

***Cylchlythyr Cymdeithas Cyn-Ddisgyblion Ysgol Ramadeg y  
Bechgyn, Aberhonddu  
Mawrth 2018***

***Brecon Grammar School Old Boys' Association Newsletter March 2018***

**Introduction**

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Last year we held our first reunion dinner at the Castle Hotel in Brecon and it was judged to be a success so we will return there in 2018.

In 2017 the second Letton Shield (and prize) was awarded following its introduction in 2016 and we thank those of you who donated to the prize fund. Relatives of Billy Letton made generous contributions and an article on Billy is included in this newsletter.

A tribute to our former Chairman, Glyn Powell, appeared in the Brecon & Radnor Express last April and is reproduced on page 7.

As you can see from the Contents listed here, Glyn continues to be a major contributor to the newsletter. Would you, dear reader, consider writing something for the newsletter? It need not

be a long article but can range from a short "snippet" to an article of up to 3 pages.

Llynedd cynhaliasom ein cinio aduniadol cyntaf yng Ngwesty'r Castell, Aberhonddu. Gan yr oedd hyn yn ôl pawb yn llwyddiant, byddwn yn dychwelyd yno yn 2018.

Yn dilyn ei sefydlu yn 2016, dyfarnwyd Tarian Letton (a'r wobwr) am yr ail dro eleni: diolch i bawb a gyfrannodd at gronfa'r wobwr. Cafwyd cyfraniadau hael gan dylwyth Billy Letton, ac mae'r cylchlythyr hwn yn cynnwys erthygl ar Billy.

Ymddangosodd teyrnged i'n cyn-Gadeirydd, Glyn Powell, yn y B&R ym mis Ebrill, ac mae'r erthygl yn ymddangos yma ar dudalen 7.

Fel y gwelir o restr y cynnwys uchod, mae Glyn yn dal i fod yn gyfrannydd pwysig i'r cylchlythyr. A fydddech chi'r darllenwr annwyl gareticed ag ystyried ysgrifennu rhywbeth i'r cylchlythyr? Does dim rhaid i hynny fod yn erthygl hir, a gall amrywio o 'bwt' byr i erthygl i fyny at 3 tudalen.

## Events of 2017

On Saturday 22nd April 53 Old Boys, Old Girls and guests gathered at the **68th Annual Reunion Dinner** of the Old Boys' Association at the Castle Hotel. This was our first reunion at this venue, which must have the best site in Brecon overlooking the old bridge and the Brecon Beacons, which on this day were framed against a beautiful blue sky! Chairman David Gittins gave a warm welcome to all and after an enjoyable meal, President Glan Pritchard was invited to give his address. He began by acknowledging the encouragement and patience of his teacher, the late Miss Charles, at Senni Primary School. He recalled that around 300 pupils sat the 11+ exam and 60 passed. After this success he worked tirelessly on the farm throughout the summer, and his proud family rewarded him with a gift of a shiny leather satchel, which saw him through the next four years. He did not sit any A level exams and to his father's horror he joined the forestry cutting brush and earning good money. Then followed a period at Brecon Marts walking the boards as an auctioneer's Clerk, after which he joined the Bedfordshire Police in 1962. He attended the Linslade Court at the appearance of the Great Train Robbers; was involved in one of the first drug squads, and fought battles in the 1980's riots. As a detective sergeant in what was the No 5 regional crime squad he investigated fraud, robberies and shootings. His career ended with the Special Branch in the 1990s during the first Gulf War, and he was personally invited to join the late Princess Diana for



drinks with her family. On retiring he moved back to the family home, where he keeps a flock of sheep which keeps him busy. He concluded by proposing a toast to the Old Boys Association and wished his successor, Michael Peters, the best for 2017/2018.

Vice President Michael Peters (on right in photo) in his response said how much he enjoyed coming to the reunions and referred to the value of a grammar school education - a hot current topic! He proposed a vote of thanks to President Pritchard and to the Castle Hotel staff and then received the chain of office from the President.

The **Stars' Award Ceremony** (formerly the Awards Evening) at Brecon High School was attended by President Michael Peters, Tom Protheroe, Arwyn Davies, David Powell and Michael Williams on 18th July 2017. A new format had been devised for the evening whereby all prize winners were seated at small tables between the audience and the stage, and each did not know which prize they were going to get! Prize winners were wearing their best "bib and tucker" and the evening resembled an Oscar ceremony (without speeches)! Heads of departments presented prizes for their subject and President Peters presented the Old Boys' Prizes, except for the Letton Shield and prize which were presented by Mr Tim Williams, representing Billy Letton's family. As usual the evening included entertainment by pupils; this consisted of various musical interludes but one intriguing item was labelled "Guest Artiste" who turned out to be Welsh teacher Mrs Williams-Pike who had an excellent singing voice. Old Boys' prize winners are listed below.

Cliff Carr Memorial Prize Sport, going on to college/university

**Ben Williams**

Geoffrey Meredith Powell Senior Prize (English lit.)

**Dominic Morgan**

Geoffrey Meredith Powell Junior Prize (English lit.)

**Olivia Mills**

Mr & Mrs K. Evans Prizes

Evans KS3 Mathematician Prize

Evans KS4

Evans KS5

Evans Art Prize (11-18 year olds)

Evans Science or Business Prize (16-18 year olds)

Evans KS3 Language Prize Most improved Boy

Evans KS3 Language Prize Most improved Girl

**Ben Pritchard**

**Zachary Morgan**

**Jenny Chandler**

**Sukey Wu**

**Tom Cutts**

**Nathan Preece**

**Bethan Hughes**

Evans Intercultural Understanding Prize (11-18 year olds)

**Guiliana Sierchio**

Evans KS4 Geography Prize

Evans Most improved history (up to 16 years old) Prize

**Rhydian Rogers**

**Erin Havard**

The Lewis/Price cup plus book token for outstanding academic achievement – **Dylan Rees**

The D.J.Powell cup plus book token for significant adventurous or entrepreneurial endeavour –  
**Dimitar Doychev**

Letton football memorial shield plus prize for Overall performance during the season – **Newton Limbu**



The photo above includes some of the Old Boys prize winners: (from left) Ben Williams, Jenny Chandler, Guiliana Sierchio, Dominic Morgan, Zachary Morgan, Bethan Hughes, Rhydian Rogers, Erin Havard, Nathan Preece, Ben Pritchard, Newton Limbu, Olivia Mills, Dylan Rees, and a representative for Dimitar Doychev.

**AGM 2017**

At the AGM of the Old Boys' Association, which preceded the reunion, some significant decisions were made.

Mike Peters was elected President for 2017-2018.

Professor Colin Lewis was elected Vice President.

Glyn Powell was elected Life Vice President.

The following resolution was passed concerning the fate of the memorabilia and funds on closure of the Association:

- a) any Evans money and Meredith Powell money (£3000) would be offered back to the sponsors;
- b) the Cliff Carr fund can be donated to the school;
- c) any other funds to be donated to the High School, to be agreed at AGM;
- d) with regard to the memorabilia, they would be given either to the school or left with the Guildhall in Brecon (not Powys).

I hasten to add that the closure of the Association is not imminent. These decision were made after discussions in committee following a question by Ken Jones about what would happen when the Association ends.

**Michael Williams**

### **Biographical Notes**

#### **Colin Lewis (1952-1959) - Vice President**

Colin from Glasbury, entered Brecon Grammar School in 1952 and realised that Geography and History were as interesting as cricket. He took the Headmaster's Prize before going up to Aberystwyth. He then lectured in Geography in Ireland. He subsequently became Professor and HoD successively at the Universities of Transkei, Zululand, and at Rhodes University in South Africa. Colin has published over a dozen books, the latest of which: *Under the Black Mountains, the history of Gwernyfed since 1600*.

(For more on Colin see the article on page 12)

### **Update on Brecon High School**

Last year's newsletter recounted the developments in Powys Council aimed at reorganising secondary schools. The initial plan included a proposal to close Brecon High School and Gwernyfed in Three Cocks, but the plan was eventually dropped as was the proposal to close the Welsh medium stream at Brecon High School. However last summer a report from the Welsh Audit Office (WAO) on education finance in the county warned about overspending. Though spending per pupil in Powys is the sixth highest in Wales, the amount of cash given to schools, known as the delegated budget, is the second lowest in Wales. A headline in the Brecon & Radnor newspaper in July 2017 read "Schools in Powys heading for £3.5m overspend in 2019-2020". The WAO report said the council should consider using its powers to strip head teachers and governing bodies of overspending schools of the ability to set their own budgets.

Meanwhile the plans for the new school to be built at Brecon have been released. The proposed site for the new school is between the leisure centre and the athletics track, and images of the building and site can be seen on the school website: <https://tinyurl.com/yc45236v>. Opening of the school is scheduled for summer 2019.

**Michael Williams**

### **The Fifties were an astonishing time Mike Peters recalls memories of 1951**

PAST EDITIONS of the Association's publications were dominated by a theme of life within the old school, from the idiosyncrasies of teachers to the success of pupils, from the crumbling buildings to

the tribulations of those who endured the Plough, and on through matters that made school life memorable to the Baby Boomer generation.

Contemplating what I might write in this Old Boys' newsletter, I had a road to Damascus inspiration - though some might say it was nostalgia with a touch of dementia. I have no more to add to my days in the classroom but, what were the realities of life at home, in and around Brecon and in the wider world for my class of 1951?

The Fifties were an astonishing time. It was the era of the new teenager, a sometimes-irreverent breed: a time when the country was fighting back from the cold realities of the 1940s. There was a gleam of light at the end of the tunnel - and it was not a train coming the other way.

Taken as a whole, Fifties parents were significantly less old-school than the previous generation and markedly more indulgent and permissive. Thankfully our rural Wales was not to experience the anti-social antics of 'cosh boys' and 'Teddy boys' that led commentators to worry that a lack of parental control, caused by mistaken kindness and the fallacies of modern psychiatry, was turning out a generation of delinquents.

A number of writers, especially David Kynaston, a specialist in social history, have looked back to what one national newspaper has described as the Vanished Years. So, what was it like to live in the Brecon and the shire in September 1951, as we put on our newly bought school caps, packed our satchels, and for the lucky ones polished up our brand-new bikes and headed for Cradoc Road? We were entering into the decade of the Coronation which saw the end of food rationing. In our first year we knew an older generation was still at war. National Service was awaiting us at the age of 18 and there was fighting in Korea as we prepared for our 11 plus.

We probably didn't realise there was a brewing international crisis surrounding the Suez Canal (6,000 British troops were sent to the Zone that year) and that we would hear one of the last gasps of the British Empire. Those large swathes of pink that covered world maps were to turn monochrome only too soon. In this life changing year, we budding Silurians probably knew little, and heard nothing, of female equality. Yet the year saw the first woman to swim the English Channel.

It was the year of the Festival of Britain with its Skylon and Dome in London; it was the year that the Port Talbot steel works opened; it was a year of political earthquake as Labour went to the country and in a complete turn-around from the 1945 general election, Churchill was back in power. The first British supermarket opened and the country learned that membership of trade unions had rocketed to an all-time peak of 9.3 million.

In some homes a new gadget was slowly making an appearance. A few homes had a television set. It was black and white, and often fuzzy, and conversations speculated on when there would be better reception. Sunday night at home was forever changed. Back from evensong and with the serried ranks of neighbours sitting on every chair we possessed, we watched 20 Questions and booed at a very rude Gilbert Harding. Play of the week followed. New actors like Peter Cushing were to make their names on this new medium and youngsters introduced to the new interpretation of literature like *1984* – and its chilling jingle: *under the spreading chestnut tree, I sold you and you sold me*. Who remembers *The Yeti* and a great furry hand coming under the edge of the tent in a Himalayan blizzard or the Quatermass series that were as avidly followed then as EastEnders is today.

In Brecon in the Fifties there was little organised outside school for pre-teen and teenagers and our weekends were sport in the morning (especially if you represented the school), a dash to dress up in

our smartest rather than dress down for Saturday night. If we were lucky there was a teen dance to attend – otherwise it was the Brecon Promenade and the Boat House where the newly arrived juke box was a phenomenon.

Coca Cola was just about arriving though frothy coffee still held sway and probably made a small fortune for Carpannini's, our haunt of the young in High Street. Sunday's were wonderful. I was fortunate to be able roam the fields and the hills around Llanfaes, to fish the Usk and the Tarrell, and - if you knew where to go - to watch the budding trials riders and their go anywhere motor-cycles.

Church and evensong was a must - but what to do in the evening. The cinemas (like just about every other establishment) were closed. Sunday evening entertainment centred around Ship Street where the aficionados gathered and cheered or jeered as the trucks heading for the Midlands car factories with their loads of steel negotiated the hill and the sharp left turn at the top. Watching and listening to the thrilling thrum of diesels and the slick, or missed, gear changes and the occasional stall which caused a tail back over the Usk Bridge may seem rather inane these days. They were perfect for a generation growing up with the motor car and the prospect of owning a motor-bike. I suppose it would be fair to say that by the time we were teenagers then our views and pursuits had changed. We all discovered girls! I would contend that school and our early months in Cradoc rapidly changed perceptions. We were changing fast and taking note of our surrounds. There is nothing like peer pressure and experiencing the competitive edge to force us to move forward and grow up! In his book, "Family Britain", Kynaston was to ask: Was there any joy in a 1950s childhood. Reviewers were to emphasise that everybody who grew up in Fifties Britain would have indelible memories of their childhood, from the first taste of welfare orange juice to the birth of rock' n' roll. Certainly, we were more trusting and like our neighbours routinely left the street door on the latch and a key on a piece of string behind the letterbox so that children could come and go as they pleased. My mother persisted in this almost up to the time she passed on.

I have memories of houses that were draughty in winter with curtains hung behind the street door to reduce the flow of cold air and frost that formed overnight on the inside of bedroom windows. However, life was certainly not all doom and gloom. You grew up in a much safer environment than we can ever imagine these days. Children enjoyed the freedom of outdoor life. They played lots of rough-and-tumble games, got dirty and fell out of trees. The purple stains of iodine were always evident on the grazed knees of boys in short trousers.

Meat, butter, cheese, sugar and sweets were rationed until 1953. War films were the staple diet of the cinema -The Dam Busters, The Cruel Sea, Reach for The Sky - all in black and white and still regulars on today's movies TV. They don't make 'em like that anymore.

That these were more law-abiding times is not a nostalgic fantasy. The fact was that, following a sharp upward spike in the post-war years, crime declined markedly during the first half of the Fifties. The numbers started to move up from 1955, but were strikingly low. Notifiable offences recorded by the police were a little over half a million in 1957. Forty years later, they were almost 4.5 million. Violent crimes against the person numbered under 11,000 in 1957, and 250,000 in 1997.

It was four years later as we sat our O levels that we began to consider a career. It was not easy. The prospect of two years in uniform loomed and the world was an uncertain place. In Cyprus EOKA was terrorising the population and murdering British soldiers.

We were basking in a summer heat wave and nobody yet used anti-histamines to ward off hay fever...you just sneezed your way through. Oh! the train drivers were on strike, again, and we endlessly discussed the fate of Ruth Ellis who would be the last woman to hang in Britain. Today's environmentalists would be going mental... there was disturbing news that the stocks of Tabun nerve gas stockpiled by the Nazis in WW2 were to be dumped in the Atlantic. The arrival of rock 'n' roll with Bill Haley's Rock Around the Clock in 1955 opened the floodgates to adult anxiety, which rose even higher the following year after Elvis Presley entered the British Top 20 chart (itself a Fifties invention) for the first time.

There was good news! Employment was at its highest ever with barely one per cent not working. A British aircraft flown by the Royal Air Force had just established the world height record at over 65,000 feet and that industry was flourishing.

Cardiff was declared the official capital of Wales. ITV had begun to broadcast; Christopher Cockerel had patented a great invention, the hovercraft, ... and for the avid fans of James Bond, Ian Fleming, had published Moonraker. And if you didn't know, BirdsEye had begun selling fish fingers.

Purely personal thoughts: but I look back and sometimes wish for those less complex days. Feeling nostalgic? I would recommend reading Family Britain 1951-57 by David Kynaston, published by Bloomsbury.

## Old Boy Glyn awarded life vice presidency



*Stalwart Glyn Powell has been honoured by the Brecon Grammar School Old Boys Association*

FORMER teacher, Army officer and activist Glyn Powell is officially a member of the old boys' club.

The Sennybridge resident has been honoured for his long-standing contribution to the success of the Brecon Grammar School Old Boys Association with the unanimous award of a life vice presidency at its annual general meeting.

The old boys met at the Castle of Brecon Hotel on Saturday where they honoured Glyn who was born in Crai and was the youngest pupil in his class when he started at the Brecon Boys' Grammar (County) School in 1943.

Glyn is well known for his work while deputy president of the Farmers' Union of Wales, with the BBC Council for Wales, and for leading resistance during 1963-72 to the building of a reservoir which would have drowned the Senni Valley. He created an organisation which was able to block roads with farm equipment whenever contractors attempted to enter the valley. Glyn, and his supporters, maintained their opposition for nine years until the scheme was abandoned.

He is said to be better known among his old school friends for his ability to remember the names and characteristics of hundreds of Old Boys and his contributions to the association magazine. He is also remembered for the rich timbre of his singing voice in the morning assembly and the school's Eisteddfod.

Glyn has been a committee member for 40 years and was chairman for five years and is still an active member.

Association chairman, David Gittins, of Hay-on-Wye said: "It is an honour that the association has bestowed on Glyn. And it is wholly deserved. Glyn has been untiring in his support for his old school and its former pupils. His dedication to the association is outstanding and his new appointment a small way for his colleagues to say thank you. We are extremely fortunate that Glyn continues to sit on our committee and that his experience and wisdom are available to the association. We look forward to many more years of his wise counsel."

After leaving the grammar school Glyn attended Bangor University where, in 1953, he obtained a degree in history and political philosophy and then a diploma in education in 1954. He was called up for national service and posted to the King's Own Royal Regiment and served in Korea, after the fighting had finished, and was also the Army Liaison Officer with the Japanese Self Defence Force before being posted to Malaya and attached to the Gurkhas where he was promoted to substantive Captain and Acting Major.

After six years in the Army, Glyn took a post teaching at Bridgend Technical College but after a year he took on a role teaching history and Welsh at the Brecon Secondary Modern Technical School. In 1971 Breconshire embraced the comprehensive system and the Mixed Secondary Modern Technical school merged with the Girls' and Boys' Grammar Schools to become the Brecon High School. Glyn taught history and was also appointed head of the Middle School.

Glyn has been married to Gwenllian for more than 50 years and has one daughter Bethan, a language teacher at Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera and two grandchildren.

The annual general meeting also elected Llanfaes-born Colonel Mike Peters, as the 2017 president of the association.

(This tribute was written by Michael Peters and is reproduced with permission of the Brecon & Radnor Express)

### Headmasters

The Brecon Boys' Intermediate School, progenitor of first the County and then the Grammar School, opened on Tuesday 22nd September 1896 with two masters and 47 pupils divided into four classes. It had been agreed that Dr Coke's Memorial Hall in Lion Street should be the temporary premises for the school in preference to 12, Castle Street. The school subsequently functioned at Cradoc Road from 1901 until 1958. In 1958 when Brecon Boys' Grammar Technical School moved

to the new building on Penlan there were approximately 350 pupils in all and 21 members of staff. With secondary reorganisation in September 1971 the two single sex Grammar Schools and the co-educational Secondary Modern were amalgamated into Brecon High School, a unitary secondary comprehensive school of some 1500 pupils at that time. The history of a school has often been the history of a headmaster whose energy, discipline and interests have given the school its particular character, reputation and success. During the existence of our Alma Mater there were five headmasters, each one imposing his own individual mark and ethos on the school.

### **Glyn Powell**

[**Editor's note**; Glyn has written pen portraits of the five headmasters and the first one now follows. Others will appear in future issues of the newsletter]

### **Nathan John BA ACP 1896-1909**

The genesis of the Intermediate School was not particularly auspicious with the appointment of the first headmaster, Nathan John, being a bone of contention in certain quarters. There were 23 candidates of whom six were short listed for interview. According to the "South Wales Echo" of 31/7/1896 Nathan John was elected unanimously. This dispute centered on a Report of the Breconshire County Governing Committee stating that all candidates not possessing a degree had been excluded from the short list. The implication of this ruling was that the highly regarded Thomas Butcher, who had for many years conducted the Middle Class School in Brecon and whose pupils were to transfer to the new boys' school, was not considered for the headship. Nathan John, the successful candidate, was appointed on a salary of £150 per annum with a capitation of £1 per pupil.

Nathan was born in 1849 in Pembrokeshire, the son of William (shipwright) and Mary Oliver John. In 1851 he lived with his parents and infant sister Anne at Lewis Street, St Mary, Pembroke. The family were still in residence at this address with Nathan being 12 a scholar, brother Jabez 8 and Mary Oliver 6, but no Anne. According to the Census Return for 1871, Nathan John was described as an "assistant" living in Finchley, Middlesex. He was back at 19 Pembroke Street, Pembroke in 1881, a 32 year old graduate schoolmaster, living with his only listed surviving sibling, Mary Oliver 26, his single sister. By 1891 they had moved to Victoria House, Victoria Road, Pembroke both remaining unmarried. In 1901 Nathan and Mary were residing at 1 Camden Villa, Brecon, having been joined by their parents.

Nathan John had been privately educated and held an external degree from London University. At the time of his appointment he was second master at the recently established Intermediate School in Pembroke Dock where a Mr Davies was headmaster. According to the "South Wales Daily News" of 28/12/1894, his salary was £120 per annum. Prior to this he had maintained a Commercial Academy for some 20 years before it was incorporated in the new secondary school. It was suggested that he was made Second Master as a sop for having to surrender his students.

In his book "Edrych yn ôl" R T Jenkins, the eminent Welsh academic and historian (a staff member 1904-17), was rather scathing in his assessment of his headmaster, this adverse opinion being shared by his colleagues. The main criticism was that Nathan John lacked backbone in his relationships with parents and scholars alike and kowtowed to the governors. Though a weak personality it was generally conceded that he was quite pleasant generally, although his treatment of staff could be demeaning. This was evidenced by his reserving his "lavatory" for his personal use, like some "homo deus", which meant that staff had to use the primitive outside toilet and the pupils' washroom.

Nathan John's ineffectiveness as a headmaster was reflected in his timetabling where his concept was simply to fill in the spaces with a name irrespective of a teacher's subject specialism. Such was the staff's dissatisfaction with the situation that Mr Morris and RT relieved him of the responsibility in order to rationalise the timetable to the benefit of all staff. With the headmaster ensconcing himself in his office and emerging occasionally to venture into a classroom, "free periods" for the staff were a rare privilege.

At the outset there were only two teachers - the headmaster and Thomas Butcher but by 1904 there were four assistant teachers, the fourth tending to be a floater. Nathan John had a penchant for aping Christ College, not only with his Cadet Corps, but also by introducing French into the curriculum and appointing a Frenchman, Monsieur T J Godin, to the staff. Such an appointment was not justified by the amount of French tuition timetabled thereby placing an added burden on the other masters. Monsieur Godin was replaced in 1909 by another Frenchman, Monsieur M D Harrault. Richard William Musk was entrusted with the teaching of Music at both schools on a part-time basis, whilst Capt. Dickey and then Sgt. Major Thomas Griffiths SWB instructed the Cadet Corps (officered by members of staff) in "military drill and physical exercise". Games had a low priority, being played intermittently on the Recreation Ground, known to pupils as "The Reck" which was leased for £5 per annum. Practical instruction in woodwork was given by Mr Christopher Scott, a local working joiner and carpenter employed for 6 hours per week at 1s-4d per hour.

Nathan John was said to have flaunted his smattering of French acquired at a summer school in Caen. He would, when the whim took him, take over a lesson from the French master to hear the class reading the set book. He also regarded himself a something of an authority on woodwork, having attended another summer school in Sweden. He would emerge from his study to deliver his twice weekly half hour lessons on "notes and drawings" to the woodwork classes.

R T Jenkins' assessment of him was "as a schoolmaster he was completely farcical" ("Fel ysgolfeistr, yr oedd yn hollol farcical"). One would be justified in suspecting that such a comment was wholly subjective but for the fact that Mr Davies, his former headmaster and Edgar Jones, headmaster of Barry County School (and father of the famous journalist Gareth Jones, Mongolia), expressed similar opinions. The general school discipline was lax. As early as December 1896, only two months after the opening the school the Managers had to consider a public complaint of the "nuisance by noise" caused by boys entering and leaving school. According to a number of contemporary pupils members of staff took the law into their own hands and dispensed their own particular brand of corporal punishment.

However Nathan John was on very favourable terms with the Governors and seems to have been highly respected in higher social circles. A freemason, he was initiated into the Brecon Lodge (Number 651) on 30th January 1901. On his death the Governors expressed "deep regret at the loss . . . of their esteemed headmaster", as they found him more pliant than his successor was to be. According to the "Evening Express" of 15/1/1909 "Mr Nathan John . . . died very suddenly last night half an hour after retiring . . ." Death was due to heart failure, confirmed in "Baner ac Amserau Cymru" 23/1/1909 ("Nos Iau syrthiodd Mr Nathan John BA, prif-feistr Ysgol Ganolradd y Bechgyn yn Aberhonddu i lawr yn farw, yn ei gartref, Aberhonddu. Brodor ydoedd o Sir Benfro"). He was 60 years of age and left his estate of £577-4s-4d to his sister Mary Oliver John, spinster at 1 Camden Villa. His funeral service was held at Kensington Baptist Church, conducted by the pastor the Rev A H Lewis BA BD with burial at the cemetery.

**Glyn Powell**

## Billy Letton (1928-2014)

In the 2017 newsletter I announced the creation of a football shield in memory of Billy Letton, and an appeal was launched for funds to support the award of an annual prize. Billy's relatives and others have generously supported this fund, and this year the Shield was presented to the second winner, Newton Limbu, by Tim Williams, representing Billy's family at the Awards Evening in Brecon High School on 18th July 2017. The photo on left shows cousin Audrey with the Shield.



Billy, who lived in the Struet, never married but he had a large extended family, some in Australia and most in Canada which he visited many times. Many of his nephews and nieces have submitted testaments and recollections of Billy. These are too long to reproduce in full here so what follows is a selection of these recollections.

Niece Bronwen sums up the situation succinctly in the words "Uncle Bill has always been an important part of our lives .... and we were his children".

She went to live with Billy and his wife for 2 years when she was 3 years old while her father, a member of the Canadian Army, fought in the Korean conflict. She refers to his many visits to Canada when he met his great and great-great nieces and nephews. He was like a pied piper and they all loved him and followed him around. When they visited Brecon Billy would organise a host of activities including concerts, trips to the seaside, the agricultural fair, the Welsh Borders Museum, and the Brecon Beacons where Billy was always way ahead of everyone.

Billy's friend, the late David ('Scitch') Morgan, said he went to school with Billy, sang with him in the cathedral choir, and had fond memories of playing many games of soccer with him first for their house - Siddons, for the school and then for a local Brecon youth team called the Classics. He recalled one game played in Talgarth where he and Billy played especially well and were complimented for their play in the Report in the 'Brecon & Radnor Express'

Nephew Rob recalls Billy deciding to teach him the rudiments of soccer and explaining the art of dribbling, kicking and passing the ball. He was also shown how to play cricket. Bob also recalls how Billy loved debating. When in Canada he used to devour the local newspaper and listen to the radio news and when Rob arrived home Billy was ready with questions on topical subjects. At Halloween, when Billy had relatives from Canada staying, since there were no pumpkins available he would collect several large turnips which he hollowed out and carved eyes, nose and mouth and placed a candle inside. These were his Halloween mementos.

It is clear from all the testaments that Billy was an exceptional man who had a very warm relationship with all his relatives, who always looked forward to his visits and to their visits to Brecon. His mantra was "to thine own self be true", which he followed every day of his life. Nephew Rob has estimated that Billy met at least 400 Canadians all of whom called him Uncle Bill! His ashes were scattered over Pen-y-fan in his beloved Beacons by his godson Tim Williams.

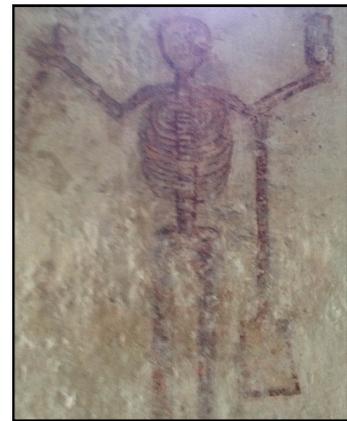
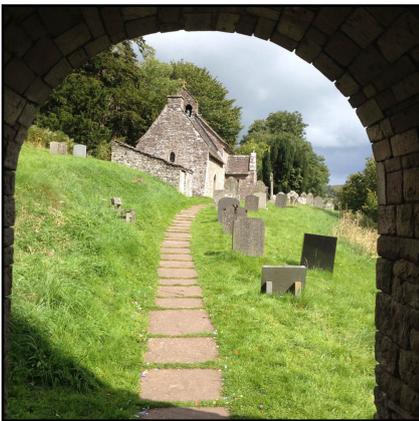
### **J Michael Williams**

(Any member who would like to know more about this stalwart of the OBA should contact the editor as we have more information than we can sensibly use in a single newsletter)



## The Church of St Issui (St Ishows, Partrishow)

How many of you have visited this gem of a church which is located some 5 miles north of Abergavenny on the southern slopes of the Gader Range with a wonderful view of the lower Grwyne Fawr and the Nant Mair stream flowing below? This church was one of two in Wales which were included in a list of the UK's 60 favourite churches in 2013 (the other was Llandaff Cathedral). The church is named after a 6th century hermit, Issui, and is thought to date from the 11th century, but most of the fabric dates from the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries. The font has an inscription dated 1055 and there is a magnificent intricate carved Rood Screen (circa 1500, see photo below). On the west wall there is a painted skeleton, a figure of doom, holding a scythe, hourglass and spade (photo below right). It has been whitewashed over many times but always reappears! The closed room at the west end is a hermit's cell and chapel called 'Eglwys-y-Bedd' and is said to contain St Issui's grave under the altar.



The churchyard contains a 13th century stone cross (photo on left) which survived Henry VIII's decree in 1547 that such crosses be destroyed, possibly because it was so remote. There is also a yew tree\* on the north side.

In 1188 Geraldus Cembrensis, the early Welsh historian, accompanied Archbishop Baldwin on a tour of Wales to raise enthusiasm for a Crusade, and the Abbot preached here at Partrishow.

A short distance down the lane from the church there was a well which became a place of pilgrimage after Issui was murdered by a man who sought shelter with him but refused to be converted to Christianity. It was reputed to have healing properties.

Next time you visit Brecon why don't you make a detour to visit this wonderful church, but beware the narrow road. (Post code for your SatNav is NP7 7LP; for walkers the OS coordinates are S0279 224). If you want to read more about this church visit <http://www.cpat.demon.co.uk/projects/longer/churches/brecon/16931.htm>. There is also a 5 minute UTube video which shows most of the interior: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoW-hwNI0s4>

\*I referred to the oldest yew tree in Britain in my 2016 article.

**Michael Williams**

## Vice President Colin Lewis

Colin was born in Swansea in 1942. His father was then an army chaplain and his mother a teacher. When his father was demobbed in 1946 the family moved to Glasbury, where his father was inducted as Vicar of St Peter's. After attending Glasbury VP School, at Coed y Bolen, Colin proceeded to Brecon Boys' Grammar School. He travelled on the famous/infamous School Train from Glasbury Station. (He and his wife live in a bungalow on the site of that station, with views over Glasbury and the Wye valley to the hills of Radnorshire.)

Colin was intrigued by Geography and History and owes much to Dr W S K Thomas and Dr Groves for the support they gave him in Brecon Grammar. Perhaps the fact that his father was a graduate in History and his mother in Geography were contributing factors in fostering his interests!

Young Lewis was a keen cricketer and, at one time, was House Captain of Theo. He also played occasionally for the school. His other interests included riding and bell ringing and he persuaded Mr Rees, who was then Headmaster, to allow the creation of a Grammar School Ringing Society. The Moses boys from Defynnog were among the members, as were the sons of the Café Royal in The Bulwark. Albert Matthews, who lived beside King Charles' Steps, who was then in his seventies, tutored the ringers. Albert had been a member of the Brecon ringers in the days when there was an excellent Stedman Triples band at St Mary's, Brecon.

In 1959 Colin went up to the University College of Wales in Aberystwyth and read Geography, History and first year Economics. He was fortunate that the great E G Bowen was Professor of Geography and that Bowen had a very gifted staff. He was also fortunate that Neil Bennett and W Gwyn Thomas, two leading bell ringers of the time, were in Aber. Under their guidance he developed into a competent change ringer, becoming Master of the University of Wales' Society of Change Ringers, 1962-64.

After graduating, Colin went on a university expedition to Iceland and worked on a glacier in the north west of that country. He returned to Aber and, under Dr Eddie Watson, started to research the cirque-glacial and periglacial landforms of the Brecon Beacons. He also led another UCW Expedition, sponsored by The Royal Geographical Society, which went to The Faroes. In 1964 he was appointed Assistant (i.e. Junior Lecturer) in Geography at University College Dublin, under Welsh-speaking Professor T Jones- Hughes, an Aber graduate and North Walian.

While at UCD Colin continued to research glacial history and edited a book entitled *The glaciations of Wales and adjoining regions*. He also completed his Ph D, which was awarded by The National University of Ireland. In addition he published books of a sporting and historical nature, for one of which he was awarded the prestigious National University of Ireland's Prize for Irish Historical Research. For a decade he was the hunting correspondent for *The Irish Field* and *Irish Times* and rode many excellent horses over the best hunting country in the world.

Colin was a member of the Synod of Dublin, Kildare and Glendalough, secretary of the Select Vestry of Bray parish for a decade, member of the committee of the Wicklow Foxhounds, served on the committee that revised the Leaving Certificate syllabus (Ireland), and Chairman of the Geographical Society of Ireland. He was Founder Chairman of East Glendalough Secondary School in County Wicklow. He exhibited and judged horses and hounds at many shows in Ireland. He was also a member of the bands of bell ringers at St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin and at Christ Church in Bray and conducted a number of peals in Ireland.

From Dublin Colin moved, on a two-year sabbatical, to the Chair of Geography at the University of Transkei. Transkei was then a black homeland in South Africa. The university was developing

rapidly and Colin soon found himself on the buildings committee. He had the pleasure of teaching students who are now among the leaders in South Africa. He also started to research the cold-climate geomorphology of the East Cape Drakensberg, and was the first to do so.

After returning to Ireland the Vice Chancellor of the University of Zululand invited Colin to become Professor of Geography and Environmental Studies there. Colin and his family moved there in 1987 but he did not enjoy Zululand: where they lived, on the coast, was very hot and humid. Colin continued research in the Drakensberg and in 1989 was invited to accept the Chair of Geography at prestigious Rhodes University, where he spent the rest of his academic career.

While at Rhodes, Professor Lewis served on two UNESCO research projects which took him to South America and what was then the USSR. He became Chairman of the Southern African Society for Quaternary Research, continued his interest in bell ringing and became Chairman of the South African Guild of Change Ringers, 1997-2006. He also oversaw rehangings of the eight bells of Grahamstown cathedral in a new steel frame and their augmentation to ten. Additionally, in co-operation with Dr Ray Ayres, he experimented in bell-casting using a foundry in Port Elizabeth, which resulted in casting over thirty bells and the formation of three new rings of bells in South Africa. Colin did the design work for the fittings and guided the hanging of two of those rings.

Among his publications at Rhodes were two books that he edited on the geomorphology of the Eastern Cape of South Africa. He also published on the island of St Helena, in the South Atlantic, and subsequently led a number of tours to that delightful but isolated island. After retiring and returning to Wales Colin has published books on *Henry Williams the Glasbury bellfounder and the production and tuning of bells*, on Glasbury bells and bellringers, and on the history of the Gwernyfed area since 1600: *Under the Black Mountains* (Logaston Press, 2017).

Colin has two sons, the eldest of whom (Brychan) has a PhD in Veterinary Tropical Disease from the University of Pretoria, but works as a computer expert in a financial house in London. The younger (Hywel) has a degree from Rhodes University and is Health and Safety Manager for an international seeds company based in The Netherlands. His daughter (Carolyn) is a specialist in emergency medicine and a Fellow of the College of Emergency Medicine (South Africa). She presently lives and works in Natal, South Africa. Colin has four grandchildren. His first wife, (Gillian nee Graney) and mother of his children, is a botanist and co-author of *The medicinal plants of Zululand*. He is married to Marijke nee van der Zeyde, an artist and former teacher, genealogist and art curator at the Albany Museum in Grahamstown, who has a research degree from Rhodes University.

### **John Lloyd, the Brecknock Society and the Brecknock Museum**

Born on 19 April 1878, at Dinas House, Brecon, John Conway Lloyd, was fascinated by the history of his family, back to Elystan Glodrydd in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. He was very aware that the Lloyds had, for over a hundred years made a significant contribution to the administrative, political and social life of Brecon and Breconshire. In every generation since 1798 the eldest son was appointed High Sheriff of Breconshire and elected as Bailiff (Mayor) of Brecon.

His mother died in 1882, when he was four, and his father in 1893 while John was still a student at Christchurch, Oxford. In 1899 he came of age and became responsible for the 800 acre Dinas estate, Brecon, which was in financial difficulties, and Dinas House had to be rented to tenants from 1900-03, 1919-21 and from 1930-37.

He was High Sheriff of Breconshire and elected to Brecon Town Council in 1906. Three years later

he was Mayor of Brecon and was elected as the County Councillor for St. Mary's Division, Brecon, a position he held for 39 years.

In 1910 he was a Second Lieutenant in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the South Wales Borderers. Just before the outbreak of war he was promoted to Captain and proceeded to France in January 1915. On 9 May 1915 he was very lucky to be only slightly wounded during the disastrous battle for Aubers Ridge. Eighteen of the 30 officers and 235 of the 977 non-commissioned ranks in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the SWB, were killed that day. In January 1917 he was awarded the M. C. for, "gallantry during active operations against the enemy". After the Armistice he was promoted to be the Deputy Provost Marshall of the Army of the Rhine, with the temporary rank of Lt. Colonel, and was based in Cologne.

After demobilisation John Lloyd was re-elected to the County Council and for many years he was Leader of the Conservative group, but he sometimes supported Liberal and Labour proposals. He became known for his determination to ensure that the children of poorer families should not have to pay for secondary school education, and that during the economic depression, the children of the unemployed, or those who earned very low wages, should have free school meals. He also had a particular interest in the finances of Breconshire County Council, which he felt were uncoordinated, and he was soon appointed as Chairman of the Finance Committee. While holding this position he was critical of County Councillors who did not make themselves familiar with all the financial details of papers to be discussed by the Council, and he also "... objected to the waste of money in calling so many meetings."

In addition to being a very active, senior Member of the County Council and Brecon Town Council, he was, for varying amounts of time:

- Chairman of the Governors of the Girls' and Boys' County Grammar Schools and Governor of Christ College;
- Representative of the County Council on the Courts of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, and the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire, Cardiff;
- Member of the Court of Governors of the National Museum of Wales;
- Chairman of the Quarter Sessions and Chairman of the Mid-Wales Police Authority.

In 1938 he was knighted for his, "services to the county of Breconshire".

In 1950, as Chairman of the Education Committee, he proposed that the Boys' Grammar School and Christ College should be "merged" to create a new school of some 650 pupils. 350 would be day, non fee paying pupils, from the Brecon, Talgarth, Hay, Defynnog and Crickhowell, educational districts, who, "...were adjudged to be capable of benefiting by secondary grammar or technical education." The governing body would consist of one-third members elected by Breconshire County Council, one third by the governing body of Christ College and one third by the Ministry of Education. There was considerable opposition from the Governors of Christ College and most of the County councillors, so this proposal was quickly buried!

#### Brecknock Society and Brecknock Museum

John Lloyd's interest in the archaeology and history of Breconshire was increased when in 1923, the National Museum of Wales asked for the sixth century Victorinus commemorative grave stone at Scethrog to be placed in the National Museum. Secondly, the National Museum of Wales decided to excavate Y Gaer and, thirdly, the discovery of the dug out canoe in Llangorse Lake.

When it became known that the finds from the Gaer were to be taken to the National Museum and that the dug out canoe, discovered in Llangorse Lake, might stay in the National Museum, John Lloyd, Capt. Evans of Ffrwdgrech, J. B. Garsed Price, Captain Christy of Llangoed, and Dr. K. D. Pringle, agreed that what was needed was a Brecknock Society whose first objective was to be the establishment of a museum for Breconshire which would house important artefacts, books and documents relating to Breconshire.

On 30 March 1926 John Lloyd organised a Public Meeting in the Guild Hall, Brecon, to assess the degree of support for, "The Formation of a County Museum." John Lloyd informed the meeting that the former English Congregational Chapel in Glamorgan Street, which had been empty for some years, had been purchased by John Price of Morganwg House, and he was prepared to rent it to the Brecknock Society to be developed as a Museum.

In October 1927 John Lloyd wrote to 25 friends inviting them to become Friends of the Museum, and contribute to the cost of the reconstruction, maintenance and future running costs of the building. The initial response was very disappointing, but, largely thanks to Lord Buckland, enough money was raised to complete the reconstruction of the building as a museum. The Brecknock Museum was opened on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1928 by Lady Buckland. At the opening, John Lloyd commented that, "He hoped someday to see the Town Council approach the Brecknock Society to take the museum over and put it on on the rates for all time, ("Hear, Hear" and Laughter) (*Brecon and Radnor 8 March*). This eventually happened in 1951.

The first General Meeting of the Society was held in the County Hall on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1928. During the next 23 years, while different members held the positions of President and Treasurer, John Lloyd was Secretary throughout these years, and from 1930 he was also the part-time curator of the museum.

By the second AGM John Lloyd was able to report that there were 381 members of the Brecknock Society, 700 visitors to the museum and over 400 exhibits on display. These varied from the Llangorse Dug Out Canoe to a box of early matches. Also, the 50 page, "Transactions of the Brecknock Society and Records of the Brecknock Museum" had been printed and distributed. During World War II the number of visitors reached 13,815 and, by then, there were around 1,000 artefacts on display, or in store, and an important library of over a thousand relevant books and documents.

During the years John Lloyd was Secretary of the Brecknock Society (1928-54) and the unofficial curator of the museum (1930-51), the major achievements of the Brecknock Society were:

- establishing and developing the museum and its collection;
- organising the campaign to raise the necessary money to purchase Tretower Court and then presenting it to the nation;
- the publication of Volume IV of the Glanusk edition of, "The History of Breconshire" by Theophilus Jones;
- initiating and organising the annual Henry Vaughan Service at Llansantffraed;
- campaigning for over 20 years to replace the inadequate original obelisk to Llewellyn with the current memorial;
- the purchase of the Old Museum building by the Brecknock Society in 1944. It was sold in 2010 for £200,000 and that money is being used to assist the restoration of the Brecknock Museum

and Art Gallery;

- an annual programme of lectures and the organisation of significant one day summer schools related to the archaeology, history, geology, fauna and flora of Breconshire, given by leading academics;
- negotiating in 1951 for Breconshire County Council to take financial responsibility for the maintenance and development of the Brecknock Museum.

Without the enthusiasm of John Lloyd, the Brecknock Society would not have been formed in 1927 and it was his dedication and determination which enabled the Brecknock Society, without any financial support from the county, to create the Brecknock Museum in 1928. A number of the staff of the Girls', but not the Boys', Grammar School, were always actively involved in the Brecknock Society and the Museum.

John Lloyd resigned, for health reasons, from the County Council in September 1952, but remained active in the Brecknock Society until his death on 30 May 1954.

Towards the end of 2018 the Brecknock Museum and Art Gallery, which has been undergoing a major restoration for four years, is scheduled to reopen.

In March of every year, a lecture is given in Theatr Brycheiniog, by an eminent academic, to commemorate John Lloyd's contribution to Breconshire.

## **Ken Jones**

### **Examination fever continues to squander scarce resources seeking to measure the immeasurable**

According to W H Auden “the aim of education is to induce the largest amount of neurosis that the individual can bear without cracking”. As parents, and more probably as grandparents, we have been progressively drawn into the stress of the process and the corresponding current confusing examination set-up. The very word examination in itself is said to be enough to prompt stress and anxiety as many of us have witnessed with regard to youthful members of our families. Column inches in issues of the “The Western Mail” have been regularly devoted to the implications of stress with corresponding guidance notes for both candidates and parents as to how to face up to the challenge. Those of us accustomed to a previous examination regime find the whole drama and frenzy that has grown up around the examination and the publication of results completely alien. Media coverage highlights scenes outside schools which assume the guise of a veritable comedy with shouts of acclamation and the squealing embracing of over-excitabile teenagers as they open their individual envelopes. I remember being notified of the results of my examinations through the columns of the “Brecon and Radnor Express” with no public congratulations or photographs. It was the custom to publish the results of all the candidates good and bad, pass or fail. Placing an individual’s results in the public domain in this way would not be considered politically correct today. However, as a concept political correctness seems to have gone mad with the suggestion that the word “failure” be expunged from the educational system to be replaced with the concept of deferred “success”.

My earliest experience of an external examination was having to sit the pernicious 11+, the so-called scholarship, as an anxious and uninitiated 10 year old country lad. I remember that morning in March 1943 travelling to Sennybridge to join a group of other candidates from the catchment

area at the recently opened Central School still smelling of newness. We were supervised by stern faced authoritarian County School masters with swishing gowns and commanding presence. It had been necessary to perform adequately in a preliminary test before being allowed to proceed to the actual 11+. The results were published in July in the "Brecon and Radnor Express" with the names, marks and positions of all who sat the exam with the top 30 being granted automatic admission. Following a four year course of study one was confronted by the CWB examination if one had stayed the course and not taken advantage of the leaving age of 15, recently raised from 14.

The CWB (Central Welsh Board) was established on 13th May 1896 and had to inspect schools for the purpose of awarding Treasury Grants. It was also the Examining Board initially offering four certificates - Junior, Senior, Higher and Honours. By our time at School Certificate level there were three grades - Pass, Credit and Very Good. To obtain a certificate one had to obtain passes in English, Maths and an additional language within the five subjects required. For Matriculation credits in this range of subjects was the minimum required, the attainment of which permitted a pupil to progress to Higher. In earlier times Matriculation fulfilled university entrance requirements. At Higher the grades were Subsidiary, Principal and Very Good with Very Good being a rare distinction. Interestingly, according to my school reports we started with 35 on register in Form II, a class which included a number of resits. By V5 there were only 17 left to sit their CWB with four eventually taking Higher. Where a pupil required subject top-up for a certificate there was a form VS.

The examination system was transformed in 1951 with the introduction of the GCE (General Certificate of Education) based on 'O' and 'A' examinations. The CWB had to some extent become discredited beyond redemption being a certificate rather than a subject based examination system. 'O' Level however was the culmination of a wide five year curriculum with a significant increase in the number of subjects. Grades at 'O' Level were a pass or a hard-earned Very Good whilst at 'A' Level there was either a Pass or Distinction. Once again statistics show a very limited number of the top grade although the editor of our newsletter was something of an exception with Distinctions in Pure and Applied Maths, Physics and Chemistry at 'A' Level. GCE was academically orientated and on reflection continued the grim days of spelling accuracy, syntactical precision and numerical fluency. Although a small percentage of pupils at the Secondary Modern School were prepared for GCE Examinations in a limited number of subjects, in the main pupils sat the Pre-Tech, PNC and PCom examinations. Then in 1965 these examinations were replaced by one nationally controlled examination called CSE (Common Secondary Examination). It was based on grades not marks, and was controlled by teachers and moderated by outside examiners. I cannot but wax nostalgic about the benefits of this particular examination for the pupils for which it was designed. Regrettably it was undermined somewhat at secondary reorganisation when the hierarchy was academically biased.

Governments seem to have a perverse tendency to tinker with the curriculum and qualifications whilst politicians like to fiddle with classroom learning. So in a change of tack the GCE was replaced by the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) with a grading system of A to G with an A\* being added later. GCSE was introduced so that the examination system and its attendant results would be less arbitrary. The curriculum, assessment and qualifications were designed to promote an approach that was more learner centred and skill focussed. However, with a syllabus closely delineated classroom creativity tended to be stifled by oppressive political control over the whole curriculum. Yet from its inception there has been constant fiddling by mandarins of aspects of the GCSE. Candidates in England experienced the newly reformed GCSEs. Most

noticeably, numerical grades from 9 to 1 replaced replaced lettered ones, A\* to G in English and Maths. All subjects will gradually change over to this system in the next two years. The new exams were designed to be deeper, harder and more rigorous but there has been political difficulty in implementing them. Grade 9 is supposed to represent an A\*\* but there is some confusion over the relationship of other grades with former performance measures. According to Justine Greening grade 4 is a standard pass while grade 5 is a strong pass. A further remarkable admission is that for the higher tier Maths paper the pass mark is a mere 18%. In Wales the letter grading system has been retained but for the 2017 examination six so-called new subjects were introduced - English, English Literature, Welsh Language, Welsh Literature and two different Maths papers. The now discredited course work is being dispensed with under the reform formula. The practice of early entry is now being questioned and according to Kirsty Williams is considered as being unsustainable in the future. Although a candidate's results are confidential, marking is in the public domain and marked scripts can be returned or challenged later.

There is a belief in certain quarters that grade boundaries have been adjusted thereby leading to a lowering of standards. Sally Collier, chief regulator of Ofqual, the examination watchdog, is reported to have proposed "to lower mark threshold" so as to ensure similar proportions of pupils passed and achieved top grades. She also commented "I want the message to be that students have done fantastically well. All our kids are brilliant". She seems to be proposing grade inflation and the lowering of the bar generally. There is actually a school of thought that there is a compelling argument to change the whole examination system. They maintain that exams used to be a means to an end whilst now they are the end. Proponents of the "ancien régime" continue to defend the former exam system as the singly true assessment of one's ability to work under stress which is the requirement of any exam. It represented, it is argued, a fair and honest assessment of one's own effort without external influences. Is such an attitude defensible today? Is it the product of over imaginative minds, full of distortions and misconceptions!?

**Glyn Powell**

### **My Vacation Jobs**

One of my earliest vacation activities, as opposed to jobs, was spent on my Uncle's farm near Llanwinio in Carmarthenshire in my mid-teens. This was a very enjoyable experience for several reasons. I got to spend time with my lovely female cousins and to enjoy delicious food because my Aunt was an excellent cook. The farm work was interesting and enjoyable, my favourite activity of course being driving the tractor. I still have vivid memories of standing on the top of a large covered hayrick stacking hay with a fork with sweat dripping from my ear lobes! I had various tasks such as collecting eggs from numerous sites around the farm, helping to clear the cowshed of dung after milking (my one attempt at milking ended when the cow kicked me!), churning to make butter, and counting sheep with my Uncle. One summer I travelled to the farm from Brecon on my bicycle - I was very fit in those days - and on the miserable return journey in the rain I suffered a very bad attack of cramp on Trecastle hill. Some kind person saw my plight and invited me into her house to warm up and have a cup of tea! Although these farm visits were not strictly jobs my Uncle did reward me with generous pecuniary gifts!

My first recollection of a paid job was delivering parcels for the Post Office at Christmas. This was very enjoyable because the customers were always happy to see me and some even offered alcoholic drinks when I was working late on Christmas Eve! Other jobs included working as a boiler-man at the Derring Lines army camp. This often involved an early shift because the boilers

scattered around the different residence blocks needed awakening in time for the morning ablutions. This was a lonely occupation, but on my rounds I did meet up with the men responsible for the large boiler which serviced the kitchens. Another army job was as a waiter at the camp in Sennybridge; serving in the officers' mess was pleasant but the washing up was less enjoyable!

Finally, working for the Forestry Commission was a very different experience. A lorry collected the workers early in Brecon and during the journey to the forest and listening to the conversations of the other men, I learned new words in the English language and a lot about human behaviour! It was physical work mostly involving trimming the lower branches of trees but the pay was good.

What were your vacation jobs?

**Michael Williams**

### **Grandpa! What did you do in the war?**

#### **Two years at the heart of the OBA with Mike Peters**

A SIMPLE QUESTION from my grand-daughter posed in late 2014 started it all. Young Sacha and her class studies were just touching on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Guns of August; and the start of the First World War. There was, she knew, four years of commemoration to come. She had a homework project to complete and to discover if her family had a connection. Sadly, but proudly, I said “we do!”



After gently reminding her that I was not that old: I was to reveal that I did have a tale to tell. Indeed, my son and my cousins and I were already making plans – particularly for 2016. What I was not to know at the time was that for two years I would be close to the beating heart of the Brecon Old Boys Association and would play a part in commemorating all the Old Boys who fought in both World Wars.

As the second full year of the Great War anniversary programme dawned I learned one of my OBA official duties would be to attend Brecon High School Remembrance Day service and read the names of The Fallen.

So, in November of that year I was honoured to be at Penlan and help list the casualties. There were 37 old boys who did not come home from the war to end all wars. And then another list from 1939 – 1945: shorter, but nevertheless poignant, especially as I came to a name I knew – the father of a teenage friend. The High School assembly was packed for the service; senior pupils and staff read eulogies and tear-starting poetry that set me thinking. In all the many years since leaving Brecon I had never returned to the town or the school to attend an Armistice Day.

Not from neglect or disinterest; in all my years in volunteer uniform, serving Queen and Country, I had paraded on many occasions - sometimes in the Midlands, in the West country, on a lonely beach in Scotland, under grey skies and falling leaves in Surrey: in Germany (as part of British Army of the Rhine) and, most memorably and emotionally, at The Cenotaph in London as National Chairman of The Pen & Sword Club.

While I am sure that many of our former colleagues and friends attend their own local parades in November each year I would encourage members of the association to join in this Penlan event – it is held on the last Friday before the national day of remembrance.

To see the next generation honouring those who had laid down their lives for their future is an experience. To see the school's smartly turned-out detachment of Army Cadets parading in uniform on the day also touched a chord.

As I came toward the end of my Presidency of the OBA last November I took my turn to lay a wreath at the school memorial and hope that my successors in years to come will continue to undertake this special duty.

What of that question posed in the autumn of 2014. Well Sacha, who looks likely to follow in my journalist footsteps, tapped out our proud tale:

***On May 31, 2016, as a guest of the Royal Navy, I laid a family wreath on the Portsmouth War Memorial at a ceremony to mark the greatest naval battle of the conflict. It was a cold, wet day full of blustering wind almost identical to that of a century earlier. A day when my great uncle Thomas Peters, gave his life in service of his country. Thomas, who joined up at the age of 12, was Master at Arms. the senior warrant officer of HMS Invincible at the Battle of Jutland. A role that encompassed the ship's policing service and usually put his battle-station at the helm of the battle cruiser.***

***Thomas went down with his ship as it succumbed to German gunfire and his body was never recovered, just like that of another family cousin, Lieutenant Richard Brandram – Jones who, a few days earlier on May 21, 1916, was to win a posthumous Victoria Cross at the Broadmarsh Crater near Vimy on the Western Front.***

***Richard was just 19 years of age and serving with the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment when he lost his life. He was commemorated in 2016 by the laying of a special paving slab at the Dulwich War Memorial in London.***

***In October the family marked another casualty in the family. Another cousin, Arthur Williams died on October 6, 1917 while serving with the South Wales Borderers He died at the Dozinghem casualty clearing centre after he was mortally injured in the skirmish at Broodseinde which is regarded as an early part of the battle of Paschendale.***

***Arthur enlisted at Brecon prior to WW1, and when war broke out he was in China. He fought at the battle of Tsientsin against the Germans. Later, he took part in the Gallipoli landings before being transferred to France in 1916 where he survived the first battle of Somme.***

***Our sad but proud tale ends in 1919 when my grandfather, William Henry Peters came home from a long and weary service with the 2/1st Sussex Yeomanry, mostly in Northern Ireland. As with many others the years had taken their toll. His health was never to recover.***

My year as President of the Old Boys Association has taught me much about our organisation. Curiously, while I have only been an active member again in the last six years I first joined the Old Boys Association in the year I left Cradoc. As a young reporter on the Brecon & Radnor Express I was sent to cover the annual general meeting in what was then the Bulwark's Café Royal. I ended up not only writing a report for next week's paper but was rail roaded onto the committee. In those days the association was run by one of the school's masters on behalf of the Head.

Over the last two years as part of your Committee I can safely say I can repeat all I spoke of at the Castle of Brecon Hotel in April 2017. I still am proud to say I went to a grammar school.

As much as it is unfashionable to support the system - and I often face jibes of dinosaur and being politically incorrect - my view is staunchly in support of grammar schools as a means for the less privileged to get ahead. Let's face it - from 1964 to 1995 our Prime Ministers (of all parties) were former grammar schoolboys.

A fellow journalist probably put it better when he wrote: In my case the Grammar school I attended gave me an environment where I could benefit from its teaching and unique atmosphere (mad teachers and crumbling buildings included). Ultimately it helped me punch above the circumstances I was given at birth, set by my family's education, which is the single biggest predictor of how a child will do at the age of 16, according to a Policy exchange report from 2014. So, from a personal perspective the achievements of Grammar schools are all too clear. All this, however, is not to say I can't appreciate the criticism of Grammar schools, indeed many of you would say that my story is just that, my own personal story.

This edition of the Association newsletter marks the end of my year as President. It has been – as the old Chinese proverb reflects - an interesting time. I have seen just how the spirit of volunteer service remains strong. I take this opportunity, on your behalf, to say thank you to those who keep our association in good shape. The association does not run itself and the officials you elect are busy people who have other things to distract them.

I have the greatest respect for those who undertake a role in the OBA. We tend to hear from the president and vice president each year at the dinner but it is those working behind the scenes we must not forget. The Life Vice Presidents, including our newest Glyn Powell, our association chairman, our secretary and the editor of the newsletter plus all the committee members who should be remembered and thanked. Where would we be without their dedication and reliability?

It takes time and effort to organise and turn up at all our events. There are not many of them but to venture out on a cold and wet November night to yet another meeting takes a special breed.

### **Headship turnover at Brecon High School**

Headships of secondary schools were sought after prestigious positions and, once appointed, heads rarely surrendered the prize until retirement. Over a period of 75 years Brecon Boys' County/ Grammar School had only five headmasters, two of whom died in post. In contrast during the 46 years of the existence of the High School there has been a considerable turnover in heads, which has not been conducive to either continuity or standards.

1971-75	Aneurin Rees
1975-89	Dr W S K Thomas
1989-94	Anthony Whiley
1994 (Sept-Dec)	Miss G A L Owens
1995-2003	Colin Eves
2003-2004	Tracy Gibbs/Gaynor Lloyd, Joint Acting Heads
2004-2007	Steve Perks
2007-2011	Mrs Ingrid Gallagher
2011(April-Dec)	Tracey Gibbs/Vicky Prosser, Joint Acting Heads

2012-2014	Rev Dr Michael Morris
2014(April-Oct)	Tracey Gibbs, Acting Head
2014-present	Bob Broadridge

**(Glyn Powell)**

### **Mike’s Bugle Highlights leadership motto of the Old School**

TO MARK HIS YEAR as President of the OBA, and in admiration of the smart turn out and demeanour of Army Cadets at the Brecon High School Remembrance Service, Mike Peters has presented an antique Silver Bugle to the school for annual presentation to their Champion Cadet. Some 95 per cent of the Army Cadet Force detachment in Brecon is composed of school pupils.

Says Mike: “I have been at the centre of two school services of remembrance as Vice President and President and each time I have been impressed by all pupils and, particularly, those who have paraded in uniform. Throughout my long Army Reserve service and as the Surrey Military Member of the South-East Reserve Forces & Cadets Association it has been my privilege to support all the cadet forces.



The Silver Bugle was originally presented by Somerset County Council to Warrant Officer Peters, the Bugle Major of the Somerset Light Infantry, in recognition of his service in World War 2 – it also represents Mike’s own service as a senior officer of the Light Infantry.

Soldiers of the Light Division and The Rifles have always been regarded as Swift and Bold and ‘chosen.’ They respond to the crisp clear tones of a silver bugle rather than the drum beat of the heavy brigade and I hope this trophy will be an inspiration to the young men and women of the school’s cadet force.



It will be awarded annually together with a mounted Welsh Dragon trophy, which mirrors the Association’s logo and school badge. The Dragon (shown left) will be held by the detachment and the winning cadet for one year at a time.

In selecting the winner of this trophy each year, the Headmaster and Gwent & Powys Army Cadet Force will take into account service to the community and the personal leadership qualities demanded by the old School motto - Bid Ben Bid Bont’.

### **Topophilia - a reason to return to Brecon**

The poet W H Auden coined the word “topophilia” (“Hiraeth” in Welsh) in 1948 to describe the sense of belonging that people experience when returning to an important place from their past. Now, in a study commissioned by the National Trust at Surrey University, scientists have recorded such a nostalgic response in the brain using MRI scans. The study showed a boost of activity in the amygdala, a key area for processing emotions, when volunteers were shown pictures of personal places. Strong responses were also observed in the medial prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for activating positive emotions and memories. There was also a boost in activity in the

parahippocampal place area, a part of the brain linked to feelings of self. You can read the report produced by the National Trust on this research here: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/documents/places-that-make-us-research-report.pdf>

Now I understand why I enjoy so much returning to Brecon, the place of my first girl friend, my first ride on a motor cycle, and singing in the cathedral choir.

So why don't you, dear reader, come to a reunion and return to **your** special places, e.g. where you first rode a bike, or passed your driving test, or had your first hike in the Beacons, or first kissed a girl, or had your first taste of beer, or scored your first goal for your House.

**Michael Williams**

### **Educational Value or Administrative Cost**

On several occasions our editor has sought to prompt correspondents into contributing to a letter column so as to promote open debate on issues relating to our Alma Mater. School funding is one such issue which has been a bone of contention since the establishment of two Intermediate Schools in Brecon in 1896 in accordance with the recommendations of the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889. From the outset the decision to have two single sex schools in Brecon, whilst elsewhere in the County the provision was for one co-educational school, was eventually to give rise to financial constraints. There had been a lobby opposing the setting up of a boys' secondary school with Christ College able to provide corresponding provision. This was reminiscent of what happened in Llanymddyfri where only a girls' school was set up in 1896 as the boys of the area already had a chance of secondary education, if their parents so wished, at Llandovery College or if they won a scholarship at Llandeilo Intermediate School. Minutes of our Council and Governors' meetings reflect their embedded parsimony and their pecuniary rather than educational concerns, fearing the cost implications of spending on the rates. The Welsh Saying "Edrych yn llygad y geiniog bob answer" (i.e. to be miserly) sums up this attitude.

In the 1920s there was a proposal to amalgamate the two schools on one site under one head, Dr Woosnam having been offered the headship. This was at the time of severe post-war austerity. During these immediate post-war years for example the Brecon and Radnor County Committee of the National Farmers' Union constantly criticised the expenditure of local authorities and campaigned on what they called "the wastage of money". Of particular interest is that one of the most popular targets for the attack was the salaries paid to officials as illustrated in this extract from their minutes: "the cost of education must be reduced and the salaries of teachers, inspectors and all officials under the Board of Education should be reduced in proportion to other workers and people who contribute to their maintenance". Today however I'm sure that teachers have every reason to make an equally condemnatory comment about "farming subsidies".

In the 1950s Colonel Sir John Lloyd raised the issue of the amalgamation of the Boys' Grammar School with Christ College, a proposal that was considered to be impracticable. Interestingly since then Christ College has been admitting girls at secondary level and has established a mixed junior section. Yet the Colonel's concept of amalgamating and rationalising provision seems to have become the acceptable policy of the current Education Authority. Presteigne School has been amalgamated with Newton under one head but on split sites. This pattern is due to be implemented with regard to Builth and Llandrindod. The proposal to join Gwernyfed and Brecon in a single school within an educational hub on Penlan however has so far been scuppered by the strength of public opposition.

Our editor has been keeping up to speed with the whole reorganisation scenario and I'm sure he would like to hear the opinions of former pupils on the recurring issue of school funding generally and its implications for Brecon High School.

**Glyn Powell**

### **Wyndham Owen Jones (1949-55) - former treasurer and President of OBA**

Wyndham who died on 7th August 2017 was brought back to his birth place, Llangattock, for his funeral service in St Catwg's Church on 30th September.

Wyndham followed in the footsteps of three older brothers as a pupil in the school. On leaving school in 1955 he began work as a laboratory assistant with British Nylon Spinners, progressing to Senior Analyst and subsequently to Management. Part-time studies led to a professional qualification in Chemistry and a Diploma in Management. Wyndham was a sociable, gregarious, fun-loving and family oriented person who participated in a wide range of communal and sporting activities. He was a member of a number of organisations and on his return to Wales in 2003 he became a member of the committee of the Old Boys' Association and acted as its treasurer for several years, putting the finances on a sound footing. He was President of the Association in 2012-13 and was appointed Life Vice President in 2014 for his dedicated service. Wyndham was very interested in music, was a star performer in the School Eisteddfod, and his sporting interests included rugby, squash, tennis, cricket and golf, whilst in retirement he took up outdoor bowls in big way.

### **David P ("Scitch") Morgan (1941-46) - founder member and former President of OBA**

Scitch acted as a part-time secretary to headmaster Jacob Morgan in his final year. On leaving school he joined the Meteorological Office before completing his National Service in Pakistan. He then entered Caerleon College in 1954 to train as a teacher. After a period teaching in England he was appointed to the staff of Dунvant Primary School, Swansea, where after further training and graduating with a degree in Education he became its Head. David subsequently wrote History programmes for the BBC School Service and articles for local history publications leading to his being elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 1991. In 2007 he received an illuminated scroll from the British Association in recognition of his contribution to the cultural life of the community where he was also a Reader in his local church. Scitch gained both his soccer and cricket colours and was a founder member of the Old Boys' Association, of which he became President in 2008.

## **Obituaries**

### **John Taylor (1937-?)**

John, a native of Talgarth, left school after his School Certificate to join the Midland Bank. After his military service, when he became an Able Bodied Seaman on HMS Belfast which took him to the Far East, he returned to the bank in Hereford. After several promotions he ended as Area Manager in Reading. Retiring early in 1983, he and his wife Rona enjoyed cruises and holidays abroad.

### **William Michael Jones (1953-60)**

Llanfaes boy Michael distinguished himself as a rugby player and cricketer. After 'O' and 'A' level examinations he joined a bank at Ebbw Vale, but then gained admission to Exeter University to read

Theology, a not unusual choice as he was the grandson of the Rev William Jones, Pentre'rfelin. Michael was a keen scouter and is believed to have subsequently entered the teaching profession.

### **John Vernon Morgan Thomas (1949-53)**

Llangorse boy John on leaving school returned to the family farm and established a successful dairy enterprise. An member of the YFC movement, he built up a reputation as an innovative farmer. He eventually diversified by establishing a pony trekking stable and later set up the highly successful multi-activity centre in Llangorse. At one stage he owned the Wellington and George Hotels.

### **Michael Balding (1950-53)**

Mike entered the 5th form and after his A Level exams went to Alsager Training College. After a career teaching Maths he spent his retirement gardening, painting and writing poetry. At school he was an active participant in athletics, and it was his prowess as a fast bowler that earned him his cricket colours. Until ill health restricted his activities he was a keen supporter of the OBA.

### **David Gareth Jones (1956-61)**

Gareth from Pontsenni left school after his GCE O-level to attend College at Aberystwyth but opted out prematurely to work at the local saw mills, then at the Army Camp before joining the staff at Brecon Library and becoming Mobile Librarian. It's said that he sacrificed an academic career to the call of hunting. His love of local history led him to publish two volumes of "This way of life".

### **Robert Roy Davies (1943-48)**

Known as "RR", Roy was one of several Talgarth boys in the 1943 intake. He was a very reserved and personable pupil, popular with his fellow pupils and respected by staff members. He was a star performer for Theo and school soccer teams, and became a regular for Talgarth FC. Roy became educational welfare officer with Breconshire CC and then moved to Social Services in Powys CC.

### **Idwal Jones (1927-32)**

Crai boy Idwal on leaving school entered the police force at Llanfyllin before being called up for Military Service, initially in the RAF and later in the Army. On demobilisation he returned to the Force at Machynleth and ended up at Llanfyllin. Following an injury sustained at work he had to retire early when he took up gardening, woodworking and helping in the local Old Folk's Home.

### **W S John Swain (1947-53)**

After completing his GCE examinations National service in the RAF John was seconded to GCHQ at Cheltenham before returning to Brecon. A period working for the Forestry Commission was followed by employment as booking clerk with British Rail at Brecon. When Beeching's axe fell he joined Brecon Rural District eventually becoming an internal auditor in Powys County Council.

### **Harley Anthony (Tony) Simpson (1953-58)**

Breconian Harley left school at the age of 16 after 'O' levels and worked in an office for a period before part-time study with the WEA followed by study at Coleg Harlech and Swansea University College. Whilst working for Social Services he completed a higher degree. He then joined the Open University, specialising in community development and becoming a roving tutor.

### **Mrs Sheila Smith (School Secretary)**

Sheila was appointed secretary to Miss A B Jones at the Girls' Grammar School in December 1961. On secondary reorganisation she became secretary to the Head of Upper School until the

consolidation of the school on the Penlan campus. Her husband, Bill Smith, was the County PE Organiser for many years.

### **Frederick John Thomas Pearce (1942-48)**

John, a fitness fanatic from Llanfaes, served his National Service in Egypt and the Canal Zone with the RAF. After 2 years at Trinity College, Carmarthen, he taught in Bromsgrove where he became deputy head and then became head of a large primary school in Bolton. In retirement he retained his interest in sport especially golf and fly fishing and also wrote poetry, some of it being published.

### **David Mansel Jones (1947-53)**

A Cwmwysg boy, David graduated in History from Swansea University and after completing a DipEd he joined the staff of Maesydderwen with responsibility for teaching History bilingually. He was excused military service on health grounds and spent the whole of his career at Maesydderwen. His great interest was music and he was a member of Côr y Gyrlais and the family quartet.

### **T John (“Midge”) Ralph (1949-1955)**

Crickhowel boy “Midge”, so called because of his modest stature, excelled at cricket and soccer gaining his County cricket colours in 1955. After O’levels he entered Cardiff College of Education, formerly Cardiff College of Physical Education, where he studied PE main and subsidiary Geography, Maths and History. He became Head of PE at Peterchurch Secondary School, Hereford.

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