

Rhos College.....St Mary's College

Laid into the left-hand wall on the corner of Abbey Road and College Avenue is a letter box. If you peer over the wall about three yards to the left of the letter box you will find, lying on the ground, a plaque reminding people that on this land once stood a school. The plaque reads: 'On this site stood ST MARY'S COLLEGE which was administered by Oblates of Mary Immaculate from 1948-1992. This plaque was erected in grateful recognition by St Mary's Past Pupils Association. AD MMI'. The plaque is also inscribed with the School's crest and motto: Recta Sapere (The appreciation of what is right).

The school building, originally known as Rhos College, was a large imposing edifice. It was built around 1915 by a Mr Glover as a school for boys aged eleven and upwards. Mr Glover appointed an Anglican clergyman, the Rev Bilton Langstaff, as the headmaster. In 1922, one boy, Alan Noel Roberts (he was born on Christmas Day) was taken away from the Grammar School in Colwyn Bay because his father felt that at the

Grammar School he was mixing with the unruly George Mellor and not getting on with his work. On his first day of term at the College he met George Mellor coming down the corridor towards him who told Alan that he was there because his father had wanted him to get away from the 'rough' Alan Roberts. The two boys remained friends till their dying days.

The Rev Langstaff was known to the boys as 'The Gaffer'. On one occasion the 'rough' Alan Roberts ran into the classroom and shouted to the rest of the boys, "Where's the Gaffer?" Where-upon, from behind the blackboard, came the Headmaster's unmistakable voice, "Ad

sum" (Latin for 'present'). A chastened Alan was told to 'see me later, outside my study'. One of Alan and George Mellor's friends, Jimmy Miller, went on to receive the Military Cross for his bravery during the 2nd World War.

St Mary's College was founded in May 1942 during the 2nd World War and was originally housed where the old rambling mansion Bryn Defaid was situated on Dinerth Road, sixty odd yards up the road from the present Co-op store. This original venture was due in no small part to the pastoral zeal and courage of Father

continually looking for larger premises. Netherton on Brackley Avenue was considered (it became part of the Rydal School estate), so was Lord Colwyn's former home, Queens Lodge (NB: Journal February 2016). Bryn Estyn in Deganwy, Arn Hall in Llandudno and Dinerth Hall off Llandudno Road were all also considered.

Eventually in 1947 Rhos College folded and, with a sigh of relief, the building was bought by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a Roman Catholic Order, from where, from 11th October 1948, they ran St Mary's College, a Roman Catholic School. The Oblate Order is a worldwide congregation of priests and brothers which run Missions, parishes, chaplaincy work, schools, colleges and universities and has been doing so for over 150 years.

The Catholic Order transformed the building from the time when Rev Bilton Langstaff, Alan Noel Roberts, George Mellor and Jimmy Miller strode the corridors. Two hundred and forty boys were educated at any one

time. In 1954 the new College Chapel was officially blessed. In the next couple of years a cricket pavilion and five separate houses were added to the college. In the 1960s the boy's dining room, a classroom block, the Biology laboratory and a music department were added. In the 1970s the library, physics laboratory, Religious, maths and English rooms, designed by Stuart Powell Bowen, as well as Arts and Crafts department and Gymnasium, which doubled up as the Assembly hall with a well-equipped stage, were added. In the 1980s new facilities to accommodate the teaching of woodwork, plastics and technical drawing were opened. And then in the 1990s the school came to a sudden



Patrick Glasheen O.M.I. The charge for Days Boys was £6 6s per term and lunch was 1s 6d per day extra; the Boarders were charged £21 per term. As part of the property there was an old stone barn alongside the inner wall running along the road; on the apex of the roof was a stone cross marking it as the site of the college chapel. The building was auctioned on 3rd December 1948 in the Central Hotel Colwyn Bay. Eventually Bryn Defaid was demolished about twenty five years ago and the site is now home to a development of nine semi-detached houses.

While the school was housed in Bryn Defaid in Dinerth Road, the Oblates were

halt and was abandoned. For the last fifteen years of its life the Headmaster (always known as the Father President) and Superior was the Rev Fr Richard O'Donovan.

To remain financially viable the school was open to non-Catholic pupils such as Paul Rayner, Terry Deakin and David Hough all of whom, after a while, were taken away by their parents and sent elsewhere. Mr Hough took his son away from the school because he felt his son was being sent home too much while the Catholic students attended Mass in the Chapel and



Revd Langstaff, with Alan Roberts behind him, 1927

celebrated other Catholic Holy days! Terry, another Protestant, always liked Ash Wednesday, because first thing in the morning all the boys had to go into the Chapel, have a small dab of ash put on their foreheads and then he would be sent home. All three boys have subsequently led very successful lives.

The school had also taken over five large houses in Rhos-on-Sea, two on Abbey Road and three on College Avenue and used them as boarding houses. One, St Lukes, on College Avenue (now No 20) was bought in 1980 at the instigation of Father R M O'Donovan and was used as a boarding house for the girls. Patricia Grady SRN (the sister of a member of our Civic Society) was in charge. The house was originally called Conover House and was used as a convalescent home; after the school bought it, during the holidays, the Governors used it as a retreat for people who would come to Rhos-on-Sea for a holiday. It has now been demolished and replaced by a large development of apartments; the name however remains on the gate post. The other four were called Campion House, named after Saint Edmund Campion, a famous Catholic Martyr (12A Abbey Road; still called Campion House). Next door, Bryn Bella (No 12) came up for sale in 1975 and was purchased for £13,500. Davies House, named after Venerable William Davies who was killed at Beaumaris in 1593, (6 College Avenue), Gwyn House, named after Saint Richard Gwyn one of the forty martyrs of England and Wales (4 College Avenue: still called Gwyn House), and Aquinas House named after Saint Thomas Aquinas

regarded as the Patron Saint of Catholic Universities and schools (49 Abbey Road: still called Aquinas House). One of the pupils, whose house was Aquinas House, was told by a teacher priest to see him in the priest's private room at the house and was tickled pink to see a statue of the Virgin Mary in the act of prayer with her hands together and with a television aerial stuck on her head. There was also Albin House (named after Father Charles Dominic Albini) which was in Llandudno Junction from where the boarders would transfer by bus each morning.

Another property, still standing, Stafford House on the corner of the Promenade and Penrhos Road, which had been the original home to Penrhos College(hence the name of the road) was bought cheaply in 1975, because it was in an appalling condition. The idea had been to use it to accommodate the foreign students

especially the Chinese and Mexican pupils. The Head of English was asked to be the House Master and to teach these students English. However this teacher found himself a new job at a massively enhanced salary teaching in the Middle East. So the project floundered and Stafford House was rented out.

In the late 1960s and 1970s the discipline was hard. All the priests had leather straps tucked between their belts and cassocks with which they would strike the boys for the pettiest of misdemeanours. Instead of leather, Father Caroline's strap was made of polythene, all the better to hurt the pupils, while Father Liam Corish's nickname was Killer Cornish for obvious reasons. On the other hand Father Corish was well known in the North Wales musical world as he played Country and Western tunes on his guitar in the Rhos Abbey Hotel River Boat Room on several nights in the week. Both Father Caroline and Father Corish taught mathematics. As the years rolled on discipline gradually became less harsh and with the introduction of girls in 1980 there was no corporal punishment at all.

Father Ryan taught German. He would arrive in the class with his Dansette record player and Linguaphone LP. The boys would all sit there and recite over and over again phrases such as 'Das ist ein Tisch' ('That is the Table'). This may be why so many of the boys took to catering after they left the school!

It is remembered by many former pupils from the late 1960s and 1970s, most of

whom are now retired, how awful the food was. There was one terrible, thin, foul tasting soup which is still recalled with horror. One day-boy, whose mother made him a chocolate drink which he took to school in a thermos-flask with some sandwiches, used to toast the sandwiches on the classroom radiator and then sell his friends a drink and a sandwich for a shilling.

It was a good school where the boys received a well-rounded education which stood them in good stead for their future lives with, for example, Paul Griffiths reading history at Baliol College, Oxford. There was a Brass Band which was led by Father Doyle and a Dramatic Society and a Film Society.

The School's Jubilee was held in 1969 but towards the end of the 1980s, in a fast changing world, the school was floundering financially as the number of pupils was dwindling. An indication of the financial problems surrounding the school was evidenced one day when Father O'Donovan appeared at Beardsalls Jewellers establishment on Penrhyn Avenue and asked Mr Ron Rayner whether he would buy from him a small bag of uncut diamonds. The diamonds had been handed to the school by the father of a foreign student in lieu of the school fees. Mr Rayner had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his bravery in flying Spitfires during the 2nd World War and he was not interested in Father O'Donovan's request. The school was eventually closed in July 1992.

All the main school buildings were demolished and the extensive area which once housed the teaching block, the chapel and playing fields are now covered in houses, built by Wainhomes, strung along a road called The Cloisters. It had taken the Oblate community forty years to build the College into a modern fully furnished College and it took the demolition gang four weeks to reduce the whole site to rubble. The gate posts on either side of the original school drive on Abbey Road are still in place as is about fifty yards of that same drive. College Avenue was of course so called because of the college along-side of which it ran. In another fifty years I wonder whether people will scratch their heads and wonder why the road is so named.



Victoria Bungalow

This large, ornate bungalow, which may have been known as Hunters Lodge at one time, has now been demolished, but thirty years ago it used to stand at the top end of the cul-de-sac that is now called Pine Court in Upper Colwyn Bay. Some people used to think erroneously that it was the Golf House as it looked out across Llanrwst Road and the golf course. In fact the old Golf House used to stand where the Pen-y-Bryn Pub and restaurant is now located. Many of the roads, on what used to be the golf course, are named after well-known British golf courses; Troon Way, Birkdale Close etc. This golf course was frequented by the toffs of the town, doctors, solicitors and such like folk while the course in Rhos-on-Sea was where the shop-keepers and local authority employees of the area went to play.

During the 2nd World War the Victoria Bungalow was a very secret base used by MI5 for the interception of radio transmission messages from German spies. The work was so secret that the operators themselves were never told specifically what they were listening to! On the other hand the local people were told simply that it was a radio relay station which seemed to satisfy them. The work carried out in the Victoria Bungalow was very important and helped enormously in the British victory in the conflict in 1945.

Before the war the building was used by the match making company Bryant & May Ltd., as a holiday home for its workers. Evidently the building was large enough to accommodate forty holiday makers at any

one time. There were other large buildings in Colwyn Bay used by companies and local authorities as holiday homes for workers in Lancashire. The John Braddock Home was set up by Bessie Bradock for the underprivileged workers of Merseyside and Coed on Tan-y-Bryn Road was for the specific use of workers from Burnley for their holidays. During the war, when the Victoria Bungalow was being used for secret clandestine war work, the rest of the large houses down the road in Colwyn Bay had been taken over by The Ministry of Food.

If there are any readers of this article who have any other memories of the 'Victoria Bungalow' I would be like to hear about them. Please get in touch with me.

Petrol Filling Stations



Heron Garage, originally Holingdrakes Garage, Princes Drive

In the 1950s and '60s when there were very few cars on the roads of Colwyn Bay there were an awful lot of petrol stations, now, when the roads are clogged with vehicles, there are fewer petrol stations; a rum situation.

In the Daily Mail in the 1960s there was an article highlighting the unusual fact that in a small village, Mochdre, there were four filling stations. Now there are none.

In the February 2005 edition of this Journal I wrote: 'In the Colwyn Bay area, from Mochdre to Penmaenrhos, in the 1940s and 1950s there were 21 garages and 4 much smaller motor engineering businesses; 25 in total: now there 4.'

On Princes Drive there were two large

busy garages with accompanying filling stations; Holingdrakes Garage (where now stands the Princes Park 1 & 2 development of offices) and Chester Engineering Garage and filling station where Barclays Business Centre and Thornley Leisure offices now fill a modern office building.

Holingdrakes was founded in Stockport by Sir H Hollingdrake who in 1904 took on Ernest Hodgkinson as a partner, who in turn eventually became the Managing Director of the Company. In the 1960s and '70s when they advertised the business as giving "A Complete Service for Standard & Triumph Owners", it was where a first rate mechanic, Austin Stevenson worked, who rose in the business to become the group Service Manager. One day when Austin was about 11 years old he went

fishing off Rhos-on-Sea Pier; he cast his line back over his shoulder in readiness to throw the line into the sea and in so doing hooked onto the Pier Master who was stood behind him. He vividly remembers that this important man was wearing a brown cotton working dust coat!

During the 2nd World War when Colwyn Bay was home to the Ministry of Food, Holingdrakes was used by the American Army as their canteen. It was a bone of contention locally that the food to be found on offer in what was known locally as 'The American Canteen' was far superior to that which was available to the people of Colwyn Bay. As the American soldiers were marched up and down Princes Drive, passed their canteen, in readiness for the D Day landings, Austin



The Picnic Filling Station, Old Colwyn

and his young school friends used to shout at them, "give us some gum chum."

Holingdrakes Garage, in the 1960s, supplied Triumph Heralds for VIPs during Colwyn Bay's Holiday Processions, including for Alfie Bass and Bill Fraser (Bootsie and Snudge) the popular television personalities of the time. Holingdrakes was taken over by the Scottish Automobile Company which in its turn was a subsidiary of the Heron Group of garages. In due course the Heron Group took over full control of the garage and rebuilt the front of the building, the parking area and the showrooms, including a showroom especially reserved for the sale of Rolls Royces. This was only four years before the construction work began on the A55 through Colwyn Bay which brought an end to the garage, as the route of the new road was to run through most of the garage. On the inside of the back wall, known to the workforce for some reason as the Belfast Trust Wall, hung an enormous clock which could readily be read by all the mechanics while they were working. The evening before the garage closed for ever the clock mysteriously went missing and was never seen again.

The CEO of Heron International, and the founding Chairman of the Jewish Community Security Trust, Gerald Ronson, was sent to prison in 1990 and was fined £5million for his part in the Guinness share trading fraud.

In the late 1940s, if you were driving into Colwyn Bay from Abergele the first filling station you would come across was William Knowles at Glan Hafod, opposite Highland Road, at Penmaenrhos. Mr Knowles was in a good spot and did good business from his road-side sight. In fact he did so well that he opened another filling station at the junction of Llysfaen and Abergele Roads which eventually became known as the Bluebird Petrol Station run by Stan Dewhurst, a distinguished Mason

and thoroughly likeable man. (As you dropped down into Old Colwyn, Meredith & Kirkham Garage was on your left on the corner of Bodelwyddan Avenue (now the site of the Aldi Store). The trams used to run up to the Queens Hotel (on the corner of Queens Road) and when they were on their way back down the hill, unable to stop in a hurry, the driver would be furiously clanging his bell to warn the car which was beside the garages' petrol pump and thus parked on the tram line which ran exceedingly close to the pump, to hurry up and get out of the way.

On the opposite side of the road from Meredith & Kirkham was the Wynn Service Station both garages in competition with one another in the petrol selling stakes. The site is now a car washing emporium staffed exclusively by east European migrants.

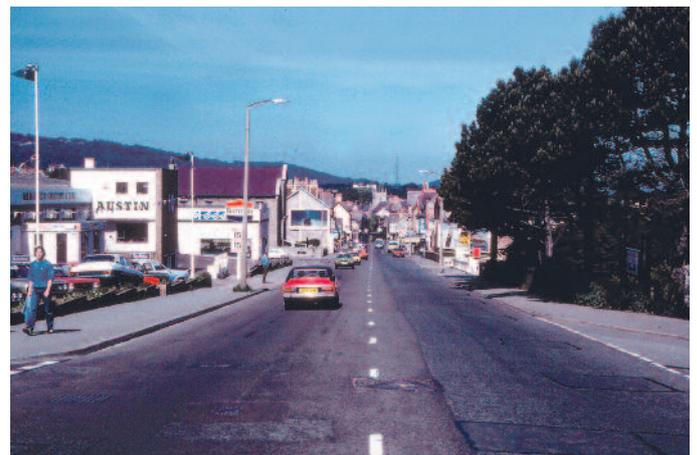
As you were leaving Old Colwyn, almost opposite the Marine Hotel, was the Llandudno Motor and Garage Company which was an extension of the Red Garage business in Llandudno and Caernarfon. The Red Garages had been created by the Middlesbrough born Frank Albert Wilkes c1915 who had arrived in Llandudno after spending ten years with Wolseley Motors. He subsequently became a prominent Rotarian and Mason in Llandudno.

Once upon a time there were five petrol stations in Old Colwyn; there is of course, now just the one filling station in the village on the corner of Abergele Road and St Catherine's Drive, now known as the

Abergele Road Co op store; it used to be known locally as 'The Mobile Garage' for many years.

On Abergele Road opposite the Nant-y-Glyn Methodist Church and the Park Pub was, and still is, Windsor Garage. This is a garage solely involved in the sale of petrol.

The two brothers, Albert and Robert Braid came to Colwyn Bay from Manchester in 1913 and set up their garages and petrol pumps on Abergele Road at the east end of the town (on the corner of Erw Wen Road) now the site of the Stermat store and on Conway Road opposite Yerburch and Gregory Avenues which has now metamorphosed into Slater's Vauxhall Truefit business. They advertised their business as being "On top for SATISFACTION". During the 2nd World War the Braids were highly commended for the work they carried out on producing jeeps and other military vehicles for the D Day landings. A highly skilled mechanic who worked at the Abergele Road garage was a small fellow called Eddie German who lived across the road in a house (No 18) at the top end of Meirion Gardens. When the war began he insisted that everyone should call him Eddie Jerman. The Abergele Road garage was, and still is, a black and white 1920s Arts and Crafts type structure while the Conway Road garage was, and still is behind the present façade designed by Tom Griffiths, a brutish brick monumental modern building. When Albert died, having returned to Cheshire in his retirement, his body was brought back to Colwyn Bay for cremation and when the cortege, very slowly, passed the



M & K, Old Colwyn

Conway Road garage the entire staff emerged from the garage and lined the road side to pay their respects.

In the West End of the town (130 Conway Road) was Francis Garage Ltd which in the 1920s Mr Fred Francis had built and opened as an extension of his coach and horses business, which he was running from the middle of Colwyn Bay beside the Cosy Cinema, which is now Matthews' Hardware Store. Indeed even up to the



Penrhyn Filling Station



The Smithy Llanellian before the need for petrol pumps

day they demolished Francis Garage in the West End you could still see the horse stables at the rear of the garage on Carlton Road. His son was more interested in the horses than the new-fangled cars which were taking over from the coaches, so he broke away from his father and opened a horse riding stable at the top end of Rhos Road on the corner with Tan-y-Bryn Road which flourished in the late 1940s, 1950s and '60s, (NB Journal September 1994). The stable buildings have now gone and the land has been incorporated into the Brompton Park Estate. The West End garage is now the site of the Lidl Food Store.

In Rhos-on-Sea the main filling station was attached to Rhos County Garage which was run, in 1952, by Mr W Wooller. The garage filled the entire space between Colwyn Avenue and Colwyn Crescent and the site is now occupied by the Cwrt Ogwen development of flats. Mr Wooller had an out-lying petrol station at what locals referred to as Glan Conway Corner at the spot where there is now a large round-about and fly-over as you turn right for Llandudno Junction and left for Glan Conwy.

There were two filling stations on Penrhyn Avenue. One was Hancock's Garage on the spot now occupied by the Penrhyn Park Estate flats.

Further down Penrhyn Avenue on the corner of Church Drive there was yet another filling station. Again the site is now filled with the Llys Alyn flats. Just round the corner, tucked into the side of Cranford Crescent is Penrhyn Service Station. This was also a petrol filling station which was originally built solely to service the cars of the owners of the Cranford Court and Penrhyn Court art deco flats which stand behind the garage and front onto Abbey Road. These flats were built on land owned by the Newton Estate and originally had flat roofs. The daughter of Mr Newton, who never married, would often be seen tooting around Rhos-on-Sea in her cream coloured two door Mercedes car sporting the number plate, NI.

Still in Rhos, on the corner of Llandudno Road and Dinerth Road (where the Co-op now stands) was yet another filling station, The Service Garage Ltd run by Mr N Bannister from Llysfaen who always seemed to be wearing a World War Two pilot's leather flying jacket. One of the employees only had one hand, the other being a fake metal one which struck terror into the local children. The garage was advertised as the 'Main Volkswagen and Jowett Agents' and invited anyone, 'day or night' to 'phone 44430 for 'Service'. Unfortunately in the 1980s there was a large fire at the garage when all the surrounding residents (including my mother-in-law!) had to be evacuated for a couple of days. That was the end of that business. Mr Bannister's daughter ran Pat's Garage (now called Nev's Garage) at Ffordlas Bridge near Glan Conwy.



Berry's Garage built in 1914 is the oldest garage in the Colwyn Bay area. It is hidden between the back of the houses on Everard and Whitehall Roads, had two petrol pumps. These were for any customers who could find the garage and for the cars which were being tended to with loving care by the Berry family. One of the pumps had a handle which Mr Berry had to operate to drag the petrol up from the tank.

In the 1960s (including Berry's Garage) there were six petrol stations in Rhos-on-Sea and now there are none.

In 1960 a gallon of petrol cost 4/6d (25p) and ten years later horrifyingly it had shot up to 6/8d (35p) and all these

garages were making a profit on that return. Indeed all four petrol pump garages in Mochdre, highlighted by the Daily Mirror, were presumably making a profit. These petrol stations were situated where now the four businesses, Cars of Conwy, Mochdre Garage, Car Sales of Mochdre and are run.

Sixty years ago car drivers were not expected to fill their vehicles with petrol, this procedure was the preserve of the garage proprietors and their staff. The driver explained how many gallons he required whereupon the garage staff would unscrew the petrol tank cap, shove the pump nozzle into the aperture and hey-presto you were on your way. Some pumps, even in the 1960s, still had the wind-up mechanism with a crank handle attached to the pump which enabled the garage proprietor to pump up the petrol from the tank below the visible petrol pump.

In those far off days there were eighteen garages selling petrol between Penmaenrhos and Mochdre, all giving a personal courteous service for a modest few shillings. In the intervening years personal service has been replaced by self-service. At the Asda petrol filling station there are no personnel at all; if you have not got a credit card you do not get petrol; the same service is offered at Tesco. What, I wonder, will the petrol filling station, if indeed petrol is still on sale, look like in another fifty years?



Francis Garage, West End

Engedi Welsh (Presbyterian) Calvinistic Methodist Chapel and Its Future



Engedi Chapel

Engedi Chapel is situated on Woodland Road West in Colwyn Bay and has now been empty for twenty one years and has become unkempt and derelict. A knight in shining armour, Gothic & Stone developers from Manchester, have now come to the rescue and propose to turn the building into eighteen apartments. They intend calling the finished development, 'Trinity'.

In the second half of the 19th Century the Welsh congregation of the Presbyterian persuasion and the English congregation of the Presbyterian persuasion both used the same premises. This was a chapel building which is now the Matthews Hard Ware shop on Conwy Road, opposite the HSBC Bank. Between its use as a chapel and a hard ware shop it was home to the Cosy Cinema. The customers walked into the cinema and were confronted by the audience looking straight at them; the screen was fitted to the inside of the wall that fronted onto Conwy Road. Indeed if today you walk down Conwy Road in the Conwy direction and turn immediately right into Penrhyn Road and then right again down the narrow lane which leads behind the buildings and into the bottom of Station Road, and as you walk down and look at the back of Matthews' Hard Ware Store, there is the obvious outline and wall of the rear of a church.

The influence of the Calvinistic Methodists (or Presbyterians) on Colwyn Bay stretches back to the end of the 18th Century when a

few lonely pioneers began services in surrounding hamlets. It is odd now to realise that the tiny chapels of Mochdre and Llanellian were the 'mother churches' of the enormous Engedi Calvinistic Methodist Chapel. However, before Engedi was built the small Welsh Calvinistic congregation and the small English Presbyterian congregation could not afford large grand churches in which to worship, so they pooled their resources and together built what has now morphed into Matthews' Hard Ware store. The land was given to the Welsh Congregation by Sir John Pender MP (an English speaker) on the condition that English services could also be held in the new chapel. Permission was granted from the Monthly Meeting and Quarterly Association and the building was then completed in the sum £700. It seated approximately 200. The architect was John Douglas (NB: Civic Journal: June 2010) and the builder was Abel Roberts of Llandudno who also built the now demolished Colwyn Bay Hotel. Most of the hard graft and organisation was completed by Mr Roberts' foreman, Thomas Parry who hailed from Llangerniew. The English clergyman was the Reverend EW Evans M.A. and during his pastorate an outstanding debt of £200 was cleared. £100 paid by the Welsh contingent and £100 by the English contingent.

The holding of both Welsh and English services in the same building caused some

inconvenience and the Welsh members soon wanted a separate place for worship, and in 1879 Engedi was erected in Woodland Road West. It was built only three years after the Battle of the Little Bighorn, better known as 'Custer's Last Stand' in Montana when Custer's men were soundly beaten by the Indians. It has therefore stood on this spot for 142 years and is now in the capable hands of Gothic and Stone.

Meanwhile in 1889 the English congregation who had been left in what became the Cosy Cinema were offered £1,800 for the building which they readily accepted. The pulpit and the pews were sold to the Methodist Chapel in Llysfaen and on the 1st August the children were given a treat – a picnic on Bryn Euryn for which the refreshments were given by the Misses Noden, confectioners of Colwyn Bay. In 1890 the foundation stone was laid for the new church on the corner of Conwy and Hawarden Roads. The cost of the land and the new church was £3,700 on which accrued a debt for the church members of £2,000 which remarkably was cleared within one year. The builder was Mr Samuel Parry from Llanrwst and as is still evident the building was constructed using Ruabon red brick. It is interesting that after the ceremony of the laying the foundation stone a strawberry tea was held in the Engedi schoolroom. Thus it seems that once both the English and Welsh congregations had secured their own separate church buildings harmony had been restored between the two communities.

The plans for the redevelopment of Engedi have been drawn up by the Manchester based GA Studio Architects. Engedi was bought by Gothic and Stone from a trust in a deal assisted by Glaisyers Solicitors who are continuing to proffer legal advice as the development progresses.

A snag has now been revealed in the planning application in that there is no off road parking. Until this matter is resolved the development is on hold. The car park next to the church used to be a field owned by the Church. RS Davies & Co. the local builders, in c1983, were converting and renovating the 'Burton' building across the road on the corner of Abergele Road and Woodland Road West and in order for the workers and tenants of the building to have somewhere to park their cars, RS Davies cleverly bought the field and converted it into a car park.

This is yet another encouraging example of the regeneration of our town and I am sure would have met with the approval of the original congregation of 142 years ago.

Bryn Dinerth

In Llandrillo-yn-Rhos Parish Church-yard there is an imposing double grave. It has a distinctive headstone built as a small wall with a light red sandstone memorial imbedded in the wall. The memorial records the fact that the grave is the last resting place of William and Edith Horton. Mr Horton, so the inscription tells us, died on 25th January 1944 aged 92 years. His wife had died the year before and their Golden Wedding had been on 29th April 1935.

Mr Horton had been a Justice of the Peace and owned most of the land in what we now know as Rhos-on-Sea.



Mr. William Horton's House: Bryn Dinerth

His home had been Bryn Dinerth, a large imposing house, set in many acres of land off Tan-y-Bryn Road in Rhos-on-Sea. If you travelled up Eberston Road West from the five ways round-a-bout, when you reached the top, at the junction with Tan-y-Bryn Road and walked straight across you were then on Mr Horton's land. This is the reason why Horton Drive is so called to this day.

The present Horton Drive follows exactly Mr Horton's drive way which led to his home, Bryn Dinerth. Running off the present Horton Drive, like the veins of a leaf, are three short cul-de-sacs, Berwyn Court, Clwyd Court and Penmaen Court. At the end of Horton Drive is Dolphin Court, a large block of twelve functionally designed flats. These flats are on the exact spot where Bryn Dinerth once stood, pointing up a huge disparity in architectural design.

The name Rhos-on-Sea was bestowed on the area by Mr Horton who thought it sounded inviting for tourists and the local residents. Prior to his renaming the area it had been known variously as Dinerth, Llandrillo-yn-Rhos, Glanydon and Rhos Trillo. He bought all the land, comprising 250 acres, from Mr Bostock of Liverpool.

Mr Horton was an enlightened benefactor

towards Rhos-on-Sea. He bought the Pier at Rhos, in 1896. It had been built four years earlier but the original owners, led by Mr Bostock, had gone bust. He set up The Colwyn Bay and Liverpool Steamship Company and bought three vessels with which he established a regular ferry service along the North Wales Coast. In 1908 one of these ships, PS Rhosneigr was wrecked near the Pier and at low water its remains can still be seen to this day. (NB: Journal January 2018)

It was pointed out to him that the Pier had originally been built skew-wiff to the coast and was outside the line specified in the original Act, so in 1911, undaunted, he obtained a new Act to legalise his purchase and was then able to charge the public for walking on his Pier.

During the 1st World War, the Pier Master, William Jones, appointed to the job by Mr Horton, found the 40 year old Private Gwilym Thomas of the Welsh Regiment, partly

undressed, on the landing stage. He warned the soldier in emphatic terms not to try swimming to the shore. Private Thomas, from Tylorstown, in the Rhondda, replied: "I'm an old sailor and I'm not born to be drowned", then promptly dived into the water, got into trouble and drowned.

Mr Horton planned to develop Rhos as a high class holiday resort and planned for a pavilion for 3,000 people, a sea-water bath and Turkish Baths, but could not raise the funding so these extravagant plans came to nothing.

The buildings which run along the front in Rhos-on-Sea from Rhos Road to Penrhyn Avenue were all built by Mr Horton. There is a date, 1895, (when Mr Horton was 43 years old) carved into the stone work on the building to the left of Nino's.

In 1909 Mr Horton generously made a free gift of 2,000 square yards of land for a new purpose built church on the corner of Penrhyn Avenue and Colwyn Avenue. This is now the site of the new Co-op store. Because Penrhyn Avenue was widened after the Church authorities began to build on the site it was rendered only large enough for the Church Hall, so the actual Church itself was erected at the other end of Colwyn Avenue on the corner of Abbey Road.

All the while Mr Horton was ensconced with his wife, from about 1895, in Bryn Dinerth. He remained there, with gardeners tending the gardens and house-keepers helping Edith in the house, for the next fifty years.

Today all his gardens and woodland are covered with delightfully designed bungalows. Some have small cobbled court-yards giving them a distinctly Spanish feel to them. People, rightly, are concerned that if new estates are to be built, they should be attractive. The Horton Drive estate is an excellent conception, attractive and humanly inviting. By the time Dolphin Court and the bungalows were designed and built, seventeen years after the end of the 2nd World War, austerity and exhaustion were at an end and more thought and imagination was being deployed in the construction of our homes. The homes that were built on Mr Horton's land, that we see today, mark an end to the jerry-built estates of the past.

Bryn Dinerth itself was a large house designed in two halves attached at an angle one with the other. There were tall chimney stacks, light wide dormer windows, an impressive castellated entrance and an enormous glass orangery. The whole house was covered in flowering creepers of some sort.



Dolphin Court now stands where Bryn Dinerth stood

Bryn Dinerth was sold in 1955 to the developers, D&M Building Company, Oldham Ltd., and Booth Street Holding Ltd., who started work on the construction of the flats and bungalows in 1962. To this day there is a depression in the garden lawn of Dolphin Court which was where Mr Horton's ornamental fountain once stood. The old house, Bryn Dinerth Lodge (now 28 Tan-y-Bryn Road) which stands on the corner of Tan-y-Bryn Road and Eberston Road West, opposite Horton Drive, was where Mr Horton's coachman and chauffeur, George Parry, lived. The house was of course owned by Mr Horton.

Larkfield

On Constitution Hill in London, carved into the Commonwealth Memorial Gates, is a quotation by the Booker prize-winning author Ben Okri which reads: 'Our future is greater than our past.'



Larkfield

We must always tread warily around the problem of retaining old distinguished buildings in preference to their demolition and replacement with more modern edifices. It is inevitably true that what replaces our old beloved buildings is so often inferior to that which it has replaced. However, as Ben Okri has pointed out, the future of our town is more important than its past.

Larkfield is a large substantial detached house on the corner of Rhos Road and Elwy Road, opposite Rhos-on-Sea Methodist Church, built in 1899. It closed its doors in 2018 having been used as a Rest Home for many years and is now under threat of demolition by Cartrefi Conwy to be replaced, surprise surprise, with flats.

The Cayley Flyer, the pub on Rhos-on-Sea promenade is so named because Sir George Cayley was one of the first people to construct a machine that could fly, indeed he is considered to be one of the most important people in the history of aeronautics. (The pub used to be called 'The Cayley'). He and his family owned a lot of Rhos-on-Sea as well as the Llannerch Estate (hence Llannerch Roads East and West) just outside St Asaph. His grandson, John, lived in Larkfield and the family crest has been worked into the stained glass. The building has a rare stone tower and the interior is adorned with some very ornate ceilings while the exterior walls, in the main, are constructed with blocks of heavy stone.

In March last year a campaign was organised to resist the demolition, by Felton PM a Heswall based firm, of the building and the

Clwyd West Assembly Member, Darren Millar, was roped in to help highlight the possible destruction of a local well-loved building. Larkfield is not listed and does not appear on the Local Authority's list of Buildings of Significant Local Interest, but never-the-less it is an impressive structure and full of character and would be a loss to the local community.

On the evening of Wednesday 6th May last year the Conwy County Borough Council Planning Committee decided to turn down the planning application from the developers to demolish Larkfield. Instead they decided to wait for a photographic survey so it can begin the local listing process with Cadw. This was a pleasant surprise to the local residents who were cheered to discover that the Committee had listened to their fears and who were given fresh hope that the Sir George Cayley's grandson's home could be saved.

On the 10th September this year the building was sold at auction for £275,000.00. We will now have to wait to see what the future holds for this mildly historical house.

An Edwardian Mansion Restored

The old solid mansion, built in the Edwardian era, on the corner of Ellesmere Road and Conwy Road in Colwyn Bay, has been transformed into a six bedroom property.

Once upon a time it was someone's spacious home but by 1925 it had been altered and became the Ellesmere Hotel run by Mrs A.S.Allen. In the 1930s it was acquired by Mr Clay Beckett, a General Practitioner in Lancashire, who renamed it the Meadowcroft Hotel. Not only was he a doctor, but he was also an entrepreneur. He bought the Rhos Priory Hotel on Abbey Road, High Lawns Hotel on Rhos Road and the Silver Howe Hotel on Llannerch Road East. Eventually, on a vacant piece of land next to the Silver Howe, he built yet another hotel and called that The Meadowcroft as well, and the one on Conwy Road reverted to its original name, and became the Ellesmere Boarding House.

When the 2nd World War began all these hotels were requisitioned by the Ministry of Food and Mr Clay Beckett's daughter-in-law, Betty, was appointed a Supervisor for this new Ministry. She spent the war organising the feeding of innumerable people in Pwllcrochan Hotel, Penrhos College and Henllys Hall, Beaumaris, all of which had also been requisitioned by the Ministry of Food



Ellesmere Hotel

and housed the civil servants working to feed the British people.

During the war the Ellesmere Hotel was also requisitioned by the Ministry of Food and housed the Legal and Enforcement Department of the Ministry. It was from there that a team of inspectors would tour the country randomly visiting farms to check if food fit for human consumption was instead being fed to livestock. If the inspectors found flour, or any other produce which should have been made available to the people of the British Isles, being hidden, for the animals of the farm, the hapless farmer was prosecuted and the clerks from the Ellesmere Boarding House would prepare the prosecution papers.

After the war, like a lot of other buildings in Colwyn Bay and indeed like the town itself, it struggled to fulfil another role in a changed world. Hotels and small boarding houses were still needed and up until the late 1950s visitors still arrived in Colwyn Bay for their summer holidays. But as people became more prosperous and foreign travel became more accessible, the fortunes of the Ellesmere Hotel declined. Eventually the local authority purchased the building and used it to house a department of the County Council's Social Services.

And now in 2015/2016 the building has been purchased by Cartrefi Conwy. The Borough Council put in about £140,000 and transferred the building to Cartrefi Conwy for £1. The Welsh Government and Bay Life have also been involved in the project. The six new apartments will be let at 20 per cent less than the current market rent to people from Colwyn Bay working in the health and emergency services, staff earning £15,000 to £29,000 and struggling to afford a deposit.

This new project of regeneration in Colwyn Bay is excellent news and will not only be good for local people but will also enhance the built environment.

Our Village Halls



Elwy Road Church House, Rhos-on-Sea

All our local village halls, with the exception of the one in Mochdre, are associated with their mother churches. There were four in Rhos-on-Sea and now there is one, three in Colwyn Bay but now there are two, but even those are not functioning. There is one in Llysaen, and one in Llanddulas and one in Glan Conwy.

Village Halls were places where young people used to go to play ping-pong, where jumble sales were held and badminton matches played; where you could find a cup of coffee or maybe afternoon tea. They were often the social centre of their communities. Every episode of Dad's Army has a scene in it where the platoon would stand to ragged attention while Captain Mainwaring addressed the men in his laughingly pompous manner. For a while however village halls fell out of favour and their fabric began to deteriorate. Ironically, as it seems many people are wearying of seeing friends on social media, and wishing to meet them properly, are venturing out of their homes to frequent village halls once again, only to find that many of them have vanished. Once again however they are being used for bee keeping courses, aerobics and tap-dancing. There is a bit of good news in that last year the Government handed over £3 million for a Village Halls Improvement Grant Scheme. The Rural Affairs Minister Lord Gardiner is quoted as saying, "village halls are more important and relevant than ever."

The Village Hall movement really took off after the First World War, when many of the halls were erected as memorials to the soldiers who had died in the trenches. The oldest village hall in England is supposed to be St Margaret's Hall in Alderwasley, Derbyshire. It was originally constructed as a chapel in the 13th Century and converted into a village hall for the 1977 Silver Jubilee.

The four halls in Rhos-on-Sea, three of which were maintained by churches, were Elwy Road Church House, now in a sorry state of repair and will soon be demolished, the Congregational Church Hall, now demolished and replaced by the Co-op store on the corner of Penrhyn Avenue and Colwyn Avenue, the Rhos-on-Sea Methodist Church Hall on St George's Road which is still going strong and the Parkway Hall built by the Local Authority in the centre of the estate of bungalows and flats reserved for the elderly of the area. The Parkway Hall has a large airy area for meetings and societies and a commodious kitchen; architecturally it is basic and straightforward but it fulfils its purpose admirably. The church halls were all large enough to host badminton matches between all the local teams.

A smallish hall has now been tagged on to what was the Rhos-on-Congregational Church which is now known as the United Reformed Church. Some tiny toilets and cloak rooms were demolished and a hall,

kitchen and new toilets were built at the back of the church close to Abbey Road. Once again this venue is open to all sorts of organisations as well as church influenced meetings. The whole church is an interesting early 20th Century Arts and Crafts design with not a trace of Gothic, which was usually incorporated into churches. The windows are of the moulded mullion and circular clerestory with tracery variety design with intersecting curves and diagonals.

The Church in Wales church hall on Elwy Road still has the date 1902-3 and two Welsh dragons etched into the woodwork above the dilapidated front door, while up-above, on the wall just below the roof, again woven into the woodwork, are the words 'St Trillo's Church Room. Inside, at the back of the hall there used to be a billiard table, where men from the surrounding area would spend their evenings. There was also a stage where amateur productions would be staged.

The church hall in Llanddulas on the corner of Abergele Road and Beulah Avenue was built in 1910 and designed by Harold Hughes who also designed the timber-framed lychgate (in 1898) and the churchyard cross (1912) which marks the spot where the Dundonalds of Gwrych are buried, for St Cynbryd's Church across the road. The church hall is built with locally sourced stone and has a delightful small corner clock tower and a slated spire. The

hall is still well used by the local community and was used for instance by the late indomitable Margaret Rawcliffe when, in 1985, she 'launched' her book 'Llandduas Heritage of a Village'.

The Glan Conwy Church Hall (otherwise known as Llansanffraid Church Hall) on the corner of Church Street and Top Llan Road is wedged up against a rock bluff. Edward Hubbard in his book, 'The Buildings of Wales, Denbighshire and Flintshire' writes that the hall was designed Sydney Colwyn Foulkes in 1932 and describes it as, "Whimsically modern, of brick,

the long convex front with an ornamented frieze built up in brick, on the stage tower behind. It also has two distinctive fluted chimneys. It is good that these three Mr Colwyn Foulkes designed halls are still in use and are much used by their local communities.

The only village hall not associated with a church is in Mochdre and is rather undistinguished architecturally. It stands between Conwy Road and Old Conwy Road from which it is accessed. It is a large light and airy barn like building. It incorporates the Sue Jones Suite which is

The third Colwyn Bay Hall is the one attached to St John's Methodist Church on the corner of Conwy Road and Pwlycrochan Avenue. It was built by Tom Foulkes, Sydney Colwyn Foulkes' father. In 1882 the Lych Gate, the Manse, called Tranby, and the foundations were built, but the site was then left vacant for five years, during which time it was known locally as 'Wesley's folly'. The building, designed by Robert Curwen, was completed in 1888. It is a very 'churchy' church with aisles, transepts, clerestory and a fine spire. Included in all this was what was originally called the 'school room' which sports an octagonal spired turret. The Methodists were keen on education and this room was originally used to educate the children of the congregation. As schooling became more universal and after every child had to attend a school, this room or hall became available for use by all sorts of clubs and organisations. The church is now part of the Rydal Penrhos School set up.



St John's Church Rooms, Cliff Road, Old Colwyn

immaculately detailed. A quadrant porch in an internal angle has a concave-profiled roof rising into an octagonal brick chimney." He's correct; it is a lovely building and is again used regularly by the folk of Glan Conwy.

The Church Hall in Llysfaen was also designed, in 1929, by Sydney Colwyn Foulkes. It stands directly across Pentregwyddel Road from St Cynfran's Church and is distinctly a Colwyn Foulkes structure. It is roughcast, has pointed windows and twin gables and you could be inclined to believe that it had been designed by Herbert Luck North (NB: October 1996 Journal) who favoured this sort of ginger bread house design.

The third hall designed in 1935 by Sydney Colwyn Foulkes is in Old Colwyn on Cliff Road behind the St John Baptist Church which is on Station Road. This is the largest of the three halls and has a commodious stage on which village and church drama productions used to be staged. Miss Margaret Lacey who died in 1989 and used to act in small parts in the Boulting Brothers and John Schlesinger films, and who used to run her own ballet dancing classes for young girls, used to stage her annual dancing festival on the stage in this hall. It is now used by the Pearl Shaw Performing Arts organisation. The building is constructed with fine brickwork, a signature of most of Sydney Colwyn Foulkes designs and includes moulding on

ideal for more intimate gatherings. The late Sue Jones was a well-regarded local Councillor and Magistrate. There are plenty of parking spaces and yet again the hall is used by all sorts of local clubs and societies including yoga and slimming classes.

There were three halls in Colwyn Bay. One is beside St Paul's Church, on Rhiw Road, at the rear of St David's Church and was used by a variety of organisations including of course church drama productions. It was designed in 1895 by John Douglas (NB: June 2010 Journal). Sadly it has now been deemed to be unsafe and is no longer used. Another hall, which was really only a 'convenience' hall, was on Prince's Drive, and no longer exists; there is now a car park where once it stood. It was known locally as the Swedish gymnasium and Coles' wholesale emporium and it was where Arthur Dunwell the printer produced the 'Towntalk' newspaper. The local lads would venture there to keep fit.

When Iris Griffiths, a twenty year old who had come to help out in The Ministry of Food, arrived in Colwyn Bay during the 2nd World War, from her home in the coal dirt blackened Ferndale in the Rhonda Fach valley of South Wales, she was transfixed at the cleanliness and whiteness of our pavements and streets. She was mesmerised. She and her friends also discovered that there was free food and entertainment in the St John's Methodist Church Hall on a Sunday evening. The trouble was that they had to attend the evening service before they became eligible for the food and fun; so they succumbed to the word of God and had a good time thereafter.

Inevitably all these existing Village Halls are used at General Election time when the locals trudge there to cast their vote. There is no alcohol served in any of these establishments. During the 2nd World War, lipstick and cigarettes boosted morale, but just as vital, as Miss Iris Griffiths would tell you, were our village halls.



Llysfaen Church Rooms and Village Hall

The Eirias Park Cafe



Demolished c1990: Now a car park

Our Role

We are members of the Colwyn Bay Civic Society but do we have a meaningful and influential view of our local built environment?

What do we think of the new flats which have been built at Penmaenhead which dominate the skyline as we leave our town on the A55 heading for Abergele? Surely they must represent a baleful influence on our civic pride. They look like something the dictator President Nicolae Ceausescu would have forced on the cowed people of Bucharest before they shot him. Who sanctioned their design?

What do we think of the new enormous Council Civic Centre in the middle of Colwyn Bay on the corner of Conwy and Coed Pella Roads? We will probably all get used to its monumentality and all its glass and be grateful for the income the employees may bestow on local businesses. It is certainly a talking point

and bestows some gravitas on the town. In my own life-time this is the third large building to occupy this site.

What is going to happen to the empty Mary Bamber building on Queens Avenue? This building was built in the grounds of Queen's Lodge, Lord Colwyn's former home and is named after Bessie Braddock's mother. Councillor Bessie Braddock was the large brash lady from Liverpool who was thoughtful and industrious on behalf of her constituents and was the moving force behind the creation of this home for the poorer people of her home city. A recent fire has now destroyed some of the structure and presumably it will be demolished and replaced possibly by more flats.

What will happen to the grounds surrounding Queen's Lodge. This represents an enormous amount of land ripe for development.

Should the people of Colwyn Bay be concerned about the developments at Rydal Penrhos School which is being transformed into a day school. Already plans have been drawn up for a building containing eight apartments on the School's Hathaway car park on Queens Drive directly behind the former home of the late Professor Robert Owen, a distinguished former member of our Society. Will the School need all its boarding houses, all its playing fields; will it still need Pwllcrochan?

Ostensibly there is a Conservation Order in place surrounding the Pwllcrochan Avenue area. Is there any longer a need for such an Order to be in place?

These are surely issues which we need to keep an eye on and The Committee welcome views and concerns which the members may like to express when we meet for our monthly get-togethers.

James Robinson's golden cuff-links

In May 1941, James Clifton Edmeston Robinson, an RAF Officer aged 23 years, put on his blue uniform, kissed his mother Ruth, shook his father's hand and walked out of the family home, The Croft on Brackley Avenue, Colwyn Bay, for the last time. On the 23rd May he was shot down over the English Channel by German fighter planes.

James' father, also confusingly called James, had given his son a pair of gold cuff-links inscribed with the letters JR. He never took them with him when he was flying. .

During the 2nd World War The Croft became a haven for twelve evacuees mostly from Liverpool; a pair of them were brother and sister, James Francis Quinn and his young sister Theresa, always known as Tes. James was 13 years old, and the oldest of the evacuees when he arrived at The Croft. Their home was on Leicester Street, just off Scotland Road in Liverpool where there was a strong Irish community. Their father, Thomas, was a blacksmith, a hardworking, uneducated man; neither he nor his wife, Annie, could read or write. It can only be imagined how James and Tes felt when they found themselves in a huge house, filled with beautiful furniture, an inside toilet, clean linen on the bed, where they were served nourishing food and dealt with in a kindly and respectful manner. Mr Robinson was a director of Mather & Platt, a steel and textile firm in Manchester and, as well as their Flying Officer son, they had four daughters. The evacuee children who found themselves sharing their home were privileged. The Robinsons made sure all the children were properly educated and the boys all had to join the local Boy Scout group. James was

employed as a 'boy messenger' at the local Post Office and received a Certificate of Character from J.R.Dowden the Head Postmaster. All the evacuees roamed and played in the Pwllcrochan Woods, well away from the deprivations of their homes in Liverpool. James and his sister spent six happy war years in The Croft.

Mr and Mrs Robinson were devastated by their brave son's death. Mr Robinson died four years later aged 76 (he had been aged 52 when his son was born) and after the war Mrs Robinson arranged for a beautiful stained glass window to be installed in St Andrew's Church in her son's memory. The window is still in place although the Church is now shut and unused.

Mr Robinson must have thought a lot of James Quinn for he gave him his son's gold cuff-links. This was an act of great generosity and trust, a trust which was honoured by James for the rest of his life; he wore them always. At the end of the war he and his sister returned home to Liverpool. James became a merchant seaman, then a sheet-metal worker and eventually a publican; he ran the Boot Inn in Liscard, Wallasey, for many years where he is still fondly remembered. He married on the same day, 23rd May, that James Robinson had been shot down during the war and wore his cuff-links. James Robinson had owned a dog, a spaniel, called Meo and when James Quinn and his new wife bought a dog, they christened it Meo. James' daughter, Jeanette, recalls that her father's favourite poem, which he would recite from time to time, was Rudyard Kipling's poem 'If'. The poem must have been brought to James' attention

by the Robinson family, as his own parents would not have heard of it or been able to read it. Ironically it was also Fidel Castro's favourite poem and before the revolution, when he was in prison in Cuba, his lover, Naty Revuelta Clews, smuggled it in to his cell. When James went to sea, as a merchant seaman, he would write letters home to his parents which he would read to them on his return.

On the 23rd January 1949, at a service, conducted by the Rev F.C.Gill MA, a room in the Friendship Club on Douglas Road, Colwyn Bay was dedicated to the memory of James Clifton Edmeston Robinson. Rev Gill mentioned that the Robinson family wanted to share his memory with the youth of Colwyn Bay. Today his name is inscribed on the Runnymede Memorial (Plinth No.30). James Quinn wore the gold cuff-links to his dying day and remained a lover of good literature, a legacy from Mr and Mrs Robinson, but perhaps above all, retained a sense of the value of honesty and kindness which had been passed on to him, almost by osmosis, by this wonderful family from The Croft. Jeanette, his daughter, describes him as a 'real gentleman' who was a good father. He died in 1982. His sister, Tes, grew up to be a very devout Roman Catholic and said Mass with Pope John Paul in Liverpool Cathedral.

The Croft is now home to a new family, unconnected to the Robinsons, and Jeanette is the owner of the young Flying Officer's cuff-links. However, she would like them to go back to the Robinson family, from whence they came and she is anxious to trace any surviving relative.

Highcroft Nursing Home



Highcroft Nursing Home on the corner of Whitehall Road and Francis Avenue was demolished in August 2020