



B.R.A. Old Boys' Newsletter

Edition 1 - September 2012

President's Welcome

I welcome you to the first edition of the Belfast Royal Academy Old Boys' Association Newsletter. I hope that you will enjoy it, and that it will be first of many.

We aim to provide information about former pupils, from different generations, which will be of interest to a wide range of Old Boys (and, indeed, Old Girls!). We hope to include in future editions some reminiscences about school days, interesting life stories and news of all sorts.

Please send any articles for inclusion in future editions, or any short news items about Old Boys in your family, to Louis Campbell, c/o Belfast Royal Academy, Cliftonville Road, Belfast BT14 6JL.

I hope that you will enjoy having memories stirred and that you will continue to support the Academy: the oldest school in Belfast and what Louis Lord used to call "a flagship school".



President, Geoff Simon, receives the Chain of Office from Immediate Past President, Stephen Orr

Ulster Public Schools' Old Boys' Golf Society

In 1934, Mr Maurice Johnston, a member of the Old Campbellians' Society and The Royal Belfast Golf Club, instigated a golf tournament which would see past pupils from 10 of Northern Ireland's top Grammar Schools compete to win a coveted shield. This gathering of Old Boys became known as the Ulster Public Schools' Old Boys' Golfing Society.

Traditionally the following Old Boy Associations and Societies competed in the tournament: Ballymena Academy Old Boys' Association; Belfast Royal Academy Old Boys' Association; Coleraine A.I. Old Boys' Association; Bangor Grammar School Old Boys' Association; Dungannon Royal School Old Boys' Association; Foyle College Old Boys' Association; M.C.B Old Boys' Association; Old Campbellians' Society; Old Instonians' Association; Old Portora Union.

The Old Campbellians' Society were awarded the inaugural Shield but it was the Belfast Royal Academy teams, mostly from Malone Golf Club (Ferguson, McErvel, Dornan and McPherson), Fortwilliam and Cliftonville (Tennant) who proved most successful and were awarded at least one of the team prizes every year.

The Society did not have any tournaments for approx ten years and Mr. Dornan spoke to Bill Tennant and implored him to call a meeting and see if the Tournament could be resurrected. This was done in the 1980's and once again the ball was rolling with B. Tennant as Secretary and W. Miscampbell as Hon Treasurer. In 2011 Billy Tennant and Bill Miscampbell both stepped down from the UPSOBGS.

The Society would like to thank them both for all their hard work and successful organisation of the tournament over the

past 21 years. These roles have been taken over by Ken and Iain Knox.

This year, B.R.A. Old Boys' won the Old Boys' Shield played on Friday 25th May 2012 at Royal Belfast Golf Club. The team comprised Tim Weir, Mike Bennett, Stewart Beattie, Iain Knox and George Armstrong. They narrowly missed out on the Gross Trophy by 1 shot to Methody and Stewart Beattie was second in the individual Nett Competition.



Arthur Espley: B.R.A. 1955-1962

Head Boy & Captain of 1st XV 1962

Edinburgh University 1962-1968 studying medicine.

I worked in Nottingham, Derby and Perth Western Australia, before appointment as consultant in Perth, Scotland in 1981. Before retirement in 2005, I worked with two other ex-B.R.A. men - Mike Forster, Consultant Anaesthetist in Perth and Stuart Evans, GP in Crieff.

I married a Scottish farmer's daughter in 1978 and have three Northern Irish children who claim to be Scottish. Many of the best Edinburgh University rugby players tended to be claimed by their school FP sides, leaving scope for foreigners to infiltrate the side. This helped to allow access to the University 1st XV for myself and, one year later, Richard and Harry Rea. Harry, of course, went on to gain several caps for Ireland in the centre while a medical student in Edinburgh.

My brother Phillip studied Dentistry some years later and captained the Edinburgh University 1st XV – the first dental undergraduate to do so.

So we had seven medics--four B.R.A. boys and three Campbellians (David Boyle, Paddy & Willie Irwin) involved in arguably the finest years of Edinburgh University rugby.

Academia features only marginally in my memories of B.R.A., although I recall clearly the intensity of JM Clements' Chemistry class, the patience of Mr Moore in Physics, the genius of classmate Denis Weaire, the much respected and encouraging J W Darbyshire and the much-loved Vice Principal, Louis Lord, who cruised majestically around at break, gently rebuking miscreants by name.

Rugby and the Castle Grounds feature strongly in my school memories with sharing the Rugby Schools' Cup with RBAI at Ravenhill being the highlight.

The idea of a 50th reunion seemed to have begun with the continuing contact between Doctors Brian McConnell (B.R.A.)



and Ivan McCully (R.B.A.I.).

I was contacted and given eighteen months to organise our group. All of that time was required as tracing the team was the hardest part. Predictably, Tony Cole was a tower of strength and had details of many of the 'lost' players.

Of the squad of '62, we had sadly lost Robert Pollin relatively recently. Some of us met Robert's widow, Barbara, and gave a donation from players of both teams towards her charity walk of the Great Wall of China, which we hope was successfully completed.

Neither Derek McGimpsey nor Jack Hamilton was able to attend due to ill health. (Sadly, we have heard, just before going to press, Jack Hamilton passed away in August)

We were delighted that, in addition to a similar number of the Inst. team, the following attended the weekend's activities: Tommy Bellieu, Ian Clements, Roy Connolly, Taffy Davies (from Pasadena), Ian Hamilton, David Honeyford, Jimmy Marks, David Martin, Rab Mollan, Brian McConnell and Richard Rea.

The weekend began with a welcome at School by Mr Moore Dickson, Headmaster, followed by a most impressive tour of the facilities--slightly changed since the Sixties! We then had a nostalgic visit to the Castle Grounds and a warm welcome from staff and pupils at Ben Madigan.

We had a memorable dinner attended by both teams and with Headmaster Moore Dickson and the perennial Robin Reid as our guests. Pre-dinner photographs were by the Ulster Tatler.

Arthur Thompson, our inspirational rugby master in 1962, had hoped to attend and was most disappointed to be unable to do so because of a recent and serious illness.

Many thanks are due to Roy Connolly and Ian Clements for their hard work at the sharp end.



Mike Kerr: B.R.A. 1982-1989

Appointed C.E.O. of Asian Golf Tour

After attending Belfast Royal Academy I studied Civil Engineering at Edinburgh University. I later attended Queen's University, Belfast, where I was awarded a Master's degree in Applied Environmental Science. From there I was offered a place on a graduate scheme which saw me live and work in Singapore for six months before being offered a permanent position.

At the age of 4 years old I became a Junior member of Larne Golf Club, Islandmagee and am currently a member of Laguna Golf and Country Club in Singapore, playing off a handicap of 7; I have never forgotten my roots at "Royal Larne". In March this year I was appointed CEO of the Asian Tour. These are exciting times for the game at the highest level in Asia which has grown immensely over the past number of years. My first official tour event was the Masters in April.

I join the Asian Tour with over 17 years of senior management experience in Asia. For the last 12 years, I have worked with pan-Asian broadcaster, ESPN STAR Sports (ESS) in a number of senior roles across the region.

Working closely with Kyi Hla Han, the Executive Chairman of the Asian Tour, it is my job to help manage the strategic direction of the Tour with the aim of continuing to build and promote

the global profile of Asia's elite professional golf circuit.

The Asian Tour, through its membership of the International Federation of PGA Tours, is the only recognised pan-Asian professional golf tour in Asia. This unique feature positions the Asian Tour at the pinnacle of professional golf in Asia, providing its events with Official World Ranking status.



Sheldon Coulter: B.R.A. 1988-1995

My very first day at Belfast Royal Academy was a blur. The scale, size and number of pupils were quite daunting at first but this soon became the norm. As did carrying a rucksack bigger than myself filled with every book until I figured out that was what the locker system was for!

I have fond memories of school, and B.R.A. has shaped me along with countless others as we journey through life. Friends from school remain my closest which is testament in itself.

I enthused in the sporting way of school life while at the time doing what I had to do in the classroom. I was and still am a keen sporting person and my first love was football. However football was not a sport played at B.R.A. at that time. I had a decision to make. Playing football on a Saturday morning conflicted with the rugby matches times which did not please Mr Moffatt and his staff. What was to become my rugby career

began.

On leaving school in 1995 I attended Nottingham Trent University to study Accountancy. At the start of second year I was struck with glandular fever and took three months to recover. A whole term at university had been missed. It was at this stage rugby as a sport turned professional and I had been progressing up through the underage ranks into the senior squads. At the start of 1997 I was offered a professional contract with Ulster and joined five other fellow professionals. (From six in 1997, the current Ulster squad has forty professionals).

Whilst enjoying my new career I continued my studies part-time at the University of Ulster.

I played professional rugby from 1997 – 2003 with the highlight being victory in the 1999 European Cup Final at Lansdowne Road beating Colomiers in the final. Ulster was the first Irish team to achieve this. Special memories indeed.

After taking some time out to travel and play rugby overseas I retrained in the Financial Services Industry where I am today. In 2006 I joined St James's Place Wealth Management as an advisor and in July 2010 I set up my own practice in Hillsborough. Through my work with St James's Place I am involved in our foundation which has raised £24million for charity since its inception in 1992. I have just returned in April this year from a trek to Everest Base Camp (5,500m) over 18 days. This was an experience that stands out, quite like my first day at B.R.A. or Dublin in 1999. To date I am proud to say the St James's Place team have raised over £600,000 from this challenge.

I have an abundance of happy memories from school and it is a privilege to be involved with the Old Boys' Association which I feel is a vital link between school life and life after school.



Michael George: B.R.A. 1974-1981

Electioneering: US style

After leaving Cambridge I opted for a career in investment banking rather than engineering – a choice that I have never regretted. Right now I work for Fortress Investment Group and divide my time between New York and London. It's an exciting and hugely interesting life which often puts me at the centre of global financial developments. As almost everyone is now aware there is a close connection between the worlds of finance and politics and inevitably my professional life and my political interests overlap. That's how I became involved in fundraising for Mitt Romney in this year's US presidential election.

Basically, I believe that a Republican victory in November's election is essential if the United States is to recover its prosperity and its dominant place in the global economy. The GOP (Grand Old Party: that's US shorthand for the Republican Party) is dedicated to lowering taxes and reducing government interference in business. I was convinced from the outset that Mitt Romney was the candidate most likely to beat Obama, and was greatly relieved to see the end of unelectable candidates such as Gringrich, Paul, Perry and Santorum. For me, their early successes in the primaries were a low point in the campaign.

In a country as vast and as diverse as the United States fund raising is es-



Michael George, shooting the breeze with Mitt Romney

sential for electoral victory and that's where guys like me come in. It is sometimes difficult for people in the UK, with its different political culture, to fully understand this.

And it has become even more important since the decision of the Supreme Court in the 2010 Citizens United decision which permitted corporations as well as individuals to support election campaigns as long as they are independent of a candidate's campaign organization known as a PAC (Political Action Committee).

May 2012 marked a record for President Obama. The Democrat National Committee and its local affiliates raised more than \$60 million. However the efforts of me and others in the Republican camp meant that Mitt Romney passed that mark. In my opinion this shows a growing confidence in our candidate.

The Republican National Committee raised \$76.8 million, and according to some sources this sum was reached in part because a significant number of Democrat voters may now be making donations to Romney.

So there you have it. With Obama and Romney neck and neck in the polls, this is likely to be a tight race. That means a lot more work for people like me.

Stephen Smartt: B.R.A. 1980-1987

Queen's scientist to lead €2.3M hunt for Universe's first exploding star

Stephen Smartt has been chosen to lead an international €2.3million hunt to discover how the first chemical elements were created in the Universe.

Professor Smartt, Director of the Astrophysics Research Centre in the School of Maths and Physics at Queen's will begin a five year research project in April to examine how chemical elements were created in the Universe and try to find the first ever supernovae, or exploding stars, in the Universe. The grant, awarded by the European Research Council, is regarded as the most prestigious research grant in Europe for funding Science and Social Sciences.

Prof Smartt left B.R.A. in 1987 and studied for a BSc in Physics and Applied Mathematics and then a PhD in astrophysics at Queen's University Belfast. He then worked at the UK's observatory on La Palma in the Canary Islands and held a prestigious research council fellowship at the University of Cambridge for five years. Since coming back to Queen's, he has won a European Young Investigator award and Philip Leverhulme prize for his work. He has just been elected as a Member of the Royal Irish Academy and is Director of the Astrophysics Research Centre at Queen's.

Professor Stephen Smartt, who beat off competition from around Europe to scoop the grant said: "I'm absolutely honoured to be awarded such a prestigious grant. With this research we hope to understand how chemical elements were first created in the Universe - we think that they were created

by the explosions of the most massive stars. The project has an ambitious goal to find the first supernovae that exploded in the Universe. Just recently we have made new discoveries of the brightest supernovae ever found and this grant will build on that success.

When asked what this would mean for Queen's and Belfast, he replied "This is great news for Queen's but also for Northern Ireland as this money will be invested in the local economy. The research will involve a team of about a dozen international scientists, who will come to Queen's to work on this project. In our astrophysics research centre we have scientists from Sweden, Taiwan, Italy, Portugal, Ukraine, Greece and we will recruit more international scientists. But I hope that local students and school children will be inspired and realise that we can do world leading science right here in Belfast".

Prof. Smartt added "I was fortunate to have three great Maths teachers when I was at B.R.A. - Dr. Hugh Morrison, Dr Nick Todd and Neil Glass. They gave me a great foundation in Mathematics which is essential to understand and apply Physics professionally. I remember them very fondly. Moore Dickson was my English teacher for many years, and although the arts are not my strength I still remember him instilling a life-long lesson in me and the class. He encouraged independent thinking. He urged us to formulate our own views, to articulate them and to present our arguments with clarity and style."