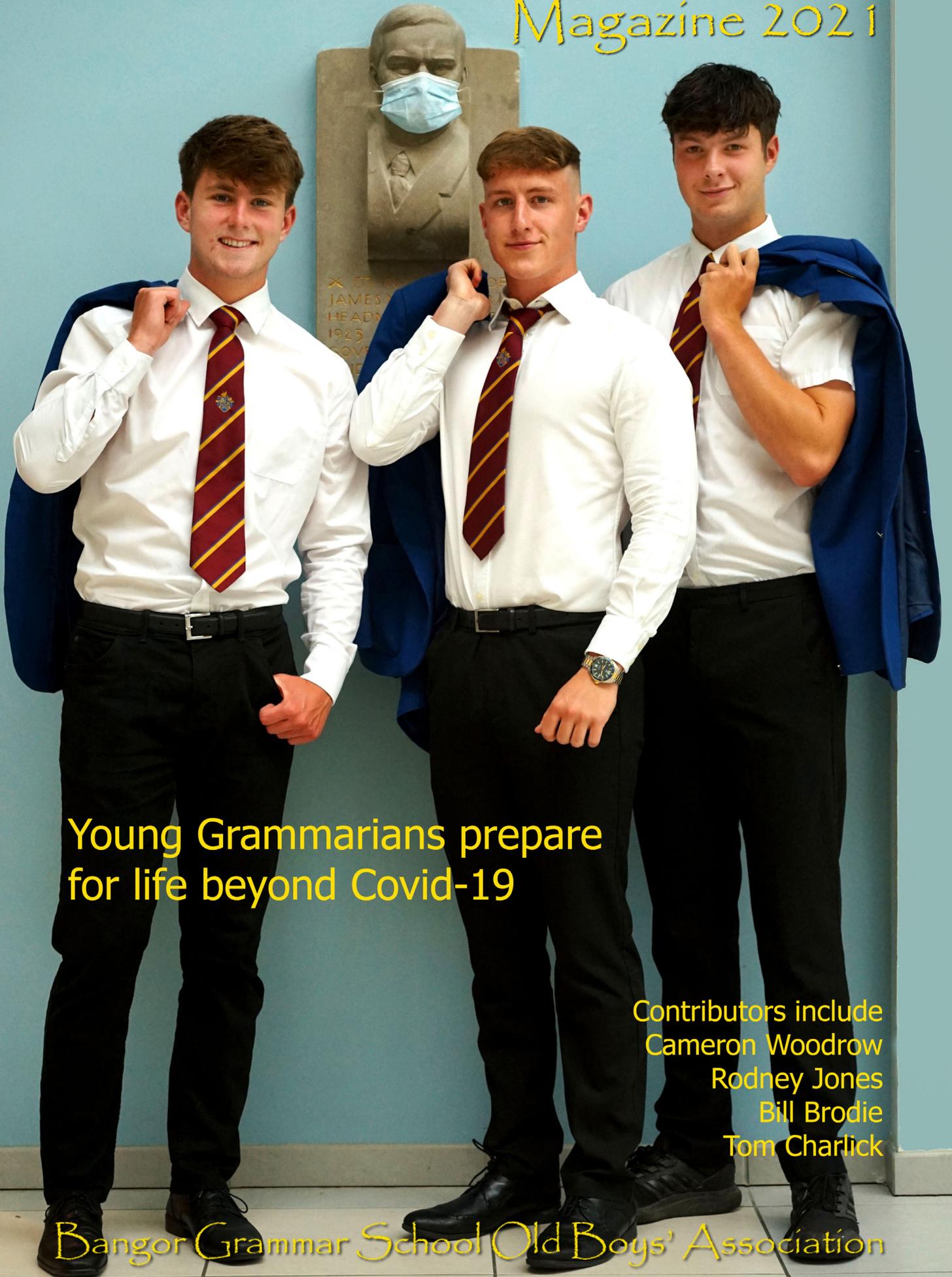


The Grammarian

Magazine 2021



Young Grammarians prepare
for life beyond Covid-19

Contributors include
Cameron Woodrow
Rodney Jones
Bill Brodie
Tom Charlick

Bangor Grammar School Old Boys' Association

AIB are proud to support Bangor Grammarians



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Chairman's Message

Terence Bowman

Fellow Grammarians,

It was never in the grand scheme of things that I should hold office for a fourth term (thereby equalling the never-to-be-broken record set a decade ago by chairman emeritus Trevor Gray) – but global circumstances have dictated otherwise.

We thought we had an idea where things were heading a year ago, with publication of this magazine unavoidably delayed and traditional Bangor Grammarians events either cancelled or (we'd hoped) postponed, but with the New Year promising better times for all. Few of us would have believed that by autumn 2021, a widespread and highly successful vaccination programme notwithstanding, we would only now be edging towards an approximation of normality.

In last year's Chairman's Message I mentioned how our 498th committee meeting (since 1930) had taken place at the School in March 2020, with a further six months elapsing before the 499th finally arrived. Members had gathered in the welcoming surroundings of the Esplanade at Ballyholme – the School itself out of bounds to all but staff and pupils.

Little did we realise that another 43 weeks would pass before it would become possible – or more accurately 'legal' – to hold that elusive 500th meeting (on 30 June past). With every respect to the Esplanade, our obliging hosts once again, it was not the grand celebratory event at Bangor Town Hall that we had envisaged would mark both the 500th committee meeting and the 90th anniversary of our foundation.

Looking back over the past 18 months, without doubt our greatest regret has been the loss of the annual dinners we hold for our wider membership, with Bangor (2020), Edinburgh (2021) and London (2020 and 2021) all falling victim to bans on indoor gatherings and travel. Thankfully, as I write this report (in late summer) it seems increasingly likely that our Bangor Dinner will take place in November. We will keep our membership fully informed as the year progresses – if you have attended the Marine Court Hotel dinner in recent years you can expect a phone call or an email!

Rest assured we haven't allowed the grass to grow under our feet and it is once again our pleasure to produce the *Grammarian* magazine for members at home and overseas. Indeed if everything has gone according to plan you should have received this edition considerably earlier than the one in 2020!

We have also been taking stock of the effectiveness of our communications with fellow Grammarians and would hope to adopt a more digital approach. The current Membership List is still mainly based on property addresses, and annually a number of these are not being updated following house moves. For example, has this magazine been delivered to

your family home (and forwarded on to you)? Maybe it has been delivered to the wrong address altogether but the kindly resident knows where you live.

That, we believe, is not fair on you, your family or that kindly resident. Our register of addresses is updated on a regular basis but if the past year is anything to go by (around a dozen emails received advising of a change of address), we suspect much more needs to be done. The solution is simple: if you have moved house, whether to another address in Bangor, Northern Ireland or anywhere else in the world, please let us know. You have paid your membership fee and you have every right to hear from us – by way of this magazine or via occasional messages about dinners and other events to your email address.

On the subject of email addresses, some years ago we determined that the magazine should be available to all members by way of an identical downloadable edition (carrying exactly the same past pupil content). A sizeable number of you opted for this version of *The Grammarian*, which saves us a considerable sum in production and distribution costs.

As of this year we (Bangor Grammarians) have more members than at any other time in our 91-year history. Numbers have been boosted by some 25% over the past seven years thanks mainly to the magnificent endeavours of BGS Sixth Form Careers and Study Supervisor Kerry Will. The downside is that currently we have email addresses for just one-third of our 1,500 members.

We are duty-bound to respect data protection legislation; in essence that means we need you to contact us, via our dedicated grammarians@btconnect.com address, with your updated contact information. When doing so, please also let us know if you would rather receive this magazine as a digital download (for PC, iPad, tablet or similar).

In conclusion, while we understand these to have been particularly difficult times for everyone – from recent school leavers to those hailing from the 'College Avenue era' – we are always on the lookout for new members to join our committee. Our evening meetings take place early in the week, usually no more than five or six times a year. If the idea appeals to you, please feel free to get in touch for further information by way of the same grammarians@btconnect.com address.

I look forward to welcoming our new chairman when, hopefully, we hold our annual general meeting in early December. He (a pretty sure bet) is assured of my full support in the days and months ahead.

To echo the closing words of a number of our magazine contributors: ***Floreat Bangoria!***



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| | | | |
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Departing Head Boy Finn Ritchie (left), along with Deputy Head Boys Josh Carroll and Chris Pyper, had a difficult final year at Bangor Grammar School. See pages 8 and 9. Photo: Ken Best.



Principal's Report

Elizabeth Huddleson

The 2020/21 academic year at Bangor Grammar School bore witness to what will in future decades be recognised as an extraordinary period in the School's history – and has produced what I should imagine is one of the briefest ever Principal reports.

Having spent the majority of the 2020 summer term in lockdown, with all pupils and staff learning/working remotely, the new term saw pupils and staff returning to the school site, albeit adhering to very strict guidance.

This resulted in the introduction of a one-way system of movement around the School, pupils wearing masks, hands being sanitised on entry into the School and different classrooms, limited numbers in the staff room, assemblies being held remotely, and the timings of the school day altered to allow for a number of different break and lunch times, thereby reducing pupil numbers at social times of the day.

Except for a couple of very small windows of opportunity in line with guidance from the Department of Education and the Education Authority, the School's extensive extra-curricular and clubs/societies programme ground to a halt. The exceptions permitted some successes early in September and before the extension to the October half term. This included Max Skelton retaining his title as Irish Table Tennis Champion and his brother James taking second place in the U21 category.

In addition, Joseph Robinson, Hunter Reddy, Daniel Palmer, Dan Sherriff and Henry Nelson competed in various individual Sailing events, culminating in the boys winning the RYANI Trophy on behalf of Ballyholme Yacht Club.

September also saw completion of the College Avenue housing development, with the townhouses, which are now part of the former Crosby House building, going onto the market.



Covid restrictions meant Remembrance Sunday in November was very different for the School's Combined Cadet Force. Members were unable to attend the parade at the War Memorial in Bangor's Ward Park as attendance was limited to just 15 people. However, on Armistice Day (Wednesday 11 November), Major Cath Watkins laid a wreath on behalf of Bangor Grammar School CCF at the War Memorial.

The extension of the October half term holiday and the longer period of lockdown at the start of the Easter term saw a return to remote learning and teaching, which involved pupils following their normal daily timetables with lessons taking place via Zoom. This allowed the boys to retain an all-important daily routine, to see their friends (albeit via a screen), and for learning and teaching to continue. Form teachers held a daily Zoom registration period, which ensured effective social time and pastoral care could take place. All staff, Senior Leadership and Parental Consultation meetings moved online too, allowing the School to continue to run as 'normal'.



Elizabeth Huddleson

An unexpected benefit of meetings being held online was that we were able to have more regular whole school and year assemblies, with one of the highlights of the year being the whole school in 'attendance' at the School's Remembrance Day service (in a normal year only three year groups are permitted to physically attend). The same applied to the following month's condensed Carol Service.

As the Principal, I found the periods of lockdown and working within strict guidance, whilst stressful, ironically allowed for a much more efficient and productive working day model, given that all meetings were via Zoom. That said, there were periods of significant disruption and stress, none more so than with the cancellation of the AQE examinations.

This removed the School's ability to select pupils academically and prompted a significant number of governor meetings of both the Admissions Committee and Full Board, resulting in a set of non-academic criteria being produced. The new cohort coming into Year 8 will be the first group in the School's history that has not had to complete some sort of academic assessment.

For the second year running schools were asked, in the absence of external examinations, to provide examination boards with Centre Determined Grades for all pupils studying at GCSE, AS and A2 level. This proved a mammoth task for all teaching staff, the one difference this year (compared to last year) being that the pupils were in the school building with teaching continuing as normal. The staff responded admirably to what in essence generated an increase in workload on top of their normal working day.

The summer term saw the guidance which permitted some pockets of extra-curricular activity to reopen, including the opportunity for three Bangor Grammar School pupils to play hockey at U18 and U16 level in the Wales v. Ulster Hockey Tri Series.



The BGS trio who played in the Wales v. Ulster Hockey Tri Series are (from left): Jamie Lyall (U18), Callum Duncan and JJ Holley (both U16)

The emphasis in the final few weeks of term was on fun, which included a series of house events to generate some healthy competition amongst the boys. The opportunity was also taken to host BBQs for the Year 14 and Year 12 groups, given the conclusion of their A-Level and GCSE courses of study. The CCF (Combined Cadet Force) also hosted a BBQ and fun evening for their senior school



CCF returned in the summer term (this picture of Year 12s includes students from Glenlola Collegiate)

contingent from both Bangor Grammar and Glenlola Collegiate.

Having faced a second year of disruption the boys of Bangor Grammar School most certainly have a greater appreciation of all that is on offer to them in the School. Many would go so far as to say they missed school during the lockdowns and were delighted to get back into the physical classroom with their teachers and classmates.

What the new term will bring is as yet unknown. Hopefully we will be able to remove masks and reopen all extra-curricular activities, along with clubs and societies, thereby allowing next year's report to be considerably more detailed and entertaining.



This picture shows the Year 12 leavers with senior staff members

Bangor Grammarians

Welcome to all our new members. There are more of you now than at any time in our 91-year history!

But has your copy of *The Grammarian* reached the right address? Was it delivered to your old family home or where you used to live?

Please tell us your current home address and, if you have never received an email about dinners, etc. from us, let us know that address as well.

The best email address to use for any magazine-related matters is grammarians@btconnect.com

Terence Bowman, chairman, Bangor Grammarians





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The Time That Is Given Us

Finn Ritchie



“I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo.

“So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

J.R.R. Tolkien – ‘The Fellowship of The Ring’

The past school year began in September 2020, as normal. But that was the only normal thing about it. Masks. A one-way system. Social distancing. It was like being transported to some threatening hospital in a dystopian future. As if that wasn't bad enough, almost none of our extra-curricular activities, clubs or societies were permitted to take place. Nor any school events.

There was no formal to look forward to and, after six years of waiting in envy, we could not even use the coveted common room. With every door and window wedged open, even in the depths of winter, the school felt like an enormous fridge.

But despite all these privations I think many of us were still just happy to be there. After six months out of school, kept apart from our teachers and our friends, it was good to be back in our building, to see people again and to be taught together in a classroom. Who knew you could miss double German first thing on Monday morning or Maths last period on Friday!

At this early stage we were still hopeful that normality would return at some later point in the academic year. However, with each passing week we increasingly feared a second lockdown was looming. An extra week off at half-term in October was the rumble of distant thunder signalling a storm was about to hit.



The 2020/21 senior prefect team – Head Boy Finn Ritchie (seated) with Deputies (from left): Josh Carroll, Rhys Green, Chris Pyper, Zak Irvine and Lewis Marks

We appreciated every moment we had in school because when we headed home each afternoon we had no guarantee we would be going back the following morning. Slightly earlier than planned, on 18 December, we were sent home for our Christmas break. We were given the doom-laden instruction to revise for our mock exams as though they were our real A-Levels.

Shortly before we were due to return in the New Year, the anticipated storm arrived. The nation was plunged into a second lockdown. Our hearts sank. We could not face a repeat of a lockdown like the last one. Learning at home during the first lockdown had been both difficult and dull. Difficult to stay motivated. Difficult to quickly and easily get help. Dull because of its monotony and lack of interaction.

During the first lockdown we had not even had Zoom lessons, which are in themselves only a poor substitute for the efficiency and ease of a real class. This is not to lay any blame whatsoever on the School. The first lockdown was an unprecedented interruption to education, for which no one could have been prepared; our teachers did their absolute best for us in very trying circumstances.

However, they had anticipated a second lockdown and, as a result of their hard work, organisation and adaptability, it was much more bearable than the first. Their optimism, reassurance and understanding supported us throughout. The fact that learning was more structured was very helpful. It kept us busy and gave our days a sense of routine and normality. The timetable that we would have been following in school was simply transposed to our homes, with our in-person classes being replaced by Zoom lessons. We even observed the same set break and lunch times, and finished each day, as usual, at three o'clock.

Zoom was much better for learning than simply receiving



One for posterity - the same group wearing masks due to the Covid-19 regulations



The outgoing Year 14 group with Principal Elizabeth Huddleson

instructions digitally and also allowed for some much-needed social interaction with our teachers and friends.

With this lockdown came the announcement that external exams were being cancelled for the second year running. What they were to be replaced with at that moment we did not know. The uncertainty at that time was extremely unnerving. I remember constantly refreshing the news page on my phone, hoping desperately to hear what was going to happen. I recall being particularly stressed one morning about my mock exams. I just wanted to know when they would happen, what form they would take and whether they would form part of my final grade. It felt like there was a dark cloud above my head and the weight of the world was on my shoulders.

However, after a Zoom call with one of my teachers I felt infinitely better. He wasn't able to provide the answers to my burning questions, because the answers at that point just didn't exist, but he was able to offer consolation and encouragement. He also made me laugh at a time when laughter was all too scarce.

When the second lockdown began we had no idea how long it would last. It was very possible I had already had my last day in BGS without realising it. During the first one, the promise that we would be back in school before the end of the year had not been fulfilled. As it turned out, after numerous extensions, the new lockdown lasted three months, until nearly the end of March.

Returning to school brought fresh challenges. It was now compulsory to wear a mask at all times when in the building, even the classroom. We also had our internal mock exams to complete. These were to be used to inform our final grade along with a body of evidence, including the benchmark homeworks and tests we had completed over the course of the year, including in lockdown.

Sitting exams straight away, after nearly four months out of school, proved tough but at least no boy could claim he had not had time to revise! I am very grateful to our teachers who did their utmost to ensure we were all thoroughly prepared.

After sitting our internal exams things began to look up. The weather, which had been abysmal during lockdown, chose to reflect a warm, sunny, temperate climate just as our exams started (typical!), but fortunately this good spell continued after they were over. Our final few weeks were simply glorious. With exams finished and the requirement to continue learning alleviated, the pressure was well and truly off. Our teachers were given the freedom to plan

interesting lessons in which we could learn about topics that were not part of our course; alternatively we could simply play games or chat.

A great many of us skipped classes and went outside to play football in the sunshine. Our teachers understood. They knew better than anyone that we needed to release the steam that had built up during a calendar year of pressure, which had started with the first lockdown in March 2020, in our Lower Sixth year. I declare those games had more atmosphere and excitement than any match played at Old Trafford! It was as if we were making up for lost time; we knew it was not possible but that would not stop us trying.

Thursday 6 May was our last day. The Senior Management Team, under the direction of Mrs Huddleson, very kindly agreed to make this a 'day of fun'. The morning began with a photograph being taken of the whole year group. This was followed by a seven-a-side football tournament and rounders. After that the canteen staff treated us to a delicious barbecue. Speeches were made. Gifts were exchanged.

In a year of receding opportunities, when rites of passage were constantly being pushed just out of our reach, we felt so relieved to get that day. It gave us a glimpse at what our final year could have been like. The next afternoon we had a water fight with the girls of Glenlola at Ballyholme Park. A conventional end to an unconventional year!

On Tuesday 22 June, we were generously invited back one last time for a leavers' lunch. Despite our initial ignorance of the term 'smart casual', we all managed to meet (and in some cases to excel!) the required dress code. I think we all felt very grateful to get the chance to bid farewell properly to each other, the school and our teachers.

I will not forget my time at Bangor Grammar School, nor the privilege it has been to be Head Boy. This was not the year I was hoping for, but nothing – I repeat nothing – not even the experience of this year – has spoiled my time in this place.

Finn Ritchie was the Head Boy from September 2020 to June 2021. He entered Bangor Grammar in 2014 as a member of Crosby House and was involved in rugby, athletics, debating and drama during his seven years at the School. From September he will be reading Law at Queen's University Belfast.

The Class of 2020

Aqeel Mohamed



Aqeel Mohamed, who attended Bangor Grammar School between 2013 and 2020, is now in his second year, reading Medicine at GKT School of Medical Education, King's College London. During his time at BGS, Aqeel was Head Boy in his final year and was involved in the CCF, hockey and the Debating Society. He was also co-founder of the School's Medical Society. Aqeel is now involved in the KCL Students' Union, the GKT Men's Hockey Team and the KCL Emergency Medicine Society Committee.

As a very disrupted, completely unforeseen, and strange academic year comes to a close, I welcome this opportunity to reflect on how differently the past couple of years have panned out for the Class of 2020. If you read my 'prequel' article in last year's *Grammarians*, you will have seen an expectancy of normalcy for us, both academically and socially.

In truth, the pandemic caused many of us to chop and change plans, particularly due to the effect Covid-19 had on exams (or the lack thereof), coupled with the subsequent shambolic grading and government U-turns. However, despite its global impact, the boys of the Class of 2020 have continued to defy the odds and have gone on to undertake amazing endeavours – the spirit of the school most certainly lives on in these fine young men.



Class of 2020 at their Formal

The classic university fresher and halls experience has definitely undergone a rebranding, with Freshers Week proving very different to the stories recounted by older students (I will let you all take that as you will)! With most universities moving to online teaching for much of the year, many of us also found it difficult to make meaningful connections with our fellow course mates.

Indeed, our main (only!) means of interaction involves the odd Microsoft Teams tutorial (other video conferencing apps are available), plus, for some of the luckier ones amongst us, a socially distanced in-person teaching day once every other month. Regardless, most of us have been able to still make friends and meet new people, made

possible of late thanks to the easing of restrictions, given the great success of the vaccination programme.

It should come as no surprise to readers that there is a healthy community of Bangorians scattered around the higher education institutions of Northern Ireland – all being very fortunate to receive my compatriots. All three neighbouring higher education institutions, Queen's University Belfast, Stranmillis College and Ulster University, welcomed a wealth of talented young men from BGS. It continues to be the case that one is likely to run into fellow Grammarians when out and about in Belfast, Jordanstown and Coleraine – socially distanced of course.

Queen's University opened its doors to several members of the 2020 Senior Prefect team, namely Adam Crothers (Deputy Head Boy), Michael McCreary (Head of School House), Alistair McConnell (Deputy Head of Ward House) and Finn Moore (Deputy Head of Crosby House), who are studying History, Zoology, Biological Sciences and French and Spanish respectively. Jack Blaney, former Deputy Head of School House, is studying at Ulster University's Belfast School of Art.

It has been a while since there has been a long string of medical school entrants from BGS. All seven of us from the Class of 2020 who applied to medical school managed to get in, with the Queen's University Belfast School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Science benefiting by welcoming Michael Reid and former Deputy Head Boy and 1st XV Rugby player Riley Westwood.

Conor Lusty (also a former Deputy Head Boy and 1st XV player) will join Michael and Riley at QUB to read Medicine this upcoming academic year after taking a gap year to play for Bangor Rugby Club and work at the Ulster Hospital.



Class of 2020 Deputy Heads of House (standing, from left): Alistair McConnell, Harry McDonagh, Jack Blaney and Finn Moore. Seated: Heads of House Jerome Guibao, Patrick Dobie, Michael McCreary and Adam Simmonite.

Joining me across the water, more future medics continue their 'studying' – with former Head of Ward House Jerome Guibao at the University of Aberdeen Medical and Dental School, while the double act of Patrick McLarnon



Members of the Class of 2020 enjoy themselves at their Formal. From left: Jamie Campbell, Aqeel Mohamed, Riley Westwood, Joshua Gould, Neil Hughes and Harry McDonagh.

(former Deputy Head Boy and 1st XV player), and Harry McDonagh (former Deputy Head of Dufferin House) are reading Medicine at University of Liverpool School of Medicine.

Liverpool continues to be a popular place

for pupils from BGS. This vibrant city has received Neil Hughes, who is reading Law at the University of Liverpool, while Matthew Finley, Matthew Gibson, Adam Atchison, Jack Fry and Adam Rushe are all studying a wide range of courses at Liverpool John Moore's University and Liverpool Hope University. I am certain all will leave their mark on the city – in a good way of course!

Several boys are flying a lone Bangorian flag at various locations across the UK. Calum McDaid is reading Psychology at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, while Adam Simmonite (former Head of Crosby House) is our man at Loughborough University, reading Sport Science, Coaching and Physical Education.

Joshua Gould continues to pursue his film-making interests by studying Film Production in MediaCity at the University of Salford. Former Deputy Head Boy Joshua Hardy is at Durham University, where he is reading Law at Trevelyan College. Joining Josh in the North of England are Jamie Campbell, Oliver Still and Jack Angus, who are reading Applied Sciences, Physics with Astrophysics and Biochemistry respectively at Northumbria University. Darcy McBrinn is studying English at the University of York, while the University of Chester has welcomed



The Class of 2020 Senior Prefect Team (from left): Adam Crothers, Joshua Hardy, Aqeel Mohamed, Conor Lusty and Riley Westwood. Bottom: Paddy McLarnon. Principal Elizabeth Huddleson is included.

Matthew Bell who is studying Primary School Teaching.

Patrick Dobie (former 1st XV player and Head of Dufferin House) is looking to study Law and Criminology at the University of Lincoln this September, while Dan McGaughey is studying Mechanical Engineering at the University of Plymouth (he is also continuing to flex his sailing skills as part of the Team GB squad, currently training in Portugal).

Outside the realms of higher education, BGS men continue to pave the way to success. Since leaving the school

after his GCSEs, Benn Cudworth, a former winner of the NI Future Star Award, NI Startup Business of the Year finalist and UK Young Business Personality, has been continuing his business foray by working full-time as a sales representative.

Former 1st XV player Cameron Stewart is now on a degree apprenticeship in Mechatronic Engineering at Ulster University,

joining a significant number of boys who are pursuing courses at UU. Will Simpson has followed his 1st XV teammate by undertaking a mechanic apprenticeship through SERC. Ben Carrigan is on an apprenticeship with Openreach to become a fibre telecommunication engineer through Belfast Metropolitan College.

The entire year group has shown great resolve despite a global pandemic. Of course, things have not worked out just the way some of us had planned, but I believe we all have ended up making the most of the situation and, more importantly, enjoying ourselves (maybe even more than that original plan).

Spread across the UK, we can all attest that university life has been quite different to what we had expected. We can all agree that online teaching has been a bit dire – being stuck alone in your room, listening to a lecture, or trying to engage in a Zoom tutorial, is definitely not what we signed up for (or pay over nine grand for). I certainly did not expect to learn how to wash my hands over a Microsoft Teams call!

One interesting aspect of Covid-19, which made it even more real to me, was when our epidemiology professor began using the pandemic as an example in one of his lectures. It was then it struck me how, given that it has already been incorporated into our medical curriculum, we will likely be experiencing the consequences of this virus for many years to come.

The light that shines through this seemingly never-ending darkness is the everyday decrease in terms of cases, deaths and the increasing vaccinations, allowing us to hopefully have a more normal year, starting from September with the promise of 'Refreshers'. The dark reality of variants, and local lockdowns, provides a sombre reminder that the virus is here to stay. Hopefully, through the efforts of everyone in society, it will become something we can live with in tandem, and definitely not something that gets the better of us.



Dan McGaughey – a current member of the Team GB Sailing Squad



Benn Cudworth



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The Class of 2017, four years on

Thomas Robert Charlick

Tom Charlick attended Bangor Grammar School from 2010/17. He held the position of Head of Dufferin House and was Ulster School's Bridge Champion and Irish runner-up (along with Bertie Parkinson, Mark Hamilton and Ryan Christie). He has just graduated from Queen's University with a Bachelor's degree in Finance and will shortly take up employment with Morgan Stanley in London.

The past year and a half could not have been more turbulent, with universities having to transition to online teaching, and plenty starting professional careers from a laptop in their bedroom. Yet, after reaching out to many of my old classmates (some of whom I haven't spoken to in four years), there is an inherent streak of optimism about getting back to normality (i.e., being able to go to a pub).



Tom Charlick

I aim to summarise and highlight noteworthy achievements and success stories, considering what we have all had to put up with of late, and to hopefully motivate current students as to the vast array of options, paths and careers that many of their older mentors, prefects and football thieves have embarked upon.

For those of us who transitioned straight into further education post-Grammar, many will now be finishing up our Bachelor's and starting our careers, pursuing a Master's degree, or taking time out to just enjoy the folly of youth. We have had boys reach far and wide, with years abroad spanning from America to Asia and everything in between, a vast array of professional disciplines studied at university and continued sporting success at national and international levels.

Former Head Boy and 1st XV rugby captain Charlie Blair graduated with a First-Class Honours degree in Law from Durham University. He was then successful in obtaining a Legal Professional role at Magic Circle law firm Allen & Overy in their Belfast office. Deputies Patrick Eves, Bertie Parkinson and Matthew Agnew all elected to pursue selfless careers in healthcare, studying Medicine at the University of Edinburgh, University of Liverpool and University of Newcastle respectively. These are renowned for being some of the top medical schools in the British Isles.

Reece Simpson, like Charlie, elected to study Law, also graduating with a First-Class Honours degree from Queen's University Belfast. Throughout his university career Reece has received multiple awards for academic excellence; this is particularly impressive given he was diagnosed with dyslexia shortly into his first year of studies.

Former Head of Crosby House Cal Ritchie has recently completed a degree in History and Philosophy at Queen's University Belfast and has his sights set on a Master's in Theology at the adjacent Union Theological College. Alongside this, he will be working for a Christian Mission organisation which aims to build cross-community relationships in Northern Ireland and Europe.

Another former Deputy, Christopher Chesney, a natural and very talented actor (playing lead roles such as Lord Capulet in 'Romeo and Juliet' and Tranio in 'Taming of the Shrew' whilst at school), elected to sit behind the camera at university as he now reads Film and Theatre Studies at the University of Reading, having produced some short films and wishing to pursue a career in documentary filmmaking.

Deputy Head of Dufferin House Matthew Patton elected to study for a Master's degree in Physics at the University of St Andrew's, with his heart set on a career in nuclear energy. A gifted musician all throughout school, he embraced the role of Lead Flute, touring with the university's chamber orchestra, and singing as tenor in the chamber choir.



Matthew Patton (centre) playing in the University of St Andrew's Chamber Orchestra

Thomas Boyd, former Head of Ward House and jack-of-all-trades sportsman, studied Sports and Exercise Science at the prestigious Loughborough University, well known as one of the most prominent sporting universities in the country (with Team GB using their facilities for Olympic training). During his studies, Thomas interned at PWC Belfast as a Consultant, where he hopes to return as a graduate and continue to play rugby and golf at local clubs.

Deputy Head of Ward House Kieran Will is reading Business Management at Glasgow Caledonian University. He is also involved with charity work, sitting as an executive on the board and trustee of the Glasgow University Union. In his spare time he is an avid and competitive powerlifter.

School House is represented by David Edge, who elected to study Mathematics at the University of Edinburgh. He continued his hockey success from school, representing the university at national level and winning the BUCS university league.

Continuing the theme of sporting prowess, Craig McMeechan has again represented Ireland at elite level for cross-country running, competing at European level and setting a blistering 5km personal best of 14:47. Not just a running prodigy, Craig elected to study Biological Sciences



Craig McMeechan
representing Ireland

at Queen's University Belfast and begins his professional career as an Associate at PWC Belfast in the coming months.

Lewis McComb has also built upon his exceptional athletic ability, representing Stirling University internationally and completing several charity events, most notably running 94km in one day for the 94 male suicides a week, raising thousands of pounds for the Scottish Association

for Mental Health. He also recently completed his first ultramarathon race and has his sights set on another.

Alongside his studies, Patrick Eves has turned his passion for sailing into a competitive sport, representing his university at national level. Many from the rugby and hockey squads have continued their love of the sport, representing their respective universities and local clubs. A testament to the training and values instilled in them whilst at Bangor Grammar School.

In terms of flying the Gryphon flag far from home, we have had boys spread across the United States of America, New Zealand and Malaysia, among other places.

The Study USA program is an extremely competitive outfit, which fully funds a year abroad at a top-flight university in the United States. Reece Simpson and Scott McIlroy were both recipients of this, studying at Aquinas College, Michigan, and University of Dubuque, Iowa, respectively. They elected to take different courses from those they had studied at home, widening their breadth of knowledge and taking full advantage of all that was on offer to them. The Geography Department will be proud to hear that Scott, who graduates this year, rose to President of the Queen's University Belfast Geography Society, alongside his studies.



Lewis Bret in New
Zealand

Lewis Bret, following school, took his passion for sport even further, moving to the Mecca of rugby as he lived, worked and played in New Zealand for a year before beginning his studies at the University of Exeter, specialising in Sports and Exercise Science. Following this, he plans to take some time out and hopefully will return to New Zealand at some point in the future.

The Languages Department also has much to boast about, with a consistent turnover of extremely confident students who seek to travel and develop their chosen foreign tongue even further (I think that part of my brain is missing, entirely). Karl Craig was reading English and Spanish at Queen's University Belfast and spent a year in Spain as part of his degree. He lived and worked in the small town of La Carolina, but travelled across Spain visiting Madrid, Valencia, Cordoba and Bilbao. He has since returned to Costa del Bangor but plans to move back to Spain in the coming months. Theo Arran is another stellar example of

linguistic proficiency, reading Geography and Spanish at the University of Lancaster. He lived in Granada for a year and wishes to return there to teach English.

Availing of a unique opportunity, Ryan Christie was able to study in Malaysia for a year while reading Actuarial Science at Heriot-Watt University. He took up rugby while in Malaysia and made the most of experiencing the culture of South-East Asia before returning home, where he will graduate with a First-Class Honours degree. Prior to entering professional work he has taken up a green-keeping role at the Blackwood Golf Centre, so feel free to use him as target practice when he drives out in the tractor to collect the balls at the driving range!

Following his studies at Durham University, graduating with a degree in International Relations, Joe McLarnon went on to study a PCGE in History at the University of Oxford. From this, he successfully obtained a permanent teaching role at De La Salle College in Jersey, Channel Islands. I don't think I've ever read a more impressive biography.

Adam Parkinson graduated with a degree in International Relations and Conflict Studies from Queen's University Belfast. He now works in the Audit Department of Grant Thornton in Belfast and has a bright career ahead of him.

Simon Rydzewski has combined his passion for streetwear with his entrepreneurial flair to set up and run his own clothing business, 'Rydz Retro', alongside his university studies. He sources, markets and sells vintage clothing to give them a new lease of life and has proved to be immensely popular, with orders coming in from across the world. He will be graduating with a degree in Environmental Management from Queen's University Belfast and plans to further develop his business and travel once restrictions ease. Tommy Hare, who graduated with the same degree, successfully secured a role with TetraTech, one of the world's leading environmental management firms.

The Combined Cadet Force continues to confirm that it is one of the best in the whole of the United Kingdom, regularly producing confident, industrious and resilient individuals looking to pursue careers in the Armed Forces. Jack McClements has deployed on operations on Astute Class submarines, where he is a Weapons Technician, while Frazer Atkinson has been deployed on operations with the British Army.

As for myself, I studied for a Bachelor's in Finance at Queen's University Belfast, where I will be graduating with a First-Class Honours degree. Throughout my four years I was heavily involved with the Queen's Student Managed Fund and in my final year I took on the role of Chief Investment Officer. In August I will move to London to begin my professional career as a Finance Analyst at Morgan Stanley.

It is clear to me what an exceptional bunch the Class of 2017 has turned out to be and it makes me immensely proud of my friends to hear what they have achieved. This is not by accident; I have no doubt the year groups that follow will maintain that same level of talent, success and brotherhood.

Floreat Bangoria!



Bangor Grammar School laid the foundations for so much that I have enjoyed in life

Bill Brodie

Bill Brodie attended Bangor Grammar School from 1967/74 before reading Modern Languages at Magdalen College, Oxford. He taught in Belfast schools for 12 years, was an advisory teacher for the Belfast Education and Library Board and was appointed Adviser for Language Studies in the North Eastern Board in 1991. During his tenure he established international links with Malaga, Alsace and Brandenburg, gaining international awards from both French and German governments. Since 2011 he has worked freelance as a trainer and education consultant, mostly in Germany. He and his wife Vanessa live in Co. Antrim and are members of the Causeway Coast Vineyard Church. They have three children and six grandchildren.



Bill Brodie in 1967 – shortly after his first meeting with Randall Clarke

Alma Mater

It was spring or early summer of 1967 when I first walked up the steps towards Randall Clarke’s office – Bangor Grammar School’s own *Holy of Holies* – for a pre-admission interview, accompanied by my mother; one *mater* entrusting to another. “What did I hope to be in future life?” Randall enquired. “A doctor,” I bluffed. He made some approving noises. In fact, I had no thoughts whatsoever about future careers.

Six and a half years later, when I next spoke to the Headmaster (!), it wasn’t about medicine or science: it was a pep talk before my Magdalen College interview for a place to read French and German. Bangor Grammar School had given me the gift of other languages. I couldn’t have known then how much – and how rewardingly – my life would be bound up with that investment, to this day.

Panache?

During our meeting, Randall scanned my list of O-Level results, made some approving noises (see 1967), and after a bit of chat reached down a well-worn copy of ‘Cyrano de Bergerac’ to read me the last lines of that French play: the hero’s famous, core characteristic, the guiding light that had inspired his flamboyant life, would be the single most precious thing he took unquenched, defiantly into heaven itself: his ‘panache’!



Bill Brodie in 1973 – when he met the Headmaster for a second time!

Did Randall think I was too diffident, perhaps, too quiet and unassuming? Was he giving me a hint to just ‘go for it’ – and to do so with gusto and with flair? Was he perhaps steeling me against possible failure, encouraging me to go out fighting and hold my head high regardless?

As it happened, I did hold my head



Prefects for the school year 1972/73 are pictured with Vice-Principal Bertie Styles and Headmaster Randall Clarke. Back (from left): P. O’Donovan, J. Byrne, W. Brodie, D. Simms, M. Montgomery, K. Best, P. Birkmyre, R. Hogg. Middle: R. Hall, S. Wolsey, R. Swanston, I. Fraser, D. Cairns, E. Blaney, M. Orr, P. Corbett, G. Bowman. Front: A. Kelly, A. McDowell, F. Thompson, R. Reid, A. Murphy, S. Irvine and N. Anketell.

high. During my Oxford interview we argued the bit out, parried with chapter and verse, Molière, Sartre, Baudelaire, two Oxford dons and I. “We’ll agree to differ then, shall we?” said Dr Raitt, as he ended my interview. I didn’t realise at the time what a compliment that was. Whereupon the College wrote to the school to inform the Headmaster, they “had no hesitation... William Doncaster Scholarship... maturity beyond his years,” etc.

“They don’t write very good English!” was Randall’s comment after he had read me the letter. But he gave the school a half-day for it.

The gift that keeps on giving

It took me a long time to realise that the other-worldly values which had developed in me since my converting to Christianity at age 16 could – and should – be fused with appreciating the best this world has to offer. I did well at Oxford, but had I the chance to do it again, I would do it differently, I would do it better.

Yet I don’t regret taking a more applied route in life after College rather than the purely academic. After 12



Bangor Grammar School’s 1st XI hockey team for 1972/73, with Headmaster Randall Clarke and coach John Smyth. Back (from left): David McCausland, Philip Martin, Mark Orr, Bill Brodie, Roger Murphy. Front: Nicholas Langley, David Orr, Vincent Gillespie, Arnold Parkinson, Paul Corbett, David McKee and Nigel Anketell.

years teaching in Belfast schools I've worked most of my life as an adviser and teacher-trainer, in the public sector and independently, at home and abroad. As with all careers there have been peaks and troughs, but looking back it has been a wonderful adventure. I've enjoyed the cut and thrust of it, the international dimension, the opportunities to be creative, to help people and to make a difference.

My next major studies were for a Master's in English Language Teaching. The supervising tutor said my research was on its way to a PhD, beyond MA requirements; that I should think seriously of contributing to journals and conferences. But I wasn't that interested, to be honest. I



Bill teaches 'The Wild Rover' during a Berlin summer school for teachers

wanted to be up and active, back training in the seminar rooms. The degree proved useful, however, and the bulk of my work these days is delivering language, literature, culture and methodology modules to retrainee teachers of English, in collaboration with the University of Potsdam.

What I've done out of intrinsic motivation, others have chosen to honour with external rewards. I've been lucky enough to pick up a couple of international awards: *Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques* from the French government for services in promoting French language and culture; and the *Europaurkunde* from the State of Brandenburg for services in promoting European integration in that region of former East Germany.



Bill receives the *Europaurkunde* from State of Brandenburg representatives

The international dimension remains of core importance in my life and my family's. As I sit writing this, I look around with a thankful smile at a fine,

high-ceilinged *Altbau* apartment from Berlin's Imperial days – one of our European homes-from-home – and I'm reminded again what a heaven-sent blessing languages have been.

Thank you, Bangor Grammar School.

Passing on the flame

It had started with Henry Rea's revolutionary language laboratory. Hours spent in audio-induced hypnosis as we internalised entire texts of French and German word for word. Occasionally we would be jolted back into consciousness by Henry's friendly if staccato interventions via the headphones: "**Les bougies by the way are the plugs.**" I can hear it to this day... "Je tiens absolument à une grande cuisine..." (Don't ask... random!)

It culminated in expert language and literature classes in Sixth Form with Errol Steele and Roy Blair. I consider it

a great privilege to have sat in their classes. True linguists, both.

As a teacher myself at BRA, I was chuffed when a former pupil sent word back to the Headmaster that her Cambridge tutor had said "you must have been very well taught", praising an essay she had written. The German text was one I had taught her but also one I had studied during those A-Level days at Bangor Grammar School. Inspiration is passed on. Teaching is truly a noble profession offering so many opportunities for us to impact students' lives, develop their skills, their outlooks, their passions – and their confidence.

In Fourth Form, after writing an essay on 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' under test conditions, I experienced one of those formative moments. Our new and enthusiastic English teacher, Peter La Grue, had been loitering with intent outside Assembly and accosted me as I exited. "Brodie. Your essay!... What do you think yourself?" Oh no, I thought. What had I done? "Outstanding! Outstanding!" he said, waving it in front of my face. It was then I knew I could do literary criticism.

You never forget moments like that. It came to mind again recently when a student-teacher in Potsdam gave feedback on her literary studies with me. I had done a session on 'The Rime' and early Romanticism; she had decided to write her term assignment on it. "Since my first encounter with the Ancient Mariner it has tightened rather than lost its grip on me. When I went on a walk through the woods reading and reciting it for the first time, I was amazed by the poem's force and by its vividness." She went on to tell how the various turbulent phases in the long poem had affected her feelings and her voice. "How powerful a poem is this, I thought. In my opinion, it is one of the most remarkable literary works the world has seen."

"You took us to other worlds and into a different time," said another student.

Peter La Grue, that started with you! It continued in those memorable master classes in A-Level literary appreciation with Messrs Steele and Blair. And then, of course, at Oxford. (Ian Hunter's kindly nurturing of my musical abilities back then is perhaps a story for another day. And he knows.)

The future of language teaching

My own start in teaching was difficult and a first inspection report proved to be not too favourable. But 11 years later the same inspector saw me in action and reported to the Principal that I had "really learned what makes pupils tick".

After making almost every mistake in the book during my first years in schools I began to realise that the way I had been taught in BGS suits a minority of pupils with a certain academic bent. People like me can thrive on it. For many other pupils with different wiring and motivations there is a great need for radically new approaches. The current national crisis in modern languages is proof of that, I believe.

I had the chance as an Education and Library Board Adviser to try out a new approach. One day the great and the good of languages policy and training were called to an

urgent meeting in Rathgael House. The Minister wanted a programme for languages in the Primary Schools – and she wanted it by yesterday!

Each of the Boards had been following their own path – with fierce rivalry I might add. Yet no one seemed to know how to proceed. After much head-scratching, sighing and muttering around the table, I did a “here’s one I prepared earlier”, pulled out 20 copies of a one-sheet five-year plan, targets, costs, modus operandi, and asked, “Would this be helpful for our discussions?” It was adopted on the spot as a blueprint by relieved Department officials – and I smiled benignly towards my competitive colleagues.

My wife wrote the Spanish teaching materials, dozens of peripatetic tutors were trained, the programme was rolled out to hundreds of schools and tens of thousands of pupils. For many of them Spanish was the highlight of their week. Teachers were known to threaten classes with cancelling Spanish as a disciplinary measure! Children with special needs were heard to say they didn’t need an assistant for that class because they were “good at Spanish”. I saw Primary School pupils acting out plays in Spanish that I knew most GCSE students would have struggled with.

The scheme lasted eight years. Teaching plans were translated into Irish – never as popular (probably one reason

the programme was discontinued). A valiant attempt was made at diversification by translating resources into Polish, but this was only ever of marginal interest.

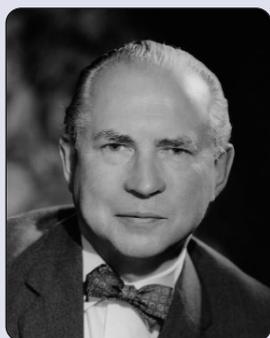
The administration of the scheme had been passed to another Board, much to my chagrin at the time. It’s a matter of record that when it came to winding down the scheme, the administration embroiled itself in difficulties. No *Schadenfreude* on my part. I hope the scheme can be resurrected one day.



Bill today

For my part, I was able to bow out and walk away from a career highlight with another feather – ‘panache’ – in my cap. What do you think, Randall Clarke? Remember our pep talk in 1973? I never got to know you well, nor you me. But you created an ethos, appointed the staff and managed a school where pupils like me could thrive.

Bangor Grammar School laid the foundations for so much that I have enjoyed in life. And for that I am truly grateful. *Floreat Bangoria, Deo Laus et Gloria.*



Baron Haire of Whiteabbey, pictured by Walter Bird in 1965

The BGS teacher who was elected an MP and later sat in the House of Lords

Back in the 1930s, few Bangor Grammar School pupils would ever have suspected that their enthusiastic young English teacher would in later years sit in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

Born in 1908 and a native of Portadown, Mr John Edwin Haire attended Queen’s University, graduating in 1931 with a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Diploma in Education. He taught at the school between 1933 and 1940, gaining a Master of Arts degree in 1936.

He was particularly remembered for founding the School Dramatic Society and for producing numerous plays. The first was a classical one-act play which he presented, with Harry Gallagher playing the lead, at a prize distribution in the Dufferin Hall.

After a few more one-act plays, Mr Haire wrote and produced school pantomimes and then moved on to produce full-length plays, the first being ‘The Ghost Train’ with Teddy Cairns playing the lead. The play was based on the book of the same name, written in 1923, by Arnold Ridley, later to gain fame as Private Godfrey in ‘Dad’s Army’.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, Mr Haire joined the Royal Air Force, rising to the rank of Squadron Leader. In July 1945, just two months after VE Day, he stood successfully for the Labour Party in the High Wycombe constituency, subsequently retaining the seat in the February 1950 General Election. During his time at Westminster Mr Haire took the lead role in a film on the life of an MP.

Mr Haire lost his seat to the Conservatives in October 1951, failed to regain it in a by-election the following year, and also missed out on a bid for the new Eastleigh seat in 1955, again to the Conservatives. He subsequently became one of the leaders of the booming caravan industry.

On 13 May 1965 he was created a Labour Life Peer as Baron Haire of Whiteabbey. Some six months later, and in the presence of a number of his former pupils, he was guest of honour at the annual Old Boys’ Association dinner in the school. Sadly, he died on 7 October 1966 after suffering a stroke in the USA, where he had been lecturing on comparative politics at Rutgers University in New Jersey.



Dramatic Society president Mr John Edwin Haire (seated, centre) pictured in 1938/39 with (back, from left): D. D. P. Leitch, T. W. G. Hynes, Mr Maurice Wilkins (Headmaster), W. F. E. Gault, H. Bowman. Front: W. P. Wilkins and G. C. Fidler.

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BGS former pupil went on to become long-serving member of teaching staff

Rodney Jones

Rodney Jones is one of a number of past pupils (others include George Heuston, Bertie Styles, Ken Browne, Dougie Rea, Sam Stevenson, Myles Christy and Sammy Sinclair), who not only attended Bangor Grammar School as a pupil, but also went on to serve for many years as a valued member of staff. Born in Belfast, Rodney attended Annadale Grammar School before moving to Bangor, and BGS, in 1967, when still in his early teens. A graduate of Queen's University, he joined the school's teaching staff in 1976, rising to the position of Head of the History Department upon the retirement of his own former teacher, Maurice McCord. Rodney's teaching career spanned 31 years.



Rodney during his BGS days

The early years

Most of my childhood was spent in South Belfast. Seamus Heaney was a neighbour but, at a young age, I was unaware of the greatness of a future Nobel Laureate. My own modest achievement was in passing the 11-Plus and so I followed my brother to Annadale Grammar School.

Regarded as 'tough', Annadale was also known as 'a grammar school for working class boys'. Its later merger with Carolan Girls'

School no doubt softened that reputation. Schooldays were enjoyable, particularly my introduction to sport and an assortment of new subjects.

Music was taught by a young teacher called Ian Hunter. Our paths would later cross as fellow teachers at BGS. Annadale's Music Department was very ambitious; I especially remember being part of a large choir singing 'The Hallelujah Chorus' at a prize giving – an amazing achievement for the music department and, of course, the 'working class' boys.

After almost three years at the school, 1967 proved for me to be a difficult year for a couple of reasons. Firstly, there was a minor outbreak of meningitis at the school and I was one of the casualties. I spent a month isolating and recovering in Purdysburn Fever Hospital. It was a frightening and traumatic experience for a young teenager.

Secondly, my family was moving to Bangor, so I would have to settle into a new school – a daunting prospect. I applied to get into Bangor Grammar School. Headmaster Randall Clarke interviewed me, with my dad present, and I particularly remember one of his questions: "Do you play cricket?" I answered in the affirmative and that clinched it for me – I was accepted for BGS.

Initially I found it hard to settle in, but getting involved in school sports gradually helped me to make good friends. In addition, some of my new teachers actually turned out



Coaches Jimmy Welch (left) and Matt Gillan with Headmaster Randall Clarke and the 1st XV for 1969/70. Back: Eric Lambert, John Nelson, John Magrath, Martin Wells, Brian Johnston, Don Emerson, John Thompson, Eric Kyle. Seated: Basil O'Fee, Gary Hall, Lyn MacCallum, Willie Stevenson, David Lightbody, Robert Hamilton, Rodney Jones. Front: Keith Weatherup and David Gillespie.

to be quite influential in my life. In particular, I enjoyed the classes of Jimmy Driscoll – a soft-spoken gentleman who introduced me to the heroes and villains of ancient Greece and Rome. Little did I know that a few years later I would be teaching Ancient History alongside him.

Irwin Bonar was another inspirational History teacher, who certainly knew his stuff, but he could be easily sidetracked, often entertaining us with stories of his many travels. However, he did make sure we got the work done. I also liked Harry Eadie, our French teacher, even if he did speak French with an Armagh patois!

I had the honour of playing rugby for the 1st XV and opening the batting for the 1st XI cricket team. We weren't a bad rugby side, but we couldn't emulate the achievement of the outstanding BGS team which had won the Schools' Cup in 1969.



Coaches Harry Eadie (left) and Bob McIlroy are pictured with Headmaster Randall Clarke and members of the 1970 1st XI cricket team. Back (from second left): Norman Irwin, Maurice Chestnutt, Ian Montgomery, Ian Brown. Front: Clive Briggs, Rodney Jones, Lyn MacCallum, Eric Lambert, Brian McDowell, Kenneth Kitson and Nigel Handforth.



Headmaster Randall Clarke and Vice-Principal Bertie Styles with prefects appointed for the academic year 1970/71. Back (from left): R. Jones, F. Herron, B. O'Fee, R. Reid, C. Mercer, J. Thompson. Middle: W. Stevenson, A. Johnston, N. Gray, N. Handforth, J. Lewis, M. Chestnutt, A. Thompson, J. Byrne. Front: G. Hall, D. Lightbody, B. McDowell, E. Lambert, D. Emerson, R. Hamilton, R. Parker.

I remember one cricket match in particular, at Ballymacormick against Regent House, for whom Ronnie Elliott (a brilliant fast bowler) was in scintillating form. We were all terrified at the prospect of facing him. I asked Harry Eadie, our coach, if there was anything I could do to reduce the threat of Ronnie's fast bowling. He advised me to take a couple of strides down the wicket and take my guard there, which I did and as a result I managed our top score of 13 runs out of a grand total of 39. Needless to say, we were well beaten, so perhaps I should have passed on Harry's hint to the rest of the team!

Sport and good teaching were vital elements during my time at BGS, which saw me achieving the A-Level grades I needed to study at Queen's University.

University years

I was happy at Queen's, and staying in an aunt's house on the Stranmillis Road meant I avoided the need to travel up and down from Bangor. I liked the freedom of a university education, which was so very different from school, and also at that time we didn't have to pay the huge sums which university students must fork out nowadays.

I finished my degree – joint honours in History and Ancient History – in 1975 and, opting for a career in teaching, followed it with a Diploma in Education.

On the sporting front, I played for the Queen's football team in the 'B' Division, alongside my old school friend Peter Dornan, and got to play at most of the Irish League grounds. I was chosen for NI Universities in a Home Nations tournament but was due to go for interviews for teaching positions so I had to cry off the team. What a pity. My one and only chance to represent my country and, what's more, I didn't get either of the jobs!

During the early summer of 1976, whilst working on an archaeology dig in the town (now city) of Armagh, I was invited to an interview for a job in Bangor. Randall Clarke's successor, Dr Robert Rodgers, explained to me that due to great demand the school had decided, late in the day, to admit another First Form stream.

With the next academic year's timetable already drawn up, they didn't want Vice-Principal Bertie Styles to have to reconfigure it, so they were looking for someone to teach the new class some six or seven different subjects. Naturally

I said I would be able to do it and when Doc Rodgers offered me the post I accepted and was well pleased. I think Bertie was too!

BGS as a teacher

Thus began my teaching career with Class 1M, which was like teaching an overgrown primary school class. The only subjects I didn't take the boys for were the Sciences, Maths and Art. I taught English, French, Latin, RE, History and Irish Studies (a very interesting study of Irish archaeology and Ulster mythology).

I got through that year without too much difficulty and then my teaching at the school was gradually streamlined down to a smaller number of subjects. History was the most important of these and I really appreciated the guidance and advice I received from Maurice McCord – Head of the History Department.

Much of my teaching was spent in Room 103 of Crosby House – the oldest (almost dilapidated) part of the school campus. That familiar big clock face was just outside my room. At least the room was well out of harm's way – or so I thought. One day I was teaching a GCSE Classical Studies class, examining the eating habits of wealthy Romans who, at banquets, ate whilst lying down. One boy commented: "Sir, that can't have been good for their digestion."

I explained that the digestive system allows you to eat even when upside down but I could see the boys were sceptical so I continued, "Right, we'll try it out." I got two boys to hold a third pupil upside down while a fourth fed him a sandwich. At that very moment the door was opened by Tom Patton (Headmasters didn't have to knock before entering a room). I said to Mr Patton: "Sir, I will explain this to you later," as he walked out of the room, shaking his head. I liked to bring a bit of fun into classes and I think the boys appreciated it.

As the years rolled on, and Headmasters too, I found myself teaching more and more History, with the result that in 1999, when Maurice McCord retired, I was appointed the new Head of History by Dr Nick Argent. It was a busy time for everyone, and with the introduction of the new modular A-Levels from the year 2000, we soon needed a new History teacher and Sam Wolfenden was recruited.



Teacher Rodney Jones (left), senior colleague Maurice McCord (right) and Headmaster Tom Patton with Debating Society officers in 1979/80. Back: David Lennon and Stephen McKeag. Front: Steven Logan, Mark Reford, Robin Johnston and Michael Pentland.

In 2007 the option came along for me to retire and I took it, with Sam replacing me as Head of the Department. Looking back now, I feel like I was a caretaker manager taking over from one brilliant historian – Maurice – and then passing the baton on to another – Sam. I was happy to leave the school knowing the Department was in very good hands.

In 2012, I heard the very sad news that Amanda Chapman had died. Amanda was a great stalwart of the History Department, a very talented teacher who was much loved by her pupils. Hers was a life taken from us too early.

Life outside the classroom walls

My involvement with school sports at BGS included helping with the U14 cricket team in the summer and, along with Joe Gildea, coaching the U14 rugby team – although the boys didn't need much coaching because so many were naturally talented. Indeed some, including Stephen McKinty and Mark McCall, went on to win representative honours.

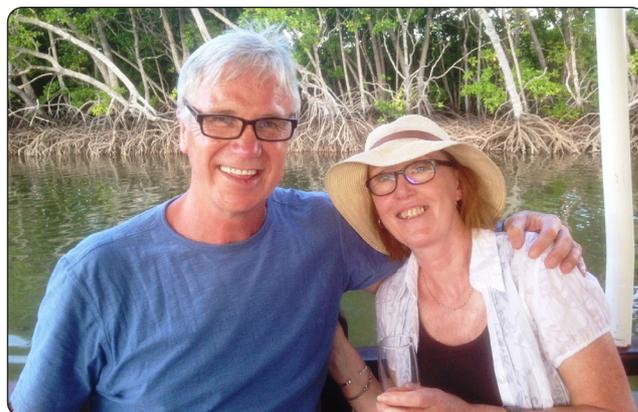
A highlight for the U14s in 1983 was an invitation to a rugby tournament at Narbonne in southern France, where our boys won the tournament despite some dodgy tactics by our opponents. Duncan Macpherson helped me with coaching the team, while Dougie Rea and Vic Swain brought along the 1st XV for a bit of experience. It was a great trip.

Late in my career, Dr Argent asked Marty Nesbitt and me to set up a senior football team, which managed to reach the Belfast and District Schools Competition final, only to lose out to our much more experienced opponents. But at least we had made a mark in schools football.

I also went on a number of school trips, including History Society outings to France and Italy, which were organised by Alan Mackie, and a trip to Greece organised by Carol Hewitt. Furthermore, because I taught Ancient History I was invited to join a party of Classics teachers from all over the UK who spent a fortnight looking at archaeological sites along the Neapolitan Riviera in Italy.

Our leader, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, was a very important man in the Classics world. He had a bunch of keys and managed to get us into buildings in Pompeii and Herculaneum which were way beyond access to ordinary mortals! It was a fascinating experience, with afternoons spent sunbathing, swimming in the Mediterranean or visiting Capri. Oh – if only education could always be like this...

I liked the Italian language and with all the school trips and holidays to Italy I started picking up a number of words



Rodney and wife Marion on holiday in Australia

and phrases. Subsequently, after attending night classes to improve my Italian, I managed to get through GCSE and A-Level exams. On the back of this, the U3A (University of the 3rd Age) asked me to teach an adult Italian class which I have been doing for the past eight years or so.

It has been a challenge both continuing to learn a new language and teaching it to classes of adults who are invariably enthusiastic and don't need to be coerced into doing homework, etc. One class member, the late Irwin Bonar, sometimes didn't produce his homework but I didn't throw him out of the class as he might have done with me back in the day! His passing will be greatly felt well beyond our Italian class.

The class has managed a few trips to Italy – twice to Bergamo in north Italy and once to Venice, also visiting Lake Como on a few occasions (with the ladies looking out for George Clooney who has a house there!).

I spend a lot of my time – too much my wife says – working on my allotment across the road from where we live. I've had this piece of land, about the size of a tennis court, for about 25 years and we are just about self-sufficient in the summer and autumn as far as fruit and veg. are concerned. I grow the sort of produce you probably don't see in greengrocer shops (not that Bangor has too many of these). Chard, kale and fennel are amongst my favourites. We are a happy community, working away at our plots.

From time to time I conduct guided tours around Bangor Abbey which is very old and has an amazing history. We've welcomed visitors from Bobbio in Italy and Bregenz in Austria, both places having links with the Abbey.

All in all I'm very glad we made that move down to Bangor in 1967!

Bangor Dinner this November

After 2020's unavoidable break, we propose to hold our annual dinner, complete with guest speaker, at the town's Marine Court Hotel on Friday 12 November.

Rather than including a flyer with the magazine, we will make direct contact with regular Bangor Dinner attendees (thereby ensuring any changes can be conveyed without delay). If you or members of a particular year group would like to attend the dinner, perhaps for the first time, please indicate your interest via our grammarians@btconnect.com email address.

We also plan to revive our London and Edinburgh Dinners in 2022. Use the same email address if you would like, at this early stage, to register an interest in attending one or other 'mainland' dinner.

Ever seen a film director? (revisited)

Allan Smith



Allan Smith, who attended BGS from 1975/82, was inspired by Dick Milliken, in a careers talk, to become a chartered accountant, leading to a career in audit, then corporate recovery with Price Waterhouse and later City Investigations where he managed the investigations and recoveries team at the Investors Compensation Scheme (predecessor of the FSCS). He set up his own accountancy and tax business, writes financial planning books, including the 'Retirement Planning Expert' series, and looks after the Estate of his late uncle, Brian Desmond Hurst, the Belfast-born film director.

Back in 1970 I played a small part in an article in our local Spectator under the headline 'Ever seen a film director?'



Allan Smith with daughter Caitlin

With Northern Ireland now boasting a massive film-making pedigree, there will be many in 2021 who can answer 'yes' to this question. This is thanks to the great work by Northern Ireland Screen with BGS's very own Andrew Reid playing a major part in its success story. But back in 1970 an internationally recognised film director was a rare spot in Bangor.

My late uncle, Brian Desmond Hurst, was one of the pathfinders for all who followed in film direction. He is Northern Ireland's greatest film director, celebrated in the Hurst Sound Stage at Belfast's Titanic Studios. He is also, arguably, one of the UK's greatest war film directors. His work includes the perennial favourite 'Scrooge', starring Alastair Sim, 'Tom Brown's Schooldays', 'Theirs is the Glory', regularly rated one of the greatest war films ever made, 'Dangerous Moonlight' (which introduced the Warsaw Concerto to the world), 'Malta Story' and 'Ourselves Alone' (a film about the Irish War of Independence, which was banned in Northern Ireland for many years).

Hurst's on-screen debut was in 1928, alongside John Wayne in the silent era of Hollywood, before moving behind the camera with his greatest friend, John Ford. His career was bookended with his adaptations of the J. M. Synge plays 'Riders to the Sea' (1935) and 'Playboy of the Western World' (1962).

Born in 1895 in working-class East Belfast, Hurst enlisted and fought at Gallipoli in 1915, where his battalion was virtually wiped out in one day. After the war, he studied art in Canada, Paris and New York, and ohh how I sometimes wish I had been just that little bit better at art while at BGS. I loved the teaching style of Joe Gildea and I hung on his every word, but the simple truth was that I was just not

very good and I applaud everyone who has the talent and courage to pursue their love of art as my uncle did.

Life is sometimes all about lucky breaks and Brian's came in Hollywood where he was mentored by legendary film director John Ford, who had admired a piece of Brian's art and enquired about the artist. The rest, as they say, is history.

After his return to the UK, Hurst directed over 30 films over four decades across three continents, working with stars like Dirk Bogarde, Anton Walbrook, Alec Guinness, Jean Kent, Richard Attenborough, Ralph Richardson, Margaret Lockwood, Siobhan McKenna and Michael and Vanessa Redgrave, meanwhile maintaining a flamboyant, unapologetically gay lifestyle. He was known as the Human Blarney Stone, never marrying, and now the whole thing has swung full circle as I am fortunate to administer his Estate.

So back to the pursuit of art and I am pleased to say I have just produced a 621-page, copiously illustrated book on Hurst's life and films called 'Hurst on Film' – fortunately I had the best of help. The book has been curated by my daughter Caitlin Smith and Stephen Wyatt, who both believe a celebration of Brian's career and cinematic legacy is long overdue. Caitlin, with a marketing and design background, selected over 1,000 images of his life and films from the vast Hurst Estate archive, while Stephen is a leading writer for TV, stage and radio. His writing credits include episodes of 'Doctor Who' and 'Casualty', but in the mid-1970s one of his first projects involved helping my Uncle Brian to write his memoirs.

So if you've never met a film director at least you can now read about one and, more importantly, see the art in film.



The Spectator newspaper article Allan mentions from 1970



Our first sporting great, his role in building the Silent Valley Reservoir and his very famous acting relative

Terence Bowman



George McIlldowie (back row, third from left) was capped four times by Ireland in the early years of the 20th Century

The first name to feature on Bangor Grammar School's 'Sporting Wall of Fame' – which was unveiled in March 2018 – is that of rugby player George McIlldowie, who was born in 1886 and was capped four times by Ireland between 1906 and 1910.

Although little is known about George's time as a pupil (at Bangor Endowed School), it has been possible, using genealogical resources, to piece together his very productive life – and his close family ties to Angela Lansbury, one of the last surviving stars of the golden age of Hollywood cinema.

His grandfather, also George, a native of Paisley in Scotland, arrived in Belfast in 1859 to work for H. & W. Seeds, Solicitors. Seventeen years later he founded the still well-known Belfast law firm of George McIlldowie and Sons.

The sons in the title included another George, who was the father of the rugby-playing former pupil of Bangor Endowed School. History does not record the years he attended BES, but it preceded a move to Sedbergh in Cumbria. With his sights set on a career as a civil engineer, George returned to Belfast and worked from 1907/09 as an assistant in the Permanent Way Department of the Midland Railway.

Between 1909 and 1911 he studied engineering at Queen's University, subsequently taking up a position as Senior Assistant on the surveys, plans and estimates for the proposed Silent Valley Reservoir. Upon the outbreak of the First World War, George joined the Royal Engineers as a Lieutenant, his rank being shown on his marriage certificate – he married Alice Lena Virtue, from Helen's Bay, at Newtownards Registry Office on 18 November 1914. Only son William Virtue McIlldowie was born on 18 October 1916.

After the war ended George resumed his role at Silent Valley, being promoted in 1923 to the position of Resident Engineer for the Belfast Water Commissioners on the construction of the reservoir, which would take up the next 10 years of his life. During this time he set up home in Newcastle.

Between 1934 and 1937 George was employed as Resident Engineer in charge of the scheme to lay new pipes between Newcastle and Drumaroad for the Mourne Conduit. Then in 1938 he joined the staff of the Metropolitan Water Board in London, being appointed Resident Engineer for the new Walton Reservoir in Surrey.

After the Second World War he played an important role in the large-scale programme of new works. At the time of his death, aged 67, on 28 December 1953, he was serving as Deputy New Works Engineer of the Metropolitan Water Board.

The most enduring memorial to George McIlldowie must surely be the Silent Valley Reservoir, which more than a century after he first became involved in the project still supplies water to a large part of Northern Ireland.

The Lansbury link

William McIlldowie – our George's uncle – married Elizabeth Jane Mageean at Windsor Presbyterian Church on 18 August 1891. Their four children included a daughter, Charlotte Lillian McIlldowie, who was born on 10 December 1895.

With an interest in the theatre that had been sparked by her father's role as a director of the Grand Opera House in Belfast, Charlotte moved to London while still a teenager, making her West End debut at the Globe Theatre in 1918. She became a leading lady in light film comedies, adopting the name Moyna MacGill, and appeared opposite John Gielgud, Herbert Marshall and Basil Rathbone, among others. At the age of 26 and married with a three-year-old daughter, Isolde (who would later marry actor Peter Ustinov), Moyna became involved romantically with Edgar Lansbury, son of Labour MP and Opposition Leader George Lansbury.

Having divorced her actor husband Reginald Dunham, she subsequently married Edgar Lansbury and settled at Regent's Park in London, putting her career on hold to have three more children, namely Angela and twin sons Edgar and Bruce. Widowed in 1935, Moyna moved with her children to New York and attempted to resume her acting career, but with only limited success.

The same, however, cannot be said of her daughter, now Dame Angela Lansbury, Honorary Oscar winner and a star fondly remembered for films like 'The Manchurian Candidate', 'Bedknobs and Broomsticks' and 'Death On The Nile', not forgetting 'Murder She Wrote' on television.

Moyna died 15 days before her 80th birthday, on 25 November 1975. She was George McIlldowie's first cousin, while Angela Lansbury (now 95) was his first cousin once removed.



Dame Angela Lansbury

'I'm sorry Justin, it's the wrong answer' – past pupil appears on TV quiz programme



Past pupil Justin Beattie (1982/87) hit the headlines around the United Kingdom and beyond in January 2021 after he appeared on ITV's *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* and gave the wrong response to a sports question.

It wasn't so much the £15,000 he lost, more the fact that, memorably, he had to be 'bleeped' after giving an answer he was certain was correct – compounded by the existence of his four lifelines. Justin (49), a submarine safety engineer and ex-Royal Navy man, had just set his safety net at £32,000 when host Jeremy Clarkson asked him to name a sports star who had retired at 26 before making an unsuccessful comeback eight years later.

While the former Ballyferris Walk resident plumped for American athlete Carl Lewis, the answer was in fact tennis player Bjorn Borg. Dumbfounded by the news, Justin sat in silence with his hands over his mouth before becoming the show's first contestant to let slip a 'bad word' after realising he was going home with just £1,000.



Justin Beattie as a Bangor Grammar School pupil in 1982

Afterwards he stated: "Obviously if I could turn the clock back I would take my time and use a lifeline but what's done is done and I just have to see the funny side of it."

He continued: "I left Bangor at the age of 19 to join the Royal Navy because I wanted training, a reliable job and a pension which stood me in good stead for my current job as an engineer in defence."

Justin's interest in taking part in TV quiz shows started in 1997 when he went on *Wheel of Fortune*, followed by *Mastermind*, *Passport Quiz*, *Tipping Point* and National Lottery quizzes. In 2019 he was knocked out of *MasterChef* at the quarter-final stage. His justinsappetites.com website reveals much more about his life to date.



The moment on 'Millionaire' when it all went wrong...

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1974 revisited

An away day to the Railway Preservation Society's working museum at Whitehead

Terence Bowman

According to my Letts diary for 1974, the usual school day on Wednesday 12 June, for a large number of pupils at any rate, lasted a single period. After that a hired Ulsterbus pulled up at the College Avenue entrance and 50 young Hobbies Club members piled on board for a day trip to the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland's working museum at Whitehead.

Staff members in attendance included Ray Mowat, Raphael Sutter and Tony Ragg, then as now a renowned rail enthusiast and leading light of the Whitehead railway project. Although I was in Lower Sixth, with just a year of my time at Bangor Grammar School to go, I joined the party as a member of the school's Photographic Club to help mentor Mr Sutter and others from within our ranks to capture the occasion on cine and 35mm film.

We were not alone with our cameras for we were joined at Whitehead by professionals from the *Belfast Telegraph* and the *News Letter*, not to mention UTV presenter Leslie Dawes (accompanied by full sound and camera crew).

I probably knew it at the time but a recent trawl through contemporary newspaper files confirmed that our visit to Whitehead was the first of an intended programme involving school groups from around Northern Ireland, hence the media coverage. It also served to promote an approaching gala day at the museum, which at the time featured the only operational mainline steam trains anywhere in Ireland.

Tony Ragg was profiled by the *Belfast Telegraph*, which referred to him 'leaving the blackboard and donning an engine driver's hat' (for the purposes of a photograph with pupils Colin Petherick, Terry Shevlin and David Stanfield).

'During the day he teaches Maths at Bangor Grammar School, while in his spare time he is operating manager of the Railway Preservation Society's steam trains at their headquarters in Whitehead,' the paper stated, adding, 'This is a new idea for the Society, inviting schools to see the only steam trains in Ireland at work.'

Meetings of the Hobbies Club were held after school on Monday afternoons at 20 Clifton Road. Back in 1974 much time was spent by members of the model railway section on the construction of a new layout, including terminus and fiddle (staging) yard. The aim was to have the project completed in time for the school's annual Open Day.

I took all the accompanying photographs. Bar a single shot in the 1974 *Gryphon* magazine, they have not appeared before in any publication.



Maths teacher Tony Ragg 'dons the engine driver's hat'

UTV's Leslie Dawes conducted interviews with a number of the BGS pupils

1974 revisited

Sponsored walk raised £2,000 for the Schools Action Committee

Friday 5 April 1974 marked the final day before the Easter holiday break, with classes cancelled to allow the junior pupils to take part in a sponsored walk, which is understood to have raised £2,000 for the Schools' Action Committee (SAC).

The walk took in a route from College Avenue to the town centre via Seacliff Road and then on to Pickie Pool and beyond. As the accompanying pictures suggest, the walk was treated as a run by many of the participants – all revelling in the opportunity to wear casual clothes rather than their school uniforms. The photographs – bar a single example in the 1974 *Gryphon* magazine – have never appeared in print before.

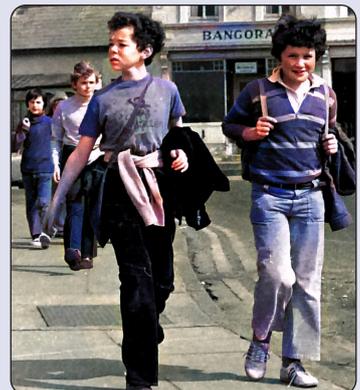
According to Trevor Gray's history of Bangor Grammar School, the SAC, which involved the five local secondary level schools, was formed in 1969, coinciding with the deteriorating security and political situation in Northern Ireland.

The aim was to encourage good community relations by creating opportunities for pupils and staff of the five schools to meet and work together. Within months of its formation, the SAC had organised a jumble sale and raised funds for various charities. Members also visited the sick and elderly and helped to restore derelict properties.

At the outset Minister of Community Relations Dr Robert Simpson (1969/71) visited the schools and applauded the efforts of the group. Headmaster Randall Clarke, addressing Prize Day in 1969, referred to the SAC as 'a constructive and intelligent attempt by young people to do something to increase understanding and trust and to prevent the spread of hate and fear which were borne out of misunderstanding and distrust'.

Nevertheless, Mr Clarke also reflected on the 'number of boys who have expressed their intention to leave the Province permanently to escape from the poisonous atmosphere of bigotry, intolerance and hate which has spread over our country.'





1974 revisited

Staff v. Boys cricket match brought school year to an enjoyable close

Sporting encounters between members of staff and Sixth Form pupils were plentiful during the 1973/74 school year, with soccer giving way to cricket during the final weeks before the summer break. These pictures, never previously published, were taken at the Ballymac playing fields on the penultimate day of term, Wednesday 26 June.

The fixture was deemed 'official' with the result recorded in the pages of that same year's *Gryphon* magazine. The staff team scored 143 (Peter Moore 33, Errol Steele 32 and Bob McIlroy 30), with David Morrow, from the BGS 1st XI, claiming four wickets for 44. The boys, however, fell short by 56 runs, scoring 87 (Alan Cruickshank 26, Trevor Kirkpatrick 24).

An enjoyable time was had by all, with the boys' team, in the main Lower Sixth students still recovering from their mock A-Levels, all looking forward to a long summer break before their final year at the school. The hard-working staff were equally deserving of their holidays!



Bowler Roger Murphy hopes to take a staff wicket



Jimmy Welch and Jack Dalzell bat while Des Weir umpires



David Morrow's wicket survives



Peter Blair in action



Des Weir bats



Chris Harte seeks a catch from Suleman Timol



George Cameron, Irwin Bonar, Bertie Styles, Randall Clarke, Bob McIlroy, Jack Dalzell and Chris Harte



Harry Eadie and Errol Steele



Paul Blair bats under the watchful eye of umpire Sam Beckett



Harry Eadie eyes a catch from Leslie Kirkpatrick



Peter Moore bats – the fielder is Johnny Martin

All photographs from '1974 revisited' were originally in black and white. They have been colourised digitally.



Back to the Future

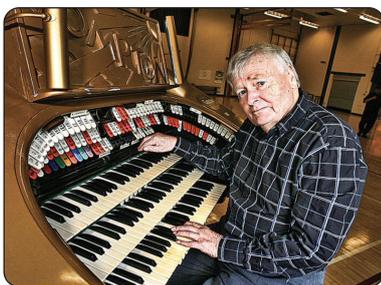
Cameron Woodrow

Cameron attended Bangor Grammar School between 1976 and 1978. He graduated from Brasenose College, Oxford in 1982 and spent the first 10 years of his career as a corporate lawyer at Freshfields, the City of London law firm. He then worked for nine years as a partner in the Birmingham office of a regional law firm, before returning to London to join the former Strategic Rail Authority. Subsequently transferred into the government legal service, the rest of his career has been spent advising successive Secretaries of State in Whitehall. He is currently responsible for advising on the law of the sea.

I was one of a group of pupils who were educated during the 1970s at both College Avenue and Gransha Road. There were eight of us, including the late Rev. Gary Shaw, who died in 2009.

We began our education in 1971, at the then co-educational Secondary School in Castle Street (or in an annex at Hamilton House, on Hamilton Road), before transferring the following year to the new Boys' Secondary School, built on what is now the Bangor Grammar School campus at Gransha Road. We spent five years at the Secondary School before transferring again, this time to BGS at College Avenue, in the autumn of 1976 after our O-Level results were published.

The old Secondary School had some inspirational teachers. My favourite was John Murray (son of Harry Murray, the Harland & Wolff trade unionist who led the Ulster Workers' Council strike in 1974). John taught Geography and French, which was the only foreign language on the syllabus. He had studied at QUB and then spent some time living or studying in France. He sported a heavy Gallic moustache and smoked unfiltered Gauloises Caporal cigarettes.



The late Rodney Bambrick seated at the Compton organ during the final days of the Boys' Secondary School at Gransha Road. Picture courtesy of the *County Down Spectator*

loft in the design of the assembly hall of the new school, with a shuttered recess on the other side of the stage to house the organ console. We were the only pupils in the UK whose morning hymns were accompanied by a restored 1930s cinema organ.

I also remember with affection Rodney Bambrick, who was an accomplished organist. He had salvaged the old Compton organ from the Tonic Cinema when it was sold for scrap. Somehow he persuaded the local education authority to include an organ

A year or two before O-Levels, we had to make a choice between the available arts subjects (History, Geography and French) and vocational subjects (Technical Drawing, Metalwork and Woodwork). I wanted to study all three arts subjects but there weren't enough teachers to allow any pupil to study more than two. I selected Geography and French, then asked the headmaster, George Hambly, if I could be excused the practical subjects and allowed to use the classroom time to study History instead, by myself. This was accepted and Rodney supplied me with the materials so that I could learn on a DIY basis.

Another impressive individual who ought to be remembered was John Blundell, the only person who has ever been able to explain Mathematics to me. I was delighted when I obtained a 'B' grade. Instead of congratulating me, John told me I could have done better.

When we transferred to BGS at College Avenue, I joined A-Level English Literature classes taught by Jack Dalzell and Jack Murphy; History classes taught by Maurice McCord and Pete Lagrue; and Geography classes taught by Ray Mowat and John Smyth. Jack (Murphy) inspired a life-long fascination for the work of Samuel Beckett and other existentialist authors. Maurice inspired a similar interest in Modern History. He also chaired the Debating Society. I joined and became a member of the school team that won the Belfast Junior Chamber and Northern Ireland Schools competitions. The other three members were Geoffrey Miller, David Rhodes and Ian McDonald.



The school team that won the Belfast Junior Chamber and Northern Ireland Schools competitions in 1977/78 with Dr Robert Rodgers, headmaster, and Mr Maurice McCord, Debating Society chairman. From left: Cameron Woodrow, David Rhodes, Ian McDonald and Geoffrey Miller.

One day I was summoned to the study of the headmaster, Dr. Robert Rodgers. I assumed I must have committed an offence and prepared for an unpleasant experience. Instead, he invited me to take a seat. He said that he had instructed the members of the Lower Sixth several times at recent assemblies that they ought to complete and submit UCCA forms as soon as possible but had been told that I had not done so. I replied that I did not know what an UCCA form was. I assumed that it was not relevant to me. He then explained patiently that it was a form that had to be completed if I wished to apply to a university and that

he assumed that I wished to do so. I said that the thought had never occurred to me. Nobody in my immediate family had been to university. I did not know anything about universities.

Robert had to reverse gear. With even greater patience, he explained why he thought I ought to apply to a university and concluded with the words "... so I think you ought to apply. Indeed, I think you ought to apply to Oxbridge." To which my baffled response was: "Where is that?"

It became apparent from the application process that I could not hope to obtain entry by sitting the then standard entrance examination. It was biased in favour of those with good public or grammar school educations, not least a familiarity with Latin (I had never been taught English grammar, never mind Latin grammar). Eventually I applied to Brasenose College in Oxford, via the then unconventional process (at Oxbridge) of an offer that was conditional on A-Level results. I selected Brasenose because it has one of the oddest and most distinctive names, not shared with a college of the same name in Cambridge (there are five colleges with the same name: Corpus, Jesus, St John's, Trinity and Wolfson; one with the same name but spelt differently: Magdalen/Magdalene; and one with the same name but different punctuation: Queens'/Queen's).

After a long and uncomfortable overnight journey by ferry and train (via Larne and Stranraer), I eventually arrived at the college's 16th Century gates in the centre of Oxford, next to the Radcliffe Camera, and was interviewed by three of the Fellows. Their questions were designed to test my aptitude for the study of Law: 'If a sign in a park states that no vehicles are allowed, does that mean you are not allowed to roller-skate?' and 'If you wake up in the morning and find you have no milk left in your fridge, is it theft if you take a bottle from your neighbour's doorstep, without asking but intending to replace it later in the day?'

When I matriculated in 1978, I spent an unconscionable amount of my first local authority maintenance payment buying the BGS school colours blazer I had always coveted but could not otherwise have afforded. I only wore it once. Decades later, I donated the pristine relic to Barry Greenaway for the archives.

I discovered almost immediately that I detested Law, which bored me rigid. I was shocked to discover that most of the other students were a lot better educated and much cleverer than I was. I ought to have studied Modern History instead; at least it would have interested me. When I tried to change subject half-way through my first term, I was told it was not possible and I struggled on miserably.

The experience was not entirely wasted. I diverted myself by joining one of the college's less successful rowing teams (the first and last time in my life I enjoyed any sport). I also played a lot of croquet, participated in student politics by getting elected as a member of the Junior Common Room committee, and managed the college punt club.

Obtaining a job was a challenge. I applied to a dozen different London law firms and was turned down by 10 in quick succession. One of the last two was named Freshfields. I knew little about the firm except that it had advised the Bank of England since the 18th Century. At the interview I was asked what class of degree I expected to obtain. My

tutors had told me that, if I applied myself, I was capable of getting a good 2nd but I qualified this by saying that I thought I would be doing well if I achieved a 3rd.

The interviewers were much amused by my apparent modesty and I received an offer of employment 24 hours later. I eventually graduated in 1982, scraping a poor 3rd class degree and proceeded to attend the College of Law in London. I then failed the Law Society Final Examination on my first attempt. Fortunately, my employers were exceptionally tolerant. They gave me time off work and paid for me to attend revision classes, which enabled me to pass on the second attempt. In consequence, I have spent the past 38 years working as a solicitor in a variety of more or less interesting capacities.

I returned to visit the Secondary School 20 years later, during a business trip to Northern Ireland. It was a depressing sight. The fabric of the building had been neglected. I was told that the flat roofs leaked like sieves and that maintenance was uneconomic. Inside, much of the exposed grey brickwork was black with decades of grime. By the time I visited again, during a family holiday about 12 years ago, it was derelict, fenced off and awaiting demolition, less than 40 years after it had been built.

Before demolition, Rodney Bambrick rescued the old Tonic organ a second time. He then sought to persuade the local education authority to re-install it at the new Gransha Road school. This time, sadly, the bureaucrats deemed the cost to be prohibitive. Hence the grand old cinema organ is now lost to Bangor and Northern Ireland altogether. After languishing for years in bits in a barn, it was eventually acquired by a collector who removed it to England.

At the time of my first visit, I looked up the McQueen twins (Colin and Paul) who had transferred with me in 1976, meeting them at the Clandeboyne Lodge Hotel with Geoffrey Miller. About the same time, I bumped into Ronnie McCombe in a street in Birmingham. That led to a series of dinners in London with Geoffrey, Ronnie, David Rhodes and Jonny Bayly.

My first and last return visit to College Avenue was in 2012, to attend the dinner held in the Assembly Hall to mark the closure of the old school. It was also attended by Maurice McCord and the other three members of the award-winning debating team.



This photograph, taken at the College Avenue closure dinner in 2012, shows the four members of the 1977/78 award-winning school debating team with Maurice McCord (centre). From left: Cameron Woodrow, Ian McDonald, David Rhodes and Geoffrey Miller.

Late in the evening, somewhat inebriated, I went to explore the now empty building. In the stairwell adjacent to the administration block, I found a commemorative board that listed the names of all the pupils who had been admitted to Oxbridge colleges. It recorded my admission 34 years earlier to 'Brasenose College, Cambridge'. So much

for all the effort that I had made to apply to a uniquely named Oxford college (has the error been corrected?).

More significantly, on the wall outside the old staff room, I found a framed photograph of our award-winning debating team. I decided to take it home as a souvenir, tucked it under my arm and went back to re-join the other diners. En route, I bumped into Ronnie McCombe (again) and

brandished the photograph gleefully. We were suddenly transported back to 1978. With all of the dignity and other demeanour appropriate to a former Head Boy, Ron said wearily:

“Grow up Cameron. Go and put it back where you found it.”



Headmaster Dr Robert Rodgers and Vice-Principal Mr Bertie Styles with school prefects appointed for 1977/78. Back row (from left): M. Colville, M. Nolan, J. Bayly, W. Dickson, J. Henderson, G. Kerr, N. Corbett, M. Robson, J. Coffey, R. Madley, J. Christy, E. Smyth. Middle: J. McMaster, J. Little, J. Pentland, J. Rowson, S. Millar, D. Stanfield, N. Cooper, R. Johnston, D. Halliwell, S. O'Hara, C. McQueen, P. Howell. Front row: C. Rodgers, T. Shevlin, A. McAuley, K. Hooks, Dr Rodgers, R. McCombe, Mr Styles, G. Miller, D. Rhodes, C. Woodrow and J. Rea.

An advertisement for Feedwell Dog Food. On the left, a golden retriever sits in a field of tall grass, looking towards the right. On the right, three bags of dog food are displayed: Feedwell Supreme (orange), Feedwell Sport (green), and Feedwell Maintenance (red). The text "Feedwell DOG FOOD" is prominently displayed at the top right. At the bottom right, the text reads "50 YEARS OF MANUFACTURING QUALITY NUTRITION FOR DOGS".

Grammarians and past staff member receive Queen's Birthday / New Year Honours



Three of our fellow Grammarians, Andrew McCormick, Mark Larmour and Bill O'Hara, along with former Bangor Grammar School Director of Music Jonathan Rea, have received Queen's Birthday or New Year Honours since publication of our 2020 edition.



Andrew McCormick CB

Andrew McCormick (1968/75), who retired in August 2021 after a long and distinguished career in the Civil Service, was awarded a CB (Companion of the Order of the Bath) in the Queen's Birthday Honours (June 2021). This was in recognition of his public service.

Andrew read Geology at University College, Oxford, graduating in 1978. He followed this with a PhD in Geochemistry from Queen's University Belfast in 1989. He joined the Northern Ireland Civil Service in 1980, working mainly in the Department of Finance and Personnel up to 1993.

He held the position of Finance Director in the NI Department of Education from 1993 to 1998, followed by Director, Central Finance Group, and, from May 2002, Second Permanent Secretary, NI Department of Finance and Personnel.

Andrew served as Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and Chief Executive of Health and Social Care from 2005 to 2014.

Further appointments followed: Permanent Secretary, Northern Ireland Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (2014/16), and then Department for the Economy (2016/18). The latter's responsibilities include economic policy and strategy, higher and further education and training, energy, minerals and petroleum licensing, tourism, business and employment regulation, consumer affairs and telecoms.

Andrew's final Civil Service position, from 2018 until his retirement, was as Director General for International Relations, The Executive Office. This involved international relations, including the Executive's Bureaux in North America, China and the EU; EU relations, including EU Exit issues; and the North South Ministerial Council.



Mark Larmour CBE

Mark Larmour (1978/85), who holds the position of Director (Political) at the Northern Ireland Office, was awarded a CBE in the 2021 New Year Honours List for his services to the peace process in Northern Ireland.

He commenced his education at Connor House in 1971, under long-serving headmaster Gordon Thomson. At Bangor Grammar School he was a member of Dufferin House.

Upon graduating with a degree in Geography and Geology from the University of Lancaster in 1988, Mark initially worked for the NI Scout Association, organising Gosford '89, an international Scout Jamboree staged at Gosford Forest Park, County Armagh. Mark then worked in the voluntary sector, leading a church-based project on long-term unemployment, before moving into media handling, becoming a civil servant and joining the Government Press Office at Stormont in 1998.

After a series of policy and corporate roles in the NIO, Mark was appointed Director (Political) in December 2014. In this role he provides advice, on behalf of the UK Government, on political stability in Northern Ireland, currently working to support Secretary of State Brandon Lewis MP.

He is also responsible for the delivery of the cross Government strategic approach to tackle the threat from terrorism in Northern Ireland. He leads on relationships with both the Irish Government, on political stability and security, and with the US administration on matters relating to Northern Ireland.

Mark has invested significant effort into building stronger relationships between the Northern Ireland Office and key partners. On the political side he works closely with local political parties and their leaders and Northern Ireland departments, while working with colleagues across Whitehall to ensure Northern Ireland's best interests.

He works closely with the Cabinet Office on national security matters in Northern Ireland, including through the National Security Council and Joint Intelligence Committee.

Mark is married to Carolyn, who is Vice Principal of Glenlola Collegiate School, and has two daughters: Darcy (18) and Cara (17).

There was a richly deserved OBE for Olympic yachtsman **Bill O'Hara** (1967/77), for services



Bill O'Hara OBE

to sailing, in the 2021 New Year Honours List. A member of both Ballyholme Yacht Club and Royal Ulster Yacht Club, Bill competed at the Los Angeles Games in 1984 and at Seoul in 1988. This double achievement earned him a place on the School's Sporting Wall of Fame in 2018.

Arguably his greatest achievements in sailing have come after his retirement from competition. He attended the Olympic Games a further six times, working as a coach, a jury member and a rules advisor. In 2001 Bill took on the role of Youth Performance Manager for RYA Northern Ireland and the Irish Sailing Association. He has also been at the centre of major sailing events such as the Volvo Ocean Race, where he is the Principal Race Officer.

Bill is one of only five people internationally who are a World Sailing Judge, Umpire and Race Officer. This summer because of Covid restrictions he worked from home as a rules advisor for both Ireland and New Zealand at the Olympic Games.



Jonathan Rea BEM

“To tell you the truth,” he told the *County Down Spectator*, “it was not something I was expecting. It’s not something you think about when you work in a sport like sailing. I have had calls from friends all over the world to congratulate me. It has been a humbling experience.”

There was a BEM for former Director of Music **Jonathan Rea** in the Covid-delayed Queen's Birthday Honours List for 2020. Jonathan, who held the position at Bangor Grammar School for a decade, is creative director of Bangor-based Christian music charity New Irish Arts. He is also a freelance pianist, consultant, writer and producer, as well as a regular contributor to Radio Ulster's 'Thought For The Day'.

Anyone with information about other past pupils who have been similarly honoured is invited to get in touch via our grammarians@btconnect.com email address.

Astronaut from final Moon mission is subject of former pupil's first book

Past pupil Geoffrey Bowman (1966/73) is looking forward to the publication of his first book, a biography of Apollo astronaut and Vietnam combat pilot Ron Evans. 'A Long Voyage to the Moon' will be on sale from 1 November.

As many of his contemporaries will remember, Geoffrey has had a lifelong interest in space exploration, and particularly the Apollo missions to the Moon which took place, in their entirety, during his time at Bangor Grammar School. Indeed, he has expressed his gratitude in the past to teachers like the late Jimmy Driscoll and former Vice-Principal Bertie Styles for indulging that interest on days when school clashed with inconveniently-timed broadcasts from the Moon.



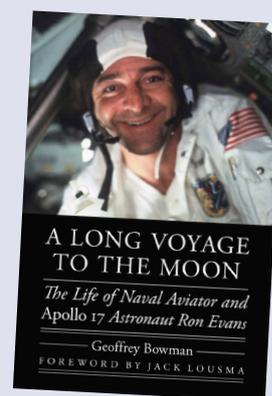
Geoffrey Bowman

The book, which Geoffrey began researching in late 2017, soon after his retirement as a solicitor, is being published in the United States by the University of Nebraska Press and will also be available in the UK and Republic of Ireland, initially in hardback and later as an audio-book.

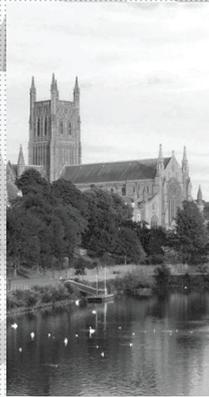
Ron Evans made the remarkable journey from a tiny Depression-era Kansas town, via the US Navy (including over 100 combat missions in supersonic jets over Vietnam) to NASA, where he was the voice on the other end of the radio when his friend and neighbour Neil Armstrong prepared to blast off from the Moon's surface.

Ron was later selected to pilot the command module on Apollo 17, the final lunar mission in 1972. After spending more time than any other human being orbiting a world other than the Earth, Ron piloted the Apollo spacecraft to a pinpoint splashdown in the Pacific, within sight of the recovery ship USS *Ticonderoga*, the same aircraft carrier from which he had flown his Vietnam combat missions.

Geoffrey points out that only 24 men, in all human history, have (so far) visited another world. The book tells how Ron Evans made it onto that exclusive list.



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Thoughts on life at Bangor Grammar School in the 1960s with the late James Connor ('Jim') Dornan

By some colleagues from the Class of '67 or thereabouts

It was with great sadness and shock that so many people, both within and far beyond the borders of Northern Ireland, learned of the sudden passing on 15 March 2021 of one of Northern Ireland's most famous, popular and highly accomplished medical luminaries.

The loss of Jim Dornan, so grievous and precipitate to his dear widow Samina, to his son and two daughters, Jamie, Liesa and Jessica, was also difficult and uncompromisingly sore to all those who knew him so well. Undoubtedly, his death has left an enormous gap in those areas of life in which Jim played such a public, pre-eminent, vital and important role.

We have been asked to pen a few words of tribute to this much beloved and honoured man ... for he was all of that and so much more. Material for this tribute has been gathered from some memories of his school days, where he showed all too often something of the lovely character whom we came to know as a school friend and 'someone worth knowing' for his wholesome, refreshing and comforting approach to life.

Born on 5 February 1948, Jim commenced his school career as a pupil at Avoca House Preparatory School (Princetown Road, Bangor), where his teacher was the much loved kindergarten leader, Miss Lorna Lawson. His colleagues at that time included Geoff Brennan and Jim Gray. In September 1955 he transferred to Connor House, the Preparatory Department of Bangor Grammar School, at Moira Drive, where he was extremely happy and was soon making life-long friends.

In September 1959, Jim proceeded to the secondary stage of his education, at Bangor Grammar School, where, at the outset, he showed little enthusiasm for academic work, although he did enjoy the friendship and companionship of school life. Alongside his activities at school, Jim undertook lessons in verse-speaking and elocution from Miss Doris



North Down MP Dr Bob Nixon (back, left) hosted a visit to Stormont for Connor House Form 2 pupils in 1957. Included are staff members Morley Hopkins and Gordon Thomson (headmaster). Jim Dornan, then aged just nine, can be seen in the front row, second from left. Picture: *County Down Spectator*

Duke, who was also a teacher in the Collegiate School for Young Ladies.

His sister Carole was heavily engaged in the same pursuit and both developed an early enthusiasm for spoken English in verse-speaking and drama, maintaining their varied interests in the arts throughout their lives. In drama, Jim was not to be upstaged at all. With undoubted finesse and aplomb, he played the diverse roles of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth and also Falstaff in 'Henry IV, Part 1'.

In one performance of 'Macbeth' we can recall that Jim was not strutting so elegantly across the stage with his usual dramatic poise. Indeed, his arms were folded and tightly crossed. During an aside he rolled his eyes and we knew something was amiss. Alas, his 'female bust' had collapsed and his crossed arms were all that could support 'a lost cause'!

Jim Dornan was the sort of person who was always at home in a crowd. His easy manner was the sort that put all those, with whom he came in contact, at immediate ease. His character was compulsive in its determination to win hearts and confidence. What is the point in being confident and forthright in one's opinion, if you cannot win the hearts and minds of people first? If there is to be a gain, then it has to be a gain, which is in substance all the more sustainable and wholesome.

On one occasion, when Jim was sitting at the back of the room during a 'Use of English' class, he was not at all engaged. This lately-introduced subject enabled those, who were having difficulty with passing O-Level English Language and English Literature, to better access university places. At one point Jim stood up and asked the teacher why he should have to take on an extra subject, when he had already passed both English papers.

Jim could be pointedly articulate in debate – a skill much in evidence during speech after speech at the BGS Debating Society. The displeasure of the master in charge of the class at Jim's rebuke was grievous, but during the resulting fairly full-blooded argument Jim utilised his razor-sharp wit before the teacher would, in all probability, have directed him to higher authority in the Headmaster's study. The master started to laugh at the joke, along with Jim and the rest of the class. It was a piece of outstanding entertainment and endeared us all, including the master, to this budding raconteur.

Jim was not a great success on the rugby pitch. His love for the sport came at a later time, but was manifestly apparent. As with everything else, he was good at talking about his game, rather than actually playing it, but he did play creditably well at out-half in our 2nd XV. The story is told that when BGS were playing at home against Belfast



Debating Society officers from 1966/67 with Headmaster Randall Clarke and staff members Brian Dee (right) and Maurice McCord (seated). Back: Russell Rowley, Jim Dornan, Gordon Fulton. Front: James O'Fee and David Carson.

Royal Academy, Jim surmised that the Ulster Schools Selectors were there to check out his performance, when in point of fact their concern was only with BGS 1st XV out-half Jimmy Kirk and BRA's out-half Martin Blake.

Jim was always keen to point out that his opposite BRA out-half was none other than Graham Crothers, who later represented the Senior Ulster side at full-back. So, giving him the benefit of the obvious doubt, perhaps Jim's proud suggestion about the Ulster Schools Selectors' intentions may have been true after all!



Prefects in 1966/67 are pictured with Headmaster Randall Clarke. Back (from left): P. Arnold, P. Davidson, R. Lawrence, J. Elder, D. Brennan, W. McCready. Middle: R. Clegg, I. Mencarelli, J. McLeavy, R. Rowley, J. Kelly, J. O'Fee, D. McAuley, J. Dornan, R. Gray. Front: J. McClean, T. Young, T. Gray, J. Kirk, G. Fulton, D. Carson, I. Titterington, W. Johnston and D. Laird.



The top table at the reunion dinner in 2017 (from left): David Carson, Jim Dornan, Maurice McCord and Warren Cree

This dear friend is no longer with us and amidst the legion of wonderful stories about his larger-than-life character, our memory is charmed by the man we knew and admired greatly. A couple of years ago Jim agreed to act as 'chosen commentator' at the 50th Year Reunion of our BGS Class of '67 or Thereabouts. When it had come to selecting the right person to represent our year, an invitation was immediately extended to Jim. Of course, he agreed without hesitation – so typical of the enthusiasm, the zest, the warmth and the genuine desire of Jim to do good by all.

As we think now of him, his dear wife and family, it would do us all well to hold his memory and character close to our thoughts, as we seek, like James Connor Dornan, to do something good by all.



Guest of Honour Maurice McCord is pictured with members of the Class of '67 or Thereabouts at the anniversary dinner in 2017. Back (from left): Adrian Gill, Robin Gray, Derek Taylor, Peter Davidson, Barry Martin, Roy Willis. Middle: Alan Pinkerton, Noel Graham, Roger Clegg, Trevor Gray, Michael Martin, Bob Hannah, Jimmy Kirk, John Preston, Ian McCullough, James Ferguson, James O'Fee. Front: John Hunter, Roy McCartney, David Irwin, Jim Dornan, David Carson, Maurice McCord, Warren Cree, Len McCormick, Philip Arnold, John (JB) Martin, John McLeavy, Richard Armstrong. Picture: *Ulster Tatler*

What drama critics said about Jim

'Lady Macbeth, played by Jim Dornan, was the perfect lady all through the play. His delivery and gestures were quite professional.'

'Loud praises have been ringing round Bangor for the Thursday and Friday performances. I hear Jim Dornan almost stopped the show with his portrayal of Lady Macbeth in the sleep-walking scene.'

Review by Helen Russell, *County Down Spectator*, December 1963

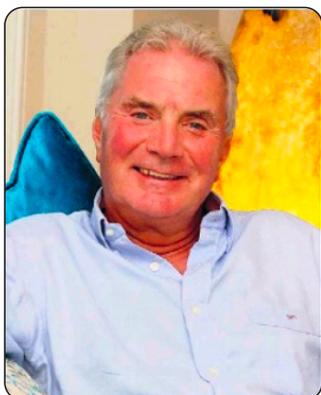
'Perhaps the most interesting feature of the production was the novel approach by the producer to the familiar character of Sir John Falstaff. Instead of the rumbustious, extrovert braggart rogue, ranting and roistering throughout the play, we were shown a man prone to lapse into melancholy – heavy with intimations of mortality – and our minds were carried forward to the haunting valedictory of a later play.'

'J. Dornan, as Sir John, acquitted himself admirably in one of the greatest parts in English theatre and gave a fine feeling of pathos to many of his speeches.'

John Knipe, chairman of the Association of Ulster Drama Festivals – *Gryphon* magazine, September 1965



'Jim's CV was a model of achievement' – warm tribute from medical colleague



Prof. Jim Dornan

The untimely death of James Connor Dornan has understandably led to heart-warming worldwide tributes. Jim was a most successful and talented man with a life that spanned and succeeded in so much more than his achievements in medicine, in which he excelled. He was a skilled clinician who was loved by his patients.

Jim was a prodigious advocate for women and improving their healthcare across the globe. He was a stalwart supporter of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and was a prominent Fellow on the RCOG Council for 12 years. He was a visionary and very popular RCOG Senior Vice President from 2004/07, making friends and achieving admiration across the extensive RCOG International membership and beyond.

Jim's CV was a model of achievement and his contribution to obstetrics in particular has been exemplary. He was a consultant in Belfast for over 40 years, culminating in being chair of Fetal Medicine at Queen's University and chair of Health and Life Sciences at the Ulster University.

He was a tremendous public speaker and very popular, with wide-ranging invitations to lecture, debate and speak. He was full of humour and happiness and would be the chosen dinner guest and speaker. No matter how many times you had heard him speak, he held your complete attention. His ability as a raconteur was legendary. It is no wonder that he was invited to speak in over 30 different countries.*

Jim overcame leukaemia through which he carried on as if it were a mere inconvenience, his personal life hardships only driving him to take on increasing involvement in leading roles in several Northern Ireland charities. He founded the Northern Ireland Mother and Baby Appeal in 1989 (now TinyLife) and he was also a major supporter of Pancreatic and Leukaemia charities. The tributes from these charities alone are indicative of his popularity, humanity and attainment.

Jim was a wonderful family man. After the tragic loss of his first wife, Lorna, he continued to be a tower of strength to his children, Leisa, Jessica and Jamie, whose wellbeing were always at the fore. In 2002 he married Samina, and their partnership quickly became symbiotic across their lives in general and in their devotion to fetal medicine.

He kept his interest in fetal medicine until the end, with his final academic contribution being published in the

British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in February 2021, on a topic he had long championed, identifying the high-risk fetus in the low-risk mother.

Their decision to move to the Middle East cannot have been easy, but was very much in keeping with their eagerness to take on yet more challenges as heads of department in prestigious institutions. In early 2020 Jim took on the position of head of department at the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland in Bahrain. Jim and Samina's onward success and popularity, developed in such a short time in their new roles, is testament to their combined personalities and abilities.

Jim was charitable, kind and personable across all walks of life. He had so many friends and his charisma invariably made him the centre of attention. He was so pleased and proud of the success of his children, each of whom has inherited his tremendous personable skills. His son Jamie's success as an actor could, to those not in the know, appear to threaten to overpower Jim's achievements; but Jamie himself would always correctly defer to his father's achievements.

It is not possible to give Jim appropriate recognition in such a short tribute but suffice it to say he was truly a *great* man. Those who knew him will feel a great loss and emptiness; his lovely family, his wife Samina and all those who knew him lament his passing. Samina has asked that I make specific mention of the three years that he was RCOG Senior Vice President during which the deep friendship between him, Prof Shaughn O'Brien (Vice President) and me, developed and then extended. These I am told were the happiest and most productive years of his life. Shaughn and I take considerable solace in this knowledge.

There is no greater privilege for me than to write about Jim, who made such a contribution to life in general and his chosen career. He was a great friend and a great man. There will be so many who feel deprived of his company, love and enthusiasm for life. Well done, Jim.

Reproduced from the RCOG obituary: Jim Dornan – Professor Jim Dornan MD FRCPI FRCOG, by Richard Warren FRCOG, Honorary Secretary RCOG (2004-2011). <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/news/membership-news/obituaries/jim-dornan/>. London: RCOG, 2021, with the permission of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

• *Editor's note – we were delighted to welcome Jim as our guest speaker at the 2012 Bangor Grammarians' dinner, staged in the Assembly Hall at College Avenue. The attendance, in excess of 300, was a record for the dinner, the last major event to be staged at the century-old home of Bangor Grammar School prior to the move to Gransha Road.*



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BARRY ARMSTRONG MBE

It was with deep regret past pupils learned of the death of Barry Armstrong (1984/91) just a month after he was awarded an MBE in the delayed 2020 Queen's Birthday Honours List for services to the victims of humanitarian disaster.

Barry, who was 47, passed away at his home in Buckinghamshire on 24 November 2020, following a year-long battle with cancer. He was Senior Humanitarian Advisor with the Department for International Development, which merged in June 2020 under the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. In that capacity he lived and worked in Malawi, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Jordan, often risking his own life to ensure refugees were looked after in their time of need.

Prior to joining the Department he witnessed the aftermath of some of the world's worst catastrophes when working as Disaster Response Manager for the British Red Cross, including the floods in Pakistan (2010), the Japanese tsunami (2011) and the Horn of Africa drought (2011).

In an interview with Belfast Live ahead of World Humanitarian Day on August 2017, Barry explained how his work involved helping refugees living in the most remote corners of Jordan, such as those stranded on the border, as well as those in shelters or camps, or living in the cities.

He admitted he had never really connected with any of the advice he received from careers advisors at Bangor Grammar School. Rather, he pursued his own dreams of travelling the world and helping the less fortunate. Despite having lived away from home for almost two decades, he missed many aspects of his life in Northern Ireland, including "the beautiful North Coast".

Human rights consultant Aidan McQuade, Barry's supervisor at university in Glasgow, described him as "a delightful person and a great thinker". He added: "He was someone who turned his intellectual abilities, his physical courage and his belief in humanity into action, which not only improved people's lives but also saved lives."

Many heartfelt on-line tributes were paid to Barry, including these words from fellow past pupil Mark Greenaway: "Barry was a great friend in schooldays and beyond. He could achieve anything he set his mind to and I hugely admire how he chose to dedicate himself to helping others." Stephen Smith added: "I was lucky to call Barry my best friend throughout school. Being three months older than me, Barry was like the big brother I never had."



IRWIN BONAR

In September 1959, when *The Almighty Invincible Bonar* began *Teaching All Ignorant Brats*, I was one of those brats, for he and I started at Bangor Grammar School on the very same day.

On that first Monday, Lower IIIIC made their way to 'A' Room for History with Irwin Bonar, who arrived with his brand new briefcase, proudly bearing, in gold, the initials T.A.I.B.

How strange it seemed, a dozen or so years later, when we met (almost) as equals, at courses for History teachers.

Irwin was born in September 1937 on the outskirts of Clogher, County Tyrone, the elder son of Tom and Myra Elizabeth Bonar. His father was a policeman and consequently the family moved from place to place. In 1942, Tom was posted as Sergeant to Hollywood, where he replaced Jimmy Welch's father, who had died. From 1943/50 they lived in Dundrum and Irwin was sent to Down High School's Preparatory Department.

Moving on to the senior school, Irwin played for the 1st XI, including a match against Bangor Grammar School at Bloomfield. DHS declared at 132 for 7, while BGS were all out for 37. He also played table tennis for the East Down Churches League and was Boys' Singles Champion for two successive years and Men's Champion for the next two. It was through table tennis he met his future wife, Una, who was also an outstanding player. He started table tennis at BGS and teams from the school enjoyed considerable success.

Irwin claimed to have been a very lazy student and credited any success he had to an excellent memory. "I wasn't a late developer," he confessed, "rather a shooting star who fizzled out." At 16 he sat five A-Levels – English, History, Geography, Chemistry and French – and, being young for his year, repeated four of them the following year.

He then went to Queen's University and took an Honours Degree in Modern History. The Head of Department was Michael Roberts, whose command of English and lectures made a lasting impression on Irwin (and me!). Following graduation in 1959, he was appointed to the rapidly expanding staff of BGS, along with John Grummitt, Bill Langtry, Billy Mercer, Tom McVeigh, Don Jamieson and Maurice McCord.

Conditions were somewhat primitive; caretaker Fred Conway was required to light coal fires in every classroom. When he received his first timetable, Irwin was horrified to discover he was to teach Handwriting as well as History. He assumed this was because his application had been completed in immaculate italic script! Irwin travelled from Belfast for five years before buying a house in Bangor, having traded in his Lambretta scooter for a Triumph Mayflower, in which he covered over 100,000 miles.

He was given responsibility for the Library, which at the time was housed in one of the school's smallest rooms and the books were unsorted and uncatalogued.

He held the post for 33 years. Headmaster Randall Clarke also asked him to assist Ivor Dougan in producing the school play ('Dear Delinquent'). When he heard Ivor was leaving the school that Easter, Irwin "almost developed a stomach ulcer with anxiety that I would have to succeed him." Thankfully Bill Hawthorne was appointed to the staff and took over drama productions. Irwin did, however, serve as the Dramatic Society's business manager for the next 37 years.



Irwin Bonar and Headmaster Tom Patton with Bangor Grammar School's 1982 squash team, namely I. Eldridge, J. Hearst and S. Fulton, winners of the Ulster Schools' League and Cup and the Irish Schools' Cup

In due course, he became Housemaster for the junior section of Crosby and, on Harry Eadie's retirement, took on responsibility for the school canteen. When Robin Harbison resigned, Irwin added squash to his responsibilities and in the early Eighties the school won "everything available" – largely due to Jeffrey Hearst, who was Ireland's number 2 while still at school.

In the 1980s BGS held a number of bazaars to raise funds; Irwin chaired the committee. In addition he gained a Diploma in Education and later a Master of Education degree, while at the same time serving on the committee of the Historical Association in Northern Ireland. In addition, he worked for 25 years as an assistant examiner or marker for O-Levels and GCSEs. One wonders how he found time to teach!

But it was not all work as Irwin went on many history trips to Europe, visiting, among other places, Pompeii, Salzburg, Venice, Rome and Paris. In addition, during the summer months he, Una and daughters Carol and Joanna, enjoyed many caravan holidays in Spain.

In retirement Irwin took up table tennis again, achieved an A* in GCSE Spanish and began to study German and Italian "in an attempt to keep Alzheimer's at bay", adding that he didn't think it was being effective! He also took over from Jimmy Welch as organiser of the retired staff members' monthly coffee mornings and annual dinner and served as chairman of Ballyholme Probus Club, as well as looking after his wife, when her health was in decline.

Irwin maintained his interest in Bangor Grammar School, was a regular attendee at the Grammarians' annual dinner and was proud to wear the Grammarians tie, having been accorded Associate Membership, along with other long-serving members of staff, some years earlier.

Perhaps Irwin's greatest achievement, however, was to have travelled on both the *Princess Victoria* and *The Herald of Free Enterprise* and lived to tell the tale!

• Irwin Bonar passed away peacefully at home in Bangor on 22 April 2021.

TREVOR GRAY



BRIAN KISSOCK

Brian Kissock, who was an honoured inductee when Bangor Grammarians unveiled the School's Sporting Wall of Fame in March 2018, passed away on 22 April past. He was a pupil between 1954 and 1959, serving as chairman of the Grammarians in 1981/82.

Aged 78 at the time of his death, Brian was, in earlier times, a leading golfer who twice won the North of Ireland Amateur Open Championship (1974 and 1976) and a former Captain of Bangor Golf Club (1992). He also played for Ireland and Ulster for more than a decade.

After leaving school Brian worked in several jobs, but his heart was in golf – he first played for Bangor GC as a 17-year-old in 1959. He turned professional in 1964, playing on the European Tour for four years. One of his warmest memories, from Malone in 1966, was of leading the field early on the final day of the Blaxnit competition, which saw Tony Jacklin winning his first professional title.

Brian returned to Northern Ireland in 1968 and established several businesses in manufacturing, clothing, distribution and retailing. He opened two factories and 15 stores, employing over 200 people from both main communities. Sadly, however, during the Troubles many of those business premises were bombed and he lost several good friends.

A deeply-committed Christian Scientist, Brian moved to San

Diego, California, where he became a practitioner and lecturer with the Christian Science Church. He served for seven years as a volunteer chaplain in the Federal Prison there. He also worked with the homeless and the marginalised. In 2012 Brian became an authorised teacher of Christian Science.

He kept in close contact with his family in Northern Ireland, making regular home visits. He eventually returned to Bangor to continue his Christian Science work until shortly before his death. Brian is survived by his wife Marci, his adult children Amanda, Alison and Graham, his seven grandchildren, his sister Valerie, his first wife Sheila and by his wider family circle and many friends.



Spectator golf correspondent Ian Alexander, in a personal tribute to the "brilliant" golfer, recalled how Brian had starred for Bangor in two Irish Senior Cups (1981 and 1984), and had played for Royal Portrush when securing the Barton Shield in 1977. He played for Ireland 22 times, winning 10, halving three and losing nine.

"Like many people of great talent he knew, or simply believed, he was special, even while still very young. I recall as a 15-year-old arriving at the first tee at Carnalea, complete with my aunt's clubs, having decided to take up the game.

"There was a youngster there already, clearly younger than me. I thought he might like us to play together and suggested it to him. 'No,' he said, 'you are not good enough to play with me.' It was Brian. Many years later I got a huge laugh when I recounted the story in a speech I had to give at Bangor's annual dinner and no one laughed more heartily than Brian.

"He shouted across to me: 'I remember that.' I played with him several times over the years and, do you know, he was right."

ADAM LYNAS



Much sadness was occasioned by the death of past pupil Adam Lynas on 4 November 2020, following a bravely-fought battle with cancer. Aged just 39 and a talented chef, Adam joined the school as a First Former in 1992.

In his teenage years he was billed 'one to watch' as he honed his skills under Paul Rankin at the Michelin-starred Roscoff Restaurant in Belfast. His career took him to Donaghadee's Pier 36, Deanes Restaurant in Belfast and Peacock Alley in Dublin, but it was his travels overseas that fuelled his culinary inspiration as he embraced the food and flavours of Mexico.

Back in 2016, as head chef, he opened the award-winning La Taqueria restaurant at Castle Street, Belfast, in partnership with Andy Rea, top chef with the Mourne Seafood Bar, and Steve Haller. Such was their success that the La Taqueria partnership joined forces with Snow Patrol's Gary Lightbody and fellow band member Nathan Connolly to open another branch on the city's Ormeau Road.



Within the first year of opening Adam had secured a prestigious culinary award – for Best Restaurant in Ireland – in John and Sally McKenna's acclaimed guides. Paying tribute to Adam, Andy Rea said: "He was warm, kind, generous and funny. Most of all he was a proper gent, a friend and a brother to all the La Taqueria team, past and present. The sheer outpouring of condolences from everyone and everywhere shows what Adam meant to everyone."



IVAN McBLAIN

My late father, Ivan McBlain, attended Bangor Grammar School between 1941 and 1945, leaving aged 16 to work for a local business. He was born in Belfast in March 1929, with the family moving to Farnham Road, Bangor, to escape the wartime bombing raids that were targeting the city.

Dad was a keen rugby player at (and for) the school – the accompanying picture, taken outside Crosby House in the early 1940s, shows him as a member of the BGS 3rd XV. He was also an enthusiastic member of Bangor Amateur Boxing Club, travelling with others to take part in a number of bouts.

Always proud to wear his BGS tie at formal gatherings, as well as rugby club dinners, until illness prevented his attendance at such events, he told me some funny stories from his time at the school. Given it was wartime, teachers past retirement age were often retained on the staff. My father recalled how one elderly teacher, who was gazing out the window in the Crosby building, spotted an unidentified pupil removing a rug from his car and making off with it. However, the teacher was too infirm to give chase!

He also remembered a plot to poke an object in the spokes of Headmaster Maurice Wilkins' bicycle as he was riding along College Avenue. History does not record if the attempt to unsaddle the Head proved successful!

On another occasion Mr Wilkins was watching as a pupil, who had been given hundreds of lines by his teacher, carried the required pile of pages into class. Well aware that paper was quite a precious commodity during the war years, the Head admonished the pupil, declaring: "Paper doesn't grow on trees you know!"

A static water tank (presumably to extinguish any fires caused by bombing) was positioned behind Crosby House. On more than one occasion a lump of sodium metal would be 'liberated' from the Chemistry Lab. and thrown into it, causing the sides of the tank to judder and water to be thrown everywhere. I witnessed this for myself, albeit on a smaller scale, in Lab 1 back in 1976!

Dad took over the family shoe business when his own father died in the mid 1950s, and he carried on running it successfully until his retirement in 1994. He had married my mother, Lily, a nurse in Bangor but originally from Portaferry, in 1959. They settled in Bangor West, where they lived with their two children, my sister Joanne and me. They enjoyed a very happy retirement, travelling extensively.

Dad developed kidney failure, undergoing dialysis for a few years at the Ulster Hospital. He passed away, peacefully at home, on 31 March 2020, aged 91.

JOHN McBLAIN (1976/83)



NEALE OWEN

Neale Owen, who died aged just 44 on 16 March 2021, attended Bangor Grammar School from 1987/94. He went on to study at Queen's University (1995/98), where he gained a Bachelor of Science degree in Geography.

He worked as a manager/ consultant with PwC, most recently in the Finance Solution Centre, giving more than 20 years of service to the company.

Neale also coached at the Shaw's Bridge-based Cooke Mini Rugby Club, teaching the sport to primary school-age children. He

had joined the club when his own son Josh started with the P1 team.

Cooke Mini RFC stated: "We are heartbroken to share the news of the death of our close friend and P5 rugby coach. Neale had been battling Covid for the past few months and unfortunately lost that battle on 16 March. We are so sad to share this news with you all and are completely devastated.

"Neale loved coaching rugby at Cooke and showed a great passion for helping the club. He was so proud of all the players and how they have progressed over the past five years, but he was especially proud of Josh, the apple of his eye."

The club hopes to create an annual award in Neale's name and also to plant a tree in his memory once Covid restrictions are lifted.



ARTHUR ROBINSON

The death occurred on 8 March 2021 of past pupil Charles Arthur Robinson (1940/45). Born on 6 November 1927, Arthur was a keen rugby player who turned out for the school's 1st XV, then for North and Bangor Rugby Club and Junior Ulster. Arthur also played for the school's 1st XI cricket team.



Arthur Robinson as a member of the Junior Ulster team

He was a very able student and from school reports (which he had still in his possession) he clearly impressed Headmaster Maurice Wilkins. Arthur was also an enthusiastic member of 1st Bangor Scout group until adulthood – one of his great accomplishments

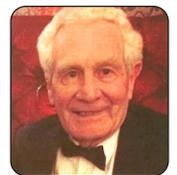
was walking from Bangor to camp in Tollymore Forest Park outside Newcastle. The Park remained one of his favourite places to visit and for camping when the family was still young.

He married Margaret Elizabeth (Marie) Robinson, from Portadown, on 12 September 1960, the couple having met a few years earlier at a dancehall in Portrush. When he proposed he asked Marie if she would like to change her name from Miss Robinson to Mrs Robinson!

Arthur worked for 40 years at the Harland and Wolff shipyard, where he became a journeyman draftsman and later a senior manager with responsibility for the construction of several supertankers and the huge building dock over which Samson and Goliath stand.

He retired just before his 60th birthday and took to painting and researching family history. He enjoyed playing golf at the Bangor club, Probus, holidaying abroad and in Ireland, the odd cruise and watching rugby, but his favourite 'pastime' was helping to look after his grandchildren. He was also an excellent cook and probably the World's best soda farl maker!

A man who never forgot his origins, Arthur was forever grateful for the opportunities and experiences that gaining a scholarship from Central Primary School to Bangor Grammar School had afforded him. He had always wished to be an architect (art being a favourite subject at school) but his father died when Arthur was 17 and so an apprenticeship at Harland and Wolff was his best option. He had his mother, Elsie, two sisters, Doreen and Marie, and younger brother Nevin to help support.



Arthur and Marie celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in 2020 and through the power of Zoom the family were all able to celebrate that milestone, as well as his 93rd birthday the following November.

He was a true gentleman in every sense of the word: kind,

respectful, reserved and always polite, while also possessing a great sense of humour. Arthur died at home with his family present and, following a Service of Thanksgiving on 11 March at Bangor Abbey, was buried at Clondeboye Cemetery.

Loved by his family and respected by many, Arthur remains greatly missed by all who knew him. He is survived by Marie, their children Michael, Peter, Gillian and Patrick, their grandchildren Anna, Elspeth, Sebastian; Flora, Hamish; Clare, Robbie; Ellie and Sean and great grandchildren Ennis and Elsie, together with brother Nevin.



Mrs Brown Thomson is pictured with the last Head of Connor House, Mr John Ekin, at an event celebrating the school's long and illustrious history. It closed in 2011.

MRS BROWN THOMSON

Mrs Brown Thomson (née Walker) died peacefully on Friday 27 November 2020 at Mullaghboy Nursing home in Donaghadee, having reached the advanced age of 92.

She was well known as the wife of Mr Gordon Thomson, who served as Headmaster of Connor House between 1956 and 1982. He passed away in 2009.

Mrs Thomson is widely remembered for her time as a school nurse at Bangor Grammar School, as a Sister in A&E at the Ulster Hospital in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and as a nurse at Bangor

Health Centre.

Brown is survived by her three sons, David, Michael and George, all past pupils of Connor House and Bangor Grammar School.



MORRIS TWIST

Morris Grant Twist passed away in Guelph, Ontario, on 14 August 2020, at the age of 78. Morris, known widely and affectionately as 'Twister', attended Bangor Grammar School from 1953/60, subsequently emigrating to Canada (1962).

He was employed as a buyer for the T. Eaton department store company in Toronto before deciding to embark on a complete change of direction. Accepting the academic challenge, he first of all enrolled at the University of Waterloo, graduating with a BA degree in 1969. This was followed by a Master of Social Services award from Wilfred Laurier University, Ontario.

For the next 35 years Morris was heavily involved in Social Services and was Executive Director of the Guelph United Way, an organisation identifying the needs of, and supporting, more than 50 community agencies. He was a member of the Legal Aid Appeal Committee, the Guelph Community Foundation and the City Allocations Committee.

Contemporaries in Bangor will well remember his ursine gait and an unrestrained sense of humour, which was underpinned by a great degree of warmth and solid dependability. Morris was an enthusiastic participant in the Scouting movement, gaining his Queen's Scout award as a member of 5th Bangor Sea Scouts.

He is survived by Annette, his wife of 51 years, and by his sons James and Padraig.

MMB

CHARLES WHISKER

Artist Charles (Charlie) Whisker, who attended Bangor Grammar School from 1961/66, passed away at Blackrock, County Dublin, on 11 April 2021. He was 71 and had been diagnosed with early

onset Alzheimer's eight years earlier.

After leaving BGS Charlie attended Belfast College of Art, going on to teach at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin in the 1980s. He moved to Los Angeles in 1994 as a video director, working with leading musicians including Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen.

His work, known for its dreamlike, often nightmarish, enigmatic quality and occasionally stark graphic effects, was deeply personal and drew from his Northern Ireland background, extensive reading and love of poetry, literature and music. It has been exhibited widely and is in the collections of the Arts Council, Allied Irish Banks, the Ulster Museum and private individuals, including members of U2, Steven Soderberg, John Boorman, Paul McGuinness and Henry Mountcharles.

He had three children, India, Domino and Ruby Mae. During the first lockdown, in May 2020, Charlie and Domino featured in a short film called 'Letters from Lockdown: Charlie and Domino'.

She stated: "One of the most important things about him was that he was a true teacher who had a different way, a more empathetic way, of looking at the world. He would force you to pay attention to the slightest thing, to notice how flowers grew through concrete and noting light on trees, finding beauty in the smallest things."



Brian David Andrews died aged 80 on 5 May 2021. He attended Bangor Grammar School from 1952/58.

Mitchell Colville died aged 60 on 13 November 2020. He attended Bangor Grammar School from 1971/78.

Gavin Mallen died aged 49 on 29 November 2020. He attended Bangor Grammar School from 1982/89.

Gregor Manning died aged 60 on 15 October 2020. He attended Connor House and Bangor Grammar School from 1965/74.

Charles O'Fee died aged 70 on 29 March 2021. He attended Connor House and Bangor Grammar School from 1957/64.

George Edward Robinson died aged 90 on 12 June 2021. He attended Bangor Grammar School from 1938/46.

Herbert William (Bertie) Savage died aged 80 on 4 May 2021. He attended Bangor Grammar School from 1953/58.

Dr Bryan Stanley Douglas died aged 89 on 18 March 2021. He attended Bangor Grammar School from 1941/46.

Late report

As the magazine was going to press we received the sad news that **John Shaw Browne**, a member of the acclaimed Class of '51 (his year of arrival at BGS), passed away on 24 July 2021. Aged 82 and a native of Donaghadee, he left the School in 1958.

A fuller tribute from John's contemporaries will appear in our next edition.

We will be pleased to receive tributes to any of the above for publication in the 2022 edition of this magazine. While we endeavour to maintain a comprehensive record of former pupil deaths, we greatly appreciate notification of same from family or friends. Please contact grammarians@btconnect.com.



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The irrepressible rise of Zach Kerr

Keith Bailie



Keith Bailie attended Bangor Grammar School between 1997 and 2004. He went on to study Politics at Queen's University Belfast and Journalism at Belfast Met. He has worked for the *Belfast Telegraph* and *Sunday Life*, covering Irish League football and the Northern Ireland national team. He is now sports editor of the *County Down Spectator* and the *Newtownards Chronicle*.



Zach Kerr

Zach Kerr's rise through rugby's ranks has been nothing short of phenomenal. At the beginning of 2020 he was turning out for Bangor Rugby Club in All-Ireland League 2C. Now, he is contracted to English Premiership side Newcastle Falcons.

Better still, head coach Dean Richards gave the former Bangor Grammar School pupil his first professional start in a 26-17 victory over Castres in the European Challenge Cup, an experience Zach described as 'surreal.'



Zach Kerr was still a pupil at Bangor Grammar School when he scored on his debut for Bangor Rugby Club

The 21-year-old utility back, who left the school in June 2018, is savouring every moment of his time at Newcastle. He recalled: "Last year I was playing at Upritchard Park and all of a sudden I found myself working with guys like Toby Flood and Mark Wilson. Now that I've been working with them for some months I feel like I belong in that sort of company, but it took some getting used to."

"It's slightly surreal that I'm friends with people I used to watch on television, but that's part of the learning process. They are so switched on. If you make a mistake, they will let you know about it. They push young players like me to be on top of their game in every single training session. I thrive in competitive environments, so that sort of intense mentality suits my game."

Zach moved to Newcastle in the summer of 2020 to study Law at the English city's renowned university. However, word of his rugby-playing prowess soon spread and the Falcons invited him to train during an injury crisis. His performances on the training pitch caught the eye of renowned coach Richards, who offered Kerr a one-year deal.

Although Zach is now a professional at the Falcons, he



Zach in action for Newcastle Falcons against Castres – his first professional start

still hopes to complete his Law degree. "Combining full-time rugby and full-time university is tough," he said, "but I've quite enjoyed the challenge of organising my time to incorporate both."

"In a strange way," he continued, "the pandemic has helped me as all my classes are online. That means I am able to take them when I want and work them round my rugby training. Obviously at some point in the future I will have to attend actual classes, but hopefully I'll still be able to balance both."

It's a dream come true for Zach, who has suffered two major setbacks in his young career. At 18, he was not offered an academy contract by Ulster Rugby, while at 20 a dream move to Yorkshire Carnegie (now Leeds Tykes) turned into a financial nightmare.

Zach explained: "I was involved with Ulster from the age of 15 to 18 in their academy umbrella programme. My dream was to land an academy contract, so when they let me go it was devastating. The scary thing is, when you're released by Ulster at 18 you really think that's the end of your professional dream."

"But I regrouped and decided not to give up. Since then I've played in the All-Ireland League, I've played in New Zealand, I played in the English Championship for Yorkshire Carnegie and now I'm at Newcastle Falcons."

"My experience at Yorkshire Carnegie wasn't ideal as they ended up in serious financial trouble. They went part-time and, in the end, weren't able to pay me. The whole thing was a bit of a disaster and again made me question if professional rugby was a good career choice."

"But those set-backs at Ulster and Leeds have taught me a lot about myself. The great thing with Newcastle is I'm also studying Law so my eggs aren't all in the one basket."

Like his uncle Mark McCall, who lifted the European Cup as both a player and as a head coach, Zach cut his

teeth in Bangor. No surprise then that he is keen to praise the school that gave him his first taste of competitive rugby.

“It was an honour to play in the Schools’ Cup for Bangor Grammar. Both my uncles and my dad won the Schools’ Cup with BGS in the 80s, so it was a privilege to carry on that family tradition.

“Bangor Grammar developed me both as a person and as a player. Any time I’m in Bangor, I head down to the school and help to coach the younger players because it’s important for me to give back to the school that developed me.”

Zach is also a familiar face at Upritchard Park, where he still pays his annual dues. “I have a long family connection to Bangor Rugby Club. I was actually a ball boy when I was young, so when I got the chance to play for the club in the All-Ireland League it was an amazing moment for me. It was really a dream come true.

“The great thing about club rugby in Ireland is the

camaraderie between all the players and members. It doesn’t matter whether you’re playing for the 1st XV or the Fourths, everyone mucks in. I don’t know what the future holds, but I will always have a connection with Bangor Rugby Club.”

But perhaps the most important period in Zach’s rugby development was the year he spent in New Zealand, just after he left the school. His impressive displays for Tauranga Sports earned him a place in the Bay of Plenty provincial team where he played alongside a string of big names.

He recalled: “I’d read a lot about the rugby culture in New Zealand and wondered if people were exaggerating but it was all true. Everyone is obsessed by rugby. Everyone in the community attends local club fixtures and gets involved in the sport.

“The standard of coaching is on another level. I played with and against guys with international and Super Rugby experience. It was a baptism of fire for a skinny ginger kid from Bangor but it has served me well.”



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Sports News



With so many individuals across many disciplines to choose from, it's perhaps not surprising that just one past pupil features in a new book, '100 Ulster Sporting Legends', by former *Belfast Telegraph* sports editor Steven Beacom.



Stephen Martin

Honoured alongside the likes of Rory McIlroy, George Best, Joey Dunlop, Alex Higgins and Mary Peters is double Olympic Medallist **Stephen Martin** (1970/77). He was a member of the GB men's hockey team that won gold at the Seoul Games in 1988, following their bronze medal achievement at Los Angeles in 1984. Since retiring from the sport, Stephen has become a successful administrator. Following roles as Deputy Chief Executive of the Great Britain Olympics team and Chief Executive of the Irish team, he is now involved with the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games team.



Gifford McConkey

The trophy for Bangor Football Club's new SureSeal NI Invitational Tournament, which was contested between 29 May and 26 June 2021, was named in honour of former club president **Gifford McConkey** (1950/55), who died in 2017. Gifford had served as a director and club secretary before becoming chairman in 1987, a role he held for eight years.

"This is a small gesture to thank his family for the countless hours Gifford gave to the club and local football over many years," stated outgoing chairman **Nicky Davidson** (1960/72). The concluding fixture, between Comber Rec. and East Belfast, presaged July's Euro 2020 final between England and Italy – with the Belfast side winning the trophy on penalties after a 1-1 draw.



Nicky Davidson

Nicky stepped down in July after four years in the Bangor FC 'hot seat', during that time helping to secure the club's future after their disastrous relegation to the Ballymena and District League. Bangor's return to the Northern Ireland Football League structure followed the first league title win in their history.



Stuart McCloskey

Stuart McCloskey (2004/11) made his fourth appearance for Ireland in last November's 23-10 Autumn Nations Cup win over Georgia at an empty Aviva Stadium. He was also in head coach Andy Farrell's squad for the Six Nations tournament.

Also in November, **Aaron Sexton**, who left the school in 2019, made his

competitive debut for Ulster, playing for over 70 minutes in the team's 43-14 win over Edinburgh at Murrayfield. He has since signed a new two-year deal with Ulster. He will complete a year-long development contract before becoming a senior professional for the 2022/23 season.



Aaron Sexton

Regrettably, Aaron missed out on the trip-of-a-lifetime to Tokyo to compete for Ireland in the Olympic Sevens Rugby tournament. While he enjoyed some 11 minutes of game time in the first day pool fixtures at Monaco in June, he did not play in the decisive repechage final in which Ireland beat favourites France 28-19 to secure the 12th and final place at the Games. His name was subsequently omitted from the 13-strong panel for Japan.

Long-serving Geography teacher **John Smyth**, who was awarded an MBE in 2016 for his services to sport in Northern Ireland – which included establishing hockey at Bangor Grammar School in the 1960s – will be guest speaker at Bangor Hockey Club's centenary dinner on 18 September at the Clandeboye Lodge Hotel.

Club president **George Wilson** (1973/80), chairman **Scott Parker** (1992/99) and past chairman **Victor Haslett** (1947/53), who are listed as contributors to the special night, are all past pupils of the school.

Paddy McGrattan (1976/83) has been appointed president of Ards Rugby Club, where he was a player for a season in his younger days. That only touches the surface of the many roles he has fulfilled in the world of sport over many years.



Paddy McGrattan

It's hard to know exactly where to start – but maybe nowhere better than August 2002, when Paddy was Ireland's head coach at the European Athletics Championships. Who did he bump into outside the stadium – none other than former BGS Geography teacher Ray Mowat (a contributor to last year's *Grammarians* magazine), who was there as a spectator with his family!

An acknowledged javelin expert, who has worked with the likes of Steve Backley, Mick Hill and Terry McHugh, Paddy has served as a sports development officer for Belfast City Council. He is also a coach with Lisburn Athletic Club.

Charlie Taylor (1964/70) won the laser class at the Royal Ulster Yacht Club's 2021 Regatta, which was held on 26 June. He received his prize from Judith Gilchrist of sponsors Templeton Robinson.





'Twelve years after passing away at just 31 Graeme Ryans is still able to raise a smile'

Ricky Armstrong

Ricky Armstrong attended Bangor Grammar School from 1991/98. In this very welcome article he pays a long-overdue (on our part) tribute to friend and BGS contemporary Graeme Ryans, who suffered a fatal seizure while playing rugby at 'Ballymac' in 2009.



Graeme Ryans in Bangor Rugby Club colours

Graeme Ryans (or Graemer as we all knew him) was the heartbeat of Bangor Rugby Club until his tragic death on 13 June 2009, aged only 31. When asked to write an article about my good friend, one of the questions posed was: "Why did Graeme have such an effect at Bangor Rugby Club, to the point that the prestigious Club Man of the Year Award has been named after him?" Good

question indeed – and one not easily answered. It was of course apt, and no one would argue with the naming, but putting a finger on why Graemer was so special proved a different matter altogether.

After racking my brain I spoke at length to his mum Lynda, his sister Susan and brother-in-law Peter, all three giving me some great insights. Old school friends and rugby peers also offered their thoughts. Time and again the same viewpoint emerged – *he was just Graemer* – and that was it. He didn't seem special, yet he was. He just wanted to play rugby (or any sport) and he didn't care which team, with whom, or where. He didn't get into the politics of selection or treat anyone differently. Whether dealing with teachers, coaches or players, old or new, everyone was treated equally and it was this rare quality that made him a colossus of a man.

At the Club, Graeme was the first to greet new school leavers with a cheeky quip, while he was also the first to stand at the bar after a game with the retired gents and chew the fat. No airs, no graces, everyone was treated the same. He was a man who shrugged his shoulders at dopey conflict, who would never take sides in nonsensical arguments, and who would raise his eyebrows and guffaw at anyone getting too big for their boots!

Always with a cheeky smile and a huge laugh, Graeme is still sadly missed by all. The great irony of his untimely passing was that he died playing the sport he loved, rugby, at the place, Ballymac playing fields, where he did not really get the opportunity to show his great talents.

Graemer attended Bangor Grammar School from 1989 to 1996, arriving from Kilmaine PS as an association footballer. That love of the round ball never left him and he wore an old Liverpool top to rugby training as often as he wore his faded Ulster top. He was instinctively smart, a

natural at anything he tried. You name the sport, he excelled at it: tennis, football, rounders, snooker, nine-ball pool, really anything with hand-eye co-ordination. But Graemer shared his time at BGS with a brilliant group of rugby players. His own year group included Michael Keenan and Bryn Cunningham, amongst others, all vying for the no. 9 jersey through their junior years, while the year above formed the nucleus of the last BGS team to reach a Schools' Cup final (in 1995), so there was always a pool of great rugby talent.

So rather than Graemer getting a chance to display his nonchalant skills in the school's colours, they were instead picked up by the great Hugh McCutcheon and transferred to the flourishing youth set-up at Bangor Rugby Club. Their tour of South Africa in 1996 was a defining moment for Graemer, when he became a part of the very fabric of rugby as a sport and the Bangor club in general. Speaking about that tour with some of his peers, it's clear how it came at just the right time for a lot of the boys, including Graeme, who realised not only was there a bigger world out there, but also how fortunate they all were with their own individual lots! Graeme took this acknowledgement of his privileged position through into his working life, devoting much time to helping those less fortunate than himself.

Graemer loved the freedom of Rugby Club life and flourished where he played across the back line for the Under 18s, then onto the 4th XV right through to the 1st XV. Before that he'd had a season straight out of school where he played with his late father Gary at Shorts RFC on the same 3rd XV, a year I know he cherished, with the untimely death of his dad occurring not long after. This was just Graemer though – playing at a level way beneath his ability wasn't an issue, it was spending time with his dad that was important.

He turned out in every position for every team. It mattered not where he was asked to play, he would arrive, kit bag in hand, smiling and whistling as he wandered down the lane at Upritchard Park – a wonderful sight to behold!

Graeme and I had the opportunity to head together to New Zealand to play at Kahukura Rugby Club in Rotorua in the 2002 season. While I played in an U-21 side much suited to my meagre size, Graemer ended up on the club's senior B team, a substantial feat. In our final weekend in New Zealand he played in the cup final, at inside centre, and received a man of the match award for scoring two tries (if I remember rightly one of them came from one of his outlandish trademark dummies) and kicking all the points. A great day and night was enjoyed by all!

He mirrored this feat five or six weeks before his death, playing at Ravenhill in a cup final for Bangor's 2nd XV, with the 'man of the match' award coming his way for another



Graeme in action at Ravenhill for Bangor's 2nd XV against City of Derry

striking performance (see the accompanying picture of him sitting down the City of Derry full back with a cheeky hip swerve!). Graeme in a cup final – unflappable, blasé, brilliant!

After school Graemer attended Liverpool John Moores University, thinking he would try the 'away to Uni' experience but it did not suit the 'home bird' in him. He was back in Bangor within weeks for his mum's home comforts! He was immediately admitted into Stranmillis University College by the late great Jimmy Davidson to do his PGCE. During his placement year he worked at the Rathgael Training Centre in Bangor and made such an impression that he was offered a job upon completion of his degree.

His passion for the lives of those youngsters less fortunate than himself was something to behold. His mum recalls how, at Graemer's funeral, one of them admitted to her that they would not be alive today had it not been for his help. The big man literally changed lives. Speaking about his work at Rathgael, Graemer once told his mum: "It's not the kids' fault, they know no better – they have not been taught a better way." He always saw the good in others.

Graemer left behind a diamond of a wife in Joanne and their two children. Brodie is now 16 and Faye is 13; both

are cracking sportspeople in their own right. Brodie attends Regent House but has opted for the round ball game at which he excels, having already played a few times for Bangor FC's senior sides. I see him growing into the teenage Graeme I knew; indeed he's the image of his old man. Faye goes to Bangor Academy and is another keen footballer, playing for Red Star Bangor. She is also a talented netball player. I am told she has her father's fiery competitive streak and his eye for a gap! How proud the big man would have been of them both.

Tragically, Joanne, after a successful fight against cancer some years earlier, was re-diagnosed in May 2018. Following a second short but tough battle against the disease it claimed her life. Graemer's younger sister Susan and husband Peter now look after Brodie and Faye (along with their own two children), and are bringing them up exactly as Graeme and Joanne would have wanted. That 'Graeme and Jo spirit' of getting on with things and not complaining is a family trait much admired by all those who have been deeply moved by the unfortunate circumstances that have touched the lives of Jo, Brodie, Faye, Susan and Pete, not forgetting Lynda, Graeme's beloved mum, whose resilience and humour have won through despite so much tragedy around her.

Researching and writing this article for Graemer has been an emotional experience for me, serving as a reminder of how sometimes great people can come into our lives and disappear just as quickly. That's why we should hold onto the good people in our lives and cherish them while we can.

During his all too short life Graeme Ryans changed things at Bangor Rugby Club for the better, not by being the best player, but by being the best club man, steadfast in his friendship, in his loyalty, and in his total honesty. I think we could all do with a wee bit more of that these days.

An oft-used 'Graemer phrase' reminds me of his affable character and also sums him up perfectly – "It's nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice". How wonderful it is that those lines – with Graeme's laughter still ringing in my ears – assure me that 12 years after his untimely death he's still able to raise a smile.



James Espie

Sport, science, politics and television – noteworthy achievements of four past pupils of Connor House, who did not go on to attend Bangor Grammar School.

James Espie, who resided at Warren Road, Donaghadee, joined the P1 class at Connor House in 1988 but stayed at the school for only a few years. An accomplished sailor, he competed for Ireland at the 2012 Summer Olympics in the Men's Laser class.

Dr Stephen Strother, who arrived in Bangor from his native New Zealand in 1965 due to his father's work, attended Connor House for the P7 year (1965/66). He is a Professor at the Department of Medical Biophysics at the University of Toronto and of late has played an



Dr Stephen Strother

important role in developing a Covid-19 vaccine for New Zealand based on locally developed technology.

Andrew Muir, the Alliance Party's North Down MLA (and former Ards and North Down Borough Councillor), joined Connor House for a short time as a P1 pupil in 1981.

Richard 'Dick' Strawbridge, with an address at Maralin Avenue, spent much of the latter half of the 1960s at Connor House, finishing top of the class on at least one occasion. Following a lengthy military career, including distinguished service in Northern Ireland, he is now a familiar television personality, perhaps best known for Channel Four's 'Escape to the Chateau'.



Andrew Muir



Richard 'Dick' Strawbridge



David Montgomery

National World Plc, an investment vehicle founded by past pupil **David Montgomery** (1960/67) in 2019, purchased regional newspaper publisher JPI Media at the beginning of 2021.

Titles in the sale, numbering more than 100, included the *News Letter*, *Derry Journal* and *Ulster Star*, along with *The Scotsman*, *Yorkshire Post*, *Sheffield Star*, *Edinburgh Evening News* and *Lancashire Evening Post*. The acquisition cost was just £10.2m, with £5.2m paid at the time and the balance due by 31 March 2023.

David graduated from Queen's University in 1970 with a BA degree in History and Politics. He joined the Mirror Group as a graduate trainee, subsequently working for the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Mirror* in a sub-editing and production capacity. He was chief sub-editor of *The Sun* from 1980/82, assistant editor of the *Sunday People* in 1982 and editor of the *News of the World* from 1985/87.

Future roles included serving as chief executive of the Mirror Group (1992/99) and founding Mecom (2000), which owned over 300 print titles (20m readers each week) and 200 websites, with substantial operations in The Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Poland.

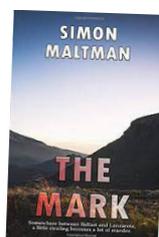
It tends to be forgotten that back in 1960s Bangor, David played the organ with leading local bands Blues Unlimited and The Power & The Glory. The former supported Them (including Van Morrison) at the Ward Park Bowling Pavilion on New Year's Eve 1964!

Peter Weir MLA (1980/87) was a casualty of the resignation of DUP leader Arlene Foster on 14 June 2021. He was replaced as Minister of Education, the position he had held from January 2020 (as well as 2016/17), by fellow Strangford MLA Michelle McIlveen. The appointment was made by three-week leader Edwin Poots and subsequently endorsed by his replacement, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson.



Simon Maltman

Crime writer **Simon Maltman** (1993/2000) followed up *The Mark*, which as reported in the 2020 *Grammarian* was published at the beginning of the first lockdown (23 March 2020), with *Witness* by New Pulp Press on 25 October 2020. While the first book was set in Lanzarote, Simon returns for the second to local shores and post-Troubles Belfast. A flawed pastor strives to make a positive difference in his community, but secrets from his past still haunt him.



Howard Beckett (1980/87) withdrew from the race, which for a time he had led, to replace Len McCluskey as General Secretary of the Unite trade union. A stern critic of Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer, former pupil Howard endorsed the leadership bid of fellow Assistant General (and Starmer supporter) Steve Turner. The result was expected as we went to press.

On 23 March 2021 science fiction writer **Ian McDonald** (1971/78) was accorded the honour of being quoted in 'The Last Word', which closes *The Times*' Daily Universal Register section. The quotation, from his 2006 book *River of Gods*, was: "Any aeai [artificial intelligence] smart enough to pass a Turing test is smart enough to know how to fail it."



Ian McDonald

Bangor musician **Paul Archer** (1980/87), a frontline health worker throughout the pandemic, coupled both aspects of his life for a new single entitled 'Art' with band Burning Codes, which was released on 23 April 2021. He hoped the song, which he described as "the best I have ever written"



Paul Archer

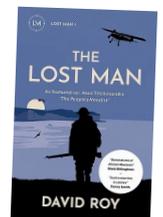


Sleeve art for 'Art'

would "throw a vital lifeline to all those feeling the pressures posed by the Covid-19 crisis."

"When I was writing the song," Paul stated, "I was thinking outwardly of people who are struggling to make ends meet. I was also thinking how art is really like music – it is empowering and cathartic, with so many elements and so many people involved."

David Roy (1977-83) has realised a long-cherished ambition to become a published author via independent company Hobart Books. A veteran of the Iraq War, having joined the Regular Army following several years in the Ulster Defence Regiment post-BGS, David subsequently retrained as a teacher.



David's latest release

He left his most recent teaching position at Easter 2021 and is now embracing a career as a full-time writer with the support of an old Army friend who set up Hobart Books in 2020. Until recently his prolific output, comprising some 50 novels, enjoyed an online-only readership via Kindle. The best of his back catalogue is now being published in book form. For further information visit the hobartbooks.com website.

And finally...

Former Headmaster **Stephen Connolly** is certainly enjoying his retirement. Having featured in this column last year for his award-winning acting skills with the Helen's Bay Players, Stephen has yet another string to his bow.

At the beginning of June he received the chain of office as president of Bangor Rotary Club from outgoing post-holder Patrick Cregg.

Fond memories of a past pupil's grandfather are recalled on BBC's 'The Repair Shop'

Former pupil Adam Bell (1994/2001) took part in a brand new episode of 'The Repair Shop', which was broadcast to an appreciative UK-wide audience on Wednesday 21 July past (with a repeat screening the following Monday).



Adam Bell and his grandfather Gary Graham at the latter's summer house, with the stained-glass window in view

Adam took along a small stained-glass window which had belonged to his beloved grandfather, retired shipyard worker Gary Graham, with whom he had shared many happy hours during his childhood and his student days at Bangor Grammar School (a photograph showed Gary and Adam, in his school uniform, alongside the window).

Programme host Jay Blades called upon the services of experts Matt Nickels (stained-glass) and Will Kirk (wood) to restore the window to its former glory, including a new frame. Adam explained how memories of Gary Graham and the window, which formed part of a display of curios from days gone by in his grandfather's summer house, triggered a lifetime's interest in history (as exemplified by time spent working at the North Down Museum, his authorship of 'Bangor Then and Now' in 2013, and his current role as a



Adam holds the restored stained-glass window at the end of the programme

curator at the South Shields Museum and Art Gallery).

Adam was one of three Bangor Grammar School pupils to gain a place at Cambridge in 2001. He read History with Education; the others were Christopher Scott (Law at Gonville and Caius College) and Andrew Jackson (Engineering at Churchill College).



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