

Cowbridge Grammar School Annual Speech Day 1971

Headmaster's Report

Madame Mayor, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is, indeed, a unique occasion both for the school and for me personally; unique in that I believe it may be the first time in the School's long history that it has been honoured by the presence at Speech Day of a Vice-Chancellor or Vice-Chancellor Designate of the University of Oxford. The serving Principal of Jesus College, Oxford, has been present on countless occasions; indeed, Mr Habakkuk is the fourth in my time as Headmaster; indeed, up to 1919 the Principal of the college was ex-officio Chairman of the Governors – but never a Vice Chancellor Designate. Interesting, too, that Mr Habakkuk's election to this eminent office is one which I am told, no Jesus College Principal has enjoyed since Sir Leoline Jenkins, our most distinguished Old Boy and benefactor. Apart from Sir Leoline, two other Old Boys have held this high office, namely, Durel, David Durel's nephew and Evans of Pembroke College, more familiarly known as the 'Evans Above Us' - but neither was a Jesus College principal. It says much for the high regard in which Mr Habakkuk is held in university circles that Oxford University should see fit to elect to its highest office an alumnus of 'the other place', Cowbridge. It is a source of great delight, pleasure and reflected glory that they should have chosen a member of my old college at Cambridge - St John's. Perhaps you can see it reflected in my eyes and face. Sir, we extend to you our warmest congratulations and I join the Chairman in expressing our warm welcome to you and our sincere appreciation of the honour you have bestowed upon us as a school by your acceptance of our invitation to speak to us and present the prizes.

It is a unique occasion for me, too, for this will be the last time that I will be called upon to give the Headmaster's Report. It is a pleasure and honour that such a distinguished guest should help me on my way. I remember an occasion very shortly after I came to Cowbridge, I was asked by the B.B.C. to give a talk on the history of Cowbridge Grammar School in a series 'The six oldest schools in Wales'. When I delved into the records, I could not help being struck at and by the length of years so many of its Headmasters had served at the school. Dr William Williams tops the league with 60 Years as Head, then David Durel with 42. Little did I realise at the time that I should finish up 3rd with 33 years! It has a charm of its own in its delightful setting in delightful surroundings; it exudes a certain sense of peace – particularly in the holidays! Not only does one enjoy a feeling of sharing in a distinguished tradition of scholarship and scholars, [the boys for generations have believed Leoline's ghost walks out at night – perhaps that's how we get this feeling] but it has always been a small community in which every member, from the Headmaster to the youngest pupil feels he is part and has a part to play. I believe the smaller units, the closer-knit units are the happiest and the more satisfactory for that very reason. [You may think this is leading me on to the ever present controversial topic of size and Comprehensive Education – but I leave it at that].

I wondered how I should present this report – give, as it were, the annual audit as usual, or say a little of the changes that have taken place over the past 33 years. It is not my task but rather that of external auditors to present a profit and loss report on that period. But I felt both boys and parents, boys in particular, would

be interested in one or two facts – I shall never forget my first day of new buildings in the presence of pupils, parents, Governors and many distinguished guests, including 5 M.P.'s – the buildings were the gymnasium and the canteen - bodily needs first, note! Little did I think then that in just under twelve months I should be prevented from entering our very own buildings by the point of a murderous

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bayonet held in the hands of an Old Boy of the School. I don't know who was the more nervous, I or the rookie soldier Old Boy. In short, the army had taken over – and we, Headmaster and all, were prevented from enjoying our recently won amenities. I said, 'army' but in those very early days it resembled more 'Dad's Army'.

In 1938 there were only 216 boys in the school, but in recent years we have topped 485. In 1938 & 39, 6 & 3 boys respectively sat H.S.C. or Advanced Level - this year there are 59. Then there were about 14 in the V1th form, recently there were eight times as many. The present generation may well exclaim 'Cor! Ooh! etc but that has been the growth. I'm not going to use these statistics to prove my special point – I've always suspected statistics – I believe Disraeli said there are 3 types of lies – 'Lies – damned lies and statistics' while W. S. ? said, 'Men use statistics like drunks use lamp-posts, more for support than light.' In short, the growth had nothing to do with the waving of a magic wand by the Headmaster – or even with the wielding of the big stick. It was a growth shared by all grammar schools due to various causes, many economics: free places, university grants etc. The present generation are not always aware how much better and fuller are their opportunities than those of their parents – they must realise that these privileges were gained for them the hard way: they are free to choose how they use them. Let them use them wisely.

Jesus College - Scholarships

Payment of Prefects

The two major changes in the organisation of the School were two which had a marked effect on the character of the School, but although I strongly disagreed with them, were I suppose inevitable. First was the abolition of Saturday morning school: Wednesday afternoon was always a half – holiday, but in 1946 we were compelled to conform to the general pattern of other schools. The modern generation may think how horrible to have to come in on Saturdays, but had a note been taken amongst the staff and pupils at the time, there would have been an overwhelming majority in favour of its retention. The worst effect was upon the boarders – the long weekend making inevitably for increasing boredom. The second was the decision taken in 1953 to confine the catchment area to fixed local boundaries. Prior to that date, any boy of the required ability could attend Cowbridge G.S. provided he paid his own fares: hence we had three, if not four buses travelling daily to Bridgend, Porthcawl and Kenfig Hill. The change was made, despite the strong recommendation of H.M. Inspectors in their report of 1947 for the retention of non - local character of the school; it was, I suppose, inevitable, however, with the growth of housing estates and population, in the areas of Llantwit, Cowbridge and Llanharan. No 'whining schoolboys' then 'creeping like a snail unwillingly to school' – they chose to come here of their own free will and consequently inculcated a strong esprit de corps and a sense of pride in the School. More and more restrictions have been placed on the catchment

area since – it is sad to lose touch with families in places like Llantrisant where some families have had sons at the school over countless generations. As for the future, no decisions have been made: if one proposal is adopted, it will become ever more local: if another it will become completely non-local but have no associations with the past and with the 360 year old Cowbridge Grammar School.

But I am to give my report – I must now be brief. I introduce to you & offer to you a warm welcome to two new members of staff – Mr Graham Lewis & Mr Gareth Scourfield, Mr Lewis an addition to the

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Mathematics Staff & Mr Scourfield introducing for the first time Metalwork into the curriculum. I hope their days here will be happy and fruitful.

Mr Philips left at the end of the Christmas Term to take up an appointment nearer his home in West Glamorgan; we were deeply worried about obtaining the services of a temporary master to replace him at short notice. The gods smiled upon us & brought us the experience and cheerfulness of a qualified Geologist-cum-Geographer in Mr Gomer Thomas. We are indebted to him for the conscientious way he has tackled the job. We wish him all success & happiness when he leaves for Australia at the end of the year – I'm not sure whether he intends to teach geology or whether he's been lured away by the lucky strikes of the Poseidon Company!

We are sorry to report the absence through ill-health of Mr Morley Davies since the early days of last term. After a long & painful illness, he is showing good signs of recovery which we hope will be speedy and complete.

Honddu: I don't know whether I dare say it – some forty odd years ago, the typically small, wing, Welsh scrum halves were playing in opposition. The one, Honddu Davies for Bangor University, the other, Idwal Rees for Swansea University. I can assure you that the relationships in opposition on that day were as cordial & harmonious as they've been during Mr Honddu Davies' 13 years on the Mathematics Staff of this school. I hope they will continue to be so when we elbow one another for Mr Whittle's tools when we return together to do a bit of do-it-yourself carpentry in retirement. We thank him for all he has done, not only in the classroom, but in his voluntary work as House Manager at Speech Days & School Play productions. May his retirement be blessed with long years of contentment & happiness.

The examination results this year were very much of a mixture. The 'A' level was very much better than a first glance led to believe. There was a 72% subject pass & a 25% A & B grades.

I wish I could be half as satisfied with the 'O' level results. I remember I was able to get up at Speech Day 1959 when we were celebrating our 350th anniversary & proudly announce our unsurpassed record of success – when the A form sat 225 subjects between them & were successful in 222. But this year such a pleasure cannot be mine. There was only a 46% pass. Some may say that that year was encumbered by overlarge classes in their 3rd and 4th years. But they were settled in the 5th year & reduced to a normal manageable size. I think the boys themselves were mainly to blame by an unfortunate attitude of

complacency. Those who have entered the V1th must see to it that they bring more determination to bear upon their efforts.

Games:

Chess:

Dramatics: Congratulations in maintaining the usual high standard of the School's long list of successful dramatic performances [especially] in Ben Johnson's 'The Alchemist'. Congratulations to Mr Codling, the cast & all who helped to make it a success.

Music: The term started on a high note – a few very high notes - in a most notable concert put on in the Parish Church on Friday night by Mr Peter Rees, his hard-working choristers & his talented organist, Mr

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Peter Wilson. I hope the choir and all who took part had as much pleasure as the audience in the packed Church. Our warmest thanks & congratulations on a memorable evening. I don't know whether Mr Rees

had any special motives in his choice of the choral works. Mrs Rees & I were delighted with the possible significance of 'The best pair of Sirens' but hope there was no special reason for choosing a 'Requiem' for our last term.

Handicraft – last but not least, congratulations to Mr Whittle & his talented pupil craftsmen on building a truly magnificent boat – now in full use by the Penybont Surf-Life Saving Club. If it is ever called into service, these boys will have saved a life or lives. The Chairman of the Club visited the school last term & presented us with this magnificent cup as a token of their appreciation of the boys' work, under of course, Mr Whittle direction. It will be donated annually to the School's best craftsman. I was most honoured and proud to accept it on behalf of the School.

And now, in conclusion, I have to thank so many people for so much. First, I must thank the Chairman of the School Governors, City Alderman P. J. Smith, who has been Chairman for 32 of my 33 years at the School. In times of stress & trouble I knew I could always rely on his help & support. Over a period as long as 32 years it would be contrary to human nature if there were not occasionally disagreements' there have been, of course, as Alderman Smith said at the last Governors' meeting – differences over certain major issues of policy, but there has never been lacking an appreciation of one for the other & the most cordial and harmonious relationship. He was deeply sorry – I know, sincerely so – that an important engagement, arranged months ago prevented his being present, I want to thank all the many Governors over the last 33 years: may I be permitted to mention one – Mr J. L. N. Baker, representing Jesus College, who has scarcely missed a meeting over 25 years despite having to put up with the inconvenience of his bus or train travel from Oxford, despite his full programme of activity as Bursar of the College & even as Lord Mayor of Oxford. Every Governor will join with expressing an appreciation of his loyalty, wisdom & punctilious attendance.

I want to thank all the Deputy Heads who served – not under me, but with me. And not least, Mr Codling the present holder of the post. I am deeply grateful to them all. To all masters – all amongst my closest friends. I thank them for their never-lagging loyalty. There must be few schools with a more harmonious Common Room. I thank the many generations of boys for all the happiness & satisfaction they have helped me derive from this responsible job – all the successive Head prefects & and not least, Michael Duggan, the present Head prefect – who sets an example to all, that Cowbridge Grammar School comes first. I admire his moral courage & he must know how much it is appreciated.

Then all the non-teaching staff – the Penny's, the Walters, the Dannys, the Bens, the Robins, who have given such loyal service. I'm glad to say they are all my friends. I thought it wise to include all the female domestic staff there – in case I might be misunderstood. Shall I say I've counted them as my friendly helpers. And last, but by no means least – I hope I shall be forgiven for this personal note – my dear wife. When we came to Cowbridge as a comparatively young married couple, she was called upon by virtue of my position to organise the domestic running of the boarding house – that with a 6 week old baby to look after as well. During my 4 years in the RAF, she carried on without my help amidst all the difficulties of rationing & shortage of suitable domestic staff. And now called back into service 7 years ago. Hers has been the part of the unglamorous part of the job. Despite the irritations, the difficulties, the frustrations, she has done it with a conscientiousness which only a woman – dare I say it – possesses. It has, however,

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had its pleasant side, its moments of fun & laughs & sometimes real satisfaction when efforts have been appreciated. If the BBC want it, Mrs Dale's Diary has nothing on Mrs Rees.

Thank you, too, for all the many friendships & friendliness we have found amongst parents.

In conclusion, may it I wish my successor, whoever he may be, as much joy, happiness & satisfaction out of his stay at Cowbridge. Whatever form Secondary Education may take in the Vale of Glamorgan, whether it be a comprehensive school at Llantwit Major only, whether it be one at Cowbridge, may the decision of the authority be wise & in the best interests of the children, born & unborn. Whatever happens it would be gratifying to know that something at least of the spirit & tradition of this ancient School should continue in the new.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have been on my feet a long time - too long; I thank you for your patience & forbearance and the attentive hearing.

Idwal Rees (retiring headmaster) – speech supplied by his daughter, Jane Harvey