

# *Cylchlythyr Cymdeithas Cyn-Ddisgyblion Ysgol Ramadeg y Bechgyn, Aberhonddu Mawrth 2019*

## *Brecon Grammar School Old Boys' Association Newsletter March 2019*

### Introduction

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This year we celebrate the **70th anniversary** of the formation of the Old Boys' Association and we are hoping for a good turnout of Old Boys and Old Girls at the reunion on 27th April at the Castle Hotel. To this end we are asking Old Boys whether they would be willing to offer lifts to anyone in their area who would like to attend the reunion but have no transport. We also ask those who would like to come but have no way of getting to Brecon to let us know. Our secretary, Tom, will then try and match up drivers and those seeking a lift.

To mark the occasion we will have a special guest speaker - Mr Glyn Powell.

As mentioned later we had 22 Old Boys plus partners at the lunch at the Castle Hotel on 9th November 2018 after the Memorial Service. Some chose to have a formal lunch instead of the sandwiches organised by Tom. We plan to offer such an arrangement next November. As usual I appeal for contributions for the next newsletter.

Eleni, byddwn yn dathlu saithdengmlwyddiant Cymdeithas yr Hen Ddisgyblion, gan obeithio bydd nifer fawr ohonoch, yn ferched ac yn fechgyn, yn mynychu'r aduniad yng Ngwesty'r Castell ar 27ain Ebrill. I'r perwyl, rydym yn gofyn ichi gynnig lifft i unrhyw un yn eich ardal chi a fyddai'n hoffi bod yn bresennol ond sydd heb drafndiaeth. Byddwn hefyd yn gofyn i'r sawl a ddymunai ddod ond sydd heb ddull o gyrraedd Aberhonddu i roi gwybod. Yna, bydd Tom yn gwneud ei orau glas i gysylltu gyrrwyr a'r rhai sydd angen lifft.

Ar gyfer yr achlysur arbennig hwn, bydd gennym siaradwr gwadd arbennig, sef Glyn Powell.

Fel y nodir isod, daeth 22 o Hen Ddisgyblion a'u partneriaid i ginio canol dydd yng Ngwesty'r Castell ar 9fed Tachwedd yn dilyn y Gwasanaeth Coffa. Roedd rhai wedi dewis cael cinio ffurfiol yn hytrach na'r brechdanau a drefnwyd gan Tom. Bwriadwn gynnig trefniant tebyg unwaith yn rhagor ym Mis Tachwedd nesaf.

Fel arfer, dyma apêl gennyf am gyfraniadau ar gyfer Cylchlythyr nesaf.

[Above text is by Brynach Parry, whose Welsh is much more polished than the editor's!]

### Events of 2018

On Saturday 7th April 2018 46 Old Boys, Old Girls and partners gathered for the **69th Annual Reunion Dinner** at the Castle Hotel, our second visit to this splendid venue. After an enjoyable three course meal, Chairman, David Gittins, welcomed everyone and pointed out that our next reunion would be the 70th and invited suggestions on how we should celebrate this occasion. He then asked Mike Peters to give his Presidential address. Mike began by asking what did everyone remember about walking towards the Cradoc Road school on the first day. He was thinking of music and the current Top of the Pops celebrity, Nat King Cole. His whole address was punctuated by frequent references to the current songs, too many to list here! He contrasted the state of the Cradoc Road school and the Plough in 1951 with the recent news that £22 million was being spent on a new school to replace Brecon High School. Despite the physical shortcomings of the school he did receive a good education for which he was very grateful. On leaving school he chose to enter journalism, first working for the Brecon & Radnor Express and then moving on to corporate communications, including government service and the Reserve Army. His career has taken him to all corners of the globe including Alaska, the Falklands, Saudi Arabia, climbing in the Rockies with the US Army, Berlin, Northern Ireland, Cyprus and Hong Kong to name a few. He expressed his



appreciation of the work done by the committee and encouraged Old Boys to support the Association. His last musical reference was to the song "We'll meet again". Vice President Colin Lewis then proposed a vote of thanks to the President, the Old Boys' committee and the staff of the Castle Hotel. He also showed us a school cap which had been found in a jumble sale; it had the name "C. Carr" inside, and the Chairman wondered whether the owner might have been Cliff Carr, who is associated with the Cliff Carr prize. Colin (on left in photo) then received the chain of office from Mike.

The **Stars' Award Ceremony** was held at the High School on 17th July 2018 and was attended by Old Boys President Colin Lewis, David Gittins, Arwyn Davies, Michael Peters, Ken Jones, Michael Williams and Charles Lewis. The new format, introduced last year, was retained. A teacher for each subject announced the prize winners for each year and also the most improved student, who could be from any year. Musical entertainment was provided by a group of two guitarists, drummer and soloist (twice) and a female soloist. Old Boys' prizes were presented by President Lewis except for the Silver Bugle, which was presented for the first time by Michael Peters, who donated the bugle, and Andrew Poe, representing the Brecknock Company of Gwent & Powys Cadet Force.

In the absence of Headmaster Robert Broadridge, who was recovering from a heart operation, Miss Tracey Gibbs, acting head, was in charge and as usual everything was very well organised. In her introductory remarks Miss Gibbs referred to the dark cloud which had hung over the school after the tragic death of a female student. The very last award of the evening, the Star of the Year Award,

was awarded posthumously to the deceased student and the audience responded with a prolonged standing ovation.

To finish Miss Gibbs asked the Chair of Governors, Councillor D Meredith, to say a few words. He said the start of the academic year had been very exciting with the commencement of the building work for the new school (the steel framework is already complete!) but the school had suffered the disappointment of the Headmaster's illness which required a major heart operation. Then the tragic loss of a female student had placed a burden on staff and pupils and he praised Miss Gibbs, acting as Head for the fourth time, for doing an excellent job in difficult circumstances. He presented a bouquet and gift to Miss Gibbs as a token of the appreciation of the governors.

The Old Boys' prize winners are listed below.

Cliff Carr Memorial Prize  
Geoffrey Meredith Powell Senior Prize  
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 Most Improved History Prize  
Evans KS3 Languages Prize  
Evans KS3 Languages Prize  
Evans Intercultural Understanding Prize  
Evans Business Prize  
Letton Shield  
D.J. Powell Cup  
Cadet Bugle  
Lewis/Price Cup

**Nelsa Rai (Year 10)**  
**Amelia Griffiths (Year 12)**  
**(Name withheld by request of parents)**

**Leo Skinner (Year 9)**  
**Luke Wilkinson (Year 10)**  
**Matthew Williams (Year 12)**  
**Lucy McGinty (Year 10)**  
**Ben Pritchard (Year 10)**  
**Chloe Jones (Year 8)**  
**Chloe Edwards (Year 8)**  
**Katie Griffiths (Year 9)**  
**Angella Morante**  
**Maisis Lake (Year 12)**  
**Rory Orton**  
**Leah North (Year 10)**  
**Sharna Fyfe (Year 10)**  
**Daisy Grimes**

At the **Memorial Service** held at the High School on Friday 9th November 2018 there was an excellent turnout of two dozen Old Boys for this 100th anniversary of the ending of WWI. The service was ably managed by Miss Gibbs as usual, and it was good to see the Headmaster, Robert Broadbridge, back in harness after his absence of several months due to illness which culminated in a triple heart by-pass operation. To mark the significance of this service the Old Boys' committee had suggested that the pupils be asked to write a piece of prose and/or poetry about the war and that the two best compositions should be given prizes provided by the OBA. The school agreed with the proposal and the two winning entries, one poem and one piece of prose, were read at the service by the authors, two year 9 pupils, after the usual readings by senior pupils, readings of the names of the fallen in the two world wars by Vice President Charles Lewis and Warrant Officer M Parry, the Last Post and Reveille, and the laying of wreaths by President Colin Lewis and Head Boy and youngest pupil. The two winning entries are reproduced at the end of this report.

In his address the Reverend David Thomas referred to the anguish suffered by the families of those who fell in the war and who were buried near the battlefield, many in unnamed graves. Relatives naturally wanted the remains of their loved one to be buried near their home. The government, in recognising this need, exhumed the remains of an unknown soldier and buried them in Westminster

Abbey in 1920. The impact of this event was shown by the fact that in the succeeding week more than 1.2 million people visited the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior.

After the service Old Boys were invited as usual to join senior pupils, cadets and guests, who included the Mayor of Brecon, Manny Trailor, and Chair of Governors, Cllr. D Meredith, and prize winners for light refreshments. The photo below was then taken in the school hall next to the poppy cascade created by pupils.



#### Winning Poetry Entry by Issac Pearce

##### **WWI Poem**

The mist cleared  
The guns spewed a rattling noise  
The British poised  
Remember them

Mud at their feet  
A dead body in wrapped sheet  
A cough and a splutter  
The stench of a gutter

The birds screech  
On Normandy beach  
Men are bold  
But the water is icy cold  
Remember them

The sea of blood  
They fall with a thud  
The bullets spray  
Together we pray  
We will remember them

Issac



Hannah



Winning Prose Entry by Hannah Marshall  
**Diary Excerpts**

Dear Daddy,

26/9/1916

We got some really bad news today. I thought you would make it back to us, and I thought that if I prayed hard enough I would see you again. I'm sorry that I let you down. Mummy came into my room at 2:37 am exactly. She was all shaky, and her face looked like someone had used an eraser on her emotions, until the shock wore over and her eyes became raw from the tears. She got a telegram. It told her that you had died in action. She says you're in a better place now, but the best place that you could possibly be is at home with a beer in one hand and me in the other, people used to say. But Mummy says I shouldn't say that to people. She say it will make them sad. I love you.

---

From Danny

Dear Daddy,

28/3/1917

It's been six months since we found out about you. I miss you a lot. I hope you got my last letter, don't worry about replying because I could never read your handwriting anyway, though now I would give anything to read it one more time. Mummy gave me the awesome present that you bought for me for Christmas. Even though we thought that this war would be over by Christmas, we kept waiting until the next one until we got the telegram. You told us not to open it until you got back, but Mummy said that I wasn't going to see you for a long time, and I was too excited to wait. I fell off the bike and broke my right arm. Now my handwriting is as bad as yours used to be! I love you.

---

From Danny

Dear Daddy,

5/7/1917

It's my eleventh birthday today. It's getting harder nor seeing you all the time. It's the first time ever that we didn't go to the playground on my birthday, because Mummy was too upset, and I didn't want to make her cry. I got nine out of ten on my first spelling test! I've been trying really hard in school like you told me to. When I grow up I want to be the first person on the moon; Mummy said that's not possible though, but I think that if I keep trying I can achieve anything, just like you told me. It's getting tougher you not being here with us. I wish that I would have never found that poster with that man with the big finger funny. Then you would never have about the recruitment centre, and you would have never left. I'm sorry I showed you that, because then I would be writing to Grandma and Grandad about our holiday. I love you.

---

From Danny

Dear Daddy,

11/11/1918

I'm really sorry that I haven't written to you in ages, but Mum said it would be better if I didn't think about you as much. I can't help it though, I still think about you a lot, and how the last thing you said was that you'd be back soon. We had to move in with Grandma because Mum couldn't afford to pay for our old big house. Mum doesn't want to admit it, but we're struggling a lot without you. When we were moving, I found a box of your stuff that Mum had put together after you died.

There was one of your old t-shirts that you used to wear to the garage, I think it still smells like you. The war ended today, so that means you'll be coming home soon, right Daddy? You probably know the Germans surrendered. At least it's over now, and we won after all that. Mum gave me some money, so I bought your favourite chocolates and waited for you at the train station. But you never came. You promised you would come back no matter what, so I won't stop waiting. I love you.

---

From Danny

Dear Daddy,

26/9/1921

It's been five years since you died now. I know you're not coming back. You're up in heaven; some people think that heaven doesn't exist, but I know it does, because I know that I'll see you again soon, even if it is when I'm really old. Mum is getting better now, and she can talk about you without crying, which is really good, because I love hearing the stories about you and Mum; you never told me about the time you went to the fun fair and Mum beat you at darts, I think that's probably my favourite story. Even though it's been five years, I still miss you a lot. I waited for you at the train station every day for three months. That's when Mum got really worried about me. I pretend to be okay around her sometimes, because I don't like it when she gets upset, her make up runs, and she looks like she's melted. I still love her, even when she looks melted. I love you too, but I know I'm not going to see you for a very long time.

---

From Danny

Dear Daddy,

26/9/1926

It's been 10 years since you died now. Can you see from heaven? Are you proud of me? I'm doing my best to take care of Mum, but she's really sick. I think this is going to be the last note that I write to you but know that I'm always thinking about you. I'm not going to see you for a long time, but I think that Mum will see you soon, she says it's because you need some company, but I know what's happening; even you said that I always knew what's going on, that I was a smart kid. Even though I'm 20 now, I still cry myself to sleep sometimes, thinking that if I'd begged you to stay you would've, and then you would still be here, and Mum wouldn't have gotten sick. Your old t-shirt is only a little baggy on me now, so I hope you don't mind me wearing it. It's still a little hard for me to admit now, but I like talking about you. I won't see you for a really long time. So, Goodbye. I love you.

---

From Danny

### **Biographical Notes**

#### **Meredydd Jones (1951-54) - Vice President**

Trecastle boy Meredydd joined the Cradoc Road school in 1951 and, on reaching the age of 15, he left, having had what he describes as "a very good and happy grounding for life". He answered the call of the land and returned to the family farm, Meity Isaf, to help his parents, eventually taking over on their retirement. He enjoyed working in agriculture and was active in the Young Farmers' Movement. He also enjoyed the very rich Welsh culture in the community. He married Eileen Jones and had a daughter Bethan. Now retired, he still lives in Trecastle and retains an interest in farming.

## **Thomas Butcher - The Founding Father**

It is said that there is no honour for a prophet in his own land, a maxim which would seem to apply to Thomas Butcher in the context of the appointment of the first headmaster of the Brecon Intermediate School, which opened on Tuesday, 22nd September 1896, in temporary premises at Dr Coke's Memorial Hall in Lion Street. Locally there was strong support for him to be appointed as headmaster; this was not surprising as he was a leading figure in the community as well as being a highly esteemed educator. A committed and active Conservative in politics, he was closely involved in the establishment of the Northcote Constitutional club in 1881 as well as being secretary of the Brecon Starr-Bowceth Society and foreman of the Grand Jury at the Breconshire Quarter Sessions. However, the appointing committee for the headship insisted on having a graduate, hence Nathan John's appointment. Thomas Butcher was subsequently appointed as second master, and with his reputation and experience he was to become the mainstay of the school until his death in 1905.

Thomas Butcher was born on 11th March 1841, the son of Charles and Hannah Butcher of Union Street, Northampton. His father was a Post Office clerk and Thomas was the fourth of six sons. By 1861 we find Thomas lodging with the family of John Bing, a hotel waiter, in the Struet, Brecon. He was described as an unmarried lodger, aged 23 years, a teacher at Christ College. In the "Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette" issue of 14th December 1861, he is described in a school advert as Third (Commercial) Master, "late student of the Normal College, Cheltenham". He was one of the three masters at Christ College with the Rev. J D Williams MA as head and W H Parry as second master.

On 16th January 1867 he married Charlotte Elizabeth Williams, second daughter of J P Williams of Y Fenni. On their marriage they took up residence at 13 High Street, the property now known as Clarke's Gift Shop. Here Charlotte set up a stationery business whilst Thomas established his Middle Class School, known affectionately as "Butcher's School", in St Mary's Street, probably at Bethel Hall and then in the Oldfellows Hall, later to become the Constitutional Club. He conducted this very successful private school providing a post-elementary education of a more liberal and vocational nature than the classical tradition of the old grammar school curriculum. It was his school that was to provide the nucleus of the initial intake for the Intermediate School in 1896.

Thomas Butcher had four children, Charlotte Elizabeth (1868), Mabel Hannah (1870), Thomas Charles (1872) and Edith Baskerville (1883). According to the 1891 Census for 13, High Street, Charlotte was a schoolmistress and Mabel a stationer's assistant.

The year 1895 was a significant one for Thomas Butcher when he bought the Old Post Office in Lion Street and the Brecon Liberal Club for £400. He still had his Middle Class School preparing pupils for local and preliminary examinations, business, bank examinations, book-keeping, short hand and drawing. The same year their only son Thomas Charles Butcher died aged 23 years. Then the whole scene changed in 1896 when Thomas was appointed second master at the newly established Intermediate School. Apart from his teaching commitments he also provided boarding facilities for pupils at fees ranging from 20 guineas per annum at Lion House, 7, Lion Street. After Thomas' death at age 64 in 1905 his widow and single daughter Mabel Hannah moved to Maendu Villa, Pendre where she kept a boarding house.

It was said that Nathan John, the headmaster, was envious of Thomas Butcher's popularity, status and respect within the community, and when the opportunity presented itself he was to commit the

inexcusable act of terminating Thomas' salary when he was taken ill in late 1904. Instead of waiting for a report on the outcome, Nathan John pressurised the governing body to provide him with a so-called substitute to whom he paid Thomas' salary. In "Edrych yn ôl" R J Jenkins guiltily admitted that he was that substitute but he was completely unaware of the dubious circumstances. In all innocence he was rather taken aback by being cold-shouldered initially by the other members of staff. As he wrote this was to be expected since "Roedd y staff yn hoff o'r hen wr ac fawr iawn eu parch iddo". Thomas Butcher died some months later and with his death the school lost a dedicated and inspiring figure who had been held in the highest regard by all his pupils. Bertram Jones, the first scholar at the school, remembered his stern discipline and his "great scorn for our knowledge of Kilimanjaro and Timbuktu and ignorance of Penylan and the Honddu". **Glyn Powell**

### Brecon Canal Path

Our reunion this year is late, on 27th April, and with good weather this would be a great opportunity to combine a visit to the reunion with a trip along the Brecon Canal path. In 2015 I wrote about cycling in the Brecon Beacons. The trip suggested here, on foot or by bike, would be a less demanding outing since a canal path must be reasonably level. After reading a book on telomeres ("The Telomere Effect") I decided that I needed more exercise and contemplated buying a bike. However because over 50 years had passed since I last rode a bike I thought I'd better have a trial run. So I borrowed my son's bike and set out to ride from Kittle on the outskirts of Swansea to Southgate on the coast, a distance of about 2.5 miles. I had to stop for a rest half way, and when I reached Southgate I needed to find somewhere where I could sit down for a rest. I cycled onto the cliff path and found a seat - hurrah! However my legs were so tired that I couldn't lift my leg over the saddle and I ended up falling off sideways and hitting my head on the ground! No harm done because I was wearing a helmet and I fell onto grass! After that experience I tried two more test rides before concluding that I would be able to manage a bike. So the next question was "what to buy?" After the great success of British cyclists in the Olympics and of course Geraint Thomas' success in the *Tour de France*, interest in cycling has burgeoned; there are many bike shops in Swansea and so many bikes to choose from. I eventually chose a hybrid bike - a cross between a mountain bike and a racer. As a teenager in Brecon I had a Raleigh racer with a four speed Sturmey Archer gearbox and greatly enjoyed cycling in and around Brecon. Then, two years ago I became the proud owner of another Raleigh at the age of 81, but this time with a modern 24 gear derailleur and very efficient disc brakes! My favourite outing is cycling along the promenade overlooking Swansea Bay to Mumbles for a coffee. The prom is located on the site of the old Mumbles railway and is hence flat!



It's never too late to take up cycling\*. So dear reader, bring your bike with you (or hire one) on your next visit to Brecon and try the canal path ride. Alternatively, if cycling is not feasible, why not try a walk. Park your car in the car park at the theatre beside the canal basin and begin your trip eastward along the canal path. There is much to see along the way - wildlife such as kingfishers, dragonflies, red kites, and the Watton lime kilns, which date from the beginning of the 19th century. A few years ago they were restored and are now a sanctuary for bats, but, as my photo shows, the entrances are being overgrown by

weeds. The canal was opened in 1796 to carry goods such as farm produce, beer, timber and lime to and from Newport Docks. (The first boats, laden with coal, reached Brecon in 1800 and resulted in the price of coal reducing from 14d/cwt to 9d!)\*\* The first lock is Brynich Lock about 1 mile from the start point, and just beyond it is an aqueduct over the river Usk from which you have a different view of *Pen y Fan*. After another mile you have the first opportunity for some liquid refreshments at Pencelli. Alternatively, for the energetic who make it to Talybont on Usk there are two pubs where you can refuel!

\* Research published in February 2018 showed that cycling can boost the immune system of older cyclists. In a study of 125 adults aged 55-79, in addition to improvements in muscle mass, the benefit of cycling extended to the immune system. The thymus, which starts to shrink from the age of 20 and which makes immune T-cells, was found to be generating as many T-cells in older cyclists as in younger people!

**Michael Williams** (\*\*Information from Ken Jones)

### **“Strictly Come Dancing”**

Remembering can be an act of creative construction rather than simply the replaying of the narrative. So when I seek to recall experiences of 6th form life, I am conscious that in some instance I may be viewing things through a glass darkly. However, if I recall correctly it was with emotional malnutrition and shredded nerves that I was introduced to ball room dancing at the Girls’ School. From the days of Mrs Margaret Bowe (1944-46) the Gym Mistress, who had replaced Miss E D Tribe, it had become the practice to invite the 6th form boys to dancing classes in preparation for the joint Christmas Dance. Dressed in a stylish tweed outfit, which she was reported never to have exchanged for either PE or Games kit, she was to some extent a victim of her own rectitude. By 1947, when I was obliged to try to trip the light fantastic, the PE teacher and dance instructor was Miss Valmai Davies, who unlike Mrs Bowe, was rarely seen out of her PE kit of short skirt and loose top. She gave the impression of being a liberated PE teacher on a mission to shake up the prim, straight-laced girls’ school.

In retrospect, although some details have become blurred by time, I recall the experience with a sense of some rapture lost in hallowed glamour, but as a callow and somewhat awkward teenager at the time, the prospect conjured up a mixture of hopelessly romantic naivety and tough cynicism. From the first tentative steps I was virtually paralysed by lack of both self esteem and confidence in my relationship with the opposite sex. So full of self doubt and no small measure of embarrassment I entered my discomfort zone as I took my first partner. Being a rather immature novice fifteen year old, I was rather overawed by my more mature statuesque partner, something of a vain drama queen moving from posture to posture. I must have been a real bore managing only a veneer of polite conversation between silent mutterings of “forward-side-together” and “slow-slow-quick-quick-slow”. Concentrating on one’s feet was hardly conducive to free flowing dance movement. Yet at the end of term I did achieve sufficient proficiency to be able to participate in the basic dance routines of the Christmas Party. The more complicated dances were to see me sitting out as a proverbial “wall flower”, and although I joined in the Gay Gordon and Conga, I was constrained somewhat by my inhibitions. Further sessions of instruction in subsequent years in the 6th form did ensure that I had sufficient command of my dances to be able to enjoy College Saturday night hops, although any judges present would never have given me more than a score of 4 for my performances.

As a boy I was told not to carry tales out of school but on reflection I think I would be justified in disclosing the bolder intentions of my more sophisticated and romantically charged fellow 6th

formers. It was evident that a number of them were enamoured by Valmai who, though no *femme fatale*, did set pulses racing. Whilst the Don Juans emitted a whole gamut of dramatic emotions, she handled the situation with resigned good humour and did not succumb to pubescent charms. The dance classes did however lead to a number of romances as the enduringly glamorous socialites and debutants used their charms to manipulate the besotted. However, personally, as an outsider and unsure of myself, I wasn't really part of the hedonistic horde, and to me the Christmas Party, with sandwiches and orange squash, represented the biggest orgy since Caligula first took off his toga. Even though dancing was never my forte the lessons at the Girls' School did at least begin the process of my conversion from Neanderthal to *homo sapiens*!

**Glyn Powell**

### **Bellringing Society at Brecon Boys' Grammar School, 1957-59**

**Colin A Lewis**

Do you remember the School Carol Service in 1957? If my memory is correct it was held in St Mary's Church in Brecon and was very special. There are eight bells in the Buckingham Tower at St Mary's, hung for full-circle ringing and cast in 1750 by Abel Rudhall, the renowned Gloucester bellfounder. The Rudhall bells replaced older bells by other founders.

St Mary's bells are rung regularly for Sunday and other services and their music has been part of the fabric of Brecon for over 250 years. They have been rung to celebrate election victories, to welcome local Members of Parliament when they returned from Westminster, for weddings, even for race-meetings and other events. They have even been celebrated in a poem by Sir John Lloyd: *Brecknock Bells*, written in 1865.

In 1812 the *Hereford Journal* reported that a peal of 'grandsire triples...in 3 hours and 25 minutes.. [was rung at Brecon]...in honour of the victory at Salamanca', during the Peninsula Wars. Soldiers from Brecon in the 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot took part in those wars. This is the first known peal on the bells and in the county.

A peal of Triples consists of the ringing non-stop of all possible mathematical combinations on seven numbers (5040), which normally takes about three hours and is a test of concentration and stamina. An eighth bell sounds at the end of every combination (row) to round-off the music. Peals on lower numbers of bells must still contain 5040 'changes'. On six numbers 720 changes are possible while on five numbers only 120 are possible, so peals on such numbers contain the repetition of 'extents'. There are 42 extents in a peal on five, but since there are various ways of producing extents the music need not be monotonous.

The *Journal* also reported that 'the same peal was rung at Llangorse near Brecon' a few days later. Since there were only six bells at Llangors, cast by the Evans foundry of Chepstow in 1721 and since Triples is rung on eight bells, the two peals must have differed. Presumably they were both of a method named 'Grandsire', which is believed to have been first rung in the seventeenth century. Unfortunately the names of the ringers are not known nor where they came from.

Further peals of Grandsire Triples were rung at St Mary's, according to the *Cambrian Journal*, in 1816 to celebrate victory at Waterloo. A fusillade of shots was fired from the top of the tower at the end of one of these peals before the ringers, and others, retired to a local tavern. One of the peals was rung by *The Youths of St Mary's Church* but, as with the other peal of 1816, their names have not been discovered.

St Mary's bells were rung before the 1957 Grammar School Carol Service by members of the Brecon Boys' Grammar School Bellringing Society aided by their tutor, Albert Mathews of Brecon, and by two Glasbury ringers: The Rev E T D Lewis and Ted Pugh.

The Society had been formed earlier in 1957 after a group of pupils from Brecon, Glasbury and Defynnog who were learning to ring in their respective towers, requested the Headmaster: Dr Aneurin Rees, to allow them to practice at St Mary's during the weekly Societies' Period, which was held on an afternoon ending at 3.50 p.m.

Albert Matthews, a gifted Brecon ringer who was then in his seventies, had agreed to supervise and tutor them in the art of change-ringing and clerical permission had been given for St Mary's bells to be utilised. The pupils initially included Colin Lewis from Glasbury, two of the Owen brothers from the Café Royal in Brecon (Gareth and Hayden: the third brother, Martin does not seem to have been a ringer), and the two Moses brothers from Defynnog.

The Owen boys were probably taught basic bell handling and call-changes by Gerald Davies who worked at the Central Garage in Ship Street in Brecon. Albert Mathews, who had rung complicated peals with the Brecon band early in the century (his first with a 'bob-bell' was at Glasbury in 1912) encouraged them to learn proper change-ringing. Albert, who had earned his living as a painter and decorator, was in his seventies and no longer undertook the strenuous teaching of initial bell-handling.

Jack Hemmings, an in-comer to that area who had married a local lady, taught basic ringing and call-changes in Defynnog tower. Among his pupils, or so the writer presumes, were the Moses brothers. Like the Owen brothers they were also Grammar School boys. Hemmings was well-known in the Brecon area as he travelled to ringing and other meetings with his motor-bike and side-car.

Colin Lewis was taught to ring at Glasbury by Thomas Vaughan, who had rung his first peal there in 1913; Ted Pugh who had also rung his first peal at Glasbury, in 1912; Eric Smith (who rang many quarter peals but no full peals); and by his father, The Rev E T D Lewis, Vicar of Glasbury.

Vaughan had learnt to ring at Llandefalle (where the four bells are no longer ringable) and was a veteran of the First World War, when he served in India. Ted Pugh was not called to active service in that war but did other war work, hauling timber using heavy horses to Glasbury railway station for shipment elsewhere. Ted resumed peal ringing in 1920 but Vaughan did not do so until 1933. Eric Smith served in the RAF in the 1939-45 war and was posted to India where he caught malaria that plagued him for the rest of his life. Vicar Lewis learnt to ring at Glasbury after becoming Vicar there in 1946.

Dr Rees was initially a bit baffled by the plotters' request, but agreed to visit St Mary's with them and Albert Matthews to see what ringing entailed. He must have been impressed since he agreed to the formation of the Brecon Boys' Grammar School Bellringing Society.

By the time the Grammar School Carol Service was held in December 1957 Society members, augmented by Albert Mathews and by The Rev Lewis and Ted Pugh from Glasbury, were advanced enough to ring St Mary's bells before the service. Perhaps it is just as well that time has drawn a veil over the standard of the ringing!

Although the Society seems to have lasted only a few years and ended by or during the 1960s, it has been of considerable benefit to change-ringing. In August 1961 D Gwyn Griffiths, a Grammar School boy who was introduced to ringing at Glasbury, scored his first peal. He achieved this feat at Bredwardine, where the peal was conducted by Colin Lewis. This was Colin's first peal as conductor. Colin has subsequently conducted peals elsewhere in England and in Wales, Ireland and South Africa and continues to do so.

On Christmas Eve 1965, while Colin was at home on holiday from the lectureship he then held at University College Dublin, he conducted a quarter-peal of Stedman Doubles at St Mary's. The

ringers (with the number of the bell each rang) were: Alan V Protheroe (1), Colin A Lewis (conductor, 2), J A (Tony) Ellis (3), Michael R Thomas (4), Malcolm T Johns (5), K J Trimm (6). Stedman is demanding and needs much concentration to ring.

Protheroe, Lewis and Trimm had attended the Grammar School, Ellis went to Christ College, Thomas and Johns to Brecon Secondary Modern. Malcolm, Michael, Tony and possibly Alan had been taught to ring by Magnus M Peterson, a mathematics master at Christ College. Johns later became Master of the Swansea and Brecon Diocesan Guild of Bellringers, formed his own peal band and took charge of ringing in Brecon, including on the new ring of ten bells opened at the cathedral in 1995. He was a charismatic and gifted leader.

Magnus had rung at St John's in central Cardiff before moving to Christ College and was, and remains, an excellent ringer and competent steeple keeper. He showed Colin how to tighten the wooden bell-frame at Glasbury, tighten the bells on their headstocks and adjust the clappers, maintenance that had not been done since before 1939. (Glasbury bells were professionally rehung in a steel frame with new fittings in 1999). Colin subsequently used those skills to restore the bells at Builth Wells to pealable order. (Builth bells were rehung professionally by Whites of Appleton in 2011). Magnus now lives in Scotland in retirement from a university post. He has done much to improve the standard of ringing in that country.

The establishment of the Brecon Boys' Grammar School Society of Bellringers was probably a passing phase in the campanological history of Brecknock, but it did much to maintain and develop the art of change ringing in the catchment area of the School and elsewhere. Perhaps it is time for Brecon High School to form its own bellringing society and to instil new life into an ancient and enjoyable art in the Brecon region.

### **Acknowledgement**

Malcolm Johns helped greatly with the provision of information for this article. A fuller account has been submitted to *The Ringing World* and Part 1 has been published in the September 2018 Issue 5604, 906-7.

### **Recollections of Geoff Wright - teacher**

I came across Brecon Boys Grammar School Old Boys' Association website purely by accident when browsing the internet, and it immediately took my interest so further "exploring" was undertaken. As a result, I submit the following information which may interest some of your readers.

I was appointed to the staff of Brecon Boys' Grammar School in September 1955, after being interviewed by a panel, which included the Headmaster, Mr Aneurin Rees, some governors and council officials from the education department of Brecon County Council, and was appointed. I took up my post in September of that year. I taught junior general science and chemistry, together with some junior maths and music. I was responsible for the December 1956 School Carol Concert held, if my memory serves me correctly, in the Chapel that now forms part of a retail development in the town centre.

After all these years my memories of my time at Cradoc Road are somewhat hazy, but I do remember it was a happy school. Like virtually all school staff, I quickly acquired a nickname and became known (amongst the pupils) as "Dreamboat", the title of a popular song of that time and which, apparently, I had a habit of humming!

I used to lodge during the week at The Bulls Head pub/hotel in the Struet, and also lodging in that pub with me were Ron Arthur (PE & Games), John Morgan (physics) and Gwyn Angel (maths). We all dispersed to our homes on Friday evening to re-appear on Monday morning. I lived in

Carmarthen. Also a member of staff at that time was Carwyn Roderick, who later became the Labour MP for the Brecon and Radnor constituency.

I remember attending the cutting of the first sod at the site of the planned new boys' grammar school in Penlan, and taking photos of the event at the behest of the Head, but the resulting film was handed over to the school and/or local authority; hence I have no actual copies of these photos. I wonder what became of them.

I do have a few photos I took in December 1955 and attach jpeg files of these – hope you find something of interest in them; my identification of the people in them is incomplete – sorry! – but no doubt someone in the society will be able to complete (or correct) my identification.



Finally, may I thank you for reviving some of the very happy memories I have of my time at Brecon Boys' Grammar School and in some respects I only wish my time there could have been longer, but with my girl friend, later wife, living in Carmarthen, there were certain reasons why I applied for and was appointed to a post in The Queen Elizabeth Grammar School in Carmarthen. So I left the school at the end of the Autumn/Christmas term in December 1956 to take up this position, but I will always remember with fondness my time spent at Cradoc Road.

I wish you all well – and long may you continue with the Association.

**Geoff Wright** (alias “Dreamboat”, now ancient, but still afloat!)

#### Photo identifications

Left photo: standing Mr Lewis, clockwise from left: Head Aneurin Rees, Mr Giles (chemistry), Miss Timothy (maths), Mr Moses (woodwork), Dr Griff Price (Latin), Mrs Arter (wife of vicar of Llanddew).

Right photo (taken at school Christmas Party held in the gym): from left Ron Arthur, Cliff Jones, Gwyn Angel; behind: Len Moses and P O J Rolands.

### **A Winter's Tale**

Why me? Several of my colleagues on the staff of William Penn Secondary Modern School for Boys were of girth and corpulence enough, and certainly of voice loud enough, to fit them for the role. Svelte of body (I did my circuit training) and quiet of voice, I was in no way fit to play the part. So why me? I gave in of course. The Headmistress of the nursery school adjoining us was very persuasive, and not a woman to be refused. So I gave in, and agreed to be Father Christmas for her little darlings that year.

At first, all went well. I have to admit that their attention was drawn to, and focused on, the very large and very colourful bag of presents at my side, rather than on any of the bodily and facial adornments intended to deceive. Just as well. The cushion which swelled my stomach to impressive proportions kept slipping. The huge white beard developed a life of its own and obviously wanted to be somewhere else entirely. Too late, I realised that my green wellies had not been sprinkled with talcum powder, and protruded for all the world and Manor Park Nursery School to see. Then Wayne appeared before me - in all the glory of his dirty knees, running nose and hair like an exclamation mark. A book could be written about Wayne. A poem should be written about Wayne - a poem to rival that one about *Timothy Winters* by Charles Causley.

"You're not Father Christmas!"

Sweet child I thought, knowing nothing about Wayne at the time. I'll soon change his mind.

"Well young man, Rudolf and the rest of my reindeer would disagree with you. Me and my reindeer have come all the way from the North Pole just to give you ...

"Where are they then?"

"What, the presents?"

"No, the reindeer."

"Ah, my reindeer have come a long way and they are tired and so they are resting."

"Where?"

"Where? Ah ... on the golf course behind your school."

"Are not."

Maybe I have written enough already to give you the flavour of young Wayne. He was full of an infant surliness nurtured and developed from an early age by his dysfunctional home. In fact, he wasn't being personal, he was being existential; he wasn't saying that **I** wasn't Father Christmas, he was saying there **wasn't** a Father Christmas. Despite the best efforts of Miss Cox and her staff, up to that time nothing in Wayne's young life had convinced him that there was anyone kind enough to want to give him anything; bruises and hunger yes; kindness no.

Schools have always had a lot of ground to make up in the lives of some of their pupils, and what I discovered in the post-war years in Slough I could still discover in the food-bank Britain of today - if I were unwise enough to don another plump cushion and white beard.

**Peter Holt**

### **Percy Morton MA 1909-1923**

[This is the second of a series of articles on Brecon headmasters]

Percy Morton, the second head of the Intermediate School, was educated at Manchester Grammar School and Exeter College, Oxford. He was the son of Williams Morton, a landscape painter from whom he inherited his artistic talent and interest in cartography. As well as having a brilliant career he was a man of many talents and interests. At the time of his appointment he had already been Science Master at Christ College for 24 years. In the final selection he received 13 votes against the 8 cast for Mr M D Vaughan, Bryncoed, Llansamlet ("Evening Post", 17.2.1909). With his appointment the Managers hoped to attract pupils from Christ College but to their chagrin the expected influx did not occur. Percy Morton had established a nation wide reputation as a scientist and was to play a prominent part in the wider scientific field after his appointment.

When Percy Morton was appointed headmaster (aged 48) there were still only four assistant teachers and a school role of approximately 60 pupils, somewhat fewer than had been in the pre-Maesydderwen days. According to Welstead Williams, a pupil at the time, the juniors still wore Norfolk jackets and breeches and huge Eton collars. School hours were from 8:35am to 5:25pm,

timings governed by the Talgarth train schedule. Percy Morton was voted a starting salary £150 per annum, rising to £580 in 1922. He was granted a capitation of £2 per pupil, rising to £2-10-0 in 1917 and to £3 in 1918.

From the outset he gained the respect of his staff by being a teaching head and also by insisting on their receiving their proper remuneration much to the discomfort of the Governors. Furthermore, unlike his predecessor, he instituted a firm disciplinary code and dispensed corporal punishment with an impressive selection of canes. His motto was "Give me a Latin Grammar and a cane and I'll make a school". The initial crack-down was welcomed by members of staff because it brought about a more conducive teaching and learning environment than they had experienced previously. According to R T Jenkins he was an excellent headmaster ("prifathro gwyh. Gwnaeth ei orau glas i'r ysgol"). In a report in the "Brecon County Times" of 7.6.1923 he was described as "a brilliant schoolmaster".

Percy Morton believed in the inviolate independence of the school and the unquestioned authority of the headmaster. This tended to bring him into direct conflict with the Governors, who once foolishly called in the Board of Education in the person of Sir Owen Edwards, Chief Inspector. However, Morton's stand was justified and in 1913 the school was adjudged one of the best in Wales by the CWB Inspectors.. The controversy between the two parties flared up intermittently with one protest by Morton being publicised in the "Brecon County Times" issue of 19.7.21

RT Jenkins did admit that he was not an easy person to deal with on occasions but as Morton declared "masters must learn that a headmaster is like a wife - the person you have to learn to live with". He was forthright and had a sharp tongue, used to effect on occasions. An over zealous H M Inspector was told "We are always glad to see you when you bring us help and useful hints". On another occasion a temporary CWB Inspector was taken to task for being harsh and discourteous to a young inexperienced master in front of his class. Anecdotal evidence claims that Morton was heard to tell him "If you treat my men like that - especially an inexperienced boy, as you should have seen - I'll kick you down the front steps" ("Edrych yn ôl", p. 216).

Through his enthusiasm the school numbers increased and the curriculum extended. According to a report in the "Brecon County Times" of 16.1.1919, "The Headmaster's report showed that there were 102 boys on the register, the largest number in the history of the school". Interestingly, even though he was a distinguished scientist he allowed an assistant teacher to continue teaching science. For himself, he introduced Geology into the curriculum and implemented a practical Agriculture and Horticulture scheme involving the establishment of a pioneering demonstration plot. He organised regular geological expeditions and an annual whole school trek to Penyfan. These were innovative educational ideas. The Cadet Corps was allowed to lapse but he acquired a school playing field as one his priorities. Despite the Governors' continuing concern about the cost of secondary education on the rates. Morton insisted on complete sets of sufficient text books to replace the ragged inadequate stock shared between pupils.

There are anecdotal accounts of two occasions on which, as a matter of principle, pupils were punished although this had an adverse result. A day before an important soccer game he placed half the team on detention for the match even though it was to result in an embarrassing defeat. On another occasion he withdrew the leading actor from the cast of a school production because "No one must be encouraged to think himself indispensable and such a boy will find that he is bringing

the whole school to ridicule”. There are members of the OBA committee who can confirm that another headmaster was to take similar action in their case!!

Percy Morton played a prominent part in the social and cultural life of Brecon. He was a leading member of the Arts sub-committee of Brecon National Eisteddfod 1889 (“Transactions of the National Eisteddfod”, 1889). Golfers will be interested that he was a founder member of Brecon Golf Club. As a Liberal in politics he was not afraid of showing his colours and did not disguise these affiliations at election times. As a headmaster Percy Morton had to steer the school through the exceptional circumstances of WWI, having to release all but one of his experienced staff for military service. At the termination of hostilities it was he who initiated the move to erect a memorial to the fallen, many of whom were his ex-pupils.

Percy Morton died at his residence at Llanfihangel, Talyllyn on Saturday morning, February, 1923, at the age of 62 years, a victim of double pneumonia. He left a widow and nine children. The funeral service was held at the Priory Church and he was buried in the cemetery.

**Glyn Powell** [This is an abridged version of Glyn’s original article; the full article can be obtained from Glyn by those interested]

### 1950s Form Photo

This photo has been submitted by David Gittins who has identified it as Form 4A in 1954/55. It was taken by Michael Burr at the Cradoc Road School with the bike shed in the background. How many boys can you identify? David, with help from Shaun Gallagher, has identified those listed below.



#### Front row (left to right)

Michael Williams (aka Styker from Llanfaes), Gareth Walters (aka Tubby), Stuart Porte (Upper Chapel), behind is John Moses (Sennybridge), David G Powell (Brecon, in short trousers), Trevor Davies (aka Tedder from Talgarth), behind Trevor is David I Williams (Brecon), David Gittins (Hay), Ian parry (Hay), Albert Scott (Brecon), Terry Watkins (aka Willie), Colin Lee (Brecon).

#### Behind the front row

David G P Price (Hay, behind David G Powell), David Powell (Talybont-on-Usk, behind D I Williams), John Nicholls (Llangynidr), Doug Parry (Brecon), Peter Gittins (Brecon). Michael Troake (Brecon), Trevor Jones (Troedyrharn), Ray Parry, top right hand corner, from Heol-Senni).  
Back row: David H J Davies (Trecastle), “Jonah” Jones (don’t know full name, Talybont-on-Usk), two boys on Jonah’s left are unidentified.

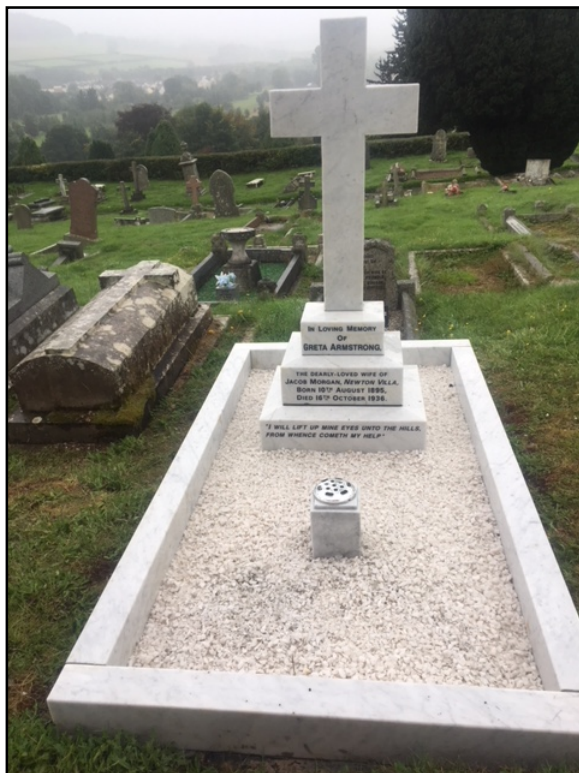
Absentees: Shaun Gallagher (Hay), Evan Morgan (Defynnog) and Doug Cochrane (Hay).

### Jacob Morgan’s Grave

Some time ago it was found that Jacob Morgan’s grave in the Brecon cemetery was in a very bad condition and the Old Boys’ Committee decided that attempts should be made to contact relatives of Jacob with a view to organising a repair. With the help of the late David (Scitch) Morgan we made



contact with Jacob’s daughter, Elizabeth Cook, and granddaughter, Nicola Munro, in Canada. We obtained estimates of the cost of repair (£1395) and sent photos of the grave to Elizabeth. She said that family members would be willing to contribute £800 towards the cost. It was agreed that the Old Boys’ Association would pay the remainder and solicit contributions from members. The first photo shows the state of the grave before repair (the headstone had been removed at this stage by the contractor), and the other photos show the grave after completion of the restoration in August 2018.



The final bill was £1400 so the Old Boys’ Association paid the extra £600. If you would like to contribute to this cost please contact secretary Tom Protheroe; the enclosed invitation to the Annual

Reunion includes a section for a donation for this purpose.

**Michael Williams**

### **For Creatures Great and Small**

(Sense of humour essential)

Veterinary services as they nowadays present in the UK and indeed worldwide are the result of a slow and steady evolution of science with new and enhanced knowledge responding to the needs of society and the animals in its care.

The history of the skills and disciplines involved takes us from ‘witchcraft’ via ‘the art’ to the ‘modern’ multidisciplinary science which is on offer today. (No doubt every generation has considered itself modern)

1761 saw the establishment of a Veterinary School in Lyon France – the start of the veterinary profession. In 1791 the London Veterinary College was founded, recognising the need to further veterinary knowledge and the art of farriery by sound scientific principles. In 1844 the profession was recognised by the granting of a Royal Charter and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) was established.

Today the RCVS has the role of overseeing all matters relevant to the profession, embracing legislation, education, animal welfare, discipline and many other activities. Membership is mandatory and the ‘licence to practice’ can be withdrawn for a number of reasons. During the early years of the ‘science’ the principal focus of attention was the horse. Its importance to agriculture, as a means of transport and in particular to the army was paramount. By the end of the 1914–1918 war the Army Veterinary Corps had increased its number from 364 officers to over 1350 and had attended to 2.5 million horses and mules. The loss of equine life was horrendous – they had no choice!

The agricultural scene of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century presented the veterinary profession with a number of serious challenges. Epidemics of disease could decimate animal populations. Cattle Plague (Rinderpest), as an example, arrived with imported cattle in 1865. In the absence of any effective medicines, and 60 years before a vaccine was developed, the only control was wholesale slaughter of affected and contact animals. By the turn of the century these crude but effective measures had succeeded and Rinderpest was no longer an issue. One can but feel some sadness that 150 years later the same measures must be applied to the control of some epidemics.

Sheep disease was rampant and the losses could be devastating for flocks. Liver fluke disease had been studied for decades – the life cycle of the parasite established by 1883. It was treated with tablets composed of ‘extract of male fern’ or by dosing with carbon tetrachloride; the toxic nature of these chemicals often proving as lethal as the disease itself. Carbon Tet. was still in use in the 1960s.

Mechanisation was rapidly replacing the horse as a power source during the 1920s and 30s; agriculture was in the doldrums and with it the fortune of the profession. At this time over 30% of the national cattle herd was afflicted by tuberculosis (similar levels in the human population). The government of the day introduced a scheme of testing cattle and removing infected animals. Eradication was the aim, unfortunately a target that has proven elusive. By contrast, Brucellosis, the cause of abortion in cattle and Undulant Fever in humans, was eradicated by means of a similar program during the 1960s and 1970s. These programs to a large extent supported the viability of the agricultural sector of the profession.

The improved fortune of the agricultural industry post WW2, and the development of new drugs; sulphonamide in 1935 followed by the penicillins and then the more potent antibiotics throughout the second half of the 20th century heralded a new era. There was a new confidence in the treatment of conditions hitherto attended with little success. During the 1950s and 60s the sheep industry benefited hugely by the development of vaccines to prevent many devastating conditions. Organochloride washes controlled sheep scab, and safer and more effective drugs became available to combat internal parasites. This new new armoury gave renewed vigour to veterinary medicine. Many consider that there was no better time to have been a vet. Farm work was quite onerous and time off was limited due to the size of the Practice. Three to four man Practices were common – emphasis was on men as the profession was at his time very much a male preserve. Jobs advertised were often worded ‘married male vet required’, thus ensuring that there was a long-suffering wife available to answer the ‘phone whilst hubby was ‘on duty’. Things have changed ! Many adverts were added by ‘sense of humour essential’ – still used today. Some things don’t change !

Twenty four hour emergency cover is mandatory for vet. Practice, thus every other night and every other weekend on duty was common. Time off is much improved nowadays.

Perhaps one of the major changes has been the demographic of the workforce. Following the ‘JAMES HERRIOT’ TV series there was a surge of interest in this ‘romantic’ profession. Entry to Vet School became challenging and the diligence and hard work of the young female won the day. This has resulted in the majority of vet. students today being of the tender gender.

Practice size has tended to increase and many larger units are able to offer specialist care. There has been a very significant polarising into equine, farm , and companion animal services. Specialisation is supported by the availability of further education studies in a wide range of topics. A condition of membership of the RCVS is to complete a period of further study every year (continuing professional development).

Two decades ago the ruling that only qualified vets could have a financial interest in the provision of veterinary services was abandoned. This has resulted in the influx of corporate finance and the appearance of much larger veterinary units – predominantly in the companion animal sector.

Membership of the EU involved the profession much more in public health and associated regulatory matters. Many colleagues from the EU nations have embraced these duties and a large number are employed in this field of work. There is concern that ‘Brexit’ may have serious consequences for manpower in this sector.

Scientific development has enabled a much enhanced service in many fields. The era of only a thermometer, stethoscope, and a syringe is past and today digital X-rays, ultrasound scans, MRI scanning, and a multitude of laboratory tests enable the physiology of the pet pooch to be scrutinised in fine detail.

These developments of the last two decades have at the same time as enabling an enhanced level of care increased the expectation of successful results. Sadly not all events have a happy ending and the modern world can be very intolerant of outcomes that don’t meet expectations. This is especially so when high costs are involved, and the profession is no stranger to the modern litigious society – a challenge virtually non existent 60 years ago. Stress levels in the workforce are high. A recent survey of over a 1000 vets found that 37% were actively thinking of leaving the profession ; 48% describing themselves as ‘burnt out’. James Herriot did indeed belong to a gentler time.

What of the future? Antibiotics - under severe scrutiny. Worming preparations - resistance rapidly developing. DDT and organophosphates - long gone. My diesel 4x4 - environmental

pariah. One step forward - one step back. Sense of humour still essential !

**Arwyn Davies**

### **Reasonable Champagne?**

Way back in the 1980s a documentary about Alan Bond, an Australian property developer and sponsor of the Americas Cup Australian challenge had a clip of a reception at Bond's seafront home. One high profile guest, an international entrepreneur, Peter de Savary, a great friend of Bond, was shown arriving by boat and on being asked by Bond what he would like to drink replied, 'Do you have any reasonable champagne?' I thought it marvellous as an understatement because the answer was obviously going to be in the affirmative.

I always yearned to have the chance to use the same phrase but of course the reply must be beyond doubt and that can seldom be the case. However, there arrived the day of the reception at the French Embassy in Brasilia for Bastille Day and on being asked by one of my fellow French attaches what I would like to drink, I had my marvellous chance to reply, 'Do you happen to have any reasonable Champagne?' The answer, with pride, was certainly beyond doubt as the French Embassy prided itself on the quality of the champagne it airlifted from France for the day.

Some small things can give so much pleasure!

**J J Price**

### **Poetry Please**

In reviewing Ewart Davies' influence on my education I was interested to note that he had inspired others, and a surprising number, to exercise their bardic muse. Billy Gallagher (1942-47), a contemporary of mine and a History graduate of Cardiff University, published a collection of his poems, a copy of which is in the archives. After a period teaching he re-enlisted in HM Forces, attaining the rank of Major in the RAEC, as did his fellow 6th former, Ron Hopkins.

Perhaps the most prolific of Ewart Davies' pupils was Mike Balding (1950-53), who is credited with five collections of poetry: "Geranium June Balloon", "No Long Goodbye", "Pages of My Mind", "Something Old, Something New" and finally "Fun and Games". The "Geranium June Balloon" collection contains poems by another ex-pupil, Peter Holt (1946-53), one of Ewart's top pupils, who has a ready facility with words and ease of expression in both poetic and prose mediums. His poem "The Calendar Poems" 2004 struck me as being worthy of inclusion in any anthology.

Recently a collection of poems entitled "Flight and Other Poems" (1994) by John Pearce (1942-48) came into my possession. A writer of both poetry and prose, John gave public readings of his work in the Midlands, North of England and Wales. An ex-student of Trinity College, Caerfyrddin, his first teaching post was in Bromsgrove from where he moved to take up the headship of Wesham School, Lancashire (1968) and then on to be Head of Masefield School in Bolton, retiring in 1986 to Leominster. Here he joined a writing group and had further work published in the "Voices of Herefordshire" series. Amongst his other published works was a radio play called "The Car with Tail Fins" and a novel "Welsh Hills and Thin Grass" (1955). His interests in fishing, walking in the countryside and nature generally are reflected in his poems.

Though of earlier vintage John A Ottewell was a raw hidden talent who had left school at the precipitously early age of 14. I was favoured with a signed copy of his "A Cry from the Heart",

described by him as “A Welsh Infantryman’s Memoirs in prose, narrative and poetry”. It covered the phase from Normandy to Holland, 1944-45. John, as an eighteen year old fusilier in “D” Coy 7th RWT of the 53 (Welsh) Division, experienced the trauma of war at first hand - even at hand to hand. His poem “Evrecy” (July 1944) was in the “Oasis” section of the publication “Poems of the Second World War” (J M Dent and Sons). Particularly poignant is his poem “No Banners”, an in memoriam to the boys of Brecon “Who Did Not Return”. In his foreward Major General R M Llewellyn, GOC Wales, 1987-1990, wrote of John Ottewell that “almost before he was a man, he experienced the worst horrors of war. His personal experiences are related vividly and humorously holding nothing back in revealing his personal feelings at the time. His poetry has an energy and a gift for imagery that compels the attention and engages the emotions. It is a soldier’s work, in soldier’s language and there is a magic and deep spirituality in the poetry which demands respect”. The following short, cryptic poem, entitled “Many a hero”, gives a flavour of the poetic muse of an actual teenager operating in a war zone.

“When all hell breaks loose with mortars and shells,  
And the air’s full of screams and agonised yells,  
When ‘Spandaus’ are whispering red death ‘cross the corn,  
And you’r wishing to Christ you’d never been born,  
There are only two things you can do my old man,  
‘Stay put in your hole or bloody well run’ “

**Glyn Powell**

### **The Future of Cradoc Road School**

For many years the old school building in Cradoc Road has been used by a local Youth Club (and until a few years ago the Old Boys’ committee met there) but the Local Authority have ejected the Youth Club and put the school up for sale in 2018. Ken Jones suggested in an Old Boys’ committee meeting that there was a case for preserving this Edwardian building, of which there are few



examples in Brecon. The committee agreed that Chairman David Gittins should take action to try and have a preservation order put in place. He has accordingly written to CADW with copies to Powys County Council (owners of the building) and Brecon Town Council, and was invited to attend a meeting of Brecon Town Council, at which some members spoke in favour of preservation. The photo shown was taken in 2011. We await the response of CADW and Powys Council. Since our initiative the Youth Club has returned to the school!

**Michael Williams**

### **Lewis Lewis**

“Lou” Lewis was universally popular with generations of pupils and highly regarded by all his colleagues on the staff over the generations in past. He was appointed to the staff in September 1919 soon after his release from military service, along with Edgar M Thomas, at the salary of £200 p.a. It was at the Governors’ meeting of 21<sup>st</sup> October that they were informed by Percy Morton, the headmaster, that there were 44 new boys in the school that term and that he had appointed these two

new assistant masters subject to their approval. At the same meeting the headmaster said that he also appointed temporarily for the term Mr J.G.T Price ("Caesar"). Interestingly both Lewis Lewis and Dr Price were to serve for the remarkable period of 39 years, both retiring on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1958, having taught under four headmasters at the school.

Lewis was a Dowlais boy who had served as an infantry officer during WWI. Initially he was obliged to teach a range of subjects according to the exigencies of the timetable with the minimal staff establishment at the time. Eventually he concentrated on Geography, a subject he was to teach with enthusiasm and no small measure of success, achieving commendable CWB results every year. For Higher, and subsequently, "A" Level, alternative inter-school arrangements prevailed whereby the 6<sup>th</sup> form pupils were taught by Miss Abraham at the Girls' Grammar School. "Lou", however, had in the interim period been delegated additional responsibilities with his appointment as Senior Master and Deputy Headmaster in 1929.

Of modest stature he displayed a certain military bearing with brylcreamed hair and immaculate dress. Quietly spoken he was precise and deliberate in speech with an attractive modulated voice. He exuded an unostentatious dignity and had an easy rapport with pupils. Seemingly ultra relaxed he did not do stress as so many in similar positions appear to do under the current educational regime. He had few discipline problems and actually was sufficiently flexible as to give pupils plenty of latitude with resigned good humour and a snide sense of fun.

To me he was the ultimate patriarch of unflappable temperament and inexhaustible patience even under the most trying of circumstances. There was that air of the stern officer and gentleman about him which enabled him to handle things with élan and subtlety. Like all masters he had his own distinctive brand of physical punishment, rarely dispensed. He manipulated his pointer with the dexterity of a Sgt Major's pace stick moving from blackboard, to globe, to wall map and occasionally, when deserved, to the seat of the pants of a transgressor with a canny knack mastered over many years of practice. In the marking of our one word weekly tests he could be somewhat overgenerous. Papers would be exchanged between pupils for marking which led to a constant hail of queries about acceptable forms of spellings of words, usually place names. "Lou" tended to be overgenerous and conceded mis-spellings that have little resemblance to the correct form! We also had him for our singing lessons, the traditional form of music so called at the time. We would sit on benches in the Gymnasium emitting tuneless, whining noises akin to a live lobster being brought to the boil. With many of the voices on the change the singing of English folk songs bore little sense of musicality. However, with "Lou" at the piano one is reminded of Oscar Wilde's sentiment "Please do not shoot the pianist. He's only doing his best"!

In his younger days Lewis Lewis was an unusually gifted all-round athlete and games player. He captained the Rugby XI at Aberystwyth University and played soccer for Brecon for many years at a time when the team was performing at a high level. He possessed a natural flair and footballing skills of a high standard which were appreciated within the local sporting fraternity. Boys of the 20's and 30's remembered only too well how he tackled and dribbled past them with Stanley Mathews ease. He was also captain of the Brecon Sports Club Cricket XI and even in his mature years his cunningly flighted off-breaks tormented the boys in the annual Staff vs Boys cricket match.

In a tribute to Lewis Lewis, "The Colonel" (J H Williams) coupled him with Dr Griff Price as two colleagues who set an example of modesty and integrity. "They have" he said "scorned any form of self-advertisement and have never sought the limelight. Their qualities have won our respect and affections and we count it a privilege to have worked with such loyal colleagues and a special

privilege to have had them as trusted friends for so long.” In the words of Tacitus on Agricola it can be said of Lewis Lewis that “he lost no authority by his affability, no affection by his sternness.”

**Glyn Powell** (Typed by **Megan Jane Morgan**, granddaughter of Lewis Lewis in Durban, South Africa).

### **Wot! No School Magazine!**

The school magazines were a distinctive feature of our former secondary schools and reflected their unique ethos. Regrettably on secondary reorganisation in 1971 “The Daisy” ceased publication after 60 editions and “The Silurian” after 21 with no composite version emerging from the new Penlan regime. These magazines have provided primary source material for those of us who have sought to research the history of the schools and their former pupils. The consequence of the failure to provide a replacement is evident in the lack of response to our efforts to incorporate post 1971 former pupils in the activities of the Old Boys’ Association.

A one-off attempt at establishing a magazine for the Boys’ School was issue No 1 of Easter 1926 priced at 1 shilling under the cover of the eisteddfod winning design of Jack Nott and with the motto “Bydd bur. Bydd eirwir. Bydd iawn”. Much of the credit for the venture was due to headmaster Dr Llewellyn Woosnam, who inspired a number of innovations in the School, and the editor, Mr Edgar H Thomas MA. A graduate in English, Mr Thomas was also a fine Welsh scholar who regularly contributed to learned publications. He subsequently became headmaster of Llangefin County School, Ynys Môn, and at the National Eisteddfod at Cardiff in 1928 he won the Chair for his “prydddest” on “Penial”. The publication of the magazine coincided with the formation of an equally short lived Old Boys’ Association. Repeated attempts had been made in the past to form an OBA but without success “due to the want of enthusiasm amongst Old Boys”. Its formation resulted from a meeting attended by about thirty Old Boys at the YMCA, Brecon on 23rd December 1925. The editorial board indicated that “the recent formation of an Old Boys’ Association stressed the need for something that would serve as a medium for interchange of opinions between past and present pupils” - a lesson that seems to have been forgotten! Yet they admitted that the publication of such a modest magazine at a price which would not be prohibitive was beset with difficulties.

The content of the magazine is varied and interesting with the first article, entitled “So this is America” by Ifor B Powell BA, being particularly significant as he was a student at Ann Arbor University, Michigan, at the time. He had been awarded an American University Fellowship by the American Union. The Riggs Fellowship was a valuable award and a rare distinction tenable for a year. He had graduated in History from University College, Aberystwyth, in 1923. In 1924 he obtained the Gladstone Memorial prize and then in 1924 he was the holder of a research studentship in the Department of International Politics. Among the many offices he held at Aberystwyth was president of the Political Union, vice-president of the National Union of Students in 1925, and sub-editor of the “University”, the organ of the union. Ifor also contributed literary articles to the “Brecon County Times” and Welsh contemporary papers. His brother, Leslie B Powell (1915-1921) also achieved academic distinction graduating in Economics and Political science in 1925. His college spheres of interest were cross country running and amateur dramatics. According to the Silurian he became Secretary of the Sugar Manufacturers Association Ltd in Kingston, Jamaica.

An article on “The Construction of a simple Crystal Set” by Robert J Williams reflected the popular technical interests of boys at the time. It was hoped that the article on “Dentistry” by an Old Boy dental surgeon would be the first to provide careers advice and guidance to pupils. W M Lomax’s humorous take on the “Stock Exchange News” was topical in the context of the economical

situation of the 1920s. The volume contains a number of pupils' items, usually the product of the 1926 Eisteddfod. The report on the School Concert of 1925 pays due respect to the work of Mr R Musk, the long-standing part-time music teacher who also played the piano to accompany the silent films screened in St Michael's Hall. Mr Edgar Thomas chaired a very active School Debating Society supported by other members of staff including Dr Topping and Mr C M Jones.

From the Sports report it appears that both soccer and cricket were flourishing team games. The cricket report for 1925 showed that, of the 16 cricket matches played, 13 were won and 3 were lost with I R Lewis, the vice captain, being a star performer scoring two centuries and taking 6 for 6 in one particular match. The Headmaster, the Sports masters, Mr R W Jones and Mr Lewis Lewis, and Dr Castigan gave valuable support throughout the season. The soccer XI also had a successful season, playing 14 matches, 10 won, 2 drawn and 2 lost. The captains were O T Lewis and C Rothero with pupil W M Lomax as secretary.

Williams McLafter ("Bill") Lomax, apart from being a member of the Magazine Committee, was a leading light in the debating society, secretary of the Football Club, member of the Cricket Committee and a contributor to the magazine. He was recalled by his contemporaries as riding to school on his Scott motor bike. "Bill" Lomax was to become a WWII casualty at the age of 34 and is buried in Pershore Cemetery. He was an RAF observer (1096989) who was killed in a Wellington bomber R1597 of 23OTU on 8th April 1942 when it struck trees growing on the mountain spur above Troedyrhiw farm in the parish of Penbualt in North Breconshire.

Cyril Welstead Rothero, another prominent senior pupil, was also a war casualty. He was killed aged 37 on 21st November 1944 whilst on Lines of Communication duties after the liberation of Brussels and is buried in Brussels Town cemetery. His relatives have recently been making enquiries about him and his widow's re-marriage.

Students appear to be most reluctant to put pen to paper and produce a school magazine built into the culture and ethos of the school. Academic achievement in itself is an offshoot of this culture and ethos and not an objective in itself. Our newsletter does to some extent fulfil a catch-up function for interested former pupils although many of us tend to use it to recall relics of nostalgia embedded in the mists of time. In a bizarre way that seems a mere idyll of benign teachers, lively studies, stimulating classes and sporting triumphs on the playing fields.

**Glyn Powell**

## **Obituaries**

### **Kendall Eli Jones (1943-1950?)**

Kendall, who died in 2016, on leaving school served in the RAF for his National Service and then joined Trinity College, Carmarthen for teacher training. After several posts in England he ended as head of a primary school in Somerset. He retired early and worked for the Lord Chancellor's Department in Bristol. In retirement he was an active member of the Masonic Movement.

### **George Peter Gittins (1952-59)**

Llanfaes boy George captained the school rugby XV and gained his colours in cricket and soccer. After completing his "O" and "A" Levels he graduated with Hons in Maths from Aberystwyth University followed by a Masters in Statistics 1963. After two years as a statistician with British Nylon Spinners he became Senior Lecturer at Staffordshire Polytechnic (later University).

**Robert Arvon Williams (1952-57)**

Cwmdu boy Robert left school before completing his GCE exams to work on local farms. He later enlisted in the RAF, serving as ground crew for 12 years. On demobilisation he joined the Police Force at Builth and later moved to Brecon. His initial interest in fishing and shooting was subsumed by a passion for tractors, and he acquired an impressive collection of vintage farm machinery.

**Mrs Sheila Smith**

Sheila's first post was as secretary to Miss A B Jones at the Girls' Grammar School; then on secondary reorganisation she became secretary to Mr Stan Beddows, Head of Senior School. She was the widow of Bill Smith, the PE organiser for Breconshire. They had three sons and a daughter who attended the Grammar School and several of them won scholarships to Millfield.

**Thomas John Elwyn Jones (1944-48)**

Llangorse boy Elwyn left school at the age of 15 before sitting his School Certificate examinations to help his parents on the family farm. On his marriage in 1961 he moved to a dairy farm, Lower Pendre, and in 1987 gave up the milking enterprise and became a beef and sheep farmer. He had no real interests outside farming.

**David Glyn Rees (1945-49)**

Crai boy David was admitted as an over age pupil to fill a vacancy in Form III. After achieving good School Certificate results he did his National Service in the RAF. He then entered Trinity College, Carmarthen and qualified as a teacher. He taught in Leicester, Corwen and finally Barry where he had to take early retirement due to heart problems. He then learned French and Italian.

**Margaret Angell**

Margaret married the late Gwyn Angell, the highly esteemed Maths teacher. Widowed in 1977 she was left with three young boys, Robert, Richard and Phillip, who were to distinguish themselves academically and on the sporting field. Margaret was appointed a laboratory assistant at Brecon Secondary Modern School and then moved to the corresponding post at the High School in 1971.

**Phil Jones (Caretaker)**

A native of Tredegar, Phil came to Brecon with the South Wales Borderers as a member of the Regimental Band. After working as MOT tester with Central Garage, he was appointed school caretaker at the Penlan Campus, where he took up residence. He was respected by the staff and popular with the pupils. He kept the premises in good order; his secret was to keep his staff happy.

**Helen Lewis (Staff)**

Helen was initially a Home Economics teacher at the High School, but following internal reorganisation and curriculum changes, she was required to teach Geography, Maths, Craft and Child Care at different times. She became Deputy Commissioner of Girl Guides. Her husband Rhobert taught Chemistry and later became Vice Chancellor of Pontypridd University.

**Brian ("Curly") Hepton (1952-59)**

Talgarth boy Brian completed his O-levels in 1956. His special forte was cricket; he gained his county colours as early as 1956. In that season he took 34 wickets for 5.6 runs/wicket, which earned him a trial for a Welsh Secondary Schools' XI. In 1958 he was awarded the Breconshire Schools' Cricket Association President's Prize. His career involved gardening and landscaping projects.

**D. Alan Thomas (1950-58)**

After his O-level and A-level exams Alan followed a teacher's training course specialising in PE and took up a teaching post in Romford, Essex. He was an outstanding sportsman and athlete. A member of both the Rugby XV and Soccer XI he was also an all round cricketer, being vice captain of the school team. He represented the school at both county and national levels several times.

**Gwyn Davies (1937-43)**

It is in retrospect that information has come to hand of Gwyn's death, resident at the time at Droitwich. Following National Service in the Royal Navy he joined the police in Birmingham and subsequently worked in Pharmaceuticals in which capacity he made contact with Muir Butler(1938-42), a school contemporary of his from Talgarth.

**Mervyn Howells (1938-44)**

Llangattock boy Mervyn was a brilliant scholar who during his sixth form years would engage with Jacob Morgan in Mathematical challenges. A graduate of UCNW Bangor he operated in the higher echelons of the Electricity Industry. In retirement in Swansea he was a volunteer warden for South Gower Coast\* and Priors Wood and Meadow nature reserves. He was also a gifted linguist.

\*An example of his survey work can be found here: <http://goweros.blogspot.com/2013/04/>

**John Probert (1953-57)**

On leaving school John returned home to farm at Beilibach, Upper Chapel. He was for a time chairman of the NFU County Committee and for ten years a member of the Crisis Committee. He was an active member of the local community and was the motivating force in establishing the modern village hall in Upper Chapel. He was a keen supporter of the YFC, Eisteddfod and cricket.

**Anthony Mervyn (Tony) Morgan (1949-54)**

Fforddilas boy Tony left school after his O-levels to work in a garage before turning to farm work which exempted him from National Service. He subsequently became a builder, setting up his own independent family business. Though no great sporting enthusiast he did enjoy a game of soccer and became a highly successful pigeon fancier as well as participating in clay pigeon shooting.

**M Dennis Combe MBE (1938-44)**

After 6 years at school Dennis entered Trinity College, Carmarthen. After his teacher's training in the Brecon area he did his National Service with the RAEC. On demobilisation he took up a teaching post at Coventry where he remained for the rest of his career. He was governor and advisor to several schools for which he was awarded the MBE. Major interests were cricket and singing.

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

**Contact details**

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