

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

N.D.Argent B.A., Ph.D., 1998-2001<sup>1</sup>

*“There are better ways of looking than over your shoulder”<sup>2</sup>*



N.D.Argent, B.A., Ph.D.

### DR.ARGENT'S APPOINTMENT

The advertisement, which appeared in the press at the end of April 1998, invited applications for the 'challenging' post of 'Principal' of a school with 'a strong preparatory department and a dedicated and talented staff', 'a proven track record in academic achievement' and 'a reputation for success in a range of sporting and co-curricular activities'. The successful applicant would, it was hoped, 'take the school forward into the next millenium'.<sup>3</sup> Although there were twenty three inquiries, there were only eight applicants, five of whom were interviewed. Following a second interview, Dr.Argent was appointed.

Nicholas David Argent was born in 1955 and was educated at *St.Albans Boys' County Grammar School* and *Portsmouth Polytechnic*. He obtained his Post Graduate Certificate in Education from *West Sussex Institute of Higher Education* and his doctorate from *Portsmouth Polytechnic* in collaboration with *Imperial College London*. Having taught in Kent and London, as well as having been a Teaching Fellow at the *University of Lancaster*, he became Head of Geography and a Housemaster at *Bromgrove School* in Worcestershire, before joining the staff of *Foyle and Londonderry College* as Vice-Principal. A chorister in St.Albans in his youth, he was a keen cricketer and hockey player and he coached the Welsh Men's Hockey Squad for the British Universities games at Jordanstown only months before his appointment to the Headship of *Bangor Grammar School*. His wife, Fiona, was educated at *Down High School* and *Ballymena Academy*.<sup>4</sup>

On his Application Form, he wrote:

*'It is my philosophy that a school must seek to educate in the broadest sense of the word. We have care of pupils at a crucial stage in their lives and it is incumbent upon us to oversee this in a way that maximizes their potential in all areas'.<sup>5</sup>*

In an age where educational initiatives were almost an annual event, Dr.Argent recognized the need for the School to keep pace with change; such was the pace of change that, in his

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the information has been taken from the Minutes of the Board of Governors or *The Gryphon*, which includes comprehensive coverage of Speech Days and Sports' Days.

<sup>2</sup> A Russian proverb, quoted by Dr.Argent in his first Headmaster's Report, 22 October 1998.

<sup>3</sup> *Belfast Telegraph*, 28 April 1998.

<sup>4</sup> *Bangor Grammarians' Annual Report*, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by the Chairman of the Board of Governors, D.B.Thompson, on the occasion of Dr.Argent leaving the School, and reprinted in *The Gryphon*, 2001.

1999 Headmaster's Report, he felt moved to quote from R.D.Laing's *The Politics of Experience*:

*'We live in a moment of history where change is so speeded up that we begin to see the present only when it is disappearing'.*

However, he also believed that:

*'we must ensure that the traditional values that underpin the School and validate so much of what we seek to achieve are not lost'.<sup>6</sup>*

While believing computers to be a valuable asset, he could see the dangers of modern technology, too; calculators, he said, had produced a generation of pupils who could not add and computer spell-checkers, he feared, would produce a generation which could not spell.

### **BANGOR IN CRISIS?**

While Dr.Argent was seeking to put his philosophy into practice and to restore the reputation of the School, the reputation of Bangor declined, as many of the newspaper headlines highlighted the growing drug culture in the town. As the *Spectator* declared '*Bangor town centre is in crisis*', former pupil Stephen Dunlop was appointed Town Centre Manager to take on the challenge of regenerating the town centres of Bangor and Holywood. The town's reputation was further damaged by the demolition of *Ardmara*, one of Bangor's finest early villas, and a developer even had the gall to propose turning the *Royal Ulster Yacht Club* into a hotel and apartments, only to be told in no uncertain terms that it was not for sale. Probably as a result of these actions, the Bangor Bay area was declared to be an '*Area of Townscape Character*', which meant that tighter planning guidelines would be in force.

There was the promise, too, of new life being breathed into the town. Although *Wellworth's* closed its Main Street store, *Robert Neill and Son* closed after 168 years, *Bairdwear Ltd.* (formerly *Debretta Ltd.*) closed its factory, and *Safeway's* planned store on Upper Main Street led to suggestions that Bangor's long established Wednesday market might have to be re-located, *Bangor Community Hospital* opened on the old site and using the existing buildings, dealing with minor injuries and providing 20 beds to be run by local G.P.s. A new integrated bus and rail station was built, (although at the same time doubts were expressed about the future of the rail line), and an extension to the *Flagship Centre* was planned, as was a new lifeboat station. The *Queen's Parade Project Team* short-listed three development proposals. Six years after it was first mooted, the £26 million *Beannchor Centre*, as it was now being called, was to have, it was said, a 3 star hotel, cafés, restaurants, an entertainment centre, a tourist information office, shops, apartments, a 500-seater theatre, perhaps even a library, and a 200-bay car park. Nor was education neglected: it was announced that *Glenlola Collegiate* and *Clifton Special School* were to get new premises, and *Gransha High* and *Bangor Girls' High Schools* were to amalgamate as *Bangor Academy*.

As the *R.U.C.* was granted the Freedom of the Borough, Sylvia, Lady Hermon, wife of its former Chief Constable, and a Governor of the School, was elected M.P. for North Down. Meanwhile, Bangor and Virginia Beach in the U.S.A. became '*sister cities*', and two local men made headlines in their chosen sports: Eddie Irvine won both the Austrian and German *Grand Prix* and Glen Ross won *Britain's Strongest Man* competition for three successive years.<sup>7</sup>

### **THE WORLD IN THE LATE 1990s**

Among the statesman, politicians and public figures to die during these years were King Hussein of Jordan, President Assad of Syria, King Birendra and the Nepalese Royal Family, who were massacred, Julius Nyrere of Tanzania, Pierre Trudeau, racist Governor George Wallace of Alabama, Lord Whitelaw, Alan Clark, Donald Dewar, Lord Denning and Cardinal Basil Hume. The world of Literature lost Brian Moore, Barbara Cartland, and Auberon

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<sup>6</sup> *The Grammarians' Annual Report*, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Details gleaned from the files of the *County Down Spectator*.

Waugh; the Arts, Yehudi Menuhin and Ninette de Valois; the Stage, Douglas Fairbanks Junior, Oliver Reed, Alec Guinness, John Gielgud; Entertainment, Harry Secombe, Charles Schultz, Russ Conway, Dusty Springfield; and Sport, Joe di Maggio, Emil Zatopek, Florence Griffith Joyner, Donald Bradman, Colin Cowdrey, Stanley Matthews, Alf Ramsay, Payne Stewart and Joey Dunlop; Reggie Kray and Robin Day, notorious for different reasons, died, while Jill Dando and Damilola Taylor were the victims of senseless murders.

In the United Kingdom, rail crashes at Ladbroke Grove, Hatfield, Selby and Paddington were in the headlines, as was Harold Shipman, who was convicted of 15 murders (although by 2005, there were estimated to have been 250 victims). Among the more risible news stories were the re-branding (briefly) of the Post Office as *Consignia*, and the conviction of Steven Thoburn, '*the metric martyr*', for selling bananas in imperial instead of metric measures. In politics, Tony Blair's '*New Labour*' retained power, only to be faced with an outbreak of '*foot and mouth*' disease and race riots in Bradford. Iain Duncan Smith replaced William Hague as leader of the Conservative Party, the government announced that the House of Lords was to be abolished, the Scottish Parliament opened, Ken Livingstone became Lord Mayor of London, Lord Archer was jailed for perjury, Prince Edward married Sophie Rhys-Jones, Mick Jagger and Jerry Hall divorced, *Posh Spice* and David Beckham married, Andrew Motion became Poet Laureate following the death of Ted Hughes, Manchester United won the European Cup, Lennox Lewis became undisputed world heavyweight boxing champion and the Ulster rugby team won the European Cup, '*under the leadership of Mark McCall and with so many of the squad having learnt their rugby at our School*'.<sup>8</sup>

Violence continued across the globe with the massacre of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo (although Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic was overthrown and brought before a war crimes tribunal), fighting in Chechnya and Sri Lanka, *E.T.A.* terrorism in Spain, unrest in Kashmir, the destruction of Buddhist idols in Afghanistan by the *Taliban*, a massacre at *Columbine High School* in Colorado, and the seizure of white-owned farms in President Mugabe's Zimbabwe. New faces appeared on the international scene as Thabo Mbeki replaced Nelson Mandela as South African President, George W. Bush (only just) defeated Al Gore in the U.S. Presidential election, Ariel Sharon succeeded Ehud Barak as Israeli Prime Minister, and Vladimir Putin became the Russian President. As John Glenn went back into space at the age of 77, the Russian submarine *Kursk* sank with the loss of 118 lives, and the *fatwa* on Salman Rushdie was finally lifted.

Closer to home, a *Real I.R.A.* bomb devastated the town of Omagh, David Trimble and John Hume won the *Nobel Peace Prize* and, as plans for the reform of the *R.U.C.* were announced, Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan was knighted, Lord Saville began his inquiry into '*Bloody Sunday*', a loyalist feud raged, and leading '*loyalist*' Billy Wright was murdered inside the Maze Prison. In politics, power was devolved to Stormont, removed 72 days later, and then restored again.

*Destiny's Child*, *S Club 7*, *Westlife*, Robbie Williams, Britney Spears and *Bob the Builder* were topping the charts, *Titanic*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Shakespeare in Love*, *Billy Elliot*, *Chicken Run* and *Bridget Jones' Diary* were filling the cinemas, and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* stories were supreme both on celluloid and on paper. On television, *Ally McBeal*, *The West Wing*, *NYPD Blue*, *Sex and the City*, *Frasier*, *Friends*, *ER* and *The X Files* were carrying off the awards.

Meanwhile, Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* was put on public display after 20 years of restoration work, *The Royal Society* called for a ban on human cloning, the *Mir* space station came down in the Pacific, and the *Odissey* mission to Mars was launched.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Grammarians' Annual Report*, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> *Chronicle of the Year 1998 and 1999; Keesing's Record of World Events* for 2000 and 2001.

## DR.ARGENT'S INITIATIVES

With his predecessor having been in post for almost two decades and with the traumas of the previous couple of years, it was almost inevitable that the appointment of a new Headmaster would herald a new approach to various aspects of the School's life and the way in which it was organised. And so it turned out; Dr Argent '*made a number of very significant changes in the management and pastoral structure of the School*', said his successor, shortly after Dr.Argent had left for the Channel Islands.

Soon after his appointment, Dr.Argent began working, along with *S.E.E.L.B.* Advisers, on a Development Plan, encompassing all aspects of School life, especially academic performance.

According to the controversial '*League Tables*', which were eventually discontinued in 2001, the 1998 G.C.S.E. results were below the average for boys' grammar schools and so Dr.Argent began a process of focusing on academic performance on a departmental basis; he and Mr.Wilson, the Director of Studies, interviewed departments, which were then asked to assess their problems and agree a strategy for progress. The Board of Governors received a brief report on each department, with a summary of results, comments by the Head of Department and an overview by the Senior Management Team. The Education Committee of the Board also began to make visits to the School for presentations by Heads of Department, which gave Board members an '*insight into the delivery of the curriculum*'.

In the light of some of the earlier criticism of the School's procedures for making promotions, Dr.Argent began to advertise internal promotions and made appointments with the active involvement of members of the Board. Members also became involved in the induction of new Staff; a Governor accompanied the Headmaster and the Senior Vice-Principal when reviewing progress after the teacher's first year.

Changes were made, too, in the School's pastoral care arrangements. Governors began to attend, as observers, Housemasters' discussions on pastoral care and, as part of the School's response to the *Wallace Report*, a Pastoral Fair was held, enabling parents to view areas of School policy on pastoral issues and to raise any concerns they might have. This event was witnessed by two of the Department's Inspectors, who commented favourably on it. (Incidentally, when parents were invited to meet Inspectors at the time of the *Quality Assurance Review*, to voice concerns, only seven parents did so, and only five attended that year's Annual Parents' Meeting, surely suggesting confidence in the way the School had dealt with a difficult situation.) Further evidence of the renewed interest of the Board of Governors in pastoral care came as Mr.Christy, newly appointed to take charge of Child Protection, explained to members the different types of child abuse - physical, mental, emotional and sexual; he also pointed out that Staff had a duty to listen and to report, but not to investigate.

In another major innovation, recommended by the *Quality Assurance Review*, and supported by the Senior Management Team, Housemasters were replaced by Year Heads from September 2001. It was felt that this would strengthen the pastoral care regime and, although Houses were retained, albeit in a weakened state, some Staff believed that Heads of Year would not have the inherent authority of a Housemaster and that pupils would feel less '*sense of belonging*'. Year 8, as Form I was now known, was to have two Year Heads, one who moved up the School with the Year Group and one who was to deal with each new Year 8. With the introduction of this system, House Assemblies became rare and House Reports in *The Gryphon* ceased; however, within a few years, there were plans to '*recharge the almost comatose House rivalry . . . by introducing House contests in everything from Debating to Draughts and Community Service to Chess*'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Stevenson's editorial in *The Gryphon*, 2004.

The *Quality Assurance Review* report had commented on pupil behaviour and following an 'exceptional closure' day, during which Staff discussed the issue, there was a move towards the 'Positive Management of Pupil Behaviour', rather than a system based on draconian laws; many of the Staff remained sceptical, however. In line with this approach, Mr.Cairnduff told the Board of the 'different approach that was now being adopted to Sixth Form pupils', not least in the hope of improving examination results by developing a Sixth Form culture. He and the Headmaster spoke to the incoming Lower Sixth to indicate that the School expected a more responsible attitude, a booklet on aspects of School life in Sixth Form was prepared, and a Sixth Form Council was elected, made up of seven Year 14 and five Year 13 boys and chaired by a Deputy Headboy, to 'foster independence of thought'. Dr.Argent explained that 'increasingly examination boards at 'A' Level seek to assess candidates' attitudes and opinions'.

Despite these attempts to treat Sixth Formers more like adults, there was, probably inevitably, a small minority of boys who did not respond positively. The worst example of juvenile behaviour occurred during Dr.Argent's final months at the School, when Latin slogans were daubed on walls and two 80-year-old hawthorn trees, which in an earlier age had marked the boundary with *Glenlola*, were cut down.<sup>11</sup>

### THE CURRICULUM

During Dr.Argent's period as Headmaster, the School also had to cope with yet another raft of government initiatives. The introduction of new 'modular' 'A' Levels, with 'AS' examinations for Lower Sixth and 'A2' examinations for Upper Sixth were combined with the introduction of Key Skills 'to provide base line skills in communication, use of number and information technology', as Dr.Argent put it. The Board of Governors was given a presentation by Mr.Macpherson, who explained that, although the proposals suggested that Lower Sixth (or Year 13) students could take up to five subjects, as well as Key Skills, the School's Curriculum Committee believed that four subjects would be a big enough work load for two-thirds of the year group, but they would be in a more privileged position than many of their contemporaries, as the School was 'within the minority of grammar schools' offering an unrestricted choice of subjects. In fact, the majority of boys took four subjects, although the government's hoped for 'breadth', where scientists would choose a Modern Language as their fourth subject, for example, was rarely achieved. To facilitate timetabling and to allow for two 'double' periods for Sixth Form between Break and Lunch, it was decided to abandon the long-standing 40-minute periods and change to a day of nine 35-minute periods. The Board 'regarded this revolution in Sixth Form Study with some disquiet', not least because the universities' admissions service, U.C.A.S., had given no indication as to the weighting it would give to these new Year 13 examinations.

The introduction of the new 'AS' Level examinations brought many problems to schools, as they faced decisions about 'resits' and whether or not the 'AS' results should be 'encashed'. It fell to Dr.Argent's successor, Stephen Connolly to pass judgement on the results of the first of these examinations in August 2001. He said:

*'I think the word which best sums up our initial response to the experience of 'AS' is "ambivalent". On the one hand, the intention of the government to broaden the curriculum and thereby enrich the educational experience of our sixth form is entirely laudable. There is also much to be said for assessing students' knowledge and understanding mid way through a course while the work is still fresh in their minds, and removing some of the pressure normally experienced at the end of a course. This is part of the justification for modularity. On the other hand, one is, I think, entitled to question the implementation of this new layer of assessment. The government believed that greater breadth in the curriculum could be achieved without the sacrifice of any depth, without, in other words, reducing the content of the syllabuses, or specifications as we are now obliged to call them. Even so, the time within which the courses had to be completed was significantly shorter. Under the burden of implementing a whole new examination system, the examining boards showed alarming signs*

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<sup>11</sup> *County Down Spectator*, 10 May 2001.

*of strain in the more than occasional inadequacy of their administration. School life has been materially affected in a number of negative ways. And beyond all this there is considerable uncertainty about what impact upon the universities the new 'AS' levels will have, not least perhaps in the universities themselves. The jury is still out, therefore, on 'AS' Levels.'*

At the same time, the School had to prepare for the development of I.T. across the curriculum (which necessitated the appointment of an I.T. Technician). A 'Core Team' was chosen for I.C.T. training, an audit of training needs was drawn up, the *Classroom 2000* initiative provided additional funding for Information Technology (or Information Communication Technology - I.C.T.), which eventually led to 120 new computers being cabled into a school intranet, creating a 'new virtual learning environment', and the *NINE Connect* (Northern Ireland Network for Education) system for email and the internet was installed, accessible from certain key areas including the Library and the I.C.T. suite.

In addition the *Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment* (C.C.E.A.) announced its *Curriculum 21* programme, which was intended to have a profound effect on the entire structure of education in Northern Ireland.

## **PUPILS**

Individual pupils continued to enjoy success in a variety of fields. During Dr.Argent's three years in Bangor, six boys went up to Cambridge and one to Oxford, and Barkley Bellingier came first in Northern Ireland in 'A' Level Mathematics and Further Mathematics and, although he also scored 598.7 out of 600 in Physics, he only came second! André McClean won a prestigious scholarship, worth \$25,000, to *Lawrenceville School*, New Jersey, in part thanks to the 'positive involvement of David Trimble and Hilary Clinton'. Ryan Wilson won the *Raleigh International Millennium Award*, which gave him an opportunity to work in a community or environmental project in Central America or Africa. A School team won the *Royal Society of Chemistry Schools' Analytical Competition* and another group of boys won four gold, seven silver and six bronze certificates at the *UK Mathematics Trust Senior Mathematical Challenge*, while the School mini-company, *Gryphon Enterprises*, produced a calendar, which yielded 100% dividends for shareholders, and the following year beautiful pairs of cufflinks with a gryphon motif. Matthew Jamison shadowed newly elected Member of Parliament, Lady Hermon, as she went about her business in the Palace of Westminster. In preparation for the *World Challenge* Costa Rica expedition, 14 boys raised £9,000 over 18 months and then, along with Mr.Cardwell and Mr.Nowotarski, had their physical endurance, qualities of leadership and organisation challenged as they experienced the 37 degree temperatures, jungles, iguanas, caymans and hot volcanic springs of Central America.

Former pupils, too, continued to make names for themselves. Adam Moore, at the *Royal Scottish School of Music and Drama*, won the *Renaissance Award* presented to him by Sir Derek Jacobi. Walter Dowdall (a life member of the *Irish Hockey Association* and a School governor) was presented with a Merit Award by the *North Down Sports' Advisory Council* for his 'long and valued service to hockey in Bangor, Ulster and Ireland', the film of Colin Bateman's *Wild About Harry* was shown in Bangor after its screening at the *London Film Festival*, and new Nobel Peace Laureate, David Trimble, who had been due to be the principal guest at Speech Day, read a lesson at the Carol Service and unveiled a photograph of himself in Library.

Tragedy hit the School in the Spring of 2000 when 17-year-old Jonathan Mezza died of natural causes. He had been a pupil at *Connor House*, had passed 9 GCSEs and had helped to produce the Junior Drama Society's *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Along with Drama, his interests included Computing and Debating, and the tribute in *The Gryphon* said that he had been 'ever cheerful and irrepressible', with a 'beaming smile and an infectious laugh'. A Shield for the pupil who achieved the highest standard in Computer Studies, and a new lectern for the Debating Society, were presented in his memory, and a tree was planted in the *Connolly Garden*.

## STAFF

Gone were the days when a schoolteacher merely taught his subject to the pupils. By the start of the new millennium, Mr. Macpherson was Chairman of the Curriculum Committee, Mr. Christy was Child Protection Officer and Mr. MacDonald was Safety Officer and I.C.T. Core Team Leader, responsible for cascading I.C.T. training to staff; in addition there was an Examinations Officer, an I.T. Co-ordinator and a Key Skills Co-ordinator. Then of course there was the paper-work: Events Book, Accident Report Forms, Computer Network Issue Report Forms, Leave of Absence Forms, Week-end Allowance Forms, Travel Expense Forms (blue and white), Application for School Visit Forms, School Visit (Consent) Forms, Next of Kin Forms, Risk Assessment Forms and many more forms.<sup>12</sup> In 2000 teachers faced an additional cause of stress when *S.D.P.R.* (Staff Development and Performance Review) was introduced; every teacher, in consultation with a senior colleague, was obliged to review his or her own performance and set targets for future professional development.

Mr. Mackie and Mr. Macpherson joined an enlarged Senior Management Team, following Mr. McIlroy's retirement, Mr. Cairnduff assuming his responsibility for Sixth Form. Other members of Staff, some of them quite junior, were co-opted onto various Board of Governors' committees. And as younger teachers took their first steps up the career ladder, so their senior colleagues ended their illustrious careers; with the retirement of Maurice McCord, Errol Steele, Bob McIlroy, Ian Hunter, Ray Mowat, Ivan Wilson, Joe Gildea and Ken Browne, the School lost over 250 years of teaching experience.

Staff continued to give freely of their time, taking groups of boys on trips to France, Germany and of course Costa Rica, *Classics Society* trips to, among other places, Pompeii, visits to the Oxbridge colleges, and to a London theatre to see *Amadeus*, an 'A' Level text, as well as on ski trips and sports tours. The Board of Governors did record that *'the valuable work being undertaken by many teachers in the extra-curricular and sporting activities was deeply appreciated'*. And yet, not surprisingly, it was in the classroom that teachers were expected to earn their salaries. In 2001 *'Threshold'* payments were introduced, to be paid to certain staff on application, in recognition of quality achievement in the classroom.

## THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

As has been noted, the Board of Governors began to play a much more active role in School affairs, following the criticism contained in the *Wallace Report*. When David Thompson took over as Chairman of the Board in 1999, he paid tribute to the *'dignified approach to the intense pressure [his predecessor, D.W.Gray] had suffered personally through the media'* and in a further improvement to Board procedures, a file of confidential information was made available to successive Chairmen.

By 2000, there were 955 people on the list of *'Subscribers'* and yet only 11 attended the annual election of governors that year; it was said that many wanted their names removed from the list and so it was decided to amend the Scheme of Management to make this possible.

At a Board of Governors' conference in the June of that year, the Chairman highlighted the School's strengths and achievements, but pointed out that *'public perception did not always match the reality'*. That day a *'vision statement'* was drawn up, aimed at improving the School Ethos, Discipline and Behaviour, Staff Communication, Sixth Form Provision and School Sport. It was proposed that there should be consultation with teaching, office and ancillary staff, and with pupils, and a committee was to be elected to allow Staff to feel more involved in how the School was managed. The document, *Strategy 2000 - Looking Forward*, was presented to Staff at the start of the Christmas Term.

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<sup>12</sup> Chris Harte, speaking at the *Grammarians' Dinner*, November 2004.

That year, too, saw the death of Dr. Hal Blair, a governor since 1973, Honorary Secretary for 15 years and Chairman from 1977 to 1980. His widow, Mrs. Noreen Blair gave £1,000 for the establishment of a Science Library in his memory.

Throughout these years, the spectre of the abolition of selection at 11+ hung over the School. The publication, in September 2000, of Professor Tony Gallagher's Research Report into the effects of the selective system of secondary education in Northern Ireland, commissioned by the Minister, Tony Worthington in 1998, was the first step in a process which was eventually to lead to the abolition of the current system. That report concluded that the pressure created by the 11+ tests disrupted the curriculum and teaching in primary schools and that, while grammar schools were geared largely towards the achievement of high academic results, secondary schools, which were attempting to meet a wider range of goals, were largely judged on narrow academic grounds alone.<sup>13</sup> During the Board's discussion of the *Gallagher Report*, it was accepted that the Transfer Procedure was not ideal, but unease was expressed about the future of the grammar schools. As public meetings were hurriedly held ahead of the December deadline for submitting evidence, Dr. Argent pointed out that,

*'society believes the current system is flawed and that the transfer system must cease to exist. However, some form of selection is essential and grammar schools . . . should be putting forward constructive arguments to retain grammar schools'.*

### THE FABRIC OF THE SCHOOL

While the *Quality Assurance Review* praised the progress made in pastoral arrangements, it was critical of the general condition of the school buildings; one member of the Inspectorate expressed his opinion that the building should be demolished and rebuilt or else the school should move to another site. Indeed in the follow-up to the *Review* in March 2001 the suggestion was made that the school should contact the development section of the Department *'to consider a long-term strategy for the main infrastructure'*. That year, the Headmaster told the *Grammarians*: *'We are already beginning to think about the long-term material provision of the School'*.<sup>14</sup> With the possible move of *Clifton Special School* to Ballykillaire, the Board registered an interest in the Ballyholme Road site.

Meanwhile a survey of the School buildings by S.E.E.L.B. officials indicated that major maintenance would be required if they were to be brought up to current standards. It was estimated that perhaps £1.2 million would need to be spent, much of it on the so-called *'Crosby'* building, and a considerable amount to repair the crumbling concrete of the *Orlit* block. A five year rolling programme of repairs was drawn up. Meanwhile, a considerable amount of renovation was undertaken. In 2000, the four classrooms in the *Orlit* block were refurbished, and the following year the outer quadrangle was resurfaced at a cost of £40,000. It was reported that pupils thought the building *'dowdy and drab'*, but as the Bursar pointed out, it could have been improved if money did not have to be spent repairing vandalism. Nevertheless, the Upper Sixth Common Room was refurbished, while the Lecture Theatre was converted into a new Common Room for Lower Sixth.

One of the less notable projects was the erection of the Perspex school name sign on the front of *Crosby House*. Within a couple of months it was recognised as being garish and was removed as it did *'not enhance the building and seemed rather out of place'*, a masterly understatement. Eventually it was placed above the entrance to the Administration block, where it was less visible to the general public.

### THE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY BLOCK AND THE FUTURE OF THE *'CROSBY'* BUILDING

Until the opening of the new block in 2002, Chemistry continued to be taught on the ground floor of the 1906 building. Dr. Argent showed the then Minister for Education, John McFall, round those laboratories when he visited the School in 1998. The Headmaster recalled:

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<sup>13</sup> The *Gallagher Report*, 28 September 2000.

<sup>14</sup> *Grammarians'* Annual Report, 2001.



*'It transpired that he had been a chemistry teacher in Glasgow in the 1970s and could see just how badly their replacement was needed'.<sup>15</sup>*

It was this, feels Dr.Argent, that persuaded the Department of Education to provide funding for the new block, although at one stage the project was *'put on hold'* by the Department, because of rumours that the Board might seek to move to Ballymacormick or to the site of *Gransha Boys' High School*. The Chairman met with Department officials and, when he assured them that the Board *'had not considered a move at this time'*, it was announced that work would commence in November 2000, Alan Dunlop Ltd. having submitted the successful tender. Of course, the School still had to find 15% of the estimated £1.7 million cost and there was much debate about how the £255,000 should be raised: by a Development Appeal, by borrowing, or by selling Ballymacormick? One problem with any Development Appeal was that the databases of neither the School nor the *Grammarians* had kept track of former pupils' careers and so Bob McIlroy was asked to co-ordinate the memories of retired staff and to begin the task of compiling a former pupil register of last 30 years.

When the new block was completed, enabling the Chemistry Department to move from the *'Crosby'* building, the question would arise as to what the future of that elderly pile might be. In the short term, the five classrooms on the first floor would still be of *'vital significance'*, but longer term there would be a number of options to be considered. Could the building be renovated internally to provide accommodation for a Library, Careers Department and Administration block, or should the site be sold for development and a different location found for those amenities? Other suggestions were to demolish *Crosby House* to give wider access to the School, or indeed to demolish the entire 1906 building. The Bursar suggested asking former pupils, who were architects, to give their ideas on the College Avenue frontage *'while maintaining some style and character which would be the public face of the School building'*, and he had his own vision of a new administration centre and assembly hall, separated by a central entrance redolent of *Queen's University*. Indeed detailed drawings were drawn up by the School Architect for a new frontage on College Avenue.

Inspection of the bell tower cupola in the mid-1990s had raised some concerns over its structural stability and so it was removed in September 1998. The cupola, which was viewed by the Board of Governors as *'an integral part of the building'*, was framed in timber with four timber legs, supporting a lead-clad timber roof. The galleon that formed the weathervane on top of the cupola was made of a thin metal sheet and it appeared to be largely intact, although the directional arms were of mild steel and showed signs of extensive rusting. However, the expense involved in repairing and reinstating it was regarded as prohibitive and the possibility of manufacturing a replacement was considered. It was estimated that the cupola alone would cost almost £3,000, while the weathervane and the erection of the cupola would add considerably to the cost. The uncertainty about the future of the 1906 building raised doubts about the wisdom of spending such a large amount.<sup>16</sup>

News that the old School building might be demolished and *'replaced by a modern, user-friendly building'* in itself raised concern. A resident of College Avenue wrote to the local press describing it as *'a fine and rare example of late art nouveau architecture'* and the weather vane, which he was eager to see restored, was, he said, in the shape of a Viking ship and had obviously been *'chosen to reflect the history of the town'*. He was appalled when Dr.Argent not only described the building as *'austere'* and *'of no architectural merit'*, but also asked him if Bangor had any association with the Vikings!<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dr.Argent, in an email to the author, September 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Details taken from a document prepared by Gordon McKnight Partnership, dated 30 September 2002.

<sup>17</sup> *County Down Spectator*, 1 April 1999.

## **BEE GEES**

When it was announced that half of the Department of Education grant towards the provision of school meals was to be withdrawn in 1999 and that the remainder was to end the following year, it was realised that numbers would drop, and that it would be necessary to introduce a revised service. Grant aid was, however, available from the Department to make the necessary structural changes to convert the Dining Hall into a cafeteria and, following visits to *R.B.A.I.*, *Sullivan Upper* and *Regent House*, it was decided to move to cafeteria service. A competition was held to find a name for the cafeteria and in the Autumn of 1999, *BeeGees (BGS)* was formally launched; it was run Mrs.Heron and her staff, rather than by an outside caterer. Despite some initial reservations, eighteen months later, the venture was pronounced a financial success, although at least one member of Staff bemoaned the fact that it was no longer possible to obtain '*a proper meal*'!<sup>18</sup>

## **THE LIBRARY**

Far from being merely a repository for books, the '*Library and Information Centre*' provided services such as photocopying, laminating and binding, and had contacts with the Audio-Visual Recording Service of the *S.E.L.B.*, *S.E.E.L.B.* Library Headquarters, the *British Library*, the libraries at Stormont, at *Trinity College Dublin*, *Queen's University Belfast* and the *Bookshop at Queen's*. Among its 9,000 resource items were several hundred videos. Books continued to be presented to the Library, including a number by the Sheehy family.

In common with almost every aspect of School life, the Library was not unaffected by Information Technology. In 1999 *Alice for Windows* (an automated library management system) was introduced and the process of cataloguing departmental resources was begun. The following year, a Homework Club, financed by £11,000 of *New Opportunities Funding* money, was started in the Library after school. It also played host to the *Debating Society*, *Scripture Union*, year assemblies, Departmental meetings and the *Parents' Association*.

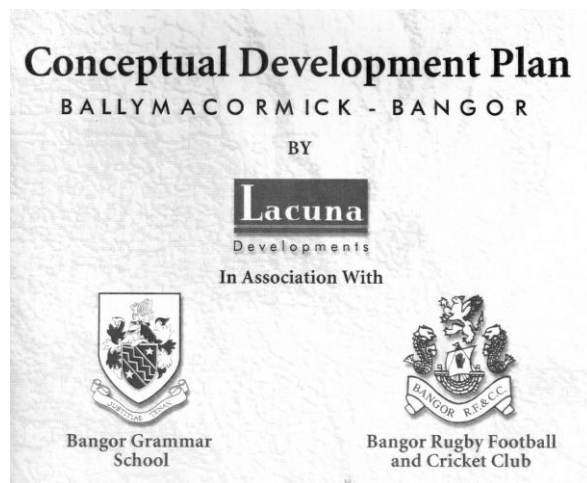
## **PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF BALLYMACORMICK**

In November 1995, representatives of *Bangor Rugby Football and Cricket Club* had approached the School with a proposal that the club should sell its playing fields at *Uprichard Park* and, in conjunction with the School, develop the playing fields at Ballymacormick. The proposal was taken no further until, in 1998, *Lacuna Developments* made an alternative proposal that the School should sell Ballymacormick to the developers and use the proceeds to develop *Uprichard Park* and *Ward Park* in conjunction with the rugby club, a project which it was estimated would cost around £1 million. The development company had an option on 38 acres of land owned by Mr.Kinghan between the Groomsport Road roundabout and Ballymacormick and was interested in acquiring the School's 22 acres. Although planning permission for part of Ballymacormick had been refused in 1991<sup>19</sup>, the developers believed that the boundary line of the green belt would be reviewed within the next few years, and they referred to the likelihood of a '*conurbation plan*' in 2004. They also believed that their plans for a '*neighbourhood centre development*', with its link roads, infrastructure and amenities, was likely to find favour with the planners. *Lacuna Developments* was prepared to offer £115,000 per acre '*plus 4% per acre uplift*'.

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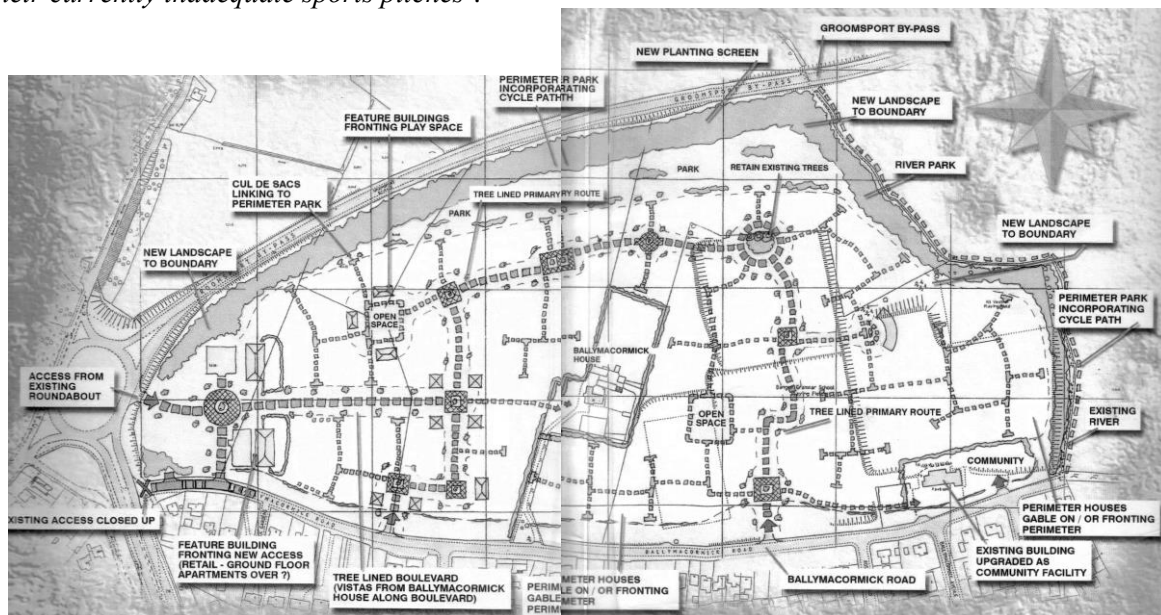
<sup>18</sup> Chris Harte, loc.cit.

<sup>19</sup> *County Down Spectator*, 25 April 1991.



The from page of the promotional brochure

The promotional brochure promised 'a range of dwelling types and densities in a pleasant and stimulating environment' and 'pockets of informal and formal open space, whilst retaining and enhancing the most natural on-site features', while enabling 'Bangor Grammar School to relocate their currently inadequate sports pitches'.



The plan of the proposed development at Ballymacormick

Although some of the Governors had reservations about entering a joint venture company with the rugby club, the lack of sufficient resources to maintain Ballymacormick adequately, the poor drainage and the recurrent problem with vandalism, not to mention the debt of £350,000 and the cost of the proposed Science Block, led the Board to consider the proposal seriously. Uprichard Park would provide three senior rugby pitches, two junior rugby pitches and two cricket areas, while Ward Park would provide one senior and two junior rugby pitches and two cricket areas, assuming of course that North Down Borough Council, owner of Ward Park, was willing to co-operate. The use of Ward Park would have the added advantage of the School no longer having to hire buses, and the 'prunty' type pitches at Uprichard Park would be all-weather. Of course all this was dependant on planning permission, D.E.N.I. approval and the lack of public objections.

The Governors were not happy to accept Lacuna's valuation of the land and independent advisers recommended that the School ask for an increase in the price per acre and a share of any windfall profits, proposals which were initially rejected by Lacuna. By the end of 1998, the final negotiated position was that the School should receive £125,000 per acre and a 50% share of any profits made above £185,000. The Board voted by 10 votes to 2 to go ahead, pending D.E.N.I. approval and agreement with the Borough Council and the Rugby Club.

The plans became public early in 1999 and they did not meet with universal approval. A public meeting was held at which a large number of residents objected to plans to build houses on the land at Ballymacormick. The residents wanted the land retained as a 'green belt'. They argued that the plan was contrary to Department of the Environment policy, would create traffic problems and would threaten wildlife.

Presenting the plans to *North Down Borough Council*, the Board of Governors pointed out that *'the School grounds are under-utilised (and are not ideal for sport, given their location and condition) and the [rugby] club has experienced a decline in membership'* and a deputation from *Bangor Sports Club Ltd.* (as the joint School/Rugby Club venture was known) explained that the hockey pitches at Ballymacormick were *'of a shale construction, which is no longer suitable and may now be considered dangerous or unsafe for children'* and that the rugby pitches were in poor condition, while the pavilion and grounds were subject to persistent vandalism.

In the Autumn of 1999, when the Department of the Environment asked for an archaeological survey of Ballymacormick to be carried out, a *'Heads of Agreement'* document was signed with the Rugby Club, but a year later there had been no further progress and the scheme has lain dormant ever since.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile a sports development company expressed interest in developing Ballymacormick as a major sports complex; it was said that the new buildings which it planned to erect would not prevent the School from continuing to use the playing fields.

## SPORT<sup>21</sup>

There was a major overhaul of the Honours system during these years. An Awards Committee was set up, consisting of the Senior Management Team, minus the Headmaster, but with the addition of Mr.Aiken, Head of P.E., and chaired by the Senior Vice-Principal. It agreed that the number of honours should be reduced (there were 118 in 1999-2000), and that there was a need to have clearly set out criteria for each sport, so that the awarding of honours would be automatic, not subjective. The Committee also discussed the problem of the achievements of younger pupils not being recognised and a special *'gryphon'* lapel badge was introduced.

Cricket, Badminton and Squash were the most successful sports during these years. The 1st XI won both the *McCullough Cup* and the *Schools' Cup*, perhaps not surprisingly with four members of the team playing for Irish Schools.



1<sup>st</sup> XI which won the *McCullough Cup* in 2000

D.Robinson, Mr.C.Harte, J.McClaughlin, A.G.Andrews, C.Scott, C.S.Cook, A.Ritchie, The Headmaster

D.C.Anderson, A.W.Gowdy, P.D.McKenzie, R.M.Bell, T.McAuley, C.J.R.Kane, M.D.Montgomery

<sup>20</sup> *County Down Spectator*, 28 January and 11 February 1999.

<sup>21</sup> A full list of team and individual successes and of representative honours can be found in the Appendices.



The 1<sup>st</sup> XI which won the *Schools' Cup* in 2001

Mr.Connolly, M.D.Montgomery, A.G.Andrews, C.Scott, C.S.Cook, D.C.Anderson,  
R.McLarnon, W.Goldthorpe, Mr.Harte

C.J.R.Kane, A.W.Gowdy, R.M.Bell P.D.McKenzie, S.Cooper

(Kane, Gowdy, Bell and McKenzie all played for Irish Schools that year, and Scott Cooper would  
do so in 2003 and 2004)

The final was played in the June that Dr.Argent left, but the photograph was not taken until the  
September that Mr.Connolly took up his post. Both Headmasters had been at the match.

One of that quartet, Ryan Bell, also contributed to the success of the School's Badminton  
teams. In 1999, Minor, Junior and Senior teams all won trophies, but perhaps the highlight  
was the Senior Team winning the *Ulster Schools' Cup* and becoming All-Ireland Division 2  
Champions in 2000, after which the team went on a tour to Glasgow.



Junior Badminton Team 1998-99

Winners of *Ulster Schools' Under-16 Cup*

The Headmaster, A.Andrews, C.Anderson, Mr.S.Waddell  
R.Bell, C.Scott



Minor Badminton Team 1998-1999

Winners of *Irish Schools' League*, Division II

The Headmaster, B.Good, S.Cooper, Mr.S.Waddell  
C.Cargo, D.Campbell



The Headmaster and Mr.S.Waddell with the Under-19 Badminton Teams which won the  
*Ulster Schools' League* 1998-1999

C.Currie R.Bell  
A.Andrews I.McCroskery

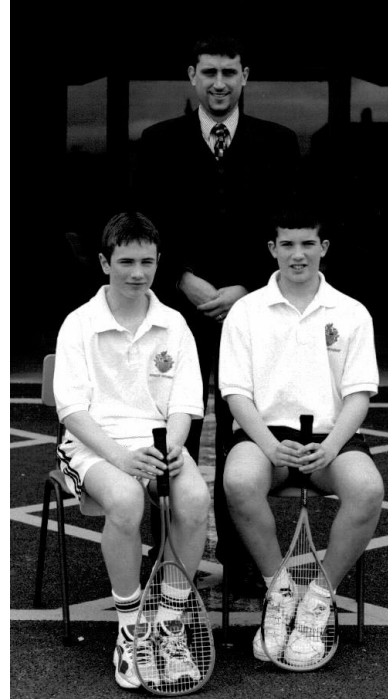


The following year, the same team won both  
the *Ulster Schools' Cup* and  
*Irish Division 2 Championships* 1999-2000

A.Andrews C.Scott  
R.Bell C.Anderson

The following year, the same team won both  
the *Ulster Schools' League* and *Cup*.

In Squash the School won the *Ulster Schools' Under-17 League and Cup* in 2000 and took the *Ulster Schools' Senior League and Cup* the following year.



Mr.P.Moore with the 1999-2000 Squash Teams  
 which won the *Under-13 Ulster Cup* and the *Under-17 League and Cup*  
 M.Briggs  
 T.Gaston J.Fraser  
 C.Nixon M.Gaston



Senior Squash Squad 2000-2001  
 Winners of *Ulster Under-19 League and Cup*  
 M.Briggs Mr.Moore B.Goode  
 A.Fynn J.Hegan

Swimming enjoyed a new '*golden age*', in no small measure due to the presence of Jonathan Nixon and the McQuillans - Peter, Steven and Mark. The Senior Team won the Ulster Grammar Schools' Senior Cup in both 2000 and 2001, while the Junior Team won the Junior Cup at Ulster Grammar Schools' Championships every year from 1997 to 2000.





J.D.Nixon

Ulster and Irish Schools' Breaststroke Champion.  
By 2002, he was ranked 96<sup>th</sup> in the world.



Ulster Grammar Schools' Intermediate Swimming Champions 1998-1999  
G.Brown, M.McQuillan, C.Bailie, R.McLarnon, J.Ferguson, Mr.A.Cardwell  
A.Barr, S.McQuillan, P.McQuillan, J.Nixon, M.Howlette  
The same team, minus P.McQuillan retained the Cup the following year.  
(J.D.Nixon and S.G.McQuillan both represented Irish Schools)

Neither Rugby nor, ironically in view of Dr.Argent's interest in the sport, Hockey enjoyed much success during these three years, although the 2<sup>nd</sup> XI did win the *Dowdall Cup* in Errol Steele's final year and Jamie McAuley represented Ulster and Ireland at Under-16 level. However individuals such as Patrick Adair in Sailing (the School's one world champion), Ian Jones in Table Tennis and Chris Cargo in Tennis distinguished themselves, as did Aaron Oettinger and Ben Goode in the less traditional sports of Ice Hockey and Trampolining. There were also successes in power-lifting, archery and orienteering.

The Rugby Club did, however, take a party of 35, including 5 Staff, to South Africa in 2000. The *Parents' Association*, *The Grammarians* and the local business community all helped by providing sponsorship, a fund-raising dinner was a great success and Hugh McCutcheon of *Bangor Rugby Club* made a valuable contribution to the planning of the tour. During their three week stay, four matches were played and, although three resulted in defeats, visits to Sun City, *Kruger National Park*, and the test match venues at *Loftusversfeld*, *King's Park* and *Ellis Park*, where they watched a *Tri-Nations* match between South Africa and New Zealand, went some way towards easing the disappointment.

After years - decades, even - of agitation, Football finally became a recognised School sport in 1998, and two teams were entered in competitions two years later. It was made clear, however, that it should not be offered to first rate players of rugby or hockey, for there was concern that the School would not be able to sustain three major Winter sports. Kit was

donated by Bill Wolsey and former pupil Peter Dornan donated twenty footballs. Although the teams did not bring home any silverware, Stuart Best played for *Distillery* and was a member of the Northern Ireland under-18 Squad.



Under-18 Soccer Team 2000-2001

Mr.R.Jones, S.Willis, A.McIntyre, T.Simpson, G.Reid, G.Houston, G.Donegan, I.McManus  
M.Cree, T.Gaston, M.Gray, M.Dyer, J.Golthorpe, S.Woodward

As well as taking part in sport, boys ran a multi-sports festival at *Clifton Special School*, as part of the *Youth Sports Trust 'Top Link'* programme. This resulted in a special presentation from the *Sports Council*.

### OTHER EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Other, more cerebral, extra-curricular activities also enjoyed success.



Winners of Division 4 of the Ulster Schools'  
Chess League, 1999

K.Hamilton, C.Wilkinson, R.Williams, Mr.K.Browne  
D.Stafford, J.Bell, B.Bellinger, S.Cooper, G.Williams  
(Scott Cooper represented Ireland at Under-14 level).



Richard P. and Andrew D.Gray  
members of the Northern Ireland  
Under-20 Bridge team 1999-2000

In spite of the fact that the School team was being coached by former Headboy (and son of '*The Bird*') Ken Hawtin, a distinguished Bridge player, the Old Boys held on to the *Simon FitzSimons Memorial Cup*, which had been presented in memory of former pupil S.B.FitzSimons, who had died in 1995.

Debating and Drama continued to flourish. In Mr.McCord's final year, Kevin McGlade won the *Edgar Graham Memorial Public Speaking Competition*. Following Mr.McCord's retirement, Mrs.Fiona Millar became President of the *Debating Society*, which moved to the Library. After presidencies of 39 and 33 years, Mrs.Millar's tenure was somewhat shorter; she left the Staff a year later to be succeeded by Mr.Philip Moore, although during her year in office, the *Society* won the *Britannic Assurance Northern Ireland Schools' Debating Competition* and Michael Rigby won the *Hazel Bradford Memorial Debate*.





Winners of the *Britannic Assurance* Northern Ireland Schools' Debating Competition 1999-2000

J.Watts M.Rigby The Headmaster T.Dougan A.Best  
K.McGlade P.Bownes Mrs.Millar S.Montgomery A.Dorrian

The *Dramatic Society*, under Mrs.Bates, staged Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*, sandwiched between two of *Shakespeare's* plays, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, while a number of boys were involved with the *Ulster Youth Theatre* and the *National Youth Theatre*, including André McClean, Adam Best, Chris McLaughlin, Andrew McEvoy, Philip Whyte, Martin Gray and Jon McKinley.

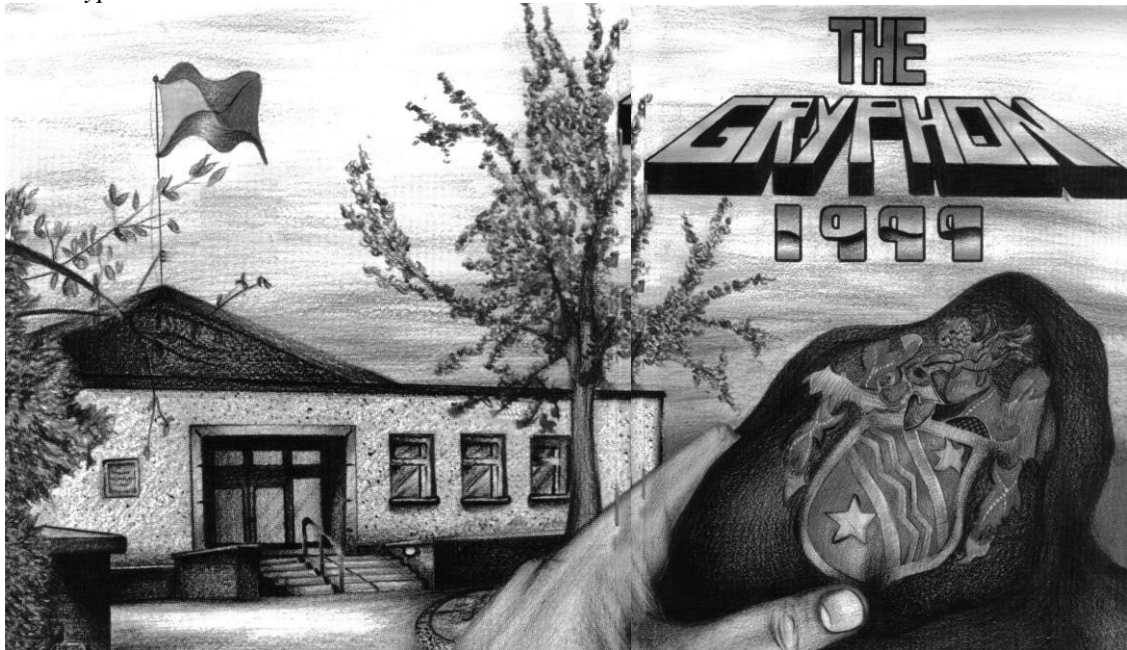
The *Community Action Team*, as the *Community Service Group* became known, held its usual non-uniform day in aid of *Children in Need*, and its Christmas Party for *Clifton Special School*. They also organised a sponsored walk, a sponsored fast and a car wash, as well as collecting books and raising £1,590 for their founder, former Vice-Principal Ivan Wilson, who was teaching in *Jormatt College of Technology* in Batibo, Cameroon under the auspices of *Voluntary Service Overseas*. In 2001, the Team raised a total of £4,000.

Although public examinations necessitated the cancelling of the Annual Concert in 1999, Music continued to play an important role in the life of the School and of the local community; over the years, the annual Christmas performances at the *Bloomfield Centre* raised over £10,000 for cancer research, and in 2000 the Carol Service raised £1,000 for Mr.Wilson's work in Cameroon. The reputation of *Bangor Grammar School's* musicians resulted in the School Band being invited to play at the *Northern Ireland Assembly's* Carol Service. Three boys, Ciaran Young (euphonium), Matthew Williams (bassoon) and Stuart Costley (trumpet) gained their *A.T.C.L.* qualifications. Others who had previously gained their *L.T.C.L.* Diplomas include David Barry (clarinet), William Thompson (singing), and Ian McBride, David Thomson, Neale Agnew and Ivan McComb (organ). A number of boys were members of the *Ulster Youth Orchestra*, with *Bangor Grammar School* musicians being the mainstay of the brass section. In the classroom, computers began to play a major part in composition work, with the store being kitted out with a midi recording facility, making the School one of the leaders in the provision of Music Technology.

A host of other clubs and societies continued to function and they were joined by several new ones. The Computer Club attracted numerous 'nerds' (*'Networked Electronic Resource Development Specialists'*), as '*Fragmaster*' called members. They engaged in bloodless computer carnage as they played games such as *Delta Force* and *Quake 2*. The Junior Art Club embarked on the creation of a ceramic mural showing *Bangor Grammar School* at the heart of the local community, as well as depicting local people and landmarks. In addition to holding an Annual Art Exhibition, the Art Department, funded by the *National Lottery*, also hosted a community arts project, creating mosaic wall panels and painted murals for a garden of

remembrance at *Savoy House* along with *Glenlola Collegiate*, *Bangor Academy* and *St.Columbanus*.

Further evidence of the talent in the Art Department is provided by the designs for the cover of *The Gryphon* in 1999 and 2000.



Christopher Bell's design for the 1999 cover of *The Gryphon*, when it contained colour for the first time.



The cover of the 2000 edition of *The Gryphon*.

### **C.C.F.**

The *Combined Cadet Force* went from strength to strength, with the usual camps, leadership courses, arduous training exercises and competitions. Andrew Rea won the *C.C.F.* Champion Cadet Trophy, the *Ulster Cadet Championships* team won both the shooting and first aid competitions, the regatta team won the inaugural *Scotland and Northern Ireland Schools' C.C.F. Regatta* and the *Seamanship Trophy* at the *National C.C.F. Regatta* at *Portsmouth*.

In 2000, six years after plans had been submitted, the contingent took possession of its new building, comprising an entrance hall, a classroom, three stores, offices and a toilet, erected by *T.A.V.R.A.* beside the *Clarke Hall*. It was officially opened by the Lord Lieutenant of

County Down, Major W.Hall. That year, too, the R.N.Section became affiliated to *H.M.S.Bangor* and an oak tree was planted in the *Connolly Garden* to mark the occasion. In 2001 Lt.-Commander Mackie was promoted to Commander and Lt.Cardwell to Lieutenant-Commander.



The official opening of the new *C.C.F.* building, December 2000.  
Lt.Cmdr.Mackie, the Mayor of North Down, Councillor Alan Chambers,  
the Lord Lieutenant of County Down, Major W.Hall, and R.S.M.Harris.



A.D.Rea, Champion *C.C.F.* Cadet (Ulster, 1999)



Judith Monson, Kyle Pritchard and Alison McKibben  
of the *C.C.F.* Naval Section who won  
the Scottish and Northern Ireland Schools'  
*C.C.F.* Regatta and the Seamanship Cup at the  
Royal Naval Section National Regatta 2000-2001

## **CONNOR HOUSE**

*Connor House* became a co-educational school in September 1999 with three girls being enrolled, one in P.1 and two in P.3, the number rising to 15 in 2000. That year the Pre-prep class was full and 21 pupils entered P.1, as enrolment gradually increased, reaching 140 in 2001. (*Glenlola Collegiate* clearly felt threatened by this development, for it was reported that fees were being cut for its P.1 to P.3 pupils, and that *Cygnets House* was itself starting a Pre-prep class). As well as adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of the girls, Staff had to endure an Inspection (as part of the Department's *Quality Assurance Review* of Year 8), introduce '*Baseline Assessment*' for the new P.1 pupils and take in the latest developments in I.C.T. as Miss Kate Montgomery, the I.C.T. Core Leader '*cascaded*' information down to them. Most importantly, perhaps was the preparation of pupils for the controversial Transfer Tests and between 1999 and 2001 over 75% of *Connor House* boys achieved an 'A' or 'B' grade.

Extra-curricular activities continued to play an important part in the life of the School. The choir and recorder group played at *Bloomfields* and *Ailsa Lodge* nursing home, and '*Jazz Art*'

combined an Art Exhibition with the musical *Jonah Man Jazz*. Individual pupils enjoyed success in a variety of activities ranging from 'Throwing the Cricket Ball' to Art, Poetry and Verse Speaking, while the Hockey Team shared the *Armstrong Cup*, and P.4 won the *Killyleagh Cup* for Choral Speaking at Bangor Festival. *The Pippin Alley Drama Company* and the writer Leon McCauley visited the School, while pupils enjoyed visits to, among other places, the Lake District (with *Regent House P.7*), the *Dunluce Centre* in Portrush Castle Espie, and *H.M.S. Sutherland*, although visits were curtailed by the outbreak of 'foot and mouth' disease (which also caused sport in the senior school virtually to be abandoned).

Mrs. Gertie Baxter, who had ceased to be full-time Secretary in 1998, continued to work part-time for a further three years until her retirement in June 2001 after twenty years' service. During that time she had not only performed her secretarial duties, she had also been responsible for the School's successes in choral speaking and Mr. Ekin commented on 'her devotion to the School and her unfailing loyalty [which] have made her someone very special in the eyes of those who have been associated with the Prep.'

In 1999, the *Mums' Committee* became the *Connor House Association for Fundraising (C.H.A.F.F.)* when dads were invited to join. The same type of activities continued - wine and cheese evenings, coffee mornings, and barbeques, for example - raising around £1,500 a year for the School, much of it spent on a new reading scheme, and the latest computer technology, which enabled the P.7 pupils to give a *Powerpoint* presentation to parents on their trip to the Lake District. As had always been the case, charities benefited from the generosity of the pupils and their parents, almost £4,000 being raised during these three years, by a variety of means including a plant sale by the *Gardening Club*.

### **GRAMMARIANS**

The annual sporting fixtures between Old Boys and the School continued to take place, as did the Bangor, Edinburgh and London Dinners. In 2000, Des Robinson, who had organised the London Dinner for over a decade, was presented with an Admiral's Decanter, and Dr. Argent received a *Tyrone Crystal* bowl on his departure. The biggest source of income continued to be schoolboy membership, which yielded over £1,500 each year, enabling the *Grammarians* to make a contribution towards the South African Rugby tour, to update the gold lettering on the honours boards and to purchase a supply of the newly designed ties.

### **PARENTS' ASSOCIATION**

*Parents' Association* fund-raising activities continued, with activities such as a Dinner Dance, Wine Tasting, a Balloon Race and a Cake Sale, enabling the purchase of rugby tackle bags, lighting for the *Dramatic Society*, equipment for the *Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme* and Badminton trophies. In 2000 members provided the labour as well as the finance to refurbish the Upper Sixth Common Room, removing the fixed seating, laying heavy duty carpet, painting the room in the School colours and providing plastic chairs, soft chairs and coffee tables. The *Association* also held a 5-a-side football tournament at Ballykillaire. The I.T. Technician gave 6 weeks' I.T. training to members of the *Association* in the Autumn of 1999.

The Board of Governors showed its appreciation of the work done by all the School's support groups by holding a reception for representatives.

### **DR. ARGENT'S RESIGNATION**

On his arrival at the School in 1998, Dr. Argent had been interviewed for *The Gryphon*. He told David Bownes and Paul Ferguson that 'it would take a lot to make me return to the mainland'. And true to his word, he did not leave Northern Ireland for the British mainland, but for the Channel Islands; in the Spring of 2001 he was appointed Headmaster of *Elizabeth College Guernsey*, which had been founded in 1563. It was, he said, 'an offer I could not refuse'.



D.B.Thompson, Chairman of the Board of Governors,  
making a presentation to Dr.Argent

Although it is probably true to say that he saw *Bangor Grammar School* as a stepping stone to greater things, his Staff saw him as ‘*a visionary*’ and ‘*an excellent administrator*’, and the *County Down Spectator* said that Dr.Argent could be ‘*credited with bringing about a complete turnaround in the School’s fortunes*’. Modestly, he claims that:

*‘the School survived a testing period because of the solidarity of the staff room and the quality and vision of its Governors, without whom the story would have been very different’.*<sup>22</sup>

And in the midst of the difficult problems and decisions facing a Headmaster, there was also the mundane and, at times, the humorous. Dr.Argent recalled writing to the mother of a persistently late pupil, asking for an explanation. Her reply, in its entirety, read:

*‘The reason that - - - - - is so often late is that he doesn’t like getting out of bed.’*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The thoughts of several senior members of Staff; *County Down Spectator*, 12 April 2001; Dr.Argent, loc.cit.

<sup>23</sup> Dr.Argent, loc.cit.