



JESUS OLD MEMBERS' GROUP (XL NETWORK) NEWSLETTER

June 2017



One of the excellent notions that came from the Abergavenny Old Members' Day reported extensively in the last newsletter, was that old members were sensitive to the idea that more should be done to support ways of encouraging a greater number of applications from state school students in Wales. The SEREN initiative moves forward, good news in this respect.

Another notion was that it would be good to find ways of making it easier for able students from very low income families to feel able to apply to Jesus in these times of very high student fees and no grants. I hope all of you have recently received a brochure seeking your support for The Old Members' Bursary intended to start in 2021. This bursary would indeed encourage applications from such students.

The target to provide an endowed fund of £100,000 is a very challenging one. The initial response has been encouraging with a good number of people committing. However there is still a long way to go. I hope that this is a cause that will appeal to many more of you, and that you will be able to make a commitment of a one-off payment or a regular contribution over time. If you think you would like to give and have not received the brochure or have mislaid the details the following website link will enable you access the details <https://www.campaign.ox.ac.uk/jesus-college>.

Over the last four years membership of the group has steadily increased – which is good news. However Richard Cosier the membership secretary is concerned that communication with active members is proving increasingly problematic. Communication is now mainly electronic, so an increasing number of email rejections suggest that some old members may have changed their email addresses and have new mobile phone numbers, which means that we are unable to keep in touch. Regrettably a number of spam filters now reject email for a number of unfathomable reasons. We try to keep our message headings mundane (in case words or acronyms like Jesus, OMG, Old Members are deemed offensive!). So Richard would like to take this opportunity to ask members to periodically check junk filters for our missives. If any member failed to receive notification of Old Members Day on 24th June it probably means there is in your case one of these issues, so could you please email membership@jomg.org. This way we might improve communication!

The Old Members' Day on 24th June is based around what should be an excellent guided tour of the Ashmolean. If you want more information go to jomg.org.

Peter May (1968)

Email: mayjpeter@yahoo.co.uk



JESUS OLD MEMBERS GROUP VISIT TO CAERNARFON, 15-17 MAY

JOMG party by
the Eagle Tower

Some 30 old members, including spouses, participated in this year's old members' visit to Caernarfon. The programme had been expertly arranged by Eddie Williams who not only scheduled interesting things for us to do but also arranged expert guides to show us around. We all owe him a great debt of gratitude.

Caernarfon is a remarkable town, with its castle and town walls which are still very well preserved. Its inhabitants are, moreover, predominantly Welsh-speaking. We began on the afternoon of Monday the 15th with a short walk through the town, led by Eddie. Due to the bad weather, this proved to be a very short walk indeed and some of us rapidly sought refuge in the bar of the Black Boy! But things really kicked off with a dinner at the Royal Welsh Yacht Club that evening. Founded in 1844, the Club is located in two bastions of the town walls in a commanding position overlooking the Menai Straits. After a short introduction to the history of the club and the town from Robat Humphreys (Chair of the Civic Society), we enjoyed a superb three course meal.

The following morning was spent being shown around Caernarfon Castle. Our guide, Sue Kirk, was extremely knowledgeable and full of information about the building of the castle and the town fortifications by Edward I, and on the kind of life its inhabitants would have lived. Her no-nonsense approach to her subject matter – and her debunking of the popular stories relating to the presentation of the first Prince of Wales to his people in 1284 – went down very well. Remarkably, once completed, the castle required a garrison of no more than 28 men at arms. We were indeed fortunate to have her assistance.

Fortunately the miserable weather lifted by the afternoon for our excursion on the Welsh Highland Railway – a twenty five mile long narrow gauge railway which runs from Caernarfon to Porthmadog, where it connects with the Ffestiniog Railway. Originally built to bring slate to the ports, the railway was never a commercial success. The re-laying of the track was completed in 2011 and it has become a hugely popular attraction. The trains are hauled by Garratt articulated steam locomotives originally built for South African railways. The scenery was stunning, particularly the long descent down the Glaslyn valley into Porthmadog. And at last the sun shone!

On Wednesday morning we were taken on a walking tour of Caernarfon and in particular of Segontium, the site of the large Roman fort dating from AD 78 following the conquest of North Wales by Agricola. In continuous occupation for over 300 years, it enjoyed a commanding position over the local landscape. Our guide for the morning was Rhys Mwyn, an archaeologist and local historian (and erstwhile member of the Welsh punk band *Anhrefn!*). This was followed by a farewell lunch generously hosted by the Caernarfon Civic Society.

Those of us who remained spent the afternoon walking along the coastal road along the Menai Strait to old Llanfaglan Church, guided by Ifor Williams. This church is a gem. It escaped the attentions of Victorian restorers – probably because a new church had been built closer to the village. As a result the old church still contained its early eighteenth century box pews, pulpit, lectern and altar rails. The lintel over the door was a 5th/6th century gravestone, complete with Latin inscription. The Church is now owned by the Friends of Friendless Churches and is Grade I listed. Earlier this year the remains of the Earl of Snowdon (Anthony Armstrong-Jones) were buried in the churchyard near his family's plot.

And so ended a most memorable visit, with thoughts already emerging of another JOMG event next year!

Rhodri Walters (1968) (Photos by George Reah)



Approaching Ryd Ddu
Welsh Highland Railway



Pete Burley will be well known to a number of you. He was at Jesus for several years in the 1970s and is an Australian who never returned home! This is one of a series of occasional articles from old members reflecting on aspects of their recent personal life in retirement (or at least semi-retirement).

Having lived in Paris for the last 13 years, and listening to the questions tourists ask, I have come to the conclusion that whoever came up with the maxim: travel broadens the mind was a nincompoop. I question whether tourists have any minds to broaden, for it seems that the one thing they forget to pack, when preparing to go on holiday, is their grey matter. Over the years I have filled several notebooks with anecdotal evidence to prove the point; here are a few examples:

While sitting on the Eurostar, travelling across the flat countryside of Pays de Calais, I overheard two Texans in conversation behind me, one of whom made the observation: *'Say, Bud, you'd think you'd see a lot more wine trees growing in France!'* On reflection, this wasn't an observation entirely without creative possibilities; it made me think of just how convenient it would be to be able to pluck a fully matured, and bottled, Saint Emilion Grand Cru from the branch.

On another occasion, in all innocence, I went to a gourmet food boutique to buy a pot of jam but as a choice of something to do, I'd have been safer diving headlong into a pit of serpents. Once inside, I found the store occupied by what I first thought to be a giant stork surrounded by dumplings. Upon refocusing, I realized it was a group of Englishwomen, one tall and angular; and two others, short, round and sporting prison haircuts. The Stork was clearly the one in control, for the Dumplings hung on her every word:

'What are those?' asked Dumpling N° 1.
'Bath salts' replied the Stork.

The young French woman behind the counter corrected her:
'They are aromatic sugars, Madame!'

The Stork's nostrils began to twitch, involuntarily; here was a woman who clearly was more used to giving corrections rather than receiving them. The group then moved to rows of bottled vinegars and oils used for salad-dressing and for cooking: *'What do you suppose they are?'* asked Dumpling N°2.

Now bear in mind this was exclusively a gourmet food store - what it wasn't, was Boots the Chemist, but the Stork (who clearly had more hang-ups about hygiene than Howard Hughes) replied: *'They're muscle relaxants - like Radox - you put them in your bath.'*

I wondered if she was considering putting her husband in a hot bath and serving him up as a casserole.

After they had left, the lady running the shop related a story of a couple who had entered on quiet morning, the couple being the only customers there.

'Bonjour' said the amiable shopkeeper:

No reply.

'Bonjour' - a little louder this time.

Still no reply.

'Bonjour, puis je vous aider?'

Behind a cupped hand, but in an audible whisper, the wife turned to her husband and asked:

'Is she speaking to us, do you think?'

Who else could she have been speaking to - the local poltergeist?!

On the same afternoon, I was sitting in Harry's New York, Europe's oldest cocktail bar; and was one sip into my Bloody Mary, when a couple from Wisconsin walked in, and Mr Wisconsin asked the barman:

'Which stool did Hemingway sit on?'

Hemingway was a lush - he drank in every bar in Paris; he either sat on all stools or was flat on his back on the floor!

Now it was Mrs Wisconsin's turn:

'Do you sell French bread?'

To which the barman, with a raised eyebrow, replied politely:

'No, Madame, we sell cocktails - French boulangeries are likely to sell French bread.'

Finally, there is one classic tourist question to which there is no polite answer; as evidenced by the following:

One evening I went to a bistro where there were three Australians sitting at an adjoining table. When the Patron patiently tried to explain to them, in the best English he could muster, every dish on the menu, he was hit with the inevitable **Classic Tourist Question:**

'But is it any good?'

How was he supposed to answer? I just wanted the Patron to reply:

'No, it's positively lethal; producing toxic black bile in all bodily recesses, to near fatal levels - one bite and it's Père Lachaise for you clobber!'

SECONDARY EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

This is the first of a series of occasional articles where an old member reflects on some of the ways the industry or profession in which they worked has changed over the course of the last few decades.

I worked in 6 different local authority 11-18 comprehensive schools over 36 years, 18 of those years as a headteacher. Latterly I was a national leader of education and a consultant so I worked in many other schools too.

Secondary schools in the 1970s were very different to now. The Local Authority was all powerful. They appointed many of the staff directly and controlled the funds. In today's money, in a large school a headteacher has a budget of £7,000,000 compared to his predecessor's £100,000

Teachers in 1970s were kings and queens of their own classrooms. They were scarcely held to account by today's standards. What they taught and how they taught it was largely their own business, whereas today the highly prescriptive national curriculum and ultra detailed examination requirements hamstring modern teachers so that the only areas of control they have, are how they teach, as long as these approaches sit easily with OFSTED conceived ideas of good teaching. Modern teachers are better trained and know much more about how pupils learn, and concentrate hard on meeting the different needs of the range of pupils in front of them. They see rightly this learning as key, whereas their counterparts a generation ago were more concerned about the quality of their own teaching and rather less about its impact on the pupils in their classes. However the professional freedom of the former generation encouraged greater risk taking which often but not always brought interesting and innovative results. They were often adept at curriculum design and development, skills modern teachers get little chance to exercise and so rarely possess. Current teachers are regularly assessed and highly accountable, not so with their forebears (in my first 18 years of teaching I was only formally observed on 3 occasions, today the equivalent figure would be many scores of times!). As a result the worst teachers today are hugely better, the average teacher significantly more effective but the best teachers are no better and may be less good because of the limitations a highly controlled environment.

As implied above the curriculum was more varied and sometimes richer a generation ago but also much more variable and sometimes unbalanced. The A level syllabus I taught in 1973 was half a side of A5 which gave me great scope, if not a little uncertainty. The equivalent now is 38 pages of A4 telling precisely what to teach how it will be assessed in minute detail leaving rather less room for manoeuvre and rather less interesting to teach. The national curriculum for those who have to follow it (strange it is not everyone) is detailed and prescriptive. To have a national curriculum is a big step forward but it should be no more than a framework of pupil entitlement. So let's have a national curriculum but please god not this one!

Successive governments of all colours have since Callaghan's 'Great Education Debate' in the late 1970s sought to intervene to raise standards. Unfortunately there has rarely been clarity about what raising standards really means and schools have had to endure pretty constant changes of direction as each new minister seeks to countermand or diverge from his or her predecessor in the name of progress. So often the major changes introduced have not been evidence based and rarely are they properly piloted before roll-out. It means that whilst in so many areas progress has been made it has been tortuously achieved.

The amount of formal testing has increased massively over the last 40 years and as we all know a pig does not get any heavier if you keep weighing it! For some children this is stressful and it leads to massively less time to learn over a school career when so much time is given to preparing for the next exam. Testing is really important but it needs to be done rigorously but less often than now.

Inspection, data overload and academies are amongst the issues that need to wait for another day. Secondary education has improved significantly in many areas over the period, but several factors mitigate on-going progress. A cross-party long term consensus on education would be a much better background to change and the notion that in the changes we espouse we maximise the time for teachers to teach and pupils to learn would be a good adjunct as well as the notion that a student's time at school should be a joyful one!

Peter May 1968

JOMG AWARDS: ENSURING YOUR GENEROSITY IS APPLIED AS YOU INTENDED

Financial support from members for the JOMG Awards continues to be good despite the deaths of a number of contributors.

However, each year a few expected contributions are not received, so our Treasurer contacts the member to establish if this was a deliberate decision or if it was an administrative error. Usually it is the latter, with two common themes. Either the member has changed bank account and the standing order has not been transferred, or the member has increased their donations to the

College and because 'JOMG Awards' is not one of the standard options, has allocated the donation to the wrong fund.

If you offer to make new or increased donations to College, it is important that you make it very clear if you want all or a part (and if so how much) of your contributions to go to JOMG Awards and/or the Old Members' Bursary.

Whilst there is no obligation to do so, if you advise our Treasurer by email george.reah@btinternet.com of any changes he will check after the relevant year end that your donations have been correctly allocated.