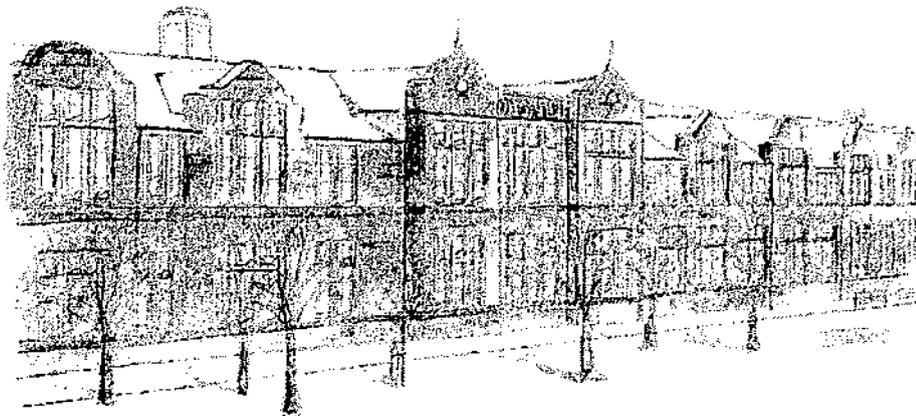


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Issue No. 16

Newsletter Winter 08

Editorial and Contents

Our gratitude goes to Tom Harpe for the work he has done in editing the Newsletter. Because of the pressure of other work (the man is retired after all!) he has felt the need to hand over this responsibility. His standard will be difficult to follow but we will do our best. Thanks Tom for a job well done.

We had a good response to the photographs that were published in the last edition. We were told that the bus trip was a visit to the 'Border Abbeys' and most of the pupils were identified. A major reply came from 'Mavis'. You'll remember Mavis, -school secretary since the year dot! She knew lots of pupils. Thanks to the rest of you who responded. The naturist photo apparently was of a Cross Country team at the County Championships. Bred them tough in those days.

Our 'Tanfield Dynasty' was well received too, so, in this edition, we are giving you another one. If you have further suggestions we would be grateful to have them.

It was interesting to meet some of the 1958 intake at their reunion. As they are a tad older than their school photos, we have put names, for your benefit, to the people who posed for a photo on the day.

We look forward to the 96th birthday party and '3 Steps to Hebburn'. Who will be the recipient of 'The Tanfield Glass' this year? Only 4 years to the Centenary - but what of the Academy proposals in the meantime? Time, and the new Unitary Authority will tell.

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Retirement of Eric Fisk

At the end of the 2008 summer term, Tanfield School bid farewell to Eric Fisk who retired after 17 years as Deputy Head Teacher.

Eric first went to Stanley Grammar School in 1961, albeit a relatively short stay as a pupil as 3 years later the Fisk family moved to Hexham.

Eric went on to study for his BEd. at Leicester where he took up his first teaching post at multi-racial boys school. There then followed a 3 year post in a school in N.Yorkshire after which he returned to the North East as Head of Year at Rutherford School in Newcastle . He remained at Rutherford for 15 years, ultimately being promoted to Senior Teacher.

1991 saw Eric's return to his old school - this time as Deputy Head. Whilst he was delighted to be back at the school he loved he was dismayed to see that the buildings had been neglected as a result of under-funding and in particular that the old 1912 block whose classrooms could no longer accommodate modern teaching methods, had been relegated to admin and storage use.

Following the "Great Fire of '98", the Tower Block was rendered useless and pupils were taught in temporary classrooms sited on the school field .Eric took on the responsibility of liaising with architects and building contractors to oversee the planning and construction of the new buildings and the refurbishment of the 1912 building. Literally, like a phoenix rising from ashes, the school overcame the adversity of the

fire and acquired wonderful new facilities and had the beautiful 1912 building restored to classroom use.

Eric's next, and arguably his most significant, "project" was the school's bid for specialist school status as a Science and Engineering College. Along with Sue Smith, Eric was instrumental in the success of the bid, raising £50000 in sponsorship and compiling a blue print for the school's development over the next 5 years. In 2002, the school's 90th anniversary year, Tanfield was awarded specialist school status - a major achievement for any school on its first attempt but especially for an 11-16 school as most of the schools bidding for this award were Sixth Forms.

Eric was and continues to be a valued member of the Tanfield Association; he played a major role in the organisation of the very successful 90th Birthday celebration which led to the popular Birthday Event which has taken place each November since then. We sincerely hope that Eric will continue to come along and join us at future events, not least the Centenary celebrations in 2012 - Academy plans permitting!!

The school and the Association owe Eric a great debt of gratitude for all he has done over the past 17 years and we wish him a very long, happy and healthy retirement up there in Rothbury.

96th Birthday of our School at Tanfield

On Saturday 8th November over 120 members and friends gathered in the School Hall to celebrate the 96th Birthday of The School. They danced, sang and thoroughly enjoyed the entertainment and performance of the lively and very talented music band "3 Steps to Hebburn". The band had its foundations laid in the 6th Form of Stanley Grammar School in the late nineteen sixties, with two of its original members still playing, Chris Morrison band leader, vocalist and performer extraordinaire (pupil 1962-1969), and performance drummer Duncan Davis (pupil 1962-1969). The audience really appreciated the performance of wide ranging musical acts by the band, with the dancing area full all evening, finishing at 10.30pm with a standing ovation to the band.

A wonderful hot and cold buffet was provided by "Harperley Hotel Outside Catering", who provided quality with quantity and everyone expressed great satisfaction.

During the evening Vice President Ted Brabbam presided over the presentation of the "Tanfield Glass" (a beautiful engraved glass bowl displaying the school crest and motto "First Things First" and different names of the school since 1912), donated and engraved by Claire Humpherson nee Flowers (pupil 1953-1960). The award is held for one year and is awarded to someone who has given un-stinted services to the Association and is considered to be a most worthy person to represent the Tanfield Association. The Working Executive was

unanimous in the decision to award the "Tanfield Glass" for 2008/9 to Catherine Hanson who is a member of staff at the school. Catherine has worked for the Association in many ways at all our events, not least of which is managing and working the bar at all our social events, she is much appreciated for all her work by the Working Executive and all Association members. The "Tanfield Glass" was presented to Catherine by the 2007/8 holder, the outstanding Barbara Churcher (pupil 1928-35) who was 92 years young the next day, Sunday 9th November 2008, a most remarkable lady.

Thanks for a very successful evening is given to head Teacher Graham Lloyd for our use of the school, the Site Manager Bill Wigham and Assistant Caretaker Gordon King for helping to prepare the hall and clearing away afterwards, Harperley Country Hotel for a magnificent spread of food, Vice President Ted Brabbam for presiding over the evening, Catherine Hanson for organising and manning a very busy bar, Keith and Julie Kirtley (pupil 1959-1965), Mike and Elizabeth Looome (pupils 1961-1966) assisting in bar and selling raffle tickets etc., Marjorie Whelley (pupil 1939-1945) raffle tickets and general assistance, Ann Hogg (wife of assistant secretary John Hogg, pupil 1954-1961), for the invaluable work of treasurer for the evening and Fred Westwater co-ordinator of the event.

Continuing Fame of Former Tanfield Pupil

In 2002 we produced an in depth study of former pupil and famous sculptor, Fenwick Lawson.. In the article we mentioned works ongoing at the time, one of which was the wonderful carving of monks transporting the coffin of St Cuthbert from Lindisfarne to Durham. Association members will be interested to know that the carving, now cast in bronze, and entitled 'The Journey', was unveiled in Millemium Square, Durham, on 29th September 2008 by HRH The Princess Royal.

honorary degree (Doctor of Letters) from Durham University, and on the 10th of November he was granted the Freedom of the City of Durham. So, next time you are in Durham, look out for Fenwick driving his herd of goats and Sheep through the city.

A full list of Fenwick's works, in many places throughout Britain, can be found on his website :
www.fenwicklawson.com

2008 has been a particularly good year for Fenwick as earlier in the year he was awarded an



Another School Dynasty

It was early in the 30's when Frank Brabban and Fred (always known as Ted) Ramsey were at Tanfield School. Both left to take local employment to support their families in hard times. Frank worked in Shimelds in Stanley and Ted went into the pits. It was, however, outside school that the two became linked, and a crop of Tanfield pupils was sown. Frank's two older brothers married Ted's two older sisters, and the Brabbans and Rasmseys were interwoven.

Frank joined the army in 1939 and became a despatch rider, on his motorbike chasing Rommel up and down the Western Desert and up through Italy. After the war he trained as an emergency teacher, and taught woodwork at Burnopfield School then at Annfield Plain, which became Greencroft Comprehensive.

Ted joined the navy in 1937, and was involved in the Spanish Patrols of the civil war, and later, in the 2nd World War was 'Mentioned in Despatches' for submarine spotting. He survived two sinkings, HMS Hyperion in 1940 and HMS Imperial in 1941. He left the navy in 1945 to become a miner again. On retiring with ill health he was a colliery Under Manager. As part of the Mining Rescue Team he helped at the Easington Pit Disaster (81 miners died) in 1951. He was very socially aware, and he had poetry published. His verses reflected his experiences :

At fourteen I went down the pit,
Wearing hand-me-downs that didn't fit.
I crawled inbye by candle gleam,
Through reeking tunnel, stinking seam.

My pony stands, sweat rising off it
Worked to death to show a profit.
No matter how ill treated he
Is valued here much more than me.

The owner ponders, face a frown,
"Good gracious me, my profits down.
Profits down, God bless my soul.
Here's your cards, you're on the dole"

"While unemployed you'll get some sun,
and find starvation can be fun".
"I don't care that you're cowed and beaten,
I've got a son to keep at Eton".

"If I can keep you in your place,
It'll help him win the social race."

I swallowed hate, my path was fixed,
To be a life long socialist.

Frank's daughter, Joy (now Abrahams), was at Stanley Grammar from 1965 until 1972. She trained as a teacher and taught primary children at Laurel Avenue school in Durham.

Ted's son Alan was at Stanley Grammar in the early 60's. He too trained as a teacher, taught in the Midlands, and retired as Deputy Head of a Comprehensive school in Bromsgrove.

From the other 2 marriages came a number of Tanfield pupils. Jean, Ted, and Mary Brabban from one family, Pat and Rosemary Brabban from the other. Bob Ramsey (Ted Ramsey's brother) fathered Joan and Norma Ramsey who were both pupils.

Jean Brabban (now Carr) left Tanfield about 1947. She became a telephonist working in the Stanley Telephone Exchange. She was still taking calls when she retired, working on the switchboard at Durham University. She married Arthur Carr, one of Ted's (Brabban) college friends. Arthur became Headmaster of Lanchester Junior School.

Ted Brabban was a pupil from 1944 until 1951. After learning to navigate aircraft during National Service he trained as a teacher. He taught at Shield Row School for a few years and then, in 1959, returned to Stanley Grammar to teach woodwork. He married Mavis Pattison who was his school-days girlfriend. He was at 'Tanfield' until he retired in 1988, during which time his Department had grown and diversified! After retiring he took up painting, and became Chairman of the North East Federation of Art Societies. He is currently Vice President of the Tanfield Association.

Mary Brabban (now Storey) was at Stanley Grammar from the early 50's. From school she joined the NCB in the Draughtsman's department. Later she became a Nursery Nurse and worked in schools in the Hexham area. She and her husband took over the Post Office and

shop in Oakwood, Hexham, and retired from there to live at Chester le Street.

Pat Brabban (now Bealing)came to Stanley Grammar from the 'Uppers'. (Annfield Plain Upper Standards School) She would be there from 1954 to 1956. She was good at athletics. On leaving she worked in the offices of the Northern Bus Co. but that was just a start! She went into the Church of England and became a Deaconess working at Bishop Auckland. She and her Vicar husband then worked in Westgate and Frosterley. They have moved to a Parish in South Shields. Pat was the first Lady Vicar ordained in Durham Cathedral. She is currently a Hospital Chaplain.

Rosemary Brabban (now Black) was at Tanfield from 1951 until 1958. She thrived on all the sport available to her, and was Captain of Neville House. She too trained as a teacher of primary children.

She taught at Tanfield Lea, Pelton Roseberry, and Stanley Front Street Schools- all at the same time on a part time basis!! She was eventually Deputy Head and then Head of Stanley Front Street School, and was involved in the move to the Shield Row premises. She retired after 10 years as Head in 1991 and is currently highly

involved in the running of Tantobie Community Association.

Rosemary's daughter, Christine Black, was also a pupil at Tanfield from 1975. Being a Mrs Jack 'star', initially she had an ambition to work in Art. Becoming aware of the problems experienced by the physically and mentally disabled she changed direction and qualified to work on their behalf. She currently works in a home for the severely disabled. She and her husband also run an alpaca farm near Bath.

Joan Ramsey was at Stanley Grammar early in the 50s. She trained in nursing before 'changing horses' and qualifying to teach. She taught in Whickham. Sadly Joan is no longer with us.

Norma Ramsey was 2 years younger than Joan. I believe that she went into nursing. Perhaps someone can help me on this.

It is interesting to note that, because of social changes, as families 'move house' the lineage is gone. Even for those of us living close by, because of the 'Catchment Area' system, Rosemary's daughter is the only offspring to attend the school. Now she too lives out of the area. And so, the Tanfield Dynasty is broken!!

1950 - 1957 Year Group Reunion 20th September 2008-12-09 Reflections of a Groupie

On Saturday 20th September 2008, at about 3.00pm there assembled at Tanfield School a group of almost 30 people.

The school had been known to them as Stanley Grammar School and , in many minds, remained so known. These people were some of the remnants of a 90 strong collection of eager 11 year old pupils who first met at the school back in September 1950. In 1950, whilst eager, most were also filled with a sense of trepidation as they really were stepping off into the unknown.

Earlier in 2008, two of the survivors - Barry Hutchinson and myself had had the bright (?) idea of organising a year group reunion to mark the fact that we were either already within

borrowed time or were nearing it that highly significant 70th birthday which arrives with it so many thoughts of our own morality. Much effort went into tracking down survivors of the original 90 - about 10% in fact - are no longer with us. Others were not available because they live in Australia or some other far flung outpost or were committed to being away on holiday or some-such. One or two expressed themselves as not liking re-unions - can you believe it? I mean, how many do they get to? It had been, at times, almost possible to sense the odds on having a respectable turn-out diminishing on a daily basis. Nonetheless, we were advised that 25-30 would be a good turnout for such an event and, encouraged, we plodded on.

On the 20th September, 2008 a number of these now very much ex-pupils also carried with them a measure of doubtful apprehension. Must have had little or no contact with each other since they left the school in 1955 or 1957. In what seemed to be not time at all there was a hub-bub of conversation as the years fell away as if by magic. Where re-introductions were needed they were quickly and easily made and calls of "your not so and so are you? Really?" Or, "didn't recognise you at first but now it's perfectly obvious that that's who you are" rang around the former Music Room to which the group had been conducted by Fred Westwater. Here we were also met by Mr Alan Johnston who as a member of staff, still has day to day connections with the old place and who had generously given up his time that Saturday - not to mention a huge slice of his patience - to show the group around the school - and to make sure that we got up to not really serious mischief.

Members of the group had travelled from far and wide - from Orpington in Kent, Eastleigh in Hampshire, Stockport in Cheshire, Stone in Staffordshire and so on. Others who had been contacted were unable to make it on the day but are scattered as far apart as Canada, Weston-super-mere, Scarborough and Australia. Still others had risked the rigours of travel from such exotic places as Dipton, Chester le Street, Lanchester and even Harelaw.

The two wardens eventually managed to get the group into some semblance of order and off we went around the school. Much money was spent on the school a few years ago - especially on the original 1912 block, which was to have been restored back to something like the 1950s' layout so familiar to all of us. There was, therefore, much that was reassuring about the place and of course so much more that was breathtakingly different. Different and yet comfortingly friendly and welcoming. No one felt totally alienated by the many changes, which, I suppose, largely consisted of alterations made to accommodate the new technology with which the place bulges and with which present day pupils and staff must be so familiar and relaxed. It was just a little scary, however, to see some of this bunch of septuagenarians so easily picking

up the reins of memory and starting to behave like the Teddy-boy generation from which they came - Tom Fraser was noted for the cut of his drape-style blazer in those days but he had, for some reason, foresworn it this time!

As we went around, there could be heard comments like "You mean Miss T*****n - I remember she taught us history and socialism in equal measure" "Remember old J** B**s clouting you behind the ear with that darned great signet ring of his?" "Did J**n S**t ever get you with that hefty wooded block on his key ring when you sneaked in late? or "That's where the Head caught some of us one night at end of term running around slamming down desk lids and took us off to his office for a thrashing" or the question "Do you remember when Mr. M***s picked you up and threw you bodily into the corridor?" which was, somewhat embarrassingly, raised in my direction. I cannot say that he was my favourite teacher.

All too soon it was time to move on and we adjourned, still marvelling, to the Harperley Hall where Fred had arranged a display of photographs from the 1950's.

So what did it all achieve? From my own point of view it was not only an enjoyable experience on the day but I had had a lot of fun in working on the organisation of the event - telephoning people from out of the blue. In the long run though the remaking of long lost contacts was, in itself, a worthwhile exercise since I refuse to believe that none of those who professed to dislike reunions has never wondered for a moment what our old school mates have done in life. In another sense it reminded me what an extraordinary place Stanley Grammar School was, although I realise that ex pupils of inferior places like Hookergate or Chester le Street or Consett. Grammar schools would quite legitimately, make the same sort of comment it is remarkable to think that to a large extent, schools such as these were an experiment in social engineering.

Whilst I see the present day educationalists' point when they say that these were divisive institutions, I feel that it is legitimate to ask

whether, without them, 50 odd years ago, these small, deprived and often introspective, mainly mining communities – the pits were still alive all around us, of course – would have managed to produce so many successes from such unpromising areas and from such unlikely people: people whose collective contributions to society have been quite remarkable. From our own group of 90, I can name 3 who became Professors in a variety of Universities, several others who built careers establishing and running their own successful business enterprises, employing many other folk. Others have had success in often very large industries and business enterprises. I achieved senior positions in the public sector and left some mark in the company I worked for during the last 10 years before I retired. Others again made contributions in public life as magistrates, teachers, councillors, senior public-sector professionals and so on. All of our year groups will have had similar records of achievement. Perhaps the answer is that we were among the very fortunate few who were given the opportunity – and who, in the main, took and used it – and not just in a self-centred manner. I retired in December 1998 after spending most of my time working in the public sector (local

government, hospital service, new towns) spruced up by 2 years (1958 – 1960) in the Army in East Africa and the Middle East with a then famous Scottish Regiment. Finally I had ten years in a large multi-national company. I think that my time at the School provided me with a component that greatly assisted me in each of those areas of work and life.

Anyway, I know that a number of people are already looking forward to our next reunion and I hope that we will all be able to make it then. I hope also that we shall have the pleasure of the company of those who were unable to get along this time.

I must conclude by expressing my renewed thanks to the Head Teacher for the loan of his School, Fred Westwater for his assistance, Alan Johnston for his friendly patience and, most important of all, to the school for being such a wonderful and memorable place over 50 years ago and now.

With very best regards to you all.

John Evans Stanley Grammar School 1950 - 55

Some memories of Stanley Grammar School, aka Tanfield, Alderman Wood etc.

I arrived for my first day at Alderman Wood School in September 1941. The country was just entering the third year of the Second World War and it was a scary but exciting time for us all. No-one else from Pickering Nook Junior School had 'passed the scholarship' to Alderman Wood so I knew almost no-one. A distant cousin, Keith Harag, started on the same day and he was a big plus because he was the biggest in the class and he protected me from the mild bullying that was then fairly common. I think that Keith later joined the diplomatic service. He certainly worked abroad and we still make contact from time to time. I also quickly became friendly with Sam Hunter from Catchgate (now living in Canada, (Bart Hunter whose parents had the fish and chip shop at Catchgate road ends and Alan Gurkin from Greencroft.

Several members of my family were good sportsmen. My father had been captain of Tantobie Cricket Club and cousins Ron Jeffery and Harry Clark had both played cricket and football for Alderman Wood. So it was natural that I quickly became involved in junior house sport and quite soon I began to feel part of my new school.

The Headmaster throughout my years at the school was Mr Carr. He was a neighbour at Clough Dene where I lived until 1946 and became a friend and for a time, my landlord. He was a Quaker and in many ways his ideas were ahead of his time. My form mistress in Form I was Miss Hakin who also did her best to introduce a fairly unresponsive group to the joys of French. Miss Mortimer taught us Maths and Mr Forster taught History in a somewhat eccentric way. I remember his advice to remember the name of the Russian general at

the battle of Borodino by saying "Kutusov and Borodinos"!

Music has always been an important part of my life but in the first year or two, the school didn't have a specialist music teacher so Miss Richardson combined her role as a Geography Mistress and teaching music. Then Mr Dobbs arrived. His full name was, I think, Jack Percy Baker Dobbs so he began life in North West Durham with a slight handicap but he quickly won us over through his knowledge and enthusiasm. In our fourth year, he invited to a meeting anyone interested in adding music to our School Certificate subjects. I was one of the small group that signed up, as was Margaret Dobson who later married Bill Wilson who played school cricket with me. Margaret was the star of the group and went on to the Royal College of Music before singing with the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company for a number of years.

Jack Dobbs also started a Music Society and arranged tickets for members to hear the regular concerts given by the Halle Orchestra conducted by Sir John Barbarolli at Newcastle City Hall. When he left the school to become Durham County Music Organiser, he was replaced by Mr Yockney who turned out to be a different kind of asset, always ready to give up a Saturday morning to umpire a school cricket match.

In 1946, I passed my School Certificate exams. At that time, it was necessary to pass in at least five subjects so it was quite possible to pass with decent marks in four subjects but still leave school with little to show for five years work. On the other hand, I guess that just having been a pupil at the school was kind of a bonus.

The choice of subjects for Higher School Certificate was limited, especially on the science

side. There was no biology teacher, so like the rest of the science group, the four subjects that I took were Chemistry, Physics, Pure Maths and Applied Maths. Had I taken the subjects that really interested me at the time, they would probably have been Music, Chemistry, English Literature and History but that sort of combination wasn't possible then. Maybe it's as well.

My two years in the sixth form were hectic. I was playing a lot of sport and was Captain of a good school cricket team that included a number of players with regular places in league sides, people like Norman Collin, Ernie Barrass, Brian Patterson and Bob Harrison. I also discovered girls and there never seemed to be enough time for studying. So much so that at one point, Mr Elliot (Little El), who was Deputy Head as well as teaching Maths, said to me that I needed to decide whether I wanted to be a professional cricketer, a pianist or pass my Higher. With the arrogance of youth, I said that I'd like to do all three. I did pass my HSC and later took a degree at what was then King's College in Durham University. I didn't play the piano or play cricket professionally but played a good standard of club cricket for well over forty years and still play occasionally my beautiful Bluthner piano.

I had a wonderful time at Alderman Wood through its evolution to Stanley Grammar School. The teachers were almost all excellent but for me the highlight of my time there was being captain of the School cricket team. When I left in July 1948 to do my National Service in the RAF, I took with me memories of seven truly happy years.

Jack Jeffery
4 November 2008

Class of '58 Reunion

A chance remark by an old friend suddenly brought it home to me that it was fifty years ago, in 1958, that we started at Stanley Grammar School. It didn't seem possible that so much time had passed since that day, yet here we all were, 61 years old.

I was told quite firmly that we couldn't let such an occasion go by without having a reunion, even if we

could only contact a small number of the people in our year group. I duly contacted the school and arranged for it to be open for two hours on the afternoon of Saturday, October 4th. The Tanfield Association generously agreed to pay two hours' overtime to the site manager, and the reunion was on!

Since there was a relatively short time for contacting people, we found that some of our former classmates were on holiday or were otherwise engaged on that weekend. However, some were available and prepared to travel, in some cases, hundreds of miles to be there. We assembled ten ex-pupils and four ex-staff members, plus partners, who met in the conference room at 2pm on the day. It's amazing how much noise a small group of people can make, getting together after years,

and in some cases, for the first time since 1963. I had previously been to visit the school to sort out photos from the late 50s and early 60s, so the first hour saw everyone poring over photos and exclaiming with pleasure when they saw themselves or friends in fuzzy black and white, in uniform, usually on the school field or occasionally in classrooms.

The second hour was taken up with a tour of the 1912 building, renewing old memories of places. After such a length of time, it wasn't always easy to remember how it used to be, but we seemed to manage quite well. At 4pm we bade farewell to the school and went to the Harperley Country House Hotel, where we had booked a meal. It was nice to relax and continue reminiscing in pleasant surroundings, and we all enjoyed the meal.

In fact, we enjoyed ourselves so much, we are thinking of having another, bigger reunion in April. This should give us more time to plan and to use the 'old school tie' to contact more people. We will still be in our 50th anniversary year, after all, so we'll use that as our excuse.

Elizabeth Hawkins (Thirlaway) 1958-65



Congratulations to Kevan Jones M.P.

The Tanfield Association sends its warmest best wishes to our Honorary Vice President Kevan Jones M.P. on his appointment to Under Secretary of State for Defence. It is an awesome job to undertake, but we feel that the Prime

Minister could not have chosen a better man. To give an insight into his ministerial life we are quoting an extract from "The Northern Echo" 5th November 2008.

'A regular irritant'



AN OLD HAND: Kevan Jones, right, talks to 88-year-old Harry Lester during the annual Veterans' Day service in Chester-le-Street in July

I HAVE a right old pompous title," says Kevan Jones, sitting in a comfy chair in his new office high up in the Ministry of Defence. Outside his window, the London Eye turns imperceptibly, the Thames flows slowly under Westminster Bridge, and a pigeon alights on the head of the statue of Gordon of Khartoum who, with a faraway look in his bronze eye and his wand of victory tucked under his arm, meditates on the meaning of military might.

"I'm Under Secretary of State for Defence," continues the Durham North MP who is the North-East's newest minister, "and after that it says Minister for Veterans, and then there's a long list of responsibilities."

As he's been in office less than a month, he collects the list from his desk, which is as tidy as his neatly parted hair, and reads off his responsibilities: pay, pensions, burials, medals, housing, recruitment and retention, low-flying and much, much more, including the Met Office.

"So, yes, I'm in charge of the weather," he says with a little chuckle.

It is, in truth, a little surprising to see him in office. Although he is in the Prime Minister's camp - he was part of the "curry house plot" which hurried the beginning of Tony Blair's end in No 10 - since his election in 2001, he seems to have relished being an outsider.

His battle with the miners' union over compensation meant he was the only local Labour MP not to be invited to this year's Durham Gala; he's fallen out with the Derwenside area of his party over council matters, and from the Commons backbenches he's been lobbing so many awkward, flaying questions into the MoD that he's been called "a regular irritant".

"I'm on a training course at the moment from poacher to gamekeeper, and it's working very slowly," he says.

"You have to accept when you come into government that you are part of that collective responsibility, but I've come here to challenge things so my argumentative style isn't going to change."

There's an understanding that, as a backbencher, it's your job to ask questions. It may be irritating to be on the end of those questions, but I think it's a good, positive thing. Now I'm going to be on the receiving end.

It was the job that drew him into the fold. He became interested in defence issues in the late



As the North's newest minister, MP Kevan Jones is responsible for everything to do with defence - including veterans and the weather. He talks to **Chris Lloyd** about his reputation for asking awkward questions.

1960s when working with the GMB union at the Swan Hunter shipyards on the Tyne, and got onto the Defence Select Committee the moment he entered Parliament.

It is a good thing the job was so attractive, because when the phone rang at 11pm on reshuffle Friday and the voice said, "Gordon here", it became clear he was to be only one of a handful of ministers who were to remain on the backbench salary.

"As a good trade unionist, why am I doing this unpaid?" he asks - he has a habit of asking himself questions and then replying. "To be blunt, if it was something I wasn't interested in, I wouldn't have accepted it. I earn enough money as a MP. Would I like ministerial pay? I think so, but it is an area I was interested in and I couldn't say no."

"This is a great opportunity because it is the command post to make sure the interests of servicemen and women and veterans are championed and in the North-East that will affect many families."

Early tasks include improving Army accommodation and making it easier for service personnel to buy their own homes. He's investigating whether there is a disproportionate number of ex-servicemen in jail, and he's looking at whether more service children

should be encouraged to go to boarding school. "We ask service families to do an awful lot," says Mr Jones, 47. "Moving around the country, around the world, putting great strain on family life. It's not easy for those kids, so anything we can do to give their stability is good, and for people going off to Iraq or Afghanistan, knowing that their kids get a great education is a weight off their mind."

He also wants to challenge the perception of the armed forces.

"It never ceases to amaze me going to Afghanistan and Iraq and seeing young men and women 18 and 19 with huge responsibilities," he says. "I find it quite humbling to know they come from communities in the North-East, which are quite challenging."

"I want to be their champion, to say that the armed forces are a force for the good. I was in Basra in July. There was this kid from Middlesbrough in North Tyneside, joined up about two years ago, got some qualifications, going for his HGV licence, and he was telling me all he had done and you could see his sense of pride."

He sings the praises of Darlington College's outreach service into Catterick Garrison. "Kids are going in there with very low literacy and numeracy skills, and within months they're turning around," he says. "The education system has failed them but the armed forces provide good educational opportunities for people who would never have got them."

For all the joys of the job, though, there are difficulties. Days after his promotion, London's evening newspaper ran a story suggesting he was the first gay defence minister.

"I had a good laugh," he says. "I have never used my private life to promote myself as a politician. It is a private matter and that is it. The fact that what they said is untrue is actually quite funny and says much about the standards of the Evening Standard."

Much harder to deal with was an early official visit to an Army hospital in Birmingham. "I met the mother of a kid who had come back with horrific injuries," he says. "In those circumstances it is hard to explain that you can't put the UK in a bubble insulated from the rest of the world. As a politician, anything I would have said to them wouldn't have made any difference but I have asked to keep in touch."

He continues: "One of the hardest decisions I ever took was to vote for the war in Iraq. It's a pie think politicians take these decisions lightly, but we don't. There was a lot of soul-searching. But that's what I've chosen to do. To be a Member of Parliament, you have to take tough decisions. Does it get any easier? No, it doesn't."

There are some consolations, though. On Remembrance Day, he will attend a service in London, dash north to pay wreaths in Chester-le-Street and Durham in his constituency, and then fly to Cairo to represent the Queen, the Prime Minister and the country at a ceremony marking the 90th anniversary of the end of the First World War.

"I will be the official representative," says the Under Secretary of State. "That sounds daunting, doesn't it?"

A.G.M. Report

The A.G.M. of the Tanfield Association was held on Thursday 16th October 2008, (the birthday of the school). The meeting was part of a Wine and Cheese Evening and open to all members, the Wine and Cheese table was beautifully prepared and laid out by Ann Hogg and was appreciated by everyone.

The following officers were sanctioned in their posts:-

President Professor M. B. Pescod O.B.E. (pupil 1944-1951)

Vice President E. Brabbam (pupil 1944-1951)

Secretary F. Westwater (staff 1977-1998)

Assistant Secretary J. Hogg (pupil 1954-1961)

Membership Secretary Mrs S. Donkin (pupil 1976-1981)

Finance Secretary Mrs K. Scott (pupil 1970-1976)

Mrs S. Donkin (pupil 1976-1981)

Newsletter Editor E. Brabbam (pupil 1944-1951)

Working Executive Member –

Brian Hopkins (pupil 1959-1964)

Graham Corner (pupil 1959-1964)

June Todd (pupil 1950-1957)

Chris Morrison (pupil 1962-1969)

Keith Kirtley (pupil 1959-1965)

Jack Nelson (pupil 1967-1967)

Tom Harpe (pupil 1958-1963)

Astrid Reeve (pupil 1950-1957)

Michael Looe (pupil 1961-1966)

Marjorie Whalley (pupil 1939-1945)

Malcolm Webb (pupil 1958-1965)

Alan Johnston (pupil 1966-1973)

Keith Alder (staff 1990-)

Susan Smith (pupil 1964-1971)

Elizabeth Hawkins (pupil 1958-1965)

The following are ex-officio and have the right to attend all meetings of The Tanfield Association:-

Tanfield School Head Teacher
Graham Lloyd

Tanfield Chair of Governors

Len Broxson

Honorary Vice President

Kevan Jones M.P.

One important change should be noted, that of Newsletter Editor now Ted Brabbam, Tom Harpe has stood down owing to pressure from other duties, including the Chair of Governors at Greenland Amalgamated Infant and Junior School, South Moor. Other members of the Newsletter Team are:-

Malcolm Webb, Tom Harpe, Elizabeth Looe, Elizabeth Hawkins, Fred Westwater.

Proof readers – June Todd, Astrid Reeve.

After some lively discussion the meeting closed at 8.30pm with thanks to all who attended and especially to Ann Hogg for organising the food and wine.

Meeting the Bishop



The Rev. Dr David Jenkins shares a joke in the Head's study prior to his giving the 5th Annual Tanfield Lecture in front of a packed audience of senior pupils, teachers, governors and invited guests from the community.

Left to right:
Archie Howat Headteacher, Joanne Beatty Head Girl, Simon Harwood Head Boy, Rev. Dr David Jenkins Bishop of Durham. Date - November 1992.

A Book Well Worth Reading

The latest book written by one of our members is "Thursdays Child" by Barbara Churcher (pupil 1928-1935) is the story of her life from birth on Thursday 9th November 1916 to the present day.

It can only be described as a spell-binding and fascinating book to read. Apart from the personal side of the story, it is also a valuable social history of the time, and demonstrates what a young girl from a mining family in Craghead can achieve with determination and grit.

Her experiences are truly wonderful, from being a member of a very close and loving family through her time at Alderman Wood Secondary School, Tanfield, her life-long friendships, her enchanting experiences as she trained for the World of Physical Education in Denmark, rising to the highest levels of teaching and lecturing.

Barbara has accomplished so much in her life gaining respect and love from people in all parts of the world. The book contains sadness as well as happiness but through it all comes her joy and her deep love for all her family, everlasting friendships, the Methodist Church and her roots in Craghead. These few words can not adequately describe her wonderful book as it oozes with her endless enthusiasm and limitless energy; it is compelling reading and recommended to all members of the Tanfield Association.

Costs £7.150 and all proceeds from the sales of the book will go to Chester-le-Street Methodist Church rebuilding fund. Order direct from Barbara at 5 Flodden Close, Fellside Meadows, Chester-le-Street, County Durham, DH2 3TD. Telephone 0191 387 3624 or contact secretary Fred Westwater for further details.

"Tanfield Matters"

Many of our local magazine readers may have seen The Advertiser's four page supplement which appeared in October under the headline "Tanfield Matters". For those who didn't have the opportunity to see this feature it's worth mentioning some of the many positive aspects which appeared:

As former pupils we should all celebrate the school's excellent GCSE results for 2008 which surpassed previous years' rates. It was wonderful to note how these results were significantly ABOVE both the Local Authority and National averages. The good news should continue next year as the present Year 11 (ie 5th year in old money) is well placed to outperform 2008's outstanding results.

The Year 11 group of 2008 celebrated the end of their Tanfield schooldays with a "Tanfield Prom". Photographs in the article showed some of the elegant/smart pupils who attended this social event.

Many of our readers may not be aware that students at Tanfield can take up to 6 GCSE's in Year 10 (ie one year early)-with tuition in some of these subjects been given in after-school sessions. All levels of academic ability and

interest are provided for at Tanfield from sitting horse-riding exams to lunch-time Latin classes.

All of us will remember PE lessons in the old Gym (which still exists). Tanfield School today, however, has very modern sports' facilities. The facilities seem to rival those available in private health clubs. The new sports' hall has a floor covering similar to that used in the Beijing Olympics and equipment includes 2 trampolines, 2 indoor cricket nets, fitness equipment and 5-a-side football posts all of which are available for community use after school hours.

The article reminds us that Tanfield is now an established Specialist College of Science and Engineering. Detailed information is given about on-going work at the school aimed at developing links with schools in Ghana and Mauritius as well as with local schools.

Do try and see a copy of this feature and I am sure you will be delighted with the school's development. As a final comment I would add that I was pleased to see the following words appear under the school's badge/logo: "First Things First"-well done, Tanfield!

Jack Dobbs

Those of us who were at Tanfield in the 40s will have memories of Jack Dobbs. Apparently he was appointed to teach English, with some music. In a short time the priorities were reversed. It was he who wrote the music to the School Song, 'First Things First', and who inspired an interest in music in many pupils. We didn't know then that Alderman Wood School was his first appointment after qualifying. After only a few years he moved on to become a County Music Advisor, and thus an illustrious career in the field of music education was born. He piloted the developed a music degree, he published books on music history, on music therapy, and music and the slow learner. He ended his career as Deputy Principal of Dartington College of Arts in Devon. In 2002 he

wrote an article for the school publication, '90 Years On'.

Interestingly, when he came to Stanley Grammar School, he also became the pianist for the Annfield Plain Gleemen for a year or two.

He was a committed Quaker, and after retirement became a prison visitor. He lived on Dartmoor. His death, at 85, was reported in The Times and in the Guardian.

N.B. The school log for Dec. 1944 reports that Mr Dobbs had made an excellent start, and that soon after his arrival had organised a Christmas Concert which was a great success. The profits financed the purchase of musical instruments for use by pupils.

Memories of Edna Hunter

As a member of the Tanfield Association Newsletter team , it's always interesting to read the many letters Fred receives from members.

A recent letter from Nora Campbell, however, stuck a very poignant note for me.

Nora sent in an obituary for her good friend Edna Hunter who, sadly, died in May 2008. Edna was a pupil at Stanley Grammar School between 1961 and 1968 and during that time she and I were classmates and great friends.

Edna, who lived on the local farm in Tanfield Village, came to SGS shortly after the rest of our year, having transferred from Hookergate School. I vividly recall the "new girl" who stood out like a sore thumb in her green Hookergate uniform and I immediately bonded with the larger than life character that was "Ed".

She was always a bit different to the rest of our crowd and could be relied on to have a different take on most of the burning issues of the day . While the rest of us girls drooled over John, Paul and George , Edna loved Ringo and when we raved about the latest hits from the "hot" groups of the moment, Edna would extol the virtues of Buddy Holly.

We always thought her taste in music was a little weird - she was probably the only girl in our class who actually listened to the heavy classical stuff forced upon us by Mr Yockney ! Clearly though she had a great love of music (and Mr Yockney) as she went on to study music to 'A' level.

In the summer of 1965 Edna and I shared a great adventure when we went on what must

have been at the time, the ultimate school trip - an educational cruise on HMS Devonian , visiting Madeira , Casablanca and Lisbon.

I have very fond memories of those two weeks, sharing hilarious moments aboard the ship - falling out of our bunks, meal trays flying off tables in rough seas and not to mention the cockroaches in the showers! I also recall a shared interest in a group of 6th form boys from a school in Leeds although for my part it was strictly observational as I had a boyfriend (my now husband) back home!

I left SGS in 1966 after 'O' levels while Edna stayed on in the 6th form after which she trained as a teacher at Margaret McMillan College in Bradford. She began her teaching career in Newcastle and then moved to Liverpool where she remained, eventually becoming head of Abercrombie Nursery School.

Edna and I stayed in contact until the late 1970's then we lost touch and I often thought about her, wondering where she was and what she was doing.

Thanks to Friends Reunited ,we made contact again a few years ago although, sadly, we never had the opportunity to actually meet up again.

So, to me Edna will forever be that happy , full of fun if not a little crazy 16 year old girl, I remember with such affection.

Edna is survived by her three children, Ellen, Ian and Roy and will be greatly missed by all her family and friends.

Liz Loomer (nee Handy)

Letters

Mary Snaith - 1947-1953

Dear Fred,

My sister-in-law Lynne Breen (nee Barkley) kindly passed on your newsletter of Tanfield School. I was so pleased to receive it.

My name is Mary Barkley (nee Snaith). Both my husband and myself were pupils at Stanley Grammar School, me from 1947 - 1953, and Hugh from 1951 - 1953 (coming from Hookergate G.S.)

Hugh and I were in the same class at school, and have just celebrated our 51st wedding anniversary.

We have not lived in the NE for many years, and now that in-laws and parents are with us no longer, the reason to come North is no longer pressing.

After qualifying to teach at Hull, I taught (until I married and had children) at Tanfield Lea Primary School. After many years as a BBC Engineer, Hugh took a teaching post in the Forest of Dean, and here we have stayed for the

last 34 years. Until I retired in 1990 I was Deputy Head at St John's C of E Primary School.

I must mention that Hugh and I were on Holy Island in 2006 and were very impressed by the sculpture we saw there. I remember being in the Art Room at SGS (I think that I would be 2nd year then) and some 6th Form boys were there. A handsome young man, called Fenwick Lawson, was taking art, and was very nice to me. You can imagine how thrilled I was to find sculpture on Holy Island by Fenwick Lawson ARCA. I have since been in correspondence with him.

I send all good wishes from the Forest of Dean, Glos.

Yours sincerely,
Mary Barkley.

(Mary sent a small bundle of photo's from her school days. Some are reproduced in this Newsletter)



Mary Snaith foreground – but who is in the background?



Visiting the 'Campania'

Staff involved in the Production of "The Admirable Crickton". Can you name them?



More Photo's

We have yet more 'blasts from the past'!

1. A group of 6th Form girls from 1951. yes, it was the photographer who 'chopped' the top!
2. The SGS Basketball Team of 1959-60
3. The SGS Hockey Team from - ?
4. The Senior Football Team from 1952(?)

Please fill in the blanks, as they say.





ROIV DAH. LEVIN NORMAN BRIAN BEICK BRYAN



A.C. TOBY KEITH BECK JACK

1951-52
 1952
 1953
 1954

Dear Fred,

I enjoyed the two pictures from 1960 you printed in the last Association Newsletter.

I can help with one of the names in the '69-'70 School Team, and maybe change one. Diet Fisk, Tom's widow, gave me a copy of the team with the names printed on the back, and she has the first 3 at the back as Harry Davidson, Bob Pearson, and Alan Riddell.

Dear Fred,

Thank you for the Summer 08 newsletter. On almost every page there were some memory pegs of my time at Tanfield, '49-'56.

The John Hogg article threw up many familiar names, but what I did not know was that while he was teaching biology at Thika (near Nairobi), I was 200 miles further inland teaching geography at The Highlands School, Eldorat – on the edge of the Great Rift Valley. We used to drive down to Nairobi for a day's shopping – involving 2 descents and 2 ascents of the escarpment for each trip. Whilst our years at Tanfield did not fully coincide, I do have very good memories of John's father who was "the Parkie" at Dipton – a very hard working and well liked Park Keeper.

You asked for help in identifying faces in the photographs. I am sure that many have already been identified, but here goes:

Dear Fred,

Thank you for your letter regarding the AGM of the Association.

Regarding the Summer Newsletr, I was very interested in the photo of the bus trip on page 8. I am fairly sure that this was on the way to a tour of the Border Abbeys of Jedburgh, Kelso, Melrose etc. and can identify most of myself at the extreme right hand side of the picture. From

The other photo of us freezing in the cold, was taken early in 1960, and was I think, a picture of us about to take part in the County Cross Country Championships in Durham. Mr Geddes thought that it would be a good idea to have the photo taken, and as we all had different tops "suggested" that we should be topless.

Best wishes,

Bill Errington. (2nd from left, -top row.)

Page 8, lower photo:

3rd left (excluding driver) Jacks Dodds, 2nd right Ken Bolam, 5th right Dorothy Hardy, 4th right Jack Croudace (my cousin).

Jack's father, Harry Croudace, was at Tanfield in the early years and could well be in the upper photo. He became a County Inspector and I can remember him inspecting the school accompanied by Mr Carr.

Page 14:

2nd left, Marjorie Henderson.

If any one remembers her and cares to get in touch, please pass on my phone number.

Keep up the good work.

Kind regards,

John Bowes.

(We have more of the names from 'phone calls. Editor.)

right to left, from me, are Ken Bolam, Alex Porter, and Jack Croudace. Jack, Ken and I, together with Tom Bolam, qualified in Medicine in 1959, and are still good friends except for Tom who sadly is no longer with us.

Of the rest I am not sure.

Looking forward to seeing you.

Yours sincerely,

Don Chapman.

Dear Fred,

Thank you for the latest issue of the Association Newsletter. As ever it is a rich source of nostalgia.

I am grateful to Ethel Armstrong for reminding me of Miss Gillam's pneumatic charms and short tunic, and of 'Pop' Forster. I also remember Bob Radcliffe who taught physics as an amiable ex-serviceman, one of several who joined the staff after the war.

Looking back at staff composition of both the Board School and SGS during WW2, there was a high proportion of women, many of whom were unmarried. This must have reflected the conscription of all men under 40 years old. I imagine that a disproportionate number of unmarried women may also have been a legacy of the 'Geddes Axe', when, in 1925, during the great depression, married women were sacked from schools and other public services.

Email from Peter Buckley

Hi, I would just like to take this opportunity to thank you for your courtesy during my visit to the school. Please pass on my regards to Fred Westwater, I was greatly surprised at how the school has developed over the years, and I hope it will keep on improving.

Regards Pete Buckley.

Treasurer's Request

Mrs Susan Donkin and Karen Scott, our treasurers, respectfully request that Association members who do not pay by Standing Order, send their £5 annual administration fee for 2008/09 to Mrs S. Donkin, 19 Lindon Avenue, Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham DH3 3PP.

Submission of Articles for the Newsletter

It would be a great help, if you have the wherewithal, if articles for publication could be submitted in MS Word .doc form. Printed articles need to be retyped after editing, and saved in .doc format before they can be placed in a Desk Top Publishing application. A .doc format article can still be edited, and then placed

Early after WW2 Mr Carr, the Quaker Headmaster at SGS, organised a visit by a group of German children to the school. The brief visit aroused mixed and often hostile feelings. I imagine it was a praiseworthy attempt to build bridges and show us that German children were human beings just like us. However wartime propaganda, memories of the conflict, and the horrors of the relief of Belsen etc. were still too raw for us to take a more positive view.

I wonder if any of my contemporaries remember this and can shed any further light on the visit, in particular members of the 5th and 6th forms at the time. Did they actually meet the group?

With best wishes,

John Wilson (London SW20)

Editors note:

Peter is our latest overseas recruit to the Association. He now lives in the Philippines where his wife is a High School Teacher. The Tanfield Association organised a tour of the school on his recent visit to family in Stanley.

The financial year for The Tanfield Association commences on 16th October (the Birthday of the School). Any member who joined after 31st March 2008, should not pay their £5 until 16th October 2009.

directly into the application. Much less time consuming.

If you prepare articles in this way, please e-mail them to: ted.brabban@nasuwd.net

Thanks, Editor.