



AD-VISOR



The Newsletter of the Birkenhead Institute Old Boy's

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EDITORIAL

I was wondering where to start with this year's Newsletter. I think that it will be best to start with apologies. The first one is in regard to my promise, at the last dinner, to keep to a fixed time in October (i.e. The first Friday in the month) for our annual get together, but circumstances at the Caldys Golf Club proved awkward and the only dates available were the 13th and the 20th. 'Friday the 13th' was out, so this year's dinner will be on Friday the 20th of October. I do regret this and will give a fuller explanation at the dinner. I do hope this does not inconvenience too many of you. The second apology is regarding my promise to consider sending these newsletters by email, but as I received just 6 (six) replies to my request for your email addresses there does not appear to be much point in pursuing this line. The cost of sending these large envelopes through the snail mail will most certainly go up in the near future. (At least that is the Royal Mail intention.) They intend to charge by size and weight. There are over 500 on the roll and costs are going to be prohibitive. I am wondering how many of my mail shots are going nowhere and I think now is the time to ask everyone to confirm their existence to me. I would ask you to send me your name and address Year of birth. Years at B.I. Telephone number, and email address on the tear off portion of the newsletter. I would dearly love every one of us to stay in touch, so please consider this as important, and reply as soon as possible. I stress that I would like everybody to reply to this request.

Now for more happy news, last year's dinner was great success. The speaker was Norman Newby-Jones. Newby came to me eighteen months before the dinner and said he would give the talk at the 2004 dinner. I am never one to deflate a volunteer, but had to tell him that I had a very good speaker already lined up for that dinner. Newby not to be defeated promptly said then put me down for the next one. I must admit it was worth the wait. Well delivered with just the right amount of humour. Thanks Newby!!! Newby has joined my gang of helpers and once again I must express my thanks to them all Jack Bassett, Mike Pollard, Bert Bushell, Joe Morgan and Newby.

I consider myself very fortunate to have received my education at Whetstone Lane version of the Institute and the friendships I have made there will last a lifetime. One such friendship is with Dave (DSW) Jones. I rang and asked him for an item to include in this Newsletter, and up came the gem that is our first item (Thanks Dave) At the same time I notice that we have not had any items from old boys who attended Tollemache Road. I have asked such old boys as I have met to submit to me any size article for your Newsletter, so far without response. Please please will one or two of you submit something for inclusion in next years' publication. I promise to publish any size of article.

MEMORIES OF AN OLD BOY AND FORMER MASTER

Dave Jones (1940-46 and 1960-85)

Let's get one thing straight----there was only ever one B.I and that was a wonderful late Victorian edifice in Whetstone Lane that our local Iconoclasts had the stupidity to scrap in the Seventies. As schools go, and ours went, it had a small roll call of pupils, and would have converted ideally into a convenient community centre and at the same time would have remained a small but significant part of Birkenhead's heritage. My first memory of the old school was when I was still at Mersey Park Junior School gazing out, with awe, from the upper deck of either the 52 or the 60 bus at a wonderful, old, black cannon that used to grace the forecourt. I have often wondered to where that old gun disappeared; someone did tell me that it was melted down to help the war effort. It was during the war that I won the scholarship to the B.I and became just one of the many who was proud to be labelled a 'Birkenhead Idiot'.

For the number of pupils, our school was a very adequate building and many will remember with affection and no small amount of nostalgia their individual form rooms, the science labs, the woodwork room, the hall (cum gymnasium) the sixth form library and art room. Each room conjures up names that were legends in their day such as Fizzie Wimps, D.J. Williams, Old Moore, Lennie Malcolm and able assistant Acker Richards, and not to forget the two reprobates, Graham Wheat and Dusty Miller, who led me astray on more than one occasion. (It was the home brew that finally finished me.) In the 'Chemmie' dept were Joe McLeod, Bummy Jones, Uncle Joe Townsend and son Peter. The art room was one of the best I have ever worked in. It was spacious and brilliantly lit from large windows and wonderful skylights. Who remembers Graham Smith or Peter Paice? Many will remember Hetty Rosenbloom (Rosie to the lads) and glamorous Nancy Price and less glamorous Dave Jones.

Leaving the first floor and descending either the stone steps or the rather splendid wooden staircase, one came across the secretary's office from where with extraordinary efficiency Miss Cojeen ran the place for various Headmasters from Wynne Hughes; Biddy Harris, Bummy Jones, Jerry Hall and finally Danny Webb. Most of who were just acting heads but they all in their turn held court and ruled with varying rods of iron from the Holy of Holies the 'Bosses' Office!

The most memorable head must certainly be the Klon. He terrified everyone. Lads would walk in the most inclement weather round the back of the school to avoid passing his room (and not just the boys). He made his mark on me, and many others with a motley collection of canes, from splintered bamboo to broken billiard cues and if some are to be believed – a rubber truncheon. Surprisingly he really did not need them – his very presence and awful eye struck terror into the hearts of the hardest villains, and I should know.

There were other memorable places on the ground floor, such as Jerry Hall's storeroom where lads lined up each morning for all sorts of reasons. Jerry was deputy and acting headmaster and was also Head of English, but it was a kindly old English Gentleman known as Johnnie P. that I remember best who tragically developed Parkinson's Disease – I recall vividly a lovely lesson, he was explaining the intricacies of bull fighting, he was talking of matadors, picadors and toreadors whilst we were asking about stevedores, cuspidors and Diana Dors. Two of the others from the English Department who stand out are Geoff Walsh with whom I played Rugby and who during his short stay wrote a scholarly tribute to Wilfred Owen. Talking of short stays there was another dedicated English Teacher who was badly treated by our local Education Authority and was forced into working his way through University at his own expense. During his tenancy, Dave Yates, was responsible for introducing boys not only to the beauty of our literary heritage but also to the theatre and the joy of creative participation in all aspects of culture. Dave was largely responsible for the formation of the Wilfred Owen Library.

In the woodwork department I only knew two teachers one was Kitty Cartwright with whom I made an articulated crocodile with blood red marble eyes in my first year at School. The second man I knew better and with whom I had a great affinity was J.D.O. Hughes, dear old Chris, he will be remembered best as the devoted house master of 'Westminster'. Chris would have made a great professional sportsman. He had that essential attribute – he hated to lose –

poor old Tommy Thacker, who was not the greatest Bridge player, was the recipient of much abuse from his Welsh partner. I was lucky with mine as I had gentle old 'Squinty' Squires – what a scholar he was, he knew more about Greek Culture than I would have believed possible – What a shame so many lads failed to benefit from his fund of knowledge.

If ever anything was responsible for killing anyone it was the change over to Comprehensive Education that ended my dear friend Dennis Hughes's life. I shall always remember him along with Donnie Hall (Head of P.E.) for the super times we had on the Rugby fields at Ingleborough Road. I often wonder if the lads enjoyed it as much as we did. Those were the days when holidays were too long and you couldn't wait to get back. Sport was always important at School and many will remember men like Johnny Robins, Cadfan Davies and a wonderful young Biologist who was such a fantastic goalkeeper (Tiger Komich of B.I.) and Bill Taylor who scored more tries at Ingleborough Road than any boy ever did. Bill was the last of a line of geography teachers that started with Jake Allison. Bill specialised in Geology and long walks up mountains to sites of special interest. I think designed to burn off poor old piggy (John Langly). John was the worlds worst at spelling, if you don't believe me then check your old school reports.

The School Hall doubled up as the Gym and Assembly Hall. Who will ever forget marching in to the strains of Fatty Leeming's rendition of Men of Harlech and humming rude words to Colonel Bogey? What about those School hymns 'The Heavens declare the Creators Glory' – 'I vow to thee my Country' and 'This Royal Throne of Kings' real stirring stuff to start the morning.

The most important thing that you had to remember before the Klon made his entry was not to annoy 'Moggie (Mr. Morris) who taught French in much the same manner as he conducted the assembly. He carried on the tradition of 'Old Moat' who had the hardest hand that ever hit the back of my head, a golden rule was never to accept to play chess in his room. Danny Webb, when he was not winning the Italian Campaign with the Intelligence Corps was also Head of Modern Language and became the last Headmaster of the old Institute, and a good one at that. Who should have filled the vacancy? There was only one worthy candidate, Mr. Birkenhead Institute himself. A man who loved the School and its traditions more than anyone else, and who was more concerned for its 'well being' and for that of its pupils than any other – I write of Lennie Malcolm, who the system did not treat fairly.

Another who suffered under the system was poor old Tommy Thacker who was obliged to teach the lot – English, French, German, History, Geography, Religion, Maths and Games for the whole of his forty years and never ever received any reward or, for all I know, any thanks. He was a crack shot with a piece of chalk and was not bad with the board duster either.

Everyone enjoyed being taught by diminutive Biddy Harris. I think it was because he was so easily digressed away from his subject. Digression seemed to be a tradition in the History Department because another firm favourite was that great character WE. Williams (our beloved WEW). Bowler hat, black overcoat and a pallor and stoop that we all thought were the result of a gas attack in the Great War. What a scholar and what a talent. A man of letters, and an artist and modeller of great ability, I shall never forget a Liverpool Tram and the Globe Theatre that he created and used as visual aids. Many will remember with great affection 'Big' Ted Evans. He excelled at most sports and was the reason for the staff's success at the annual Chip and Putt and Bowls tournament against the sixth form, held on the last day of the summer term. The other Bowler and Golfer was John Allen. He was Head of English and inspired many of his pupils to attend the theatre. He and Lennie Malcolm kept the Liverpool Playhouse going for many years.

Mr. Thacker and Eric Sorby were my form masters throughout my school career. It was pleasing that they were still teaching when I joined the staff in 1960 as head of Art. There were others who had lasted the course one such was Dickie Bolton a lovely man and a wonderful Maths teacher; many will remember him riding his bicycle to School whatever the weather. I knew him as a gardener and allotment holder. He left BI when he was not considered for the post of Head of Mathematics, but won rewards as Head of that Department at the Birkenhead School (Girls) where he found a lovely wife from the staff. They lived very happily together into old age. Eric Sorby retired and joined his wife in their hobby as 'Friends of Chester Zoo'. Mrs Sorby was a talented artist. She painted the exotic plant murals at the ape enclosures. Incidentally she

taught my sister at the Girls Sec. who will ever forget the girls on their bikes whizzing to their School via Whetstone Lane with those split skirts flying around their armpits? Oh happy days!! Eric was a member of the group who never failed to do the Times Crossword puzzle aiming to complete it in a quarter of an hour. When I was at School poor old 'Puddle' Lake was the music master - boys can be very cruel and I am sorry to say we were very cruel to Mr Lake. His replacement was a Mr Shaw (Pebble to his witty pupils) he seemed to always have a cigarette in his mouth, this stained his moustache with orange nicotine. He enjoyed taking the boys for swimming. I seemed to have forgotten the French Department, Mr Webb was assisted by a contemporary of mine Vernon Mealor he gave way to Stan Pierce and a Mr. Thompson (he with the terrible twins and progressive methods of bringing up children). A new face in the Biology Dept was Dickie Richards. He had not marked any of his books for years and was in real trouble when we learned of a General Inspection. He was up marking for three weeks solid, but it proved too daunting a task and he just gave it up in the end. I can recall dozens of old dodderers who lent an air of scholarship to the old Alma Mater. Maggie Maillard who was not a beauty queen yet caused many a pencil to fall to the floor and Tiger Lewis who enjoyed seeing me thumped in the boxing ring by a monster called Chris Roberts and Old Moore who almost wrecked Physics as a subject and who continually cried 'Go out that boy! I know who it was! Who was it?'

No doubt about it, I could go on reminiscing about the happy days. I was one of the lucky ones because at 55 I was offered ten years enhancement on my pension and thinking that both Pat's Dad and my Dad had died before enjoying any of the rest they deserved in old age, I decided to pull out, lo and behold twenty years later I am still enjoying my retirement - painting a bit, watching Marc play Rugby, taxiing Jade back and forth, gardening and sometimes just sleeping - It's been a good life and I've enjoyed it.

A letter from an old boy in Canada

The General Election of 1944

Don't tell me - there wasn't one, except in the hallowed halls of BI. Mr Wynne Hughes, aided in this instance by Biddy Harris, had the great idea of holding a mock election to introduce the concepts of British democracy to the senior forms. There were to be parties and their candidates, public speaking and heckling - no holds were to be barred!

The three main parties were represented, and their candidates escape my memory. Labour and Conservative were both strong (and vocal), and the failing Liberals (de mortuis nil nisi Bonham Carter) were a distant and weak third. Two other minor parties participated, and I can remember both candidates. Des Cracknell found fault with each of the big three, so he participated as a Socialist with no particular aim other than to provide an acceptable alternative. The other was the Communist party, which was advocated by a young man called Rushton. He was by far the most interesting, since he could quote Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin at length, and could be considered as somewhat to the left of Joe Stalin! With a full knowledge of his subject, and an oratorial style equal to Adolf Hitler, he promised to enliven the meeting.

The first four speakers delivered their expected pitches with all the conviction and credibility of George W. Bush, and were cheered and jeered by the assembled multitude in the gym. Klon watched the whole proceedings with interest and a somewhat sadistic grin on his face - he enjoyed the heckling, particularly when the sallies were particularly apposite. Finally, he decided that he could not be completely quiet at a meeting of his design, so he got up and addressed the assembly between speakers.

He had joined the regular Air Force. Tragically, he was killed in a flying accident several years later.

When I arrived at Kuala Lumpur - then far from the modern city it is now - I was posted to a small RAF detachment of only 12 to 15 people with the grand title of 'Advanced Air Headquarters, Malaya' on a big army HQ. When I arrived, one of the incumbents was an Old Instonian named Jones, an aerial photographer. He was older than me and all I can remember is that he had red hair. What a coincidence, I thought, meeting someone from the school in far-off Malaya. But that was not the end of it. I was only there 14 months, but before I left yet another Old Instonian joined this very small outfit. His name was Davies. He, also, was a National Serviceman and I recall that he lived in Everest Road, near the Institute playing field. Hope you are reading this, Mr. Davies!

Flash forward to the year 2000. My wife and I flew to Santiago, Chile to join a cruise ship at Valparaiso to take us through the Chilean fjords and up to Buenos Aires. For meals, we were assigned to a table for two. But two other couples were directed to the same table and after a bit of negotiating, all six of us were seated together elsewhere. When we introduced ourselves, and said where we came from, I found that one of the other four was David Moore who had been at the Institute at the same time as me. I was 1942-49 and he was 1941-51. And to complete the Birkenhead connection, my wife went to the Birkenhead High School and his to West Kirby Grammar. We became firm friends and, with the other two, meet regularly at our respective homes. And we have been on several holidays together - this brings me to the latest twist in this story.

In February this year, all six of us met again (by design) at Valparaiso to join a cruise across the Pacific to New Zealand. We had a splendid time and, of course, had a joint table. At breakfasts, one could sit anywhere and, one morning, we sat with a couple, I detected a slight Merseyside accent. It turned out that they live in Prenton and - you've guessed it - his school was the Birkenhead Institute. His name was Bob Clark and he had attended during the 1930's, and his wife had gone to West Kirby Grammar.

Is that the end of the matter? I doubt it. I am almost anticipating the answer when I next say 'And where do you come from?'

BIOB Golf Society

The golf society had yet another very enjoyable outing at Prenton Golf Club. There were 25 old boys taking part as players and several people turned up for the dinner afterwards. The club now have new caterers and the cost for a three-course meal is only £12, old boys wishing to play also pay the green fee of £20.

This year's winner of the Pyke Cup was Arthur Howarth (58/64) and the runner up and winner of the Len Malcolm Tankard was Vic Swift (56/61).

Next year the competition will be held at Prenton on Friday May the 11th all details can be obtained from Derek (Mick) Turner (46/50) at 46, Cornwall Drive Prenton (telephone no. 0151.608.5785).

This competition is open to all old boys and is a very enjoyable day out. It is worth turning up, if only for the meal. The company is good and the surroundings excellent. An early booking is necessary to enable the pairings and catering arrangements to be put in place.

Obituary

I have had a report of the sudden death of B.E. (Brian) Ware (36/44.Head Boy 1944) at hospital in Thames Ditton, Surrey

Brian's eyesight had been failing for some years, and as his wife died some eighteen months previous, was living alone. It appears that he fell in the house and lay unattended for some days. He was removed to hospital and died approximately one week later.

Brian wrote a good article for the No. 8 issue of our magazine (Autumn 2003). He will be remembered with affection by all Old Boys that new him.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Will ALL Old Boys please complete the "Application Form for the Annual Dinner", the form to be amended as necessary. This will enable me to keep our records up to date, and save on Postage etc., a full explanation for this is given elsewhere in your Newsletter. I thank you all in anticipation. Any member wishing to keep the 'AdVisor' whole is welcome to send their details on plain paper.

APPLICATION FORM FOR THE ANNUAL DINNER

I WILL/WILL NOT BE ATTENDING THE DINNER AT CALDY GOLF CLUB
(For those attending please enclose a cheque for £25)

This covers the cost of hire of the facilities; the meal plus wine on the table; free entry into the draw and all gratuities to the catering and bar staff. Donations for the draw would be very welcome. Cheques to be made out to BIOB (not to me please)

Dress; Lounge Suit/Blazer. Time 6.30pm for 730pm

NAME

ADDRESS (incl; Post Code)

EMAIL ADDRESS (if any)

TELEPHONE NUMBER (incl; dial code)

YEAR OF BIRTH

YEARS AT BI

Those attending only (any dietary requirements)

Please return this form as soon as possible to Harry Burkett ; 13, Prenton Farm Road
Prenton, Wirral CH43 3BN