



## Whitehill F.P.s' Club Newsletter

Issue 35 June 2025

It's been some time since the last Newsletter so here is an update on the first half of the year, which seems to be flying in.

We held our Spring lunch at the House for an Art Lover on 3rd April and although numbers were down to a disappointing 26, we had an excellent afternoon with a good lunch and plenty of time to chat and share stories.

### **Tom Mc Nab**

Our lifetime achievement award was made to Tom McNab, sportsman, coach and best selling author. The citation is reproduced, in full, below.



Tom McNab attended Whitehill School in the late 1940's through 1952. He was school captain and sports champion in 1952. By the age of 16 he had won a UNESCO essay medal and by 18 had had represented Glasgow at football and was already establishing a formidable position in athletics.

Tom did National Service in the Royal Air Force, leaving with the rank of Flying Officer and went on to Jordanhill to train as a P.E. teacher. During this period his athletics progress continued with wins at national level in the triple jump. He taught in Bermuda and represented the island at rugby.

In the 1960's, Tom became an athletics coach and went on to develop decathlon training programmes which led to the success of Daley Thomson and others. He authored, Triple Jump, Decathlon and Modern School Athletics, which became a standard textbook.

In 1978, after coaching many world ranked athletes he was approached to become technical consultant for the film Chariots of Fire which went on to win four Oscars. During this period Tom started his highly successful novel, "Flanagans Run" which topped the best sellers list in 1982, was translated into 16 languages and was later developed into a TV series. In that year he was declared Scottish Novelist of the Year.

Through the 1970's and 1980's he continued coaching, including the British Olympic Bobsleigh team to improve their starting time. This was successful and the GB team had the fifth fastest starting run at Lake Placid Olympics. Tom has been a coach of the England Rugby Union team which in 1992 reached the finals of the World Cup and in 1992 and 1994 was British coach of the year.

In 2000 Tom returned to serious athletics coaching and by 2005 had turned Greg Rutherford into the world leading long jumper.

In recent years Tom has written further novels and stage plays, including 1936 about the Berlin Olympic Games and also Leni-Leni, on the German film maker Leni Reifenstahl which was developed into a short film shown at the Cannes film festival.

Tom McNab has had a long, eventful and highly successful career as a sportsman, author, coach and public speaker. Now in his 90's he continues to support athletics, plays tennis actively and gives an entertaining annual lecture on the making of Chariots of Fire at the Eric Liddell centre in Edinburgh.

Tom McNab is a worthy recipient of the Former Pupils Club achievement award and it should be noted that he is the only former pupil to have his name on the award twice, as sports champion in 1952 and now recognising his lifetime achievements in 2025.

## **Whitehill School War Memorial**

The war memorial section of our website continues to create interesting enquiries. I have reproduced two recent requests received as a result of people researching former pupils named on the memorial.

We received the following from a historian from County Arklow, Ireland on 24th February 2025.

*I really hope you can be of assistance. As a local historian, myself and others have been trying to obtain a photograph of the late Alexander William McGarva- age 22 -Sergeant (13650810) Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.*

*Alexander's Lockheed Hudson of No1 (Coastal) Operational Training Unit took off from Silloth, on 24th February 1942, for a training flight but crashed into the sea off Cahore Point, Co.Wicklow. The flight crashed near here and two of the bodies were recovered and buried in our local cemetery. I have discovered that Alexander was a pupil at your school and possibly you could help us by pointing us in the right direction with a view to finding a photo.*

*Colin O'Reilly, Arklow Burial Ground Registrar.*

*Today is the 83rd anniversary of his death.*

Unfortunately we were unable to help with a photograph, but I had a few emails back and forth with Colin. It is heart warming to note that even after 82 years people will honour the bravery of a 22 year old lost in conflict.

This email was received from Barbara Begg with a request that she and her 90 years old mother could visit the school and see the name of her great uncle on the war memorial.

*I am reaching out to you as I have been on your website looking at your war memorial information. The reason being is that George Cunningham, listed on the bottom of the left WW1 column is a relative. My mother, who is currently 90 and still living in Glasgow but not in the area of the school, is so keen to visit the memorial to see it as George Cunningham was her uncle, the brother of her father and although George passed away before she was born we have visited the Necropolis and her grandparents grave many times over the years and his memory was a very prominent part of her childhood, growing up being around her grandparents and her father who were still grieving his loss. The picture you have on your website is in fact a painting which his parents commissioned in his memory. It took pride of place in their home and has passed down over the years. The information you have is correct, he did lie about his age however, in order to join the army and so actually joined before his 18th birthday although died after it.*

*I would be so grateful if you could let us know who we could contact to see if we could visit the school and look at the memorial. I am a teacher ( primary) and so if it would be beneficial for the students at Whitehill to have more information about him at all, for history lessons or whatever, I am more than happy to help.*

I have passed Barbara's request on to the headteacher and will follow up with her to help get her Mum to the school to see the memorial.

## Autumn Lunch

We plan to hold the Autumn Lunch at the House for an Art Lover in early October. Hopefully we can attract more former pupils to join the lunch.

## Finally

Sadly, in the final section of this Newsletter we remember three committee members who have passed away recently.



Myra Hunter, Past President and Secretary of the club. Teacher, tennis player, coach and administrator, Girl Guide leader and much more.



Rev. Robert Watt, Church of Scotland Minister and a devoted family man.



Jim Aitken, civil service officer involved in foreign aid and development in Africa and South Asia. Long service promoting and supporting the FP club.

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