

“Geography Williams”

This story begins with a response to a message that I placed in January 2021 on an internet forum, to advertise the reactivated Trinity website and Facebook group. The response was from Stephen Williams, the son of “Geography Williams”, one of the popular teachers at Trinity in the 1950s, when I was there. I was delighted to make this connection and explained to Stephen how I had been inspired by his father’s teaching, particularly economic geography, and I recalled his lessons about Russian geography, his account of the growth of Russian industry and the British scheme for a huge steelworks at Corby. Further messages from Stephen gave a more rounded picture of his father, Eric and his mother, who had also been a teacher at Trinity (Margaret McShane) and their association with the school. Stephen’s response and what he explained to me forms the rest of this story.



Geography Williams teaching form 5a in 1956 – photo by Colin Hale

Eric Williams was born and raised in North Wales, his father was a coal miner who was in later life able to leave the mine and become the landlord of a village pub. Eric came from a family with a strong sporting background; two cousins played top level football in the English First Division and were capped for Wales. Eric himself played at a decent amateur level - in today's terms, perhaps National League South. He served in the RAF during the war as a Navigator and Education Officer, and joined Trinity afterwards. Eric met his wife, Margaret McShane, at the school where she was a French teacher, they were married in 1950, lived in Hampstead at the side of the Heath for a while, and moved to live in Southgate, where Stephen was born in 1956. Before this happy event they often spent the long summer holidays touring France on Eric’s Triumph motorbike.

For many years at Trinity, Eric was also the local delegate for the teaching union AMA (Assistant Masters' Association) and always attended their annual conference. Eric stayed teaching at Trinity right through its metamorphosis into Wood Green Comprehensive; he was

offered promotion several times, but preferred to stay in the classroom as a fulltime geography and sometime sport teacher. He took many local and overseas field trips and sports tours and was at the school until he retired from fulltime work, when he eased into retirement via a part time role at All Saints teacher training college in Tottenham. He took huge pleasure in keeping in touch with former pupils (many of whose children he also taught) - and several colleagues from Trinity were firm family friends and became "uncles" to Stephen. Of the "old guard" of teachers Stephen has fond memories of Bob Howson and Jim Wallace (whose post-Trinity career is documented extensively on the TOSA web site), and then in the 60s, Mike Jones and Geoff Williamson.

Margaret, who before joining Trinity had taught at the John Howard school in East London and at High Storrs in Sheffield, left the school before Stephen was born. She later returned to work at Eversley and Bowes primary schools in the 1960s, as part of a LB of Enfield pilot scheme to teach French in primary schools. Margaret came from a Glasgow family of Irish ancestry, who left Scotland to find work in England when she was eleven. Her uncle John McShane was both a headmaster in Walsall and also a Labour MP for the same town - and her brother was one of the many Scots who found work in the steel town of Corby, Northants. Perhaps Corby with its steelworks was on Eric's mind when he taught me geography in the 1950s.

Eric and Margaret were blessed with a long and happy retirement, during which time they learned Spanish, visited the country many times, made new friends at Whitewebbs Golf Club where they played regularly, and became grandparents.

Colin Marr - February 2021