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Conway Club Dinner

THE 1969 Dinner of the "Conway" Club, which was preceded by the Annual General Meeting, was held in London on 4th October at the Royal Overseas League. The General Meeting was well attended and was chaired by Captain R. J. B. Dunning, Vice-President. Mr. P. F. Broadhead, who was to have been chairman, had shortly before been admitted to hospital.

The proceedings opened with a tribute to our late President, Captain W. H. Coombs, C.B.E., R.N.R. and the meeting stood for a minute's silence in his memory. After approving the 1968 accounts the meeting elected Captain E. Hewitt, R.D., R.N.R. to be the new President. The retiring Vice-President, Mr. P. F. Broadhead, D.S.C., who had been in charge of Club affairs since the death of Captain Coombs, was asked to continue in office for another year and vacancies on the Committee were filled by Captain A. J. R. Tyrrell, Mr. D. A. Davey and Commander A. D. Braithwaite, R.N.R. Captain Hewitt proposed that the Headmaster of the "Conway" be *ex-officio* a member of the Committee during his time of office. This was carried unanimously. Mrs. Coombs and Mrs. Hewitt were elected Honorary Members of the Club as was Mr. W. Thompson of the M.M.S.A., who has done so much for the Chapel Appeal Fund by his work in connection with the income tax returns on covenants.

Ninety-three sat down to dinner under the chairmanship of Captain Dunning, who, after proposing the Health of The Queen and reading the text of the loyal telegram he had sent on behalf of the Club and Her Majesty's gracious reply, spoke briefly of the great loss we had suffered in the death of Captain Coombs and of his life of service to the "Conway" Club and seafarers. He wished Mr. Broadhead a speedy recovery, announced

that Captain Hewitt had just been elected president and made a short speech of welcome to the Club Guests, who were our old friends Captain L. W. L. Argles, C.B.E., D.S.C., R.N., Captain of H.M.S. *Worcester*, Mr. Ian Gunn of the Shipping Federation and a member of the new "Conway" Committee of Management, Mr. B. E. Lord, M.A., the Headmaster, Rear-Admiral B. C. F. Place, V.C., D.S.C., Admiral Commanding Reserves, Mr. L. B. Slinn, Shipping Director, Mr. Richard Stone, Q.C., Chief Cadet Captain D. A. Sandy and Senior Cadet Captain C. J. R. Tollast.

On replying on behalf of the guests, Mr. Richard Stone, in a charming and witty speech mentioned that when he heard that the "Conway" motto was "Quit ye like men, be strong" was disappointed at not seeing a notice, "You are entering the Strong Country". He told us amusing stories of working in the Admiralty Court under Mr. Justice Hewson and of some of the forthright and nautical language that took place when Hewson and Broadhead were involved together.

Mr. Slinn of the West Hartlepool Shipping Company in proposing the toast of "The Sea Services" started by telling us a little of the history of his own company from 1856 and went on to talk of the new vast ships of the Merchant Navy and some of the problems of cost, building and manning of this tonnage.

He said: "With the great advances that have been made it is ever more important to see that the right type of person taking up the sea as a career has the proper training and in this respect 'Conway' has always been a source of producing the right sort of person to do so. She has produced a number of eminent men including holders of the Victoria Cross, an Admiralty Court Judge, the Chairman of the Steel Company of Wales, and Her

Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, to mention only three"; and he then went on to speak of the debt we owe to the Royal Navy in keeping the seas free in war and peace for our ships to bring home their vital cargoes.

The Admiral Commanding Reserves in replying to this toast said how delighted he was that it should be expressed as "The Sea Services" thereby embracing all those who serve Britain and their fellow-men in any occupation connected with the sea and this gave him the opportunity to express his personal tribute to that grandest of men from H.M.S. *Conway*, who died this year after many devoted years of service to his fellow seamen, Captain Coombs, who he remembered presenting the Queen's Gold Medal on Prize Day at H.M.S. *Conway* last year: as each cadet received his prize Captain Coombs asked if he was going to sea. If "Yes," he asked: "Which line?" One boy replied: "The Royal Navy," to which Captain Coombs replied: "Ah, yes . . . I have heard of it." The speaker assured him afterwards that a great many in the Royal Navy past and present had heard of Captain Coombs and held him in high regard.

He went on to say that a great many "Conways" had gone to wider fields than the Merchant or Royal Navies, many even to professions not connected with the sea, but all took with them that self-reliance that a sea-slanted training gives a man and he felt sure that all members of the "Conway" Club had retained such an interest in maritime affairs that they would wish him to give his views on the importance of the sea services today and in the future.

He then gave an illuminating picture of the vital importance to our existence of the protection of our sea trade, without which we cannot exist as a nation, and to the threat of potentially hostile fleets and of the astonishing increase of Russian merchant shipping in the past few years. He went on to speak of the necessity of co-operation between the Royal and Merchant Navies in technical and organisational matters and in training, of the tendency to drift apart in peace time, but how encouraging it was to see the increasing mutual reliance between ships of the fleet and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and co-operation in communications, transfer of stores, etc., using helicopters. He outlined developments in the future training of R.N.R. officers and ended with the opinion that the struggle concerning overseas trade would depend on the early recognition of the threat to our national determination that our sea services be pre-eminent in the prosperity of our country; that we not only had the responsibility for advancing the expertise in our own fields but doing our utmost to ensure our countrymen appreciate its vital importance.

He paraphrased the ancient words written in H.M.S. *Conway*: "It is upon ships and sailors, under the good providence of God, that the prosperity of our nation does principally depend".

Captain Hewitt, in proposing the toast of "The Ship" said: "Although, particularly where 'Conway' is concerned, I suppose most people who know me would call me a traditionalist, for reasons, some of which are obvious to you if you give them thought, I have accepted the Committee's request to propose the toast of the Ship, though for some years tradition has given this honour to the Chief Cadet Captain and remembering the

excellent speeches made in the past by his predecessors I feel certain that to have heard Sandy tonight would have given you far more pleasure than having to listen to me, and I sincerely hope that tonight will be an exception and that in future years all Old Conways dining together will be able to hear the reigning C.P.O."

"Perhaps, however, in future years, the toast will not be 'The Ship'. I hope it will not be 'The School' for that would mark too great a change between Old Boys leaving before 1969 and those leaving after, and I believe it is links with continuity with the past and not breaks with the past, that we, as an Old Boys' club, should seek to foster. It may be, however, that as the years go by and we die off, the toast of 'The Ship' will become meaningless and I venture to suggest that in future years the toast should be 'The Conway'. Tradition may be either stultifying or encouraging. We all know the reaction of the 'Prom.' audiences when Colin Davies proposed omitting 'Land of Hope and Glory' and 'Rule, Britannia' from this year's Proms, and it came as a pleasant surprise to many of my generation to find how vociferous was youth in insisting on the retention of these two traditional tunes.

"It reminds me of how, soon after the Ship was lost, I felt it would be inappropriate to sing the 'Conway' song each Sunday but the then cadets insisted on it, so I wrote to John Masefield and asked him if he could re-write some of the verses, keeping the chorus and tune, and he replied, saying that although the words might be inappropriate, the tradition was the thing and no change should be made, so, although seventy years separated him from the cadets of that day, the strong sense of continuity joined them.

"All of you know the great educational strides 'Conway' is making and is hoping to make in the future. I see Mr. Lord is due to respond to this toast and I know he is too modest to refer to them, but all of us will wish to congratulate him, his staff and his cadets on their success in Science Fair, both in this country and in Holland, and perhaps most of all to congratulate Mr. Lord on carrying the non-resident staff with him in perhaps the biggest hurdle he will ever have to surmount, that is, afternoon activities and evening school instead of the day school routine we and later cadets endured. Changes of routine tradition like this are all for the good and if they foretell other improvements in the education of future 'Conway' cadets then all Old Conways will give credit where credit is due. Suffice perhaps to say that if my grandson were fool enough to follow my son and me in wishing to go sea, 'Conway' is the one pre-sea training establishment I should like to see him join, though I gather he would need more brain than I possess to be accepted now. Let us then as Old Boys rise and drink a toast to the Ship of the past and the 'Conway' of the future and may Old Boys in a hundred years' time be as proud of being Old Conways as we are tonight".

Mr. Lord, the Headmaster, replying to the toast of "The Ship" said: "I received an invitation from Captain Coombs to attend this dinner tonight with mixed feelings. Pleasure at receiving an invitation from someone whom unfortunately I only knew slightly but whom, even on short acquaintance, I respected; expectation at the thought of meeting representatives of 'Conways' earlier—and if one is to believe all one is told—more glorious years; apprehension, that I might be asked to

do what I am doing now. So I approach the occasion in the spirit of the young lady from Kent . . .

"When I took charge of 'Conway' last year, I was given a directive by the Governing Body that 'Conway' was to be organised not as a ship but as a school—a school with a strong nautical bias. Thus in responding to the present toast I am in a somewhat difficult position because, gentlemen, the ship no longer exists, save in your minds and memories. In one sense this has always been so, for the concept of the Ship has been something separate and individual to each one of you and the reality of the Ship has been those facets of your years in her which are stored in your memory for your mind to recall. You are clearly better placed than I to conjure up those memories and share them with each other. Let me rather indicate how we have sought, in radically changed circumstances, to add to her tradition and yet remain true to her

"The year has been one of teething troubles for it is not easy to convince an L.E.A. that there is a world of difference between a day school and a boarding school, let alone a school unique as is 'Conway'. Further, the B.S.F., as foundation Governors have been taking up the reins and getting a measure of the task ahead. New routines have been introduced (games 2-4, afternoon school 4-6), leave out week-ends have been introduced and at the end of this month we experiment with a five-day half-term. The builders are with us and chaos reigns. The Navigation, Seamanship and Geography Rooms—recently in Kelvin—have been brought up to the Main building. In each case two classrooms have been knocked into one to give space adequate for the subject. (Let that be an indication that nautical matters take pride of place.) The Gym is to be refloored, two staff houses and workshops are to be built and all this is to be completed by next summer. At the Dock, No. 1 Motor Boat has had a face lift and heart transplant in the form of a new engine, No. 2 is engineless and the Pinnacle is nail-sick. The M.S.'s have been replaced by G.P.14's. Even before the workshops are installed we are embarking on a dinghy building programme. Work is in hand to prevent the present Practical Seamanship Room disappearing under a land slip. The provision of an indoor swimming pool is being actively pursued and a site has been allocated for it—as also for a complete Engineering Block and more staff houses. Your own Chapel site is pegged out. Additionally, the Library is being refurbished and additional books have been ordered. We have a small 8½-hole golf course under development and archery butts also make their appearance on the playing fields.

"All this deals with the physical side of 'Conway'—in many ways the least important side. It is grand to have these things, as it is to go through the last rugger season with only four defeats and those narrow ones. But this is only a springboard for the development of other qualities—indicated in one way by our project in Science Fair '69 and later in the International Science Fair at Eindhoven. A satisfying performance—not just because 'Conway' did well but because it showed the correlation of the nautical and scientific sides of 'Conway'. This—if I may use the word—up-dating of the nautical emphasis has been taken further because we have introduced a new course labelled 'Marine Science' starting last month and we have persuaded the A.E.B. to accept our syllabus

as a fully fledged G.C.E. 'O' level subject. This, like the Towing Tank project, is attracting widespread—and by that I mean national—interest.

"Gentlemen, you each in your generation, I trust, helped to add lustre to 'Conway's' name and have continued to do so whether at sea or ashore. The present generation, typified by Sandy and Tollast have certainly, each in their own way, added to that story.

We are not stagnant; we are alive; we are developing. Whether on the basis of a priceless heritage we, as a staff help our cadets achieve the all-round development of character for which the sea and civilian life increasingly calls; whether we manage to harness the new advantages we have been granted and at the same time manage to minimise the added handicaps under which we are called to work; whether from our past we can evolve to a yet more glorious future—only time will tell. It calls for our inspiration, our devotion, your understanding, your support.

"A glorious past, a present partnership, a future fulfilled in service to our fellow-men. As for our predecessors, so for us. Let us 'Quit us like men—be strong!'"

After the speeches, for those who did not have to rush to catch trains, there was time, although too short, to meet one's contemporaries at the bar and yarn over old times.

Official Guests were: Captain L. W. L. Argles, C.B.E., D.S.C., R.N., J. Gunn, Esq., B. E. Lord, Esq., Rear-Admiral B. C. F. Place, V.C., D.S.C., L. B. Slinn, Esq., Richard Stone, Esq., Q.C., Chief Cadet Captain D. A. Sandy, Senior Cadet Captain C. J. R. Tollast.

Members attending, with "Conway" dates:

Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirse, K.C.B., D.S.O., A.F.C.	1905-07
Group Capt. T. Q. Studd, D.F.C., D.L. (Retd.)	1909-11
Air Vice-Marshal H. G. White, C.B., C.B.E. (Retd.)	1910-12
Commander L. A. W. Johnson, M.V.O. (Retd.)	1911-13
H. B. Langworthy, Esq.	1911-13
Commander C. V. Stevens, R.N. (Retd.)	1912-14
Commander K. S. Munro, O.B.E., R.D., R.N.R. (Retd.)	1915-18
S. A. Blake, Esq.	1916-18
Lieut.-Commander P. W. T. Kime, O.B.E., R.N.R. (Retd.)	1916-18
Captain J. E. N. Coope, R.N.	1916-18
Captain R. J. B. Dunning (Retd.)	1917-19
J. A. Watson, Esq., M.INST.T.	1918-19
Captain E. Hewitt, R.D., R.N.R. (Retd.)	1919-21
Lt.-Cmdr. T. K. Macdonald, R.N.R. (Retd.)	1919-21
Capt. W. R. K. Clarke, D.S.C., R.D., R.N.R., (Retd.)	1920-21
Air Commodore D. N. Roberts, C.B.E., A.F.C. (Retd.)	1920-22
Lt.-Cdr. C. E. Hall, R.D., R.N.R. (Retd.)	1921-23
Captain J. H. Wright, R.D., R.N.R. (Retd.)	1921-23
Captain G. G. Franklin	1922-24
F. H. Heggs, Esq.	1922-24
J. H. G. Colquhoun, Esq.	1923-25
Comdr. T. P. Kinlock Jones, R.N., (Retd.)	1924-26
Lieut.-Commander J. Brooke Smith, R.N.R.	1925-27
Lieutenant J. H. Mosley, R.N.R. (Retd.)	1925-29
A. E. Smith, Esq.	1925-26
E. F. Witchell, Esq.	1925-27
Lt.-Cdr. M. S. Work, D.S.C., R.N.R. (Retd.)	1926-27

Captain W. R. Williamson	.. .. .	1932-34	L. A. Haslett, Esq.	.. .. .	1946-48
W. J. Hector, Esq.	.. .. .	1934-36	Captain A. D. Braithwaite, R.N.R.	.. .. .	1947-49
C. G. Lea, Esq.	.. .. .	1937-39	A. G. Dunlop, Esq.	.. .. .	1947-49
W. P. Martinson, Esq.	.. .. .	1937-38	R. O. Fairbairn, Esq.	.. .. .	1947-49
J. B. Harbord, Esq.	.. .. .	1938-40	Lieut.-Cdr. M. R. H. Llewellyn, R.N.R.	.. .. .	1947-49
Captain L. J. Thompson	.. .. .	1939-41	M. B. Pascoe, Esq.	.. .. .	1948-50
Captain W. Davey	.. .. .	1940-42	J. M. Brew, Esq.	.. .. .	1950-52
Lieut.-Commander G. L. Haskins, R.N.Z.N.	.. .. .	1940-43	D. A. Redman, Esq.	.. .. .	1953-55
Lieut.-Cdr. N. Kirkwood, R.N. (Retd.)	.. .. .	1940-42	R. P. Frost, Esq.	.. .. .	1954-56
D. C. McGill, Esq.	.. .. .	1940-42	T. C. Dunn, Esq.	.. .. .	1955-57
Lieut. E. H. T. Pickles, R.N.R. (Retd.)	.. .. .	1940-42	N. P. W. Yeo, Esq.	.. .. .	1956-59
P. A. Smith, Esq.	.. .. .	1941-44	G. F. Dibson, Esq.	.. .. .	1957-59
L. A. Allison, Esq.	.. .. .	1942-44	D. W. Atkinson, Esq.	.. .. .	1958-61
P. H. Carden, Esq.	.. .. .	1942-44	R. M. Gordon, Esq.	.. .. .	1959-61
D. D. Hall, Esq.	.. .. .	1942-43	A. R. Homer, Esq.	.. .. .	1964-67
Commander G. G. Greenfield, R.N.R., R.D.	.. .. .	1943-45	C. G. K. Manton, Esq.	.. .. .	1964-67
D. G. Fletcher Rogers, Esq.	.. .. .	1943-45	R. J. Pearce, Esq.	.. .. .	1966-67
Reverend E. Kelly	.. .. .	1944-45	Staff Member: Wing Cdr. T. E. W. Browne,		
A. E. Potter, Esq.	.. .. .	1944-46	M.A., M.Sc. (Retd.)	.. .. .	1934-64
J. A. Davey, Esq.	.. .. .	1946-47	and other guests of individual members.		
J. Hardy, Esq.	.. .. .	1946-47	Non Member Guest: Wing Comm. Sir J. V. Peregrine		1916-19