



HOWELL'S SCHOOL
Llandaff

GDST
GIRLS' DAY SCHOOL TRUST

7th December 2018

What's In A Name?

Last week was the Hywelian Advent Service at the Holy Cross Church in Cowbridge, then afterwards all in attendance headed across the road to the Bear Hotel for my first Christmas lunch of the season. Some of the Hywelians present were at school during the war years, others in the 60s and 70s. Conversation turned, as it often does, to the teachers who stalked the corridors of power when we were Howell's girls ourselves. Some are remembered fondly, as a source of inspiration and encouragement; others are recalled with a grimace. A member of staff from before my time who was never much liked by the girls was known throughout the school as The Louse.

It reminded me, for the first time in years, of the nicknames that we used to have for our teachers when I was at Howell's. The Physics department's Hairy Mary, named for her long blonde hair that turned up in sausage curls at the ends. My beloved Hammy-J, with her ramrod straight back and Dame Maggie Smith delivery, who once caught me in the Churchills hotel bar at lunchtime, rolled her eyes and kept on walking. There were more nicknames, some less kind, which are best left in my memory. I am quite sure that they all knew what we called them, and I wonder if they minded.

In Alan Bennett's *The History Boys*, the History teacher Mrs Lintott—known as Totty by the boys—asks a newly minted teacher if he has been given a nickname yet, and explains, "A nickname is an achievement, both in the sense of something won and also in its armorial sense." A nickname, affectionately meant, does cement a teacher at Howell's long after they have left, and I wonder what our current students call their teachers. Some penetrate the staffroom door, others, I am sure do not.