



The Belmontian

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Belmont Continues to Prosper

■ Head's Report to the Old Belmontians March 2009

As I write at the beginning of a very difficult year economically for the entire country, I am pleased to report that the School remains full with strong demand for places at both 7 and 11 years old. The Foundation is supporting a number of able and talented pupils with bursaries, some from money kindly donated by Old Belmontians and Old Millhillians. This September we will be admitting one boy and two girls into Year 7 on full fee remission; the children will offer a great deal to Belmont and subsequently to Mill Hill. In addition to their high academic ability, they play the trumpet and piano and one of the girls is a County standard cricketer. Girls now constitute 41% of the School, our highest percentage ever - and they are a tour de force within it delivering results both academically, in music, drama and sport.

Last summer we took a group of talented boys and girls to Cape Town to play rugby and hockey against a nearby Township side, local school sides, including SACS boys' school with which we have strong links. Joining them on tour were some of our most talented musicians and singers who presented a concert to the parents of SACS and ran an instrumental workshop in the Township. The experience was a life-changing one for some of them, particularly when they saw the poverty of some South Africans. Since then the parents of the touring party have organised a delivery of rugby boots and kit to the boys so that they can continue to play the



The rugby squad winners of the Middlesex Cup

game with some protection and not in bare feet. The development of the boys' game as a result of the Tour was evident during the Autumn Term when they played magnificently in the Middlesex Rugby Cup Competition, winning 10-7 in a thrilling and closely fought final game in January. They then went through to the National Finals at Epsom College, finally being knocked out in the quarter finals. These boys are very talented and, I'm sure, will be the nucleus of an excellent U14 side at Mill Hill next year.

The girls have not been resting on their laurels either. The Year 8 'A' netball team lost only one match all season, the Year 6 'A' team finished in the top three in a netball competition at Orley Farm and at our first County Athletics Meeting this season the girls finished in 1st place and Sophia Humphreys was asked to join the County squad. There were 6 sports awards won at Mill Hill to crown a fine winter season.

Other awards to Mill Hill included one full academic award, seven English exhibitions, three for Latin, two for science, one for French, six for music, one for DT, two for art and three for drama. This, with three additional Continuation awards awarded at 11+, is a haul of 35 - quite impressive from a year group of 79 pupils.



The Poon Nature Reserve

We have been fortunate to receive a donation from an ex-parent to help us develop a rather neglected part of the Estate to turn it into a Nature Reserve. A pond has been constructed and the surrounding area planted with a mix of wildflower and wild grass seed. Finished last autumn, the area is still being colonized and the flowers have yet to emerge, but already Muntjac deer have been seen coming to drink at the pond, foxes and rabbits of course, and the frogs have found a perfect place for their spawn. A large shed with a verandah has been built to house science equipment and to be a place where experiments can be conducted. The verandah will be a perfect place for sitting to watch the wildlife or sketch the beautiful view across the valley. The children will, from this summer, be able to use the Nature Reserve for pond dipping as part of their science curriculum

and save the time and expense of trips out to Epping Forest. The Poon Nature Reserve officially opened on 9th May 2009.

We always welcome contact from Old Belmontians and later this term we will be arranging a tour for Roger Holliday and his party visiting the area. Do get in touch if you would like to visit and see how the School has changed since you slid down the banisters from the dormitories on the first floor to the bathroom on the mezzanine floor (now classrooms for History and Latin and the ICT room).

I would like to finish my report by mentioning two Old Belmontians who have given so much to maintain and develop contact with ex-pupils and promote the Association. Firstly Christopher Funnell, ex-Deputy Head at the School and latterly Editor of the Belmontian; Christopher has decided to retire from the role after 10 years. Christopher has worked tirelessly on behalf of you all to produce a regular newsletter full of interesting articles that keep us all in touch with the history of the School and with one another. His encyclopedic knowledge of pupils and teachers has no match and his input into the production of the paper will be sorely missed. On a personal note, I would like to thank him and his wife Grace for being so supportive when I became Head, helping me get up to speed with the history of the Association and the production of the Belmontian. He has promised to keep in touch and to keep inviting me to Lord's so that our shared passion for cricket can continue. On behalf of the School, thank you Christopher.

Adrian Williams has finally managed to escape the clutches of the OB Committee, where he has acted as Secretary for 11 years, and has decided to step down from the role. Adrian says this is because it is time for a younger person to take over, but I have rarely met anyone younger with Adrian's energy and enthusiasm and it has been a privilege to work with him in my 4

years as Head. Adrian has been an outstanding person to have on the Committee for he is efficient, organized and relentlessly cheerful, even in the face of mounds of mailing having to be addressed, enveloped and posted. Adrian will be a very hard act to follow and I thank him for all his hard work on behalf of us all.

Lynn Duncan ■

■ Belmont in the 1920s



Professor Bernard Queneau in his Belmont uniform

Belmont in the 1920's was essentially a boys' boarding school with all but a few of the boys living the full term at the school with no visits by the boys' parents. Some 120 boys were in six forms from I to IV, with 20 boys per form. There was a rigid dress code consisting of a Harris Tweed jacket, short trousers, stockings and bare knees. A large, starched collar attached to a white shirt and a black tie completed the uniform.

The school day started with breakfast at 8:00 a.m. consisting of oatmeal, milk,

toast and prunes. Then there was a half hour church service in a brand new chapel built on the campus. The service was mostly singing and praying and conducted by the Headmaster, Mr. A.J. Rooker Roberts with the other teachers, all men by the way, giving informal sermons from time to time. We then attended classes until 1:00 p.m. when we had our main meal. There was an hour break where we could do as we pleased, followed by a rigorous sports programme, then dinner, a one-hour study period, and so to bed. Lights were out at 9:00, and no talking was allowed after that. In regard to the food, the less said, the better. There was plenty of meat, plus potatoes and overcooked vegetables. Spinach was the worst!

On Saturday mornings, we ran about five miles, and the afternoons were free. On Sunday mornings, there was a long chapel service, a really good Sunday dinner with roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, and plenty of cake. The afternoons were again free, and in good weather, the boys would play games, climb trees, and enjoyed long walks. I was enrolled in Belmont on a Saturday, and promptly got into trouble during this free time on Sunday. I found some large logs and built a raft at a nearby pond, with the help of a friend. We poled out onto the water and promptly capsized in my spanking new Sunday outfit! A very bedraggled and repentant boy crept back to the dormitory and faced a patient and understanding House Matron. She said, "Never mind, get out of these things and I'll lay out a clean outfit. This time I will not tell the Headmaster of your escapade, but never come back looking like this again!"

I had previous schooling in England, but my father, who was a consulting engineer, moved to southern France, and I became a student in a French school in Cannes. He was not satisfied with the school, so he was able to have me

enrolled at Belmont. Since I was 12 years old, I was assigned to Form II based on my age, but it was obvious pretty soon that I could not be assigned to a single form because of my unusual background. I was promoted to Form III for English, Mathematics, History and Geography; Form V for Latin and Form VI for French. French class was taught by Mr. Roberts. He was a tall, gaunt, typical British gentleman and a former all-England Rugby player. He had a remarkable understanding of boys, their strengths and weaknesses, and won my complete devotion soon after I arrived. He certainly had a greater effect on me than any other teacher in all my 19 years in school.

Although small for my age, I was strong and fast so that I took to the game of rugby with real enthusiasm, and Mr. Roberts assigned me to play scrum half. Early in the semester, my wind was knocked out during a game, but as soon as I could breathe again, I was ready to go, which greatly pleased Mr. Roberts. He took a real liking to any boy who played with fortitude.

It should be emphasized that the school was run essentially on the basis that all the boys would work conscientiously and if they did not, prompt and severe punishment was dispensed. There were no rewards for good work and no prizes or other incentives. For minor infractions, you were assigned to write a hundred lines, and if a major infraction occurred, you were sent to the Headmaster for caning. There was a bully who unfortunately threw a drafting pen into the air, and on returning, entered a boy's eye, causing total loss of sight in his right eye. I was a witness, and following the student's code of not snitching, I would not tell the teacher who had thrown the pen. He promptly assigned me to write a hundred lines. When I refused to write them, I was

sent to see Mr. Roberts, the one who could cane a student. Mr. Roberts told me to assume the angle and he whistled the cane in the air a few times. Then he asked me to tell him who had thrown the pen in such a way that it let me stay silent. He said that it was nearly certain that it was a certain boy, and that he was going to be expelled from school. If it wasn't this boy, I should speak up and exonerate him. Since I didn't, the boy was expelled. Mr. Roberts went on to say that I should still write my 100 lines, since I had chosen not to snitch, and I was glad to get off so easily.

Unfortunately, my father moved again, this time back to the United States, and I went with them. I was very sorry to leave because of the wonderful year I had had at Belmont. Rooker Roberts was kind enough to write on my progress report "He was making his mark on the school, and I am sorry – very sorry – that it is necessary for him to leave. I hope, however, that he has learned some lessons he will never forget." It was a great year for me, and I learned many lessons which I have not forgotten, Mr. Roberts.



Bernard Queneau with Lynn Duncan at Belmont in 2006

■ Belmont 1932-1936



Brian Leicester aged 12

I can remember my first day at Belmont as if it were yesterday. I arrived with my mother to be welcomed by Rooker Roberts, the Headmaster, and his wife, and was taken into their lounge which overlooked a beautiful cedar tree on the lawn. I was obviously starting to get concerned about what was going to happen: a new environment, Mother leaving, being on my own for the very first time — all natural enough. There was one person in the room who knew exactly how I was feeling — I say 'person' but actually it was Rooker Roberts's dog, a lovely, very large St Bernard, and he knew exactly my situation. He immediately took charge and befriended me. Started to make a big fuss and made sure all my attention was on him. He must have helped many boys over the years; he certainly helped me to stop crying when my mother eventually left.

Belmont in those days was mainly a boarding school with a few dayboys and I was taken to meet the other new

boys who had arrived before me. Strange as it might seem, I cannot remember many boys' names, but my best friend was Douglas St Watts who went on to Mill Hill with me. Sadly he is no longer with us. There was one other new dayboy I remember: his father was the well-known (at that time) film-producer and director at Elstree Studios, Herbert Wilcox; his son was chauffeur-driven to the school each day in a Rolls Royce, wrapped up in a car rug. Poor lad, we didn't half tease him!

Some masters' names I can remember: my first form master was a Mr Sanderson; there was a Mr Chatterley; and of course everybody of that era remembers Mr Ricks. There was also a Mr Sobey who coached us at rugby; at the time he was in the England Rugby Team as scrumhalf. He would have a fellow team-member, a Mr Spong, who was fly half for England. Mr Ricks used to run the chess club and, when we were good enough, we were selected to play what I can only describe as a 'school-type' chess game. You sat back-to-back from your opponent, with a board in front of you with only your own pieces. Your opponent did the same, and there was a full board between us controlled by a third person. The aim was to play 'blind' with your moves recorded on the middle board, and you were told if you had taken your opponent's piece, and the position on the board.

I was lucky because, at that time, the playground was specially surfaced for roller-skating. Everybody skated and, by the time you were ready to move on to our next schools, we were all very good skaters. This was only in the winter and spring terms because, in the summer, the surface was too soft for skating, so we played marbles instead.

The other two pastimes were tree-climbing and making a camp. There were a number of trees that were climbable, but there were three favourites. There was a large oak tree which was called the Gallias (why, I don't know); to get to the first branch a two to three-foot log had to be placed against the trunk. That was high enough to get the first good hold and then up you went — great fun. The other two were the N and the Y. You could climb to the very top of the N and then cross over to the Y. We were allowed to climb trees in those days.

Just off the playground was an open area before the wood and here we built 'camps'. These consisted of a depression in the ground with a fireplace, forming an underground 'camp'. Here we dug a large hole about five feet deep of sufficient size for three or four boys. We would haul up logs, which were lying on the ground in the woods, and place them over the hole to form the roof and cover it with smaller branches. We were allowed to take any wood that was lying on the ground. It was then necessary for a Master to inspect the roof before we were allowed to cover it with earth. A fireplace would be incorporated in one side opposite some steps to get down. We were allowed to have a fire and, at weekends, we could cook eggs and bacon, which we could buy from the Mill Hill tuck shop at the other end of the Ridgeway.

The school uniform was: short trousers, an open-neck grey shirt and the school blazer. But on Sundays it was a dark grey suit and stiff (very stiff) Eton-type white collar that was worn outside the jacket. Most uncomfortable, particularly towards the end of term when the inside of the collar became rough from the starched washing. After the church service in the morning, we were allowed to change back to normal daywear. Sunday evening was always looked forward to, as Rooker Roberts would

read to the whole school in the Large¹. He would sit on a chair placed on one of the tables and we would sit around him. He would read adventure stories about Bulldog Drummond, a great champion against villains. Also stories like King Solomon's Mines, a great story set in Africa, and of course Sherlock Holmes.

I was lucky enough that, while I was at the school, an outdoor swimming pool was built, and the Countess of Athlone, a cousin of King George V, opened this with great pomp and ceremony. The swimming pool was greatly used during the summer term.

It was very sad when we moved on to 'The Big School' and for a while some of us would come back on Saturdays, borrow some skates and enjoy joining in the fun, but single-handed hockey on the Quad at Mill Hill soon began to be our out-of-school-hour sport. What a shame this school game is no more!



Brian Leicester on Top Terrace

Brian Leicester ■

¹ In Brian's time at Belmont, the large room at the north end of the main school block (subsequently the music room, library, staff common-room and now the art room) was known as the Large.

■ Rt Revd Colin Fletcher (late '50s and early '60s)



Rt. Revd Colin Fletcher, Bishop of Dorchester

My days at Belmont in the late 50's and early 60's seem a long way away from my current job as Bishop of Dorchester here in the Oxford Diocese and yet it does not take all that much effort to remember back over the fifty years to when I first joined the school.

My first school had not been a very happy experience but Belmont opened up new horizons. Battles waged between boarders and dayboys undoubtedly honed some of my political and bargaining skills (how else did you escape the singularly unpleasant task of being captured and then forced to mine clay for the opposition?). Games of Marbles on the playground satisfied a certain entrepreneurial bent (and an acquisitive one too). Work on the whole was fun and team games played a major part in my life. The crocuses that appeared each year were beautiful and I will never forget the winter of 1963 when the pond froze so hard that fish were caught up in the ice that we walked across as a matter of course.

But, as ever, it was the teachers that were the biggest inspiration and Miss King together with Messrs Bromehead, Sturgess, Gee, Alston and Lanyon all gave me something of themselves for which I remain profoundly grateful.

Thinking back it might be convenient to claim that a direct line linked my experience of weekday services in the school chapel to my call to ordination. However that would be to overstretch the truth. Certainly I enjoyed the singing – not least when there was an 'alternative version' or a *double entendre* – but I cannot claim to be able to remember any particular talk, any more than I can remember the sermons so faithfully preached along the Ridgeway at St Paul's where my family went to Church. In reality I only decided that God might be calling me to be a priest during my final year at Oxford. In the meantime, whilst my cousins (the Wrights and the Haileys) went to Mill Hill School, I and my brothers (Philip and Geoffrey) went to Marlborough College.

My first degree in History and Economics at Trinity, Oxford was followed by a second one in Theology during my training at Wycliffe Hall. A four year curacy in Bradford preceded five years back at Wycliffe training the next generation of Ordinands. During that time I had married Sarah and the first two of our three children were born in Oxford prior to our move to Kent in 1984.

In Margate I served as the Vicar of Holy Trinity for just over nine years and then I joined the staff of Archbishop George Carey at Lambeth Palace and worked with him as his Chaplain for seven years from 1993-2000. That period of my life was both fascinating and frustrating. It meant that I experienced some of the best and worst of the Church in many

different parts of the world – from the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda, to the bravery of Christians in China, to the exuberance of young people in Sabah, to the humility of those building peace in Mozambique. Back at home I was closely involved in many of the great national events of those years, whether Princess Diana’s funeral or the Millennium Celebrations and I was given an OBE for the work I did with the Government and other faith communities on the latter. Yet at the same time, I also experienced at first hand the mess we can get ourselves into as Christians and it was sad that some problems remained so intractable.

And so to my present job here in Oxfordshire. The title, Bishop of Dorchester, does, of course, cause endless misunderstandings as I have to explain that my See takes its name from Dorchester on Thames (where St Birinus, the first Bishop of Dorchester, set up his base in 635AD) rather than its rather more famous namesake in Dorset.

Working under the Bishop of Oxford I have day-to-day responsibility for about 200 parishes and 140 clergy (paid and unpaid) together with the thousands of volunteers who work in the churches of our County. Much of my time is spent doing very obviously ecclesiastical things but much of what I particularly enjoy is working at the interface of the Church and our wider society. Very often I find I can act as an ‘honest broker’ bringing together different parts of the County’s life and showing something, I hope, of the love of Christ and the nature of the kingdom of God as I do so.

As a job it is endlessly fascinating, even if it has its problems as well as its joys. When I arrived at Belmont I had no

idea that this was the direction my life would take but, looking back, I would not want to change very much of it. Looking to the next generation considering their futures it is a job I would warmly commend and, who knows, the next Belmontian to become a bishop might be one of the first of our female ones.

Colin Fletcher ■

■ Time for a Change of Bowling

Adrian Williams reflects on 11 years as OBA’s Hon Secretary and Treasurer



Adrian Williams

There are two sorts of job that feature in the public eye. There are the jobs like President of the United States, or Member of Parliament, for which people will compete so savagely that you are bound to wonder whether the defects of character they exhibit in their struggle disqualify them *ipsis factis* from holding office. And there are jobs like

Treasurer of the Village Fête which, when the call comes to fill it, cause people to become absorbed in a study of their fingernails or move them to declare that there is a lamentable gap in their keyboard skills.

Honorary Secretary and Treasurer of the Old Belmontian Association falls squarely into the second category. But, since a nice-seeming chap by the name of Christopher Funnell had just put his hand up when Tim Bunyard called for a new Chairman at the Association's Fourth AGM on 5 July 1998, it seemed only fair that someone should also volunteer when Tim invited us to follow suit for the offices of Hon Secretary and Treasurer. The Minutes record that "...after a pregnant pause and some tentative questions about the nature of the compatibility of computer records... Adrian Williams offered himself for election. He was promptly proposed by Matthew Baldwin..."

Of course I should have known (after a career that had involved computers for most of the previous 40 years) that any assurance concerning the compatibility of computer records needed to be followed by Due Diligence before acceptance. So a manual set-up of the database on my own computer was the first task that faced me. No fault of Ian Wicks, the outgoing Secretary — how was he to know what sort of idiosyncratic system I was running? And to be fair, with that mountain climbed, the road was smoother thereafter. A bonus was that the nice-seeming chap elected as our Chairman turned out to be nice indeed. The rest, as they say, is History.

Membership stood at about 50 in those days. The Committee ramped up this figure substantially by doing a

large mailshot and offering free membership for a year, reaching a membership-level of about 250 at the start of the Millennium. That figure has settled back to about 220 now. At this level, it's possible to fill the envelopes with the invitations to Old Belmontians' Day and label them and stamp them, in the time it takes to listen to *Götterdämmerung*.

Not that it's the chore of envelope-stuffing that has moved me to stand down at last. Indeed, the twice-yearly journey over to Belmont to see through the dispatch of the spring and autumn mailings has been one of the pleasures of the job for me, and this is a good opportunity to record my appreciation of the help given to me across the years by the staff in the School office and a succession of enthusiastic gap-students from South Africa who, I am sure, would have much preferred to be out of doors doing rugby or cricket-coaching.

But it did seem to me, as I wrote myself the birthday card that Old Belmontians receive when they reach a Serious Birthday, that it was a little unseemly for the membership, especially those at the younger end, to have their Association's affairs looked after by someone who was just about to turn 70. I am not so Ageist as to think that administrative capability necessarily begins to flag with advancing years; but I had become aware, as I floundered among the increasingly complicated demands of the information-technology world, that it was time for a change of bowling.

So it is with enormous optimism that I look forward to seeing the Association's administration managed by someone who is far more able than

I am to use technology to best advantage. The hardest part of this kind of job, actually, is to find one's successor. When Christopher Funnell decided to stand down as Chairman, I was delighted that David Short could be persuaded to succeed him. Now, if all has gone at the AGM as I had hoped (as I write, the AGM is two months in the future), Heather Baim will have been elected to the Committee and is now your Honorary Secretary and Treasurer. I am deeply grateful to her for agreeing to take over from me; I cannot think of anyone more capable.

Heather will doubtless seize the opportunity to do things differently, and better. I envisage swathes of OBA data whizzing (securely) around the country on the internet, with the eventual intention, perhaps, of dispensing altogether with a separate OBA database because the Foundation's database (remotely accessed) can do all that I did and more. I'm not saying this *will* happen; I merely say that it will become a practicable possibility, now that you have got someone in post who doesn't need to go and lie down for a spell after attempting a file-backup operation.

I wish Heather every success, and as much pleasure and fulfilment as I have enjoyed in being your Honorary Secretary and Treasurer for the past 11 years.

Adrian Williams ■

■ Going the Distance



James Ellen and his tent

Last year, *The Belmontian* reported on **James Ellen's** plan to walk from John O'Groats to Land's End without a break, taking in Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon along the way. **Adrian Williams** finally caught up with him to learn more.

James — You are now in the record books as the first person to complete this walk — End to End and taking in the Three Peaks — as one continuous slog. Why did you do it?

The idea was hatched quite innocently really. I was sitting with my family talking about what I might get up to in my Gap Year and then the idea of John O'Groats to Land's End came up. It was eventually decided that adding the Three Peaks was what the trip needed to make it a real challenge.

Was there any moment when you said to yourself, "This is horrid, and I'm hating it — why did I ever get myself into it?" If so, how did you cope with those moments (as you clearly did, since you finished the walk)?

The clearest moment when I thought something like that was during my second week, moving down from Inverness to Fort William. My body was in a pretty sore state, particularly my feet and I was carrying much more kit than I needed to. At that stage, I was seriously contemplating reaching Fort William and getting a train home. Whenever it became like that it was simply a case of focusing on getting to the next checkpoint, not worrying about what was ahead, and enjoying the trip as it happened. There is no better motivation than knowing even when it gets really hard; you can still make your destination.

You reported in *Martlet Issue 47* that your brother Stuart had climbed Ben Nevis with you. Did you have company for other parts of the journey, or were you mostly on your own?

I was predominantly by myself. However, as well as Ben Nevis, Stuart joined me for Scafell Pike, along with my uncle, and also did two days with me on the South West Coast Path along with his fiancée. My parents saw me off at John O'Groats. Friends and family put me up at a few stages along the way. All of those things certainly helped to break up the trip and gave me an incentive to make the legs and keep to my schedule.

Did you meet any interesting people along the way? What did

they think of what you were attempting?

I met so many fascinating, helpful and friendly people along the way and due to the people I met, I have so many great memories. Most of the people I met in Scotland thought I was mad and most of the people in the South West were just amazed at what I had done. It was always great fun telling people what I was doing and watching their faces change as they tried to comprehend the scale of the trip. Once I met a cyclist heading to John O'Groats who came from Muswell Hill! We stayed on the same campsite and shared some great stories and invaluable tips. Another end-to-end cyclist I met had previously walked the distance in only 2 months, amazingly fast. It was a real inspiration to meet others who had experienced similar journeys and they were a great source of support, even in the brief moments we met.

Did you have a back-up team at home who could advise you about the route ahead, re-supply you with new socks, Kendal Mint Cake and so on?

I have never been a big fan of Kendal Mint cake but I was certainly glad of a few fresh socks when the time came! The route had been planned ahead of time. I had made the decision to do that so that I didn't have to worry about it whilst I was on the move. However the biggest help came from my mother who was fantastic in helping me book and find accommodation for the night, whether it is the nearest campsite, Youth Hostel etc. sometimes even arranging things a matter of minutes before I arrived. It was great to know that she was helping me out back at home. My whole family was fantastic in helping

work out alternatives when the plan changed beyond what I could sort out with only a map and a few notes. I don't think you can appreciate trainers quite as much until you've spent every day for several weeks in boots.

Route planning must have been quite a challenge. No walker cares to hike along a busy A-road that has no path beside it. How did you cope with that? Did you manage to get off the road much? Did you need to call on the map-reading skills that you would have doubtless acquired in the CCF?

Unfortunately, the first week was spent mainly on A-roads, which wasn't too bad in the very north of Scotland but once I reached the towns, walking down a busy A road on the grass verge became very interesting. Whenever possible I took prominent footpaths such as the Great Glen Way, West Highland Way, Cumbria Way, Offa's Dyke Path and so on. It was fantastic to be able to enjoy the walking, scenery and all of the sights and sounds without worrying about whether a 10 ton lorry was coming towards you or not. Most of the navigation was done by using the method of micro-navigation and using the landmarks and my GPS for maintaining and checking my course. The CCF did teach me all of those skills and it is now great to know that I am inspiring others to understand how valuable it can be to be able to navigate yourself confidently in any situation.

And finding accommodation: was that all pre-arranged, or did you rely on finding B&B at the end of each day?

As the route had been planned in advance, the places where I was going to stop were also planned. As the

majority of my stays were in campsites, many sites would say 'no problem, there will definitely be space' as the size of my tent was very small and I was usually only staying for a single night. Rest days, of which I had 1 a week, were planned in B and B's or Hostels or similar in order to give myself a good roof and space to administrate myself, do washing etc. And just give myself a soft bed for a change.

How big was your backpack, and what kit did you carry in it?

I carried a 75-litre Macpac Bergen, which was a fantastic bit of kit. I lined the inside with a large canoe drybag and also used my second small drybag as a day sac on days off. I had 3 pairs of socks and underwear, 1 pair of lightweight trousers which could be made into shorts, 1 thermal top, 1 light weight t-shirt for walking, 2 t-shirts, 1 lightweight jumper, 1 softie jacket, waterproofs (slightly thermal, trousers could be worn when washing walking trousers or when relaxing), flip flops (for showering and relaxing in the evenings), cooker and fuel, small self inflatable lightweight roll mat, sleeping bag, travel pillow, 1-man tent, pen knife, small cool bag, maps, map-case, compass, GPS device, map-measurer, pen/pencil/notebook, iPod, camera, solar charger, water bottle, additional roll-up water-carrier, first-aid kit, toilet roll, wash kit, mess tins, drying cloth (small) and, most importantly, a spork¹! With regards to laundry, I tended to wash clothing only on rest days when I had the ability to wash and dry things comfortably.

Do you have any advice to pass on to aspiring long-distance walkers?

My biggest advice would be to put in a lot of effort into the preparation. The

¹A piece of plastic cutlery that has a spoon at one end and a fork, with a serrated edge for cutting at the other end.

more preparation you do, the less you have to worry about things when you are actually on the journey. Route planning is key and having chosen my route before-hand allowed me to just follow what I had planned and make minor adjustments rather than spend long hours planning my next day. Getting used to your kit is another key issue, particularly knowing where everything is in your Bergen and what the best and most comfortable way of packing it is. I spent a lot of time practising how to put up my tent in a variety of conditions. Know your walking speed when you are fresh and also when you are tired. And finally, get walking. There is no substitute for experience. Finally, just go for it! Decide to do it and stick to your guns, no matter how hard it gets.

As well as the exhilaration of actually completing their journey, long-distance walkers sometimes find exhilaration along the way. Did you have any such moments — a particular view, a “half-way point moment” or someone coming through on your mobile with a message to cheer you up?

I distinctly remember one moment. I was on the West Highland Way and the previous day had been one of the worst days. I had walked up and over the Devil's Staircase, the steepest point on the WHW and it had rained all day from start to finish. I was soaked to the skin but as I started on the road the following day I saw some of the most amazing views as I moved out of Glencoe. I remember thinking to myself that this was fantastic. I was miles from anywhere and anyone, in one of the most spectacular places in the UK and better still I had walked here and better still, I had planned, prepared and done it all myself. It was

an incredibly exhilarating and proud moment.

Your website

(www.the3peaksjogle.co.uk) shows an impressive list of sponsors. They must have been pleased with you. What can you tell us about the support they gave you?

They were all fantastic. I was supplied t-shirts by Regatta, a sleeping bag and softie jacket by Snugpak, my Bergen was supplied by Cotswold who also offered discounts in their stores along the way which was a great help when I needed extra items. Wayfarer foods supplied me with energy bars that kept me going throughout the weeks. Channel7media created the website for me and financial support was offered to me by the Old Millhillian's Club, the Mill Hill School CCF and Alleyn's School CCF. Also Bryher Campsite and the Isles of Scilly Steamship Company kindly offered to cover my costs to reach and stay in the Isles of Scilly for a few days at the end of my trip. All of their support took great pressure off me particularly when it came to acquiring the equipment I needed, without which the trip might never have happened.

You were doing this in support of two charities: The Army Benevolent Fund and Cancer Research UK. Now for what people like to call The Bottom Line, James: how much did you manage to raise for them?

With all the help and generosity of those who supported the charities and me I raised £1,182.50 for the ABF and £5,468.16 for CRUK. A further £856.70 went to support the Mill Hill School CCF Corps of Drums.

Any future plans for epic journeys?

Oh yes, it's definitely got my imagination going. In April I am running in the Tresco Marathon with my brother, Stuart, also an Old Belmontian. I also plan to do the Welsh 3000s challenge this summer and then take a trip through Europe and Scandinavia with some friends one of whom is another old Belmontian. I also intend to travel further afield and on foot but in a different environment; yet to be decided.

It sounds as if we were very lucky to catch you in time for this interview, James. Congratulations on a magnificent achievement. And not just the physical bit, but on the fund-raising side too. OBA members will be proud to be associated with someone who has done so much. A cheque for the Association's donation to one of your nominated Charities will be in the post tonight.

(And members who feel like following suit on their own account can donate online by visiting James's website, www.the3peaksjogle.co.uk)

**James Ellen was interviewed
by Adrian Williams** ■

■ Editorial

Christopher Funnell edited "The Belmontian" for over a decade. The Association owes him a great debt of gratitude for his sterling work over those years. It was with great trepidation that I accepted the invitation to follow in his footsteps and whilst I will do my best to carry on the good work, "The Belmontian" is of course your magazine.

Consequently in order that it may continue to develop and flourish it needs your input.

I wish to encourage contributions from all.

Whether they be reminiscences, additions to the reminiscences of others, news of former pupils and staff, photographs, suggestions for the future etc.

I look forward to hearing from you!
'Et Virtutem Et Musas'.

Lynda Mason ■

■ Mrs Robin Corbett



Lynn Duncan and Robin Corbett

Last summer saw an end of an era when Robin Corbett retired as Matron of Belmont, a post she held for twenty years, starting shortly after Belmont's transition to a day school only.

As many people know Robin shared for many years the task of running Winterstoke House with her husband Tim and her connections with the Foundation went back to 1975. She has therefore seen more than one generation through the system, including her own two sons.

Robin's qualities as a medical practitioner and her sympathetic manner were a strength of the School and reassuring to pupils, parents and staff. We all wish Robin and Tim a happy retirement and would welcome any memories of "Matron".

Lynda Mason ■

■ The Association's New Hon Secretary and Treasurer

Heather Baim's association with the Mill Hill School Foundation goes back to 1983. In 1986 she joined Belmont as Master's Secretary to Gordon Smith.

Heather writes:

"After three years as Registration Secretary at Mill Hill School, I was honoured to be called into the then Bursar, Ted Webb, to be informed that the Master's Secretary at Belmont was leaving and advising me to apply. Three months later in April 1986 I joined my two sons, Spencer and Miles who were then in Years 7 and 3 respectively and worked with Gordon Smith and then John Hawkins. I left Belmont in 2002 after 19 years in the Foundation, as my husband, Michael, and I moved to the Bedfordshire countryside and the commute was long and tiring.

However Belmont was and is still in my blood. It is therefore with delight that I rejoin the Belmont community as Honorary Secretary and Treasurer to the Old Belmon-tian Association. After so long in the Founda-tion, I feel I will know many Old Belmon-tians and they will, I hope, remember me. I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at future reunions and to hearing all your news".

■ Is There Life After Belmont? (A Personal Reflection)

Living on the South East edge of England, the rest of the world can easily pass one by. Attending this year's Prep School Confer-ence in Liverpool after an absence of five years was a most enjoyable experience and I was minded to consider how life had changed for me (and Margaret) in the inter-vening years, including three fulfilling years of retirement.

Our decision to retire to "Planet Thanet" was made back in the 1980s when we bought our current house and when we finally chose to leave North London, sad though that was; it was more a case of returning "home" to a very familiar land-scape.

For a quarter of a century running prep schools had been our life. Much has changed since I first attended national con-ference in 1981 as a new head. Had I missed it? Was it the correct decision to finish when we did? Had our quality of life improved? IS THERE INDEED LIFE AFTER BELMONT?

I am not a believer in going back; certainly I feel strongly that retired heads should keep well clear of their former schools; "the king (queen) is dead; long live the king!" is an adage which I support. So what made me return to conference this year; I did want to say farewell to retiring friends, then there was the lure of the City of Culture as well as the opportunity to play Conference golf plus a round at Royal Birkdale.

So was it worth the long trip and expense to a "pensioned has been"? Definitely; the conference itself was a time to renew old friendships (I was struck by the number of my contemporaries who have the energy and enthusiasm to still be running schools) and I was delighted to meet the newer members of the association; the city of Liver-pool is in splendid order, my bus pass allowed me a free tour of the city and a concessionary ride on the Mersey ferry; Monday evening's function at the Mersey-side Maritime Museum was a relaxed occa-sion, ideal for meeting and greeting and the opulent surroundings of St. George's Hall provided a memorable venue for the dinner. However, the highlight of the week for me was the worship, and in particular the sing-ing in the stunning atmosphere of the Met-ropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King; that was the moment I realised what I had missed these past five years.

But... there is life after Belmont, and life in abundance. I was fortunate to be let down fairly gently into retirement with a year's additional headship and a job as the ISC rep on the General Teaching Council plus some head's appraisals.

Margaret, on the other hand, spent most of those first two years caring for her elderly parents, one of our main reasons for coming here when we did. Since her mother died three years ago Margaret has become more and more active in the Canterbury Diocese and in the Thanet Deanery, as a selector for others wishing to enter Lay Reader ministry. She continues to preach, take services, including funerals and organises the Pastoral visiting in our large parish, particularly to the 19 care homes in Westgate and Birchington. She is soon to become District Chairman of Inner Wheel, covering Kent and Sussex. Last year she somehow found the time and energy to complete the London Marathon walk for Breast Cancer!

For me the real benefits in retirement have been:

- The ability to take control of my life
- The chance to spend more time with family and especially the grandchildren (Fergus, 10 in June; Hector, 7 in September and Artemis, 4 in April)
- A massive reduction in stress levels
- Exercise, in my case cycling and golf

I feel fitter and freer than I have for many years yet I believe that I am using to the full the skills I learned and developed as a Head. I am better off than I thought I would be - do please remember that good health is preferable to wealth – and I am free to take up new challenges and opportunities (e.g. this year I helped to organise an open air pop concert, with amongst others Suzy Quatro).

As the Chairman of Governors of an IAPS school and a member and frequent attendee at District gatherings I am able to keep in touch with IAPS. I am also able to devote quality time to church and local charities. I have recently been appointed Vice-Captain of the Old Millhillians Golf Society, which is sure to bring me in touch with Old Belmontians.

Life after IAPS is certainly rewarding; it is most definitely enjoyable but above all it has allowed me the freedom to give something back to society after a career of real fulfilment. We have been greatly blessed with our friends here in Birchington but we would always welcome a visit from members past and present of the Belmont community.

Over the past two years we have welcomed friends from far and wide to help us share two landmark birthdays and we are now preparing to celebrate our Ruby Wedding this summer.

John Hawkins ■

(Master of Belmont 1991-2004)

The Old Belmontian Association

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Chairman

David M. V. Short

Committee

Carole Adler (Deputy Head), Heather Baim (Hon Secretary and Treasurer), Lynn Duncan (Head of Belmont), Matthew Frise, George Nosworthy, Nick Priestnall, Anthony Ward, Stephen Wright.

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