1st Portadown Company Boys’ Brigade
Old Boys’ Association

1939

75th Anniversary

2014

By Paul Teggart
When the great plants of our cities
Have turned out their last finished work,
When the merchants have sold their last yard
Of silk
And dismissed the last tired clerk,
When the Bank's have raked in their last pound
And paid their last dividend,
And the Judge of the earth says. "Close for the
night."
And asks for a balance - what then?

When the people have heard their last sermon
And the preacher has made his last prayer,
And the sound has died out on the air,
When the Bible lies closed on the altar,
And the pews are all empty of men
And each one stands facing his record,

And the GREAT BOOK is opened what then?

When the actor has played his last drama
And the mimic has made his last fun,
When the film has finished its last picture
And the billboard displayed its last run,
When the crowds seeking pleasure have vanished
And gone into the darkness again
And the trumpet of ages is sounded
And we stand before Him - what then?

When the bugle's call sinks into silence
And the long marching columns stand still
When the Captain has given his last orders
And they've captured the last fort and hill,
When the flag has been hauled from the
masthead

And the wounded afield checked in
And a world that's rejected its Saviour
Is asked for a reason - what then?

When life, friend, has run to a finish
And the last thing you can do is done,
When your work here on earth is ended
And eternity's issues begun,
As you think of how long God has pleaded
Of how Christ bore your sins on the tree,
And your soul stands there naked before Him,
And the Father denies you - what then?

WHAT THEN -
The Bible says:
and as it is appointed unto
men once to die, but AFTER
THIS - the judgment:
So Christ was once offered
to bear the sins of many;
and unto them that look
for him shall he appear the
second time without sin unto
salvation.
Hebrews 9 v 27 & 28

Submitted by Trevor Brady

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
FOREWORD

by

Rev. Norman Cardwell B.A.
President of the Old Boys’ Association

Since its institution, the Old Boys’ Association has been an influence for good. 1st Portadown Company Boys’ Brigade has had a strong Christian impact on generations of Boys’ Brigade boys and young men.

In 2014, another milestone is to be reached and celebrated. 1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys’ Association is celebrating its 75th Anniversary having been formed in February 1939. The present boys of the amalgamated 1st Portadown (Thomas Street Methodist and Epworth Methodist) as well as the 7th Portadown Company (Edenderry Memorial Methodist) are grateful for the ongoing and valued support of the Old Boys’ Association.

The Association provides a Christian witness and practical support for the work of the younger boys of today. It also provides an opportunity for the continuation of friendship and fellowship among former members of the Boys’ Brigade.

It is right and good that the Chairmen of the Association over the years have supported and encouraged the successive Captains and Officers of the Boys’ Brigade in Portadown.

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. It is timely that we re-emphasise the saving message of our gracious Saviour on another anniversary.

As we thank God for His grace and love and mercy, we wish the Old Boys’ Association the Lord’s blessing for the next seventy five years, and to Him be the glory!

Rev. Norman Cardwell B.A.
President, 1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys’ Association.

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
Chairman’s Message

I am honoured and humbled at being able to pen these notes for this special 75th Anniversary booklet – honoured at being Chairman of this Association since 2010, and humbled when I look at the names of my far more illustrious predecessors. When I joined the Association as a teenager, it never occurred to me that one day I would hold the office of Treasurer, then Vice-Chairman, and ultimately Chairman, and I am extremely grateful to the Committee for their trust and support for me.

I wish to express a word of thanks to Paul Teggart for compiling this booklet, as he did for the Association’s 50th Anniversary in 1989. Much has changed since the last publication, both for the Association and society in general. Many faithful members have passed away and, in most instances, have been difficult to replace.

The aims and values of the Association are the same today as they were in 1939, the year of our formation. We continue to support the two Portadown Methodist Boys’ Brigade Companies in Thomas Street and Edenderry Memorial Churches (Epworth having merged with Thomas Street in 2002) as well as the Portadown and District B.B. Battalion and the Portadown Methodist Circuit.

Our clubrooms are now situated on the top floor of the Thomas Street Methodist Church suite of halls, which were built in 1994 to replace the old Thomas Street School. 1992 saw the loss of the Methodist Institute building, which had been the ‘home’ of the Old Boys since 1946.

As I said earlier, the aims and values of the Association are the same as they were 75 years ago, but we do have to compete with the challenges of the modern age. Back in 1939, computers, mobile phones, the World Wide Web, social networking sites, satellite television and digital radio were not in existence.

The Bible Class made a welcome return to the Old Boys’ calendar in 1993, but like general clubroom activities such as the playing of snooker and billiards, it has not reached the heights of earlier years. However, we are thankful to the members of the Association and the B.B. Companies, as well as other Church and school groups who still support and use the facilities.

The Annual Church Service has almost become another victim of modern day apathy with a lack of interest and declining numbers being a major disappointment to the Committee. We even had to postpone the annual Reunion and Dinner for four years until it was revived in 2010, mainly due to the outstanding efforts of the late Ivor Smyth.

As the Association enters the next quarter of a century, we approach it with faith and more than a little bit of hope. Membership of the Association is currently over 100 and together with the two Methodist B.B. Companies, under the current leadership of Captains Andrew Millar (Thomas Street/Epworth) and Kenneth Vennard (Edenderry Memorial), we look forward to a bright future. I end these comments by thanking everyone for supporting this booklet, as well as our advertisers for their invaluable financial assistance.

Steven Wright
Chairman

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
Preface

As I sat down to gather my recollections and memories of the 'Old Boys' Association', my mind went back more than 25 years ago to think of the small booklet I put together then to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Association. It seems almost like a different age. Back then I was in my prime, as Secretary of the Association, with Leslie Wells as Chairman and the Rev. Cecil Newell as President. I was still a relatively young thing, (or thought I was), among men who like me had grown up in the B.B. and had become immersed in the Old Boys and all it stands for. Men to look up to, men who were respected, men who lived by the aims and traditions of the Boys' Brigade and above all men who truly believed in the advancement of Christ's Kingdom among Boys and the promotion of habits of Obedience, Reverence, Discipline, Self-respect and all that tends towards a true Christian manliness. Many of those men have now passed into history but it is encouraging to see that new generations of equally dedicated men have taken their place and the work of the Old Boys' goes on.

Now, 25 years on, I am in the advanced stages of middle age, hanging together on a wing and a prayer and many of those whom I looked up to are gone to the great B.B. camp in the sky. The B.B. in Thomas Street that was once a 100 young men strong Company is now much smaller in size. Times have changed, and in some ways for the worse, but the one thing that has kept going through thick and thin, through good times and bad, has been the Old Boys' Association. I am delighted to say that in our 75th year our membership is still over 100 strong and there is rarely a monthly Committee meeting where new members are not admitted to the ranks, or placed on the waiting list for entrance. We still have the usual problems of getting men to turn out when we need them but that's only normal – ask any good wife – however, when it matters we have no shortage of volunteers. I often ask myself why this is but I think the answer lies in the fact that memories of the B.B. and what the B.B. taught us in early life never leaves us and we feel a great debt of gratitude to those men who gave up their precious time to pass on their skills and knowledge and their love of the organisation and its aims.

So as we celebrate 75 years of the Old Boys' Association I look back with fondness, as I am sure many others do, to all the good times we had, of friendships made and a life time of memories. I remember the leaders, like Norman Lyttle, Billy Coulter, Bertie Day, Harry Burrows, Derek Laverty, Kenneth Twyble and Albert McNally, as well as the numerous characters like Sam Crozier, Billy Barnes, Tommy Austin, Ernie Montgomery, Ronnie & Noel Cole, Sam Montgomery, Billy Mills, Alex Lutton, Amos Jeffers and many more who graced the clubrooms. Some instilled discipline, others brought a sense of humour but they were all true and loyal Old Boys and while the Association exists, their friendships and memories will never be forgotten.

Paul Teggart, 2014

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
Officers and Committee Members of
1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys’ Association 2014

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Mr. Andrew Millar (1st Portadown)
Mr. Kenneth Vennard (7th Portadown)

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
Introduction

Any attempt to record the history of 1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys’ Association would be impossible without some mention of the important part played by the 1st Portadown Company B.B., without which there would not be an Old Boys’ Association, and Thomas Street Methodist Church, without which there would not have been a B.B. Company in the first place. In 1919 when many people were beginning to recover from the horrors and losses of the Great War, four local men - Joe Aldred, Norman McCullough, Jimmy Proctor and Joss Bell visited the Methodist Manse in Thomas Street to ask permission from the then incumbent minister, the Rev. W.J. Parkhill, to start an organisation for boys. Permission was granted and meetings first took place in the old school premises on Friday evenings.

There seemed to have been little difficulty in getting boys to attend and numbers soon swelled to thirty. The first leader was ex-Petty Officer Palmer who had just been demobbed from the Royal Navy and activities included drill, physical training and boxing. After six months, Petty Officer Palmer was succeeded by ex-Stoker Campbell, also from the Royal Navy. It is unlikely that Messrs Aldred and Co. envisaged what would eventually arise from their initial simple request, but it was from these humble beginnings under the leadership and vision of the Rev. Herbert Deale that in 1920, the 1st Portadown Company of the Boys’ Life Brigade was founded – the first such company in Ireland.

Rev. Deale came from Limerick to take up his post in Thomas Street Methodist Church in 1919. He had spent some time as an Hon. Chaplain to the Welsh Fusiliers, stationed at the Curragh. Used to moving among troops, he was quick to recognise the potential of using military habits and the benefits of boys having a proper disciplined footing in life and in the autumn of 1920, the 1st Portadown Company of the Boys’ Life Brigade was founded – the first company in Ireland. The staff consisted of the Rev. Deale as Captain, Joe Aldred, Alfie Quinn and Joss Bell as Sergeants, and the number of boys rose to around fifty. Joss Bell described the uniform as being made up of forage caps, black belts and white haversacks. Church parades were held each month alternately to Thomas Street and Edenderry. By 1922, the Company had a Bugle Band under the leadership of Alfie Quinn. This Boys’ Life Brigade Company existed until it amalgamated into the growing Boys’ Brigade organization in October 1926, which had been founded in 1883 by Sir William Alexander Smith in Glasgow, Scotland.

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Rev. Deale’s time on the Thomas Street, Portadown Circuit came to an end but before leaving for Belfast, he appointed his three sergeants to the rank of Lieutenant and brought in Sam Crozier, Howard Hawthorne and Ernest Magowan as newly appointed sergeants. Military connections continued with the appointment of Mr. William Russell DCM as Captain. He had been an ex-RSM with the Irish Guards. Due to ill health, Mr. Russell was succeeded by Thomas Gray. During his time as Captain, amalgamation with the Boys’ Brigade Organisation took place in October 1926. The Company then became 1st Portadown Company of the Boys’ Brigade, by virtue of the fact that it was the oldest formed company in the town.

Over a period of time long lasting friendships were obviously forged and a need arose for a way to maintain those friendships and develop the aims of the B.B. into adult life. Hence the idea for an Old Boys’ Association.

**Beginnings**

The beginnings of 1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys’ Association are well documented in Thomas Street Methodist Church records. It was formed on 26th February 1939 in the Guild Room of Thomas Street Methodist Church Lecture Hall, in Portmore Street Portadown. The first President of the Association was Captain G.E. Lutton and its first Chairman was Mr. T. Gray. The Association did not have a ‘home of its own’ in those early days but met for a time in what became known as the Church Parlour as its activities were of a Bible Class nature and the church buildings served these purposes well. Incidentally, an Old Boys’ Silver Band, (later re-named Thomas Street Methodist Silver Band), preceded the formation of the Association. It had been in existence from the late 1930s, its first bandmaster being recorded as a Mr. T. Campbell.

The Church Parlour continued to be used for meetings of Old Boys’ but the founders of the Association obviously had something more outreaching than just a Bible Class in mind for the future and in the early 1940s, the Association moved to a loft above the potting sheds of John George McCann’s nursery in Clonavon Avenue. Here young men could meet socially and discuss the talking points of the day as well as continue the friendships they had built up together during their years in the Boys’ Brigade. The beginning of the Second World War and the Belfast Blitz must have provided a few nights of discussion as no doubt they plotted ways to defeat the Nazis. Some of our early members did ‘join up’ and played an active part in the War, some paying the supreme sacrifice. Sporting activities also played an important part in the early activities of the Association and it is recorded in early Minutes that the Association had a football team and that it was the backbone of the Old Boys’ in those early years.

The first recorded event held in the Association’s name was a Silver Jubilee Church Service held in Thomas Street on 31st May 1945, to mark the Silver Jubilee of the 1st Portadown Company B.B. At this service, a silver bugle was presented to the Company as a gift from the former members of the Company. Two plaques were

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At a Church meeting, dated 7th September 1945, attended by Rev. E. Shaw, Messrs W.A. Mullan, W.J. Green, W.D. Irwin, D.W. Thornton, Captain G.E. Lutton, R.D. Thornton and J.J. Bell, the possibility of raising the finance needed for the purchase of the building which became known as the Methodist Institute was discussed. It was unanimously agreed that an appeal for £7,000 be launched to purchase the Institute and build a new hall at the rear. It was further agreed that the money would be raised over a period of seven years.

Mr. J.J. Bell, representing the Old Boys’ Association at the meeting, informed the Old Boys of the decisions made at the meeting and stated that he hoped that the Association would join the appeal scheme and find in the Institute the accommodation they had so long desired, under Church auspices. In fact the Old Boys undertook to unveil and dedicated to perpetuate the glorious memory of those members of the Association who served and paid the supreme sacrifice in the Second World War.

1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys’ Silver Band, 1945


Front Row, Left to Right: E. Curran, W. Gibson, A. Turner, W. Forker, W. Patterson, G. Corbett (Conductor), T. Watson, B. Briggs, L. Best, V. Reavie, R. Wright.
raise £1,000 towards the finances of the Institute and a letter to the Management Committee of the Trustees of the Methodist Institute confirms this decision. At a further meeting of this Committee, dated 31st May 1948, this letter was read, and recorded in the Minutes is a vote of thanks proposed by R.D. Thornton and supported by W.J. Green, congratulating the Old Boys' Association on the spirit which prompted their proposal.

In the ensuing years, as the building was acquired, extended, and paid for, the Association played a prominent part, volunteering to carry out some of the actual work themselves, and pay from their own funds the cost of decorating and floor covering. So it was that our romance with this extraordinary building began.

Many Church organisations used the Institute as their home. Over the years it was owned by the Church, from the Old Boys' Band to the Bowling Club, the Badminton Club to the Youth Organisations, but the Association maintained their own Clubrooms throughout this time and established within it a snooker and billiards hall second to none in the local area. In addition to this hall, there was also an integral committee room, doubling as a TV and games room and all the usual amenities. It has always been the policy of the Old Boys' Association to pay its way. Whilst we recognised that

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no amount of money would ever pay for the hospitality extended to us by Thomas Street Methodist Church over a period of years in the Institute, we endeavoured to contribute what we could on a regular basis towards the upkeep of the building and the maintenance of our Clubrooms within it.

The acquisition of the Institute by Thomas Street Methodist Church and the establishment of our headquarters within it led to the beginning of the ‘golden years’ of our history. In 1957, our Annual Service leaflet reported that the Methodist Institute had become ‘the centre of the Association’ and that there was ‘a most congenial atmosphere where the days of our youth are the keynote to the happiest and most successful men’s clubs in Methodist circles’.

By 1950, the Association had expanded to include some 97 members and during that year, the Old Boys had a football team playing in the local summer league. In 1951, the Association’s five-a-side team won the Festival of Britain competition, held in the Public Park. An Old Boys’ Bible Class had been started and the Institute became the gathering point for large numbers on a Sunday afternoon. Although it was the Old Boys’ Association of 1st Portadown Company B.B., the Association was non-denominational and everyone was made welcome. From the membership of the Bible Class, an Old Boys Choir was formed and made quite an impact and name for itself in the years which followed. It says much for the leaders of the Association, and in particular the dedication of Norman Lyttle, who were able to stimulate so much interest in the men to the message of the Gospel.

Sport and sheer enjoyment were also top of the list for the Old Boys in those heady days of the 1950’s. Football remained a very popular activity although competitive billiards was gradually taking over as the main sporting activity of the Association. Darts and table tennis were also practised to a fair degree of success, while in the early 1950s, the Old Boys had a bowling club with over 20 members. However this

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latter activity seems to have died out before it really got established. On the social side, a unique event became very popular with the Old Boys. The so-called ‘Barney’ was a mixture of games, socialising and an excuse for downing copious amounts of Irish Stew. Flying 13’s and Lives, (billiard table games), darts and table bowls became the hot favourite games on these evenings and many a good night’s ‘craic’ was enjoyed by all who attended. The holding of ‘Barney’s’ seemed to die out by the early 1960s but from time to time over the years since, they have been revived to provide that unique blend of playing, talking and eating.

1st Portadown Company B.B.  
Old Boys’ Bible Class

Pictured above is the 1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys’ Bible Class in the late 1950s.
In many ways, the 1960s were the Golden Years of the Association. The decade opened with the Old Boys coming of age. Special celebrations were arranged for our 21st birthday. A dinner was held in the Savoy Cafe on Friday night 26th February 1960, 21 years to the night that the Association was formed. During the evening, a Chairman’s Board was presented to the Association by its former Chairman. That Board still hangs to this day in the Clubrooms and contains the names of all our esteemed Chairmen. On the Sunday following the dinner (28th February 1960), a parade of past members of 1st Portadown Company B.B. attended a service in Thomas Street Methodist Church. The guest speaker on that occasion was Rev. S. Deale, the son of the founder of the 1st Portadown Company.

1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys’ Association
Winners of the Belfast & District Amateur Billiards Junior Shield & League Runners-up 1961 - 1962

The Institute became a hive of activity during the 1960s. Our Clubrooms were always packed with budding snooker and billiards players and of course the ‘oul hands’ who kept them firmly in place by beating them off the tables. Men honed their skills and the Old Boys came to prominence by playing against the best amateur

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1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys
Runners-up Belfast & District Billiards League 1963 – 1964

Standing Left to Right: Billy Mills, Albert Forsythe, Dickie Pentland, Ronnie Baxter, Billy Barnes, Jimmy Turner, & Billy Jones. Seated T.C. Mullen, (Vice President) & Ronnie Cole (Team Captain)

1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys’ Association
Winners of the Belfast & District Junior Billiards League
1964 – 1965

Standing Left to Right: Jim Wills, John Taylor, Tommy Austin, Noel Gillis, Albert Forsythe, Ronnie Gordon, Jimmy Turner & Errol Whitten.
Seated Left to Right: Ernie Thornton & Ronnie Baxter.

players in Northern Ireland in the Belfast and District Billiards League. Matches were played against teams like Willowfield, Queen’s University and Falls and it was

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a credit to our players that they managed to win the Belfast and District Knock-out Shield in 1961 and were runners-up in the League the same year. Our team also won the Belfast & District Billiards League in 1964 – 1965. It was somewhat unfortunate that by the end of the 1960's political unrest in Northern Ireland led to many teams being unwilling to travel to Belfast and our involvement in the League gradually died out amid fears over player safety. This was a great pity because the Old Boys team had become one of the most feared and respected teams in the League.

Many Wednesday nights were spent playing to packed crowds in the Clubrooms, when making the slightest noise could find you thrown out for disturbing play. The rise of snooker as a popular game gradually took over from billiards but this merely encouraged a whole new generation of players. As billiards declined, snooker took over, providing a new outlet for the talent which abounded at this time in the Association. Among the creditable performances recorded in the field of snooker at this time were Tommy Austin and Jackie Rae reaching the semi-final of the Belfast and District League Snooker Pairs Competition in 1968. The unique blend of the skills of Jackie and the craft of ‘the Ta’ was a perfect combination. If they couldn't outplay someone, Tommy was able to talk them out of it. A number of other snooker players enhanced the reputation of the Association. Ronnie & Noel Cole as well as Billy Barnes were able to adapt to snooker and they were joined by a number of up and coming snooker players who represented the Old Boys up and down the country with great success. Of course this made the Institute a very popular place. You could sit sometimes for nearly two hours to get a game and you were lucky to get two games a night in those days.

1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys’ Football Team
Belfast Churches League Winners 1968

Back Row, Left to Right: Keith Jones, David Pepper, Leonard Gillis, Jim Stubbs, Mervyn Carrick & Kenny Hampton.

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In the mid-1960s, the Old Boys increased their fame considerably when they put together a football team which took Northern Ireland by storm. Building on the footballing success of our B.B. Company’s team which won the Lurgan & Portadown District League & Knock-out Cup in the 1959-1960 season and went on in 1961 to do the same at Northern Ireland level, Brian Crozier managed the Old Boys to success in the prestigious Belfast Churches League. The team clocked up some notable victories as they took on the might of many very good amateur teams from Belfast and around the Province. There is always great rivalry between teams from the ‘city’ and those who come from our provincial towns but on occasions, matches bordered on open warfare. Nevertheless our team battled through to win the Churches League in 1968.

The famous red and white stripes were a formidable team of well seasoned and experienced players battle scarred from playing in local junior leagues. Never good enough to grace the same field, I became a constant traveller to matches becoming orange slicer at half time and wallet holder in times where luxury changing rooms were the back of a container, if you were lucky, and the back of a hedge if you were not. On the odd occasion, I got to do linesman but I soon gave that job up because if I gave any decision in favour of the enemy, I got grief the whole way home. Having reached such dizzy heights, the all conquering football team fell apart with players scattering to teams everywhere or retiring from the game. They had outdone the achievements of their counterparts back in the 1950s but like everyone else, age caught up with the ‘dream team’ and there was very little coming along behind it to

1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys’ Choir 1966

Front Row, Left to Right: Noel Carvell, Sammy Lyttle, Leslie Briggs, Sammy Hall, George Russell, Norman Lyttle (Conductor), Billy Gibson, Dick Wright, Lincoln Pillar, Cecil Lyttle & John Baxter.

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
Towards the end of the 1960s, members of the 6th Portadown Company B.B. (Epworth) were admitted to the Association as full members for the first time. This boosted our ranks and when the 7th Portadown Company B.B. (Edenderry Memorial) was formed, they too contributed to our growing membership and provided many valuable Old Boys. Indeed as the years went on, the Edenderry Company in particular grew stronger to the point where it was providing more Old Boys than the 1st Portadown Company which was to decline rapidly in numbers during the 1970s and 1980s. The winds of change were beginning to blow in local circles as population shifts and the beginnings of civil unrest in the country were starting to take its toll on recruitment and attendance at the clubrooms. This was an early sign of what was to come but it was not noticeable at the time and there would have been little the Association could have done to change the situation. Still, there were more good years to come.

By 1969, some of the founding fathers and stalwarts of the Old Boys had reached the veteran stage and one or two had been called ‘home’. One such stalwart was Norman Lyttle, who sadly passed away in 1969. Norman was the mainstay of the Old Boys for many years. He was Chairman on seven occasions, was Bible Class leader and was also leader and conductor of the Old Boys’ choir for many years. His finest achievement was to take a bunch of men and turn them into a musical unit which entertained people up and down the country. He had that gift of leadership which only rarely comes along and is so hard to replace. It is notable that after his passing, the choir went out of existence, although it is fair to say that many pictured with Norman went on to join Portadown Male Voice Choir in later years. The Bible Class which Norman lead for many years also declined after his death and it too ceased to exist for a number of years until it was revived in the 1990s. There are only a few people who come along worthy of the name of ‘great’ in any organisation but Norman was a true ‘great’ in our Association.

It was around this time that two other stalwarts of the Association also passed away. The untimely death of Ronnie Baxter, a notable past Secretary and Chairman of the Association, and one of the founding fathers, Sam Crozier left gaps in the ranks which were very hard to fill in the years which followed. In later life, Sam became caretaker of the Institute and the building became his life’s passion. He was an ever present in the Institute on a daily basis and though he could be a bit of a stickler at times regarding keeping things clean and tidy, he was well liked and was a faithful servant to the Old Boys’ Association.

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The 1970s began well for the Association. Our billiards team won the Belfast & District Shield and once again ending up as runners-up in the League. Following these achievements, our team did not take part in the competition again. However, ‘friendly’ matches were held against a number of clubs and these proved very popular with supporters often travelling to away fixtures. The internal competitions and the Christmas competitions continued to attract big numbers and rivalry was fierce.

Even though the football team had disappeared, table tennis became a widely played sport again in the Old Boys. The front room of the Institute, which was later turned into a Coffee Bar became the table tennis room and skills were honed to the highest levels in that venue. The Old Boys had a formidable team in that era. Names like Dennis Clarke and Philip Caddell come to mind. These two experienced players were the focal point of the game in the Institute with many trying to reach their level of play. It was a great pity that the political troubles in Northern Ireland at that time prevented many from developing their sporting prowess and the Old Boys, like many other clubs, suffered greatly from a lack of competitive play outside the local venues. Players began to drift away and for the first time the winds of change began to blow across the fortunes of the Association.

It was reported in the Minutes of the 1973 Annual General Meeting that ‘the affairs of the Old Boys seemed to be suffering a temporary decline’. The Old Boys’ Bible Class was a casualty of the 1970s and whilst most other things improved by the end of the 70s, the Bible Class never recovered from those trying years.

By the beginning of the 1980s, the Association seemed to be back on an even keel. Membership was again on the increase and financially we were as well off as we had ever been. Nevertheless we were all saddened by the deaths of another two of our outstanding members. Mr. Joss Bell had been a founding member of the Old Boys and one of those who had assisted in acquiring the Institute building for our headquarters. His experience and knowledge of local and church affairs, as well as his dedication to the Association made Joss one of our most respected members. He had been Chairman twice but he mostly worked behind the scenes and most of his achievements were never publicly acknowledged. The death of Tommy Austin was most greatly missed in the Clubrooms. My personal memories of ‘the Ta’ will never fade. He had an amazing sense of humour with just the right amount of bravado to ‘wind up’ people – particularly Ernie Montgomery – in the nicest possible way, of course. He was always on call to do any job that had to be done. He looked after the billiard tables, cleaning and ironing them to perfection, he re-tipped cues, acted as caretaker and was generally an ever present in the Clubrooms. Tommy was a very humble man but he personified what a true member really was. His
loyalty to the Old Boys was unquestionable over a long number of years and like Joss Bell, we will never see their like again.

In 1982, the Committee decided to introduce a new competition to supplement the usual two internal competitions. The ‘Charity Cup’ was introduced to raise money for many worthy causes and did so over a period of years. It was the brainchild of Daryl Silcock and marked a change in direction for the Association in looking beyond ourselves to try and help others, perhaps less fortunate. Daryl, who passed away recently, was another Old Boy who did his best work behind the scenes and a number of charities benefitted from his idea.

Of course the usual internal competitions, which had taken place without a break for a long number of years, still attracted great interest among the members and friendly rivalry among the players remained as high as ever. Gentlemanly conduct and courtesy among members has always been a quality we have tried to maintain in the Clubrooms, but this did not stop the pre-match unwanted advice, the heckling from the sidelines and the after match banter. A few members, who shall remain nameless, almost built a reputation on this but it all added to the enjoyment and helped to breed the next generation of ‘characters’ and ‘wits’.

A major refurbishment of the Clubrooms was carried out in 1985. This was the first large scale overhaul since we acquired our headquarters. The hard working committee of the time and in particular Daryl Silcock put considerable effort into the project which eventually led to the carpeting of the main room. When the Clubrooms opened again, we had one of the most comfortable premises in the country.

Towards the end of 1986, the Association was informed of an appeal to assist the Portadown B.B. Battalion in sending their football team to Texas, USA in 1987. True to the nature of the Old Boys, we offered to help by holding a ‘Sponsored Play-in’.

**Members who took part in an all-night sponsored snooker event to assist the Portadown B.B. Battalion on their trip to Dallas, USA 1987**

Left to Right – Robin McFadden, Billy Barnes, Philip Jeffers, Jack Corkin, Ronnie Herron, Leslie Wells, John Cummings, Neville Jeffers, Sam Montgomery, Paul Jeffers, Harry Skates, Maurice Whita, Geoffrey McMullan, Amos Jeffers, Steven Wright & Mark Clements.

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
In 1987, the Association once more began taking part in competitive snooker outside our own Clubrooms. Two teams were entered in the newly formed Armagh & District League and it was not very long before the Old Boys were recognised as a force to be reckoned with. Our ‘A’ team won the League in its first year and our ‘B’ team finished top of all the ‘B’ teams, thus confirming that our members had lost none of their playing skills.

In 1989, the Old Boys celebrated its Golden Anniversary. The then Officers and Committee were determined that the 50th anniversary would not go unmarked. Preparations for the anniversary began in 1988 when it was decided that we would raise the sum of £3,000 to provide new front and side doors for Thomas Street Methodist Church. Being Secretary that year, it was a great privilege to be able to write to members past and present to ask for donations towards this cause. For six months or more, the cheques poured in, some coming from as far away as the West Indies, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA as well as all over the British Isles and Ireland. Once again we were overcome by the generosity and support of our members and the fondness shown for our Association by them. The appeal was an overwhelming success and the doors were delivered and erected on time for the Annual Service in February 1989.

**50th Anniversary Service of the Old Boys’ Association**

Picture features Pastor David Burrows, who travelled from his home in the USA to be guest speaker on the night. Also included are Rev. Cecil Newell, President of the Association, Rev. Winston Good and Chairman during the 50th Anniversary year, Mr. Leslie Wells.

*75 Years of Service and still going strong!*
On 26th February 1989, fifty years to the day that the Association was formed, a special Golden Anniversary Church Service was held in Thomas Street Methodist Church. The guest speaker was Pastor David Burrows who had travelled from the USA to be with us on the night. The church was filled to capacity and past members of the Old Boys’ Choir came together to provide a very special musical highlight to the evening. Our anniversary gift to the church was officially handed over to, and dedicated by the President of the Association, the Rev. Cecil Newell. Over 100 past and present members of the Association paraded to and from Thomas Street Methodist Church behind Thomas Street Methodist Silver Band. It was a truly memorable night and was a fitting tribute to all those who called themselves Old Boys of the 1st, 6th & 7th Companies of the Boys’ Brigade.

The Service was followed up with a Golden Anniversary Dinner & Reunion which took place on 13th March 1989 in the Craigavon Civic Centre. Over 130 guests attended and they were royally dined and entertained. Good wishes on reaching our 50th year were received from all corners of the world, thus proving that the Old Boys Association encompasses the globe and is truly an international group of friends.

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
The Dark Days

As we approached the 1990s, it was sad to note that a few more of our long standing members passed away. Walter Caddell, a legend in local B.B. circles, had passed away in 1988 and in 1990, we lost Bobby Bell and Billy Barnes. These were loyal members who we could not afford to lose as the Old Boys, just like the B.B. Company itself, was beginning to decline in numbers and interest in the Association was waning. Despite a very successful 50th Anniversary Year in 1989, the Committee struggled with the dilemma of what to do for the best as circumstances were not working in their favour. Snooker, our main social activity, was beginning to decline worldwide and not as popular as it used to be. Also the whole area around Thomas Street Methodist Church and the many streets off Thomas Street – Carleton Street, Hanover Street, Mourneview Street, George Street, Queen Street and the like – once the old stomping grounds of our membership, were being lost to the world of business and the advance of the private landlord. As the population scattered to the outskirts of the town and beyond, readymade members became thin on the ground.

Perhaps this state of affairs was masked for a time by the success of competitive snooker in local circles. Interest in snooker which had reached its peak in the early 1980s, with extensive coverage on TV and the success of local heroes like Alex Higgins and Dennis Taylor. The local Snooker League saw our teams being somewhat successful under the management of Harry Leeman and others but the real truth was that we were attracting snooker players, not Old Boys, into our ranks. Even that didn’t last as it became increasingly difficult to find players to represent the Association. Attendances at our main functions were also dying away gradually and our Old Boys’ Bible Class proved impossible to get going again through lack of interest.

Cover of ‘Grounded Firm and Deep’, written by Paul Teggart to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Association in 1989.
With interest in the B.B. also in decline, and company numbers falling, a general sense of fear for the future began to set in as the steady flow of new recruits dried up.

In 1992, the Old Boys reluctantly had to move from the Institute as the building was sold by the Church to the RUC. The move into temporary premises just beyond the railway bridge down the Annagh I think had a further detrimental effect on the Association and its membership as we came to terms with the loss of our spiritual home. So many memories of choirs, Bible Classes, billiards and snooker matches and the everyday ‘craic’ that went on between the members was lost forever. The loss was difficult to come to terms with and indeed a number of Old Boys left, never to return. Many hoped and longed for our new premises in the new church (buildings now), being erected in Portmore Street to be finished so that we could establish ourselves again, but that was two years away and in that time, our Association declined still further.

**Last night in the Institute - 11th April 1992**

Back Row, Left to Right: Robin McFadden, Billy England, Maurice Whitla, Malcolm Bell, Billy Coulter & Leslie Wells.
Front Row, Left to Right: Daryl Silcock, Bobby Arlow, Steven Wright, Amos Jeffers, Paul Teggart, Harry Leeman & Ernie Thornton.

By the year 2000, things had reached such a low ebb that it prompted our Secretary in his Report to members at our AGM to state,

> ‘Competing interests and modern lifestyles create difficulties in maintaining satisfactory membership, not least lack of members within the ranks of our Boys’ Brigade Companies and on whom we have relied for long term membership. For two years now, we have not had a single application for membership’.

**75 Years of Service and still going strong!**

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In 2001, our then President, Rev. Jim Rea, suggested that we should perhaps examine our Constitution to see if changes could be made to remove restrictions which may be no longer relevant to see if that would attract a larger membership. After much deliberation at Committee meetings during 2001, changes were voted in at the 2002 AGM which made entry into the Association more flexible. Only 12 members turned up to pass the Notice of Motion presented that night and indeed few realised the risk the Committee had taken in that overall control of the Old Boys’ Association might well pass, for the first time, into the hands of non-B.B. members. Indeed, the Minutes record a certain measure of desperation in that the Association was willing to change the membership status of an Associate member to that of a full member because he had shown an interest in the Secretary’s job – there hadn’t been a Secretary officially for a number of years. The changes made little difference to overall numbers. Only 26 members attended the Annual Service and 39 turned up at the Annual Reunion & Dinner.

The following year, the Secretary’s Report at the AGM stated that –

‘Active members are declining in numbers and there seems to be a lack of enthusiasm, something which has been experienced for a number of years. Interest in our Clubroom activity, billiards and snooker, waxes and wanes with the general sporting fashion and has an effect on attendance at the Clubrooms. We are thankful

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
that the Bible class continues in operation but I do believe that better support could be given there too’.

The Old Boys’ Bible Class had been revived on moving into our new premises in Portmore Street in 1994 and it is a credit to Derek Laverty, as leader, that since then it has continued without a break. Paid up membership in 2005 dropped to only 30. There were not enough members at the AGM of that year to form a full committee and the Treasurer in his Report stated that –

‘Financially the Association will only last two further years. The whole future of the Old Boys’ Association is now in doubt’.

Return of Bible Class

Desperate times indeed! An Extraordinary General Meeting was held on 27th September 2005. At this meeting, attended by 23 past and present members, the dire situation the Association found itself in was outlined by former Chairman, Robin McFadden. Robin reported that income from snooker and billiards and subscriptions had fallen to the point where we could not even make our annual contributions to Thomas Street Methodist Church and the B.B. Companies beyond the current year. Regarding the Annual Service, it was reported that numbers in attendance had declined to the point that the band leading the parade was bigger than the Old Boys behind it.

The Committee were also considering abandoning the Annual Dinner due to general apathy. The meeting also discussed the lack of support for the Old Boys’ Bible Class and even the AGM. It was even proposed at the meeting that our premises

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
Bible Class - Sunday 8th May 2005

A special Old Boys’ Bible Class held to remember Wilson ‘Joker’ Joyce. His wife Hilary presented a Desk Top Lectern to the Association in memory of her late husband Wilson, a former Treasurer, Secretary and long-standing member of the Old Boys’ Association.

Included in the picture are – Front Row, Left to Right: Victor Pickering (Secretary), Kenneth Martin (guest speaker and close relative of Wilson), Mrs. Myrtle Wright (Circuit Pastoral Assistant), Mrs Hilary Joyce, Wilson’s daughter Helen, Derek Laverty (Leader of the Bible Class), & Billy England (Chairman). Back Row, Left to Right: Billy Gibson, Robin McFadden, Albert Adamson, Steven Wright, Jim McClung, Kenny McClatchey, Bobbie Wright, Ernie Montgomery, Lynn Burrows, Ernie Thornton, Eddie Vennard, Harry Leeman and Wesley Gould.

be handed back to the Church. Paid up membership at 17th October 2005 was at an all time low of 28 people. The response to all this was really very negative. At the AGM in 2006, only 18 members turned out and it was decided at that meeting to abandon the ‘Parade’ element of the Annual Service for the first time. Forty members turned up at the Service and to make matters worse, the Annual Reunion & Dinner was abandoned through lack of support. In 2007, only 24 Old Boys attended the Annual Service and by 2008, further relaxation of restrictions which basically offered membership to any person regardless of B.B. background or not. The use of our facilities was granted to a number of organised groups, e.g. the Church Youth Club.

What will the Future Hold?

The year 2011 saw a gradual turning point in the fortunes of the Association. Thirteen new members joined during the year and use of the Clubrooms also increased, thus making the Association financially sound again. It was reported at the AGM of 2010 that attendance at the Annual Service was 43, even though the overall congregation was poor in numbers, and 36 members turned up at the Annual Reunion & Dinner. 75 Years of Service and still going strong!
Moving into 2011, paid up membership had increased to 49 and a further 27 new members joined during 2012. As I write this booklet, paid up membership to date stands at over 100. It is hard to understand why numbers have increased dramatically in the last few years as numbers attending our two main functions in the calendar year remain low and average attendance at Bible Class remains at around 12 or 13. One explanation could be the considerable efforts put into recruiting by our present Chairman Steven Wright and his hard working Committee, but we also believe that the work of the Old Boys in carrying out the aims of the Boys’ Brigade in adult life and the discipline and fond memories of our leaders in the past has not only kept us going but also convinces us that the work of the Old Boys’ Association is far from done.

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
I cannot foresee another ‘Golden Age’ for our Association, certainly in my lifetime, as we now live in different times and society lives by different values. What held us together in the past as an Association has all but disappeared. B.B. leaders, dedicated and enthusiastic though they are, will be fortunate to see a rapid rise in their company membership in the years to come and this will inevitably have a major effect on our membership.

We may be able to draw support from other sources in the future to ensure our survival but we are equally determined to keep the name of 1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys’ Association alive for a long time to come. With the help and support of Thomas Street Methodist Church, and the dedication of our leaders we can maintain our special ethos and continue to work towards ‘the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom among boys and promote the habits of Obedience, Reverence, Discipline, and Self-respect and all that tends towards a true Christian manliness, well into adult life. For now we should be happy, but not complacent, in what we have achieved. There is still work to do and God willing we will receive the inspiration to carry on towards our centenary in 25 years time. What a joy that would be.

Pride of Britain Winner

Kenneth Vennard (centre, front row) was the Northern Ireland winner of the Daily Mirror’s ‘Pride of Britain’ award in 2012. He is pictured above displaying his trophy with members of the Old Boys’ Association, at the monthly Bible Class.

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
Recollections

Rev. Desmond Bain (Methodist Minister)
1st Portadown Company Boys’ Brigade 1965-1968
I joined 1st Portadown in 1965 – on a free transfer – from 5th Londonderry. I did so with the audacity of a 16 year old who assumed being a lance corporal would hold in the big Thomas Street Company. It may have caused debate among the officers but keeping the stripe can hardly have endeared me to better qualified members of the Company! Three years of drill nights, gym squads, and Bible Classes later (and a treacherous overnight expedition in the snow covered Mournes), I retired to a drive a W.D. Irwin’s bread van, before training for the Methodist ministry. Today, it is a particular joy that Kenneth and David Twyble are colleagues in the life of the Church. Kenneth is Lay Leader of the Methodist Church and David chairs the Development Board. We work together closely as we seek still to promote Christ’s Kingdom.

Ivan Davison, Old Boys Chairman
1967 - 1971
Memories are made of this! Memories can be pleasant, others not so pleasant. Regarding my memories of the Old Boys’ mine are definitely in the former category. In my mind’s eye, my thoughts travel back to the end of the Second World War when I was privileged to become a member of 1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys’ Association; just seven years after the Association was formed.

(The picture on the left shows Ivan playing the last ever shot in the Methodist Institute on 11th April 1992).

The Clubrooms were in the upper storey of stone outhouses at the rear of Tavanagh House. The entrance was via a pathway from Clonavon Avenue, (approximately opposite the Elim Church car park), leading into a large courtyard. The buildings were approximately in the area of the present swimming pool car park. Entrance to the clubrooms was via an external staircase. The late John George McCann carried on a market garden business on the ground level of the same building. The clubrooms included one snooker table, one table tennis table and a dart board. The table tennis team played in the local league. Every Christmas, a dart competition was held, the winner receiving about 50 pence. There was also a Committee Room with a large table and chairs. Mainly during the winter months, a “barney” was held on Saturday evenings, everyone present had to tell a joke or sing a song and a penalty was imposed on those who did not perform. The minister of Thomas Street Methodist Church was often present on such occasions and had to take a ‘bit of stick’ like all the rest, especially from the late Sam Crozier. I remember vividly many of the members of yesteryear. Billy England, Sam Crozier, Billy Lyttle, John George
McCann, Joss Bell, Billy Coulter, Bobby Bell, Stanley Gray, Victor Reavie and my chum in those days, Gerald Reavie. Years passed by and in 1946, Thomas Street Methodist Church purchased the Institute building in Edward Street and invited the Old Boys to vacate their old clubrooms to occupy a billiards and snooker room in the Institute. Originally there had been two snooker tables and a table tennis table but a third snooker table soon appeared. One thing however never changed – comradeship. Practically every Saturday evening, my friend Bobbie Wright and I played a few games of snooker before visiting Gaynor’s for a cup of tea. At that time, the late Norman Lyttle was the Chairman and Tommy Austin was the caretaker. For a few years, I was Honorary Secretary and then was Chairman myself for four years. Many new members were introduced, I recall Albert Forsythe, (an excellent billiard player), Billy Forker and Andy Camblin all joining at this time.

One of the highlights each year was the Annual Parade and Church Service in Thomas Street Methodist Church. On many occasions, over 100 members of the Old Boys and past members of 1st Portadown Company B.B. paraded to Church via Edward Street, High Street and Thomas Street. On several occasions a past member of 1st Portadown was the special preacher. I recall the names of Rev. Joseph Craig, Rev. Joe McCrory and Pastor David Burrows.

Time marches on. Thomas Street Methodist Church Trustees demolished the former Thomas Street Primary School and erected a new hall. The Old Boys were invited to occupy one of the rooms therein. At that time due to many other interests and responsibilities, my visits to the clubrooms became infrequent and now in later life they have become non-existent. Nevertheless I still take a keen interest in the welfare of the Old Boys and will continue to do so until God calls me to the ‘Club’ above where I trust I shall meet my old friends and we can recall those days in the Clonavon Avenue clubrooms, the Institute and the clubrooms in Portmore Street. ‘Memories are made of this’.

Kenneth Twyble

1st Portadown & 7th Portadown Companies of the Boys’ Brigade

May I first of all offer my heartiest congratulations to the B.B. Old Boys’ Association in achieving a truly remarkable milestone in their 75th Anniversary. In so doing, may I also thank all those officials and committee members who have sacrificially offered their time and talents over the years to steer the Association to where it is today. In particular, I would like to pay tribute to the current Chairman, Steven Wright, and Secretary Paul Teggart, for their tremendous efforts in compiling this history and tribute booklet, and organising other events to mark the occasion of this year. I regard my own years of involvement with the Boys’ Brigade as being the most character-forming and supportive years of my life, from my days in the Life Boys

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
attached to Edenderry Memorial Methodist Church, through the many years of membership of what is today called the Company Section in Thomas Street, and eventually into Officership in both the Thomas Street and Edenderry Companies. As we grow older, it is often in reflection and reminiscence that we truly value previous involvements and activities, and it is in this that the Old Boys’ Association has played a significant role for so many.

For me, two memories of the Association stand out. The first is of carrying the tilley lanterns to enable the Old Boys’ Band to see their music in the parade to the annual Church Service in Thomas Street, and the second is of the late Tom McDevitte (with his alter ego Barney McCool) regularly entertaining us all at the annual reunion and dinner.

Perhaps the B.B. and Old Boys’ Association face greater challenges today than ever before, but I thank Almighty God for all their influences on my life, and pray that both organisations will remain an influence for good and for God, for many generations to come.

Canon Mark Russell
Chief Executive of the Church Army
(former member of 2nd Richhill Company B.B.)

I am delighted to send my good wishes to the Old Boys’ Association on the occasion of their 75th Anniversary. I wish your Society well as you celebrate this event and hope it will be time to take stock of the fantastic contribution that the 1st, 6th & 7th Portadown Companies have made to the lives of so many young men over many years. May you continue to know God’s blessing and provision as you seek to advance Christ’s Kingdom amongst men and boys.

Dr. Harold Wright
Wheeling, West Virginia, USA
(Former member of 1st Portadown Company Boys’ Brigade)

I was born into the immediate post World War Two era. My grandfather, James Wright of Burnbrae Avenue, attended Thomas Street Methodist Church and served as an usher on Sunday evenings until his death in the 1950s. All of his five sons were members of the Boys’ (Life) Brigade Company. The oldest, Dick, Jim my father and then Earl, Wilfred and Eric. Wilfred died during a German attack on his RAF station in 1940. In the goodness of time, I attended Sunday School at Thomas Street Primary School and then returned there on Monday where my education, both spiritual and academic was closely supervised by Miss Clements, my first grade teacher. What a saintly soul. Eventually, I was enrolled in the Life Boys,
learned to play crab football, and to march more or less in step to the commands of Harry Burrows. I was on the leading edge of the post-World War Two ‘Baby Boom,’ and the streets of Portadown were filled with youthful voices and boys kicking football between gable walls. I lived in Hanover Street. These were the good times,... but political tensions in Ireland, which had eroded during World War Two, started to re-emerge and eventually, at a later time, prompted my journey to America.

At the age of twelve, I duly transferred to the ‘big’ Boys’ Brigade. I cannot remember the particulars of the occasion, but undoubtedly it was a Thursday. Without a doubt, the Captain was in command. The Captain being Billy Coulter. Later in life, we may have referred to other of our officers as Bertie Day, Walter Caddell, Errol Johnston, and Brian Crozier. However, ‘the Captain’ was always the ‘Captain’.

The incoming recruits came from all over Portadown and the countryside beyond. Private cars had now reappeared, but most members walked to the Lecture Hall Drill Parade on Thursday night and to the Minor Hall Bible Class on Sunday afternoon. And what a group of young people they were. Included in that group were: Kenneth Twyble, former Mayor of Craigavon; his brother David Twyble, retired teacher; David Montgomery, merchant marine officer, now living in Australia; Albert McNally, long time teacher; Ronnie Gordon, Mervyn Carrick, one time MLA; Robin and George McFadden, who then lived around the corner from me in South Street; Mervyn Haire, soccer player; Brian and Ronnie Morrison, soccer players with Portadown; and all the other members of the 1959/60 B.B. Champion soccer team and my close friend now in Lisburn, Bobby Wilkinson. There were many others of note, but sadly 50 years has dimmed my memory of all these wonderful people.

I have lost touch with some of these people over the years, but I have managed to keep in touch with Bobby Wilkinson. His story is worth telling. He left Portadown Technical School at 15 and worked as a Telegram Delivery Boy and later as a Postman. In his early twenties, he switched to Nursing and trained as a Psychiatric Nurse in Belfast. He ended his career as Chief Nursing Officer at the Belfast City Hospital and as a member of the UK Nursing Council. He was introduced to Queen Elizabeth when she visited both of these bodies.

As for myself, while at Queen’s University, I was fortunate to spend three years living as a lay student at Edgehill College, where I got to know a generation of Methodist Ministers. How I loved the quiet of Sunday morning at Edgehill......when the theological students left to practice their pulpit skills. I graduated in Medicine in 1970 and was a House Officer at the Royal Victoria Hospital. In July 1971, I moved over to the Royal Hospital for Sick Children on the Falls Road. In January 1972, with insurrection and gun battles on my doorstep, I moved to Winnipeg, Canada where I subsequently trained in anaesthesia. I married Sandra Ingram of Winnipeg in 1973. We then set forth on an adventure to the USA which has now continued for 37 years. I retired two years ago. We have three grown up children, Ian (Philadelphia), Katie (Charleston, West Virginia) and Patrick (Chicago), and two wonderful grandchildren. Sandi and I live on a wooded hillside in Wheeling, West Virginia.

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
David Blevins, Sky News Ireland Correspondent, 6th Portadown Company Boys’ Brigade

The poet Alexander Smith (1829-1867) wrote: “A man’s real possession is his memory…” His namesake, William Alexander Smith (1854-1914) founded an organisation that has given me 30 years of memories – The Boys’ Brigade. Having come through the ranks of 6th Portadown (Epworth) under the captaincy of John Gates, I went on to serve as Captain myself for 15 years and oversaw the amalgamation of 1st Portadown (Thomas Street) and 6th Portadown before stepping down due to the demands of work. We never retire from seeking to advance Christ’s Kingdom so I wish BBOB every blessing for the next 75 years.

Pastor David Burrows, 1st Portadown Company Boys’ Brigade

(From his home in Sun City, Arizona, USA, David wrote to me just after Christmas stating he had just celebrated his 92nd birthday surrounded by his entire family).

Greetings to all my friends …… who are still living, ha ha. I am 92 years old and feel like a man of 50. I am delighted that the Old Boys is still going strong and wish I could be with you to celebrate the 75th Anniversary at the Service on 23rd February. I have so much to give thanks for in my life but inspite of living over 60 years in the USA, I have never forgotten my early years in Portadown and I still fondly remember my time spent in Thomas Street with the Boys’ Brigade and the Old Boys’ Association.

I remember men of high ideals who were committed to the physical and spiritual development of boys, who, by their love and service built a rapport with the members of the 1st Portadown Company, that ultimately became the impetus for men of vision to negotiate the purchase of the Institute Buildings in Edward Street so that the friendships formed in the B.B. could continue for many years. Among others the names of Gray, Pettigrew, Lyttle and Thornton stand out in my mind. They were men who touched my life and I will be eternally grateful and thankful for that.

Captain Gray asked my father and Jack Gillis to be Company cooks at the various camps, and I still have many photographs of those encampments. My years in the B.B. were rewarding and exciting because I was the first recipient of the Deale Memorial Cup, a member of the Bugle Band and a member of the victorious Drill Squad that won the Belfast Battalion Competition – I still have the cap, belt and haversack I wore that day.

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
War broke out and the black-outs began, causing apprehension and uncertainty, but night after night I joined with the boys to listen to the resident philosophers like Sam Crozier, Billy England, Tommy Austin and others. They covered a wide range of subjects from the happenings at Shamrock Park, the Borough Council members and their meetings, the sermons preached the previous Sunday in Church, to what girl was dating a soldier! No-one was exempt from their discussions. The black-out outside was diminished and dispelled by the light and joy experienced night after night in the Old Boys, and for that I am very thankful.

Graham Lyttle, Queensland, Australia
(1st Portadown Company Boys’ Brigade)

My earliest memories of the Old Boys’ Choir was during the middle ‘60s when as a 17 year old being told by my father that I was going to spend part of Sunday afternoons at choir practice. The choir was made up of a diverse group of men from all backgrounds, some of whom had the typical Ulster humour which made the time go quickly particularly if we were concentrating and singing well. If not, we bore the brunt of the displeasure of my father, the Choirmaster. But nevertheless, the members always came to the fore when it was required.

Many long journeys were taken to the South of Ireland where small Methodist congregations were treated to a service of joyful singing punctuated occasionally by the antics of certain tenors in the front row. The long bus journeys were shortened by much singing and frivolity especially after a couple of rest stops in towns along the way. The Old Boys’ Choir was widely known and highly sought after and the annual concerts were always packed to capacity.

There were many wonderful singers who could give solo performances and many great friendships were forged during this time. I often look back with fond memories of the fellowship and camaraderie we shared not only under the leadership of my father N.A. Lyttle but also my brother-in-law Jim Girvan.

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
A number of young men from many walks of life went off to fight ‘the Hun’ when war broke out in 1939. The military-like background that the Boys’ Brigade had provided young men led many down the path of the recruiting sergeants and the members of the Old Boys were no different. Over the course of the next six years, many experienced life changing events and some paid the supreme sacrifice. The Association is proud to be linked with the following members who did just that. Their names will never be forgotten.

**Members of 1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys’ Association and 1st Portadown Company Boys’ Brigade who gave their lives in the service of their country.**

‘WE WILL REMEMBER THEM’

**Wilfred Wright, Aircraftman 2nd Class 103 Squadron RAF,** died 4th January 1940 aged 20. Wilfred was the son of James & Esther Wright who lived at 12 Burnbrae Avenue, Portadown. He is buried in Drumcree Church of Ireland graveyard. Wilfred was a member of the 1st Portadown Company B.B. and had been employed in Tavanagh Weaving Factory prior to joining the Air Force. His brother Earl also served with the RAF during the Second World War. Wilfred is commemorated on Portadown War Memorial and on the War Memorial of Thomas Street Methodist Church.
Samuel Webb, Driver Royal Army Service Corps, killed in action on 2nd June 1940 at Dunkirk, France. He was aged 25 and was the son of Edward and Susanna Webb who lived at 45 Mournview Street, Portadown. He has no known grave. Samuel was employed by Anderson’s grocers of Church Street prior to the war and had been in the army about four years before he was killed. He is commemorated on Dunkirk Memorial in France and on Portadown War Memorial.

Thomas Dawson, Pilot Officer 144 Squadron RAF, lost in air operations on 1st November 1940 on a bombing mission to Berlin. He was 20 years of age. Thomas was the son of William Joseph and Sarah Dawson who lived at Rosnaree, Eden Crescent, Portadown. He too has no known grave. Thomas is commemorated at the Runnymede Memorial, Surrey in England, the Portadown War Memorial and the Portadown College War Memorial, where he had been a pupil.

David Todd, Sergeant RAF, lost in air operations on 30th August 1941 while returning to his unit in the Mediterranean. He had been previously wounded in 1940 and had spent some time in hospital in England prior to returning to the war. He was the son of Robert and Ann Todd who lived at 72 Hanover Street, Portadown and was 29 years old when he died. He has no known grave. He was employed in the office of Spence Bryson before enlisting in the RAF. He was also a member of 1st Portadown Company B.B. Old Boys’ Silver Band. David is commemorated on the Malta Memorial and Portadown War Memorial.

George Pentland, Gunner, Royal Artillery, died as the result of an accident in England on 20th September 1942. He was the son of Robert and Jane Pentland of 29 Carrickblacker Road, Portadown. He was aged 27 when he died and is buried in Seagoe Cemetery, Portadown. George had been a member of Seagoe Church Lads’ Brigade but became a member of the Old Boys prior to going to war. He is commemorated on Portadown War Memorial and on Seagoe Parish Church War Memorial.

David Gillis, Sergeant (Air Gunner) 90 Squadron RAF (VR), was killed on air operations on the way to Germany 22nd June 1943. He was the son of J. Gillis of 31 Victoria Terrace, Portadown and was a Sergeant in the 1st Portadown Company B.B. Aged 24, he had been sent as one of a crew of seven on a bombing mission to Krefeld. His aircraft was shot down by a night fighter and crashed at Hoogwoud, North Holland with the loss of all the crew. David is buried in Bergen General Cemetery, Netherlands. He is commemorated on the Portadown War Memorial and the memorial in Thomas Street Methodist Church.

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
David McClatchey, Rifleman, 2nd Battalion The London Irish Rifles, Royal Ulster Rifles, died of his wounds on 10th August 1943 in Italy/Sicily. Aged 30, David was the son of Edward and Isobel McClatchey of 22, Queen Street, Portadown. He was married to Carol McClatchey and they resided at 2, Mons Villas, Armagh Road, Portadown. David was wounded in the head during the invasion of Sicily, was captured by the Germans and died undergoing surgery in an enemy hospital. He has no known grave. He is commemorated on the Cassino Memorial, Italy, Portadown War Memorial and the War Memorial of St. Mark’s Parish Church.

Ernest Bramwell Blair, Sergeant 578 Squadron RAF (VR), was lost on air operations over Germany on 13th April 1944. He was on a bombing raid to Berlin when his aircraft crashed due to engine trouble. Ernest was the son of John and Martha Blair. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial, Surrey and Portadown War Memorial.

Samuel Joseph Clayton, Sergeant (wireless operator/air gunner) 218 Squadron RAF (VR), son of William and Elizabeth Clayton of 2, Eden Avenue, Portadown. Aged 24, Samuel was killed on air operations on 2nd May 1944 in France. Samuel was keenly interested in the Royal Air Force and achieved his lifelong dream when he was accepted for aircrew training. He was posted to Squadron 218 of Bomber Command. Samuel was one of a crew of eight in a bomber which took off from Woolfox Lodge Base to destroy railway lines and storage depots at Chambly in France. The operation was part of the bombing offensive in the lead up to the Normandy landings on D Day. His plane came down at La Housaye near Auneuil with a loss of four crew, including himself. All four were buried in Poix de Picardie Churchyard, Somme, France. The four surviving crew all evaded capture. Samuel is commemorated on Portadown War Memorial.

Robert Buckley, Constable, Royal Ulster Constabulary, aged 31 was killed on duty in the Ardoyne area of Belfast on 26th February 1971 when IRA gunmen opened up with automatic weapons behind the cover of a rioting mob. Attached to the RUC Special Patrol Group, he had joined the Police in 1958. He was a native of Portadown but was residing in Belfast at the time of his death. Well known in RUC football circles, Robert left behind two daughters aged three and one.

Andrew Wood, Private, Royal Irish Rangers, was a single man who tragically died on guard duty in his barracks at Mahon Road Military Base in Portadown in 1997. He was a Private in the 3rd Battalion the Royal Irish Regiment.

David Crawford and Richard Bell laying a wreath at Portadown Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday morning on behalf of the Old Boys’ Association

75 Years of Service and still going strong!
# Roll of former Chairmen

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Acknowledgements

In completing this booklet, I wish to thank all those who had some input into the making and producing of it. The whole project would not have been possible without the support of the Committee of the Old Boys’ Association and in particular, Steven Wright who masterminded the advertising campaign, acted as accountant and liaised with the printers.

I am very grateful for the contributions made by those who sent their recollections of the Old Boys, especially those from far away. They truly demonstrate that the influence of our Association is not just local but is spread throughout the world.

On behalf of the Association I would also take this opportunity to thank all those members, former members and friends both at home and abroad who donated to our 75th Anniversary Fund.

All proceeds from the sale of this booklet, surplus advertising funds and donations will be presented as our Anniversary gift to the three Portadown Methodist Churches, who provided the Old Boys’ Association with the bulk of their membership and without whose generosity and kindness over the past 75 years, the Old Boys’ Association would not have existed.