



**ARCHIVED NEWS ITEMS**  
**BEFORE HONOR HUMILITY**  
**&**  
**A Mystery Solved**

**BEFORE HONOR HUMILITY**

Penny Harrison writes: "In innocence rather than ignorance I accepted a "spellcheck" change of the word Honor to Honour. On day one of the launch of the website I had a comment from one Old Girl about this, asking when we changed the spelling! I naturally followed this up and have, courtesy of my predecessor, Penny Gardiner, been able to post here a piece which was published in Newsletter 101 from which you will see that the most recent version of the motto (and the one that was being robustly defended by SMHA at the time) was Before Honor Humility.

The changes from Before Honour Is Humility took place in 1930s (Honour to Honor) and 1950s (removal of Is). Penny also wrote: "I'm afraid it is a perennial point of anguish amongst the Old Girls and I'm not surprised that, having reverted to Honour, you have had some questions". Another Old Girl adds, "I was most interested to read the report from Miss Payne about the use of the school motto & the ensuing debate. I'm intrigued by the spelling which is always associated with being American. I've spent time on the internet to see if Bateman had any US connections - no. My family Bible from the 1880s uses "honour". So I got out my Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology & looked up "honour". In the passage it quotes - Latin honorem, nominative case honor & further down L honorare f, honor. Then I put in the Latin from the crest on the front of the book 'aura sanct mariae' & discovered it is Latin for St Mary Hall.

By the way I'd never realised that Henry Venn Elliott was related to John Venn who introduced Venn diagrams which I vaguely remember trying to learn in Maths!. Since the reversion was unintentional I am asking for it to be changed and indeed you should see Honor throughout (other than in the explanation above), but I thought you might like to read the background"

## BEFORE HONOR HUMILITY

### *The use and suitability of the School Motto*

Following comments made at the 1998 AGM, it was decided to have a discussion on the subject of the motto at the May 1999 Reunion. The meeting was chaired by Miss Payne, who prepared this report.

Mrs Jean Roberts, SMH's honorary archivist, noted that the earliest references she had found to a School Motto were in 1902 and 1903, and at that time the motto was rather more long-winded.

*Aim high, and always try once oftener than you fail.*

The origin of 'before honor is humility' is in two Biblical references in the book of Proverbs.

*The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; before honour is humility.*

Proverbs, Chapter 15, verse 33.

*Before destruction the heart of man is haughty and before honour is humility.*

Proverbs, Chapter 18, verse 12.

I must confess I thought Henry Venn Elliott a great student of the Bible and that our Founder must have suggested this motto, but this was obviously not the case, as the first reference Jean Roberts could find to it was in 1904. Despite the fact that it carried the note 'Our Founder's motto for the School', it must have been the proposal either of the then Headmistress, Miss Potter, or perhaps of the Chairman of the Governors. No reference to this motto appears in Bateman's biography of H V Elliott.

Over the years, notably in the 1930s and in 1954, the motto has changed slightly, with variants of the spelling honor/honour, and the inclusion of the word 'is' before humility.

**Kim Cook** (1954-60) has produced an excellent account in which she points out that:

. . . the concept of humility has nothing whatever to do either with Uriah Heep or with doormats. Rather, humility is about recognising that God is greater than we are, and acknowledging our debt to Him for all that we have and all that we are. Assertiveness and ambition are both fine in that context. In fact, it is quite clear that God wants each of His children to achieve his or her full potential, and to use wisely the gifts and talents He has given. So I see no difficulty in retaining the motto in the light of the school's aims to turn out young women who can have fulfilling roles both in the home and in their working lives. . . . What is important is that it has been a valuable guideline for staff and pupils for at least 95 years and, properly understood, still has relevance and validity today.

There is an interesting passage in Miss Meades' *History of SMH, 1836-1956*. This extract from an address made by Henry Venn Elliott on 1 August 1859 to the staff, pupils and friends suggests that our Founder would certainly have approved of the current motto.

Have true unity. Humility and love are necessary to produce it. Pray for me. St Paul asks the prayers of his youngest converts, and I will ask yours. Pray for your Superintendent; pray for the Governesses. Remember that without the blessing of God on their teaching, it is labour in vain; you learn everything in vain if God is not with you, to bless both those who teach and those who learn.

**Miss Payne**

## **BEFORE HONOR HUMILITY**

How do I feel about the school motto? To tell the truth I never took much notice of it at school, it was never a guiding light for me, but I did absorb its meaning in some fundamental way. Humility may be seen by some as old-fashioned, unsuitable, and out of step with 1999. However, if you translate from 1904 to 1999, the sentiment is still real, living, and should be one of the first concepts of any teaching environment. Humility is not about being humble or bending a knee, it is about being modest and recognising your own faults, shortcomings and strengths in order to become a person able to accept Honours with honour and eventually to be able to return those gains to the community from which they sprang.

**Sheila Allison** (née Humphrys) SMH 1936-40 Published in *Light Years*; St Mary's Hall, Brighton – *Millennium Anthology*; Compiler – Liz Fincham

## **BEFORE HONOR HUMILITY**

Miss Olwen Davies (Headteacher, 1965-1973) writes "I am also fascinated by the Honor/Honour debate. I have often wondered why we had the American spelling. The only query I had about the name was from a cleric who was intrigued why a low-church evangelical foundation was called St. Mary's. I told him he would have to go back to the history of St. Mary's Church in Brighton to answer that question. I am so pleased that the archives are being preserved. So much was lost during the war when the original Elliott House and Babington House suffered bomb damage - or so I was told. Babington House was sold during my time in the late 1960s. Like St. Hilary's it was a lovely Georgian house while the resurrected Elliott House was an architectural eyesore!

I often recall various snippets from the annual reports which particularly appealed to my imagination. One was sometime in the 1860s I believe, when the report began "Two disasters had struck the Hall during the year.... The first was "the arrival of the ringworm. Such was the severity of the outbreak that the Hall had to be closed". The second was "the death of the architect who fell through an aperture in Ely Cathedral and expired where he fell". The priority given to the ringworm seemed a little hard on George Basevi - and I particularly liked the language in which both were recorded!"

## Notes on the SMH Motto – from Jean Roberts, May 1999

The SMH Newsletters and/or the SMH magazine have provided the most complete record of the history of the motto.

On the front cover of the SMHA Newsletter of 1904 is the first mention I can find.

Motto:

'Before Honour is Humility' Proverbs XV 33  
(Our Founder's motto for the School)

In the two previous years, 1902 & 3, the motto on the outside of the Newsletter was

'Aim High and always try once oftener than you fail'

There were earlier Newsletters in 1900 and 1901 but our copies are incomplete, missing the covers where the motto would have been.

From 1902 onwards there is often a school motto for the year.

1906 was the last time the Bible reference and the bracketed note about the Founder's motto appears but the motto 'Before Honour is Humility' continues on the cover from that year when the publication becomes the combined Newsletter and School Magazine, right up to 1938.

In 1939 the motto appears in the form of the badge with the flowers and SMH in Latin. (below, top left)

NB: 'Honour' and no verb in the motto.

There may be earlier records of the badge but I've been unable to find them – possibly on official school writing paper? However, I've looked through quite a lot of correspondence to no avail, most of 'our' letters being carbon flimsies.

In 1940 the school closed so there was no longer a Magazine and paper restrictions limited the Newsletter to a very basic form with no motto or badge until the end of the war. This continues to be true of the Newsletters and Magazine until 1954 when both have the motto in its original wording – 'Before Honour is Humility' in a new badge. (below, top right)

This continues until the Newsletters and Magazine combine and are produced in a new format in 1973 when the badge and motto disappear until 1998.

I don't know when the library stamp with the badge with the flowers as pre 1939 was first used. Nor can I find any reference to the significance of the flowers.

In the present decade the badges have been increasingly used, often the flower badge minus the Latin, used sometimes with the wreath and/or motto and sometimes not.

I felt that there must be a reference to the motto in Bateman's 'Life of H.V. Elliott', but though I read it from cover to cover, I cannot find one. Bateman's material is derived mainly from Elliott's sermons and letters, and maybe the motto is something he would have spoken of in school assemblies...? His whole life reflects his lack of interest in honours or preferment and his contentment in serving in the sphere to which he had been called, so it seems very fitting that he should choose such a motto for SMH.



1939



1954

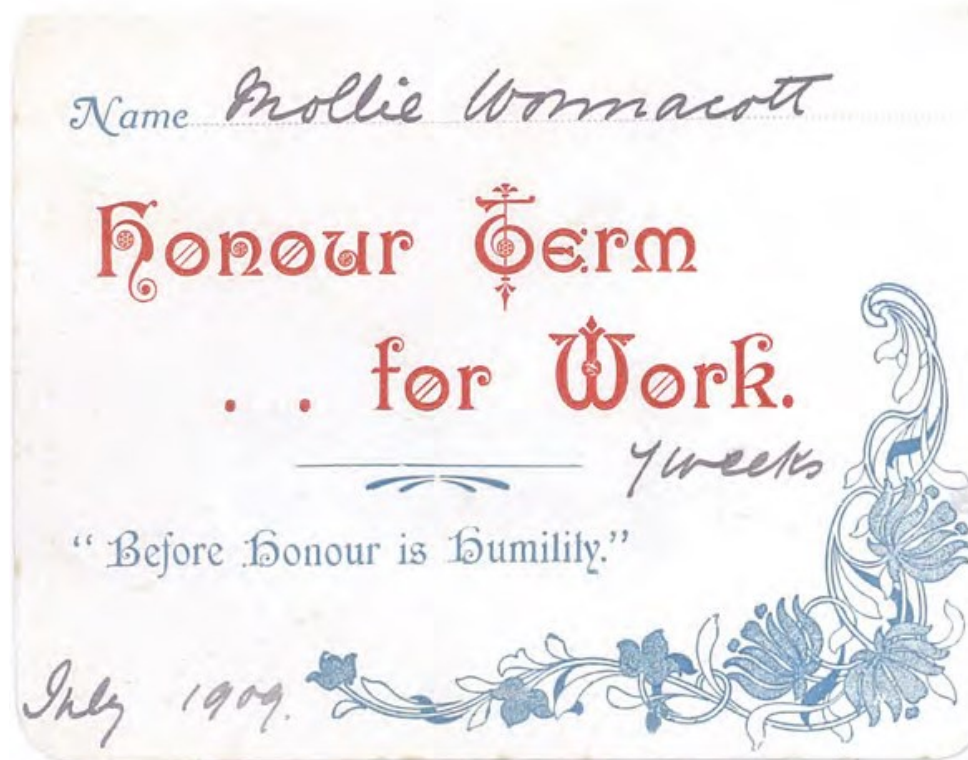


Most recent Prospectus

**St Mary's Hall**  
ESTABLISHED 1836



Current version



### **A Mystery Solved**

In 2003 the then Archivist found a large silver cup in Tina Johnson's room. It was engraved "Paul Groves' Memorial Cup". She could find no reference to Paul Groves or why the cup had been presented or to whom. It remained a mystery for seven years but recently she was given a collection of memorabilia which the caretaker of SMH had been gathering together and amongst them was an album containing newspaper articles kept by Teresa Broadbent. Included in these she discovered one headed "Catherine wins the Cup in memory of Paul".

Paul Groves had been walking between the Goldstone Football Stadium and Aston Villa's stadium to raise money for the Zeebrugge Disaster Fund, 1987. Sadly he was knocked down by a car and killed. His family and school, Stanley Deeson, decided to present a cup in his memory to someone "serving the community" and Catherine Harris from SMH was awarded it for taking a mobile library round a local hospital every Saturday morning. So, the mystery solved. But it has led to another – why was the cup still at SMH in 2003? We unfortunately have not been able to make contact with Catherine Harris, who might be able to answer the second mystery, above. Letters to her address have not been answered. If any contemporary (1984-1990 approx) can assist this would be enormously helpful. Please email [secretary@smhassociation.org](mailto:secretary@smhassociation.org)