

Mr George Head OBE

Here is an extract from the memoirs of Mr George Head OBE from Pontefract. At a sprightly 90 years of age, we think Mr Head is our oldest surviving alumnus! Mr Head was a student at Trinity from 1935 – 1937.

Many of the students of my year came from Yorkshire and had to travel some 250 miles by train. This meant leaving home at 7.30am, travelling to Normanton, changing at Wakefield, where we boarded the Manchester train. Here we collected the Lancashire contingent. From Manchester we caught the Central Wales Express. First stop Shrewsbury where we had a break for around 30 minutes! Then on to Craven Arms, Knighton, Llandrindod Wells, Builth Wells, Llandovery and finally Llandeilo Junction where we changed for Carmarthen. Fortunately we had very little luggage because in those days for two shillings (10p today) the railway company collected and delivered your luggage no matter what the distance. On arrival in Carmarthen at 5pm we felt isolated and far from home. No wonder Canon Parry in his welcome speech said "If you feel like crying, do so, it will do you good". Then we were regaled in the refectory with the best supper we'd had – a thick slice of boiled ham with beetroot and margarine!

In spite of our Spartan sleeping conditions few of us had difficulty getting to sleep as we were exhausted. Our bedrooms, described as Study Bedrooms, were for sleeping only. The beds had springs – diamond shaped ones attached to a solid metal frame just like the ones we used during our war service soon after becoming Certified Teachers. Our training at Trinity enabled many of us to become Sergeant Instructors in the Army Physical Training Corps – a fine body of men with the motto *Mens sana in corpore sano* (a sound mind in a sound body) – which could have applied to our training at Trinity College. The only furniture you were sure to get was a bed. There was no table, but if you were lucky you might get a chair and a mat. There was no wash basin in the room, just an ablution room in the middle of each floor. In case of emergency, we had an enamel chamber pot under the bed. The wing was locked at night and I shudder to think what would have happened in an emergency. Lights out was at 10.30pm and to make sure we could not use them, they were switched off at the mains. I was 21 in May of 1937 and we celebrated with pop and birthday cake by candle light.

At 7 or 7.30am we had to leave the wing, cross North Hall, go down the steps to the quadrangle to the toilets which were on the right hand side, as I remember. There was a single strand of barbed wire between the supports to keep us off the grass – a relic from the First World War. There were no doors or toilet seats – all I suppose in the interest of hygiene or economy. What a wonderful change it was to spend a night at the last reunion in a student bedroom with en-suite facilities!

There were no baths in the sleeping wing and we all wondered where we would get our weekly bath, the usual pattern in our day. We had not been told, but Thursday afternoon was games afternoon and everybody played some sport. When we trooped back, tired and dirty, we found an open door and inside, there were the cleaning materials and the baths. They were sturdy Victorian models with huge feet and all rather unsteady as there was water everywhere. Feet were the first part to be washed but how eighty odd men managed to get clean, I'll never know!

Having seen the library of today, I feel that the whole College of my day would fit inside it. Our library was in the anteroom before the Chapel and there were few specialist books available. One had to be very quick to get one's hands on a rare book. It was just as well that set text books covered our course of study. The Groundwork of Educational Psychology by Ross was expanded by Canon Parry – Principal and Lecturer in Psychology, so most of use managed without the library.

In spite of all the shortcomings there was a great camaraderie amongst the students, many of us had been in school together for some years as contacts grew between our school and Trinity. Of course, we accepted because that was the order of the day and furthermore Teacher Training was one way of escape from the 'working class' and we were glad of the opportunity. It is interesting to note that in 1881, a teacher's salary was £120 per annum with free lodgings and in 1937 it was £180 with no lodgings.

Between the hostel and the original building was the 'Smoke Room', where we each had a locker which held our books and woodworking tools. We all bought locks from Woolworth so there were really useless on reflections. Of course here too we could smoke. Then there was the North Hall with an office above occupied by Miss Francis, College Secretary. Here, once a month on average, we met the Principal.

The only lecture room that remains as it was, more or less, is the tiered one on the right; gone is our bathroom at the end and so is the room used by the Vice-Principal Mr Humphreys – lecturer in Mathematics and Teaching Methods. There were two upstairs lecture rooms where we spent three and a half hours locked in private study every evening except Sunday. At the end of the first room was a small room which was the Sick Bay and the room where we had our final Medical Examination.

I must not forget the new Gymnasium and Art Block built in 1932 and the Radio Room which was completed around 1936. The Gymnasium was a marvellous place and many great feats were carried out there. There was a Reunion, probably in 1937, and the former students wanted to try out their old bedrooms, so we gave them up and slept on the gym floor.

Mr Wilford, Music Tutor, Head of the Model Practising School, Organ and Choirmaster at St Peter's Church was always welcome at the College. His visit brought relief from the last period of Private Study and gave us a chance to sing our hearts out. We learnt many songs from "Up the Jolly Roger, Boys", "Farewell and Adieu to you Spanish Ladies" to the rather sad and serious song by Sir Arthur Sullivan, "The Long Day Closes". It is a matter of regret that recording was not a possibility at the time – just imagine eighty young male voices happily singing in four part harmony. It was from these sessions that we managed to develop fortnightly concerts. Sadly, they were all male affairs – womanising was not allowed. However there were a number of artistes – pianists – quite a few, a number of violinists and one of two playing wind instruments. There were plenty of songs to sing; sketches were performed – mainly reflecting our monastic life. I don't remember any members of staff being present – probably just as well!

We used to attend evening services at St Peter's Church and for this purpose we learnt to sing a number of hymns in Welsh – quite a task for Yorkshire Tykes! One such was Calon Lân and I well remember a Welsh lady with whom I was billeted during the war being amazed when I played the tune on the piano and sang the words in her native tongue. We were usually up in the balcony – I don't know why – and we often got carried away and finished before the congregation – how awful of us. The thing was, the sooner we got out of Church the more time we had in town.

One beautiful warm and sunny Sunday, when we were due to go to St Peter's, we – the North country contingent – decided to skip church and go for a walk. We did not often get a chance of one, so we set off to Llanstephan. For sixpence we got a cheese sandwich and a half of Felinfoel ale – a cardinal sin next only to womanising. Our sins unfortunately were discovered. The mother of one of our number had been taken ill and the tutors waited at the door to give him the news. We all admitted our guilt and were condemned to be 'gated' for the next four Sundays. We only served one 'gating' as the Senior Student didn't want to lose his Sunday freedom too.

You will see from this that Sunday evening was important. It was the only evening we were allowed out – after the end of evening service. This was never before 7.30pm. The Principal's timing was impeccable and roll call was at 9.30pm. The student whose duty was to ring the bell for roll call, took the bell to the town square at 9pm, began to ring and rather like the Pied Piper, collected eighty or so students on the road back to College. Such was the merry life we led. The favourite hymn, after the halfway mark was known as 'Nearer Home, starting 'Forever with the Lord' and continuing with the line 'And nightly pitch my moving tent a day's march nearer home'.

There were a number of characters in my year. Job from my own school heard the opening words of the Lord's Prayer in Welsh "Ein Tad" and said "I say, so am I". The family of another student had won the pools sent him to Trinity on the strength of it. A Canadian called Leahy had qualified in his home country but had to get a British Certificate to teach here. Another student called Lewis could play the violin like the jazz violinist Stefan Grapelli – no training, no music just sheer ability. We had a rather flamboyant dresser from County Durham who was always known as Lord John.

Our College Anthem was sung to the tune of "There is a Tavern in the Town".

There is a tavern in the town, in the town
And there my true love settled down, settled down
She read her books so merrily
And never, never thought of me, thought of me.

We came from near and far then, unto Trinity Carmarthen
And we saddened as the days drew near to part, to part
We do, O Trinity, we do, we do, we do
Regard thee with affection true, affection true

I'll hang my hat on the Old Oak Tree,
And may the world go well with thee, well with thee.