



Old Boys' Newsletter

Belfast Royal Academy
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Adrian Brown attended BRA from 1967 to 1974. On leaving Academy, he studied Social Sciences at Queen's University. After a brief interlude in Industrial Management, he began his career in Financial Services in 1983 and continues today to maintain his brokerage on a part-time basis.

Adrian has been closely linked to the School for many years. Both his children, Ben and Katie, are products of both Ben Madigan and BRA and have progressed successfully to their chosen careers.

Adrian has been involved with Academy Sports Club since 1974 and has been on the management committee for several years. He was the main negotiator between the School, the Sports Club and the Sports Council successfully winning substantial funding for pitch upgrades at Roughfort. He is a past President of Academy RFC and has been Chairman for 12 years.

Adrian is a well renowned after dinner speaker and now uses this medium to raise funds for cancer charities. He admits to being addicted to golf and Tottenham Hotspur spending too much time pursuing both interests without any great aspirations!



President's Welcome

Welcome to the third edition of The Belfast Royal Academy Old Boy's Association Newsletter. This year's edition contains four articles from Old Boys - three of whom are at the pinnacle of

their glowing careers, the fourth is at the start. The Right Honourable Lord Justice Girvan is one of the most respected members of our Judiciary and I have known him and his family for several years - I am delighted he took the time to share some of his thoughts with us. At the other end of the legal spectrum, Ben Brown is embarking on a career as a commercial litigator - I follow his progress with particular interest as he is my son! Martin Sieff is one of the world's most eminent political journalists having covered conflicts throughout the world. He has received three Pulitzer Prize nominations and has written three best selling political books. Martin is my first cousin and is domiciled in Washington D.C. He has interviewed Presidents and Prime Ministers throughout the world but when he comes home he's just cousin Marty! Finally, I would wish to thank one of my closest friends, Colin McIlheney. Mack was part of my 1967 year group and we became friends very quickly. He travels extensively as a research analyst but it's always a great pleasure when we catch up - he has agreed to be my guest speaker at our forthcoming London Dinner at the RAF Club, Piccadilly, London on 27th February 2015. Several events remain in my presidential year, notably the Annual Dinner on Saturday 29th November 2014. I very much look forward to welcoming members to the Dinner that evening.

BRA Golfers win again

The Ulster Public Schools Old Boys' Golf Society 2014 tournament was played on Friday 25th April at Royal Belfast Golf Club. This was the 80th Anniversary of the competition and, for the third year in a row, the matches were played in good conditions which allowed for good golf to be played. BRA won the two team prizes:

The Gross Prize {Cup} from Campbell College by 6 shots.

The Nett Prize {Shield} from Sullivan by 0.4 of a shot. This trophy is played for from exact handicaps.

Sheldon Coulter had a very impressive round of 37 points to win the Best Individual Nett Prize sponsored by F.J. Malcolm's on the Lisburn Road.



From left to right: Tim Weir, Steven Minford, George Armstrong, Iain Knox, & Sheldon Coulter.

Martin Sieff: B.R.A. 1957 - 69

I loved my time at BRA – It launched me to Oxford and gave me the basis for everything in my life.

I was regarded by friends and teachers alike as a “brain.” My future was not in doubt. I was going to be an academic. Everyone was convinced of it. I couldn’t imagine anything else myself. But in my postgrad years at the London School of Economics, I found I loathed the whole, endless, tedious boring slog in endless archives, even though I was fascinated by what I found in them.

On a research trip to Israel, an ex-girlfriend introduced me to another of her ex-boyfriends who worked in the research department of the Jerusalem Post newspaper and he got me in on the ground floor. The timing couldn’t have been better. It was 1977 and President Anwar Sadat of Egypt was about to come to Jerusalem to launch the first real peace process. In journalism, as in so much else, timing and luck trump everything.

Over the next eight years I learned my real vocation covering conflicts in the Middle East and back in Northern Ireland. I became a stringer for The Washington Times, the number two newspaper in Washington, DC, and in January 1986 they brought me on board in their newsroom as a senior foreign correspondent.

Within a week of me starting, my foreign editor, the legendary Holger Jensen had given me the best beat on the paper – covering the Soviet Union. I could read Russian fluently and speak it – very badly – thanks to the great Earl K. Robinson at BRA. I’d studied Russian Imperial and Soviet history at Oxford and already travelled more than 20,000 miles overland across the Soviet Union as a freelancer from the Amur River to St. Petersburg. But Holger knew none of that. My most important qualification in his eyes was that we were already drinking buddies at the Hawk and Dove on Capitol Hill. Liking people, and having a good time with them has been more important to my career than a clutch of degrees.

Within another week, President Mikhail Gorbachev proclaimed the Glasnost and Perestroika reform policies at the 28th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. 33 years of stagnation since the death of Stalin were over and the Soviet Union was on the road to total collapse. And I was working for a genius, Arnaud de Borchgrave, Chief Foreign Correspondent of Newsweek for 32 years and then editor-in-chief of The Washington Times.

He always knew exactly where the action was going to be – and sent me there. Timing and luck again.

In my 13 years at the Washington Times, I earned three Pulitzer Prize nominations covering the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Iran-Iraq war and the wars in former Yugoslavia. I then moved over to United Press International for 10



years as its Chief News Analyst, including two years running its global coverage as Managing Editor, International Affairs. During those years I reported from 70 countries and a dozen different conflicts.

I’m supposed to be taking it easy now, but with three kids in or heading for university and American college costs being what they are, I can’t afford to, and I don’t want to anyway. I’ve hung out my shingle at The Globalist for the past five years and I do consulting on Northeast Asia – mainly China and the Koreas and on Central Asia. I’ve had three books on current affairs published in the past six years and another two have been completed and are due out this year and next.

I love my work and I’ve had a wonderful run. And I owe it all to my family, my school, my teachers, my friends and especially my Dad for getting me into BRA.

The photograph opposite shows some of the Old Boys who attended a lunch on 14th August in the Royal Portrush Golf Club. These lunches are co-ordinated by Mr Robin Reid.



Ben Brown: B.R.A. 2000 - 07

I particularly enjoyed studying History, Politics and Economics during my Sixth Form years at the School. Ultimately, unsure about what career path to choose at this stage, my grounding in the Social Sciences drew me towards studying Law at Queen's University in 2007.

I found Academic Law to be (not surprisingly) a fairly dry subject and welcomed a year abroad between my second and third years. I was offered a scholarship through the "Business Education Initiative" to study business at Millikin University, based in Decatur near Chicago. In being given an opportunity to learn from a more commercially focused curriculum, I began to develop an interest in corporate law.

On returning and subsequently completing my final year at Queen's, I received a 2.1 in my degree and realised I was not quite ready to enter the 'real world' just yet. I soon found myself living in Tel Aviv for the best part of a year, where I studied for my Master's degree in Conflict Resolution and Mediation. I chose to study here due to the obvious relevancy to the subject matter (although admittedly slightly ironic) but it was also a much more practical course than my law degree had been. It soon became clear to me during my time there that I wanted to take the next step and pursue a legal career.

I began to apply for solicitor training contracts when I arrived back in the UK. Around six months and several interviews later, I secured a contract with CMS Cameron McKenna, an International Law Firm based in London. After a brief stint as a paralegal in Belfast I started my Legal Practice Course (LPC) in England. Now having finished the LPC I am currently employed in the firm's marketing department prior to starting my training contract in February 2015.



Seven years after leaving the school I have finally learnt to appreciate the strength of our alumni network. I remain close to many of my BRA colleagues and find that quite a few from my year are now moving over to England at this point in time. Indeed, I recently enjoyed the inaugural Former Pupils' London Dinner and look forward to next year's event, with greater numbers expected during my Father's year as President of the Old Boys' Association.

I am extremely grateful for my time spent at the Academy and even at these early stages of my career I have no doubt the School provided me with an excellent platform from which to best take advantage of the various challenges that I have been presented with since leaving the school in 2007.

Class of '89 Reunion - Saturday 7th June 2014

This reunion was organised by Wesley Moody and Catherine Johnston (Irwin). Following brief talk and a tour of the School given by the Headmaster in the afternoon (attended by around 15 former pupils), a total of around 70 attended the informal reunion at the Belfast Barge, Lanyon Quay later that evening. Reunions such as this are an ideal way of reconnecting with the School and reliving fond memories.



The Rt Hon Lord Justice Girvan B.R.A. 1962 – 1967



I was born in Larne, Co Antrim and attended Larne Grammar School until the age of 14 when the family moved to Belfast. My father, uncle and aunt attended BRA and so it seemed the natural place for me to go. I enjoyed my years there my main interest being languages. In those days Jimmy Raw was the head of languages and I greatly enjoyed his French classes. I started German under Doris Withers and later Alison Moffett taught me at A level stage. I was fortunate to get a place at Clare College Cambridge in 1967. I did my first Tripos in French and German. Language teaching at Cambridge was very academic and I decided to change to law for my second Tripos. I really enjoyed the study of law and immediately felt at home in the subject. I graduated with a 2.1 in 1970. I returned to Belfast to study for the Northern Ireland Bar and was called to the Bar in 1971. In those days we had to sit the English Bar Final (old syllabus) and I was placed first in the UK in the exam. I practised from September 1971, taking silk in 1983. As a junior I specialised in commercial and Chancery law and as a senior continued largely in those fields though also did a lot of medical negligence casework, a fascinating field. I became a High court Judge in 1995 sitting initially in Queen's Bench (generalist work) then as Chancery judge and subsequently I was in charge of the judicial review list, the heaviest workload in the High court involving a large range of public law issues. I was appointed as a Court of Appeal judge in 2007 and now deal with appeals in a large range of cases, civil and criminal. As member of that Court I am a member of the Privy Council and have sat in some appeals in the Privy Council from Commonwealth countries such as Jamaica and Mauritius. The law is a fascinating profession; no two cases being the same and the range of questions which a lawyer has to deal with is enormous – all human life is there, as they say. As a judge I have to deal with a huge range of issues for example criminal law and sentencing; public law involving the review of decision making by public bodies; human rights (an increasingly large aspect of the work of the Court of Appeal); appeals from a large range of tribunals and lower courts. The profession is currently very overcrowded but there will always be room for the right person. My early years at BRA provided me with a sound base on which to build a very fulfilling and stimulating career. Although my real interest at school was in modern languages, an interest I continue to have, in the world of law a linguistic training is a great help particularly in the field of drafting where facility in language is vital. I remain indebted to my education at the school and particularly to my language teachers who provided so much inspiration.

Colin McIlheney - B.R.A. 1967 - 1974

In the summer of 1967, just before I started at the school, my mother visited a fortune teller on the cliff path close to Portstewart where we were on holiday. The fortune teller's main message was that I and my brother Barry would travel the world - not in uniform - but that we would visit the four corners of the earth. So it has proved. To date, I have worked in and visited 65 countries. My aim is to keep the tally ahead of my age but of course that is getting harder as I get older and the number of places to visit diminishes!

I am convinced that my time at BRA prepared me very well for working abroad. The school encouraged a spirit of adventure and provided a good foundation for the skills that you need to conduct business in a wide variety of different environments. I didn't show an aptitude for languages but the school prepared me well for dealing with a wide variety of cultures that I have experienced during my 35 year career.

I was recently discussing my experiences at school with a number of contemporaries and one thing that stood out for me was the fact that I was amongst a relatively small group of pupils who could walk to the school from home. I had attended Cliftonville Primary and was thrilled to be able to walk from Manor Street to BRA. I still visit the area whenever I can and have stayed friendly with a number of people who were also amongst that group who walked along Manor Street to school.

From a very young age I had a particular ability in mental arithmetic and I think this allied to an inquisitive nature was a great help in steering me towards a life-long career in research. I was fortunate enough to win the Thouron Scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania in 1978 and followed that with an MSc in Research Methods at Jesus College, Oxford. I always enjoyed the fact that something that I was genuinely interested in helped me in my professional career. For example, for many years I contributed to the BBC's analysis of election and exit polls. One of the high points was to successfully predict the results of the Good Friday Referendum to within 1% of the actual vote. I will never forget the pressure of the moment when the then Secretary of State, Mo Mowlan rang our office to check whether the numbers were correct or not.

For more than twenty years I have worked at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and there is no doubt that the education I received at BRA gave me the essential building blocks for my current role as Global Research Director at the firm.

I look back with nothing but fond memories of my time at the school. The longer I work the more I realise how important the education I got has been to any success I have achieved.



Class of '74 Reunion- Friday 27th June 2014

This reunion was organised by a committee which included Adrian Brown. Following a tour of the School in the afternoon given by the Headmaster, the group met at the Hilton Hotel, Templepatrick where they were entertained by representatives from the School's Senior Traditional Music Group before sitting down to dinner.