

Idwal Rees, Cowbridge Grammar School headmaster – articles

Memorials in Cowbridge Church: J Idwal Rees

Last month's article pointed out that the space between the Chancel and the Taynton Room was infilled with a wood and glass screen as a result of donations from the Old Boys of the Grammar School. This was to commemorate two great twentieth-century headmasters of the Grammar School; it is strange to write now of one who was head for my first five years in Cowbridge!

Idwal Rees was headmaster of Cowbridge Grammar School between 1938 and 1971. Swansea-born, he attended Swansea GS, University College Swansea (where he read Classics) and St John's College, Cambridge, where he won blues for rugby in 1931 and 1932. He then played rugby regularly for Wales between 1934 and 1938. Described as 'a classic centre of the Welsh school - clever, correct, finished and unselfish', he also played at fly-half and on the wing. A finished and resourceful footballer, he always played an intelligent and well-judged game and kicked beautifully. In the 1935 match against the All Blacks, the Welsh victory by 13 points to 12 owed much to his tiger-like tackling and precision relieving kicks, and established him as one of the immortals of Welsh rugby. Idwal played first-class rugby for Swansea, London Welsh, Edinburgh Wanderers and the Barbarians.

There was little time to play rugby after he came to Cowbridge and he was soon called up for war service in the RAF. On his return in 1945, he did referee school matches, and was always delighted to see the home team win. On one not-to-be-forgotten match against West Mon school, Cowbridge were holding on to a one point lead until the last minute of the game, but a West Mon player grabbed the ball and had a clear run towards the Cowbridge line. Idwal, always a rapid thinker, immediately blew his whistle, enquiring "Who swore?" Rumour has it that many a West Mon player did swear as a result of losing the match.

Although he was always busy as headmaster, with a boarding house to keep an eye on as well, Idwal managed to continue teaching Greek, and indeed it was because of his influence that Cowbridge became one of the leading providers of Classicists to the universities - though of course he was ably assisted by other teachers such as Iolo Davies and Sid Harris. He had a real concern for his pupils, and Peter Cobb tells the story of how he used to wander through the examination hall during terminal exams, and gasp audibly when he detected an error in the candidate's paper so that a correction could be made.

His appearance was always immaculate - dark suit, MA gown, highly polished shoes - and he was a firm disciplinarian. He seldom interfered with teaching methods, and was highly regarded by staff and most of the boys. During his time as head, Cowbridge's academic results were excellent, and the rugby team provided a stream of internationals - and the school plays were outstanding, and the musical productions much enjoyed. Indirectly, it was the atmosphere created in the school which allowed all these things to flourish. He, and his wife Megan, also played a great part in the life of the town.

By Jeff Alden

IDWAL REES, HEADMASTER OF COWBRIDGE GRAMMAR SCHOOL 1938 – 1971

There are few people whose names are entered in the 'hall of fame'; far fewer are those who are universally acclaimed in two separate fields. Idwal Rees was one of this rare breed, a man who achieved distinction both in international rugby and also as a headmaster.

He is one of the rugby immortals, noted particularly for his sterling defence against the All Blacks when Wales beat New Zealand by 13 points to 12 in 1935. The first half was noted for some hard tackling by him, and "at the end, Idwal Rees now seemed to be playing New Zealand on his own. The All Blacks put up an awesome aerial bombardment, but each time there was Rees, all sinew and skill to the end, coolly making his angle and intersecting the line of touch with scholarly precision" wrote David Smith and Gareth Jones in *Fields of Praise*.

Swansea-born, he attended Swansea GS, University College Swansea (where he read Classics) and St John's College, Cambridge, where he won blues for rugby in 1931 and 1932. He then played rugby regularly for Wales between 1934 and 1938. Described as 'a classic centre of the Welsh school - clever, correct, finished and unselfish', he also played at fly-half and on the wing. A finished and resourceful footballer, he always played an intelligent and well-judged game and kicked beautifully. Idwal played first-class rugby for Swansea, London Welsh, Edinburgh Wanderers (because he was teaching at Fettes College) and the Barbarians.

From Fettes, he came to be headmaster of Cowbridge Grammar School in 1938. There was little time to play rugby after he came to Cowbridge and he was soon called up for war service in the RAF. On his return in 1945, he did referee school matches, and was always delighted to see the home team win. On one not-to-be-forgotten match against West Mon school, Cowbridge were holding on to a one point lead until the last minute of the game, but a West Mon player grabbed the ball and had a clear run towards the Cowbridge line. Idwal, always a rapid thinker, immediately blew his whistle, enquiring "Who swore?" The resulting scrum meant that Cowbridge saved the match; rumour has it that many a West Mon player did swear as a result.

Although he was always busy as headmaster, with a boarding house to keep an eye on as well, Idwal managed to continue teaching Greek. Indeed it was because of his influence that Cowbridge became one of the leading providers of Classicists to the universities - though of course he was ably assisted by other teachers such as Iolo Davies and Sid Harris. He had a real concern for his pupils, and Peter Cobb tells the story of how he used to wander through the examination hall during terminal exams, and gasp audibly when he detected an error in the candidate's paper so that the boy could realise his mistake and make a correction.

His appearance was always immaculate - dark suit, MA gown, highly polished shoes - and he commanded instant respect. He was an intellectual - I can picture him slumped in his study, feet up, dashing off the Times crossword before school started. He was a liberal - he seldom interfered with teaching methods, and allowed the boys to make their own decisions. As a result, Idwal was highly regarded by staff and most of the boys. During his time as head, Cowbridge's academic results were excellent, and the rugby team provided a stream of internationals - and the school plays were outstanding, and the musical productions much

enjoyed. It was the atmosphere which he created in the school which allowed all these things to flourish. Idwal Rees was a great headmaster.

Photographs:

1. Idwal Rees making a characteristic tackle in the Varsity match of 1931
2. Cowbridge Grammar School First XV, 1970-1, with the headmaster and a youthful Hugh Williams. Perhaps the two current Cowbridge residents, Rob Vaughan, back row, 2nd from right, and Clive 'stropky' Farrant, middle row, 3rd from right, would like to write in with the names of all the others?

Gem article

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On Saturday last, 8 November, Cowbridge was full of men 'of a certain age', many with their wives, who had come to pay their respects to their former headmaster, John Idwal Rees, and also to remember those old boys of the Grammar School who had died in the Great Wars. Holy Cross Church was full, and we took part in a memorable service. Canon Derek Belcher and Revd Norman Williams took the service, there was fine singing by the Cowbridge Choral Society as well as by the congregation.

The three lessons were read by former students who had been masters at the school - Adrian Trotman, Ken Westcott and Colin Lewis. The memorial plaque in the chancel to J Idwal Rees, Headmaster, 1938 - 1971, was dedicated. After the laying of wreaths, and the reading out of the names of over 80 old boys who died in the wars, the Last Post was sounded, the trumpet being played beautifully by Cathryn Osborne, a current pupil of Cowbridge School.

The Revd Peter Cobb preached a wonderful sermon, in turn witty and thought-provoking, and with each word well-chosen, in which he combined an appreciation of Idwal Rees, a great headmaster, with a commemoration of the fallen - 'such a great number of people from a small country grammar school'.

A buffet lunch at Cowbridge Leisure Centre saw over 200 old boys gathered to talk and reminisce; for some it turned out to be a very long day indeed! Neil Workman, who organised the whole day, is to be congratulated for his organisation - it was an excellent day.



**SWANSEA MAN
YOUNGEST
HEADMASTER
IN COUNTRY**

MR. J. IDWAL REES, who was on Saturday appointed headmaster of Cowbridge Grammar School, at the age of 27, is probably the youngest headmaster in the country.

He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Rees, Rosehill-terrace, Swansea.

At Cowbridge he will be in charge of one of the oldest grammar schools in Wales. The school was founded in 1885, and Jesus College, Oxford, is represented on the Board of Governors.

One of the school's houses is reserved for boarders.

Mr. Rees, who succeeds Mr. Richard Williams, retiring after 20 years in that office, was educated at Swansea Grammar School, the University College, Swansea, and St. John's College, Cambridge.

EDINBURGH POST

He has an honours degree in classics, is a B.A. of Wales and Cambridge. From the latter University he went to an appointment at Fettes College, Edinburgh, the famous Scottish public school, in 1933.

In 1931, when he went to Cambridge, he received his "Blue" as a Freshman, and from 1932 until last year he played 14 times for Wales as a rugby international, captaining the side last season.

He has also, of course, played frequently for Swansea College, the All Whites and the Edinburgh Wanderers. Last year he married Megan, daughter of the Rev. R. R. Davies, Neath, and they have one son.

1608

MR. IDWAL REES, the new headmaster of Cowbridge Grammar School, at the age of 27, was a popular, though extremely shy speaker at Swansea gatherings. Sometimes the **YOUNGEST "HEAD"** committee of the Grammar School Old Boys' Association were able to persuade him to speak at one of their monthly suppers, and on these occasions he would emerge a little from his customary reticence, particularly with regard to sporting matters.

I remember him telling the story of how he received an important telegram while he was taking a class at Edinburgh a few days before a Welsh rugby international. He stopped to read it, and there were a few seconds of breathless silence. It was finally broken by one of the class who observed, in a joyful stage whisper: "It's a boy!"

Some time later, of course, his guess might have been a correct one, though I fancy this particular cable had to do with the Welsh captaincy.

Cuttings above: unknown date and origin.

A MEMORIAL SERVICE

'Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages,
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages.'
(Cymbeline, Act IV)

A SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING FOR THE
LIFE AND WORK OF

IDWAL REES, M.A. (Cantab)

25th July 1910 - 31st August 1991

HEADMASTER OF COWBRIDGE GRAMMAR SCHOOL
1938 - 1971



AT
HOLY CROSS CHURCH
COWBRIDGE

Saturday 30th November 1991
12.00 Noon



PARISH OF COWBRIDGE



**Cowbridge
Grammar School
Old Bovians
Centenary Memorial Service
and
Dedication of Tablet to
The late Idwal Rees. M. A.**

**The Parish Church of the Holy Cross,
Cowbridge
Saturday 8 November 2003
At 12.30pm.**

TO-DAY'S WELSH BACKS.



VIVIAN G. J. JENKINS
Bridgend and London Welsh.



G. REES JONES
Oxford Univ.



J. IDWAL REES
Swansea and Edinburgh Wan.



W. WOOLLER
Cambridge Univ.



CLIFF W. JONES
Porth and Cambridge Univ.



CLAUDE DAVEY, Capt.
Swansea and Sale.



HAYDN TANNER
Swansea.

Photos by Mr. J. E. Thomas, Photographer, 34 Chepstow Road, Newport, Mon.

TO-DAY'S WELSH TEAM.

There are four new "caps" in the Welsh side for to-day's momentous game, *i.e.*, **Haydn Tanner** (Swansea), scrum half; **D. J. Tarr** (Swansea and United Services); **H. Payne** (Swansea) and **E. Watkins** (Cardiff), forwards. Tanner, in practically his first season in first-class football, has well merited the honour accorded him, by all-round consistency which has stamped him as one of the finest scrum halves in the four countries, and every confidence is reposed in his ability to stand up to the opposition as well as adequately serve his backs. Tarr has had a varied experience since his Cardiff University days, but this season has jumped into the limelight by reason of excellent displays for the Portsmouth Services and Hampshire County teams, supplemented by a splendid performance for Swansea when the All Whites lowered the All Blacks' colours. Payne played alongside Tarr in the Swansea side front rank in the same game and is a hard-working honest scrummager who can be depended upon not to let his side down. A popular selection is that of Eddie Watkins, the Caerphilly ex-Schoolboy International, who is in his third season with the Cardiff club and for whom he has acted as "lock" forward. A forward of unchallenged natural gifts, always in fine playing condition and a worker over the full course.

Here are brief details regarding other old "caps":—

Vivian G. J. Jenkins, full back. Formerly sports master at Dover College and now in business in London. Playing great game for London Welsh this season. An Oxford "Blue," seasons 1930-1-2. Got first "cap" against England in 1933 and to-day gets his seventh "cap."

G. Rees-Jones, right wing. At Oxford University, where he has had his "Blue" three successive seasons. A solid, dependable wing, capped twice in 1934 and against Ireland this year. To-day fourth "cap."

Claude Davey, right centre and Captain, which honour he held throughout last season. In scholastic profession at Sale and formerly Swansea centre. Playing better than ever and was an inspired performer for his old club against the tourists. First appearance for Wales against France in 1930—to-day's his eighteenth International.

J. Idwal Rees, left centre. Another old Swansea boy, now holding a scholastic appointment in Edinburgh, playing for the Wanderers of that City. Credited as being one of the best centres in Scottish club Rugby and playing alongside his old club mate, expected to fulfil highest expectations. To-day's his fifth "cap."

W. Wooller, left wing, ordinarily centre, where he has achieved fame both in "Varsity and International football. Cambridge "Blue," seasons 1933-4-5, and almost irreplaceable when in form. A "giant" in attack and defence and a dangerous drop-kick. First "cap" against England in 1933, and to-day's his seventh.

Cliff W. Jones, outside half. Acknowledged one of the "wonder" players of recent years, with a noteworthy side-step and an elusive swerve. Brilliant in attack and sound in defence. Cambridge "Blue" seasons 1933-4-5, and with Wooller, the "Varsity's" mainstay. Has played for Wales uninterruptedly since January, 1934, and to-day's his seventh International.

T. J. Rees. One of the hardest grafters of Newport's excellent pack, displaying fine form in the Trials and meritoriously retains his place in the Welsh side since first selected against Scotland last season. Third "cap."

Trevor Williams. A member of the Cross Keys pack, famous this season for its all-round efficiency, and like Rees, has justified re-selection in his third successive International.

Glyn Prosser, a prominent member of Neath's stalwart pack, who jumped into prominence by securing three "caps" in 1934 and again regains favour to place the fourth "cap" to his credit, an honour he is fully expected to justify.

Jim Lang. A typical specimen of the fiery Llanelly vanguard, which he has faithfully served for many years. One of Wales' adepts at line-out work. Got two "caps" in 1931, another two in 1934 and last season figured in the three Internationals. So to-day's his eighth "cap."

A. M. Rees. A Cambridge "Blue," 1933-34 and at present in great form for London Welsh. A constructive player of ability and shone in last Trial. First "capped" against England 1934 and figured in each International last season. Fifth "cap" to-day.

T. J. Rees.

J. J. Rees

Arthur Rees

Bland Perry.

Bill Jones

Oran Jones

Geoffrey Jones

Harold Jones

Wulf Miller

J.P. & Harold Tamm

Jim Lang

THE WELSH RUGBY UNION.

Cardiff Arms Park, Cardiff

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21st, 1935

NEW ZEALAND
V
WALES

KICK-OFF
at
2.30 p.m.

OFFICIAL
PROGRAMME

Walter G. Rees



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NEW ZEALAND

Full Back G. GILBERT (1)
West Coast
Threeqrtrs.—Right Wing G. F. HART (2)
Canterbury
Centre N. A. MITCHELL (7)
Southland
Left Wing N. J. BALL (5)
Wellington
Five-Eighths— C. J. OLIVER (3)
Canterbury
J. L. GRIFFITHS (11)
Wellington
Half-Back B. S. SADLER (12)
Wellington

Forwards

A. LAMBOURNE (15)
Wellington
W. E. HADLEY (14)
Auckland
D. DALTON (16)
Hawkes Bay
H. F. McLEAN (26)
Auckland
S. T. REID (20)
Hawkes Bay
R. R. KING (21)
West Coast
J. E. MANCHESTER (25)
(Capt.) Canterbury
A. MAHONEY (29)
Bush Districts



Referee:

Mr. C. H. GADNEY
(English Rugby Union), Leicester.

Welsh Touch Judge:

Mr. MORGAN MOSES,
W.R.U., Newport.

New Zealand Touch Judge:

Mr. J. HORE,
Otago

* Denotes new Internationals—other players previously capped.

STOP PRESS

IMPORTANT.

The above New Zealand Team is subject to one or two changes at the last moment, and these will be indicated on a board sent round the ground at 2 p.m.

WALES

(A) VIVIAN G. J. JENKINS Full Back
Bridgend and London Welsh
(E) W. WOOLLER Left Wing
Cambridge University
(D) J. IDWAL REES Left Centre
Swansea and Edinburgh Wanderers
(C) CLAUDE DAVEY, Capt. Right Centre
Swansea and Sale
(B) G. R. REES-JONES Right Wing
Oxford University
(F) CLIFF W. JONES Outside Half
Porth and Cambridge University
(G)* HAYDN TANNER Scrum Half
Gowerton County School and Swansea.

Forwards

(H) T. J. REES
Newport
(I)* D. J. TARR
Swansea and Portsmouth Services
(J)* H. PAYNE
Swansea
(K) TREVOR WILLIAMS
Gross Keys
(L)* EDDIE WATKINS
Cardiff
(M) GLYN PROSSER
Neath
(N) JIM LANG
Llanelli
(O) A. M. REES
London Welsh

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The Welsh XV

VIVIAN JENKINS

GEOFFREY REES-JONES

IDWAL REES

CLAUDE DAVEY

(Captain)

WILFRED WOOLLER

CLIFF JONES

HAYDN TANNER

TOM REES

D J (JACK) TARR

HARRY PAYNE

TREVOR WILLIAMS

EDDIE WATKINS

GLYN PROSSER

JIM LANG

ARTHUR REES

(Pack Leader)

See that you get
all the necessary
equipment - be
waste! and it's
and in good
time.

Yr. Ever,

John A. New

Emmanuel
College.

1: XII : 31.

Dear David,

I have great
pleasure in
inviting you to
play against
Oxford on Tues.,
Dec 8.

Heartiest congratulations