

Charlie Byron (by Lily Byron)

RHS leaving year 1947

21st February – email received by Rector Pauline Walker.

My husband Charles Byron (nearly 93), a former pupil of the Royal High School is dying and is trying to remember the Greek written on the wall in the regent Road School - (in the entrance? or hall.) He has asked a local minister to say something in Greek at his funeral.

Today, in the local Migdale hospital, Bonar Bridge, he is trying to remember what it was and what it meant. He has often talked about it. He says he wasn't deemed clever enough to learn Greek but he always loved it. He really enjoyed spending time in the library there and became an avid reader. Unfortunately, he is almost blind now and cannot read even with good magnifiers. It would be lovely to know what it was. An email reply would be wonderful. Thank you very much, Lily Byron



Lily and Charlie Byron at the Pier restaurant in Lairg in 2023

22nd February

The RHS school historian sent several files: Charlie's entries in the Annual Reports, His teachers, and two synthesised versions of Vivas Scola Regia, along with a translation of the Greek on the WW1 Memorial Porch.

As the historian of the Royal High School, I've been asked by the Head Teacher to respond to your inquiry. We are so pleased that you contacted us, and would like to offer the following responses.

The Greek inscription which your husband recollects is at the head of the WW1 Memorial Porch, and translates literally as 'They Died, but did not Die'. The originating poem by Simonides translates as "Fallen they are, but Death is not their guardian".

I've attached extracts from the 1947 Annual Report showing your husband's class list, and teachers of that year. I've also attached a

photo of the Memorial Porch, initially installed in 1923 in the Regent Road building which your husband attended, since relocated in 1968 to the new campus in Barnton

I've also attached two synthesised versions of the Royal High School song - Vivas Schola Regia'

It was good to speak with you this morning - I'll call again in the next few days, but please feel free to ask for any further information you may wish.



The RHS WW1 Memorial Porch. The Greek inscription translates as "They Died, but did not Die"

24th February

Dear Mr Allanach,

Thank you very much for your email, with all the attachments. Our son and daughter were at the hospital with Charlie when it came in, so I forwarded to them and they played the school song to him. Although he was just semi-conscious, he asked them to play it again and then raised his hands to conduct the loud bit!

Apparently, he then started reminiscing about his old teachers in the RHS. Some had been involved in the war, as were his three older brothers, so he was more interested in their tales than the subjects they were teaching!

It's a very sad (and busy) time for us just now but it's lovely that your email came in time. We do appreciate it very much

I am at his bedside right now at nearly 4 am. He's quite a character!
Thank you, Yours sincerely, Lily Byron and family.

13th March

Dear Mr Allanach. Thank you very much. Sadly, Charlie passed away on the morning of March 1st 2024 with our son, Dougie Byron by his side.

His wish was to donate his body to medical research and, to our surprise, it was granted. As a friend said, that was Charlie, generous to the last! Therefore it is a memorial service that we have arranged in our local Rosehall Church of Scotland on Saturday 16th March.

Your music teacher might be amused to hear that, as he was dying, he talked a lot about the eccentric Mr Melalieu, his music teacher, who believed in "fat" notes and "thin" notes. He sang a scale to me, starting very low, on the "fat" notes and as he went higher the notes became "thinner". I think this is true because he told me about it before.

He didn't like the fact that this teacher kept order by the use of the belt and did not really approve of the jazz sessions held by Sandy Brown and fellow musicians in the music room at lunchtime. Charlie loved it and this is what inspired him to take up the clarinet himself.

Yours sincerely, Lily Byron.

26th April

Dear Alastair. I apologise for the delay in answering your last email. Here is a photo of my husband Charlie (aged 92), our son Douglas, taken outside our home, Smithy Cottage, Rosehall, near Lairg, Sutherland.

My grandfather came here as the estate blacksmith around 1880 and it was where my father and his 12 surviving siblings were brought up. In 1974 we were able to buy what had been a tied house and we came to live here with our two children in 1976.

Charlie left the RHS when he was 16 and served a 5 year apprenticeship to qualify as a refrigeration engineer with Turner and Co. He was then called up to serve 2 years in the R.A.F.

He'd always been interested in drawing and had attended night classes in Edinburgh and Dover, to improve his skills. When he was demobbed, he only spent a short time back at Turner & Co, before applying to Edinburgh College of Art, having gathered together a portfolio of his art work. He was successful and spent what he said were the happiest four years of his life there on the drawing and painting course. After that it was supply teaching and then silkscreen printing and design.

This is what he was doing when he met me (Lily Mackenzie from Ardgay, Ross-shire), a 3rd year M.A. student at Edinburgh University.

We married in 1964, just before I went to Moray House to train as a teacher.



Charlie (aged 92), son Douglas, and wife Lily taken outside our home, Smithy Cottage, Rosehall, near Lairg, Sutherland

Charlie's memories of the Royal High School.

From time to time, I would write down things Charlie told me about his life.) His family lived at 8, Hope Crescent (now called Hopeton Crescent), where his mother ran a boarding house.

He got a tram car up to the top of Leith Walk and then walked along to school or went over the Calton Hill.

He remembered the history class with "Bobo" Aiken with whom Charlie got on well but said he wasn't a good disciplinarian and sometimes had to go to the head of department for support. He later learned that Bobo was a keen Scottish Nationalist.

Later he had Mr MacIver for History and English. He had served in the Royal Naval Reserve and often told the pupils stories of his experiences there. He was well-respected by the pupils and used to put on plays. He was a Gaelic speaker and used to be on the radio.

Once he had an argument with Harding on the radio about the merits of lobsters, saying that those from the Western Isles were superior and punched Harding, who was very opinionated! It got into the newspapers!

During the war, Charlie said, you heard a lot of American jazz on the radio. What Charlie enjoyed most about school was when Sandy Brown (on clarinet), Al Fairweather (on trumpet) and Stan Gregg (piano and drums) formed a jazz band and he would go down to the music room to listen to them at lunch time.

The music teacher, Mr Melalieu, did not like jazz. Apparently he used the strap a lot to keep control in his classes, something Charlie didn't like as he had been brought up by non-violent parents.

However, he did accept Charlie into his B choir and they did an annual concert in the Usher all, all the four years Charlie was there.

I hope this answers your questions!

Yours sincerely, Lily Byron

