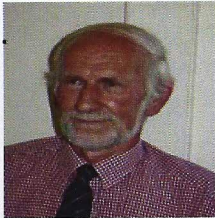


Chairman's Report – Peter Harris



Welcome to the 6th edition of the Spur, which I hope you will find enjoyable.

It has been another successful year for the Old Brymorians Association with increased membership and well attended events – you Old Brymorians have been most generous in your support, not only financially, but also with words of encouragement. Thank you all.

The OBA is, I believe, quite unique. Not many schools hold annual events for past pupils on a regular basis. Of course, I am very aware that none of this would be possible without your enthusiasm, support from the school and the goodwill shown by so many people connected with Brymore.

Sometimes I am asked by prospective Old Boys who wish to join the OBA what they get for their subscription. Well the answer is – with tongue in cheek – not a lot! However, you have the tremendous satisfaction of providing lads the opportunity to come to, or continue to come to Brymore School through the bursaries that you provide.

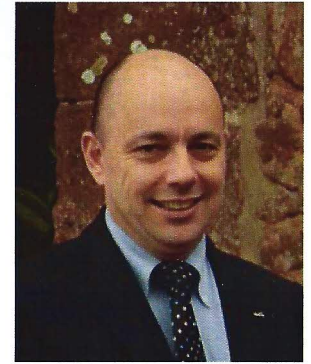
In September 2012 Brymore School will have been in existence for 60 years and it is hoped that this milestone will be celebrated in some way, probably jointly with the School. Your committee will keep you informed of developments on this front. If you have any suggestions of how we could celebrate the Diamond Jubilee, please let us know.

Finally, it is of some concern to me as your Chairman, that if we are to survive as an Association in our present form, we must try to encourage younger Old Boys to join the Committee to provide continuity of purpose – the present Committee, and those that have gone before, have served you well, in true Brymorian fashion, but we cannot go on for ever.

On a brighter note, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Peter G Harris

Head Teacher - Mark Thomas



It seems that many times over the years Brymore has faced uncertainty over its future due to its unique nature and the fact that it does not fit into a 'one size fits all' model. The fact that it is unique is clearly one of its strengths, because it does offer something different and does it in a way that is different to many other schools. Maybe that is why a 'Brymore Boy' stands out and why so many people are so positive about the students both past and present.

However, Brymore does need to move with the times, especially when education is changing so dramatically on a national scale. League tables have always been used to compare schools but the introduction of floor targets; minimum levels students must achieve, have now increased the pressure on schools dramatically. There is a real threat of closure if schools do not meet these targets consistently, which is why I must ensure Brymore is never in that position. If only there were league tables for resilience, responsibility and resourcefulness – we would be top every time!

One of the strengths of Brymore is its size, however this is also something that makes it difficult for Brymore because small usually means expensive and inefficient economically. Therefore, Brymore has to increase in size to make it financially sustainable and to offer more choice to the boys. This in turn will help improve examination results and move us above the dreaded floor targets. Significant investment is also needed to bring the farm, gardens and workshops up to the standard expected of a school with a national reputation in these three areas. With the majority of schools converting to academies, we must also make sure we make the most of the opportunities available. As a leadership team, we are currently exploring the possibility of Brymore becoming a University Technical College. These are small schools that specialise in vocational and practical education – i.e. what we do already. If we are successful in our application, it could bring significant funding with it, somewhere between five to eight million pounds. This will go a long way to improving the facilities and the experience enjoyed by the students at Brymore.

One final change may be the introduction of girls so that Brymore, and all it offers, is open to all. This will significantly change Brymore but it may also be the key to its survival. Progress is inevitable, but it is my job, and my intention, not to lose all that is good about the school and all that it stands for. Difficult decisions and times may lie ahead but I hope in years to come we can look back proudly as many Old Boys do now, who were involved in the ground breaking and innovative idea of setting up a school for rural technology in the first place. As it says in the first ever forward of the first ever Spur; 'We look forward 'to the years when Brymore is a school of national renown having produced men of national repute.' I can safely say that is now the case and long may it continue in the future

Farm Report - Paul Kingston

Here is my report for another year, which has turned out to be a reasonable year. There have been low points like the extremely dry spring meaning that our fodder beet crop failed, it managed to germinate but with no rain following for the next month meant that the little seedlings just dried up! We were also quite worried as to the cow grazing as in May the silage grass started to be strip grazed by the dairy cows as everything else was going a strange shade of brown. Little rain seemed to follow until silaging but the silage crop was really quite decent, giving us a reasonable second cut as well. Our baler played us up at the start of the season requiring contractors to bale the first few bales but with time, patience and a bit of money we finally got her working and baled the majority of the silage ourselves.

Dairy

The start of the winter proved to be a sad time as we had to get rid of one of our older cows due to age and the fact she was actually barren, however in her last lactation she had given around 14000l (over 2 years) but had also suckled 2 cracking calves for 3 months also, she just kept giving and giving.

We have just purchased a 4th lactation Friesian cow from an organic dispersal sale, she is settling in well but she just needs to get used to all of the attention that she is getting.

We have had one heifer over the summer calve and a further 3 (hopefully 4) to calve in the early spring /early summer. The herd is just standing still as we have a few cows that will have to be culled due age and failure to get in calf.

The milk prices are still far too low for organic milk (along with prices for the other enterprises) so it seems like yet again we seem to be doing gross margins – organic verses conventional.

Beef

Beef are doing well as the beef shorthorn stores are growing on, hopefully leading to some decent finished cattle. They have just finished the Winfred that was available towards the end of the summer and moving now onto some grass/clover ley, hoping to keep them out for as long as possible.



Adrian Beef Shorthorn

Sheep

What a summer for worms and maggots! The lambs have taken up so much time with daggging, worming and fly treatments. Even after treatment, the flies were digging in attacking some of the lambs 2 or 3 times over. The ewes weren't so bad but a lot different to last years virtually hassle free summer.

This summer we have bought in 10 four tooth mules to replace the cull ewes from the year just gone.

No lambs have been sold yet although a few are fairly close to finishing.

Pigs

Everything is going well with the pigs (except high feed prices compared to low pig prices). We have swapped an in-pig gilt for a Cornishman boar that has been doing his job well; we have also bought a little gilt (Mary bloodline) that is now in-pig to the above boar. We now know the she is in pig as we have recently purchased a Doppler to Pd the pigs. We will hopefully be getting the boys to use the machine as we can also use it to scan the ewes.

Litters of pigs are fairly regular and quite a size also with litters of 12 plus. Thankfully, we have been able to sell most of them as weaners and keeping a few to finish.

Poultry

In the spring, we bought an incubator so that it could be used as part of the new B-TEC course that we are running. With it we also purchased a breeding trio of light Sussex chickens. Up until now we have bought eggs to hatch which we have had reasonable success with a few point of lays getting ready to provide us with eggs and couple of cock birds for eating but most recent, a few weeks after our trio started to lay we have hatched out our own chicks which are doing really well.

In the spring we had a little bit of a fox problem resulting in having to buy in some new point of lays so we chose the Columbian Black tail which are laying really well, which is just as well as we have no problem in selling the eggs.

Fodder

After a very dry spring, wondering whether the grass would ever grow it turned out that the silage grass grew on and we had a reasonable first cut and actually got a second cut off of the earlier cut fields.

The barley that was under sown with grass also did well with 10 round bales to the acre.

The hay crop yielded well but was cut a little bit later than I would have liked due to the rain and there not being a long enough window.

Treasurer's Report - Mike Fry

Once again, it is my pleasure to report another successful year with membership staying fairly static in the 350 area. While we gained a further 15 new recruits at the Leavers Service and another 15 on Open day, the trend for some cash members to fail to renew their subs, unfortunately, continues.

Following a record return from this years Summer Draw, we were able to assist with three more Bursaries, bringing the total Bursary Funding for six years to £38,200. Well done and our extreme thanks to all!

The continuing 'PLIGHT of the HONEY BEE' is widely accepted and you may be pleased to know that the committee have asked the Woodworking Department, run by Mr Standford, to assist by making some beehives. Six students are currently involved in making one beehive, each of which will be added to the schools apiary. It was felt that as well as helping with the bee situation, it would be a worthwhile project for the boys. The OBA and I will jointly fund the cost of the materials and our thanks go to Ken Edwards of the Quantock Beekeepers Association who have offered to provide the necessary bees to stock the hives. Buy your supply of 'Brymore Honey' at Open Day please.

The response to bringing forward the date for the Pym's Night dinner indicated the favoured option. However, our new date clashed with many other events and the numbers were down by a third. This was most unfortunate for those of you who would have liked to attend, because the meal and the evening proved to be probably, the most successful so far. Maybe a later Saturday in October 2012, should be considered?

When considering the year 2012, bells start to ring regarding the 60th Anniversary of Brymore's conception in 1952. Celebrations must be the order of the year, so any thoughts would be welcome.

Regrettably, we have to announce the retirement of our most valued OBA Coordinator, Gina Bryant. Gina has been most generous with her unstinting help and time since the OBA was reformed, and the committee were unanimous in showing their gratitude and thanks by awarding her with an Honorary Life Membership. The very first Lady to receive this award. This was most appropriate, as Gina was always the first contact for me with any OBA business. A personal thanks to you Gina...Good luck in your retirement...Open Day may never be the same again!

'Over the Garden wall' A Year in the Horticultural department Reuben Willcocks

Looking over the garden wall, (which is a feat in itself at Brymore!) I see lads clearing their plots, some are single or double digging and incorporating barrow loads of manure, which they have hauled up from the farm, leaving a little trail, much to the annoyance of the cleaning staff! In the background I can see a few cider apples still clinging to the trees, the remnants of the massive crop which we have harvested and which now lies in lines of bottles proudly bearing the words "pressed from apples grown in our school garden". The juice will soon be sold to pupils and parents, whilst a number of litres bubble away in barrels, filling the air with the smell of cider.

In the top corner of the walled garden stands the new Garden Club polytunnel, funded by the lottery from a local food grant and erected with considerable help from the maintenance crew. We still have a lot of work to do in the coming year, with a pergola to erect and benches to construct.

Over the far wall, the bees are still working the flowers, which bloom in profusion, having had no frosts yet. About six pupils have regularly attended the club and are now enjoying the sweet fruits of their (more truthfully the bees') labour. We may even have some to sell!

Nearly two thirds of the year 9s have asked for a plot and many year 10s and year 11s have kept theirs. This means we have had to use one of the demonstration plots to provide plots for them all and in so doing we have decided to properly and neatly trim and re-align the edges of the large demonstration plots.

We are experimenting with a 'no-dig' system on one of the large plots and we will report back next year as to its success. We are also reducing our use of peat and so we have moved away from John Innes compost and make up our own using sterilised soil from the bottom of the compost heap and leaf mulch or compost. The old steriliser broke down in March after 13 years service and was replaced in May. The new improved steriliser has worked hard since then and despite the initial outlay is saving us enormous amounts of money.

Garden Club (open to anyone with a plot) has been oversubscribed and so we limit numbers to 12 on a Monday evening and they are full of enthusiasm with a few lads planning and preparing garden areas on the school site.

Over the year we have battled with the severe winter weather (our stock plants survived mainly intact), the builders (lawns and beds were dug up but are now gradually returning to a state of normality, although there is still a lot of work to be done), dry spells (we need to improve irrigation, an ongoing work) and a shortage of funds (how far can you stretch a small budget?). The department staff have worked INCREDIBLY hard to ensure that every pupil has the chance to achieve all that they can and enjoy the experience as well. Nearly 70% of last year's year11 pupils were awarded with a BTEC First Certificate, which is equivalent to a GCSE grade C and of those 50% gained a merit (GCSE grade B).

A labelling machine has been purchased so that each plant that we sell can be named and have the words "Grown by pupils at Brymore School" attached to it. This is indeed true' because unlike at other establishments where staff are employed to upkeep the grounds or produce plants for sale, here at school the lads do it all; from soil sieving and compost mixing, or seedbed preparation, to sowing seeds and taking cuttings, pricking out, potting on (time and time again!), planting out, weeding, watering, harvesting, preparing for sale and then selling to parents and friends. We regularly have the sale barrow out on Saturday afternoons and also attend Combwich Farmers Market once a month. Some produce and plants have been sold through Blackmoor Farm Shop and also the Cannington College shop.

There were trips to Westonbirt Arboretum and the DLO glasshouses in Taunton (the organisation who care for the parks and floral arrangements in Taunton Deane and further afield) and growing links with Cannington College and the National Trust. In October, we held Apple Week and Mr and Mrs Wilson came down from Kent, gave a talk to the lads, and displayed some of the many varieties of apple that they grow. The annual Garden Plot Produce competition was a smaller event this year but Ashley Simms, Harry Orr and Toby Hills all got prizes. We have also just been presented with a certificate and plaque by the RHS for achieving Benchmark Level 5 in their Campaign for School gardening which is a real accolade as we are one of only five secondary schools in the UK which have gained this award. We have an English Oak to plant as part of our prize.

Looking back over the wall again, I see that the apple trees which we pruned so severely in the winter to try to get rid of the canker have bounced back to life and will need a good tidy up again. Let's hope we have stopped the disease and can now maintain those trees.

Penrose has just arrived! These students come from a special school in Bridgwater and this year they have been joined by pupils from Elmwood as well. They come weekly and carry out tasks on the farm and in the gardens.

This increasingly strong link benefits the students so much and even though the tasks are very simple the challenge is enormous when you are wheelchair bound or have other difficulties. This year they are taking charge of two raised beds outside the new polytunnel which have been constructed (by students from Cannington College who come up on a weekly basis) at a height which is accessible if you are a wheelchair user.

So we have a busy department, stretched to its limits and yet always keen to keep Horticulture in the limelight and a dedicated staff who would love to do more if only finances and time were available. Thank you so much to Malcolm Coates the groundsman who teaches the pupils to use mowers and machinery, repairs our tools, coaxed the aging mowers through another season and manages to fit his own work in somewhere too! Sara Nash works with us two days a week, assessing the lads, helping generally within the department and is such a positive and supportive help to Fiona. Fiona Stanley the mainstay of the department, organises the practical tasks, prepares plants and produce for sale and then delivers them, works incessantly with the lads in her quiet, yet firm way and is a constant driving force within the department. There are a number of other staff who this year have taken on teaching theory (Miss Bowering and Mr Baker) and some practical teaching (Mr Oliver, Mr Fitzsimons and Mr Baker). As they are non-specialists this has increased the burden on Mrs Stanley. However, they work enthusiastically and the lads are able to get outside and work. We also have a year 12 studying Horticulture level 3 at Cannington College and Oliver Mahon is working with us for his Work experience days. He has been an enormous help and a very positive role model and we are extremely grateful for all he does. Myself, what do I do? Well I leave that to your imagination, as I lean on the wall in the warm Autumn sunshine and continue to muse.....

**Reminder - to
pay Subs either
by cash or
standing order**