary notion for the combining of the boys’ County School with Christ College in a brand new school was floated in the terms “that the LEA should examine the possibility of an arrangement with Christ College, Brecon, on terms acceptable to the LEA and Governors for the accommodation of boys from Brecon, Defynnog, Hay, Talgarth and Crickhowell, educational districts who are adjudged to be capable of benefitting from secondary grammar or technical education”. The proposition was a dead letter and the stringent economies proposed were opposed by Col. Sir John Lloyd,

who was subsequently from 1950 to become Chairman of the Governors of both secondary schools. So a plan to build an extension to the Girls' Grammar School came to fruition and on 3rd June 1938 the new building was opened. In the same period, 1935-1939, there was also pressure for a corresponding extension to the Boys' Grammar School with the possibility of a development on Penlan, to which there was considerable opposition at the time. However with the outbreak of war the project for an extension, for which plans were already framed, had to be deferred and a two-form entry remained a biennial or triennial arrangement. It was not until 1958 that the long awaited dream came to fruition with a new building on the Penlan site. With secondary reorganisation in 1971 and the amalgamation of the three schools into a single comprehensive unit, the ultimate in economy had been achieved. Yet current discussions would intimate that we are still shuffling between present, past and future.

Glyn Powell

Cradoc Road School Photograph

In a letter in the last newsletter I asked whether anyone had a good colour photograph of the Cradoc Road school. The only one I received was a black and white photograph on a postcard which had been coloured; it was dated 1909 so it represented the school as it looked just a few years after the building was opened. So, having failed to acquire the desired photo I tried again myself, this time by asking the owner of the house facing the school if I could take a photo from the garden. I thus succeeded in getting the whole building in one frame. I have removed the satellite dish and some of the unsightly signs, and the modified photo is shown below, together with the 1909 photo. This comparison shows that two roof extensions in the original are missing in the present building. I wonder why they were removed. Does anyone know?

The sharp eyed amongst you will have noticed a new blue plaque on the building. A close up of this plaque is shown here. The suggestion that an Historic Building Plaque



be placed on the school came from the late Bill Leonard two years ago. Permission of the Local Authority and the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority was obtained, and the plaque was erected before the 2011 reunion.

To complete our photographic archive I now need a photograph of the Penlan Grammar School; does anyone have a good



colour (or black and white) photo of that building?

J. Michael Williams

2nd Lieutenant Morgan Jenkins, Welsh Regiment at No. 2 Commando

Most of the mystery surrounding the identity of Morgan Jenkins has been resolved by reference to the book “Commando to Colditz” by Peter Stanley, a copy of which was purchased for the OBA by Dennis Morgan. Morgan Jenkins was one of two subalterns and 20 men under the command of the legendary Capt. Micky Burns of Six Troop No. 2 Commando, who participated in operation “Chariot” on the night of 27-28 March 1942. It was a combined Royal Navy/Commando force which destroyed the huge dry dock and ancillary installations of the port of St Nazaire. Morgan Jenkins led the Six Troop men in Motor Launch 268; their mission was to protect a demolition party. As his launch neared the dock it was hit by a shell and blew up, with fuel from the unprotected extra auxiliary fuel tanks on the open deck setting the surrounding waters alight. Morgan Jenkins died in the blazing sea and he is commemorated on the Brookwood memorial in Penderyn Church and on his parents’ gravestone in Penrhyn churchyard.

Unfortunately details of his years of attendance and scholastic record at Brecon Boys’ County School remain unconfirmed. What is known is that he was the son of a miner and attended school from Tynewydd, a small settlement on the fringes of Penderyn, marginally within the Breconshire border. On leaving school he went to London where he enlisted in the Territorial Army in the London Rifle Brigade in the pre-war days. On the outbreak of war he was selected for a special unit which later became the “Commandos”, being promoted to sergeant within its ranks. His powers of leadership were recognised when he was recommended by his seniors for a commission, and he was subsequently gazetted a 2nd Lieutenant in November 1940 in the Welsh Regiment seconded to the “Commandos”. Described by a fellow officer as “my mad Welsh friend”, he was credited with intelligence and self-reliance as well as being of an independent frame of mind, qualities essential for members of this unorthodox force.

Glyn Powell

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

April 2011

Harley Simpson’s whinge in his article “Bitter Sweet Memoir” in the last newsletter prompted me to write this letter. I attended three grammar schools and have perhaps a broader perspective than most as a result. King Henry VIII Grammar School in Abergavenny was, unlike Brecon, a one form entry and drew pupils from a wide area. There was no 11+, but a scholarship exam which pupils sat at 10+, 11+ and 12+; in 1947 the pass rate was 35%. At the Simon Langton Grammar School in Canterbury half the school was demolished during the war and in 1948 we were housed in huts. The pass rate at the 11+ was only 10%. Boys who failed and left school early worked and enjoyed having money in their pockets. None of them were envious of me, if anything the boot was on the other foot.

I arrived in Brecon in 1950. Harley refers to “looking through the window at the cosy A-boys” but I don’t know when the “cosy” class rooms arrived; there were none in my time. Also, most teachers who taught me (outside the sixth form) also taught at the Plough. As for walking a mile to school (Harley’s experience), anyone living within 3

miles of school was expected to walk or pay, infants included. Many pupils walked much further before catching the train or bus. At Canterbury we walked 2.5 miles to the playing fields!

In spite of punishments I didn't like or dislike teachers. They worked within the system to keep unruly boys in order and try to instil a little knowledge. I was caned three times before I was eight. My crimes? - dirty shoes, not having my gas mask in its box, and alleged bird nesting in the school grounds. I was at the doctor's at the time, but the head said "If you'd been here you'd have been with them". He caned everyone on the left hand so they could write without hindrance. Being left handed I was unable to write until lunchtime!

An old card playing soldier I knew in my National Service days used to say "Life's a bugger son, you've just got to play the cards you're dealt".

Mike Balding (1950-1953)

Obituaries

Canon David James Wilkinson (1958-1965)

After a successful school career which included playing for the school first cricket team, David went to St David's College Lampeter where he read Theology. He was ordained a deacon in 1969 and as a priest in 1970. He became a canon of the Brecon & Swansea diocese in 1999 and was Vicar of Pennard and Ilston, Gower at the time of his death.

Cyril Godfrey Morgan (1947-51)

Cyril, a native of Hay, on leaving school worked for Hugh Lewis at Hay prior to completing National Service in the RAF. He then worked in London and elsewhere in administration and computer capacities, and ended his career as regional manager with Sun Life of Canada. He was also prize winner at school eisteddfodau and sports.

Curtis Grove MA FRGS (staff: 1958-61)

Curtis Grove, whose wife Glenys came from Llanfaes, succeeded the legendary Lew Lewis as Geography master in 1958 and soon established a rigid academic routine within the department. He then secured the headship of Crickhowell Secondary Modern School, then Oldbury and finally Bishop Gore Comprehensive School in Swansea.

Godfrey Arthur John Scott (1949-53)

On leaving school Godfrey was apprenticed to the Electricity Board before completing his National Service with the Royal Signals. On leaving the Electricity Board he set up in partnership with Bobby Weller before launching out on his own. He was a keen sportsman and played soccer for St John's.

Abram (Abe) David Price (1939-42)

Abe, a native of Talgarth, left school early and worked for several years on farms in the Talgarth area before finally moving to the Pen-y-Fal Hospital, Abergavenny where he worked initially as a groundsman and then in various capacities on the Hospital farm.

Dr Meirion Pennar Davies (1955-60)

Meirion was the son of the the Principal of the Memorial College at Brecon and he moved to Swansea when the College was transferred there. He was an eminent

academic, linguist and poet, and was best known as a scholar of Early Welsh and Irish literature. Latterly he was a lecturer at St David's College, Lampeter.

Gary Davies (1945-47)

Gary transferred to Christ College on scholarship after two years at Cradoc Road. He graduated in law at Cambridge and practised as a solicitor in Hereford.

Michael Powell (1961-67)

Michael was a native of Battle and member of Siddons. From his initial year at the School he appears as a consistent winner in the Art Competitions at the annual eisteddfod, and it was this artistic talent that was to direct his career into design and illustration. He was a talented athlete and played in the School first XV.

William Brian Davies (1943-47)

Brian, a native of Talgarth and member of Siddons, left school early to work on the land. After some years on farm service he changed career to become a care worker at the Mid Wales Hospital, Tagarth. An accomplished gardener he shared his largesse with his neighbours. He was a devoted cricket supporter and President of the Talgarth Club.

John Ashmead (1942-47)

John was originally an evacuee from Bristol at the outbreak of war but his family subsequently took up residence in Talgarth. He was obliged to join the 1943 school intake, five of whom, including John, were to join the police force. There he achieved high rank, becoming head of CID and Deputy Chief Constable of Coventry.

John Stuart Maxwell Jones (1931-34)

A Brecon boy and member of Siddons, his sojourn at the school ended when the family moved to Oswestry. His article on "Memories of Brecon County School" in the 2011 newsletter reveals his many family connections with the school. His highly successful career ended with the post of Assistant Director of Education for Powys.

Henry Ieuan Evans

Died in August 2008; ashes scattered 1/9/08 (reported by daughter, Carol Evans). His late brother Meurig was also a pupil from 1942 to 1947.

Douglas Cochrane (1952-58)

Doug, a native of Hay, on leaving school joined H. Lewis Accountant and, apart from a break of 4 years running the Cock Hotel at Bronllys, he remained in accountancy in Hay. Moving across the river to Clyro in retirement, Doug immersed himself in family life and photography, and served his local area as a member of Black Mountain Lions.

David Owen Price (DOP) Jones (1949-55)

DOP read Economics at UCNW Bangor. After his PGCE he taught for two years at Birmingham and then went to St Bartholemew's Grammar School, Newbury, where he set up an Economics department. In 1967 he was appointed Education Officer in Preston and became responsible for Special Education in Lancashire County Council.

J J Alan Bevan (1946-53)

Alan, a Breconian and member of Siddons, on leaving school went to UCW Swansea to read Geography. After gaining his Diploma in Education he moved to Canada. He taught in Nova Scotia for four years and then moved to British Columbia where he was a very successful teacher and principal until his retirement in 1994.

Stan Beddows (Staff: 1962-90)

Stan was appointed Head of Music initially at the Grammar School and then at the High School in 1971. In 1973 he was promoted to Head of Upper School and remained in post until his retirement in 1990, when he moved to the West Country. His special legacies were the challenging and highly successful musicals which he produced.

Gerald Quarrell (1965-72)

Gerald, a Breconian and member of Gam, entered UCW Swansea with the intention of becoming a teacher but abandoned this to enter the Civil Service. He had a successful career at the Welsh Office and then with the Welsh Assembly. He became head of the section dealing with access to the countryside and the establishment of the coastal path.

Mrs Glenys Evans (Staff: 1941-45)

A pupil of Neath Girls' Grammar School and a graduate in English from UCW Cardiff, Glenys was appointed to the staff as a wartime replacement for Proser Roberts, who was on service with the RAF. Aged 22 on her first teaching post, she was assigned to teach Welsh and English with the added challenge of taking senior boys in Physical Training. (See separate tribute by Ken Jones on page 4)

Caerwyn Eifion Roderick (Staff: 1954-57)

A product of Maesydderwen County School and Maths graduate of UCNW Bangor, Caerwyn was appointed to teach Maths and Science, and is remembered with respect by former pupils. He served as Labour MP for Brecon and Radnor between 1970 and 1979 and was PPS to Neil Kinnock. Later he was Organiser for the NUT in Wales.

(See separate tribute on page 5)

Peter Michael ("Pete") Norbury (1960-65?)

Initially a draughtsman with SWALEC, he later worked for the local authority in Brecon. As mayor he hosted royal visitors in 1981. He instigated the twinning of Brecon with Gouesnou in France, and was involved in the establishment of Theatre Brycheiniog. He played in the band "The Mists of Time" and was a member of Brecon Golf club.

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