

Cylchlythyr Cymdeithas Cyn-Ddisgyblion Ysgol Ramadeg y Bechgyn, Aberhonddu Mawrth 2020

Brecon Grammar School Old Boys' Association Newsletter March 2020

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Last year we made a special effort to encourage Old Boys to attend the **70th anniversary** of the formation of the Old Boys' Association and we were pleased that we got a much better turnout than in 2018. Decreasing attendance at the reunions has worried the committee and this newsletter contains three articles on the subject of reunions.

There is good news about the future of the Cradoc Road school. Although CADW has declined to list the building and there is no appeals procedure, the Charity

"Cymryd Rhan" is negotiating with Powys Council to buy the building. Nicholas Evans, CEO of the charity, attended our committee meetings in July and November 2019 and gave us his vision for the future of the Cradoc Road building and site. This charity provides home care for vulnerable people in Wales. As usual I appeal for contributions to next year's newsletter.

Gwnaethom ymdrech arbennig llynedd i annog yr aelodau i fynychu dathliad 70 mlynedd sefydlu Cymdeithas y Cyn-Ddisgyblion ac roedd yn bleser cael ymgynulliad llawer yn well nag yn 2018. Bu'r lleihad yn y niferoedd yn mynychu'r cyfarfodydd yn destun pryder i'r pwyllgor a cheir tri chyfraniad yn y Cylchlythyr hwn ar destun aduniadau.

Mae newyddion da am ddyfodol yr Ysgol yn Heol Cradog. Er gwaethaf gwrthodiad Cadw i restru'r adeilad, heb modd am apêl, mae elusen 'Cymryd Rhan' wrthi'n trafod prynu'r adeilad gyda Chyngor Sir Powys. Daeth Nicholas Evans, Prif Weithredwr yr Elusen, i gwrdd a'n pwyllgor ym Mis Gorffennaf a Mis Tachwedd 2019, gan gyflwyno ei weledigaeth yntau am ddyfodol yr adeilad a'r safle ar Heol Cradog. Mae'r elusen hon yn darparu gofal cartref i bobl fregus yng Nghymru.

Fel arfer, dyma f'apêl am gyfraniadau i rifyn nesaf y cylchlythyr.

[Above text by **Brynach Parri**]

Events of 2019

On Saturday, 27th April 2019, 64 Old Boys, Old Girls and partners assembled for the **Annual Reunion Dinner** at the Castle Hotel, Brecon. Chairman David Gittins called for a minute's silence at the start in memory of former Chairman, Dennis Morgan, who had died in February 2019.

For this special anniversary the committee had invited Glyn Powell as a guest speaker with the approval of President Colin Lewis, so we did not have the usual Presidential address (readers should note that there is much information about the President's globe-trotting academic life in the article, "Vice President Colin Lewis", which he wrote for the 2018 newsletter).

In his address Glyn (photo below) demonstrated his incomparable knowledge of Old Boys and the Association. He began by referring to his first day at school in 1943, a time of war, blackouts and evacuees. (One of the evacuees, Richard Shead from London, regularly came top in every subject, including Welsh, but when he returned to London Glyn came top in Welsh). He wore short trousers, long stockings and hob-nailed boots. He recalled the nicknames of some of the pupils, Brer Rabbit, Tarzan, Big Jumbo, Little Jumbo and Pinhead, and those of the staff, e.g. Colonel, Lousy, Dragon and Kaiser. The intake of that year of 1943 was later to be involved in the discussions that led to the formation of the Old Boys' Association. In 1949, when the desirability of having a War Memorial



for those who fell in the war was discussed, it was realised that ex-pupils would provide the information needed, and they could be reached through an association. The initiative was taken by Headmaster Jacob Morgan, who called a meeting where the formation of an Old Boys' Association was proposed. The objectives were "the renewal of friendships, the welfare of the school, and the formation of a bond of union between past and present pupils". Prosser Roberts was to be its first secretary and treasurer, positions he held for many years. The subscription was set at 3/6, or 15/- for five years, or life membership at £3. The school magazine, "The Silurian", was also launched in 1950.

Glyn reviewed the early years of the Association by naming the reunion dinner speakers, of which there were six!! For example in the first dinner in 1950 a toast to the school was proposed by Lt-Col Sir John Lloyd, M.C., Headmaster Jacob Morgan responded; a toast was then proposed to the Association by W. Emrys Evans, W. Ifor Jones J.P., Chairman of the committee responded; a toast was then proposed to the guests by F. M. Thomas, Vice Chairman of the committee, and Senior Prefect (i.e. Head Boy) D. F. Candy responded. (Note that the President, Garnet Morris C.C., did not speak). This format continued for several years.

Glyn concluded by saying that the Association now had a very good team, i.e. the committee, in charge. He highlighted the contributions of Tom Protheroe, who holds the posts of secretary and treasurer, the Newsletter editor Michael Williams who has improved the publication to provide a much appreciated service, the archivist Shaun Gallagher, noted for the "President's board incident", and others who strengthen the association.

He closed by singing part of Dafydd Iwan's well known song "Er gwaetha pawb a phopeth, ry'n ni yma o hyd" (Despite everyone and everything, we're still here), and then quoted the school motto: "Bid ben bid bont" (if you want to be a leader, be a bridge).

Chairman David Gittins then invited Vice President Charles Lewis to propose a vote of thanks. Charles congratulated and thanked Glyn for his impressive address, delivered without reference to notes, and presented Stephanie, representing the hotel staff, with a gratuity cheque. President Colin Lewis was then asked to transfer the chain of office to the new President. Before doing so he expressed his personal thanks to Glyn for his address, and he reflected briefly on his school experience when he was encouraged by the Head, Aneurin Rees, to study Science. He avoided this possibility by failing his science O-levels, and went on to study Geography, History and English at A-level and won the headmaster's prize, for which he chose the book "Our primitive contemporaries", the text book for the anthropology section of the first year course in Geography and Anthropology at Aberyswyth. He ended up by becoming a Professor of Geography. He referred to the incoming President as a fellow globe-trotter since Charles had also spent time in Africa. The photo below shows Charles with his chain of office with Colin. Our incoming Vice President



Meredydd Jones, Trecastle was welcomed as the Chairman invited everyone to join him in a toast to "The Association".

Before we sat down for the meal a beautifully decorated cake (see photo) had appeared on the top table, and no one seemed to know who had provided it. Glyn Powell, who knows everything, later reported that it had been made by Isabel Hurn,



granddaughter of old boy Gareth Davies of Bronllys Castle and owner of the Honey Cafe in Bronllys, following a request from Jeff Davies, Gareth's brother. The cake was decorated on each side with the correct coloured icing highlighting the four houses, Theophilus, Vaughan, Gam, and Siddons. This was a lovely gesture and the cake was delicious. Jeff was invited to cut it. So ended a memorable reunion dinner!

The **Stars' Awards Ceremony** was held at the High School on 16th July and was attended by Old Boys Tom Protheroe, Allan Lloyd, Meredydd Jones, Michael Williams and President Charles Lewis, who awarded the Old Boys' prizes. The awards were announced in batches interspaced with four musical interludes performed by students and one drama sketch. The latter was created and performed by year 9 students and depicted the trials and tribulations of being a fresher at the school. The last two awards of the evening were the Cadet Award and the Lewis/Price Cup and Miss Gibbs gave the history of the bugle and its donor, Michael Peters, and also linked the Lewis/Price cup to the school motto: "Bid Ben Bid Bont". The evening was introduced by the interim Head, Richard Jenkins, and was well organised as usual by the efficient Miss Tracy Gibbs. The Head, in his closing remarks, thanked everyone who had contributed to the evening and made no reference to the status of the new school, which is nearing completion with an opening expected in November. The winners of the Old Boys' Prizes were as follows:

Cliff Carr Memorial Prize
Geoffrey Meredith Powell Senior Prize

Dan Gilbert
Tom Harrington

Geoffrey Meredith Powell Junior Prize

Mr & Mrs K. Evans Prizes

Evans KS3 Maths Prize

Evans KS4 Maths Prize

Evans KS5 Maths Prize

Evans Art Prize

Evans KS4 Geography Prize

Evans History Prize

Evans KS3 Languages Prize

Evans KS3 Languages Prize

Evans Intercultural Prize

Evans Business Prize

Letton Shield

D.J. Powell Cup

Cadet Prize

Lewis/Price Cup

Ioan Zimmer

Gwenllian Kenchington

Douglas Norton

Zachary Morgan

Isabella Fernadez

Amy Pitt

Teagan Higgins

Cassie Howe

Chloe Edwards

Aleksandra Fafara

(Not awarded)

Isaac Pierce

(Not awarded)

Abi Newton Perry

Francesca Thompson



Thirteen of the prize winners are shown in the photo with President Charles Lewis.

They are (from left to right): Amy Pitt, Teagan Higgins, Cassie Howe, Dan Gilbert, Douglas Norton, Francesca Thompson, Ioan Zimmer, Isaac Pierce (obscured),

Abi Newton Perry, Aleksandra Fafara, Zachary Morgan, Tom Harrington, and Chloe Edwards.

On 11th November 2019 several Old Boys and one Old Girl attended the **Memorial Service**, which was to have been held in the new school, but its opening was delayed so we had the service in the usual hall in the High School. After the usual readings from senior pupils Sergeant Major Duncan Bell, representing the military, read the names of those Old Boys who had fallen in WWI, and Vice President Meredydd Jones read the names of those who had fallen in WWII. There followed the Last Post, one minute's silence, the Reveille and the laying of wreaths by President Charles Lewis and Head Boy, Ishu Gaha and youngest girl, Alice Williams. The Reverend John Townend began his address by asking whether anyone present was from a military family. One girl responded and said her father had been posted overseas. Rev. Townend said "you would understand how families were concerned about such absent family members". He cited his own family connections with the two world wars. Both grandfathers had seen active service in WWI. One enlisted at age 16 and after a brief training was sent to France, where within weeks of reaching the trenches he was gassed. He survived but suffered the after effects for the rest of his life and died of lung problems. His other grandfather also served in France and survived. Rev. Townend referred to the poppy, used world

wide as the emblem of charities which raise money for war veterans and their families, as resembling a wound. That the two wars affected most families in the UK is illustrated by the fact that only 53 villages (4 in Wales) had no family members involved in the wars. He concluded that it was important that we continue to remember the sacrifice made by those who died in the two world wars and also those who have died in later conflicts.

Biographical Notes

[In last year's newsletter I made the mistake of including the Biographical Notes of Meredydd Jones, our current Vice President, instead of Charles Lewis. I now include the omitted notes with apologies!]

Handel Charles Lewis (1956-63) - Vice President for 2018-2019, President for 2019-2020

Talgarth born Charles describes himself as "not an overzealous scholar academically" but he progressed with the encouragement and skill of the talented staff who knew how to bring out the best in their charges. He participated in most sports and represented the school in rugby and athletics. He enjoyed singing and recitations in the school eisteddfod and competed at the Urdd Eisteddfodau on two occasions. He was house captain for Gam and one of two deputy head boys.

Gerry

Gerry, at thirteen, was not into sport and he certainly didn't know one end of a cricket bat from the other. He had all the persuasive charm of the Irish though and, accordingly, got himself voted interim captain of the Siddons house junior cricket team to play Gam house, in the absence of normal captain Curly Hepton. The slumbering giant of school athletics was awakening!

The great day of the match dawned 'neath blue summer skies, and the Watton wicket was perfect. The umpire, English teacher Cliff Jones, called the two captains to him for the toss of the coin. The calls were made and the coin was tossed.

"You've won Gerry. What do you want to do?"

Looking suitably perplexed, Gerry replied,

"Well, Sir. What choices do I have?"

Looking even more perplexed, but with a twinkle in his eye, Cliff said,

"Well, do you want to play with the wind, or do you want to play up the slope?"

Gerry pondered this for a moment and then replied,

"I'll play with the wind Sir."

In fairness to him, the only toss of a coin he was vaguely aware of was from seeing house football on the slopes of Cradoc fields.

No! Other than boxing, of which he was a great fan, he knew nothing about sport but he was a fast learner. In (54-55?) the Race Walk was introduced into the athletics inter-house championship for the first time. Gerry volunteered and won it comfortably, or, as he might have coined it, 'triumphantly'. The slumbering giant was awake. Ambition was stirred!

He started to do light training with the aim, as he put it, of 'defending my title' the following year. He did so, but when comfortably into the lead, and steaming into the last lap... "GALLAGHER", was called off the track for running. Gerry stepped off, as some distance back did Micky Gallagher of Vaughan house...no relation but a very close friend. By the time the judges realised that the announcement was meant for Micky, Dai 'arry Price, also a Hay boy, had powered through the tape. Gerry was desolate! He was the ex-champion, but the trigger had been well pulled. The boy who

knew nothing about sport, and cared little about it, suddenly strove to become the ultimate competitor.

He started to train hard, to eat the right things and to read every book he could find about training methods for middle- and long-distance athletes, and become 'special'. In his final two years he smashed the school and county records for 880 yards and the mile, took a close finish fourth place in the Nationals at Colwyn bay and over the years continued to bring his times down substantially. Unfortunately, his times, like so many other track records, were I understand, wiped from the record books when in the mid sixties the UK went metric. At the time of leaving school in 1958, he was more than proud to be selected (admittedly one of many) to carry the baton containing the Queens message for the opening of the Empire /Commonwealth games in Cardiff.

After leaving school he continued to train assiduously while representing Hereford and County Athletic club, studying for his accountancy inter and final exams and getting married. He retired from athletics in his late twenties and focused on his other great, but more cerebral loves - chess and backgammon - at which he reached county level and beyond.

In his chosen career, he worked largely in the UK, but his urge to travel took him and his family to Zambia and the United Arab Emirates, before coming home and taking a similar position with the County Courts in Hereford. Sadly, he died aged 56 in 1996, of cancer, leaving his wife, Irene, and three sons.

I miss him still, but with his easy Irish smile, he is with me every day. He did not, like Muhammad Ali, shake up the World, but with sheer hard work, and with strength of mind and body, he reached for the stars and became 'special'.

My big brother was a giant.

Shaun Gallagher

Llewelyn Woosnam MA DPhil (1923-29)

[This is the third of a series of articles on Brecon Headmasters]

The appointment of Llewelyn Woosnam was hailed as a coup by the Governors. His appointment took effect from 29th July 1923 at a salary of £250 per annum rising by annual increments of £15 to £600. He was a product of "Mwynder Maldwyn" (Montgomeryshire) and was educated at Llanidloes County School before proceeding to University College, Bangor and graduating with an Honours English Degree in 1909, and gaining his MA in 1912. Between 1911 and 1914 he made visits to Germany as a research scholar. He was Director of Studies at Cambridge for two sessions, 1914-15 and 1919-20, subsequently being awarded his D. Phil from Gonville and Caius College in 1920. Prior to his appointment to the headship at Brecon he was teaching at Liverpool Collegiate High School for Boys.

Llewelyn Woosnam was a progressive and innovative headmaster whose primary aim was to establish high scholastic standards and to extend the pupils' cultural experiences. He did not countenance being a non-teaching head and set high teaching standards, assigning himself to teach Latin, English, History and Maths. He was, however, fortunate in inheriting a comparatively settled staff with subject specialisations. Lewis Lewis and Dr Griff Price had joined the Staff in 1919. It was Woosnam who introduced the House system and the annual St David's Eisteddfod. An attempt to establish an Old Boys' Association failed to come to fruition because of the negative response from within the ranks of former pupils. The school magazine venture was equally unsuccessful with the single issue of 1926 being a "one off".

Unfortunately for Llewelyn Woosnam his tenure of the headship was bedevilled by the financial constraints of the 1920s. It affected staffing levels in terms of salary and teaching commitments. It also resulted in pupils leaving school prematurely, and the CWB Inspector's report for 1929 deplored the large percentage being withdrawn after only two years of secondary education. With the proposition that the two County schools should be amalgamated under one head, after some soul searching he indicated that he would undertake the headship for a trial period of two years.

On 13th December 1928 he submitted his resignation terminating his employment on 31st March, 1929 on becoming Headmaster of the Municipal Secondary School, Howard Gardens, Cardiff. Professor Joseph Jones, Chairman of the Breconshire Education Committee, said that it was unfortunate that they had to accept the resignation as Dr Woosnam had done excellent work. He remarked "he came here five years ago with the highest possible credentials and they would never forget how he captured the committee at interview". Col. John Lloyd, governor of the school, said "he was confident that during the five years Dr Woosnam had been its head he had done all in his power to improve the tone and standard of the school. They would deem themselves lucky if they got a successor who was anything like him". Such a testimonial from Col. John Lloyd was not unexpected as Percy Morton was associated with him in forming the Brecknock Society. The first issue of the Transactions lists him as one of the 16 members of the Council.

Dr Woosnam wrote "it is not without regret that I take this step, not only because I have received such kindness, courtesy and consideration from the members of the Breconshire LEA individually and collectively, from the Governors of the school and from parents and the townspeople generally. Yet I recognise my limitations in a small school, and can only hope that with greater numbers there may be some elasticity in, and scope for, reorganisation in my new post". It is evident therefore that he found the situation at Brecon rather restrictive and that he wanted a greater challenge. Continuing he wrote "I beg to thank the LEA for electing me a member of their committee, as well as for their exceptionally kind help during the whole time I have had the honour of conducting the school, and I feel assured that everything possible will be done by the Committee to ensure the future success of the Boys' County School and that the same warm welcome and assistance will be extended to my successor. I cannot conclude without expressing my gratitude to the staff for their loyalty and unstinted service in the interests of the school" ("Brecon & Radnor Express", 24/1/1929).

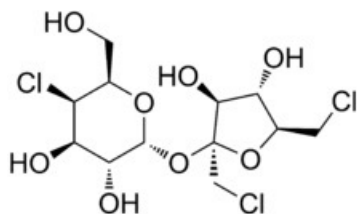
Glyn Powell

My Retirement Activities - Part 1

I took early retirement in 1998 after my wife, Anne, had an emergency operation to remove a tumour from her colon. Sadly, although the surgeon thought he had got it all out, it later spread to the liver and, whilst chemotherapy did extend her life, she died in 2002. I then gradually immersed myself in a wide range of activities such as Welsh learner classes, Fench conversation classes, and for a few years, until the tutor died, Spanish classes. However there was one activity which was unavoidable, namely cooking! I enjoy cooking which is like practical chemistry, which I always enjoyed. As a good experimentalist, I like altering recipes to try and improve the product. Since I have a sweet tooth I make lots of desserts, and the simplest alteration one can make is either to reduce the amount of sugar or replace some of the sugar with the artificial sweetener, Splenda (not to be confused with Slenda).

The discovery of Splenda is an interesting story. It was made in the research lab of Professor Leslie Hough at Queen Elizabeth College, London. He had a grant from the Sugar Research Foundation,

USA, to convert sugar into new compounds that might be of commercial interest, and one of his post-graduate students reacted sugar with the chlorinating agent, sulphuryl chloride, and obtained a new compound which he succeeded in purifying by the technique of crystallisation. He immediately told Prof. Hough of his success in a telephone conversation and Les replied “great, we must get it tested”. The (foreign) student misheard “tested” for “tasted” so he tasted it himself - a dangerous



thing to do - and found it was extremely sweet. The new compound was called Sucralose and is over 400 times sweeter than sugar. As the structure shows it contains three chlorine atoms. This causes an irrational worry in some people because chlorine is toxic, but in Sucralose the chlorine is strongly bound. Tests have shown that Sucralose passes through the body unchanged, and it has been approved for use by authorities in many countries. However an internet search can easily find reports of harmful effects of Sucralose.

Let me give one example; heating pure Sucralose at high temperature causes decomposition to substances that may be harmful. But of course such experiments do not represent real-life uses of sucralose. The stability of Sucralose during baking was tested in cake and biscuit mixtures etc and no breakdown products were detected. Extensive testing of the toxicity of Sucralose in animals and humans led to the allocation of an allowed daily intake (ADI) for humans of 0-15 mg/kg body weight per day, based on the “no observed adverse effect level” (NOAEL) of 1500mg/kg body weight per day found in a long term study of rats and a safety factor of 100! My usage of this artificial sweetener typically might involve replacing 2oz (50g) of sugar with 4 tablespoons of Splenda, a powdered product which contains 1% Sucralose and 99% of maltodextrin, a carbohydrate prepared by partial enzymic digestion of starch. To provide bulk, dried egg has to be added as well. Four tablespoons of Splenda weigh 9.8g and contain 0.098g of sucralose. I weigh 69kg so one sixth of a cake containing Splenda (I like a big piece!) contains 16.3mg, which equals 0.24mg/kg body weight, well below the 15mg maximum recommended. If anyone is interested in trying Sucralose you can read the detailed review of all the studies on Sucralose safety published in 2017 here: <https://tinyurl.com/y9amk2u4>. For the most recent information see this 2019 article in JAMA (<https://tinyurl.com/y5qxqzbb>) , which includes the statement “Although there was no evidence of substantial harms, the researchers couldn’t rule out negative health effects, **particularly with long-term use at high doses.**” Note the last phrase which I’ve highlighted.

One interesting study published in 2017 reported that Splenda, when administered to rats in water over a 6 month period at the human ADI level, affected the gut microbiome (the microbes that inhabit the intestine) by increasing the risk of developing tissue inflammation. An analysis of my microbiome revealed that it is healthy, so I am relaxed about this potential problem, especially in view of the fact that my usage of Splenda is irregular and nowhere near the ADI level.

Before I leave the subject of cooking I want to refer to an example of a healthy chocolate cake! I have many hundreds of recipes, some from my wife’s collection, some from her mother, some found in magazine and newspaper articles, and some observed on TV cooking shows. I am always on the lookout for healthy recipes and I have several healthy recipes for chocolate cake. One such recipe (from Nigella Lawson’s TV series) contains no chocolate, no butter and no flour, and it is moist and delicious*!!

What of my other activities? To avoid a long article I’ll just mention one more, namely autism research. This began when my grandson was diagnosed with autism. After a normal first 18 months he regressed and began showing behaviour which his parents eventually realised was due to autism.

Such regression is quite common in autism. In the next year he became a very miserable little boy who cried frequently, avoided eye contact, ate a very restricted diet, and had no interest in his parents or his sister, who was two years older. My daughter and I began going to conferences on autism and talking to other parents of autistic children. My research showed that the prevalence of autism was increasing at a steep rate from 5 in 10,000 in 1960 to 1% or more today. Also many autistic children suffer from co-morbidities such as intestinal problems. Analysis of blood, urine and stool showed abnormalities which suggested errors in cell biochemistry. Genetic and environmental factors are implicated in the causation of autism. One controversial topic is mercury, a toxic metal which some believe is responsible, and some parents organise chelation therapy to remove mercury from the body. After reading many scientific papers relating to autism I offered a talk on the subject to a local group in 2014 in an attempt to raise awareness of autism. This was the first of several such talks I've now given to groups in my local area and further afield, and each time at the end of my talk there is a queue of people with questions and stories to relate of problems in their family or families they know. There are an estimated 700,000 autistic people in the UK and there is an urgent need for early diagnosis and treatment.

I'll return to "My Retirement Activities" next year. Meanwhile, why don't you, dear reader, tell us about your retirement activities?

[*cocoa powder replaces chocolate which is rich in sugar and fat; olive oil replaces butter which is rich in saturated fats; ground almonds replace flour, almonds reduce total blood cholesterol level]

J Michael Williams

Bertrand Jones - "To begin at the beginning"

According to the Japanese saying: "to know the future you must first journey to the past". Reflecting on this maxim in the context of the new prestigious £24 million Learning Hub on Penlan playing fields, one cannot but look back to the time when the Intermediate School came into existence in 1896 as a result of the 1889 Welsh Intermediate and Technical Education Act. We do have snippets of the history of those modest early years of the school, particularly an article written by Bertram Jones for an issue of "The Silurian". Bertram Jones (b. 15.5.1883) entered the school as the first scholarship pupil from the Brecon district. The entrance examination for scholarship candidates was based on the basic subjects taught in public elementary schools. For non-scholarship pupils the tuition fees were £5 per annum with music instruction being £2 5s extra. To cover stationary there was a charge of 7s 6d per annum and a similar sum for the use of books. Initially it was intended that the school would be located in No 12, Castle Street but the extent and cost of repairs required were deemed prohibitive, so at the last moment the hall and vestries at Dr Coke's Wesleyan Chapel in Lion Street had to be leased at an annual rental of £40.

Organising the classes and setting the first intake of varying ages and attainments posed a major problem. Initially there were four classes and two teachers, Nathan John and Thomas Butcher with Mr Morgan joining as a science teacher soon afterwards. On Tuesday 22nd September 1896 42 boys enrolled, with 47 on roll by the end of that first week. Bertram Jones was one of three pupils placed in Form IV along with Jack Kennedy of Talgarth and the Rhys Prytherch (later Rev.) of Trefeinion, who was to become a World War I casualty. Form IV was the highest form where Bertram Jones was to remain for the duration of his three years before he left to take up an apprenticeship in the local branch of the National Provisional Bank, terminating his banking career as manager of the Penmaen branch in Swansea.

An advert for the school, which appeared in the “South Wales Daily News” issue of 31st December 1896, offered a “thorough modern education; London and Welsh Matric Exams etc.; beautiful mountain scenery; healthy and bracing climate; boarders received by the Second Master, Mr Butcher, Liondore House, Brecon at fees from 20 guineas per annum”. I cannot but agree with the reference to the scenery, even more striking from the Penlan site, but one questions the favourable impression of Brecon’s distinctive climate. Bertram Jones explained that all the initial pupils had to start from scratch in subjects such as French, Latin, Algebra and Euclid. From the CWB inspectors’ first report on the school in 1897, it appears that there was a wide range of subjects on the timetable including English Grammar, Scripture, Translation of Welsh to English, History, Geography, Scripture, French, Latin, Agriculture, Physiography, Drawing, Maths, Chemistry and Science. Bertram Jones makes special reference to Mr Morgan, who taught Chemistry and Science with little more apparatus than a kitchen sink and a bunsen burner on the landing at the top of the stairs. Fortunately a few months later a consignment of test tubes, flasks and stoppered bottles arrived. Interestingly, from the outset, classes from the girls’ school came for their Chemistry lessons. The practice of shared 6th form lessons and the interchange of pupils was to become a traditional facility right up to the establishment of the comprehensive system in 1971.

The annual inspection and examinations for the new secondary schools were carried out by the CWB (Central Welsh Board) established in 1896. Initially certificates were offered at four levels - Junior, Senior, Higher and Honours. It took a number of years before the first pupils worked through to the higher level. Bertram Jones does not mention his having taken any examination during his three years at the school. He found the Friday music lesson with mild mannered Mr Musk “a high spot”, reminiscent in many ways of the music lessons that we were to experience many years later. Bertram was surprised that Mr Musk did manage to “make us proficient enough to make some sort of show at the first Prize Day”, which was held at the Guildhall where the stage was spacious enough to hold all the pupils of both Boys’ and Girls’ Schools. There were no games either at the outset or for a number of years later. There was, however, military style physical drill of the barrack square type with Cpt. Dickey SWB. A cadet corps was also established, fully uniformed with Thomas Butcher as OC.

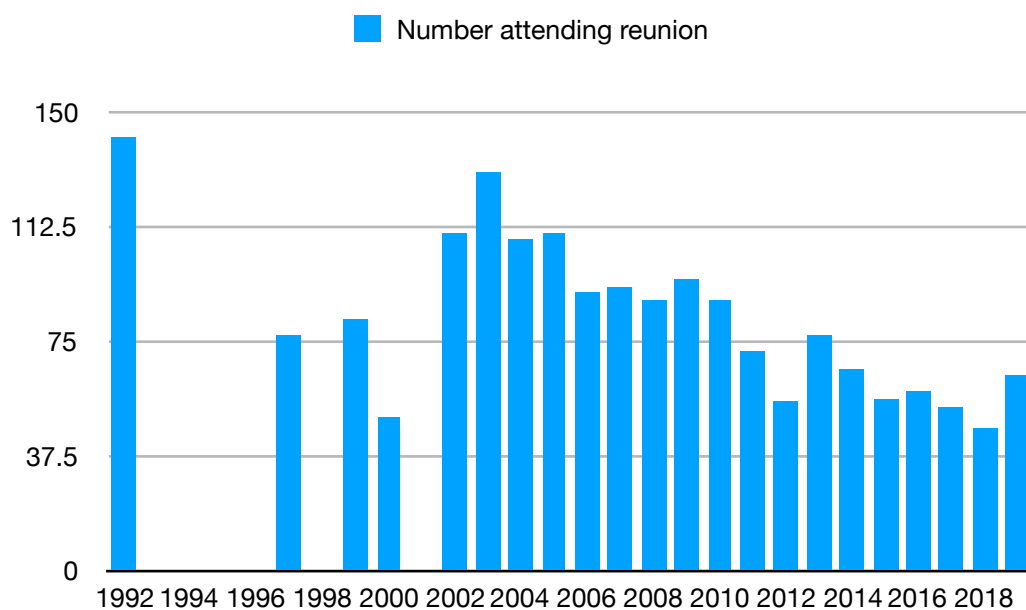
Particularly interesting is Bertram Jones’ explanation that the daily school times were based on the train times from Talgarth. The morning train was due in Brecon at 8:15am and the return journey home was at 5:30pm. Boys from the country areas were obliged to lodge as they had to continue to do until a comprehensive school transport system was implemented. Living in Crai, I was obliged to lodge at Monmouth House for the duration of my school days, because the after school double-decker South Wales Transport bus did not leave until about 6:15. This meant that I would not have reached home, after walking from the bus stop, until well after 7pm each evening. So to some extent there had not been a significant change since Bertram Jones’ days. Pupils in my intake of 1943 were still obliged to pay tuition fees of £5 per annum, based on parental income. The concept of free secondary education for all was eventually instituted by the Education Act of 1944. Yet we still made modest contributions in the form of library and games fees. However in reverting to Bertram Jones’ account one is reminded of the King of Heart’s advice to White Rabbit - “Let me begin at the beginning”.

Glyn Powell

Attendance at the Annual Reunion

In 2002 in his Presidential address the Rev. Geraint Hughes referred to the fact that the Old Boys’ Association would eventually have no members because the Grammar School ceased to exist in

1971. Since then numerous attempts have been made to encourage Old Girls to join us at the Annual Reunion, and also Old Boys from the Penlan era. The numbers attending the reunion have decreased steadily as shown in the graph below. The numbers were obtained from the newsletters from 2003 onwards, and I am indebted to Shaun Gallagher for searching through the archives for data pre 2002. There isn't much, but he did find some interesting comments. Ladies attended for the



first time in 1970, and in 1979 a dinner dance was held for the first time but was poorly attended! In 1991 the highest ever attendance was noted but not the number. The numbers held up well until around 2010 when the recent decrease began. Following our record low number of 46 in

2018 it was very pleasing to see a substantial increase for the 70th annual reunion in 2019. In his article entitled "Reunion - Two Cultures", in 2017 Glyn Powell speculates about the reasons that Old Boys don't come to reunions, and in a longer article "Reunion - reality and parody" in this year's newsletter, he gives his personal perspective on reunions. Some Old Boys clearly don't like a formal dinner with speeches, but the main problem of course is incapacitating illness in old age and the deaths of Old Boys as listed in the Obituary Section of each newsletter.

What we lack is Old Boys from the Penlan era. In 2005 a reunion of the class of 1955 was organised by Brynach Parri and Phillip Malham, and of the original 65 pupils, 50 gathered in Brecon. (See separate article by Brynach) This was an impressive turnout which perhaps reflects the greater attraction of meeting former classmates as opposed to former pupils from different years.

Estimating the number of Penlan boys who might be still alive is not straightforward. The first cohort of boys who finished their education in Penlan entered Cradoc Road in 1952 (after 7 years of study) or in 1954 (after 5 years). The last cohort at Penlan began in 1970 and ended in the High School. The midpoint of this period is 1961 and the life expectancy of boys born in 1950 (i.e. the 1961 entry) was 66, so we might expect a significant proportion of these would be dead now. However life expectancy increases with age. For example my life expectancy at birth was 67 but when I was 76 in 2011 my life expectancy was 85 according to Office of National Statistics! There was a two form entry to Cradoc Road in 1952 so, using an average of 30* pupils per form, I've estimated that around 1100 boys would have passed through Penlan Grammar School. Some will have died but several hundred will be alive, most retired and some in their early 60s. How can we find them? If any readers know Old Boys from the pre-1971 Penlan era who might like to be added to our mailing list, please ask them to contact Tom Protheroe (t.protheroe@talk21.com, tel: 012790 623525). There is no subscription fee and the newsletter and invitations to the annual reunion and

mini reunion are sent out each February. Old Boys from the 1930s to the early 1960s regularly attend the annual reunions which are a great opportunity to meet former classmates.

For the past few years we have organised informal lunches at the Castle Hotel, initially in October but in 2018 these were switched to November immediately following the Memorial Service at the High School. Around 20 attended in 2018 and a similar number in 2019. At this speech-free mini reunion some members have opted for the hotel lunch as opposed to the sandwich lunch organised by Tom.

(*This is probably an underestimate because in 1961 a list of 69 pupils who sat O-level exams was published in the 1962 Silurian magazine.)

Michael Williams

The 50 year reunion of our 1955 class

It suddenly dawned on me in 2004 that 2005 would mark the fiftieth anniversary of going to the Grammar School. Like most people, I had lost touch with the majority of class-mates, so wrote a circular to the five or six I was still in contact with: Tom Thirgood, Hank Jackson, Phillip Malham, Peter Powell, Martyn Prowel, Handel Jones, and we held an initial meeting in the George. Just meeting was enough to quadruple the number of contacts, and we proceeded from there, chasing up anyone we could think of who might be in touch with other Old Boys. Some proved much more difficult to find than others, and did involve knocking on doors, and, in one case, visiting an ex-wife! Bit by bit, we managed to trawl up close to fifty, not too bad from an intake of 65 or so who entered the Old Grammar School in 1955. Some proved totally untraceable - Freddy Charters, David Leeworthy - and of course there were the inevitable losses to the Grim Reaper; Robin Day was keen to come, but succumbed to pneumonia before the event, as did his close friend Richard Bastable, who even attended a 'Committee' meeting, and was looking forward to joining us, but unfortunately he died a few weeks before the event.

Some whom we managed to locate were not at all interested in attending, for various reasons, but Phillip Malham in particular was very assiduous, and made identity badges for everyone using old school photos and magazine articles. These were extremely helpful, as fifty years had wrought tremendous changes to physiognomy, and we wouldn't have been able to recognise such changed faces. Some, however, were instantly recognisable, hardly changing at all in half a century.

We had a clutch of attendees from far-flung corners of the world - Tom Thirgood from Ireland, Lance Billington from Canada, John Burgess from the USA, Royston Lewis from Australia and Jeffrey Davies from New Zealand, as well as others from mostly the south of England.

Peter Powell had managed to obtain a school hand-bell, like that used in Cradoc Road, which we rang to get attention, or silence., as we read out a list of absent friends, and held a minutes silence for those sadly departed. It was a very enjoyable evening, with a bar and a good buffet and endless reminiscing, and a group photo, as well as notepads and pencils (courtesy of Ikea!) for everyone to jot down details of addresses for future reference. It ended up with a very enthusiastic sing-song, which attracted quite a number of curious gate-crashers from the bar; Alan Frame, originally a Londoner teased endlessly by Mr Harvey Williams for his accent, and now a retired stockbroker in Surrey, was amazed how many Welsh hymns he could join in with after all those years. There was a tremendous unanimous vote for a further do three years later when we would all have reached an

even greater age, but although we did organise a further event, it was nothing like as well supported as the original reunion. 'Been there, done that' seemed to be the order of the day!

On the night, a handful of wives and partners had a supper date in Cantre Selyf, and, on the next day, quite a few gathered for Sunday Lunch in the Castle Hotel.

Some of us are still in touch with each other, but it seems unlikely that we will repeat the occasion.

Brynach Parri

Reunion - reality and parody

The clarion call of the Old Boys' Association over the successive generations has been "reunion", within which is encapsulated a range of traditional activities capped by an annual dinner. In our case maintaining the tradition is becoming progressively concerning the evident trimming of the ranks of former pupils. The reality is that there is only a finite number of possible members as a consequence of secondary reorganisation in 1971. However, every effort continues to be made to Marshall the optimum number possible for the annual dinner and for increased attendance at other events associated with the OBA. Through the good offices of the editor of the newsletter a number of surveys of the membership have been conducted to assess the interest level amongst the rank and file. Regrettably the response has been generally negative with but few expressing any enthusiasm to participate. Disappointingly, a number were rather condemnatory as if stirred by unsettling reminiscences of their days at their Alma Mater and haunted by memories they thought had been buried. Some view a reunion as an exorcism of an unpleasant past and consider that these old memories are best left forgotten. There was also in some quarters a misconception that reunions should be kept for old soldiers, comrades-in-arms, where deep undying and enduring camaraderie has been forged in military conflict. Yet even in military circles Old Comrades Associations are having to lay up their Standards with the rapidly declining ranks of the veterans. Recently the Korean War Association Branch at Hereford, with which I was associated, was obliged to submit to the inevitable.

As former pupils of Brecon Boys' Grammar School we are fortunate in having a loyal cadre of members and a dedicated team of indefatigable officers. As a result of their efforts the spirit of the Association is alive and vigorous and truly maintained. The annual dinner continues to be an occasion for remembering mundane but unforgotten noises of school life, for a good gossipy catch-up, popping the odd Weathers' Original criticism for good measure. As diners we might very well appear to be relics of the past embedded in the present but very convivial, fun to meet and quick to talk. A reunion enables me personally to lift a curtain on a past that once seemed so important and to tap into the nostalgia of the 1940s, my school days in wartime and post war austerity years. A school reunion offers the chance to the person one has become and to revert to being the moody teenager and the nerdy contemporary of the sports loving, the athletically inept, wimps, swots, layabouts and scholarly!! It affords the opportunity of reconnecting with the good people and good times since confined to the back of the mind and to wallow in the good old days. There is also the chance of getting reacquainted with people you were once glad to see the back of a lifetime ago. There are those who view it as a gentle nostalgia to recall former teachers, past pranks, reprimands, and possibly failed exams. It is as if life is coming full circle as expressed in the Chinese maxim, "Luo ye qui gen" - "falling leaves return to their roots".

The perspective of those who take the negative standpoint over the issue of reunion, if unanswerable, is unconvincing. Even if naive, those of us who are supportive tend to wax lyrical and pen regular paeans of praise to our experience of those perceived halcyon days as if lusting after some lustre lost. This evidently reflects a continuing obsession with a retrospective apologia fusing the past with the present. In proclaiming and inexorable belief of being in the majority on the issue, one is prompted to note Mark Twain's words that "whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority it is time to pause and reflect". William James' words also add a note of caution in that "a great many people think they are thinking when they are really rearranging their prejudices".

An interesting dimension of a reunion is to observe that others have suffered from the ravages of time even more profoundly than oneself with one being drawn to it out of a perverse curiosity. A certain unsettling strangeness can emanate from these reminiscences of all the various tics and twitches of former school life. Reunions can be rather patronising with a mixture of memories, myths, anecdotes and half-truths if not an occasional element of preening self-satisfaction. Such a conception does not however detract from the joy and satisfaction of reminiscing with former classmates and other contemporaries. One gets a kick from recalling house matches and of wallowing in the mud on the school field and then returning with a gallop to catch the school transport bedraggled and stained with sheep! No less memorable were those gladiatorial kick-about on the threadbare playground and adjacent waste lot with no quarter given or asked. One tends to be surprised to find the sporting joker who always got the girl has gone to seed and the spotty oik who was the butt of jokes rolls up in a new Merc with a trophy wife on his arm. The former school stopping hero with wider waist and less hair appears, punctured by the stresses and strains of life, to be inexplicably knackered.

In the no smoking environment of the annual dinner the habit of the past adds to the checklist of nostalgia with recollections of the curling smoke clouds circling above the Clochmerle style toilet block with its Picassoesque illustrations and primitive sanitary arrangements. Amazement is expressed at the unexpected with the changing fortunes of former contemporaries not least when the arch bad boy and rebel without a cause was found to have become a senior police officer. The school may not have been twinned with any other school, but did have a sort of suicide pact with Christ College. However the ladies of Miss Jarvis' seminary did provide for embellishments of flights of fancy of first girl friends and first heart breaks. Reunion is what one makes it and how one is prepared to view the commonality of the recollections of experiences of school life - in the words of a Bohemian proverb: "a hedgehog thinks he has curls"! In the final analysis the right to be heard does not include the right to be taken seriously on reunion or its parody.

The sentiments of former pupils are echoed in the words of Sir Henry Newbolt in stanzas of his poem "The School at War".

"We heard beyond the desert night
The murmurs of the fields we knew
And our swift souls with one delight
Like homing swallows northward flow"

"We played again the immortal games
And grappled with the fierce old friends
And cheered the dead undying names
And sung the song that never ends"

“Till, when the hard familiar bell
Told that the summer night was late
Where long ago we said farewell
We said farewell by the old gate”

Glyn Powell

“Tempus fugit” - Time flies

When the Association was established in 1950, amongst Prosser Roberts’ initial recruits were some of the earliest of the former pupils of the school. Many in their ranks had achieved academic accolade, success in business and prominence in public life. Senior amongst the members was Garnett Morris 1896-99, first President of the Association, who, in his capacity of Chairman of Governors, undertook the official opening of the then new Penlan School building on 24th September 1958. The ceremony consisted of the unveiling of a plaque and the unlocking of the main door of the school. The first turf on the Penlan campus site had been cut on the 15th March 1956 by another distinguished former pupil, David Lewis MBE JP CC (Crai), 1899-1901, Chairman of the Breconshire Education Committee for the sixteen years between 1952 and 1968. A list of some of the very first senior members of the OBA is appended.

Garnett Morris	1896-99	A G Colwell	1902-07
Bertram Jones	1896-99	H Jones	1903-07
T J Badgett	1897-99	T F Jones	1902-05
W Ifor Jones	1898-1902	H V Jones	1903-06
David Lewis	1899-1901	Dr J G T Price	1903-13
C H Jenkins	1899-1902	T E Williams	1904-07
P Jones	1899-1902	E G Jones	1904-06
Stanley E Jenkins	1900-04	H C Jones	1906-10
A A Preece	1900-03	Rev O T Wallis.	1906-10
W V Jones	1900-02	T Cross	1908-13
F Beverley Jones	1901-04	R Hopkins	1909-13
H V Davies	1901-05	I E R Morgan.	1909-11
A Cheyne	1901-06	E C Parry	1909-14
D Thomas	1902-05	H Elston	1909-12

Glyn Powell

My Motor Cycling Days

During my first term at Birmingham University I had lodgings some distance from the University and it was a tedious bike ride of at least 20 minutes or a 30 minute journey by bus. Then I changed lodgings and had a slightly shorter journey, but things improved considerably at the start of my second year when my dad bought me a second hand 350cc Panther motor bike. In his youth my dad had a motor cycle and later acquired a side-car so that he could transport my mother during their courtship. He once had an accident in which he came off his bike but survived without serious injury, so he was well aware of the dangers of motor cycling.

In addition to using the motor bike to travel to and from the University, a journey of just 10 minutes, I also used it to transport my girl friend, Anne who later became my wife, and one of our favourite trips at the weekend was to Sutton Park, where we would find a remote spot for a picnic

and a cuddle!! We did some unconventional things which may have been illegal. For example when Anne wore a short skirt she used to sit side-saddle on the pillion. Also when it rained, provided it wasn't too windy, she used an umbrella to keep us both dry.

I only had two mishaps on the bike. One Sunday evening when on the way home from the university a dog ran out in front of me. I braked and came off the bike and broke my arm. By a stroke of luck it happened outside the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, so I walked in and, while waiting to see a doctor, a nurse, whom I had met at the hop the previous Saturday, walked past and offered me a cup of tea. After seeing the doctor and having an X-ray which confirmed the break, I needed to have a general anaesthetic to reset the bone. That presented two problems. First, because I was under 21 the hospital needed my parents' permission to give the anaesthetic!! My parents had no telephone so the hospital had to phone the police in Brecon and ask them to visit my parents!! The second problem was the cup of tea, which meant I had to wait some time before the anaesthetic could be given. I eventually got back to my digs at midnight with my arm in plaster!

The second mishap on the bike occurred when I was travelling from Birmingham to Newcastle under Lyme to visit my aunt and uncle. Whilst travelling along a dead straight road at high speed (i.e. between 50 and 60mph) the engine suddenly seized up and the drive wheel locked with the result that I skidded to a halt. Had that happened on a bend I'm sure I would have been injured.



Fortunately it happened near a pub. From there I phoned my uncle who came to rescue me. He was a mechanic who specialised in repairing farm machinery, so he knew what to do. He removed the spark plug, squirted some ether into the chamber, and used a large spanner to jiggle the drive shaft back and fore to loosen the piston.

When I finished my studies my (late) brother David inherited the bike; he's pictured on left with the bike, which he used for a few years before graduating to a car.

Michael Williams

Harold Prosser Roberts: 1909-1984

The choice of one's Higher School Certificate subjects was something of a problem when one's School Certificate and Matriculation reflected a modest attainment level in a wide range of subjects, whether Arts or Science, rather than having a special talent in a selective number. Having qualified for admission to the Sixth Form in 1947 I was obliged to opt for History, English and Welsh without being particularly good at any of them. It transpired that I was the first pupil for many years to decide to take Welsh. Stepping up from what was virtually Welsh second language level to a Welsh first language Higher course was initially to present a daunting challenge. However I was fortunate in having one to one tuition with Prosser Roberts, who had returned to teaching after military service in the RAF(VR) in 1946. In the process I soon became familiar with his blend of tobacco and accustomed to his mid-lesson visits to the Staff room.

Prosser Roberts was born at 9 Cambrian Terrace, Borth, Cyfoeth-y-Brenin in Llanfihangel-Geneau'r-Glyn parish, Cardiganshire. The village of Borth had had a legacy of lead and copper

mines. Prosser was the eldest child of William Roberts, originally from Bethesda and Elizabeth Roberts (née Prosser), a native of Llangeitho. He was educated at Ardwyn School, Aberystwyth before proceeding to the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth where he graduated in Welsh. He had intended to continue his studies for his MA had circumstances permitted. However, the need to find employment in the economic circumstances of the 1930s led him into the teaching profession. On 1st September 1931 he was appointed to teach Welsh and PT at Brecon Boys' County School where he was to continue as a member of staff for 24 years. With the newly built gymnasium ("Bevan's Folly") Prosser Roberts fulfilled the requirement for the first qualified PT teacher. He also took over responsibility for school games from 1933 to 1942.

From personal experience I am fully aware that teachers are subject to parody and woe betide anyone who had an evident idiosyncrasy. Prosser Roberts was no exception and as an uncompromising disciplinarian he was given the distinctive label of the symbol emblazoned on the Welsh National flag!! Pupils' opinions of masters could often be negative and overtly critical without appreciating their positive qualities. However there were occasions when Prosser Roberts was capable of temper tantrums of Wagnerian proportions. Teachers often had a repository of polemic and could be blind to their own absurdity. Prosser Roberts possessed a razor sharp tongue and was given to melodramatic eruptions when driven to exasperation by annoying and disrespectful pupils. Some ex-pupils considered him to be belligerently sarcastic, acerbic and laser tongued. Today the most innocuous joke and physical confrontation would threaten to swallow up teachers in disciplinary procedures that could cost them their careers. However one wonders to what extent his spluttering censorious indignation and vibrating fury was an act of overdramatisation as in a theatrical sense as he was something of a Thespian. He was closely associated with the Little Theatre not only as an actor but also as director of many of its productions. There were occasions when I suspected that his outrages with a million burst capillaries were more theatrical than actuality. Despite his brusk manner and over-exuberance, he was seen by some as being horizontally laid back and ultra relaxed. Yet he was so capable of explosive catharsis of pent-up emotion.

Prosser Roberts must have been mystified when I opted for Welsh at Higher as it involved his having to prepare for a wholly new syllabus. It has to be appreciated that masters who had been serving for years in uniform had the task of catching up on lost time and subject content. Initially a tentative relationship evolved between us but we soon fused in a close partnership of mutual study. I came to respect his sharp intellect and his wide knowledge of Welsh literature and the complexities of its linguistics. The legacy of his tuition was to come to fruition with my achieving a Principal grade at Higher and subsequently being offered the option of a Welsh Honours course at the University College of North Wales, Bangor.

The Higher course was exceptionally challenging, requiring the study of a considerable body of literary texts as well as the study of the development of the Welsh language. It evidently involved Prosser Roberts in a great deal of preparatory work. The set books included "Manawadan mab Llyr" and "Branwen verch Llyr" from "Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi"; "Rhys Lewis" and "Gwen Tomos" novels by Daniel Owen; "Y Flodeugerdd Gymraeg" and "Blodeugerdd y Ddeunawfed Ganrif", anthologies of poems; "Gweledigaethau y Bardd Cwsg" ("Visions of the Sleeping Bard") by Ellis Wynne (1671-1734); "Llyfr y Tri Aderyn" by Morgan Llwyd (1619-1650); "Trwm ac Ysgafn", a collection of essays by T J Morgan (the late Rhodri Morgan's father); "Y Ffydd Ddiffuant", a really heavy text by Charles Edwards (1628-1691); "Cwm Eithin" by Hugh Evans (1854-1934); "Drych y Prif Oesoedd" By Theophilus Evans (1693-1767).

Prosser Robert's contribution to school life outside the classroom was not always fully appreciated. He should be credited with a number of significant achievements. During his period in charge of school games he inaugurated School Sports Day, which he organised with considerable thoroughness. He was also the prime mover in organising the first Inter School Sports held at Brecon on 26th July 1929. In 1943 he was called up for military service in the RAF(VR), attaining the rank of Flight Lieutenant and subsequently returning to teaching duties in 1946. On 20th May 1943 he married Gwyneth Frances Lewis, daughter of Mr & Mrs E J Lewis, a draper of High Street Brecon. He held the rank of Pilot Officer at the time and they later took up residence at Harddfan in the Avenue. On his demobilisation he returned to devote time and energy to organising sporting activities at both the school and county level. He was Chairman of the Brecon and Radnor Young Wales Clubs during 1947-51.

On leaving the teaching profession in 1955 he found his niche in the Youth Service as County Youth and Further Education Officer in succession to O J Timothy. He was particularly supportive of the Young Farmers' Club movement and community drama societies. He continued in the post until his retirement in 1974. He was credited with making the youth clubs and Further Education Centres in Breconshire second to none in Wales.

He was also prominent in the social life of Brecon and after retirement he remained active serving on such committees as the Post Office Users Committee and the Rural Community Council, as well as being a founder member of the Brecon Probus Club. He was a keen eisteddfodwr and over the years he visited the surrounding villages to adjudicate at their eisteddfodau. A founder member of Brecon Welsh Society, he used to organise the annual Brecon Eisteddfod at which I competed on occasions and was later to adjudicate.

Prosser Roberts was the prime mover in the establishment of the Old Boys' Association in 1950. He was its Hon. Secretary and Treasurer from 1950 to 1955 before handing over the joint office to H C ("Cliff") Jones. Prosser also instituted the Annual Dinner and joint dance with members of the Old Girls' Association which I regret never having had the pleasure of attending through absence at College and subsequent years in HM Forces at the time. It was he who organised the end of term soccer and cricket matches between the School and the Old Boys. The 1952 matches were quite interesting in that both soccer games ended in a draw whilst the cricket match resulted in a narrow win for the Old Boys by 20 runs. Having originally been responsible for school games, he had, post 1946, handed over responsibility to Ewart Davies. Yet he still acted as a referee for house matches but, as with PE lessons, he did not bother to wear appropriate sports apparel for the occasion. Prosser had a comprehensive record of former pupils which became vital when, as Secretary of the Association, he organised the collection of subscriptions towards the cost of the Roll of Honour tablet which he subsequently had unveiled on Saturday the 26th September 1953.

Several decades of pupils formed a negative opinion of Prosser Roberts perhaps because of his consummate skill of packaging insults, his implacable intransigence and punctilious conformity rather than any generosity of spirit. However outside school he was known as a gregarious personality who enjoyed good company and socialising. He is remembered in social and cultural circles as a superb raconteur and convivial conversationalist. Even his critics harboured a hidden and grudging admiration for him outside school.

Glyn Powell

He who dares to enter!

In raking over the smouldering coals of the past I always harboured a perverse curiosity about the hidden world behind the door to the staff room. It was with no small measure of trepidation that any unfortunate miscreant, who was obliged to knock on that door, was fearful of the response. There was a zero tolerance to disturbance from the coterie within. When the door was opened one sensed that there was a certain unsettling strangeness and grimness about the place. In the words of Evelyn Waugh in "Brideshead Revisited" there emanated "the soft vapours of a thousand years of learning". R T Jenkins, a staff member from 1906 to 1917, highlights the spartan conditions of this claustrophobic den with its small dormer window. In this respect it was reminiscent of the Nawab of Bengals's "Black Hole of Calcutta" about which Doug Inglis was often given to quoting one pupil's misquotation of the 146 British prisoners being incarcerated in a small cell with only "one small widow".

In "Edrych yn ol" RT Jenkins wrote that "Rhywle dan y to a'r muriau o bopty yn codi'n big uwchben y dormer, fel na allech sefyll ac ar ei drws STAFF ROOM. Ond nid oedd na tân na gwres arall ynddo Pe syrthiai'r angheniad natur ar y prifathro, roedd gabddo ef le at y pwrpas ond yr oedd yn rhaid i'w gydathrawon groesi'r iard gyda'r bechgyn ac i'r un man". Such therefore were the primitive conditions at the beginning of the century - no heating, washbasin and no staff toilet. RT was particularly scathing about the headmaster who, though he had a toilet to himself, did not permit his staff to share in this facility. Staff members were obliged to use the boys' external Clochmerle-like toilet - open air urination "a la grisette" - with its crude wall art, hardly Banksey, based on a common suggestive theme. Within the staff room it was only down the central area that a normal sized person could stand upright.

With only minimal working surfaces and book storage space the staffroom did nor provide an environment conducive to the effective exercise of teaching duties. There was one central table whilst much of the remaining floor space was in the alcoves under the eaves. Very little had changed down to the time that the building was vacated by the Grammar School staff and pupils. Asa parting shot Aneurin Williams reminded us of a room "compounded of tobacco smoke, mouldering football boots and stale air". One was aware of tea cups ringed with tannin stains and containing dregs in progressive states of mould shunted into an unobtrusive corner. Little did I realise that a mere three years after leaving school I was to gain admission to this very same cavern of academia during a temporary attachment to the school. During my assignment as very much a junior I learnt, in Queen Elizabeth I's words "video et taeco" - "I see and keep silent". Then some ten years later on my appointment to the staff at the Secondary Modern School I became a permanent resident until our transfer to Penlan. The only major change was the provision of separate male and female staff toilets formed from the conversion of the former VS classroom.

Glyn Powell

The Presidential 1st XI

Reflecting on the 70 years of the existence of the Old Boys' Association one cannot but be impressed by the succession of its distinguished presidents. It was at the instigation of Jacob Morgan that a formative meeting of Old Boys was called for Friday 6th January 1950, when 50 members attended. It was decided unanimously to form the Association having as its objectives "the renewal of friendships, the welfare of the School, and the formation of a bond of union between past and present pupils". The subscription rates were to be 3/6 annually, or 15/- for 5 years or £3 for life membership. An issue which prompted the headmaster's initiative was the call for a memorial

to honour former pupils who had made the supreme sacrifice during WWII. As its Honorary Secretary and Treasurer, Prosser Roberts, set about communicating with over 600 Old Boys whose whereabouts were known. As a consequence 650 were listed on the original register of members, of whom 430 maintained membership over the first decade. Prosser Roberts relinquished the joint office of Secretary-Treasurer in 1956 to be replaced by H. Cliff Jones until 1961 when Aneurin Williams assumed the office. During this period the Association's Presidents represented an impressive cross section of eminent political, social and cultural members of the community and were drawn from amongst the earliest pupils.

1950 Garnett Morris (1896-99): one of the first intake of pupils to the Boys' Intermediate School. A county councillor of longstanding, he served as Chairman of Breconshire County Council and succeeded Col. Sir John Lloyd MC as Chairman of the Governors. He was elevated to the Aldermanic Bench in 1951. As the oldest ex-pupil and Chairman of Governors and first President of the OBA, he performed the official opening of the Penlan School.

1951 Jacob Morgan, Headmaster (1929-54)

1952 Stanley E Jenkins (1900-04): a county councillor, he was elevated to the Aldermanic Bench of Brecon Borough Council and elected an Alderman of Breconshire County Council.

1953 W Ifor Jones JP (1901-04): the first Chairman of the Association.

1954 E B Powell (1917-21) MBE 1954: was the well respected headmaster of Llanfaes C. P. School who subsequently became a County Councillor.

1955 F M ("Fred") Thomas (1910-14): the first Vice Chairman of the Association. He was stationmaster at Brecon and served as Mayor of the Borough.

1956 G W Davies JP (1910-13): was a Director of Brecon Motors and President of the Brecon Chamber of Trade as well as serving as Mayor of the Borough.

1957 P Beverley Jones (1910-13): a former Chairman of the Association; played soccer for Cardiff City and umpired the Old Boys' cricket match into his 80s.

1958 W B Hargest (1914-18): Borough Councillor and one time Mayor he worked in the Treasurer's Department until he took over as Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages for the Hay and Builth District.

1959 Aneurin R Williams (1925-32) BA(Hons) LLB (Wales) Diploma in Public Administration (London) LLB (London) Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts: he taught at the girls' school from 1951-56, becoming Senior English Master at the Boys' School (1956-71) and then Head of the large English Department at the newly established High School. Aneurin took over the office of Secretary/Treasurer in 1961.

1960 E Z R ("Ivor") Morgan (1909-1911): an eminent Borough Councillor he served as Mayor on several occasions. He was elected a Governor of the Boys' and Girls' Schools and was President of Welsh Non-County Boroughs' Association. During the war and post-war period he served on the War Agricultural Executive Committee.

When a first XI takes to the field it is customary to have reserves on the bench, and in this case there were two prominent figures.

1961 Oscar Owen (1917-20): proprietor of Cafe Royal which hosted the early Association dinners. A leading figure in the Calvinistic Methodist Church, he was also a lay preacher.

1961 David Lewis (1899-1901) MBE: a JP and long term County Councillor he served an extended period as Chairman of the Education Committee. A leading figure in the farming industry he was the liberal candidate for the constituency in the 1945 election. He had the honour of cutting the first turf on the Penlan site in 1956.

Glyn Powell

Put pen to paper - not click the mouse

At one of our committee meetings it was mooted from on high that we should highlight the achievements of prominent former pupils in both our newsletter and the local press. There was some reservation about the inherent tendency towards subjectivity and the issue of omission rather than inclusion. Apart from the alumni and “eminence grise” there was a host of more ordinary ex-pupils whose contributions in their diverse spheres, though seemingly modest, is no less worthy of recognition. As a compromise and starting point, to which others are invited to contribute, I am prompted to provide a brief review of the literary works of a number of our kin.

“This way of life”, 2 vols by Gareth Jones (“Big Gareth”)

Gareth was a very talented pupil who from his early teens was to sacrifice a highly promising academic career for his passion for fox hunting and the chase generally. In his two volumes he displays that easy facility of expression for which his eminent Mathias antecedents were renowned. After completing his GCSEs Gareth undertook a short college course at Aberyswyth travelling home at weekends on his scooter to follow the Saturday meet. Then, following spells of temporary employment at the local saw mill and Sennybridge Army Camp, he got the job that suited his talents on the staff of Brecon Library. He fulfilled the post of mobile librarian, a position he held for some 27 years, being known to the readers as “Gareth the library”. In compiling his volumes he was fortunate in having access to the store of primary material in the library archives. He had also acquired a remarkable collection of rare books, photos, manuscripts and general memorabilia. His volumes provide an insight into the country way of life in the wider Sennybridge area over the past 150 years. They are brim full of historical content and a compendium of photos, many of rare provenance. However, in Vol I he devotes a disproportionate space to the fox-hunting fraternity and commentaries on actual hunts with assessment of the performance of individual hounds. To Gareth hunting became a virtual addiction in which he participated as a terrier man. He contributed a number of articles to “Horse and Hounds”, “Hounds” and “Shooting Times” as well as to the local newspaper under the pseudonyms “Jim” and “Bytheiad” (the Welsh word for fox hound).

“Lest I forget” by Ieuan Jones

This is a 56 page monograph which Ieuan undertook to publish himself. Generally contributions to the newsletter tend to be paeans of praise for the Alma Mater as a locus classicus of traditional academia. Ieuan’s attitude was somewhat different. Far from waxing lyrical about his school experiences he expresses disappointment and dissatisfaction. In deviating from the traditional nostalgic narrative he reflects a certain maverick attitude. Ieuan had been admitted as a pupil in 1947 and was to become, in his words, one of the “rest” who “just left as soon as we were able, having failed to be motivated or inspired by the system.” He found the lessons to be unimaginative

and crushingly boring. Text books, he wrote, were uninteresting and apart from the science laboratory the only basic piece of equipment was a black board. Given that Ieuan was a bit of a loner for whom the legacy of his scholarship was not a “very splendoured thing”, what frustrated him was the wholly academic curriculum, which he saw as the antithesis of the pragmatic needs of a substantial proportion of pupils who, like himself, intended entering the agricultural industry. Actually in the early decades of the school’s history there was provision for agriculture and horticulture on the curriculum. There was a scientific demonstration plot and the subjects were examined externally by the Central Welsh Board.

Early leaving, particularly among the farming fraternity, was characteristic of the period as the labour market was very fluid. Ieuan subsequently took every opportunity of self-education and mastered a whole range of rural skills. He spent an extended period of study in the USA and on his return settled down to become a leading figure in the rural community. However, even though Ieuan may have been less than complimentary about the staff, it was “sine ira et studio” - “without anger or partiality”.

“So much to do, so little time” by Stanley Jenkins

It was in 2000 that Stanley Jenkins published his autobiography under the above title. He was a Brecon boy, born in 1920 the eighth of nine children of the highly respected Jenkins building contractor. Two of the children succumbed to TB in childhood, a disease which he himself survived. In 1940 he was called up for military service with the Royal Engineers. He was posted initially to Burma where he was delegated to train West African troops. Then as a 25 year old officer he was given command of a problematic unit, the 32nd Nigerian Works Company RE in Rangoon before being posted to Mandalay to take charge of the 26th Artisan Works Gold Coast Company in order to restore order after a mutiny. Demobbed with the rank of major in 1944 he enrolled at Cardiff Technical College to study building technology. It was during that period that he became involved in student politics as Vice President of the NUS. As NUS President in 1948-51 he took a firm stand on the issue of communist subversion within the British student movement. Under his leadership the NUS disaffiliated from the IUS following a national referendum.

After stepping down as NUS president Stanley joined the Foreign Office and undertook two assignments in Singapore. Then in early 1960 he served as First Secretary in the Chancery in Rangoon during the period the Burmese Socialist Programme Party seized power. In 1967 he was posted to the High Commission in Nicosia as First Secretary. Returning to the UK as counsellor he sat on the Civil Service Selection Board before retiring in 1978.

Stanley’s book is a remarkable read, detailing his experiences in the Army, as a student leader and in the Foreign Office.

Glyn Powell

Dr William Samuel Thomas (“WSK”)

Known in school circles as Dr Ken he was intimately involved in the realms of secondary education in Brecon for over thirty years. He first entered the local scene in 1958 having secured the position of head of history in Brecon Boys’ Grammar School in succession to J D Huw Thomas (1954-58), who had been appointed the first headmaster of the newly established Brecon Secondary Technical School and who subsequently became Senior History Lecturer at Swansea Training College in 1960. Dr Ken was himself to become head of the Secondary Modern in 1965 following in the footsteps of Harvey Williams (1960-65), who died in tragic circumstances. On secondary reorganisation in 1971 Dr Ken became Deputy Headmaster to Aneurin Rees of the newly constituted Brecon High School, succeeding to the headship in 1975 from which post he retired in 1988.

Dr Ken was born in 1929 on a small farm in the little mining village of Cwmllynfell in the upper reaches of Cwm Tawe. His mother tended the farm whilst his father, a miner, was lost in a tragic accident when Ken was 17. He received his secondary education at Ystalyfera Grammar School before proceeding to University College Swansea where he graduated with Honours in History. He then studied for a Diploma in Education and, after an interval of two years on National Service as a Sgt in the Royal Army Education Corps, he returned to Swansea as a research student. He was awarded the Llewelyn Williams Postgraduate Studentship by the University of Wales and, on completion of his research, a PhD. After a period as Research Assistant he started on his teaching career with his appointment at Brecon.

Dr Ken's young life was slightly marred by his catching diphtheria, an illness that was to affect his health in years to come. He had passed the examination to enter Oxford University but decided on Swansea so that he could assist his mother and brother, Ellis, on the family farm as a consequence of his father's untimely death. His one claim to sporting fame was as the second row partner to the legendary R H Williams in the School XV and to have trialled for Wales. In the formative years it transpired that Ellis was to continue with the farming business whilst Dr Ken followed the path of higher education. However Dr Ken was to remain very much "a son of the soil". Having been reared on the small farm on the industrial fringe, he was able to empathise readily with pupils from the rural catchment areas and was well attuned to youth culture generally. Dr Ken had a liking for field mushrooms, and from his knowledge of nature's cycle he would know exactly when to expect me to bring him his annual supply.

Dr Ken had the gift that makes for a great teacher and his former pupils readily admit to his inspirational teaching. He would start every lesson with a flourish and would maintain the interest level throughout. Then as a headmaster he displayed the full exuberance of his personality and bonhomie which ensured the high profile and public image of the school. In the opinion of his staff and the public generally he "filled the window" with his presence and added distinction through his scholarship and authorship. He steered the school with foresight and imagination through a period fuelled by change. He was of strong conviction and applied his ideas with a single minded sense of purpose. When he became head of the Secondary Modern School for example, he instituted the mixed ability teaching system, and then as head of the High School he dispensed with the revered Speech Day and introduced an Open Day in place of the formal Prize Distribution. To the pupils he was an impressive figure with his winged gown billowing in his wake - a feature that gained him his distinctive nickname!

Dr Ken was a larger than life character and extremely generous in word and spirit. Apart from his academic career he loved music and singing, and was extremely proud of being related to the late Welsh playwright and Hollywood icon Ivor Novello. He loved sport and enjoyed travelling and especially his membership of Brecon Lodge and Probus.

His academic legacy was also significant through his authorship of books on Welsh history, namely "Tudor Wales" 1983, "Stuart Wales", "Georgian and Victorian Brecon" 1993, "Brecon 1293-1660: an Illustrated History" 1991, "Footprints in the Sand: Brecknock Notabilities" 1993, as well as the scholarly work on "The history of Swansea from the Rover Settlement to the Restoration" 1990.

Glyn Powell

Cricket Team of 1953

In previous newsletters I've included photos of soccer teams and a rugby team. For a change here's a cricket team photo which I found in an archive of the late Bill Leonard.



How many can you identify. Here are my thoughts:

Back row from left: Tony Tovell (scorer), E B White, Marcus Shellard, D Davies, Tony Hepton, A C (Tony) Went, P C Pugh, V M Sullivan;

Seated: Jacob Morgan (Headmaster), E G (Gambo) Powell, Tony Ottewell, Parry Richards (Captain), Peter Holt, Mike Balding, Mr J E D Jones;

On ground: T J Ralph, B T Williams.

Michael Williams

Obituaries

Alun Irfonwy Bannister (1936-39)

Alun, who died in February 2019 aged 94, was a talented sportsman; he played soccer and cricket for the school 1st XIs and soccer for Brecon Juniors. He was the Head of School of Production and Mechanical Engineering at West Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education in Swansea. During the second World War he was an officer in the Royal Navy and served on several minesweepers.

Dennis Morgan (1940-45)

Patriarch and premier of the Old Boys' Association over many years, Dennis had been a member from the outset. At school he distinguished himself academically and sporting-wise as the school goalkeeper. He graduated from UC Aberystwyth in Chemistry and Agricultural Chemistry which exempted him from National Service. By 1950 he had moved to Bangor and he subsequently undertook further study at Michigan State University before joining the Ministry of Agriculture Advisory Service, becoming Senior Nutrition Chemist and finally Head of Agricultural Science for

the East and West Midlands. On his retirement he returned to the proverbial Athens of Wales becoming a “Gog” and mastering sufficient Welsh to engage in conversation. Not only did he become no mean golfer, he became one of the hierarchy of the club, of which he wrote a history.

Ian Michael Davies (1967-71)

On completing his O-levels Ian had to return home to the farm for family reasons. From an early age he became a member of the YFC movement and participated in a range of activities, specialising in stock judging. He became a leading figure in the farming industry, participating in overseas delegations to several countries. Apart from farming he had an interest in enduro-sport.

Philip Colin Price (1957-62)

Philip was a considerable athlete, his forte being the hurdles, 200 yds and quarter mile. He represented the school in the County Sports, gaining County Colours as well as at the National Games. At his farm in Tredomen he kept Shire horses and Shetland ponies. He also worked for the Probation Service, and acted as a volunteer steward for Brecon Jazz and Theatre Brycheiniog.

John Rees Thomas (1947-51)

John returned home to assist on the family farm after his O-level examinations. He subsequently took over the farm which had a large beef and sheep enterprise. He supported the YFC movement and Trallwng Eisteddfod. He was interested in Maths and genealogy and visited N. America in search of family connections. He enjoyed being a social member of Cradoc Golf Club.

Peter J Morris MBE (1946-51)

Peter, son of George and Sally Morris of Church House, Glasbury, left school to work for a local builder before joining the civil service and working his way up through the ranks of the Foreign Office. He saw service in India, Seychelles, Australia and Katmandu and was awarded the MBE for his work in India. On retiring he took up residence in Durban, having married a South African girl.

Philip Thomas - Staff

Following military service Philip worked as a civilian at Sennybridge Camp. With his technical training he was later appointed workshop technician at the School. His remit included servicing the Woodwork, Metalwork and Technical Drawing Departments. He was also obliged to work closely with the caretaker and lunch time supervisory staff. His social life was centered on the RAFA Club.

Walter Clifford Holtam (“Wally”) (1944-47)

Walter of Aberllynfi left school to become an apprentice electrician for the Midlands Electricity Board at Hereford. After his two years military service in the RAF, he returned to the MEB. In 1964 he left the MEB to work for Neweys becoming a branch manager. He retired early in 1957 but later worked with Vernon Davies. He played badminton and was a former Scout Master.

Keri Thomas (1955-62)

Breconian, Keri, passed seven subjects at O-level including Agricultural Chemistry, and was a form prize winner in 1960. He was a member of the school rugby team in 1961-62. After completing his A’levels he joined University College, Swansea for a degree course (subject not known).

Brian Frank Adams (1952-58)

Libanus boy Brian left school before completing his sixth form studies and worked on the Forestry for a year before joining the Metropolitan Police. After a short period in the the Met he moved to

Bishop Auckland where he worked in a factory and then as a publican, and finally he became manager of a Workingman's Club. At school he excelled at several sports including soccer.

Roger Leslie Howells (1941-47)

After completing his CWBs Llangattock boy, Roger, joined the civil service and, after a break for National Service in the RAF, he eventually became Manager of Employment Services in Wales. Following further promotions he ended his career at Manchester as Regional Director for ACAS. He was a keen photographer and golfer, but his passion was rugby and supporting the Welsh team.

Arwyn Morgan (1949-53)

Anecdotally it is said that Arwyn rode to school on his bike and left at age 15 to return to the family farm, Ynysmynach. During the 1960s he won the Brecknock Agricultural Society farm award on several occasions. On his marriage he moved to Libanus where he won the "Western Mail" Farmer of the Year award in 1993 and 1995. He was a keen member of the YFC , and also of Probus.

John Ifor Davies (1944-48)

John was known as "Bill" both in school and within the Brecon community generally. Initially he was employed as a member of the office staff at Brecon Motors but subsequently became an insurance agent.

[It would be appreciated if former pupils would provide details of deceased contemporaries so that due tribute can be paid to their memory]

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