



Old Boys' Newsletter

Belfast Royal Academy

October-2018

The President 2018-19 -- Robert McIlhagger

Robert McIlhagger attended Ballymena Academy for his first few years of primary education until he moved to Wingfield, when his family was re-located to Belfast. His elder brother, David, entered Form 1. He moved to 'the Big School' and made good progress through the school, enjoying rugby and athletics culminating in being a member of the 1st XV during his final year. He was honoured to be selected to be Head Boy the same year and Captain of Pottinger House.

Continuing his education, he entered the Queen's University, where he read Aeronautical Engineering having been fascinated by aircraft and flying throughout his life. This was a rewarding period, becoming President of the Society of Electrical, Aeronautical and Mechanical Engineers in his final year.

On graduation, he joined the Hawker Siddeley Aviation Company (now part of BAE plc), in Manchester as a Graduate Apprentice. Here he formed and captained a new rugby team with extensive company support. However, after twelve months, due to a down-turn in the aviation industry, he returned to Queen's to study for a Mechanical Engineering Degree and subsequently a Doctorate degree.

On graduation, he joined the Lambeg Industrial Research Association and became Head of the Polymer Division. After 10 years there, he joined the Ulster University as Reader in Mechanical Engineering, establishing the Engineering Composites Research Centre, (ECRE) being awarded a Personal Chair in 1993. He has authored or joint authored over 140 academic publications and, in 2001, served on the UK Research Assessment Panel (Metallurgy and Materials), assessing the academic output of all UK Universities. He resigned from the Directorship of ECRE in 2004 and was awarded the status of Emeritus Professor by the Ulster University for achievements in and contributions to development of advanced composite materials for engineering applications.

On the sporting front, he played rugby throughout the early part of his career, captaining several sides at Junior level and playing at Senior level for the Academy Rugby Club. Through this and the School he has developed many long-standing friendships which he greatly values.

His experiences at the Academy laid a very firm foundation for his career path development in life-long learning and interpersonal skills. Development of his leadership skills played an important part both in the work place and subsequent social and other activities. He is indebted to all the staff of the School for their commitment and dedication.

In 1971 Robert married Helen, an old girl of the school. Their four children graduated from university, are well established in their vocational careers and are all married.

Robert is passionate about education having served on the Board of Governors at Friends' School, Lisburn for 30 years and participated in the activities of both the GBA and AQE.



Annual Dinners.

The Annual Dinner of the Old Boys' Association will be held in the Europa Hotel Saturday 3rd November. 2018.

The London Dinner will be held on Friday 8th March 2019 at the RAF Club, Piccadilly.

The Edinburgh Dinner will take place on Friday 26th April 2019 at the New Club, Princes Street.

Old Boys' News

[Dr Ian Clements, OBE: BRA \(1957-1964\)](#)

I started 'big school' at the 'Academy' in 1957, having come up from Skegoniel Primary School. Alongside my nemesis – A.H. McMurray!

It was only natural to follow in my Father's, Uncle's and Aunt's footsteps. My Father later served as a school governor. Auntie Marjorie was a music teacher at that time, alongside May Curran. She had the best behaved class in school. The threat of being sent down to Joe Clements [chemistry teacher – no relation] kept everyone listening attentively.

My brothers, Brian and Alan followed a few years behind me. I should mention, Ann [nee Thompson]. Alan's wife is a serving governor and past warden. A great servant of the school!



Many happy days followed during the next 7 years. Rugby was all that really mattered. The high point of a very average but enthusiastic rugby career was captaining the 'Under 13' XV. Jimmy Paul was a great coach and mentor. Later, Harry Rea, Robert Pollin and David Martin who had been elevated to the 'Under 14 XV', joined with the likes of Roy Connolly, Henry Halliday, Roger Davies, Billy Baird and many others to create the group that shared the school's cup in 61/62, 62/63 and 63/64. We recently enjoyed 50 year reunions. No one had changed a bit!

I entered Queen's to study medicine, in 1964. Skipping swiftly ahead to 1971 and qualifying, after experiencing first hand some of the horrors of the 'troubles' in A & E at the Royal Victoria Hospital I signed for a 3 year GP vocational training scheme based in Cumbria. I had enjoyed a chequered few years in medical school but again the highlights were on the rugby pitch.

BRA (FP) joined the Senior League in 1968/1969. Mike Cromey and I were a devastating defensive centre combination. We seldom saw the ball! The following season I was honoured to be vice-captain to Billy Clarke's 1st XV. This time 'Dowdie and Clements' featured in the attacking centre line up. Except we could never remember who was left, right, inside or outside. It didn't seem to make much difference. 'Lutty' and Tommy [Bellieu] were outside us so best to get the ball on out – if we could!

My medical career:- a short summary should suffice

My new young wife, Joanne, a Strathearn girl, and I set off for South Africa in 1976. We lived and worked in Natal, outside Durban for 5 years. Our daughter, Suzanne, and eldest son, Richard, were born in Durban. We loved the beautiful but troubled country and have never regretted our time spent there.

We returned to Northern Ireland in 1981 and I joined Dr Geoffrey Bell, another academy 'old-boy' in his practice in Newtownards. Geoff was a wonderful role model, quietly conscientious and totally committed to his patients. I learned my trade and practised within the Newtownards and surrounds until retirement in 2009.

For those outside the Health and Care service the series of different posts I held, outside the practice, in leadership roles with my GP colleagues would be meaningless. Suffice to say I always thought 'we could do better for patients'. I held advisory posts to Health Trusts and Boards and led GP Commissioning Groups. It seemed a natural progression to apply for and, happily, be appointed as Chair of the new Regional Health and Social Care Board in December 2008. I still hold this post. I was obviously delighted to receive the OBE in the recent Honours Awards for 'Services to Healthcare and the Community in Ards'.

I have had the privilege of serving the community as a GP and in various community organisations. I have worked with many wonderful colleagues, all committed to caring for patients, and their families. We have tried to make our health service work better for patients and carers. That remains the continuing challenge.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time at BRA. I am sure that the ethos of encouraging achievement, while respecting diversity, has stood me in good stead over the years.

I also have many long-standing friendships from those happy days providing a great sense of continuity, support and stability.

Ian Clements

Tributes to DR LOUIS CAMPBELL on his retirement from Hon. Secretary

Dr Louis Campbell was Honorary Secretary of the Old Boys' Association for ten years, one of the longest periods for one individual to hold the post in recent times.

On graduation from the Queen's University with a Doctorate Degree, Louis joined the staff of BRA as a Chemistry teacher. His career advanced through Head of Department to Vice-Principal, contributing to the development of the School throughout his professional career.

Such loyalty is rare these days. He always worked for the benefit of his pupils and for the Association, he being President of the Association for the Year 2007-08.

His ten 'charges' paid the following tributes.



FAST CARS, BOSS SUITS- HEART OF GOLD

I first encountered Doctor Louis Campbell as a member of the teaching staff during my children's attendance at B.R.A. They were never personally taught the subject of Chemistry by him but they became, like myself, great admirers of the sartorially elegant Doctor Campbell! I became much more involved with Louis as a member of the "Old Boy's" committee where our mutual friendship was cultivated without any encumbrance!

Louis enjoys the good things in life – the racy motor car coupled with the designer gear. Yet through it all, he maintains an air of both humility and total sincerity. His genuine warmth is so unique - difficult to replicate in modern society! It is true to say Louis could not possibly have any enemies – an existence that few could comfortably boast! He has a passionate interest in live orchestra music and is an extremely keen walker. These are healthy pursuits but the one thing that sets him as a "class apart," is his love of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club. What possibly could be more admirable?

I have, on several instances, witnessed the astonishing relationship he has with our pupils – both past and present. On one occasion the adulation was tantamount to "hero worship" when I encouraged him to address a post Schools Cup semi-final function at Academy RFC, attended by our sixth formers. I have also watched young people racing over to gain a seat at his table at several London ex pupil dinners - such is his popularity.

The role of Secretary of B.R.A. Old Boys' Committee is multi-faceted – it requires a very steady hand! For 10 years Louis has steered our ship alongside 10 very different Presidents. Each of those who have served as President in the last decade possess different skills and varying styles. It was Louis's great strength to not only work closely with each one but also to assist in bringing out the best in each of us!! He knew exactly what was required and never refused to provide the correct advice – always there to sort out any little difficulty or concern. He prepared the minutes and organised the meetings with ruthless efficiency. When the committee decided to promote past pupil dinners in both London and Edinburgh, Louis was at the centre of the requisite planning. He worked closely with the "Alumni" group and maintained close correspondence with the School and its requirements. He became involved in all the activities of the "Old Boys" Association during his tenure and yet always impeccably completed these tasks with that endearing smile!

In wishing him a long and healthy retirement, I personally feel indebted to him for all his help and kindness (especially at times of personal trauma) and hope to serve on Committee with him for many years to come!

President No 7 2014-15 A. C. Brown

'Louis was a dedicated Hon Sec of the OBA whose Minutes were impeccable, so much so that even Robin Reid could find no fault in them. Louis was also an important link between the OBA and the School and was particularly good at encouraging school-leavers to join the OBA and attend functions such as the Annual Dinner.'

President No 1 2008-09 Professor H. L. Halliday

'There is an endless number of adjectives that could describe this gentleman. He is a true gentleman that gave much energy to the position of Honorary Secretary.'

President No 2. 2009-10 J.M.H. Cooper

As a former a President of the OBA Louis was very well placed to know what was required in the Hon. Secretary position which he performed with distinction. He provided me with tremendous support throughout my term and therefore made my job so much easier. Since then more functions have been introduced to the annual calendar and Louis' organisational skills have been a great asset to the Association. He will be a hard act to follow.'

President No 3. 2010-11 T. C. Reid

'As Secretary Louis was most efficient and made the task of being President very straight forward I think however looking at the "bigger "picture Louis committed his professional career to Belfast Royal Academy and managed to have the total respect of his teaching colleagues and the pupils. I can confirm this in that my son and daughter had the privilege to attend the school when Louis was vice principal and continue to hold him in the highest regard.'

President No 4. 2011-12 S. B. Orr

'Louis was the most able Hon Sec a new BRA President could hope for. Throughout my year as President, which I thoroughly enjoyed, he was always available to me with guidance, advice and encouragement.

I know that all Presidents received the same professional commitment and we are all indebted to him.'

President No 5. 2012-13 G. R. Simon

'During my time as President of the Old Boys and also in recent years in the organisation of the London and Edinburgh Dinners Louis was an absolute pleasure to work with. Meticulous and fastidious in everything that he was responsible for and undertook Louis worked very hard in the interests of the Association and the relationship between the Association and the School.'

President No 6. 2013-14 D. A. Haslett

'Louis Campbell taught at the School during the attendances of our three children and although only James was in his class in Form Three, they all have very kind memories of him.

In my Presidential year, I visited the School to progress some Committee business and I was struck by his popularity in the place at a time, after retirement, when he was there on a part time basis. The London dinner was an area of concern to myself and the informed and conscientious manner in which he carried out his Secretarial duties allayed my fears and a good evening was enjoyed by all present.

He has been a cornerstone of the Association for many years and we all wish him a pleasant, lengthy and not too distant retirement.

President No 8. 2015-16 A. M. Cole

'In my year as President Louis was unfailingly approachable and helpful in guiding me through the requirements of the office. He gave unstintingly of his time and experience to assist the President and the Association generally, his contacts with the School have also been of great benefit to our Association.'

President No 9. 2016-17 R. Fletcher

'For many years Louis Campbell has been the heart and soul of the Old Boys' Association. As a former President and Association Secretary, he has consistently shown that he is an intelligent, reliable, honourable, talented and collegial man whose friendship inspires everyone to give of their best.'

President No 10. 2017-18 M. Blake

Golf News

Picken Cup on Thursday 14th June 2018 at Malone GC. Winner – Chris Cooper
Jeremy Weir's Captain's Day on Friday 14th September 2018 at Royal Belfast GC. Winner – Mark Cooper
Ferguson Cup (for the best aggregate score over both outings. Winner – Mark Cooper

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