

Cowbridge Grammar School – various research

A Cowbridge tailor named Toolye owned this site between Church, Church Street and the Town Walls at the turn of the seventeenth century: it was acquired by Sir Edward and Sir John Stradling of St Donats, who established the Free School here in 1608. The school and many of the Stradling lands in the Vale were acquired by Sir Leoline Jenkins - an illustrious 'Old Boy' who had become Secretary of State to Charles II - and then bequeathed by him to Jesus College, Oxford, thereby ensuring the financial security of Jesus College and beginning the long connection between the school and the College.

Up until 1847 the school was a modest building, with initially one school room for all ages of pupils; its mode of construction would have been similar to that of the 'boothouse', now standing dilapidated in the school yard east of the South Gate.

A rebuilding in Gothic style took place in 1848 - Prichard the architect attempting to create some harmony between the ancient houses in Church Street, the South Gate, the Church and the school. The neatly cut lawn surrounded by flowerbeds and enclosed by the building and two raised banks created an impression of an Oxbridge college; and indeed the school was particularly successful in preparing students for Oxbridge and other universities. Two old boys (who went to neither) were Alun Lewis, highly regarded as a 'war' poet, and Anthony Hopkins the actor.

As a boarding school, there were three dormitories which could not have changed a great deal between 1848 and when boarding ceased soon after the school went comprehensive in 1974; the school building fell out of use soon after.

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Parallel with the growth in numbers various changes took place in the buildings occupied. The first alteration was the provision in 1920 of an additional bath and the installation of geysers to provide hot water and many excitements; for the gas jets had a disconcerting habit of sending their flames downwards instead of upwards or going out altogether and leaving the expectant bathers shivering. Next in 1921 came the fire escape staircase running from Top Dorm. to outside my study. This involved the alteration of Pritchard's building by enlarging the windows of Top and Little Dorms. and converting one side of the windows into doors. The arrow slit of the Old Sick Room was at the same time enlarged to a full size window. These

alterations luckily did not spoil the beautiful view of the buildings from the lawn.

In 1926 many alterations were carried through. The Woodwork room was very considerably enlarged ; the Lab. was doubled in size by the incorporation of the old changing room and for the first time was equipped with modern benches. A new changing room, with shower baths, was provided by carrying the buildings into Council Twt with a furnace room, and book store on the lower level. This addition projected into what had once been the moat of the walled town of Cowbridge; the builders could find no solid foundation and ultimately had to drive piles into the yielding soil. In the autumn of the same year part of the property in the main street, given to the School four years previously by Sir Thomas Franklen, was converted to provide additional accommodation for Boarders, and was opened under the name of Franklen House and the care of Mr. Reid and his sister.

The Glamorgan Water supply reached us just before the end of that same year and enabled central heating to be installed in the School the following term. Since then it has not been possible to roast potatoes or chestnuts in the Schoolroom but the huge chimneys have provided extra nesting places for jackdaws and starlings. An almost greater boon was the electric light that came in the following year, and in that same year the Tally Court wall collapsed into the Churchyard. When the wall was rebuilt, the addition of a central wall and of a new wall on the Church St. side produced a Fives Court. Unfortunately the new game has never caught on and the only use made of the Fives Court is to provide an extra space for soft-ball cricket.

The October of that year saw the School expand beyond the bounds of its old foundations; an extra classroom was sought for and found in the Baptist Chapel Schoolroom five minutes' walk away. The following year two rooms were taken in the new Pavilion Picture House which Mr. Mills had built. These provided for two more classes but it took eight minutes to get from the Pavilion to the Baptist Schoolroom and the masters had plenty of walking exercise. Mr. McAdam complained that he found it very difficult to adjust himself to the sobriety of the Baptist Chapel when he had just come from the frivolity of the Cinema.

For three years we laboured under the disadvantage of widely separated and not very suitable rooms, and then our problems were solved by the acquisition of Old Hall with its numerous rooms and delightful grounds. It was in 1932 we first took possession and gradually we took more and more of the building into use, until at the present time nearly every room is occupied. Old Hall also added a grass tennis court to the hard court which had been constructed in Franklen House garden in 1928. Now a spacious new Gymnasium, together with changing rooms, and a fine Dining Hall to provide for 150 are almost completed and will be opened next term.



1786, 21st July Letter from Mr Daniel Walters, Free School, Cowbridge, to Lord Bute :

‘My Lord,

In consequence of the great increase of Cowbridge School, it is found necessary to alter and enlarge the house. The intention is to erect a new kitchen and chamber over it and to convert the present into a dining hall and sitting room for the boarders. For this purpose the society of Jesus College has subscribed £20, to which Dr Hoare has very generously added £10 and on account of the great advantages which the county must necessarily derive from the prosperity of this seminary has recommended an application to the principal gentleman in the vicinity for their assistance.....’

L/44/32

Some Headmasters of the Grammar School

Bovian magazine No 6, November 1895

There are hardly any records of the past history of the School in existence, as far as we know, but a few facts gleaned from one quarter or another may interest some of the readers of *The Bovian*.

The first Headmaster that we can find anything at all about, at present, is the Rev THOMAS WILLIAMS, who must have come as Head about the year 1750. He did not confine himself to his School duties entirely, as we find that he was also Rector of Bishopston and Vicar of St. Donats. What the state of the School was at that time we have no accurate means of determining, but from the inscription on his successor's monument, it seems to have dwindled away considerably.

This successor, the Rev. DANIEL WALTER, in 1783, brought new life to the School, *Quam fama preceptoris reddiderat frequentissimam*. But, alas, he was one of those whom the gods love, and consumption claimed him as a victim at the age of 23, in 1787. His worth and work, we are told, were not to be reckoned by years, for-

Si numeres annos juvenis jacet, ecce, sepulchro. Si studia et mores et benefacta, senex.

To him succeeded the Rev. WILLIAM WILLIAMS, who ruled the scholastic world at Cowbridge for the next fifty-nine years, and is still remembered as a fine old man by many of the inhabitants of the town. He married a daughter of the above-named Thomas Williams; Benjamin Malkin, the author of the well known "History of South Wales," marrying another daughter. In those days the School was purely classical, the boys going in a body for writing lessons to the Eagle School, now Mr. Edward John's implement store, "a very good school for reading, writing, and accompts." Towards the end of Dr Williams' long life, the School naturally sank in numbers and efficiency, till at last there was only one boy living in the school-house. The buildings, too, fell into decay, so in 1847, the year of "the old Doctor's" death, Jesus College set about pulling them down and erecting new ones, preserving, as far as possible, the character of the former School.

(4.12.1814 Died at Cowbridge in 46th year of her age, Mrs Williams wife of Revd Dr Williams of the Free School. 6 children

1822, 8th November Died on island of Madeira, Revd Robert Williams, Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford, in his 29th year, eldest son of Revd Dr Williams of Cowbridge

Cambrian)

The Rev. Hugo HARPER, the next Head- master, while the new School was building, lived with his boys in the house now occupied by Dr. Mellor, and kept school in the Town Hall. He resigned the mastership in 1850, having been appointed to a similar post at Sherborne. He afterwards became principal of Jesus College, and died in 1894, after an illness of several years.

The Rev. W. HOLT BEEVER took Dr. Harper's place, and turned out some distinguished scholars in the first few years. Mr. Beever, however, had tastes other than scholastic, and farmed extensively at Crossways. He is still remembered as a successful breeder of shorthorns, and as an authority on all farming matters. In 1864, he resigned, and went to live in Herefordshire, where he died some few years ago.

Dr. Harper's Second Master, the Rev. THOMAS WILLIAMS, next took the reins of government, under whom the numbers went up into the seventies. He encouraged the presence of the day scholars from the district, which the last two masters are credited with having discountenanced. It was at this time that the property across the road was rented by the College, the cottages being fitted up as class-rooms and studies. The boarding- out system was also allowed, which led in many cases to grave abuses, though several struggling scholars raised themselves to honourable positions in life by its means. In 1870, Mr. Williams resigned the Mastership, and sought that ease in a college living that a school does not grant. We are happy to say that he is still alive and well, the respected Rector of Aston Clinton, near Tring.

The Rev. J. C. F. MORSON, who followed, was already well known to many in the School, as he had been Second Master from 1865 to 1867. Mr. Morson introduced many of those public school ways and customs, that at that time were new to Welsh Schools. The numbers rose still higher than under Mr. Williams, and the distinctions won at Oxford were more numerous than at any other period in the history of the School; but, as in the case of Daniel Walter, a hundred years before, the brilliant career was all too short; Mr. Morson, to the great sorrow of all, died in 1875. The window in the south aisle of the Church was put up to his memory by the past and present Bovians of that time.

To the Rev. M. P. WILLIAMS fell the difficult task of taking up the work of a successful man, called away when at the zenith of his fame. During the next few years, the numbers in the School sank, the class-rooms and studies being disused soon fell into a state of neglect, and finally of ruin. Scholarships at Oxford were, however, still won, but in fewer numbers than before. In 1889, Mr. Williams resigned, being presented to the living of Rotherfield Peppard, near Henley-on-Thames.



Students at the Grammar School 1851, from the 1851 census

At the time of the Census, the school was still being rebuilt, and so the boarders were living in the town

#42 - 56 High Street, under supervision of Michael A Farrar, second master and teacher of Mathematics

- William B James, 14, b Caerleon, Mon
- Herbert T James, 12, b Caerleon, Mon
- Alfred Adams, 11, b Ebbw Vale, Mon

#43 - 54 High Street, under the supervision of William H Beever, Headmaster, and Henri Bertrand, French teacher

- William H Morrice, 18, b Aberystwyth, Cards
- William Thomas, 18, b Beaumaris, Anglesey

Thomas Thomas, 18, b Llandeilo, Carm's
John Bowen, 16, b Newport, Pembs
Jacob Bryant, 17, b Chatham, Kent
Rees Jones, 16, b Llanelli, Carm's
Edward Savours, 14, b Neath, Glam
John R Bennion, 15, b Wrexham, Denbigh
Jeoffery Hooper, 17, b Cardiff
Studley Lewis, 14, b Llangadog, Carm's
Frank Lewis, 12, b Llangadog, Carm's
William A Hobkirk, 13, b Rio de Janeiro, S America
Sidney Cave, 15, b Skenfrith, Monmouth

(possibly, as this was an adjoining property and two scholar-boarders are listed)
(#44 - 52 High Street
John Griffiths, 14, b Brecon
Thomas Thomas, 15, b Llandeilo, Carm's)

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Football at Cowbridge Grammar School

The school magazine, the *Bovian*, was first published in 1894. Reports in the *Bovian* show that football was played certainly before 1893 (one article suggests that it took over from rugby, and we know that rugby was played at the School in 1879). Opponents in the first seven years of the magazine's reports included:
Cowbridge Town, Cardiff Teachers, Cardiff Reserves, Llandaff Doves and Penarth Swifts. Penarth Parish Church, Ely, Cardiff YMCA and various invitation teams were also played. In 1904 it was reported that an old boy, E.J.G. Davies, was playing for Bristol City.

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Pupils at Cowbridge Grammar School in the 19th century (continued) – compiled by Jeff Alden

Sources: *The Bovian*, July 1944, No 152 - 'Cowbridge Grammar School Fifty Years Ago' and *The Bovian*, December 1944, No 153 and **The Bovian*, December 1939, No 138
** *The Bovian*, December 1938, No 135

At school, May 1890

T. C. Brown (latterly Calvert) (from Carlisle) Kings College, London ; gospeller to St Clements Danes. His many curacies inc St Dyfrig's Cardiff. Finally Vicar of Acton Green, London**
S. Carter (from Oxford)

IHC Morison, later Vicar of St Paul's, Worcester

Arthur Swan Morgan, later Rector of Shirenewton, the author of the article

EMS Morgan, son of the Vicar of St Nicholas, Fishguard, later a Chartered Accountant, and a Brigadier-General in the 1914-18 war

John Morson, son of Revd JCF Morson, BA Oxon 1898; curate of Llanblethian 1898-1900

W Murdock, in VIth in 1890, later 2nd Class Mathematical Hons, Oxford

D.H. Pugh, later Canon of Manchester

LE Richardson, in VIth in 1890, Open Classical Scholarship at Jesus, Oxford, and 2nd Class Classical Hons. Head Boy 1893, Captain of Cricket, Football and Athletics; Rector of Shirenewton 1913-1919; Rector of Rotherfield Peppard 1919-39. Died 5/5/39*

A Peers Smith (from Ireland)

TL Smith, later London Intermediate BA

GWC Soden (from Ireland), later Colonel Soden - joined between 1890 and 1894

D Williams, in VIth in 1890, later BA, Jesus, Oxford

Source: *The Bovian*, March 1946, No 157 (Obituary)

John Percy Morgan (at CGS, 1875-81), son of Rector of Llanilid and Llanharan, died at Shirenewton 10/10/1945, aged 81.

Exhibitioner, Keble, Oxford; Modern History

Theological College, Wells and Llandaff

Curacies of St John's Cardiff; St Woollos, Newport

Living of Stanfield and Apley, Lincoln; Waterperry and Hanswell, Oxford; many European chaplaincies

Decorated for his work overseas, 1916-18

Source: *The Bovian*, December 1936, No 129

RB Pratt, left 1877, emigrated to New Zealand

F. Griffin Stokes, entered 1863, Postmastership at Oxford 1871. Author of *Dictionary of Shakespearean characters*, etc

Source: *The Bovian*, July 1940, No 140

BKS Lawrence, left Cowbridge 1868, Scholarship in Maths to Jesus College; completed his degree in Canterbury, New Zealand. Foundation master, Christchurch HS

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Herbert R Thomas, Cowbridge auctioneer – Grammar School pupil 1913-1919

As a day boy, he had to arrive at 7 am. Prep was from 7-8. Soccer in the autumn term and half of the spring. The hockey season in half of the spring term. Cricket in the summer term. No rugby.

He was awarded the Coleman Cap for soccer, became school captain.

Notes in unknown hand typed by B Alden

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Dramatic productions

In the 1950s and early 60s, productions were held in the Town Hall and usually stage-managed by Peter Cobb (geography), Mary Davies (art) and Reg Whittle (woodwork). The 1960 production of ‘Dr. Knock’ was translated from the French by Upper VIth pupil Tim Chilcott and Peter Cobb.

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Extract from The Lion magazine, January 1960 (the Lion being the weekly boarders’ magazine, editor Mr Iolo Davies)

Thursday night saw a very busy Mr Davies oscillating between the school & the Town Hall as fast as his boots would permit him. This was the eve of the dance organised by the local branch of the British Empire Cancer Campaign. The hall was full of balloons and flags, amongst which was Goff, all ready to be put up as decorations. Goff was given a ladder, and while Mr McNeil and Mr Davies hammered furiously, he balanced delicately on the top rung, draping the multi-coloured flags on the walls. At one point of the evening, one of the Town boys, whose aid had to be called upon by Mr Trevor Williams to blow up the balloons, fell backwards into a heap of inflated balloons piled high in a corner. Amidst thundering bangs, he disappeared into a sea of colour, and all that could be seen was a mitt clawing the air above a swaying surface of technicolour.

The dance itself was successful. Everybody enjoyed themselves including Mr Davies, whose jiving with our Tweetnik must have been something special. Bill sat in a corner and watched it all, and certainly got an eyeful.

‘The Fighting Lady’ was the feature film in the Canteen (or ‘Spud’s) last night – a film which attracted quite an audience. All the boarders were there, and about half of the Vicar’s Youth Club, whose admission cost a shilling each. The film ran well until the loudspeaker broke down and Chil had to flash across the room to put his limited knowledge of electronics into use. A few of the High School belles were present, obviously attracted by the title.

John Yardley, boarder

Extract from The Lion magazine, June 1962

‘We have often heard that legend about a horse grazing on the headmaster’s lawn, but last Monday must have been the first time that a pig actually ran round it. It was Market Day and the school was quiet at the beginning of the second week of the exams. Suddenly, a pig escaped from the cattle market, came thundering down the road past the School Field, and charged eventually into the Stable Yard, pursued by irate farmers and by Mr Pugh, who evidently fancied the animal as Stradling’s answer to our Hundred Yards champion. Then followed Cowbridge’s ever only rodeo with Mr Roy Hodgers Pugh charging round the lawn after the biggest boar Cowbridge has seen in a long time – showing us that they don’t wear cowboy hats in Porthcawl for nothing!

The chase was long and fierce but our hero ran the Caledonian monster down, chased him back into captivity and prevented him breaking into the Prefects’ Study, where he obviously intended making his home, not surprisingly.

Incidentally, one of the farmers present, an Old Boy of the school, made a rather funny comment : “The last time I was on this path”, he said “was 40 years ago when I walked up here to receive six of the best from Dick Williams!”” . *By ‘Yardley’, Lion magazine*

Snow conditions

‘The remarks I made last week about the thaw which seemed to have come on in earnest, have turned out all too premature. On Wednesday there was enough snow to cause a closure of the school as a precaution against buses failing, later in the day, to get through. This move turned out, on the day, to have been unnecessary though no-one was heard complaining. After that, the temperature plummeted again, so once more we have to bring out an edition of The Lion with no sports coverage; there has been no sport’.

Iolo Davies, boarding master Lion magazine 2nd February 1963

‘Grass, some of it surprisingly green in spite of its long dark period in the darkness under the white, appeared in the week; and there was never such a singing of the birds. The pundits had told us that a cold spell always ends with a ‘conventional’ fall of snow followed by a thaw. This seemed to be the pattern. On Tuesday night a snowstorm of extreme intensity came on, and the roads were blocked not by drifts but by lack of visibility. Mr Oliver, cautiously driving towards Cowbridge from Bridgend, was startled to see, as he edged along through the swirl, a lorry passing him on his left. In the morning the Head closed the school. Came the thaw. By next day, the snow was almost gone in many places. On the moors the ice on the Steeplechase Watersplash was still holding one’s weight (I know because I stood on it) but flowing on top of the ice was a foot’s depth of flood water. The world began to get into a ‘business as usual’ mood, and yesterday’s cry “They’ve given snow again” was only a joke. However it has come true. We are back in the whitest of winters, and there was no singing of birds today’ . *Iolo Davies, boarding master The Lion magazine February 9th 1963*

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Influenza in the Boarding House

‘This is something of an emergency issue of The Lion in the sense that the epidemic of influenza which has struck hard at the boarding house this week deprives us (we trust only temporarily) of some of the magazine’s staff. The cover this time ought to have been by the terrible twins of the fourth form, Disco and Tim. The last I saw of these operators was on Friday. I excused them from the boarders’ turn-out which is one of our hardman traditions of St David’s Day, on the grounds that they were off games. When I next enquired of their health, they had already been shipped off home on doctor’s orders. Much the same is true of Foggy, our clips man – only he went a day earlier. So swiftly does this brand of flu take its toll’. *Iolo Davies, boarding master Lion magazine March 2nd 1963*

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2005 From a letter to Jeff Alden from G R Francis (Francis Minor 1942-46)

‘Garfield Owen and myself were both in the Stradling House of the Grammar School in the 1940s. Whilst playing rugby against Seys House, I was trying to take the penalties and but failing at every attempt. The weather was appalling and the ball was like lead. Owen said he could do a lot better and so he did. The next is history. However he did let the ball go between his legs in the first international match against Australia at the Arms Park. Keith Maddocks (known as ‘Flyer’ Maddocks) was also at Cowbridge in my time. The last time I saw him was in the early ‘50s having been selected for Wales. Walking down Westgate St towards the Arms Park with one hour before kick-off was Keith, his kit in a small bag with his boots swinging down loosely and smoking a cigarette without a care in the world. Wales kicked-off and brought back for a scrum, Keith in his eagerness was well in front of the ball.’
