



Belmont Full for September 2010

▪ Head's Report to the Old Belmontians March 2010

The academic year 2009-2010 saw the return of the selection of prefects in the School, led by a Head Boy and, for the first time ever, a Head Girl. Jacob Locke-Gottel and Amy Webb have been outstanding in the role and as they finished their six month appointment, were replaced by Alexander Matraxia and Gabrielle Sanchez who will complete the year.

The School Council has been very active and suggested a number of changes to help the smooth running of the School and the selection of Year 8 for prefect status (rather than all Year 8 being prefects) was top of their agenda in 2009. Prefects are now identified by the wearing of white shirts and a special tie, selected by the School Council from a range of designs. Another of their wishes was to have more career information given to them at Belmont rather than waiting until they move to the senior school, so if any Old Belmontian would be interested in speaking to Year 8 about their career, please get in touch with me via email:
lduncan@belmontschool.com

The Houses have been very busy competing in the major sports, but also chess, fives, drama and cross country



Darren Gough with Lynn Duncan at Parents' Day

to name a few. At the end of the summer term in 2009, the Saxons were triumphant, some way ahead of the Danes in second place and the Jutes were a very sorry fourth, but here we are coming to the end of the spring term 2010 and the Angles are currently in 1st position, the Danes second and the Saxons 3rd. The ebb and flow of the activities points brings endless amusement and excitement to the children and is serious preparation for the triumphs and disappointments they will face in adult life, especially for the Jutes!

Our major sporting achievement this year was the U13 rugby team reaching the Middlesex Cup final for the second

year running; although they did not manage to hold onto the Cup they put up a brave fight to the finish, finally losing 27-12 to Halliford School. A group of 30 boys and girls spent the half term holiday in February in Holland, playing friendly matches against local schools and clubs at football and hockey respectively. They arrived to find the pitches covered in a foot of snow, but such is the quality and quantity of sports facilities near Eindhoven, all the matches were able to be moved indoors at the last minute. Our next major sporting tour is being planned for Easter 2011, when we hope to take a party to St Kitts to play cricket and netball.

As I reported last year to the Old Belmontians, the economic climate is still very difficult for parents and we have, sadly, had to say goodbye to a number of lovely children. At the moment however, we are expecting to be full for September 2010, with again a couple of very able children coming in on 100% free places through the bursary scheme. We are proud to be able to give deserving children the opportunity to come and be educated at such a wonderful school; for some it could be a life changing experience.

Finally, every school's success depends very largely on the quality, dedication and professionalism of its staff. We are lucky at Belmont in having some exceptional teachers who have dedicated their careers to the advancement of the education and progress of the children in their care. We are losing two such teachers this

coming summer, Mr Duncan Elder (games) and Mrs Carole Adler (English and Deputy Head). Both are retiring after 20 and 25 years respectively. The School will be marking their retirement at the end of the summer term with a social evening and presentations to wish them every happiness for the future.

■ **Lynn Duncan**



Girls Sports Festival - Rugby

■ **Editorial**

This edition of "The Belmontian" features members' recollections of the School's time spent in Cockermonth during the Second World War. It was therefore a sad coincidence that after receiving these memoirs Cockermonth again featured in the national news after suffering severe flooding. As a result our treasurer, Mrs Heather Baim, sent a donation on behalf of the Old Belmontians to the Flood Relief Fund and engaged in correspondence with a Cockermonth Belmontian, reproduced in this newsletter. It is interesting to note that Belmont's stay is still remembered after nearly seventy years.

Although two years away, 2012 will be a significant year for all Old Belmontians as it marks the Centenary of the School. Plans are already afoot, but if anyone wishes to help or contribute ideas please contact Heather Baim or myself.

I hope you enjoy this edition and thank you to all the contributors and to Anthony Ward, whose technical expertise transfers my raw copy into the finished item.

▪ **Lynda Mason**

▪ **Letters from Joe Milburn**

Dear Mrs Baim,

It was kind of you to enquire about the floods and to send best wishes. Fortunately our property is several hundred feet above the flood plains so we were OK. But the dreadful destruction and the loss of the bridges makes life uncomfortable with a strange sense of guilt at having got away with it personally.

The loss of so many bridges has split Allerdale in two. Six major road bridges over the Derwent have been destroyed or rendered unusable for some months to come. There is only one road bridge usable between Keswick and the sea at Workington. Naturally for much of the day this is choked with traffic and almost any journey which entails crossing the river needs an extra hour or more adding to it. Two bridges over the Cocker have been destroyed or are out of action. We in the valley are hardly a priority, so I suspect it will be

a good year before we give up long detours.

Those who were with me at Belmont (Cockermouth 41-46) would weep if they could see the lovely old town now. Main Street and those adjacent to it were flooded to a depth of 8 feet, i.e. up to the first floor. The damage to the shops, businesses, hotels and the like is colossal and as I write in December no one yet knows the extent of the structural damage. This was not a case of normally arising flood waters, the rivers in full spate flowed through the town creating enormous pressures on any structures (some of which are very old). But the bounce back of the people is astonishing! In less than a week fourteen shops or businesses had been relocated in empty properties above the flood level including two 'shopping malls' in the old auction mart and abattoir. Other examples are shops squeezing up to make room in their premises for flooded out shops. There are countless examples of this sort of generosity. The town has really pulled together and is pulling itself up with its own boot straps long before government assistance kicks in. But this is the West Cumbrian way. The public around the country (indeed the World) have been generous and supportive. In no more than a week £1.5 million had been raised for immediate relief work by donations to the Cumbria Community Foundation.

So there it is. Through immense effort new temporary shops and businesses are being put up.

Kind regards, Joe Milburn

Dear Mrs Baim,

Thank you very much for your letter. The Mayor of Cockermouth is grateful and is touched by the donation made by the Old Belmontian Association. The generous gesture comes as a 'blast from the past', as a young Cockermouth boy he remembers us being at St Helens. The funds will be distributed directly to flood victims in the town.

It really is a wonderful gesture from an Association with, by now, a distant connection with the people of the town. The Mayor, Stephen Coates, is very grateful to the Association. By all means use the rather inadequate description of the flooding as you see fit, if you feel folk are interested. There are not very many of us left!! However the 'bounce back' goes on and only tomorrow the Mayor is opening a 'mall' of new temporary shops in place until Main Street properties are restored in six months or so (located in the old abattoir!).

Kind regards, Joe Milburn.

▪ **Some memories of Belmont sixty years ago**

I started at Belmont in the autumn term of 1947 aged nine. The entrance was by examination, which I had taken earlier at the school. The fact that I passed was both a surprise and a delight to my parents and to me. The difference between Belmont and my previous school, Birkenhead Prep, could not have been greater. The

school at Birkenhead was situated in a series of dark Victorian houses with only a small garden to play in, although we did have the use of the senior school playing fields.

By comparison, Belmont was a paradise. Light airy classrooms, large beautiful grounds and joy of joys, the extensive woods and pond plus so much freedom. The ethos of the school founded in 1912 by Rooker Roberts and carried on by his son Arthur Roberts, was that education not only consisted of academic excellence but also the development of the whole person. The study of nature and wildlife, the playing of games and the encouragement of the love of music and drama, all these were as important as the 3 R's. For me it was like placing a dried up wilting plant into fresh, watered soil – I loved it.

As a day boy I was in the minority, the school being three quarters boarding. However, my father insisted that my life should be as near to the boarding routine as possible except that I slept at home. I did not get home until after 6pm and then had to do my prep, getting up at 7am the next morning for an early start at school. There was no time for any outside activities except on Sundays and then only after the obligatory church service.

Life at Belmont was fun. In the morning break we all gathered in the playground where marble shies were set up, some with over a dozen marbles in them. Some marbles were more prized than others, the best being "smokeys" or "twists," and at the bottom of the pile was the humble "bottlewasher". We

kept our marbles in old cotton flour bags. Then there were the clay fights in the woods after lunch. The ownership of the claymines was jealously guarded, some being better than others. We took up positions on either side of the “ravine” just behind the chapel, cut our hazel or willow sticks, attached the lumps of clay to the end and wham – shot them over to the other side! It was usually boarders v. day boys. We could also build dens in the woods having just received permission from the Headmaster in the form of a piece of paper with our names on, signed by him. This paper was then attached to the den to protect it from attack – it hardly ever worked!

In the spring we hunted in the woods for pignuts. These were small fibrous bulb-like roots, which lay about two to three inches deep in the earth. They were rather tough but sweet to eat: anything tasting sweet in those far off days of rationing was greatly prized.

It was whilst playing in the woods one very foggy winter’s afternoon that we heard a dull thud followed by the noise of clattering dustbins. Everyone fell silent wondering what could have caused such an eerie noise. Later on we heard that a plane had crashed on the top of Highwood Hill, narrowly missing the school.

As I previously mentioned, music and drama played a large part in our lives. Under Maurice Lanyon we had music appreciation lessons and were encouraged to play a musical instrument even if only the triangle (my apologies to any triangle players!) The

Chapel Choir was of a very high standard and several records were made of their performances. To train our voices we had to sing “cuckoo notes” so that Dr Whale could hear them in his study at Mill Hill School along The Ridgeway. Poor Dr Whale! Plays were performed either on the stage of the old wooden gym or outside the changing rooms down by the outdoor swimming pool.



Belmont Pool 1947

The usual sports were played, football and rugby in the winter and cricket, tennis and track events in the summer. The highlight of the year was Sports Day in the summer term with its races, speeches and presentation of prizes. However, for us boys an even greater highlight was the tea that followed. Unimaginable delights were laid out on

pristine white linen table cloths: mountains of sandwiches, sticky buns covered with white icing, cakes, biscuits and best of all, Neapolitan ice creams. Mountains of wonderful food, but of course we had to wait until parents and guests had had their fill – then whoosh, a scrum of boys descended to Hoover up the rest!



David Short

Finally, I remember the first assembly taken by a new master at the beginning of term. His name was David Gee and to us he looked middle aged but was probably only in his early 20s. We all assembled as usual in fine weather on the playground lined up in our respective Houses. The excitement and noise was intense. Suddenly Mr Gee appeared in front of us and waited for silence – none came. He called out “Quiet!” The row continued. Finally he shouted “Silence!” A hush fell over us. “Right” he said, “You will all go to your classrooms and write out the first chapter of Genesis.” Consternation all round. Bibles were suddenly at a premium (of course we all were meant to have one in our desks). It took ages and Mr Gee never had any trouble again!

■ David Short

■ Old Millhillians’ News

Congratulations to our Chairman, David Short, who has been combining his Old Belmontian responsibilities with the prestigious position of President of the Old Millhillians. He will shortly be visiting the southern hemisphere as part of his presidential duties and we wish him and Juliet a very enjoyable trip.

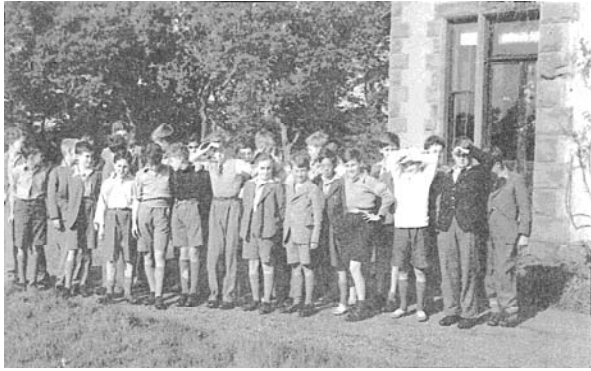
■ Belmont in the 40’s

With articles in the last Belmontian about Belmont in the 20’s, 30’s, 50’s and 60’s I am prompted to attempt my own contribution about Belmont in the 40’s.

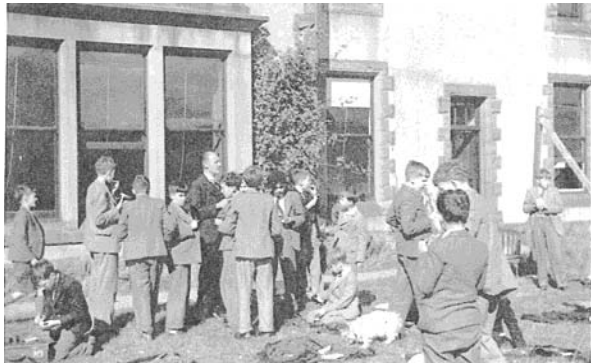
I was at Belmont for three very happy years from 1943 to 1945. At that time Mill Hill was evacuated to St Bees in Cumberland and Belmont was out-based at Cockermouth about 18 miles away. There was thus very little contact between the two schools but we did attend Foundation Day at St. Bees in 1944. Why we went then but not in 1943 or 1945 I really don’t remember. It was not, of course, an expedition to be undertaken lightly. There were no cars and no coaches available for hire. Even getting to Cockermouth railway station would be a major undertaking. Probably we went on bicycles or we walked and the train journey itself took the best part of two hours.



Cockermouth 1939



Cockermouth 1939



Cockermouth 1939

The house we occupied in Cockermouth is now called Wyndham House though in my day it was known as St Helens. It is about a mile east of the town on the old road to Keswick. It is still there today, with its distinctive red roof, and not much altered although it is now the administration centre for a holiday park and the grounds are full of static caravans. On a recent visit there I found the owner very obliging and he let me wander around the building seeking old haunts. I even climbed the front stairs from the entrance hall to the first floor landing for the first time in my life. This was strictly forbidden in my time. We boys always had to use the back stairs!

Also still very much unchanged is the lodge which can be seen quite easily from the road and which was used as an overflow dormitory.

The headmaster was Arthur Roberts, son of Rooker Roberts. I remember him as a very handsome man, full of laughter and with a lovely sense of humour. There were two other members of staff who were there throughout my time. One was Robert Chatterton who taught Latin. When Belmont returned to London in 1946 Bob and his wife stayed on at St Helens and attempted to establish their own prep school there. But it was not a success and I heard later that they went to live in Lincolnshire and he took up farming. The other permanent member of staff was the redoubtable Mrs Clark. She was married to an Englishman but she herself was French through and through. She was a charming lady but I never knew her first name. Needless to say she taught French and a very good teacher she was too. She also taught at the Secondary school in Cockermouth and I believe she stayed on there after the war. Cockermouth's gain but Belmont's loss. One of my clearest recollections of her is coming to school on "D" day with tears in her eyes and telling us with great pride that "zee allies have landed in Normandee".

In relating this story you have to realise that in those days, unlike today, there was no television, no transistor radios, no mobile phones and trunk phone calls were a luxury. In fact we boys had virtually no communication with the outside world at all. Occasionally we

might see a newspaper but in any case we were more interested in the football results than in the progress of the war. The spread of news was almost always by word of mouth.

The remainder of the staff were all only with us for short periods of time. Masters (and their wives) and mistresses came and went according to the fortunes of war. Some were obviously glad, however briefly, to spend some time in the relative peace of Cumberland. One at least had been invalidated out of the services. Then again some came back from retirement to fill in gaps that appeared all too frequently. Maintaining a full complement of staff must have been a nightmare for poor old Arthur but we boys were never conscious of the difficulties he had to face.

Another of Arthur's problems was the electricity supply. The house was not connected to the mains and power was provided by a petrol driven generator which was somewhat unreliable. He usually managed to get it going again when it went wrong but I do remember having to do prep by the light of acetylene lamps on several occasions.

When Belmont first came to Cumberland at the beginning of the war most of the boys were from London and the South and at the beginning and end of term the LMS railway used to lay on special carriages between Euston and Cockermouth. Arthur used to travel down to London the previous day in order to accompany the group on their journey north. But gradually the

scenario changed as the older boys from the south went on to the senior school to be replaced more and more by boys from the north including a few from Cockermouth itself and the arrangement with the railway company was (I think) discontinued. Nearly all were boarders but one or two were day boys. Presumably the day boys came to school on bicycles. Or walked. I really don't remember. There was certainly no other way of getting to and from the school. As far as I can recall the total number of boys (no girls!) was about 40.

There was a field in the school grounds known as Big Acre which acted as quite a good rugby pitch even though it was on a bit of a slope. There was also a smaller field known as Little Acre on which it was possible to play other games including soccer. For cricket, however, we had to use the Cockermouth cricket club ground at the far end of the town. The only way of getting to and from the ground was by bicycle.



Cockermouth 1939

Mention of bicycles brings me to one of the really outstanding features of life at Belmont. We were all encouraged to bring bicycles to school and we were

allowed out of the school bounds on bicycles provided we were accompanied by at least one other boy. More popular, however, were the organised rides which took place on nearly every Saturday and on some Wednesday afternoons as well. We never realised how lucky we were. There was almost no road traffic apart from the buses and they only went every hour at most. If by any chance we saw a car we assumed it was the local doctor out on his rounds. So we had almost exclusive use of all the roads round Cockermouth including a large part of the Lake District. Keswick (12 miles away) was a favourite gathering point; there was a baker's shop in Lake Road which sold doughnuts and these helped to supplement the packed lunches provided by the school. Another occasional pastime in Keswick was going up to the railway station and goggling at the Roedean girls who were evacuated to Keswick and located in the Station Hotel. Honister, Newlands and Whinlatter were favourite routes back to Cockermouth. On many occasions this meant cycling back to Cockermouth along the shores of Crummock Water in the evening sun and ever since then Crummock has been my favourite lake.



Cockermouth 1939

The real highlight of the year was the four day tour when Arthur and Bob Chatterton would take a party of 8 senior boys on a cycle tour round the lakes with overnight accommodation in Youth Hostels. I went on two of these tours and I remember them with great pleasure. On both occasions we went over Wrynose and Hardknott Passes which at that time were not properly surfaced. The road over Wrynose had been used for tank training earlier in the war but by 1944 this was no longer taking place presumably because this was well after D Day. The cost of staying at a hostel was 2/6d a night. A shilling (5p) for the evening meal, a shilling for the night and sixpence for breakfast.

At least in the earlier years the boys who had enjoyed the facilities of the London Belmont were inclined to compare them unfavourably with the facilities at St Helens but on the whole we were happy to accept things as they were. The swimming pool for instance was a small open air affair with water supplied by the local stream. It was known to us as the "Stinker" but it seemed to be quite adequate for our purposes. No chlorination and no Health & Safety but no one ever suffered. We were also allowed on occasion to swim in the river Derwent in the grounds of Cockermouth Castle courtesy of Lord Leconfield.

I was a little surprised on joining the Old Belmontian Association to find that I recognised only one name apart from my own amongst the 220 members. This might be because I myself did not go on to Mill Hill. But it would seem that

those of us who were at the school in the Cockermouth years are, for whatever reason, reluctant to join which is a pity. For myself I have often thought that I ought to pay a visit to the “real” Belmont in London and maybe this summer (64 years later!) I will get there and have a look round. Making a comparison with what I experienced in the 1940’s would be interesting. I am sure the facilities now are of a very high standard. But all in all, and despite the unreliable electricity supply (and the Cumbrian weather), I really don’t think you could beat the Lake District environment which we were privileged to enjoy during those wartime years.

▪ **David Aston, 1943 - 1945**

▪ **Belmont in the 1940’s**

SETTING THE SCENE

I must confess that my original remit had been to write about life at Belmont during the latter years of the wartime evacuation to Cockermouth, but I had been seeking the means to broaden this, as only two of my five years were actually spent there. With the last edition of “The Belmontian” containing articles from the indomitable Bernard Queneau on Belmont in the 1920’s, from Brian Leicester on Belmont 1932-1936 and the Rt. Rev Colin Fletcher on the late 50’s, early 60’s, what better ‘in’ for me than – Belmont in the 1940’s.

Until fairly recently, my position as having been the only O.B. to join the school at Cockermouth but then to come down to Belmont N.W.7 was

unique, but I suppose that now that Sam Duckworth, albeit from Morpeth and Julian Horsley-Heather (who for our first year had had the bed next to mine in Dormy 8) have joined the Association, I am now only nearly.... OOPS ! Almost fell into that one! As anyone who was ever taught by the late and much respected Harold Alston will know, something is either unique or it is not unique – ‘unique’ cannot be qualified.

To this day I wince if I encounter a split infinitive or a preposition used to ‘end a sentence up with’ (yes, you’ve guessed it, Harold Alston again) and it had been palpable from this publication, time and time again, that those O.B s of that era who have developed a love of the English language, of literature, poetry, the theatre or of music, can and unfailingly do trace this back to the likes of the inspirational Harold Alston and, in his unassuming unobtrusive way, Maurice Lanyon. I can add to this the aesthetic Paul Haeffner for an interest in History, Miss Perret (pronounced Per-ray) for an abiding love of the traditional music of the British Isles and after, at Mill Hill, the choirmaster, H Berge.

I am sure that not one of us recognised this at the time, which leads me to the proposition that education must be a ‘slow burner’, a subtle, subliminal inculcation and it distresses me when an education, at any level – and we were so fortunate – is wasted, simply because it is not perceived as having an immediate relevance.

It is some conceit that we should return to a place that holds fond memories with a sense of outrage, we find that in the

meantime someone should have had the audacity to make changes and, with this in mind, Ladies and Gentlemen, I present to you: Wyndham's Caravan Park. Big Acre, the football field, is now a mass of caravans, extensions, awnings, cars, barbecues etc, and the school building itself, which does not seem to have been altered externally, has been converted into the admin H. Q. and private flats. Tragically, the precious woods, in which we played, scrapped, climbed trees for hours have been reduced to a series of caravan-bearing terraces. The old oak tree, which stood in splendid isolation in the field about 200 yards from the edge of Little Acre, the school boundary, and visible from Dormy 8, is long gone but nothing can change the magnificent view down to Grassmoor and the mountains on the Southern horizon.

There were three main differences between Belmont at Cockermouth and Belmont on return from evacuation (then, let alone now):-

1. There were less than 60 boys (and no girls)
2. The vast majority were boarders coming from as far afield as Northumberland to Southampton, Central Wales to Lowestoft
3. There was a war on.

Directly the war did not seem to have a great day to day impact on the running of the school, although I think I recall blackout covers being put in place after dark in the dining room. I am sure I had dispensed with the gas mask which hitherto had accompanied me

daily to school. But then by the time I joined (Sept. 1944) D-Day had already taken place, the theatre of operations had moved to Europe and the Far East and in retrospect I am surprised that I was so unconversant with the general progress of the war.

There were none of the troop movements (including U.S. personnel) which were commonplace in Kettering (Northants) where we were living at the time and I can remember seeing the sky full of flying Fortresses on daytime bombing missions, likewise planes towing gliders on training runs or airborne operations, my all-time favourite, the Mosquito and the thrill of seeing for the first time the twin-boom Lightning hurling through the sky.

Twice I remember waking up in the middle of the night under the dining room table and finding this so comical that, to the irritation of our mother, I promptly woke up my younger brother Adrian, until the last AGM our Association's Secretary.

We actually had an air raid shelter which we shared with our neighbours at No 101, the entrance being in their garden and the emergency escape hatch, a concrete square which fitted into a lip, in ours at No 103. However this shelter was always either calf deep in water or smelt disgustingly dank and in any event one day a friend of ours, nine year old Monica, stood on the hatch, it shattered beneath her and she fell through the aperture. So what price a direct hit from a Heinkel?

Nor, earlier, had we been entirely immune to the activities of the Hun in

Ruthin. A bomb was dropped on the outskirts, probably a German bomber which by accident or design had failed to find Liverpool. A local was heard to remark that they had been aiming for the railway, with visions of a furious Hitler, right index finger across moustache, left hand thumping the table in front of his quaking subordinates and 'Ve must at all costs eliminate ze Ruthin to Corwen railway'. Well, where Hitler failed, twenty years later Dr. Beeching succeeded.

My mother had had the good sense to take me up to the school on a visit preparatory to joining and I met Mr. And Mrs. A.E.R. Roberts, Nickey and an erratic dachshund by the name of Ding Dong. I can clearly remember entering past the gatehouse occupied by Mr. Chatterton, the sweep up the drive between rhododendron bushes, the bridge over the stream and the turn of the drive at the top of the bank to the school. It had a beauty and serenity and integrity all of its own and I am sure that having had a background in North Wales helped me to settle in quickly.

Nevertheless it was a robust place and, while I was at the quieter end of the spectrum, some of the boys really were a handful. The head of the school, de jure or de facto, was Alan Flutter, but in any school there is a clique of semi-rebels; the head of this clique was Hugh McLeod – and I was terrified of him, although in truth neither he nor anyone else were ever in any way malicious towards me; by and large we all seemed to get along very well together and it wasn't

unusual for most junior boys to be included in whatever game or activity was in progress. On arrival there was a whole new vocabulary to learn, such as 'roll call', 'assembly', 'confiscation', 'out of bounds', as well as the current school slang and a raft of new hymns, like 'When through the whirr of wheels and engines humming', 'Lord of all Hopefulness', 'Glad the I live am I' and 'Morning has broken', which I still have somewhere on an old Cat Stevens LP. With regret, I think that a lot of these have gone right off the radar, to be replaced by 'Lord of the Dance' etc. presumably lest, heaven forbid (if I am still allowed to say that) someone, somewhere, might be offended.

A long time ago, but right now it seems like yesterday and I hope to continue these reminiscences.

▪ **Gresham Williams**

▪ **Letter to "The Belmontian"**

Just by chance, I happened to look up Belmont School on the Internet, and saw your interesting article on Maurice Lanyon. I had forgotten his name, as we always called him 'Fish' and I thought it was an extraordinary coincidence that I should read an article on him. I thought he was called Fish when I was at Belmont around 1965-66 because, if we were misbehaving, he used to give us a 'fish crack' on our heads with his clenched knuckles. It did hurt! I remember his grunt too, funnily enough. Powerful characters in those days! I remember him being a big, solid man, slow and deliberate in his movements, with large hands (not

dissimilar to John Dykes Bower's hands, which I saw when auditioning for St Paul's Cathedral Choir School in 1964).

I am the organist of a local Church on the Welsh borders, but as a hobby only these days. I was Organ Scholar at St Lawrence College Ramsgate 1973-75, and my sons are at Hereford Cathedral School, so Fish must have had an influence there.

James Burnet was the Head Master in my time, a kind and extremely nice man of whom my mother always spoke highly. The late Patrick McGoohan, the original 'Prisoner' was a neighbour of ours (my mother was Head of Catering at Mill Hill School, and we lived in 'Cleveland' opposite the School). I remember Alistair and Andrew Turnbull very well (their father was a House Master at MHS at the time), and would like to get in contact with them. I had a crush on their sister Alison, although she probably never knew it, being 8!

■ **Nelson Whaley**



The Whaley Family at OBs day

After writing the above article Nelson and his family visited Belmont on Old Belmontians' Day. He very kindly played the organ at the Chapel service and as a result of his visit added on are some of his thoughts of that day:

I played the organ for last OB's service and the whole occasion was quite emotional for me as it brought back many memories. I was amazed to see that The Ridgeway has not changed at all, which surprised me given the 'change for changes sake' mentality we live in these days, including the outside of 'Cleveland', the house we lived in as children. It was also a trip down memory lane to see Northcote Lodge where Patrick McGoohan lived. They were certainly good times and brought back strong and fond memories for me.

■ **“So why do you want to do medicine then?”**

This is the question for which every medical school interview candidate knows they must have an answer prepared. Having struggled to find a unique way of explaining their desire within the confines of the 'personal statement' box on the UCAS form, eventually each one finds themselves in an interview, without the aid of a thesaurus or school careers advisor. A considerable number of those who, like me, left Belmont in 1992 to move on to Mill Hill chose to apply for medicine: Marc Dweck, Barry Rose, Sundeep Kalra, Matthew Welck. I can't recall from the inevitable discussions after interviews if they were asked.

My interview at the first institution was not a great success. I should perhaps have sought clarification when the interviewer asked me why I thought stockings might be worn in operating theatres. Clearly members of the surgical staff had a right to wear pretty much whatever they wanted underneath their scrubs, I reasoned, but this was clearly not the answer they were looking for. Perhaps it was to prevent or treat the varicose veins to which surgeons must surely be liable from standing at the operating table for so long? Almost as soon as I suggested this the penny dropped that the question was of course intended to test my understanding of the risks posed to the patient of deep vein thrombosis from prolonged recumbence. Things were not looking good.

Having received a polite letter of rejection I moved on to the next university where the one question that sticks in my mind is "So you didn't get in there? Well that means you must certainly be keen for us to offer you a place then?" I suppose I was and indeed they did, but finding myself already on an impromptu gap year I couldn't face going and withdrew to apply again the following year. This time I was armed with my A-Level results and a further twelve months of diverse activities to prove what a balanced and rounded individual I was. Things went a little better. I managed to provide a satisfactory answer to the question of how I could be sure that my sources for the pre-interview essay contained information that was 'true'

and there were no misunderstandings about compression hosiery.

There was an urban legend that the pre-clinical years at Cambridge were at some point in the recent past assessed and found to be the most demanding in the world in terms of the assimilation of factual knowledge required to pass. Though we knew this to be a myth there certainly did seem to be an awful lot coming at us at a frightening pace right from the outset. Anatomy especially involved so many questions: where does this nerve run, where does that muscle insert, why does that demonstrator insist on dissecting without wearing gloves? It was, however, the science that had really drawn me towards medicine and though those three years were tough they were fantastic fun. I'm sure many of my experiences at Belmont contributed to my interest in the science behind it all - how things work and more importantly how they go wrong. Aubrey Haigh's Major Magnet which intermittently appeared at the end of science lessons (surely it must be possible to pull those blocks of steel off the poles if it were just turned this way); the woods to be entered every afternoon for den-building and general exploration at a time when the only pre-requisite was that a boiler suit was worn; the Great Egg Race where, armed only with several paper straws, some sheets of card and a ration of sticky tape the tallest structure possible had to be constructed in the allotted time.



Matthew Frise

I moved to Oxford for the clinical years during which I was supposed to put into action all that I had learned in the previous three. The strategy of spending three years in lectures and practicals to then go and meet some patients and learn what being a doctor actually involved had appealed when applying and fortunately suited me. This is not such a popular approach these days; integrated courses are seen as the ideal with pressure being put on those universities offering classical courses to expose students earlier and earlier to patients and the practicalities of doctoring, with the risk that important but less trendy bits disappear from the syllabus (like pharmacology). Here I am reminded of the observation by Sir William Osler, who left Johns Hopkins to become the Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford at the beginning of the 20th century, that "to study medicine without books is to sail an uncharted sea," though he did add the caveat that "to study medicine only from books is not to go to sea at all."

Just prior to finals was the two month elective period which we were able to spend almost anywhere in the world. I

had previously visited Ethiopia with a group from Mill Hill which included several Old Belmontians. This had left me with a fondness for East Africa and now I found myself returning but this time to Kenya for an incredible eight weeks where for a time I was on call for what seemed like nearly every other night (without the benefit of the next day off to catch up on sleep). The complaints of those coming to the hospital, often having travelled huge distances, ranged from severe malaria and tuberculosis to gun-shot wounds, lion attack and even a case of rabies. After that I was pretty certain I could survive a night on call as a junior doctor in the John Radcliffe.

I've stayed in or around Oxford since qualifying and am now training to be a physician and intensive care specialist. It's difficult to believe it was two decades ago I started at Belmont. Just as a great deal has changed in the structure of medical training and the NHS in that time, a lot has changed in what is now the Foundation of which Belmont is a part. Whenever I visit though it seems to me the same emphasis can be found on making learning enjoyable and fond memories come back.

So why did I choose medicine then? I don't think I was asked the question. If I had been? Well I think I'd have been forced to take Osler's advice again: "Look wise, say nothing, and grunt. Speech was given to conceal thought."

■ **Matthew Frise, 1987 - 1992**

▪ Old Belmontians' Day 2009

The guests of honour at the last Old Belmontians' Day were Grace and Christopher Funnell, who served the School over many years in several capacities. Christopher taught French at Belmont and since then has worked tirelessly for the Old Belmontians from its inception. He has been ably supported by Grace over the years and she herself was a well known figure at Belmont as a matron. It was therefore a pleasure to be able to recognise their devotion to the School.

At the AGM Adrian Williams was thanked for his hard work as the Old Belmontians' Secretary and Treasurer during the last eleven years and was presented with an inscribed decanter in recognition of this.

Adrian and Norma have been invited to be guests of honour at the next OB Day.

The AGM was followed by the Chapel Service, conducted by the foundation Chaplain, the Rev. Andrew Keep. The congregation, as always, raised the Chapel roof with their hymn singing, ably accompanied on the organ by Nelson Whaley, OB, who was attending for the first time.

Lunch, as usual, was a splendid affair and gave everyone a chance to reminisce and catch up on news, followed by an opportunity to look at a few archives and a stroll around the grounds, which were looking very attractive in the April sunshine.



Grace and Christopher Funnell

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