

The pages which follow comprise some random reminiscences sent in by Old Girls kindly responding to our request for 'memories'.

We hope that this spurs you on to share your own recollections.

If you are moved to put fingers to keys, then please send your thoughts to me and I will be delighted to add them in to 'a fifth edition'!

I am deeply grateful to those who have contributed thus far.

Reading it has indeed been **SUCH FUN**.

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One last word – please do feel free to show this to your family and friends but please keep them 'in the family' as they are NOT for general publication.

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MEMORIES OF LIFE AS A BOARDER AT ST. MARY'S HALL 1954-1961
SHIRLEY READ-JAHN

I was sent to St. Mary's Hall in 1954 at the age of 9 after being on a Dutch cargo ship for 2 ½ months with my 11 year old sister, Pam, and our mother, whose health needed extensive rest and sea-air.

Looking back on my years at S.M.H., obviously there was good and bad but I was unhappy for most of my time there. I don't remember feeling lucky or blessed to have this school to attend, yet I certainly do remember feeling abandoned when my mother would leave me off at the school at the start of a new term. I think—to feel more in control of my young life, I developed the habit of counting the wooden wall panels while progressing slowly down the queue waiting to get into the dining room for meals. I now see that this was a form of obsessive-compulsive disorder, which, albeit to a minor extent, has remained with me throughout my life because I still occasionally feel compelled to count things! But, yes, there were also some good times to be had at the school to mostly balance out the bad.

This photo shows me in 1961 at nearly 17 years old, standing by my mother's car, school trunk on the roof (wrapped up against potential rain) with me giving a forced grin for the camera. At least I appreciated that my last term at school was coming up!



At the start of each term, to get from our house on The Island at Thames Ditton, Surrey, carrying my school trunk, our old boatman, Fred Painter, had to row us in his flat-bottomed boat down the Thames the whole length of The Island and around to the river beach next to the Swan Hotel. The Island held 44 houses on stilts upon it. There was a bridge but it was only for pedestrians and it had a turn-style. You paid a penny to go through that turn-style. No good for our school trunks!

One of the definitely good, even delightful, things I remember about being at S.M.H. was lying lazily on my back on the Far Field in the sun, chewing a piece of grass, watching the clouds scud across the blue, blue sky, hearing bees buzzing in the bushes behind me, and the gentle thwack, thwack of balls being lobbed back and forth on the grass tennis courts. I loved playing tennis, and I enjoyed waiting for my turn in such a blissfully relaxing manner.

Another very special part of my school days at S.M.H. was my little garden. It was one of a row of small plots in front of a beautiful mellowed brick wall and specifically divided up for us “gardener-girls”. It was situated before the Far Field and at the top of the sloping green lawn that led down to the tennis courts.



This photo shows, from left to right, my sister, Pamela (Read-Jahn) Bailey, with Amy Easter and Susanne (Nicholls) Rea on a garden bench in front of our little gardens. They were two forms above me.

My sister worked in a garden plot, too. I absolutely loved working in mine. I can't remember now whether I shared the plot with Pam, or with a girl in my own form. Our mother was a marvellous gardener and it was from her, and from working in this little plot, that I became hooked on gardening. One of my varied careers in life was as a landscape gardener and I can trace it directly to this early experience at school.

This photo is of me at age 15 in 1959, with the school Sanatorium in the background. The little shed between me and the San could well have been where we took our pottery classes.



I kept falling ill with Glandular Fever. I had it seven times during my young life. Instead of going home to The Island one holiday time, I was sent to Frederika Woods' farm in the countryside of Sussex. She was what we boarders disdainfully called a “day-bug” in my form at S.M.H., but I liked her very much.

She was a tall, sturdy, girl with black pigtails and pink cheeks. I was to convalesce on her chicken farm. I remember having to get up at dawn every day to “muck out” the hen-coops. There was a stain on the floor inside Freddie's front door. She said it was blood

from a murder committed many, many years before. They had tried every product to wash out that stain, but it always seeped back. I held her in high esteem for that spooky fact!

I enjoyed being allowed to go for occasional walks on the Downs with a few of my form-mates. This was encouraged for our health. We would sometimes take picnics. We even smoked the occasional cigarette up on the Downs and got away with it!

Then there was the blissful day when I was told my maths were so bad that I need not study it any longer, taking simple arithmetic instead. I remember regretting ending my studies of algebra and geometry when I arrived at Columbia University in New York City because their entrance examination included English and Mathematics. I got Honours in English BUT, in the maths exam I was required to plot a parabola and come up with the axis of symmetry and thus the answer to the question. There were about 75 people in the huge hall who were sitting this exam. Eventually I noticed the presence of the black-gowned provost looming over my desk, hands behind his back, peering down at me bemusedly over his half-glasses. Having forgotten the formula (never, actually, having even learned it at S.M.H.!), my parabola wandered across my blue-book entrance paper, across the desk, down the table-leg and, as I was wondering how to “bring it back”, the provost assured me my exam was over and I may leave the room. I got four questions out of a hundred correct in that exam, thanks to the wisdom of S.M.H.! I was accepted into Columbia University regardless, because of my English proficiency, but forced to take remedial maths. The professor got exasperated with me when stating, “If $x = y$, then ...” and I responded, “Why? Why *should* $x = y$? If x is x then surely y is simply y ?” His answer was to tell me I’d do far better in the Philosophy Department’s classes.

Our S.M.H. dining room had a reproduction of Frans Hals’ “The Laughing Cavalier” painting, whose eyes would stare at me if I did something naughty. I hated the school sausages and would stuff them behind the radiators. When my sister, Pam, and I went back for our only school reunion in 1999, forty years after Pam had left S.M.H., we looked behind the radiators to see if those ancient carcasses were still there; of course they weren’t!

I remember I had a pash on Mariam Kanoo and felt it very unfair that my idol didn’t have to eat the sausages because of her religion. I had a pash on Miriam because I was “ordered” by older girls to have a pash on one of them. I chose her because she was exotic. I must have known back then how much I was to love seeing foreign lands. Here Miriam with her skirt spread out all around her, near the pupils’ gardens.



Susanne (Nicholls) Rea visited Miriam in Bahrain recently. Miriam married her cousin straight after leaving school and has lived in Bahrain ever since. Miriam is also known as Om Adel, that means mother of Adel, her oldest son. She has a son, four daughters and grandchildren now!

The school was very good about showing us films from time to time. One of them has stayed forever in my mind. It was Paramount Pictures' 1954 "Elephant Walk". I think it was the first film I'd ever seen. It starred Elizabeth Taylor and Peter Finch. She was the young bride of a rich planter who finds herself the only white woman at the Elephant Walk tea plantation in what was then called British Ceylon. I remember Miss Dolphin sighing with delight over Peter Finch, the man she referred to as her "unrequited love," causing us girls fits of giggles. That film opened up the world of travel in my mind.

When Pam and I returned to England from overseas (Australia and the U.S.A., respectively) in 1999 for the only reunion we've ever been to at S.M.H., nobody came from my form whatsoever (I'd left in 1961) and the only returning girls I remembered from Pam's form, two years ahead of me, were Rowena Cook, Amy Easter, Sarah Boyd, and Carol Pink, whom we used to call Pinkie. Rowan (Cawkell) Fookes didn't attend that reunion but she has remained my best friend throughout our lives, even though she was in Pam's form. In fact, she is the godmother of my only son.

Often at school I felt very lonely. I took my teddy bear to school with me, and have him with me to this day, even at age 71; he's survived my "loving" remarkably well! He has one brown original eye and one blue button eye. My mother was in the throes of removing both his eyes when I was very young,



fearing I would pull them out and hurt myself with their metal prongs. I wailed so loudly that she stopped, but one had already been thrown away. Poor Teddy was one-eyed for years. When I arrived at S.M.H. I acquired a blue button from the sewing room and gave him his second eye back. Now he resembles an Australian Sheepdog with his bi-coloured heterochromatic eyes.

There was a red-headed girl at S.M.H. Apparently she was expelled because she'd been caught "in the act" with one of the choirboys at St. Mark's Church. This was staggering news to my friends and me because we had no idea whatsoever what "in the act" actually meant! I wonder who she was and what form she was in...which leads me to my own memories of boys.

The high wall of St. Mary's Hall's grounds separating it from Eastern Road in Brighton was topped with broken glass. I never learned whether this nasty glass was to keep us girls in or boys out.

In my form I had a friend called Elizabeth "Busy" Bailey. Her parents lived far away so one half-term she was coming to stay with me at my home on The Island at Thames Ditton. I was 12 or 13 years old and this was the first occasion I was permitted to take the train from the village up to London to meet Busy and to bring her home. The train was one of those that had a walkway through the middle of each carriage. When I got on I noticed a man in a raincoat and hat seated in the middle of the bench at the end of my carriage. There were no other passengers. I kept my eye on him, thinking he looked suspicious. At one of the next stops another man got on and chose to sit directly opposite me, where Raincoat Man couldn't see him. The new man suddenly stood up and leaned over me, and, to my horror, I saw a long "balloon" getting bigger and bigger snaking upwards from his clothing...and I realised he was about to attack me—not that I had any idea whatsoever at that time what it was he intended to do. I opened my mouth to scream but no sound came out, as Raincoat Man was to later tell me, and who had rushed to my rescue. Raincoat Man pulled on the cord to stop the train. Rape-Man flung the train door wide open and leapt out. I remember the bang, bang of the swinging train door before I collapsed in a heap.

Raincoat Man stayed with me all the way to Victoria Station where the station police met us, took his statement, and let him go. In a small group, the police and I went to meet Busy Bailey's incoming train. Imagine her surprise, seeing me being marched toward her by two policemen and a policewoman! We two girls were driven back to Thames Ditton in a big, black, police car. Mother was appropriately shocked and horrified. My sister, Pam, was banned from the room. More interviews were taken and eventually the police, armed with a good sketch of Rape-Man, departed. Back at St. Mary's Hall after half-term, Busy and I had the best story of all to tell and we milked it for all it was worth! It wasn't till years later that I was once again allowed alone on a train and not till then did I truly appreciate how close to disaster I'd come.



Busy Bailey, half-term on The Island, Thames Ditton.

Miss Orme was the school housekeeper, and in charge of food and the kitchen. She'd make me sit in the basement to finish my chips or any other unwanted ghastly dish. The chips had congealed white fat on them. I was kept in the basement until I was either sick (then off to the San!) or ate it all up. To this day I find I can eat absolutely anything whatsoever that I am served, and you can thank Miss Orme for that. A good lesson learned, presumably.

Miss Orme was a holy terror, with clanking irons on her legs (or was it just one leg?). The poor woman had had polio, but I had little empathy or compassion in those days. It was either in 1999 with Pam, or in the early 2000s, when I'd returned with a friend to show him the school I'd gone to, I came across her in one of the garden areas. It was definitely Miss Orme, with the same leg-irons, but with white hair, as I recall. She must have been very old by then. At school I used to already think she was ancient! She shielded her eyes and I must have told her that I was an Old Girl. She squinted at me saying, "Well, if it isn't one of the Read-Jahn sisters come back to haunt me!" I can't imagine she was still working there; perhaps she, too, had returned for a visit. On my visit back to S.M.H. in the early 2000s, I was on a guided tour being taken around the school. Part of the tour included going into the Headmistress' office. The teacher guiding us told us that there, on the wall behind the Head's desk, had once been a horrible stain, caused by the throwing of an inkwell at the then head, Miss Doris Conrady, and the naughty girl had been expelled. "Ah", said I, "I well know who that was—Rowan (Cawkell) Fookes. She's been my best friend all my life, and she was expelled from the next boarding school she was sent to, too!" I've always admired Rowan for her spunk. She loathed Connie and literally "let her have it"!

Thinking back to Miss Orme, the kitchen, under her watchful eye, used to have a giant pot boiling away on the stove in the mornings, filled with what must have been over a hundred eggs. My sister, Pam, and our friend, Rowan Fookes, loathed those eggs because both of them swear they found chicken beaks in them. Neither of them will touch them to this day!

Some of the desserts at school weren't too bad. One was called flies' graveyard. I think it was perhaps tapioca with raisins or sultanas in it. It definitely resembled a graveyard of flies but was actually quite tasty!

The library, that dreadful place at the top of the school: back in my time it was not carpeted. This was a Good Thing because some mean teacher refused to let me go to the lavatory when I'd asked permission to leave the room. I have this memory of us girls standing in a line with books on our heads, learning "correct young ladies' posture". Naturally, eventually nature took over and I left a humiliating puddle on the floor, and got into big trouble for that.

Miss Conrady had piercing eyes. One day in morning assembly Connie informed us that a "very bad girl had stolen apples from the gardener's tree". She commanded the thief immediately to stand up in front of the school. I was not the culprit but, to my dismay,

when I saw Connie's eyes sweeping the room, I felt myself go crimson with shame. She always managed to make me feel I was the wicked one, even when I wasn't!

At one point I actually made it to some sort of "prefect" status at school. I don't remember what my exact title was, or the look of the badge I wore, but it all came to a sudden end. As I wrote in 1970 in an in-house newspaper put out by a major New York legal firm where I worked:

"School memories of the day the Headmistress caught a gangling me up a tree, watching the neighbouring Brighton College Boys School setting out on their morning constitutional. The shame and humiliation of being brought up on the school stage at the next morning assembly to be formally 'de-pre'd'— a nasty, rather military experience, whereby the Headmistress lectures you before the entire school, and rips your badge from your cardigan. You spend the next hour in the sewing room, mending the torn cardigan and pondering on the evil of your 15-year-old ways."

The sewing experience: this was a useful learning experience for me because, after that, whenever I was truly "naughty" I was sent off to the sewing room. There I was given a piece of Belgian linen and ordered to create something beautiful. I drew a peacock on a branch with apple blossoms and spent the rest of all my seven years at S.M.H., when naughty, creating a lovely "punishment piece". When I left school, I hadn't quite finished the peacock's tail. Years later, my sister told me I had to finish what I had started, but with all the tears and pain that piece had given me, I refused, so Pam finished it for me—hence the tail of the bird is slightly different from the rest of the work. But, the lesson of looking for the silver lining in what life hands one did get learned.



Another great benefit of going to this boarding school was that I learned to get on with all types of people, coming from many different backgrounds, including a couple of princesses. One was from Thailand and another from Africa. To this day I find I can easily talk to anybody, from aristocracy or even the occasional royal, down to the man sweeping the street; this has been a great help in all the countries I've lived in and all the different types of work I've done, and all the very different people I have met.

When I was almost 12, on May 30, 1956 Her Royal Highness the Princess Victoria Alexandra Alice Mary, Princess Royal and Countess of Harewood came to inspect our Girl Guide troop at St. Mary's Hall. Princess Mary had been made President of the Girl Guide Association in 1920. Here's a photo showing the event, with the names of the girls seen in the photograph.

Left to right:

Tessa (last name?); Vivienne Ottaway; Rowan (Cawkell) Fookes; Phyllida Bennett; Pamela (Read-Jahn) Bailey, Shirley Foulsham; Shirley Read-Jahn; Celia Kimmins; Nicola Bruton; Anne Jarvis; Gloria Smart; Gillian (last name?). Princess Mary and the Headmistress, Doris Conrady.



Later on that same day, our school prize-giving ceremony was held in "The Dome" adjacent to the Royal Pavilion in Brighton, the fantastical minaret-topped building originally intended as a stable block commissioned by the Prince Regent in 1805. I received a prize that year. My prize makes me smile now because it says it was for "Craft" but I well knew it was actually for being the best basket-weaver in the school. I

have always associated this work with, shall we say “Occupational Therapy”, so I felt a certain chagrin that I was getting that sort of a prize instead of a prize for, say, Latin! When receiving a book as my prize, the photo shows me looking away from H.R.H. the Princess Royal, the presenter of all the prizes on that occasion, and looking as if I’m about to sigh. It was Charles Dickens’ *The Old Curiosity Shop* that I was given, and I was wondering why nobody had told H.R.H. that I already owned this book! As an aside here, I’d like to point out that in the photo I am wearing Clark’s sandals. By one of life’s quirks, my son has married one of the Clark family’s daughters!



As I also wrote in 1970 in that New York City law firm in-house newsletter mentioned earlier: “Wonder of wonders—Her Royal Highness, the Princess Royal, was actually there, in person, beaming down from the stage. Panic ensued in the wings, as girls tripped over girls, practised crooking their knees for their curtsies and how to back away from royalty, fell about, ran to the lavatory, practised their one line of ‘Thank you, Madam’, and suddenly it was my turn. A hefty kick propelled me out onto the stage, flashbulbs popped, the Headmistress was all smiling teeth, as I stumbled toward The Royal Outstretched Hand, bent both knees, wobbled dangerously, and promptly forgot my line. I hung onto her long grey glove, seeing only the missing pearl button, until she pressed a book, my prize, into my hand, and somebody steered me gently away.”

Latin is, of course, the basis of all romance languages. I knew I wanted to travel so I took Latin and French at S.M.H., then went on to learn Spanish, and all three were of great help to me in some of the fields of work I’ve been involved in. In my landscape designer job knowing Latin helped me no end with the scientific botanical names of plants. Knowing Spanish was imperative for speaking to the Mexican gardeners in my California business. I’ve also been an interpreter and, when in 1983 I co-founded the

San Francisco Jazz Festival (now SFJAZZ), knowing languages definitely helped me work with our international performers. One of my fondest memories of returning to S.M.H. in 1999 was seeing Miss Bristol there, my much beloved Latin teacher. I told her that her teaching had been of the most help to me out of **all** my learning at S.M.H. Tears stood in her eyes and she seemed very grateful for the recognition. This made me, in turn, very pleased because I'd always admired this teacher.

I did my A levels after leaving S.M.H., when I was at the then-named Regent Street Polytechnic in London, affiliated to London University. It's now known as The University of Westminster. The following memory has relevance inasmuch as my French teacher at S.M.H. clearly taught me well.

I did my written French A level then had to go into the office of the man who would pass me, or not, in the French A level oral exam. So I timidly knocked on his door. "*Entrez!*" So I entrez'd and saw a long Persian runner leading straight up to his big, dark, desk. He sat behind it, wearing *pince nez*, and holding his fingertips together at his nose. With beating heart I started to walk along the runner and promptly tripped on a *ruche* in the carpet. As I fell, I yelped out, "*Merde!*". He passed me on the spot, exonerating me from the rest of the oral.

Sometimes as early as six each day, whatever the weather, a long crocodile of girls wound its way from St. Hilary House down to Brighton Beach for our Daily Dip, slithering and sliding over tar-covered stones. Voluminous uniform cloaks covered itchy dark blue uniform swimsuits. Three dips into the icy Atlantic, and a teeth-chattering crocodile rewound its way back up to school. We had to change into our swimming suits under our cloaks on the beach, then to swim in the sea, whatever the weather. Then we had to dry off and change back, again under our cloaks. This has helped me dress and undress discreetly on any beach to this day. I wish I'd kept my cloak...I have no idea what happened to it. This quick-change artistry has been quite beneficial to me in my middle-eastern belly dance career, too. There have been many occasions when I've had to change into or out of a performance costume quickly and discreetly in virtually open spaces, when the curtains provided either didn't fit or blew open in the wind.



Shirley in 1961 in her cloak.

We always changed our shoes from indoor to outdoor, or vice versa. We NEVER wore outdoor shoes inside the school. The cloakroom was down a corridor as you entered the side of the school at the top of the driveway. We each had a hook to hang our cloaks on. Every item of our clothing had to have specially-ordered labels bearing one's name. Before each term started, we had a list of exactly how many handkerchiefs, how many socks, how many of every single piece of clothing we were allowed to bring to school. Our parents were told they could only purchase our uniforms from approved shops. We never wore trousers. Shorts were only worn for sports. I think we were also allowed two "mufti" outfits consisting of a dress or a skirt and blouse that were only worn on certain occasions. The majority of the time we were in strict uniform including straw boaters in the summer and navy blue felt hats in winter. I'm all for uniforms because it stops the more affluent students from flaunting their name-brand clothing and making the other girls perhaps feel jealous.

My sister Pam and I both remember with dismay the Sanatorium where Sister Brown, in her starched white head-covering, administered two cures for most things that ailed you: the gargle & swallow or the gargle and spit. There was a stone trough next to the San under a cover of some sort, and that's what you spat into. I remember two more things. One was the dreaded black ointment. That was put onto any wounds you sustained. I tend to think it had iodine in it. I developed some sort of allergy to iodine and to this day cannot tolerate it. Then, when we girls reached puberty and started to menstruate, there was the queue that you had to stand in at the San to receive your "sanitary pad". This line was separated from the black ointment/gargle line by a cloth screen. It was always embarrassing to be seen in the "S.T." line...

One day, my father came over from Germany to visit my sister and me. I hadn't seen him for so many years that I honestly didn't remember what he looked like. Miss Conrady swept into my form room with her black robe flying out behind her as we all stood, chairs scraping back. I remember her saying, "Read-Jahn, step forward!" (Did they really call us by our surnames back then? I remember that, so they must have done...) Then she said, "Read-Jahn, this is your father". I saw a terrifyingly huge man holding a trilby hat and wearing a greatcoat, and who was sporting a reddish moustache. I fainted. I awoke in the San. Upon asking Sister where "Daddy" was, she told me that when I'd fainted, he had left, because they had taken me to the San.

Around the age of 12 my parents were getting divorced. One day a solicitor arrived at S.M.H. and I was told by Connie to go immediately to the Library (not the one at the top of the school, where I'd left my humiliating puddle, but the one nearer her office, as I recall). Or was it perhaps the conference room on the ground floor? It was a room we girls were never allowed in. I *think* the photo on the following page shows the room I was commanded to go to because the table and the fireplace look familiar:



At the end of the long, shiny, table sat a man with striped trousers, a bowler hat on the table, and a furred umbrella leaning next to his briefcase. He said he was there to ask me whom I wanted to live with, because now I was twelve, I could decide. I was frozen with terror, because, he said, if I chose my mother I would continue to be brought up as an English girl, but if I chose my father, I would be sent to Germany and obviously be brought up as a German. This was frightening because some of the girls had repeatedly taunted me because of my “semi-kraut” surname of Read-Jahn; this was only some years after WWII had ended. He then gently told me, “You know, my dear, I am absolutely forbidden by law to tell you that your sister chose your mother”. Naturally, I then chose my mother because there was no way I was going to be separated from my sister, Pam!

I have some hilarious memories, too. Regarding sex education, Mrs. Jackson, the scripture mistress—wearing glasses, and with her iron grey, severely cut short hair with its kirby grip holding it to one side, strode one morning into our classroom with its wooden desks and inkwells. With much scraping of chairs, we all stood. “Girls, sit!” More scraping of chairs ensued. “Today we will be learning about the birds and the bees.” Holding out first one hand in front of her and then the other, she intoned, “On the one hand we have a MAN. On the other, a WO-MAN.” Her two hands came together in a resounding prayer-position clap. “Girls, we have a child! Let us pray: Our Father, which art in Heaven...”. Gobsnacked, confused and bemused, we then proceeded to our biology class where a delicate older lady in her black robe, and with beautiful white hair swept up into a chignon, sweetly declared we would tackle the same subject. “Girls! If you kiss a boy you will become pregnant! Girls, if you wear a NYLON NIGHTDRESS you will become pregnant. Now, let us get on with the frogs I’ve brought for you to

dissect...". For years afterwards I was far too scared to ever kiss a boy. To this day I eye nylon nightdresses with suspicion.

I'm sure it was Mrs. Jackson who wore false teeth and, one day, she was enthusiastically declaiming some salient point in the Bible when she said, "Sssso, girls..." and out flew her teeth! I remember nearly bursting from trying not to laugh. I didn't dare look at any of the other girls as poor Mrs. Jackson (if the teacher was indeed she) bent down to retrieve the escapees. She had, also, I was given to understand, undergone a mastectomy and looked, for the longest time, "lop-sided". Cruel people that young girls are, we all found it weirdly funny, and something to mock. Of course, I regret that now....

Then there was the Day of the Painter. I, for one, not having a father or brothers at home, had never really seen many boys or men up close, so when a young fellow in jeans (tight jeans!) suddenly appeared on a window-washer's ladder at our classroom window with only his waist down looming into our view, the atmosphere in the classroom became electric, and, as we all gaped at the astonishing sight, I'm sure I wasn't the only girl who squeaked in excitement. The teacher glared at the window, commanded, "Girls, eyes RIGHT!" then rushed left to the window, rapping loudly on it to make him go away. His face with its mop of dark, curly, hair bent over and peered back in at our teacher. He grinned, nodded, then slid down the ladder and disappeared, to our sighs of dismay. It was the sight of that young man that made me fall in love for the first time, and ever after, with curly, dark-haired, boys and men.

When we were naughty the occasional teacher would hit our hands with a ruler; that really stung. Some of the teachers would flick chalk at us; some of them were a pretty good shot; that also stung and could, actually, have taken out an eye. Then there were a few teachers who would say, "Since we are not allowed to use corporal punishment" [ha, some did, as I say!] or, "since we are not allowed to spoil your young ladies' handwriting by giving you 100 lines to write at a time saying 'I will not do it again'", "or even to spank you, which would spoil your marriage prospects, we shall have to deal with you in another way". I was to discover that the way they referred to was punishing us "mentally".

So they would then go through your mind in one way or another, which was actually a Very Bad Idea, to my mind (pun intended). One, in particular, was Miss Dolphin, our St. Hilary House matron. When I was "bad" she'd make me go up to the top of the house, into the total, scary, dark, and stand there for however long she deemed necessary—sometimes it seemed as if it were just about the entire night. She'd creep around in her felt slippers to catch you talking after lights out, or to check you were handling your punishment properly. That is another way I learned a good lesson to make good come out of bad. I taught myself how to stand absolutely still and do what I now know is called meditation. And that's how I survived such cruel mental punishment.

Miss Dolphin and the telephone call: I used to have what I'd term "second sight," only so far as the telephone went. We were allowed the occasional phone call but that was only in the event of some serious matter coming from home. I could tell, somehow or other,

when that phone was going to ring for me. I kept that ability into my late twenties but, sadly, it's mostly gone now. One evening, when I was already dressed in my white nightgown for bed, I just knew that my mother was going to ring me. So down the stairs from the dorms in St. Hilary I flew, to take up my waiting position outside Miss Dolphin's door. The phone began to ring. After a few words she said, "I'll go and fetch her". She flung open the door and nearly tripped over me. "Why do you DO, that, girl?" said she, all a-flustered. It was, indeed, my mother, ringing to relate that my grandfather had died.

I have this next memory that I now simply cannot believe actually happened. The memory is that one evening I tried to run away from St. Hilary with another girl who had also suffered enough humiliation. I have a recollection of climbing out of a window at the back of the house and made it as far as Brighton Hospital where we stood, selling the books we'd lugged with us for a penny a tome, hoping to make enough money to catch the train up to Victoria Station and so find our way home. Mr. James, vicar of St. Mark's, our school church, walked out of the hospital and saw us. He dragged us back to school by the scruff of our necks. Of course, we were stupidly wearing our school uniform! We did have "mufti" to wear but hadn't been clever enough to think of that...so is this an authentic memory? It's definitely in my mind but my sister cannot remember this happening to me...yet I feel sure it did because I REMEMBER every detail of the adventure! I also appreciate that our memories can trick us...Besides, surely I would remember the punishment meted out to me; perhaps even the threat of expulsion—which certainly didn't happen.

I also recall that I hardly ever remembered to take a handkerchief with me to Sunday church services and that my nose seemed to be continuously running, then getting into trouble because of the mess it made on my face and clothes. My sister, Pam, and I got quite clever at communicating with each other by sign language in the church. I sat over on the left as you went in, and her form sat on the right. The sign language we used was spelled out by letter rather than by whole words. I can still do that sign language and discovered that signers in the U.S.A. (and now in Australia, too) can actually understand what I'm spelling out! There's a fascinating inclusion in the 1954 St. Mary's Hall Newsletter that shows me where my sister and I may well have learned our sign language skills.

THE DEAF-BLIND SALE.

On May 22nd Form Remove B was privileged to help the Deaf-Blind League with their sale which was held in school. The aim was to raise funds for the printing of the "Rainbow," the Braille magazine for the deaf-blind. Our first task was to learn the alphabet for the deaf with which Miss Conrady gave us help.

I assume that I was confirmed at St. Mark's around 1958, probably two years after my sister, when I was 14. I know I felt very saintly at my confirmation, and I loved the very old gossamer shawl I was lent to wear.

This is my sister, Pam, wearing one of those nun-like, tasselled, confirmation shawls. The photograph would have been taken around 1956 because she believes she was about 14 at the time.



One Sunday after church in 1959 I went on an exeat in Brighton with my sister and our mother. I rang the doorbell of a grand house in Royal Crescent looking for Victoria Burge, a day-girl in my form at S.M.H., to see if she could come out to spend the day we'd planned with us. Laurence Olivier answered the door and told me she lived next door to him, and had a little

chat with me about the fact that Victoria and I both went to the same school. In reading Tarquin Olivier's book about his father, Sir Laurence Olivier, he describes the home Olivier had in Royal Crescent at one time. Olivier was a sweet man, dressed in a baggy old cardigan and slippers and holding a pipe.

Art class was a wonderful "escape" for my loneliness at boarding school. The art teacher (I've forgotten her name; perhaps Miss Davies?) was an inspiring, gentle, kind woman whom I liked. She praised my artwork, which helped a lot! I still have the paintings I did that received "honours". I was always painting romantic pictures of far-away places. One shows a young couple dancing outdoors on the terrace of a beautiful old house, with palm-trees swaying in the gardens below.

Another kind of art that gave me pleasure was sculpture. There was a "pottery barn" set up in a small shed close to the San and I passed some happy hours in there "being creative". I made a rabbit, painted with carrots, that I have lugged with me to all the areas of the world I've lived in my long life!

Here's Bunny:



I played lacrosse (we called it lax) and, because I was short-sighted but not given glasses (I wonder why that was? I was always seated in the back of the form-room and squinting to see the blackboard), I was made goalie in some of the games. Some of the girls said they admired my bravery and courage but, in effect, I was just stolidly standing between the goalposts, not even seeing most of the balls hurtling toward me, and hoping my “armoured” body would repel them. This it fortunately did often enough!

One day Connie ordered me and a few other girls into her Headmistress’ study. She said that it had been reported that one of the girls “smelled”. She then walked all around us, sniffing each of us in turn. When she reached me, she poked me, telling me, “It’s you, you smell!” I was mortified. I must have just reached puberty. Nobody had told me that this would involve needing an anti-perspirant. She sent me off to see Sister at the San where I was given some sort of roll-on deodorant (Mum? Odorono?). After that humiliating experience, the story was whispered around to a lot of the girls, and I suffered some nasty jibing.

Here’s a photograph of my form at St. Mary’s Hall. I do not recall which year it was taken. I’m in the back row, sixth from the left. I’ve mentioned the day-girl, Victoria Burge, in this story, whom I went to see on an exeat and found Sir Laurence Olivier instead. She is pictured third row down from the top, and third from the right. My best friend Kuabrut “Nong” Sivadiith from Bangkok is also in the very back row, first person on the right. The African princess, Sharifa Salawu, is pictured in the second row, first person on the left. Unfortunately, another person I’ve mentioned in my story, Freddie Woods, is not seen in this photograph. Vice Head, Miss Farmer, and Headmistress, Miss Conrady, are in the third row down, in the middle. I don’t remember the name of the teacher next to Connie, but she’s very familiar to me.



I quite enjoyed music class. We had Gwendolyn Wyn as our music mistress—a small woman from Wales originally, I believe. She taught me an everlastingly good lesson: how to listen to music using one's imagination. I sat there entranced, visualising knights in armour, horses rushing across fields, all sorts of beautiful visions, while she played music for us on her old gramophone. We learned to sing from her, too, but unfortunately, I lost my singing voice after those several bouts of Glandular Fever. Miss Wyn sometimes let me pump the organ up on the stage. I think I had to go behind it to accomplish that.

We learned to dance at St. Mary's Hall—the waltz, the foxtrot, and all the other dances that the teachers expected we'd need in our adult lives. I always had to play the role of the man, being tall. I believe some girls were lucky enough to go to dances (perhaps at Brighton College?) where they danced with boys, but I have absolutely no memory whatsoever of ever being allowed to enjoy that. To learn these dances we'd have sessions in the gym with Miss Wyn at the piano, chanting out, "one, two three, girls, let's all look *alluring*, yes?" Alluring, no, in our elasticated navy-blue baggy bloomers and white plimsolls.

As you crept up the stairs to Connie's study you passed paintings of previous headmistresses. It was always with heart pounding that you'd creep up those stairs and past those eyes glaring down at you, then past Connie's study as fast as you could scamper to your classroom, hoping she wouldn't be coming out as you flew past....

Once a week we went to the school "tuck room" to get our allotment of a quarter pound of sweets to last us one week. Now I think that small amount was a really good idea for the health of our teeth, but at that time, only ¼ lb. sweets was really hard to bear! For sports we wore, over our white underwear, those navy blue bloomers I've mentioned above. I always made sure I was wearing those under my skirt going into the tuck room because that's where I surreptitiously hid extra sweets. Then came the day when the elastic broke and my naughtiness dropped into plain sight. That happened to other girls, too, I've heard!

At the bottom of the sloping lawn, before you went to the Far Field, there were clay tennis courts, with trees and bushes behind them. This is where we loved to build Indian grass huts and go off into a fantasy world of a cowboys and Red Indians game. We used to build a little tepee made of sticks swiped from the gardener's wood pile, and rough grass pulled from the verges of the Far Field. On the very occasional times that I saw my sister and could play with her, I was always Running Flat Foot, the Indian, who'd get tied to one of the trees and whooped at by the others, while my sister, Pam, was always The Indian Chief. She was in two forms higher than me, so it's not surprising!

I enjoyed drama. I can't remember who our teacher was. I remember two plays I was in. One was a French play and to this day I remember the words I had to say. I was a guard, supposedly meant to stop the enemy coming over a wall or through a gate. A "man" (another tall girl dressed rather unconvincingly as a man) strode through the gate.

I had to say, raising my pretend rifle menacingly, “Qui va la?” and he/she responded, “Je suis le colonel!” So I let him in. That’s all I remember of my part. In another theatrical production I was one of the Three Musketeers. I remember wearing hideous bloomers over tights, a floppy hat with a feather, and a fake moustache. I had to stride onto the stage and start proclaiming my lines. I remember entering, standing centre-stage, and totally freezing in place. I couldn’t bring myself to say a single word. So I ran off-stage in utter embarrassment. I used to sometimes think of that ignominious beginning to my “stage career” when, so many years later on in life, I was acting in a small repertory house in California in a number of plays, once even having the lead role; no freezing allowed there!

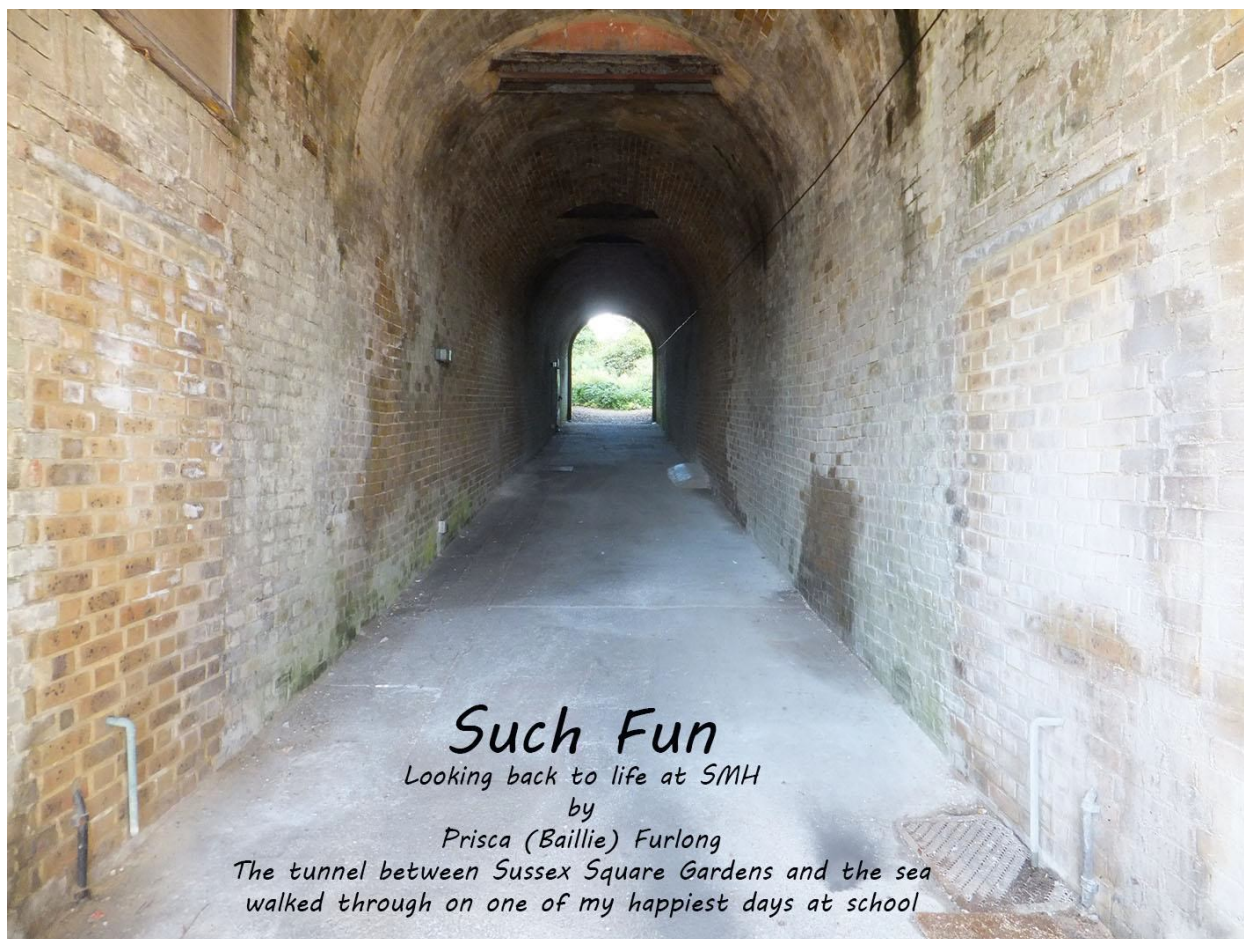
When I think of historical events that touched my school life, I think of the girl at school in my time there whose claim to fame was that her grandparents had gone down in the Titanic. Her tales about the event always fascinated me. When some of the 5,000 artefacts from the unfortunate ship, including a 17-ton piece of the Titanic itself, were brought for display to a museum in San Francisco, I was one of the first in line to stare at them, including found jewellery that could even have been worn by this S.M.H. girl’s grandmother.

We played table tennis at school. There was a ping-pong table in St. Hilary House. I developed a mean back-hand and enjoy the game to this day. I also learned to play chess at school and must have become quite good at it because I have a recollection of going to a chess competition and winning the game against my opponent. We chess-players must have been representing S.M.H., because I can’t imagine where else I would have played it.

One of the girls in my form was, I think, from the West Indies. Her name was Lucinda Tudor.

Here is a photo of Lucinda and me (both nearly 18) standing in front of the St. Mary’s Hall front door in 1962 upon the occasion of our return to the school to receive our G.C.E. diplomas.





Such Fun

*Looking back to life at SMH
by*

Prisca (Baillie) Furlong

*The tunnel between Sussex Square Gardens and the sea
walked through on one of my happiest days at school*

I'd always said I wanted to go to boarding school – it came over as 'such fun' in the children's fiction I used to read. My father was delighted as he wanted me to have the best possible education and he knew a lot about St Mary's Hall as his mother, Nora Strong, had attended the school in the late 1800s. She too had been the daughter of a clergyman, as was I.

We lived in a lovely country vicarage in Dorset and as well as being in charge of two parishes and a teacher / sometime Chaplain at Milton Abbey public school my father had a mushroom farm and later a chicken farm. This was in order to earn enough money to send my brother to Milton Abbey School.

When I said I wanted to go to boarding school my father could not possibly have afforded all my fees too and so he got me coaching lessons by a local very sweet but rather asthmatic teacher just down the lane, in order for me to stand a chance of getting a Scholarship for Clergy Daughters.

The only really valuable part of the coaching I remember was not so much the maths and English lessons but the preparation for the interview with the headmistress – Miss Conrady. 'You will be asked where you live', Miss Ashford told me, 'what will

you say?' 'I'll say I live in a village in Dorset called Milborne St Andrew'. 'You could,' she said, 'but it might be better to show you have a good vocabulary and say – I live in a village in Dorset called Milborne St Andrew that is equidistant between the towns of Dorchester and Blandford'.

My parents drove me the 120 miles to Brighton for the interview with Miss Conrady (I seem to remember I took the scholarship exam a few weeks before the interview at my primary school, overseen by the dragon of a headmistress there). Every time I was driven by my father to SMH we did not go via the shorter route along the coast but via the cathedral cities route – Salisbury and Winchester - (God knows why but I'm blessed if I do as it took for ever and I hated long car journeys).

On arrival I loved the look of the school. I remember climbing the main stairs for the first time and Connie greeting my parents and me at her study door. After introductions my parents were taken off for a cup of tea and I had my interview. Connie appeared kind and smiled a lot (when I became a pupil she usually had a much sterner demeanour). And guess what? She actually asked me the question I had been so well prepared for! I swear it was the word 'equidistant' that won me the scholarship!

My father was so pleased and as proud as punch when, after the interview, Connie told us all that she was happy to offer me the scholarship. We went to have a meal at a hotel on the seafront to celebrate. Then we went to the designated shop to buy my uniform. During the summer holidays before my first autumn term an elderly maiden aunt who was an excellent seamstress made me two mufti dresses, one blue, one green and both with white collars. When I started wearing them at school they felt like yet another uniform as they were far too formal and all the other girls had casual skirts and jumpers!

I remember packing my trunk with my mother for the first time – I had a brand new sponge bag, and dressing gown both of which I loved. The uniform went in and also some drawing materials as we were told to take a hobby for weekends...oh... and a new writing pad, envelopes and stamps for writing home.

I was in Elliott House. After living in a Georgian vicarage this felt like a horrible modern hospital and never felt like home. Six years later, for my very last week at SMH, Elliott was commandeered as the San because there was an epidemic of 'flu and I was evacuated to St Hilary House – what bliss – a place that actually felt like home (more on this later) and I wished I had spent all my years at SMH boarding here rather than in Elliott.

Because the girls in St Hilary and Babington houses had a bit of a walk to get to school, Elliott girls were required to walk right round the sloping field and enter the school by the back door every morning (though we came straight down the drive in the evenings).

I was in a dorm for five which included Judy Littler (daughter of impresario Emil Littler) - she was the captain of the dorm and had to check that we all made neat hospital corners and kept our cupboards tidy; Jeanette Woodcock, whose parents lived in Aden;

Mary Browne, whose father was a gynaecologist at Guys in London and Yurie Uyama whose father was a Japanese diplomat in London. Yurie was a brilliant artist and in fact was very good at everything including the piano and maths and she taught us how to do origami and make beautiful Christmas decorations that term.

On my first morning it was a shock to my system as it was the first time in my life I had to get out of bed without having had a cup of tea which my mother always brought to me first thing in the morning (spoilt or what!). By the time I had walked round the sloping field and got in the dining-room for breakfast I was feeling very faint and sick and couldn't face anything to eat or drink. I must have been as white as a sheet because someone told Jill Smith, who was sitting next to me, to take me to the San. Jill, who was in Transition, was very kind and asked me if I was feeling home sick. She was a veteran having been at the school since the age of 8 or 9. Her parents lived in Borneo and she was used to being away from them perhaps all year. I remember she was wearing a blue gingham apron – as all in prep and transition classes did in those days for meals.

Most of the time I loved school, all the girls were lovely as were most of the teachers. I made three friends for life during my first year: Jane Amherst-Clark, Corinne Hannant and Lindsey Heath. All were day-bugs though Corinne and Lindsey both had a taste of weekly-boarding for a term or two. Mary Browne and Judy Littler were weekly-boarders, Jeanette Woodcock went home to an aunt most weekends and Yurie was usually taken out for the weekends too. So the weekends became very lonely for me in my first term.

We had prep for an hour and a half on Saturday mornings, then an iced bun and bottle of milk and then we were free until lunchtime. With no close friends around I usually went to one of the piano practice rooms to play the three pieces I knew from memory over and over and over again and sometimes try out amateur attempts at improvisation. By the second term someone had suggested to my parents that I should have 'extra' piano lessons and so I had the lovely and patient Miss Bowell (who became Mrs Hills). In my second year I had Ratty. Both realised I was never going to go far as I had a real problem with sight reading and preferred to play by ear and memory – but I loved music and the lessons nevertheless.

The little outhouse beside the back door of the school, that became a mouse / hamster pet house, was originally where all the second-hand lacrosse boots were kept. Within my first week I needed to be kitted out and this was when and where Jane Amherst-Clark (Watson) became one of my best friends. Jane was a veteran as she had been in Transition and was not a new girl in the first form, unlike me. She was put in charge of kitting out people with right-sized boots. When I was still feeling a little homesick in my first weeks Jane was the perfect antidote – a lovely, practical and very kind girl with a good sense of humour. She is still exactly the same 52 years later and still serving the school - now in the role of SMHA secretary!

We were allowed 4 weekend exeats each term and throughout my years at SMH I regularly went to stay with Jane, Corinne or Lindsey and their lovely families and occasionally they came, individually, to stay for a week with me in Dorset in the

holidays. Other lovely days out I had with Philippa Johnson, Binty Ballantyne and Marylyn Slee. I also remember Yurie's parents taking me out with Yurie one weekend for my first experience of Japanese food at a restaurant in Brighton. With Binty I went to see the film Dr Zhivago. Her mother dropped us off at the cinema but it was PG and we were under age and so she had to buy a ticket for herself too and come in with us – leaving after the lights went down!

One very sad memory from my first year was of praying for many days in assembly for Anne Lenigan – a beautiful and talented sixth former who had been critically injured in a car accident while out on a weekend exeat and was lying in a coma. There was a shadow over the whole school at that time. I only knew her by sight but knowing people by sight at SMH meant you passed them regularly in corridors etc. and had eye contact and if they smiled, and by the way they smiled at you, you knew something of the beauty of their souls. This girl was beautiful inside and out and when she died at the end of that week of prayers we all were devastated. A memorial cut-glass rose bowl was made for her and stood on the table in the front hall. It was still there when I left the school and I wonder if it remained there until the school closed?

In my first weeks I really only felt homesick when it was dark or if there was no-one around. One of the worst times was on a Saturday after watching a film on the old school projector – 'Whistle Down The Wind'. I loved the film and was able to lose myself in the story but when it finished it was a cold, dark and lonely evening with none of my day-bug or weekly-boarder friends around. How I wished I was in Hilary House as most of my form that boarded there were full-boarders!

Miss Jones, the games mistress was my first form mistress. She was young and more one of the 'older' girls than one of the staff, so our classroom was always bright, breezy and carefree. How very different it was the year when Mrs Webb, the French teacher, was my form mistress – she seemed to have it in for me from the word go – probably because French was my worst subject. That year we had a school fair and I decided to do fortune telling at 3d. a go. I was given permission to set up a table and two chairs in the gardener's shed next to the old san. I moved all the tools to one end, installed the table and chairs, put a note on the door and sat in the semi-darkness waiting for my first customer. My heart dropped when Mrs Webb walked through the door! I shuffled the pack of cards and thought fast... to this day I cannot remember what tale I concocted for her but she seemed amused as she exited the shed.

I really liked all the teachers that ever taught me at SMH with the exception of Mrs Webb. Miss Farmer was a great geography teacher and a very kind person. We went on a school trip once on a coach through some windy Sussex lanes. I was feeling very travel-sick and Miss Farmer was very kind providing a sick bag and emptying it for me when we got to a lovely little olde-worlde teahouse and stopped for a cup of tea and toasted teacakes – miraculously I was so fully recovered I relished the treat, as did everyone else.

Miss Crowley was our brilliant English teacher. From starting with her I got 'A' grades most of the time. She was excellent on composition, probably because she had been a journalist and I think that it was her love of English composition that she instilled in me that gave me a firm grounding to become a freelance journalist / writer and to set up a small publishing company.

Miss Sykes was a great games teacher and she encouraged me to join the Under 16 Lacrosse team and then the 1st team. I loved playing Lacrosse and particularly playing in the away matches to be occupied on Saturdays and get a jolly good tea at other schools. On one occasion my parents came all the way from Dorset to watch me play in a game at Bexhill. Bexhill had a brilliant Lacrosse team and were slaughtering us 19/0. I was 3rd Man on the defence side (I usually played 3rd Home on the attack). I was so fed up with us not getting any goals that when I had the ball in my net and should have passed it to one of our attack side I belted beneath and between all the much taller opponent girls, cradling away, and whacked the ball into the goal myself. We may have lost 19/1 but it made the day for my father – first a scholarship and now a goal – he could hardly contain his pride!

I adored tennis too but was not amongst the best. I too, like Shirley Read-Jahn, remember sunbathing on the high bank of the far field, waiting for my turn to play. Unlike Shirley's experience on the two occasions when we were taken to Wimbledon it wasn't raining and the sun shone. I remember watching Pancho Gonzales on court 1 and being so impressed because he played so well and must have been about 40 at the time. Mrs Egg wanted to take some of us for a second trip to Wimbledon that week but it didn't come off – probably just as well because it was revision week for our final GCE O'level – Bible Knowledge. I think I was the only one in the class that failed the exam and had to retake it the next term – when I passed. This was a moment when my clergyman father cannot have been too proud of me. I put it down to the fact that I had spent every available moment watching Wimbledon on TV instead of revising – ridiculous to have GCE exams around the time of Wimbledon!!

Talking of revision for exams – I have to thank Viv Straiton (Taylor), Patricia Hillier-Fry, Wendy Bland and Lindsay Still for initiating me into the best possible way to revise (clearly forgotten during the last Wimbledon week in 5th form!). These girls were in the form above me but in my second year I was put in a dorm with them. In exam weeks, every night after lights out, these girls would take their revision books and a torch and climb the shelves of their built in cupboards (that lined the end of the dorm) open the big overhead cupboard doors and climb in, almost but not quite shutting the doors behind them. I took their lead and did the same. We studied for a couple of hours each night by torch light. They told me that if you did intensive revision before falling asleep, for the next-day exam, it would all be fresh in your mind for that day... before being forgotten again. They were right! We all did exceptionally well in our exams that year!

Miss Davies who came to the school as headmistress in 1965 was a breath of fresh air after the antiquated (Victorian) values of Miss Conrady. She modernised the school physically and in mental outlook. Thanks to her we acquired the outside corridor, new

classrooms and the dining-room moved to the basement, all within a very short time. And we had SO MUCH top quality music exposure thanks to 'Noddy'. She brought in 'Ratty' who bludgeoned us into doing the best we possibly could so that when our Choral Society (of which I was an avid member), together with Brighton College's performed the British premiere of Kodaly's Psalmus Hungaricus we received a glowing review in the national newspapers from the critics that came down from London. Poor 'Ratty' would have loved to have conducted us for the 'Messiah' with Brighton College but in a still male dominated world Mr Lawson of BC felt he was the only one who could possibly do it. At the final rehearsal 'Ratty' was put in a position to claim her wish – Lawson got so carried away conducting the Hallelujah chorus that he fell off his rostrum backwards landing on his wrists. He broke them both. You would have thought, wouldn't you, that he would have conceded at that point? But no – he insisted on conducting with his wrists in plasters. We really enjoyed performing at the concert but I do wonder if it came over as somewhat of a stiff performance!

Jimmy Blades, the world famous percussionist brought an enormous Chinese gong to the school hall for a talk he gave us. This was the very gong sounded at the beginning of Rank films. He gave us a very tender demonstration of its sound but told us if he were to strike it hard enough it would literally bring the school hall down. Anthony Hopkins (the famous actor and musician) came to the school when he was still quite young and we all fell in love with his easy charm – he played the piano beautifully for us and was so entertaining.

We attended the Brighton Music festival every year and heard Jacqueline Dupres performing Elgar's Cello concerto conducted by her husband and the likes of Ashkenazy playing a piano concerto and another of my favourites - the wonderful conductor Carlo Maria Guilini. Jacqueline Dupres wore a burgundy dress and mismatched scarlet shoes (or the other way round – I can't quite remember now). She played with wild abandon and her cello string snapped twice – little did we know then that tragedy was to take over her life shortly afterwards.

I joined the girl guides with my friend Lindsey Heath – mainly to get the chance to go camping once a year which would mean another weekend away from the lonely boredom when Elliott house was virtually empty of young life at weekends apart from me and one or two other girls in different forms. The first year we camped with our leader Miss Stokes in the park in the western end of Brighton. There had been a murder there quite recently and when one of us picked up a tent peg mallet and made a shadow with it by torchlight outside one of the tents we frightened the girls inside half to death. I can't remember if I was the culprit or someone else but the upshot was that the following year we had to camp on the grass tennis court above the far field on site! But we had a great time anyway and I remember Noddy joined us one afternoon with a huge bowl of cherries and we had a spitting competition (on her instigation) to see who could spit the cherry stones the furthest! I cannot imagine Connie suggesting such a thing!!

We had a wonderful skiing holiday to Lech in Austria one Easter holiday. Mrs Egg and her husband took us and how we enjoyed her liberal attitude to life – there was a lot of

kissing going on with one of the three schoolboys that accompanied us on the trip, on the train on the way out. He was Nikki Wood and went to the French Lycee in London. (She was a very pretty 3rd former from our school!). She dumped him in Lech and took up with another boy there. Corinne, Jane, Lindsey and I had a great time – our travelling gear was smart new trouser suits (all the rage at the time). Poor Corinne became ill with glandular fever while there and so did not do much skiing. I managed to wrench my knee saving myself from going over the side of a mountain, with a ridiculously angled snow plough halt on our last day. The instructor had to bandage my knee and how I ever got down the mountain I really don't know. The good thing about it was that the good looking Nikki Wood volunteered to carry my suitcase for me, as well as his own, on the homeward journey!

I loved the summer-time weekend afternoons spent at Blackrock outdoor seawater swimming pool – a welcome change after the winter freezing croc walks along the front or to the Downs. How that walk to the Downs has changed now! When I returned for the school reunion and unveiling of the blue plaque on the school wall a couple of years or so ago, I went one evening to try to walk to the Downs along our original route. I lost my way as it had all changed and was so built up. I was told by friends later that this is a really rough area of town now – how sad!

Another summer event that was a highlight of my time at the school was a birthday party for my form-mate Sally Ruffet. Sally was in Hilary house and she had her party in the Sussex Square gardens – a lovely picnic tea-party. Later we went down the underground tunnel from the gardens to the sea. It was a scorching hot early summer evening and because some of the girls in the party had their life-saving badges we were allowed to swim out to the end of the pier in water that, uncharacteristically, had the really calm quality of a millpool that evening. We floated and trod water there for about half-an-hour. It was a blissful and magical interlude.

I left school in December 1969 after my first term in Lower VI. My father had been appointed to be Anglican Chaplain to Peru and he felt that if he left me in England in Brighton in the drug infested late 60s / early 70s I might be in danger!! I was actually very pleased because I would not have missed the experience of living in Peru for all the world. Ironically he got me into Markham College in Lima (the British independent school for boys there – mostly Peruvian intake but many ex-pat sons too) and outside our VI form block window the previous year pupils had grown marijuana (it was later harvested for personal use by a couple of the young teachers!!).

I remember being collected by my parents during the last month at school to be taken to London for the weekend to buy appropriate outfits for our new life in Peru. We went to the Army and Navy stores and I was kitted out with some really lovely outfits including a Twiggy creation long evening gown. My mother and I bought tennis dresses and new racquets as we had been told we would be members of the Lima Cricket club which had many clay tennis courts. My father was fitted for various suits. Three years later I accompanied my mother there again as my father needed a new jacket for one of the suits – 'I don't suppose you remember my husband' she said to the tailor. 'Oh yes I do,'

said he 'the rather corpulent gentleman'! – Spot on! My poor father had suffered with asthmatic breathing problems and his steroid medication had helped to cause the corpulence.

During my last week at school, as mentioned before I was in Hilary house. Miss Payne was lovely, treating us as adults. I remember being in the common room one evening where she was admiring our dresses – we VI form girls were off to a ball at Ardingly College. Of course I was wearing my new Twiggy creation and felt very grown up at sixteen going on seventeen.

I had such a good evening at Ardingly, due in no small part to my dress, I'm sure. No sooner had we got in the door than one rather nice looking dark boy (my favourite sort) came up to me, took me by the hand and we danced all evening, even winning the prize for the best dancers (a box each of matchmaker chocolate sticks) – which was amazing as I had never been to a dance before... he must have been an excellent dancer himself to bring anything out in me!

And so I left SMH on a very high note. Perhaps I wasn't an academic high flyer but I had been prepared so well by the institution and its values to hold my head high with confidence wherever I walked in life; to always be considerate to others and value everyone's contribution however small or great.

Five months later I knew my wonderful old school could be called upon to help in a crisis - that being the devastating earthquake in Peru of 31st May 1970. It was the longest duration earthquake ever recorded at the time and it killed at least 50,000 people. It shocked me to the core. My form master's family had been wiped out in Caras - a small town near the epicentre and the school in that town had been destroyed. My new headmaster wrote to all the Headmasters' Conference schools in England to ask for monetary donations to help rebuild a new school in Caras. And I wrote to Noddy in the same vein.

Noddy organised the girls to do some fundraising and the result was a very generous cheque to help the cause. Within a year a new school rose up in Caras out of the devastation and chaos of that dreadful earthquake. What a wonderful example of the essence of our school prayer: 'make this school as a field which the Lord hath blessed...' and '... 'stablish we pray thee the thing that thou has wrought in us that whatsoever things are true, pure, lovely and of good report shall here forever flourish and abound...'. The section '... exalt it with a wider usefulness...' has been exemplified countless times that I am aware of with the great and equally valuable 'lowly' works old girls have gone on to perform in life and the joy they have brought to others.

In recent years I have been mindful of this when, through the gorgeous voice of Diva, Anne Fridal, (who was a year behind me at school) I have re-established contact with many 'old-girls' whom I knew or who I did not know, personally, but have become valued friends through this mutual contact. Not least of these is Penny Titheradge (Harrison), who has done so much to hold SMH together, even beyond its final closure, and to encourage others to do so through the SMH Association.

A PURSE FOR A PRINCESS

“Heather, Miss Robinson wants to see you”.

Miss Foster, our form mistress, was telling me that the Head Mistress wanted to see me. What had I done wrong, I wondered. Although Miss Robinson was a kindly lady, nearing her retirement, I was still terrified at the thought of being called to her study. Although I was only nine years old and wasn't aware of any misdemeanour I may have committed, I could not think I was called to her study for anything other than some wrongdoing.

So it was that I climbed the wide wooden staircase to the carpeted corridor above with some trepidation and stood outside the door saying 'Headmistress'. I knocked and was greeted with a kindly “Come in Heather, sit down”.

“You may remember,” she said “that recently you returned a box in which you had collected money for the Church of England Children's Society”.

I did remember, I had had the little blue box at home by the telephone and when friends visited they were asked to put a coin in the box. I had collected the princely sum of 8/-, nothing to write home about, or so I thought.

“I am pleased to tell you” she continued “that you collected the highest amount in the school” (I wonder if that was true. If it was, it wasn't very impressive, even in 1950)
“You have been chosen to represent the school at Central Hall in Westminster, where you will present a purse to Princess Elizabeth”.
This sounded very exciting.

So it came about that a few weeks later my mother and I took the train from Brighton to Victoria and then a taxi to Central Hall. I was dressed in my school uniform and my mother smart in her best coat and hat. Central Hall is a large, impressive building near Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. When we arrived the place was teeming with people, adults and children. Our names were taken and we were ushered into our places at the front of the Hall. Parents had to take a back seat on this occasion.

There was a mix of children, all quite young, some in school uniforms, others in their best party dresses. On the stage in front of us was a row of chairs plus a prettily decorated cot – what could that be for, I wondered.

We had all been given what they called a 'purse' but in fact it was a small satin drawstring bag that was supposed to contain money but probably only held pebbles. We were shown how to curtsy and given our instructions for proceeding across the stage and presenting the purse, although the presenting consisted of dropping the small bag into the cot.

After a short wait, and rather a lot of fidgeting as the anticipation grew, we were told to stand. In came a group of rather severe looking men and women and this rather short young lady in a dark red velvet trimmed coat and matching hat. But where was the Princess? They all took their seats and this young lady sat behind the cot – how strange, there were no seats left. Where was the Princess going to sit and when would she arrive? We were all eagerly awaiting the arrival of this magical person in a beautiful dress with a crown on her head, but there was no sign of her.

Suddenly we were told to stand up and make our way to the stage. About one hundred of us were to walk across and curtsy to the Princess. She was the lady behind the cot. What a disappointment! She looked so ordinary, pretty enough but not like a princess at all.

I suppose I should have been excited or overawed but all I felt was let down, what was the point of walking across a stage and dropping a bag into a cot? That was hardly presenting a purse to a Princess! After we had made our parents proud as they watched us troop across the stage, there were a few short speeches thanking everyone for supporting the Church of England Children's Society and that was it, it was all over. Princess Elizabeth had smiled and was gracious but it was all over so quickly.

We were ushered into another room where the adults had tea and we were given orange juice and spam sandwiches.

In no time we were back on the train to Brighton, a little wearied but despite the Princess being just a lady, elated by the experience. Gradually it sank in what an honour it had been to be chosen to represent the school on such an occasion.

Next day I was back in class regaling everyone with the story of my passing visit with a Princess.

Now Heather (Heald) Johnson, 1948-1957, shares three memories with us!

MISS CONRADY

We knelt to pray; the building that we knew as St Mark's Church, but was about to become the school's drama centre, was filled with a voice that sent shivers down our spines and made the hairs on the back of our necks stand on end. It was the 150th anniversary of our school's founding and Miss Conrady, who had been headmistress during my years at St. Mary's Hall, was reading the school prayer. ".....that whatsoever things are true, pure, lovely and of good report, may here forever flourish." How the memories came flooding back.

Doris Conrady came to the school as headmistress in 1950; she would have been forty-five at the time and during the seven years I was at the school with her, she never seemed to change. She was quite tall and her bearing added to her imposing stature. Her hair, a dull grey, was worn short and in a soft style away from her face. She appeared to have a rather large nose, on which was perched a pair of unobtrusive spectacles. However her main feature was her voice which we all remember; it had a certain resonance – commanding but not unpleasant. She dressed mainly in skirts and twinsets but these were not too obvious as she was rarely seen without her academic gown as she moved around the school – her presence was felt in every corner.

She was strict, almost fierce and all but a few were in awe of her. We speculated about her single status and the story abounded that she had lost her fiancé during the war and this accounted for her stern attitude. However she did have a soft spot and that was for her wee dog that appeared in her arms from time to time.

Unfortunately I was not her favourite person. I was always playing the fool, so was often in trouble. Many a time, as we filed into lunch, Connie, as she was familiarly known, would be standing in the hall watching us. I was often called out of line and rebuked for talking or giggling. I was terrified of her but even so I still seemed to leave myself open for chastisement.

Each year the more senior girls had the opportunity to go to Wimbledon. I was most upset when I found my friends were going but that I had been left off the list. Our games mistress had been told it was because I had misbehaved but she did not know what this meant. I still cannot believe I did this, but when I saw Miss Conrady after supper that evening, I approached her and asked her what I had done wrong. She told me that it was nothing specific, it was because I was noisy and whistled (not very ladylike!). They say 'nothing ventured, nothing gained' and that seemed to be true, as half an hour before the coach was leaving for Wimbledon the following day I was told I could join the group. However it ended up an empty victory. Yes it was an outing from school but there was no play at Wimbledon, as it rained all day!

Connie was very strict about the way we carried ourselves and if we were seen slouching we were immediately reprimanded. When she entered a classroom we stopped everything and stood up, until given permission to sit and carry on with our work. She was a great disciplinarian but the advantage of this was only appreciated after we had left her domain.

When we reached the Fifth form we had to spend one week a term sitting at top table, at meal times. It was always the dread that we would have to sit next to Connie. I was almost shaking when my turn came round but was pleasantly surprised, when we were able to talk about Norway, which I had visited during the summer holidays and she knew well.

Miss Conrady was very keen on the Sciences and if you did not follow that route you were not considered of any importance. At the final prize giving ceremony before I left school, she mentioned in her speech, that a few pupils were leaving to go to University – not many went from our all girls school each year – she spoke of one or two other careers which were being followed and finished off with the deprecating words “and some will be training as nurses or secretaries” – as far as she was concerned, the lowest of the low – if you were not academic you were nothing in her eyes.

Whilst at school we disliked her, were scared of her and did not appreciate the influence she had on us. Years later I corresponded with her; met her again at our 1986 reunion and grieved for her when she died at the age of 93 – a strong personality whose memory will not be forgotten by the many who knew her over the years.

WIMBLEDON

“It’s too late” I felt like shouting. It was assembly on the last day of the summer term. It was also the last day of my school life and here was our headmistress announcing that the following January the 6th form would be going on a skiing trip to Austria. What was I worried about, there was no way that I was a skier but I still had the feeling that I had missed out. Up until then school visits had been limited to educational outings to the theatre, museums, historical sites and what proved much more fun, to Wimbledon during the championships and to see the Wightman Cup.

Our visit to the Wightman Cup, which was played for bi-annually between the British and American ladies, was a bit of a disaster. The day of the outing dawned wet and miserable. We all set off in high spirits. However when we reached Wimbledon the rain was sheeting down heavier than ever. We found our seats on Centre Court and amused ourselves watching large pools of water gather on the covers over the court and cascades pouring from the roof that protected us from the rain, but not, unfortunately from the cold and damp and this was the middle of June. We ate our packed lunches, we chatted, we met up with a school from the Isle of Wight and exchanged stories which whiled away the time but still the rain was relentless.

Eventually at 5.00pm the announcement was made that there would be no play that day and we all reluctantly returned to the coach for the rather forlorn journey back to Brighton. We were all chilled, there was no heating in the old fashioned charabanc and we were not even in the mood for a sing song.

How different was our return visit to Wimbledon two weeks later when we were taken to see the world famous tennis championships. No problem about me going this time, although perhaps there should have been. We did have a short, sharp downpour when we arrived but that caused no problems. Several of us were in the front of the queue for standing on Centre Court and the soldiers on duty managed to get us right to the courtside which was brilliant. It was all very exciting. We were so close we were almost able to touch the tennis players and one of my favourites, Lew Hoad was about to come on court. The Duchess of Kent was in the Royal Box and the atmosphere was electric, the sun shone and the tennis was superb. I must admit I did get rather over excited and was glad that Miss Conrady was not with us as, without realizing it, I found myself shouting and jumping up and down, although I don't think I whistled. Later we strolled through the grounds, passing players on their way to various courts. We took photographs; bought souvenirs to remind us of this great day and generally absorbed the buzz and excitement which pervades, to this day, at the All England Club.

What a fun day we had. We sang songs on the way back in the coach – 'Sussex by the Sea', 'Men of Harlech', 'Pack Up Your Troubles' and more. We were a group of girls who had had a memorable day but who eventually arrived back at school exhausted, hardly able to eat our evening meal or keep our eyes open. For a change bed was very welcome.

THE MILLENNIUM REUNION – May 2000

Schoolgirls
Supportive, older
Remembered, changed, reunited
Gathered together after so many years apart
Friends

Sue and I met at an hotel in Hove and took the bus to our old school, St Mary's Hall in Brighton. It was the Millennium Reunion and as Sue Broadley and I sat up front on top of the bus, we felt, and probably behaved, like excited school children. Whilst on the bus we had talked about the proposed visit to Babington, our old boarding house. This house, on Brighton seafront, had now been transferred into private ownership. When we alighted from the bus, a young man got off at the same time. As we moved away, he said he looked forward to seeing us that afternoon, as he was the present owner of what had been Babington House!

We approached the school via the front drive and entered by the main door – what an honour! We were greeted by a prefect and were directed towards the Hall. We reached the area where milk and buns had been served at break time, but now it was wine and soft drinks on offer. On the walls were old school photographs, which were fun to scan and it was amazing how often we remembered faces from the past. Unfortunately there were only six of us at the reunion from our year, but at least we all recognized each other.

Fourteen years earlier, in 1986, we had attended the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary reunion of the school; the first time many of us had met up since leaving school nearly thirty years earlier. At that time we had all needed the named labels we had been provided with, to know who was who. It had been surprising how much we had all changed; some were fatter; some had been ravaged through fighting illness; those who had lacked confidence seemed to have blossomed; the farm girl was now a gardener and the prospective housewife, a businesswoman – what changes had been wrought in thirty years.

However this time, we all seemed much the same as we had been fourteen years before; maybe more rounded, hair a bit greyer and a few more signs of life etched on our faces, but still recognizable.

Forty years on from when we left the school in 1957, all our teaching staff had left the school. Our headmistress, Miss Conrady, had died; Miss Farmer had married late in life and was unwell at the time of the reunion, so unable to attend and Miss de Baughn, our domestic science teacher had left the school to become Sister Audrey, in a local order of nuns. However they were not forgotten as memories came flooding back.

The school itself was where the changes were more noticeable this time round. The downstairs cloakrooms were now the canteen – no formal eating, as there had been during our time at the school. Here we had our lunch; it was supposed to be a ploughman's lunch but there was rather more than that with choices of ham, tuna, cheese, pate and salad, followed by fresh fruit. I wonder what choice is available for the pupils for their meals. Later we toured the school; our classroom was now the fiction library; there were modern science labs; the domestic science room had become a theatre; the Sanatorium had become an arts centre and part of the grounds had been taken up by a swimming pool and a boarding house for 6th formers – what changes. We spoke to the present headmistress, Sue Meek, and told her how in awe we were being able to wander on the lawn in front of the main school building, which was now a play area – what sacrilege! The only time we had been allowed there was on Founders' Day. She was surprised to hear that it had not always been a play area. We felt really old as we filled her in with how things had changed over the years. One playing field, across the main road now housed several town houses and flats, the sale of which probably paid for the swimming pool or other improvements to the school's facilities.

Following tea we made our way down to Babington. It was hard to visualize how it used to be; now it was beautifully furnished and the owner was obviously an art lover, with

wonderful pictures adorning his walls. He was fascinated to hear our stories of what went on - 'this is where the sweets were kept'; 'this was our dorm in 1955, there were five beds in here' and his elegant sitting room had been the House common room; oh memories, memories. If we hurried we would also be in time to have a look round Hilary, the boarding house we had occupied in our last year at school, so off we went. Hilary, in Sussex Square, was still owned by the school, so had not changed so much. It was a smaller, more rambling house and we found it difficult to remember which our dorm had been. . Again memories came flooding back about midnight feasts when we ate tins of condensed milk and drank Babysham, how we got away with having alcohol I'll never know. As many of the rooms were occupied by the students, we could not be too intrusive. However whereas we had had four or five beds to a room, nowadays most rooms only housed two young people. What did hit us was the number of overseas students, especially from the Far East that now attended the school. Although during our school days there had been a few girls from Africa and one or two from elsewhere, they were very much in the minority; now they are the majority of boarders.

Back at the school we had about two and a half hours before the evening events got underway and we were wondering what to do during that time, we didn't have a car and didn't want to make the effort to go into Brighton. We were chatting to Sue Meek and she said if we felt like it to go to her house, which was quite nearby for a cup of tea, she had one of the older ladies as a house guest and we would be welcome to join them. We said we would have a further wander in the grounds and change and then see how the time went. We did this, changed in the Headmistress's study, this felt rather wicked, as during Conny's time this was regarded as the holy of holies, and then decided to wander down to her house. We found it alright in Eaton Place and on ringing the bell the door was opened by her son. We were soon joined by Sue and her house guest Barbara who had been having a rest. We had a pleasant and relaxed chat over a glass of sparkling wine talking about the school and how it was and her plans for the future.

In the evening they were having a Back to the Future party where we were asked to dress nostalgically. I did my best to dress a la Doris Day, fullish skirt, striped shirt, knotted scarf at my neck, wide elastic belt and an Alice band. Pat Chapman had dressed as a hippie and Liz Cockburn had pinned an old school photo of herself on a school type blouse along with school badges and old school tie, plus she had pinned her old ringlets, which she had kept, on to the side of her head! Unfortunately the turn out for the evening was poor and the organizers were disappointed but we enjoyed ourselves. They provided an excellent buffet meal with choice of chicken in a sauce or curried beef with rice and salads and superb, very fattening desserts. There was a very pleasant trio playing in the background and later we were invited to the casino to play either roulette or black jack and any money raised was going towards a breast cancer charity. We had great fun and it was after 10.30pm before we left.

What an eye opener this visit to our old school had been. It had been good to meet up with friends but it was the school that surprised this time round.

Random Ramblings

Reading through these two lovely reminiscences, so much came flooding back to me – and I have now bowed to pressure and added my own memories.

Firstly, a confession. I really really wanted to be Deputy Head Girl. I loved the organizing side of life (and spent my working life organizing) and felt that I could make a valuable contribution to SMH if I was given the opportunity. But it was not to be. I was best friends with 'my' head and with one of her two deputies so I was lucky enough to be able to have some of the game without any of the responsibility.

For example, I always did the 'table plans' for lunch and spent the first course patrolling the dining room to make sure the tables were being 'taken'. This meant I did not get a main course – or at best I got a congealed small portion; but I always got pudding and never had to clear. My two day-bug friends with whom I always sat, Angela and Rosemary, saved me loads of lush rice pudding, semolina, sponge pudd with custard or jam; chocolate pudding with chocolate sauce...golly I loved them ALL and I still love pudding more than meat.

I rebelled against not having been 'chosen' for high responsibility and became a regular escapee at 4 o'clock. I acquired a boyfriend who lived locally and his family more or less adopted me. He had three brothers, all younger, and lived a chaotic bohemian life – completely different from my own staid middle class upbringing and I adored it, and him. I'm very pleased to say that although our romance fizzled out we are back in touch these days and probably closer, virtually, than we ever were, some 40+ years ago. For me, a very happy ending.

But I leap ahead of myself – this all came at the end of my four years at school. The beginning was almost by chance. I had started at the local grammar school only to encounter bullying on a grand scale. By the first term of my second year only two girls in my class were still speaking to me – behind the backs of the cohort who were well, less kind. I started having random illnesses and all the horrors which accompany this sad experience and eventually my mother worked it out and gave me the choice of a day school (London Collegiate) or boarding. Even then I knew I was not academic enough, or at least would not work hard enough, to thrive in the former environment, so we looked at three boarding schools. The first two were terrible and the third – last hope – was SMH. Mum loved it from the second we arrived. She and Noddy were kindred spirits. I thought Miss Payne was lovely and the girl who showed me round was kind.

Best of all, they were not mad on games; were very keen on music and Noddy agreed with mum that the important part of education was learning to learn...So, in I went, to III form, being a September birthday.

Initially I was homesick – unsurprisingly – and as I had to go to the San every day to take some medication or other, used to speak to Sister about this. She was kind to me but never said anything beyond the usual 'stick at it' but unbeknown to me spoke to

Noddy who spoke to Mum...and one morning about three weeks after term started instead of calling the register Mrs. Martin told me to gather together the contents of my desk and hightail it to Mrs. Webb's class as I was henceforth in IV form!

This was news to me, but I immediately settled into the classroom at the far right of the main building as you look at it. There, after lessons, we sat on the radiators, unmindful of the 'piles' we would get (we had no idea what they were, anyway), singing 'knock three times on the ceiling if you want me; twice on the pipes...' banging with our rulers at this point. Mrs. Webb had us all collecting used postage stamps for the school charity and as my Dad worked for a large company he marshalled the entire workforce and I regularly received a LARGE package of stamps which ingratiated me with Mrs. Webb, almost making up for my bad French grammar. The other compensation was an excellent accent.

I also started to take piano lessons, eternally grateful to Alison Kirby who told me on no account to sign up with 'Ratty' but to go to the quiet Miss Gilmore who loved teaching me and under whose aegis I flourished. I was a superb sight-reader and frequently won prizes in the Brighton and Worthing festivals for sight reading. I also played for evening assembly regularly and through that established a musical rapport with Noddy and a 'persona' which has meant many younger Old Girls still remember me. At least I hope that is why they remember me!

I was of course now behind academically as I had missed a whole year and been dumped straight into the 'O' level studies. Gone were Physics and Chemistry (yippee); Biology (Bilge) stayed with the nice red headed teacher who was pregnant in my V year although she never referred to this and when it came to sex ed. simply referred us to the relevant chapter in McKean. English Lang and Lit but oh good grief with smelly, alcoholic, fag smoking, hem dragging teacher, as a direct result of which I bombed Lit and only just managed to get permission to take the 'A' level. French – Miss Fabian how I loved you then and love you now; History – Miss Payne, who spoke so fondly of 'Pam' and 'Dizzy' and disparagingly of Melbourne; Geography – Miss Farmer except for the smashing term when we had a Geordie lad on teaching experience who must have had permanently watering eyes from our perfume. Lastly Maths, with Mrs. Parsons, and coaching in the chemistry lab under Mr. Liddell. Thanks to the two of them I had a sudden Damascus moment and passed my bete noir subject.

I remember flu in the San at the end of my first term – we took over the whole of Elliott and everyone who could go home early, did. I also clearly remember my first Sunday when I was told we were going to go to the Downs 'in croc'. I waited patiently to see some form of transport turn up, but we just went, two by two, for a walk. It was some time later I worked out this was a crocodile. Walks were either to the Downs – up towards the racecourse, or along the sea front.

I loved my cloak. I was shown how to unpick the hems so that my hands tucked in. It was so warm. I wish I had kept it but, with all my uniform, it was sold in the second hand shop when I left. One thing I was glad to see the back of was my lacs stick.

The two years of IV and V, both spent in Mrs. Webb's tender care, passed in a blur of work and music. And suddenly there we were, exams taken, and on holiday waiting for our results. Except for me – I had to be different, so went down with glandular fever at the beginning of the holidays. I was ill right through them and missed the first week back.

When I did turn up I was signed off games. How happy I was! I was set to do things such as organize the lockers and clear the floors. Miss Bowes thought I would hate it and rush back to lacrosse...how ridiculously she misjudged me. I also moved to Miss Rogers' classroom 'up top' next to the library and began to wear 'mufti' and be allowed out more than five days a term, which could not include the first or last weekends and could commence only after prep on a Saturday or church on a Sunday.

My parents took under their wing one special friend of mine whose family was overseas and she spent several half terms at my home. They would also include her in days out. This was repaid over and over again when her family returned to live in Brighton and she became a day girl (and indeed Head Girl). They had me to visit and stay and her mother, who worked for Greens, often caused sponge cakes to be brought in, which were devoured to the last crumb between breakfast and the start of the first lesson.

I was also lucky enough to have friends of my family living in Eastbourne and an Aunt and Uncle in Haywards Heath so I was never short of somewhere to go. And thanks to having Mrs. Sheasby for History I was always able to catch the 3.30 bus since we had double history on Friday afternoons. She spent the second period going to have her hair done and I followed her down the drive at a discreet distance in good time for the Ebne bus!

By now I was in every choir, including Chapel Choir, so somewhere into my busy social life I fitted in the various rehearsals and performances and of course the annual trip to sing evensong at Winchester. We enjoyed this enormously. We shared a bus with the boys, of course; always stopped at the same place for fish and chips and the goings-on on the bus were to be marveled at. Quite innocent of course but still good fun.

The big musical event was always the joint choir 'do' at Brighton College which introduced us to great music and some fantastic soloists including several of the founder members of The King's Singers, old boys of BC. There was also at least one big inter-house music competition I remember, at the end of my VI year I think. I played for the House choir – Three Little Maids and yes we won. I also accompanied Jane Smithard's wonderful voice – a Schubert Lieder I think; Mary (surname forgotten) from Elliott who played the trumpet beautifully, Hattie Evershed on the oboe...and doubtless others.

I also fell right off the steps to the stage, bruising my thigh terribly and causing permanent muscle and tendon damage. To this day I have a dent in my leg. But not to worry because Sister put Witch-hazel on it!

In my time Noddy caused the New Hall to be built and we lived through the building site. I remember, in my first year, watching films in the old Hall (the noise of the projector drowning out Dirk Bogarde dying so gracefully on the guillotine while Miss Payne sighed over him) and having guest lecturers. I remember one who was an Antarctic explorer. He was an old man when he spoke to us but wept as he told us of the death of some of his team. I wish I could remember his name.

For some reason I took no part in anything dramatic. I love am dram but I guess there was not time for everything. Lower VI was also the year we took some sort of world studies with Mrs. Allen (she of the infamous eyes of different colours) and she introduced us to Mao. This kick-started my ongoing love affair with China and all things Chinese. I have been fortunate enough to have spent two holidays there and have an extensive library of books about that fascinating place and its people.

I'm also grateful to her for opening my eyes to real literature. We had to work very hard but she also encouraged wide reading and bothered to explain things about what we were studying. For the first time I started to see that it was possible to go past learning by rote. Wilfred Owen, T S Eliot, Chaucer, of course – but reading around them as well as reading them.

In early years I extended the 'five days' by taking part in the various sponsored walks. We did one from Telscombe to Alfriston and another along the seafront, to and fro. They each offered opportunities for our families to meet us and FEED US!

I remember 'taking prep' in Miss Bristol's form room and sitting on her special desk (so pleased that this has been saved by one kind old girl who has bought it). Susan McDonagh – I wonder if you remember me sitting 'up there'? I certainly remember you.

One Monday morning I was, unusually for me, in my uniform shoes having leant my 'heels' to a friend who was away for the weekend. Shoes, like suitcases, Afghan coats, tie-die shirts and various other enviable items were more or less communal in our year group. My weekend case, which I still have, and use regularly, has travelled all over the south east of England without me. But I digress. I was as always in a hurry and left the common room to go down to Mrs. Allen's form for registration...crash, bang, down a whole flight of those wooden stairs towards the loos on the half landing...I ended up huddled in pain with Miss Bowes standing over me. She started to rip into me for wearing inappropriate footwear and even in agony I was so happy to show her my feet. Which of course only made her more angry. This occasion was also memorable for Mrs. Allen's reaction. I was late for registration. I was NOT told off. Instead I was helped, by her, to assembly and given a CHAIR for the proceedings. I wonder, now, whether she and Bowesey felt about each other as Bowesey and I did? Mrs. A had, by then, had her encounter with a Brighton bus which broke her leg, so I guess she had some empathy with my far lesser pain.

I was glad to see the back of Miss Rogers' class, not because I disliked her – there was nothing to dislike – but because of her smelly little dog which sat on her knee or was

tucked under her arm at all times. I don't think that would have been allowed in more modern times.

In Hilary we had our home life. I can still remember every bed and dormitory although I can't name them. I was first in a five or six bedder on the first floor at the back, then in one up a little set of stairs but using the same washroom. That was the term I spent playing with the Ouija board with two girls in the year above me who shared a two bedder next door. Then I remember two terms, one in each of the two big rooms at the front where we were forbidden to go on the balcony (this was of course simply an invitation to do so). One in a two bedder with a girl called Rosemary, who was not much liked. Miss Payne asked if I would share with her and bribed me to do so with the promise of the same two bedder with MY Rosemary the next term. Poor unpopular Rosemary; I wonder why no one loved her? She died very young and I was saddened to learn of it. I also had a term in a two bed at the front, next to the big rooms, with Wendy Foster, and two terms in a two bedder with Diana Markham who was my bridesmaid the following year and with whom I am still very friendly.

My cohort was the largest VI form they had ever had; swollen by a number of 'General VI' so we had to have large rooms in the first of the two years with the luxury of two beds (three in a few cases) in upper VI. We had gas fires which we used to sit in front of to dry our hair and which we could snuff out in a second if we heard Miss Payne or one of the Matrons coming.

We had 'bath nights' but seldom stuck to them, sneaking baths whenever we could get them. The bathrooms were huge rooms, sub divided with cubicles and four, I think, baths in them. We did all our 'smalls' washing in handbasins, soaking them through the day and then rinsing and drying over the big pipes in the basement.

The basement was also home of the 'studies'. I never bothered to ask for one. I went to bed to read and write. After the glandular fever I got tired very quickly and tended to go to bed as soon as we got back to Hilary after supper. I still love bed, or reclining on the sofa, more than anything else. But I do remember frequenting a study on the night of the lower VI party to which BC boys were invited. The same event was memorable for my first and only 'puff' (I thought it was a cigarette and it had no effect whatsoever), for getting drunk on cider, which I thought was apple juice, and for behavior so louche that the hitherto annual event was cancelled in perpetuity. Sorry, all girls younger than me...

Tuck shop was also in the basement and Miss Payne had a notebook with our pocket money listed in it. She kept meticulous records. We could buy sweets and 'necessaries' there. When I went to school my mother had forbidden me to use tampons (why?) but I was in a minority and very conscious of this. So I 'borrowed' from a friend who used Tampax. I wish I had had the box as then I would have known to remove the cardboard applicator! Not to worry, like everything else, I got there in the end.

Sunday tea was in the playroom at the back of the basement which also housed our annual, or perhaps termly parties. I only remember one of these when Hattie, Sue Corringham and I wrote and performed 'John Peel'.

The chorus went:

'Oh the sound of the bell brought me from my bed,
And the cry of Miss Payne from above my head
Saying "Wake up my dears, and get out of your bed
And get dressed for the rest of the morning" ' I think.

I wish I could remember some of the verses. They referred to various girls and their quirks and were really well thought out, largely due to Hattie and Sue.

Miss Bowes served hot water for our bottles from the kitchen there where she also showed us how to make the delicious ice cream sauce of melted Mars bars...I can still taste it.

One night in upper VI I was summoned by Miss Payne to go and sleep in the bedroom of one of the Matrons (I want to say Mrs. Redfearn?), right at the top of Hilary, next to the 'babies' dorm. She (Matron) had been sent for to go home and Miss Payne needed someone 'there'. I have no idea why she chose me but I took my duty very seriously and listened out for them diligently.

I loved Miss Payne dearly. I have written in the VCR about the time a few of us encountered a 'creep' on the train but that is one of only many occasions when she was kind and loving towards me. I don't think she was flavour of the month with Noddy and it must have been awkward for her to have Miss Bowes as one of her Matrons. I am happy to be able to record that I kept in touch with her from the time I left school until her death and met her on several occasions.

I am sure there is MUCH more waiting for me to recapture it. I have not mentioned Founder's Day, Garden Parties, Sports Days (shudder), the kitchen – which has been so vividly recaptured in the VCR – and I have tried not to duplicate things like 'helping the old folk' which have been written of elsewhere, but I hope that you enjoy what I have scribbled down so far. Writing it has been 'Such Fun'

Penny (Titheradge) Harrison 1969-73

‘Such Fun’ – (Elizabeth Ferguson) Eastham, 1969-76.

My life at SMH all started as I left primary school, a perfectly normal, fairly new state primary school just down the road from my home. I passed my 11+ but apparently the pass rate was so high that year that they raised the bar and I wasn't offered a place at the local Grammar school but rather the secondary modern in the next small town. At the time (1969) Warden Park School in Cuckfield, Sussex (for those who watch UK TV - of Richard Osman and Pointless fame) had a very poor reputation and my father had no hesitation in saying “well, you are not going there!”. So, where should I go? My mother attended SMH in the 40s so it seemed worth investigating.

I remember going for an interview but my abiding memory of that day (besides Noddy) was just how confusing the basement was. I thought I would never figure it out.

I do not recall having to sit any sort of entrance exam...I suppose my 11+ was deemed adequate. I do not actually recall partaking in any other visits or discussions over other choices of school either.

I was made to have my long hair cut during that summer “as it will take too long to get ready in the mornings”. I hated my mother for that, but besides a period around 5th form, when it was longish, I've never had my hair long again, (to the eternal chagrin of my husband) so mother was probably right. I suspect if I'd worn pigtails to school I would have been on the receiving end of some more jibes (see next section).

So this young, sheltered ‘state school’ girl joined 1st form in September of 1969, already at a disadvantage as there were a number of girls who had been in Prep or Transition (or both) who were of course very familiar with ‘the way to go on’. I distinctly recall a few assemblies in the old hall and seem to remember listening to Anne Fridal (Frizz) sing whilst I was in the audience being taunted one way or another. With hindsight I don't think I was bullied as such but was definitely ‘picked on’ to begin with. I was awarded a less than complimentary nickname which stayed with me for seven years and more, to the extent that in U6th even some members of staff used it. So, from an insult it became a term of endearment. I suppose I wasn't the sort to tolerate harsh bullying (too ‘Rottweiler’ like’ as I was later to be dubbed) so I was merely stuck with the nickname. There may be some who remember it but my lips shall remain sealed as I never did enjoy being so ‘tagged’.

I doubt these are in chronological order but some specific memories:

Being forced to ‘christen’ my school beret by yanking out the tab in the middle – leaving a hole!

The flu epidemic.. Winter of 69/ 70 I think...I know I was in the room at the top of the Elliott wing, presided over by Miss Griffiths and eventually, there was myself, Katherine Howard and Miss Griffiths as ‘last men standing’!

I remember doing ‘circuit training’ in the old hall, using the old ‘wall mounted’ equipment – I hated that. I suppose the old hall must have been knocked down in about 1970 to be

replaced with the new one. Never a lover of tennis - I blame blue eyes which water in bright sunlight - I was fond of Rounders, Stoolball and Netball and will even admit to being OK (not outstanding) at Lacrosse.

An earlyish music class with Miss Ratner, in the new music rooms. We all had to sing whilst she moved around the room listening to us. ".... you, you and you - Choir practice, Tuesdays, after school" (or whatever it was) . I was a "you"... I never have learned to properly read music, never having learned an instrument but an ability to follow the music and a good memory have stood me in good stead ever since.... I now sing in a French Choir in multiple languages! What do all those squiggly shapes at the beginning signify anyway?!

I have always had a stark reaction (adrenaline rush with pumping heart) to (perceived) authority. I can recall being sent to Miss Davies to hand over a message from a member of staff. Standing in a queue outside her office I was quaking in my boots, heart thumping despite the fact that I was merely a messenger and not awaiting a punishment or even a reward as most of the others in the queue were.

Sticky buns and 1/3 pint milk bottles...the buns with thick icing on the top that could be peeled off and enjoyed after the plain bun.

Austerity lunches...one of my favourites...random vegetable soup, and lots of bread and cheese...the money saved supposedly going to a good cause...they won't have made much profit on my portions, I loved it!

Latterly, as the school moved with the times (perhaps Miss Orme had retired, I have no idea) we would occasionally get Burgers in Buns with salad and chips...such an innovation!

Other than that, less memorable stews and pies, tapioca or sago puddings...scratch that...very memorable for the wrong reasons!

I was forced by my father to study Latin, it would stand me in good stead - he was right I have to admit. Suffice it to say that after end of year exam results of 28% and 27% respectively he admitted defeat and permitted me to switch to Cookery ' O' level - my best O level grade, former profession and keen hobby to this day.

It seems that under the right conditions I have a reasonable head for languages, being able to turn my hand to pretty competent French and getting by in German (once my brain remembers the vocabulary) but my 'thorn' was grammar, still is, so there is no way that I was ever going to make headway in Latin. I was also pretty bored with Plato and Virgil and the stories of war and the building of Roman roads.

The only verb I have ever successfully managed to remember the conjugation of was the extra special version of amo:

Amo, amas, amat, amamus, a pa mus, a wee baby mus!

The night before a proper exam (I want to say a French O level but looking back I think

it must have been A level year so maybe it was German O level which I sat in 6th form) I was stung by a wasp on my ankle. It swelled up so much that by the morning the only shoes I could get on my feet were my mum's Scholls on the widest fitting. It looked very much like a case of elephantitis! I couldn't walk, so Dad drove me to school that morning and having had assistance to get from the car into school I sat the exam with my foot in a bowl of water! A 'special consideration' letter was sent to the exam board but it didn't make any difference...I still failed!

I have photos (one of which I think is in the VCR already) of one girl doing other homework under the desk, one girl passing notes and another actually asleep with her head down on the desk. I of course had the camera...how Miss Bristol missed/ permitted this behaviour I shall never know.

I was in Miss Fabien's class for French, not good enough for Mrs Webb; and the expression 'je m'excuse d'être en retard' was commonly used just after the beginning of each lesson. As mentioned earlier, grammar was my 'thorn' and remains so to this day but (and I am sorry, Cynthia) the French people with whom I communicate on a near daily basis now, tell me that the ability to communicate is much more important than having immaculate grammar! It has only occurred to me in the last year or so that having a much higher than average command of the English Language doesn't necessarily 'translate' into a second language, nor does it need to. It frustrated me that I could not remember the various conjugations of verbs off by heart but 'apparemment' it just doesn't matter as long as one is understood.

On the subject of Mrs Webb, she did once suffer a nasty case of the 'Marilyn Monroes' one windy day in the quad outside the Elliott wing, between that and the 'Old San'. I did have photographic evidence but despite a promise from Penny Harrison to pay a 12 month subscription to 100 club, I have been unable to locate it although I do have other photos taken during the same morning break in the quad.

I had Mrs Webb as a form mistress (Year 4?) and I've known since then how to spell Mississippi! We had end of term quiz or something similar and one poor unfortunate, when asked to spell 'that river' came up with variations including "Mrs Zippy". She had such a ribbing that when it was spelled correctly " m- i-ss-i-ss-i-pp-i" I took it to heart and have never forgotten!

I recall embarrassing myself completely, I was mortified but I doubt that anyone else even recalls it. We had a programme to watch, I think as part of History, as I seem to recall Miss Payne being there. Something made me comment OUT LOUD in the darkened room, in the middle of the programme....the others just laughed, so I suppose it was funny!

Girls from overseas...having never seen snow before. Dark skinned girls who got sports shirt tan lines - I didn't realise that happened.

Vicki Angus regularly had parcels from her parents including salted sunflower kernels –

very exotic...as a 'day bug' I was only occasionally allowed to have a few of these treats. I think her parents were in the Virgin Islands or similar.

Year 5. Rachel Beckley was voted form captain, I was her deputy (goodness knows how that happened). She had to have her tonsils out, so I remember going to RSCH to visit her with the good wishes of the class.

Three day week...sent home from school at lunchtime, in the snow...to find my Mum heating lunch on the open fire in the sitting room.

I must have been virtually the only girl in the history of the school to be allowed to give up English Literature. I really wanted to do the sciences, geography and cookery, even maths. I recall "as you are still doing history" (which involved writing essays), I was permitted to drop it. I hated history...until I found social history....never could be bothered with politics, wars and significant regal dates!

To this day, whilst I love reading I am not fond of poetry or plays (in written form) nor art study...I like it or I don't, I'm not interested in what frame of mind or period of their life the author/ artist was in when they created said masterpiece. I'm definitely a scientist!

The hallowed staff rooms...never ever went in those, until Founders Day, the day we left - we had tea in the staff sitting room. What odd things we recall.

There was a particular boy at Brighton College who caught the same train as we did most mornings from Haywards Heath. To begin with, he was just one of the crowd of kids who tried their hardest to be as obnoxious as possible to those from ' the opposition'. We hurled insults, played practical jokes and were generally revolting...especially as observed by our fellow commuters, I've no doubt. Of course there were the kids on their way to PNEU, Brighton and Hove High school for girls, Hove Boys school & Lancing College in the mix as well.

There was one occasion, probably 3rd or 4th form when I was one of a group of ' commuters' from SMH hauled up in front of Noddy and given a good talking to. Apparently, a member of the public contacted the school to complain after we'd been caught letting off fire extinguishers in the train. I was not directly involved, too much a scaredy cat ...but distinctly recall it being ' Such Fun' as a close onlooker. With hindsight, not something I would advocate...but as it was ' only' water...you can see the appeal. We had to write to the lady with an apology.

On another occasion, the high jinks between BC and SMH involved somebody chucking my briefcase off the train just as we were leaving Preston Park (just outside Brighton and four stops prior to mine). I can't imagine why I was so upset. It only contained homework after all...now that would have been a good excuse! However, I reported it to the conductor and had to wait at HH station as it had been recovered and put on the next train...would that happen these days? I couldn't even tell my mother why I was going to be so late home...no mobile phones in those days!

The No 7, 37 & 47 buses (as I recall) took us to and from Brighton Station. The school stop was just around the corner (after St Marks Church) and we would all hurtle to the stop at 4pm as school finished to give us time to buy sweets from the kiosk just next to the bus stop. I seem to recall that cigarettes were also available but I cannot corroborate that, having never had so much of a puff of a cigarette in my entire life(note Halo...but I did inhale 'secondary' smoke, working in pubs and so on for several years). If I am right, I assume that no staff members ever found out as there would have been hell to pay, for us and the lady in the kiosk! For me it was Fruit salad and Black jacks - 8 for a penny!

I do recall some girls sneaking off behind the old prefabricated building (old art room? – we did pottery there) that was somewhere near the top tennis courts for a quick puff - I could probably name names but I'd never be forgiven!

Now, here is a ' false memory' - my mother told me that one day, when she was standing at the same bus stop, some 20 years earlier, a pigeon got caught under the front wheel of the double decker bus and was squashed from its tail forwards. Until it popped! Now, clearly, this isn't my memory but the picture was so vivid that I could easily claim it as my own.

I have to include the story of the bloke on the bus one day, whose 'dongle' was hanging from his smart business suit trousers! He was standing right in front of me facing the back of the bus (you know the square, standing part, half way down the single decker bus)...I was in the seats immediately behind. I had to talk to the girls behind me, travel sickness be hanged! I have no idea whether he was a pervert or if it was a genuine accident...I wasn't about to draw attention to ' it' or me for that matter but the sight has never been forgotten...revolting!

Swiftly moving on - getting back to ' the boy', I only became more aware of him as he was one of the mainstays of Brighton College choir/ choral society and we attended many a rehearsal at the same time ('together' would be over exaggerating) but to begin with at least my interest hadn't been piqued.

At the church I attended in Haywards Heath, a Friday night youth club was started up when I was just 15. My father was extremely strict but I suppose I must have been allowed to go as it was ' church' after all. One evening, said ' boy' turned up with some of his mates to the youth club and was challenged by them to ask me to dance...not the prettiest girl in the room, probably the most awkward and unfashionably dressed but nevertheless he asked me to dance and walked me home afterwards.

As I entered L6th I found out that several girls before me had had crushes on him - his 'pet' name was written into hearts in several places on the sloping walls of the common rooms in the eaves!

Mrs Lesley permitted the 6th form to have a disco and I had a boyfriend (see above) who ran a disco (wasn't I the bee's knees) so he and his friend DJ'd for us. However, I do not really recall much of the evening except that Mrs Lesley called all the girls for a pep talk before the disco started. All I can recall of what she said is that there was to be "no fornicating in the corners, girls" ...fornicating? Whatever was that? Cue rush for the

dictionary! I am not sure that I can ever recall having heard the word used since, except when recounting this particular tale!

I stopped taking sugar in my tea at 11 years of age, after asking my dad about it and him suggesting I try it without...but I couldn't give up sugar in coffeeuntil 6th form. Our 1/3 pints of milk could be turned into coffee in the common room but for some reason we never had any sugar - so I learned to go without at the same time as we singed

(now there is a confusing word for a non-English native speaker) our shins in front of the fire, singing along with whoever it was playing the guitar and exchanging stories of boyfriends, holidays and other equally interesting topics. I suppose the younger girls were outside at break time but that was all behind us.

Never a top grade student, "tries hard but could do better" being a mantra often applied; it seems that I was adept at doing 'just enough' to achieve what I wanted. I didn't go to University; instead I did an HND in Hotel, Catering and Institutional Management and went on to work in hotels, hospitals and industrial catering. An invitation to go back to school, probably circa 1983, to attend a careers evening as an 'old girl' was another of those life lessons - where one's own perception is not necessarily the same as others. The Front of House Manager of the Grand Hotel in Brighton was with me on the 'catering profession' table. Dressed in his uniform 'penguin suit', I was somewhat in awe of him...until we started on the topic of where we'd studied catering. I went to Westminster Hotel School in Westminster (naturally!) which, whilst not being a degree institution was one of the best known catering colleges in the world. He was verbally in awe of *me* that evening!

Interestingly, post children, I switched careers and ended up selling Photonics - it became obvious to me that some of the physics and applied mathematics knowledge I thought I'd never use had actually stuck and finally, in context, made sense!

At time of writing that 'boy' and I are to celebrate our 37th wedding anniversary in a few weeks' time, so without a doubt SMH was responsible for providing the environment and catalyst for 'Such Fun' in our post Brighton lives.

Kathy Howard's memories of the period 1967-76

The first memories begin when I arrived in Prep Form aged nine, with Miss Plowman who had also just started at St Mary's Hall (possibly her first teaching job?); we were based in what was called The Robinson Wing. This was a single story pre-fab building and the other half housed the next form up called Transition.

Nearby was a small piece of grass and a wall of The Old San building, against which we used to have fun playing "Sevens" with tennis balls. Other games we played were Jacks, French Skipping, and Splits (involving using a pen knife, which I'm sure would not be allowed now!)

I remember one day while in Prep, we decided to drink loads and loads of water at lunch time, not sure why but I expect it was just to either annoy the prefect at the head of the table by continually asking if we could fill up the jug, or as a competition. Anyway, come the afternoon, during one lesson we were all bursting for the loo and one brave girl asked to go to the toilet – and then we all rushed out!

In Transition, when the form mistress was Miss Laws, one lesson involved understanding the large area of skin we all have as human beings. I was chosen to be completely covered in paper, which was then unfolded and hung up on the wall so that everyone could see the area of skin, and be measured. I remember being rather embarrassed at seeing the size of it.

We then all moved up to the 1st form, in the main building, in one of the many class rooms in the Elliott Wing. These classrooms had lockers with wooden flaps as doors. Some of us enjoyed banging these doors as they made a loud noise when they hit the lockers themselves; I can still hear Mrs Martin (an English teacher with a Scottish accent) saying "Stop that, girls!".

At lunchtime, one pastime was trying to hide from the prefects who had to ensure we went outside to play. We were forever trying to find new places to hide from them, whether amongst the lax sticks in the basement, in the loos, up the fire exit that connected Room M to the Geography Room above. Some prefects were more vigilant than others at finding us, though some did not really bother but preferred to chat amongst themselves (probably about their boyfriends at Brighton College!).

The first dining room I remember from 1967 was in what turned later into in Room K. It had a number of paintings all over the walls, such as Gulliver's Travels, and a jungle scene. Photographs of the paintings were sold (which I have still got, and I believe there are some in the SMH Archives). The room was not very large, and had a small platform at one end. Later of course the dining room moved down into the basement, providing much more space for meal times. I can also remember some of the food we had for lunch: the sausage roll thing that had to be cut into slices, the caramel "slop" that was dished out using a ladle from a large plastic bowl (Yuk!), and the joy when chips were introduced! Overall I enjoyed the lunches, not sure everyone else did.

Subject wise, I was more on the science side and particularly enjoyed Physics. The then newly appointed Ken Crowther brought a bit of fun into the lessons, though I expect the non science girls won't agree with this. He asked us to dissect a bull's eye to find the lens, and we even had a go at putting a finger into a beaker full of mercury to feel its density – something that definitely would not be allowed now. When learning about evaporation and latent heat, it was suggested we distilled cider and I remember the first droplets of fluid were almost neat alcohol which of course we tasted – wow, our mouths tingled! I remember Ken made excellent Kona coffee in the dark room, using a Bunsen burner and we drank it out of glass chemistry beakers. During one lesson he tied up his hair into bunches. Occasionally he threw the chalk board rubber across the lab to remind us about using consistent units in our equations (something that has stuck with me ever since, an extremely valuable lesson!).

Whilst the Physics lab was relatively modern, the Chemistry and Biology labs, which were on the other side of the main building on the first floor, were more traditional with wooden benches, sinks, easily accessible chemicals/acids, and various animal bits preserved in jars. I remember well putting the end of my plastic biro in a Bunsen burner flame to watch it curl and melt. In addition, we made our hands brown with potassium permanganate, and later going down to lunch still with discoloured hands.

As a child, having to meet with some teachers sometimes was perceived as a little frightening. For example, if anyone had to see the headmistress, after knocking on her door we had to wait nervously for the 'traffic lights' outside to be green before entering. If one had done badly in the French vocabulary test, Mrs Webb asked to see us the following day before assembly to be tested again. Mrs Allen, an English teacher, could also be rather fierce in lessons.

There was also the more humorous side, for example Miss Roger's (Maths teacher) who used to walk her dog (Barney) around the 'sloping pitch' (before this was built on) while having a smoke. Then there was Mrs Webb's Fiat car which use to wizz up the drive each morning as we walked into school (we sometimes cheekily wondered how she fitted into it!). When Miss Davies ('Noddy') used to teach us Maths, she wore her black university gown with which she used to clean the board; not the best thing as the chalk powder showed up clearly on her gown.

The Lower Sixth's common rooms on the top floor of the main building were a good place to hang out in 'free periods' or during lunch breaks. I tended to use the one nearest the library and I remember people used to scribble little ditties, phrases, or drawings on the walls, which sometimes were rather rude. One day a teacher read them and told us to paint over them.

Of course I'm sure many old girls still remember the wonderful old loos at the base of the Elliott Wing, with the wooden doors, pull chains, and a drainage ditch below the sinks. It seems that these were never updated, except for painting some of the pipes

purple, as we found out during the last visit to the school a few years ago. Perhaps they should have been 'given' to the National Trust as a fine example of Victorian sanitation!

Hymn Practice with Ratty was also memorable, with her enthusiastic clapping of hands, telling us to pronounce words clearly, and forever asking us to go over and over a particular line. She also set up the school orchestra when I was there, and I learnt to play the clarinet. I was not that good at playing it but it was a fun introduction to music, and I enjoyed the first school orchestra concert which sounded more like a band.

Lunch breaks outside in the summer could be fun, as we 'dared' each other to do things, or found different things to explore. The pond by the tennis courts were of interest to some as girls tried to push each other in. Then there was the "secret" old abandoned art studio behind the tennis court on the upper level by the lax pitch; there was a narrow gap down the side where we could get into the 'outside world' by road to the hospital.

Another challenge was to try to walk along the narrow ledge along the brick wall the far end of the lax pitch, with our backs to the wall slowly edging ones way along by shuffling feet. We also liked to roll down the long grass slopes of the lax pitch; I remember occasionally feeling a bit dizzy afterwards.

Then there was the Old San, or Mouse House, where the borders had their hamsters. The building was also later used for Art and pottery lessons; I'm sure many old girls remember throwing wet clay up to the ceiling where it would stick.

Finally I remember how thrilled we were on becoming sixth formers, thus being allowed up the steps by the side of the driveway and in through the main doors, while the rest of the school used the Pupils Entrance by the Elliott Wing, or steps down into the basement cloakroom. On our very last day, we were allowed in the staff room where some of us chatted to teachers, saying farewell.

Fond memories, where did the years go?

Memories of a 1970s SMH Day girl

Introduction

At the patient but constant nagging of **Penny Harrison** I have finally sat down to put pen to paper and committed my memories of our school to the written page – or in my case the digital variety on the laptop!

Having been raised by, among others, Miss Payne I can't write this without a thought to where I was then where I am now and try to relate it to some kind of historical context. Not for nothing have I read some sort of history real and fictional most of my life. So everybody here goes!

Preparatory and Transition

I started at SMH in September 1967 just two weeks after my 9th birthday so effectively I was an 8 year old. What my parents were thinking of I do not know. The one picture I have shows me in my new school uniform absolutely tiny! I had already managed the journey from my prep school on the bus unaccompanied and the journey to SMH was shorter. One bus, either the 1, 3 or 37, up St James's Street into Eastern Road and along. It always amuses me when today's parents say they have to take their teenagers to school by car! Maybe that is one of many reasons why as a nation we are getting fatter. Children don't seem to walk anywhere any more.

We were in the Robinson wing for our lessons but still went to morning assembly in the old school hall and had lunch in the old school dining room with the whole school eating together. We were also playing outside with the older girls and looking back many of them took us under their wing. We were probably like live dolls to them. Sadly, I can't remember the names of my protectors or even what they looked like but I will forever be grateful to them for looking out for me and making the transition into big school easier.

Miss Plowman looked after the youngest class and, again in today's terms it was traditional and rather strict. Desks in rows, teacher out in front, tests, and homework which had to be handed in on time. Definitely no calling teacher by her first name even when it was known. I did it once as a dare and nearly collected a detention. Profuse apologies (grovelling) in the end rescued me. We had to use real fountain pens and for anyone who knows me well will know that the ink was soon all over me as well as the exercise book! In those days we had woollen dry clean only grey skirts and mine must have been dirty most of the time.

In that year we had Miss Ratner teach us music as Mrs Aviss (she was unmarried at the time only started the year after) and Miss Davies was a very remote figure of whom we were all terrified of although looking back quite why remains a mystery! During my first year my friends were Shelley Hayes, Susan Graves(now Sharman), Kathy Howard, Claire Bowes, and occasionally Penny Perry. Susan and I also started the clarinet, having joint lessons, as Miss Ratner started to build up the Music department at this time. Singing for me at this time was never an option although I longed to do it and join the choir I failed every single audition a fear of which still stays with me to this day.

I can't remember how but Sue and I got hold of one of the gardens on the sloping field and as I lived in a flat I was really grateful as this gave me the first taste of growing things a pleasure which has stayed with me to this day although I have never had a proper garden.

I spent two years in Prep as it was decided to hold me back a year due to my immaturity and lack of confidence although I made up for this by the amount of noise I could make! At the time I was naturally very upset and my parents always regretted it but looking back as I have always struggled with exams and formal tests due to anxiety it was a wise decision by Miss Davies to give me that extra breathing space. It also meant I had new companions, Melanie Rose, Caroline Rea, Sandra Jantuah and Anna Tinner among them.

During this second year I remember three of us missed the call from morning break and were subsequently late for Miss Ratner's lesson. Instead of being sensible and going in and apologising we decided to hide behind the cloakroom door. Needless to say she found us and was not impressed. To this day the memory of the sound of her high pointed heels on the linoleum terrifies me!

One teacher who frightened me until I was her class was Miss Laws who looked after the Transition form. Tiny white haired even in those days she seemed 100 to us. She helped me complete my topics project on Syelורים (prehistoric creatures not just monsters from Doctor Who) the first time I had completed anything properly. Again she appeared really strict but if you played by her rules she was very kind and patient. During this time, I twice boarded briefly whilst my parents went on holiday in Hilary House – I have to say I hated the experience and to this day am thankful that I was never forced to do it regularly.

1st year – 5th year

We moved into the main school just as the new hall was being built and collected a whole group of new companions – my memories of the building time are very dim but it must have been hugely disruptive. Maybe I was used to getting used to having different teachers for each subject and having to move classrooms as well. Also new class mates joined us, Akiko Shaw, Gina Behar, Philly Leaney and Karen Harrison among them.

The things I remember most are being taught Maths by Miss Davies in the first year – this was so traumatic for both of us that she taught the sixth year the year after. Her efforts were followed by Miss Rogers and Mr. Liddell – both tried their best to clear my block with figures. The fact that they failed is no fault of theirs but at least their efforts were rewarded eventually in my “after life” when I became a public sector accountant for twelve years.

Mrs Webb taught us French:- who can forget her red talon finger nails and flapping black gown! She warmed to me as soon she realised I was actually interested and going to use the language – I made very slow but steady progress. She was replaced

in 1973 by Mademoiselle Jacquot who adored me and named her dog after me! She came from Rouen where we would regularly stop for lunch on our way down south – this is probably what endeared me to her rather than my prowess with her native tongue. In the second year we started Latin with Miss Bristol. Lessons quite often were disrupted as Anna Tinner and Terry Benjamin along with Caroline Rea endeavoured to liven proceedings up.

My favourite subjects were undoubtedly History, Music, English and strangely enough RE. History was taught by the wonderful Miss Payne (the only subject for which I was in the first division along with the Geography as they were timetabled together). Miss Boyes I believe tried to get me put back in the second division as my Geography was terrible. It still is. Julia Playfair and I used to spend most of our time in the back row playing noughts and crosses but Miss Payne was having none of it!

Music remained a passion of mine throughout under the guidance of Miss Ratner and later Miss Farmer and Miss Macintosh. Miss Ratner decided when I was in the second year that I was going to be a music teacher like her and she summoned my mother to insist that I begin Piano lessons. My mother under the combined assault of Noddy and Miss Ratner agreed but insisted that I should practise at school as we had no piano or any room for one. This dear reader is how I became the only day girl in my era to be allowed to do piano practice at school. A consequence of this was that I never had any trouble evading the prefects at lunch break. I merely hid in the music cells! I became main lead with the clarinet in the school orchestra under Mr Aviss. Later I became Music prefect and joined the Brighton College chapel choir but more of that later.

I also adored RE and Miss Griffiths and this has led to a life time attachment of going to church. Quite how this happened as we were always a strictly “hatched, matched and dispatched” type of church going family and rarely if ever went to church is something of a mystery. Indeed, quite how I ended up in such a strongly based church school is also now lost in the mists of time. I was confirmed at Brighton College wearing one of the old communion gowns. For once doing this a year earlier than my contemporaries as my mother being a lapsed Roman Catholic was determined I should be done as early as possible. I loved assemblies and all the hymn singing and was cross I was never allowed to do the harmonies. I have certainly made up for this since! It is to SMH that I owe my religious beliefs and attendance. I never did do RE GCSE and would love to rectify this at some stage.

Other highlights of my slow passage up the school include the dedication of the new school hall and chapel and the fact that Miss Ratner made us sing the Hymn ‘Christ is made the Sure Foundation’ every day for a week to ensure it was up to standard. To this day I hate this hymn with a passion which surprises my husband and current church organist who can’t understand the hysteria this hymn generates.

I remember the garden parties with all of us on our best behaviour. Poor Sarah Kentish’s embarrassment when her step mother turned up in bright pink hot pants! All the rage and she did have the figure to match but hardly suitable attire in those strict

days when 3 piece suits for the fathers, smart dresses, hats and gloves for the mothers was considered suitable attire!

I also remember Miss Orme - who could forget her? Absolutely enormous with complete control over all of us I now realise that she fed us incredibly well on what were probably fairly meagre rations. She would of course have been brought up during the war years and would have remembered rationing – waste was definitely not permitted and neither were fashionable or faddy diets. She would have had no time for allergies and if there were any vegetarians in our era they probably went hungry. In our day most if not all of the food was freshly cooked and personally I loved school dinners. I can't remember a single pudding I didn't like and am probably carrying the evidence of my greed on my thighs to this day. She always caught me when I tried to snaffle the iced buns at break but somehow I managed (just!) to evade serious trouble. She might even have realised that being sent to school on a boiled egg and a glass of milk (the only breakfast my mother would permit) meant that by the mid morning I was famished. I now realise that I was brought up by a life long anorexic and I shall be forever grateful to SMH during term time and the French during the holidays for teaching me the positive aspects of enjoying meal times as a shared and necessary activity. It is probably thanks to this that my relationship with food whilst by no means perfect is at least sensible. To this day I can eat most food which is put in front of me – something which seems to have disappeared in modern living.

After 1973 we lost Miss Davies and many of the more traditional teachers including Miss Ratner and Mrs Webb. Mrs Leslie tried desperately hard to make marriageable young ladies out of us – she failed miserably with me and always found my year “lively!”. At the time I was left with the impression that our year was considered to be noisy, inattentive and difficult to manage. In reality the good teachers who captured our attention and set boundaries had no trouble. Even in those days we were an independently minded bunch of girls who hated being told what to do – nothing much seems to have changed over the year.

Sixth form years

In 1976 I entered the 6th form and not for the first or last time would have to resit 3 of my GCSEs. I was very proud being able to walk in through the front door and wear my own clothes. We also lost quite a few of the year which had numbered 50 became about 20 in Lower sixth and this dropped again in our final year. I absolutely loved the more mature atmosphere being at the top of the school and taking charge of tables. The prefect system had been abolished a few years earlier with all the year expected to help in the running of the school and with people being specific areas of responsibility. Mine needless to say was Music and I loved helping out Miss Farmer and Miss MacIntosh. They had warned me that whilst they had absolute faith in my ability to cope Mrs Leslie had questioned the wisdom of my appointment. In 1976 we put on Dido and Aeneas and I remember the endless rehearsals acting as page turner and generally “organising” everybody. It was the long hot summer that has gone into our collective memories and I shall always remember on performance day every fan being employed to keep the harpsichord cool. The humans just had to put up with the heat!

I somehow managed to join Brighton College Chapel Choir. Quite how I managed this I don't know as in my day this was strictly a boarders' privilege. I have already said that I loved going to church and whilst at SMH Brighton College Chapel was my church family. Somehow I managed to sneak into the back row behind the choir which was in all probability really reserved for school staff and their families but as I was quiet and well behaved and clearly knew what I was doing they welcomed me and invited me to coffee. I joined the choir and fell under the influence of Gordon Lawson's tender care. Two summer parties followed including one memorable one in Chichester after Evensong but I never did score with the tenors and basses much to my regret at the time.

Conclusion

I left in the summer of 1977 relieved to be breaking out of school impatient to move on with life and vowing never to darken the doors again. Not for me reminiscing and return trips, I even lost touch with most of my class mates. It wasn't until the school closed and I went back to the School open day in 2009 with my husband in tow that I began to evaluate what the school had in fact done for me.

I met up with about 15 of my old class mates and it was as if we had never been away! We met in the archive room, one of the first year class rooms in our day, with the archivist saying plaintively saying "Please ladies be careful of these precious documents" and our group with wine glasses fully charged getting noisier and not taking any notice. Nothing had changed! We went around the school my husband as bag carrier and photo taker taking shots when required. He adored all my SMH friends. Anna and Caroline insisting on one outside the head mistress's study as they spent so much time waiting outside to go in, a group photo in the school hall various shots on the playing fields and of course the old toilets.

Since then I have become more and more aware of what I owe to the school. It has struck me how many teachers I can remember faces and names numbering twenty at least. Talking with contemporaries who went elsewhere I now realise how unusual this is. We were lucky enough to be taught by strong minded women and men who on the whole had a real love of their subject, were desperate to pass that love on and were not hemmed in by rigid curriculum diktats from Westminster or over-testing by Ofsted. Some of it has even rubbed off on some of their pupils!

More importantly however was the ethos that was taught outside the classroom through everyday mundane living. Looking back the school practised inclusivity and diversity long before these were fashionable. We were taught how to accept everybody whatever their class colour or creed. To treat everybody with respect and kindness -not because you have to but because you are a decent human being. To put forward your view coherently with passion and facts but to respect the other person's position. To realise that life does not go your way all the time and not to give up at the first hurdle. To muck in and do chores which nobody wants to do but still need doing. To do things you don't like doing such as in my case science and sport yuk!

In short not only did SMH give me a large number of life-long friendships, music and my faith but an ethical way of living which is sadly lacking in some of our political and establishment class today. Oh and it got me through a few exams as well! It is a real shame that the school is no more as these values are so desperately needed. In the end it was FUN!

Sian (Williams) Spencer 1967-1977