

My original opening words were to be 'thank you all for coming this evening...', that was if the President's Dinner had taken place as planned on 24th November but as that did not happen I now thank you for reading the 'Past' section of the school magazine.

I am now in the middle of my term as President of the Old Scholar's Association and I want to formally thank last year's President, Ashley McCausland, for the hard work she carried out during her term of office.

Having now been in office for six months I now appreciate the time and commitment Ashley has invested in organising events and making the Association known much more amongst younger past pupils and indeed those leaving the school last year.

Appreciation must also go to the Old Scholars' Committee who have attended Committee meetings and helped me this year to date.

John Stanage, as ever, has done all the chasing to get appropriate articles and photographs into this section of the magazine, so a big thanks to John and not forgetting Aaron Chestnutt who displays great patience by waiting for this final page of the magazine.

Thanks must also be attributed to Joanne McGaffin and the staff in the school office who very kindly send out e-mails and assist with the distribution of the school magazine.

My first engagement as President was to distribute prizes at one of the Prep. School sports days.

The weather was glorious and the excitement of the youngest of children in the school was so great to witness.

While I never was a pupil in the Prep school, the day took my mind back many, many years to my first years in 'big school'.

Let me reminisce.

I was a 'day dog', as we were labelled, who made my way to school by train, steam train at that, from Finaghy, trying to finish my homeworks on those hard, wooden, slatted seats.

When I now lecture my grandsons about the importance of spending time completing their homeworks when they get home from school, I admit I do feel guilty.

Why is it when I recall schooldays that I seem to remember the things I should forget and forget the things I should remember?

I was wondering recently what the Health and Safety laws would make of Henry John Turtle taking the whole football team to play Rockport School, Cultra, in his Morris Oxford shooting brake. Yes, he fitted all eleven of us into the car, but then we were all first form boys.

Or the time we went with J Arnold Bennington to the cliffs of Islandmagee to be lowered down over the cliffs without helmets etc. to ring gulls.

Much has changed over the years in the school, not least the fantastic building programmes which have produced a very beautiful school containing very up to date facilities and equipment – but at the expense of the dear old swimming pool! Outside, as well, the sporting facilities are second to none.

I had the pleasure recently of handing over to the school, on behalf of the Old Scholars, two new rowing machines for use in the gym which again is full of so much modern equipment.

The facilities have no doubt been one of the things which have enabled many of the varied sports teams and individuals to achieve great heights in their fields.

The school also continues to excel academically, as readers of the annual league tables of results will know.

Congratulations also to Mr Moore, his fantastic staff and pupils who achieved The Sunday Times, Secondary School of the Year, 2017 award. Well done to all.

This year I also attended Speech Day in the Assembly Hall.

The thought of going again to Speech Day brought back memories of the pupils all trooping down to the local cinema to listen to, what to us, were boring speeches but two things struck me this time.

One was the very enjoyable, humorous but challenging speech by the guest of honour, Neil Gibson, Chief Economist, Ireland, Ernst and Young.

The other memory which impacted me was remarks made by the Headmaster, Stephen Moore.

They were to do with finance and he had also brought them to the attention of those who attended the AGM.

He was citing the facts, which we all know, of the very great pressures there are on school budgets these days and the even greater pressures to come in the next two years but when he made it so personal to Friends' School it made me question what I and the Old Scholars of the school can do to help in some very small way, in some areas of the school to provide some much needed equipment.

Every little helps!

As I said, we were able to hand over to the school this year, two rowing machines and in the past couple of years we have been able to provide Audio Visual equipment and a scrummaging machine.

I would ask that you encourage old scholars to join the Association and attend events to help us provide something which the school may not feel justified in purchasing because of these financial pressures. This would lead me on to encourage members and friends to attend events. Some are free and at some we try to raise money to enable us to help the school as described above.

Unfortunately, we had to cancel the annual President's Dinner this year due to lack of numbers. This was disappointing, after the work the Committee had put into the organizing. We have a few events of interest about to be finalised for the new year and we will have our Annual Golf Outing in the spring, at which we really want both male and female members to come and bring friends. In May again we hope to organize the Table Quiz which has proved popular and succeeds in raising money for school equipment. Look out for notification of these events and please plan to attend.

In this magazine of fifty years ago, Joan Mail, who was Hon. Secretary reported 'it is becoming much more difficult to find suitable functions to bring us together'. Things have not changed and we do welcome suggestions for events which would interest more Old Scholars to come together.

Before I close, to go back even further than fifty years, I had the great joy, along with one of our past Headmasters, Arthur Chapman, to visit an old scholar and Past President of the Association, Gladys Pullen, who was celebrating her 100th birthday on November 1st. She came from Fintona and boarded at the school and later taught music in the school. It was a joy to spend an hour as she chatted about the school and her fellow pupils with much enthusiasm. I hope, if I live to her age, I am as healthy as she and am as content a person as she is.

If the President in 50 or 100 years' time is reading this, I hope you have a successful year

On that note let me invite you to get more involved in the Association of this great school.

QUAE SURSUM SUNT QUAERITE

Donald Patterson
President