

Recollections of Alan Smith
1954-1961

I entered the School, in Pwll, in September 1954 when the headmaster was T V Shaw, who occasionally took classes in religious education. The deputy head was Afan Jones a Latin master. School uniform was "de rigueur" with a maroon blazer with badge, grey trousers, school tie and cap.

I still have a panoramic photo the school staff and pupils of 1955, taken on the front lawn which doubled up as the first team rugby pitch and athletics track, but only of circumference 330 yards, and not 440 which was the norm for competitions. This of course was well before metrification.

I recall the Duke of Edinburgh, arriving by helicopter, probably in 1956, to officially open the school and I was stationed, by Hwyl Thomas, Thomas Gym, and Scarlets full-back, in the gymnasium doing a hand stand and to hold a salute while the Duke passed.

I spent my first 2 years in Pwll during which Stan Rees, of the Rees and Richards Lemonade family, took over as headmaster. He arrived from Pontardawe Grammar school and naturally instigated rugby matches between the schools. This second year started a lifetime friendship Nick Hurley, from Llangennech, who went through school with me for 7 years. He was amazingly good at every academic subject, from algebra to zoology, but because of a heart complaint did not participate in physical activities. He was also an accomplished musician and I doubt whether the School has ever had a better all-round scholar. Every Prize Day, he walked away with 90% of all awards for his year. Sadly, he recently died.

Of the masters, in no particular order, I recall Malgwyn Thomas for his most expressive French accent with facial movements, Ron Jacobs for his expertise in producing artistic work for the backgrounds in school plays, but unfortunately not for any of his teaching abilities in Geography, John Harries, Froggy, later Headmaster and Len Llewellyn, who moved on to promotion in Swansea, for the basics they taught me in Maths, Frank Phillips who composed and wrote the school song, Harding Rolfe for his application of physics, and others for whom I can only recall the nick-names, e.g. Bingo, Bola, smoking Les, Dai Bull. Again there were other masters from Stradey, Coleshill and Steboneath who were inevitably present for the Llanelli Schoolboys rugby team.

In the 3rd year I moved up top, and could no longer walk to school so it was down to cycling even though the last stretch up Marble Hall Road was a bit of an effort, especially if you could not get behind a bus and cycle in its slip stream.

We started in form 3G, a really friendly and sporting group, which was successful in virtually every "inter-form" events. I recall there were sash-windows to our form room and it was always a pleasure to see a pupil from Hendy arrive when he would hurl his satchel at the window frame, which would start the "domino" effect of opening all the windows. Always greeted by cheering and a "Here we go again" from Mike H.

We had sixth formers, now in black blazers and Prefects who could, for minor offences, award you the chance of writing 100 lines as punishment. However life seemed to be good, but the chemistry and physics laboratories were rather old and dilapidated. Again "Uncle Tom's Cabin" a little hideaway which could only seat about 6 or 7. Ideal then for Latin and Greek lessons.

Towards the end there were several times when either individual teachers or classes were transferred from one school to the other for various lessons, which caused some headaches both for the pupils and Carmarthenshire Education Committee in arranging buses and financial commitments.

As I recall school meals were better in quality and volume than in Pwll, even more so when we advanced to the sixth form. But I have no idea of the relative number of pupils in the 2 schools.

Both the lower and upper sixth formers were invited annually to the sixth form dance with the Girls School, held alternately in either school.

This was the only formal contact as the Girls Grammar School was a totally separate entity, situated further down the hill towards Coedcae Road.

It was around this time that seven-a-side rugby gained popularity in school. At a senior level London Scottish ruled the roost in the Middlesex sevens and in 1959 the Grammar School entered the Rosslyn Park Sevens. When the School won the tournament at their first attempt it started some heads to be turned, especially among the public schools, who may well have resented our presence. After the second victory in the next year it became even worse. In the 3rd year, wearing the scarlet track suits, bought by the London Branch of the Old Boys, there would be more spectators watching us warming up for our next game, than were at the main competition on an adjacent pitch. We were told not to answer any questions from the press or others, but refer them to the headmaster or Thomas Gym.

After the 3rd consecutive victory the press was full of the “professionals” from Llanelli and repeated “What is a Grammar School doing in a Public School competition?”. So much so that the Headmaster, Stan Rees decided that the school would be withdrawn from future competitions and as a final quote stated that ***“Modesty forbids me to deny that we are invincible but the facts forbid me to deny it”***

When the captain of the team, Geoff Davies from Pemberton, started at Loughborough College, he took with him all the skills and training methods that Thomas Gym had instilled in us and records will show that from then onwards, Loughborough took over the mantle London Scottish formerly held.

In October 1961, I started as a student in London and became involved the Grammar School Old Boys, London Branch. Alan Prosser-Harries, a teacher in Mill Hill, was the Secretary and Fred Edwards his equivalent in Llanelli. Every year at around the first Friday in December we had our annual dinner in the Park Lane Hotel, Piccadilly.

The Headmaster and Fred Edwards were always invited and were usually guests of Dr Malcolm Hollis, from Burry Port, in his house-cum-consulting rooms, in Green Street, Mayfair. He was also a consulting physician to the Harlequins Rugby team.

Stan Rees, was as ever most amusing when giving the School report, often relying on non-academic facts, such as how many pupils had become fathers while at school, or number of broken limbs, to add a little spice.

On one of these occasions, after the Girls Grammar had been partly burnt down, he reported on how days had been divided in Pwll such that it would be a Girls School on say, Monday, Tuesday and Thursday mornings and a Boys School in the afternoons or other days in the mornings. There was never any thought given to mixed schooling. He also reported that toilet graffiti showed a marked increase in volume and content when the girls were around.

When AP-H retired, I took over until the Old Boys decided to close down the London Branch when the Grammar became comprehensive. I had several satisfying years as Secretary, especially when invited to attend the Park Lane Hotel special” menu sampling” evenings where we would taste snippets of the forthcoming dinners and sample some of the wines they had for the forthcoming season. We had Stan Rees as a guest for several years, but I was rather saddened when John Harries the new Headmaster died before he could attend the dinner. He had been a guiding light in my early days in school.

I cannot recall if Alun Thomas, Caesar, and acting head came as his replacement

The last headmaster to attend was Denis Jones, Birdie, and I believe he only came once or twice before things changed.

I'm sure Wyn Oliver, Brian Davies and Iorweth Evans would be able to give more information about life in the upper school as I believe they never went to the lower school as pupils, although they came regularly for rugby and athletics.

Alan Smith