



## News and events

- **Our next meeting** is on **15 March** when Andy Gibbs of the British Schools Museum in Hitchin will tell us about **Talking in class: an oral history of the British Schools**.
  - **SAHAAS**, the St Albans History Society, will host a talk about the **Battle of Barnet and the Barnet Medieval Festival** on Tuesday 21 February at the Marlborough Road Methodist Church in St Albans. For details and to register, go to <https://www.stalbanshistory.org/events/category/events>
- 

## Des Thomas

John Desmond Thomas (known to all as 'Des') was headmaster of Wheathampstead School from the day it opened in 1965 until he retired in 1986.

Des was born in Llan Ffestiniog, North Wales, in 1926, the third of seven children of Blodwen and John Owain Thomas. His father was a cobbler and he and Blodwen had a shoe sales and repair shop while John also ran a general store.



When Des was about five years old the family moved to Llanrwst. John continued to work as a cobbler until he was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. Des spent his school holidays caring for his father in the last few weeks of his life.

The Thomas children attended the local primary school. Des, a very bright student, was admitted to Llanrwst Grammar School at the age of 10. He excelled in languages and studied Latin and the classics.

Having gained his School Certificate, Des left school and, as it was then the 1940s, he was conscripted to become a Bevan boy working in Chirk, North Wales, and in the South Wales coalmines. Years later he related to his sons stories of the hours he spent underground responsible for the cantankerous pit ponies dragging loads of coal through the passageways.

After finishing his Bevan Boy duties, Des worked as a civil servant in Llandudno. He attended Bangor Normal College where he studied English and French and gained his B.A. teaching degree. He was an active member of the Dramatic Society at Bangor and played hockey for the College first team. After the war ended, he won a scholarship to the Sorbonne in Paris to further his French skills.

Des enjoyed his stay in Paris and returned to London to teach French and English at Kynaston Comprehensive School in St. John's Wood. He married Jane Thomas in North Wales in 1955 and was appointed Head of English at Blackwell Comprehensive School in Harrow where he set up a new library and helped in the development of Drama Studies. He also attended Birkbeck College in London part-time to study Spanish and taught English to foreign students two evenings a week.

Des was appointed headmaster of Wheathampstead School at the age of only 39. He became a trustee of the James Marshall Foundation, stood for election to the County Council as a Liberal Party candidate, was involved with the 9th Harpenden Scouts, became Chairman of the Hertfordshire Head Teachers Association and was an active member of the National Association of Head Teachers in Hertfordshire. He was a member of Harpenden Common Golf Club and of the London Welsh Club, Secretary of the Luton Welsh Chapel and a member and later Master of Gwalia Lodge Masons.

Des lived in Harpenden for over 50 years. He died aged 89 in October 2015 and Jane in May 2021. They were married for more than 60 years.