

THE OLD CESTREFELDIANS' SOCIETY



Ninety Fourth Annual Dinner and Reunion

The 94th Annual Dinner and Reunion took place on May 16th 2025 in the 1866 Room at the SMH Group Stadium, home of Chesterfield F.C. The 45 attendees spent a very enjoyable evening in the company of old friends and colleagues.

Derrick Priestley, OCS Chairman, was again Master of Ceremonies for the event. Unfortunately, Stephen Pettett was indisposed and so Past President, Ron Smith acted in his stead beginning with the loyal toast and the Grace.

The list of apologies was read.

Sadly during the last year 12 Old Cestrefeldians had died.

Special mention was made of David Finney (3/11/39 – 22/3/25) and Terry Woodhouse presented a eulogy. Terry like David had joined the School in 1951 and had been a stalwart supporter of the Old Cestrefeldians' Society. He had represented the School at football and subsequently played in OCS football teams.

Following the hiatus from 1975 to 1985, he played a significant role in the resuscitation of the Society in 1986 led by Rob Wadd, Michael Hadfield and John Roberts and subsequently was on the organising committee with Michael and John Moss. He tended to be unheralded and unseen but remained a mainstay of the Society latterly as Deputy Chairman to Derrick Priestley. The Society recognised his involvement with gratitude.

During the meal, further toasts were taken among them being with the oldest present and those who started in decades from the 1930s to 1991.

Tony Hine, one of the trustees of the Old Cestrefeldians' Trust gave a summary of the activities of the Trust over the last year. He thanked Rev Ron Smith for leading the Remembrance Day Service and Derrick for its organisation. Brookfield School students had taken part in the service at Sheffield Road. Three Old Cestrefeldians attended Brookfield's own remembrance activities.

A display cabinet has been installed in the reception area at Brookfield School containing items of Chesterfield School memorabilia which were chosen by Brookfield School History Department. A plaque in memory of Geoffrey Price who was our long-serving headmaster at Brookside from 1968 to 1991 is to be purchased and installed there too.

The articles of the trust relate to preserving the memory of the School and also to the encouragement of students currently in education in Chesterfield. Grants to students of five schools, Chesterfield College and Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire Music Centre, guided by school staff, have been made in the last year.

Tony said that the Trust would welcome new members. Membership can be achieved by donating £10 or more per annum.

The accounts of the Old Cestrefeldian Society for the year ending 31st December 2024 were provided on each table.

The toast to the Old School, the OCs' Society and the OCT was proposed by the Chairman, Derrick Priestley. Fortunately, Stephen Pettett had written his speech in response which was delivered by Ron Smith.

Stephen wrote that as President he had only attended one function, the Remembrance Day Service with other OCs, 3 Brookfield pupils, one staff member and a Chesterfield College representative. He said that, as anticipated, attendance at the Reunion had declined significantly but hoped that OCs would continue to meet for as long as possible. He wished to thank Derrick Priestley who worked so hard to hold the Society together, and with the support of the incoming president would continue to meet.

Next John Drabble was called on to propose Brell Ewart, a fellow 1960 entrant, as President of the Society for the coming year. Whilst he would freely admit that he was not the most academic of students, Brell's entry in the Valette section for 1967 leavers demonstrated how involved he had been in all that was offered by way of official extra-curricular activity. Particularly worthy of mention were his chairmanship of the Transport Society and achievement of the Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award. On leaving he became a site engineer with Henry Boot Civil Engineering and then worked for several other civils companies before founding the very successful civil engineering contracting company, Whitehouse Construction Ltd. In 1977.

He has had a lifelong passion for the railways first purchasing (in 1980) and restoring a standard tank engine and then Princess Margaret Rose (1987) and Duchess of Sutherland (1998) all now being owned by the trust he founded, the Princess Royal Class Locomotive Trust.

In 2019 he was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant of Derbyshire in 2019, President of Ashbourne British Legion and in the 2025 New Year's Honours List was awarded the MBE for Services to the community of Derbyshire.

In his response, Brell, a third generation OC, stressed the value of the "Education for life" that he had received at the school from many dedicated masters, mentioning particular but not limited to Messrs Glister and Naylor. His excellent memory enabled him to recount many interesting tales of events through his school life. His gratitude for the education that he received enabling his development in unanticipated ways was a theme that was repeated and he wished he had taken the opportunity thank Messrs Glister and Naylor personally.

His education continued after his school days enabling him to achieve the equivalent of a degree in civil engineering and to create a company with 120 employees and turnover of in excess of £20m pa.

His passions, outside his career and family, have always been his support of Sheffield Wednesday, steam engines and the Rolling Stones. Among many related stories were those of his pride in the Duchess of Sutherland hauling the Royal train across North Wales (which Queen Elizabeth said was her most enjoyable experience aboard) in Golden Jubilee year 2002 and the then Prince of Wales over the Settle and Carlisle line in 2005. His appointment as Deputy Lieutenant came out of the blue and led to his leading the Queen's Canopy initiative in Derbyshire and 36000 trees being planted. Brell formally receives his MBE in June.



Past President, Rev. Ron Smith, formally installs Brell Ewatt, M.B.E, D.L. as the new President.

Past President, Ron, then formally installed Brell as his successor, placing the Presidential medallion around his neck and passing on, for safe keeping, the Old Cestrefeldians' Society crest.

The formalities were completed by the singing of the School Song with choruses sung by the appropriate house, followed by Jerusalem, the latter accompanied by a recording of the School Choir and Orchestra.

Next year's Reunion will take place on Friday, May 15th 2026.