



**Old Palace *of*
John Whitgift School**
Independent Girls' School



Old Palace
Alumnae

Memories of Old Palace



Old Palace in the early Nineteen-Twenties

by Phyllis Clow (nee Scrivener) 1920-1925

I was a scholarship pupil in the lower school and enjoyed my time there very much. My father was a postal worker at Mount Pleasant sorting office and my mother a housewife. We lived in Selsdon Road, South Croydon. The headmistress was Sister Rosemary and she and all of the nuns were extremely kind.

All life and work in the school centred on the chapel; the High Anglican ethos permeated the whole school. I took great pleasure in this aspect of school life. We had frequent assemblies (whether they were daily I cannot remember) and communion once a month if one was confirmed. (Confirmation instruction was given by the Reverend Pat McCormick, Vicar of Croydon, who later went on to be incumbent of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, and confirmations at the Parish Church by the Archbishop of Canterbury.) No food was permitted before communion, not even a cup of tea, and I walked daily from South Croydon. We knelt in chapel for the whole service, with no pews for support and, as you can imagine, girls would sometimes faint. However, we were rewarded by a breakfast afterwards cooked by the sisters. Two of the most frequently sung hymns were “The Church’s One Foundation” and “Blessed are the Pure in Heart”, both connected with the school motto. I do not remember the Angelus being said in my time there.

I remember these teachers: The Misses Reeve, Taylor, Webb, Steward, Bokenham, Winifred Spencer, Phyllis Spencer, Winter, Mrs. Philips, Sister Verity.

Miss Reeve was my form mistress in the sixth form in 1925 and I believe she wrote the words for the school song.

I remember too, hockey on Duppas Hill and cricket on Mitcham Common, to which we travelled by tram. (Will the new tram system be inaugurated at school as the old one was in 1901, I wonder?)

All the subjects mentioned in the curriculum were taught in my day. I’m proud to say that I was the only girl in the school to get “very good” for Patching... (I still have the certificate!)

On leaving in 1925 I obtained employment at the International Correspondence School. Three years later I applied for a position at the London branch of the Mitsubishi Bank and was asked as a test piece to reply in typed French to a business letter. By happy coincidence, Miss Philips, my Old Palace French teacher, happened to be a lodger of one of the Mitsubishi cashiers and on hearing my name mentioned, was able to give me a good report! I remained at the Mitsubishi until I married and then of course left to become a housewife as was the norm.

My daughter was born on May 16th, 1939, on the day that “Miss Goldsmith was away on an anti-gas course”! (I have listened to the account of the school’s war years with great interest.)

I very much enjoyed my Centenary visit but I’m afraid I no longer see, so I can never visit you again. However, memories remain clear and I am always keen to hear of the school’s progress, which obviously continues apace.

Old Palace in the late Forties and early Fifties

by Jo Tuck (née Akers) 1946-53

After attending four different schools, I passed the entrance exam to go to Old Palace in 1946. And how everything has changed since then – for instance, the fees as I recall were seven guineas (seven pounds seven shillings) a term!

Our first classroom was a prefabricated building in front of the current Cathedral Building. But it was out to the “washhouses” at the other side of the main school building to reach a toilet, which seemed to me to have been frozen for a good part of the winter. Not until the sixth form could we use a toilet indoors, in the main building – with one washbasin and one mirror for the whole sixth form!

The Banqueting Hall was used for gym and was also our refectory. Attached to the very high beams were climbing ropes which, when no-one was looking, you could swing on from one end of the hall to the other. Climbing those ropes to the top was quite an achievement. At lunchtime, in the winter, sometimes soot blew down from the rafters onto the jam on top of the sponge pudding – not good!

Three netball courts, I think, were squeezed into what is now the school Garden. Hockey games meant walking to Duppas Hill and, in the summer we took the trolley bus to

Wallington, to the old gas company sports ground near the aerodrome, for tennis and rounders. Swimming was at the old public baths in Scarbrook Hill.

My special pleasure was taking part in the inter-school debating competitions, which were run by the Council for Education in World Citizenship. For the first debate which involved me, I well remember the motion was “We shall never have world citizenship unless we give up national sovereignty.” On another demanding occasion (and I was still only 15 I think) the motion was “If you answer violence with violence, you forfeit what you are fighting for.”

When I left school in 1953, after getting 3 A levels, I went to the French Institute in South Kensington for two years and qualified as a Translator Secretary.

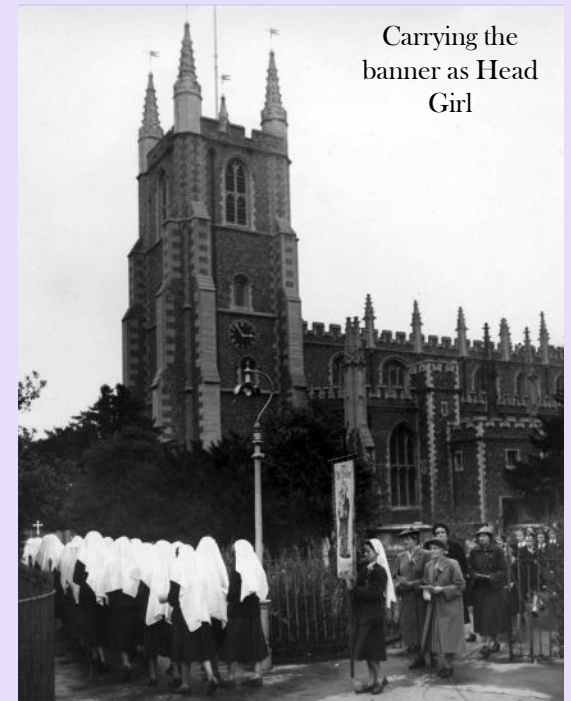
I was thrilled to be Vice Head Girl, but always regretted not being Head Girl!



A Midsummer Night's Dream



Jo telling fortunes



Carrying the banner as Head Girl

Old Palace in the late Forties and early Fifties

by Maureen Bunn (née Collins) 1949-55 Part 1/2

Having passed the 11+ Exam, I was looking forward to attending Purley County School where most of my friends were going. But no, a letter arrived saying I was offered a place at The Old Palace School as we lived just over the border of Purley into Croydon. I was so upset and when I went with my mother for my interview with Sister Gabrielle, I cried and told my mother that the place was falling apart! In fact, so soon after the War, it was indeed in need of a lot of TLC.

However, looking back I realise that it was the best decision and I enjoyed many very happy years at the School.

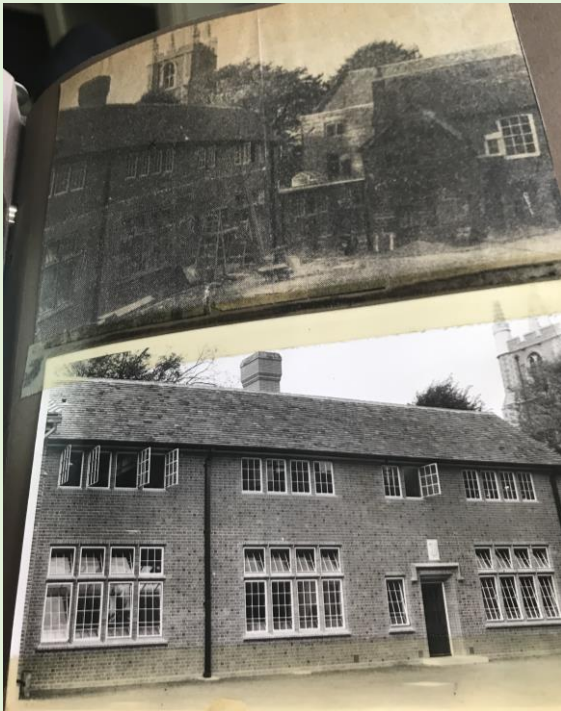
Starting in 1949, I had Miss Clayton for a Form Mistress – our classroom (111A 2) being a prefabricated Building on the site of the Cathedral building. I asked to be in Anselm House as a friend was already in it – that turned out to be a good decision!

I was in 4B, 4A, 5B, 5A and then 6C. I wasn't particularly academic but loved school so learning Shorthand/Typing in 6C with the delightful Mrs Lufkin was the answer.

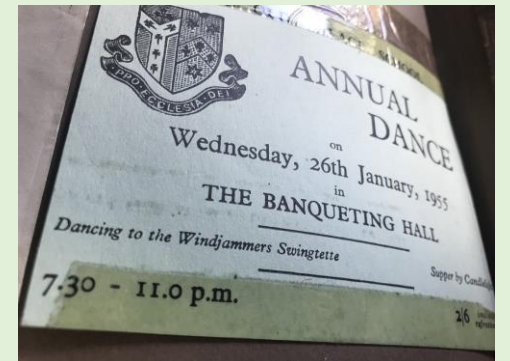
There was no dedicated 6th form room but I remember we did have a wind-up gramophone. We still wore our school uniform in the 6th form.

My main interest at school was Sport and I became Tennis and Netball Captain. In later years, Miss Fisher asked me to come back and teach the girls squash – a new venture.

I remember the School Dance! It was 2/6d a ticket and staff sat around the walls of the Hall to keep an eye on us!



The new science wing at Old Palace School, Croydon, which will be opened on October 29 by H.R.H. the Duchess of Gloucester. Our picture shows how well the new building blends with the old.



Old Palace in the late Forties and early Fifties

by Maureen Bunn (née Collins) 1949-55 Part 2/2

I also remember getting the trolley bus to Plough Lane to play tennis, rounders and Sports Day was held there. On Ascension Day we had a rehearsal for Sports Day at Duppas Hill.

Prize Giving was at the Civic Hall in Crown Hill. On Founders Day we walked in crocodile style from school through the churchyard to the Minster (in those days called the Parish Church). The Head Girl and Deputy held the cross and banners. The choir all wore white veils.

Wash House was the “technical” name for the toilets and washbasins housed in a tin hut with no heating! Only the 6th form had an inside wash basin complete with one mirror!

I recall Jane Dormer – that was the sick room next to Sister’s Office.

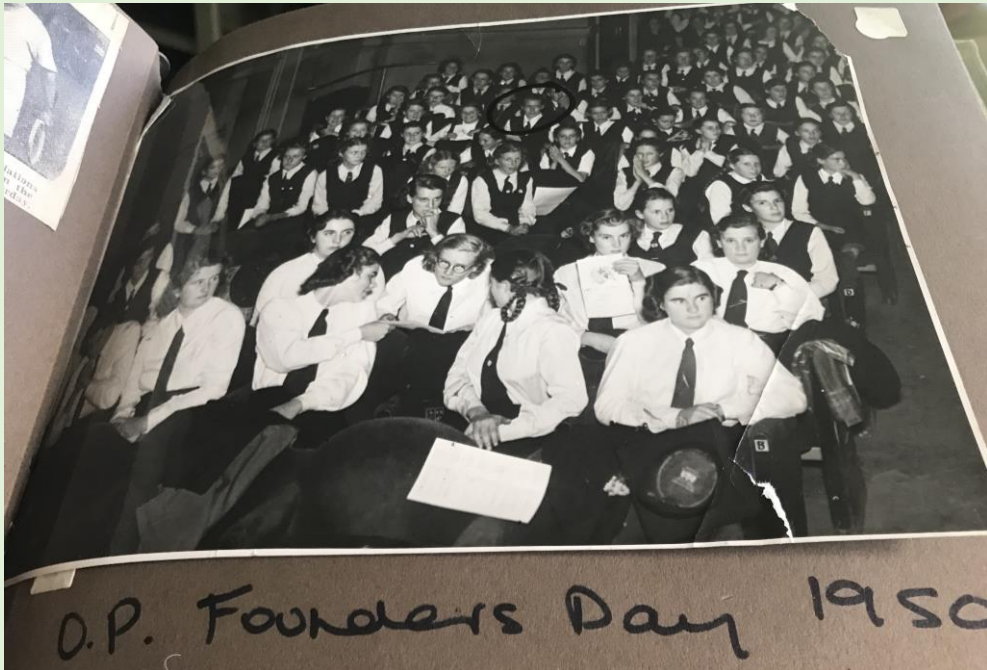
One great visit was to the Festival of Britain. It was a memorable day out and I think the whole school went.

A meeting was held in the Banqueting Hall to discuss the outcome of merging with Croham Hurst.

Perhaps the greatest gift Old Palace gave me was friendship – I am still in touch with girls I met in 1949 and we still reminisce about our days there. On leaving school, I joined the Old Girls Association and then the Committee and for many happy years I was the Chair.

With great sadness I heard that the School would close. The buildings hold so much history and so many stories – hopefully they will be safeguarded and history will never be forgotten.

Pro Ecclesia Dei



Old Palace in the Sixties

by Liz Davenport 1960-1968 Part 1/13

I was the much-loved (and very thoroughly supervised) only child of moderately elderly parents. I went to a small private primary school which closed when I was 10, the year before I was due to sit the 11 plus. Hence in May 1960 I found myself taking the entrance exam for Old Palace. I remember being in the front row at what felt like a very big desk in Panelled Room, and the winding shallow staircase up to it, and the cream paintwork and big window. I must have done alright because next I remember the interview. I was put in Jane Dormer and given a passage to read, then interviewed about it in Sister Fenella's office next door. It was all rather scary, especially Sister Fenella in her nun's habit, but I passed and my parents were pleased, and in the Autumn I started in IIIB.

We lived near Trinity School on the Shirley Road (though it wasn't built until a few years later) so I had to take the bus to and from school. I'd had some practice in this as I'd been travelling home on the bus from primary school since I was about 8. The primary school was nearer, the child bus fare was a penny halfpenny! Going to OP, the bus used to stop in George Street, opposite the entrance to Allders Arcade. I'd then walk down Crown Hill and Church Street. Later, when further up the school, I often waited for and walked with other girls - Jill Goddin and her sister Joy amongst others. We had to be in school by 8:40am. I don't remember the first day at OP at all, though I suppose it was made easier as I knew both Lynne Smith and Karen Perrott, who been in my junior school but left the year before me. I was in the Oak Room in a class of 30 with Miss Martin, a pleasant older teacher who retired the following year. She remembered my cousin Audrey Davenport who'd been at OP 20 years earlier.

The first time I went to prayers, junior prayers in the big high Banqueting Hall, was a bit scary as my family were non-conformists and I wasn't used to the formality of what felt like a church service every morning. However, as every girl who attended OP at that time knows, you didn't dodge prayers, so they soon became routine. The angelus bell at 12 noon was another surprise. The carefully timed tings, in groups of three. I really didn't get this idea of praying to the Virgin Mary. I found the names of the rooms confusing too. I understood that the rooms needed names, so you knew where to go, especially in a big school, but why did a room have a saint's name? Surely calling it class 3 would have been OK?

My first term coincided with yet another visit of a Queen Elizabeth to the school. First half a dozen from Elizabeth I and now this one from Elizabeth II and Prince Philip. The excitement mounted, there were rehearsals. On the afternoon we were all lined in up the - then - gravel courtyard outside the Banqueting Hall, by the chestnut tree. Half the school had their backs to

the hall, the other half opposite with backs to the prefabs which housed the IIIC and IIIA classrooms. The visitors walked on a carpet laid in between. All uniform was tidy and correct, everyone wore their brown velour hat, brim turned down at the front and up at the back in the approved manner, and each girl clutched a little union jack. In due course the visitors arrived, to be greeted by the Reverend Mother and then the headmistress, Sister Fenella. The head girl shouted three cheers for the Queen, we all shouted "Hip! Hip! Hooray!" and waved our flags as practiced. The Duke veered off to talk to some of the girls. I was lined up on the Banqueting Hall side and he spoke to the girls opposite. I remember a couple of older girls behind me muttering jealously. Then the guests disappeared inside, to see Queen Elizabeth's Room and a scene from the millennium pageant, and we went home.

I remember a few head girls. In 1960 it was Pamela Allum, who seemed amazingly poised and grownup to a 10-year-old. Over the years they became less awesome, I recall Rosalie Bailey and Barbara Thomas and then my friend Sue Bettle.

The Reverend Mother was another new and slightly confusing concept when I started at OP. Reverend Mothers had not featured in my life up to then, but it was clear that as the head of the Community of the Sisters of the Church she was very, very important. Indeed, almost bigger than the Queen. The respect with which the sisters and some staff spoke of her made me visualise her as being in charge of as least twice as many nuns as there were girls at OP. It was much later that I realised that the reality was somewhat different. She came and spoke to us a couple of times. I suppose part of my confusion came from the fact that she wasn't a person that my parents would show any deference to, apart from common politeness.

I recollect some of the girls in my class - as well as Karen and Lynne, there was Lynne's cousin Trina Howes, and Heather Ryan, Jane Chester, Jane Smith, Jean Cooper, Mary Peacock, Margaret Hill, Susan Efford, Una Rigg, Elizabeth Webb, Clare Mepstead, Barbara Howe, Jane Goddard, Penny Jagger, Sarah Durston, Mary Dobb, Cynthia Dobson... the rest escape me.

My first year passed, and I moved up into IIIA1 in St Agnes. Now, after the eleven plus exam, there were two classes of 36 girls in the year, and I was in Miss Davies's class in the prefab on the left. I recall the crowded cloakroom/changing room between the two classrooms. My peg was at the back, I literally had to push past everyone to get there. There were lots of new girls to make friends with, but some of the girls I knew well in IIIB were now in IIIA2 in the adjoining classroom St Hilda, with form mistress the Latin teacher Miss Coombs. With slightly different timetables we didn't see each other so much. Friendship groups shifted.

Old Palace in the Sixties

by Liz Davenport 1960-1968 Part 2/13

I sat in front of Ann Comer, and I remember Elizabeth White, Sara Manton-Smith, Muriel Crane, Pamela Gutteridge, Denyse Moore, Heather Arnold, Jane Cheetham and Shalini Subramaniam. Years later at work I was phoned by someone called Subramaniam, who started to spell out his name, and I stopped and surprised him by reading it out to him, absolutely correctly. Thank you Shalini! She was a live wire and great fun throughout the school. I'm still in touch with Heather and Denyse. Many of us came to school by London Transport bus, and I recall the hoots of laughter when one morning one of the girls (I won't embarrass her though I do remember who it was) recounted how as she went up the stairs on the bus she realised she'd forgotten to put her panties on that morning! In IIIA2 were Sue Bettle, Astrid Dunton and Avril Pizey, who I'm still in touch with. Also Diane Finlayson, who was a good friend over the years and who sadly died in 2019. I'm not sure if we were in houses in IIIB. I know I was in Hatton in IIIA, though I never had much interest in house competitions.

Teachers – Miss Gross, who taught us maths, was a young and exciting new teacher. In the fashion of the time, she wore full sticky out skirts, with a stiff petticoat underneath. Very refreshing compared with some of the older staff. She left to get married in the summer. There was a nice young lady who taught English, but only for a month or so. She had a fiancée who was either seriously injured or killed in an accident in South Africa, and she disappeared, never to return. Oddly enough, though I discovered science and loved it, I can't remember who taught me that year. I do remember converting °F to °C, and vice versa.

In IIIA1 we also had the birds and the bees talk from Sister Fenella. This first step in sex education (there weren't any more) was undertaken in the chapel. Sister Fenella was obviously anxious, she twisted her fingers together as she went into an in-depth description of pollination, with a short concluding bit on people (but nothing actually about intercourse). My mother had told me about periods, and why they happened, but until this lesson at age 11 I'd had no other sex education.

As might be expected in a school run by the Community of the Sisters of the Church, religion was of importance. Scripture was compulsory for everyone, and much attention was paid to the teachings of the Anglo-Catholic Church. I was used to the non-conformists with their emphasis on the Bible, and was somewhat conflicted and concerned. I could not believe in transubstantiation, yet the nuns seemed to expect me to. I felt bad because I couldn't. I still can't, but it doesn't worry me any more. Understandably, the nuns, who taught RE, took it all very seriously. The importance of behaving well was impressed on the girls. I felt that the sisters presented a picture of a God who was disapproving of sinners, even angry, not a God

who loved people.

In the summer term IIIA performed *Hiawatha*. I don't know what version it was, but it was largely in song. Cynthia Dobson, who had a lovely voice, was in the lead role with Elizabeth White as Minnehaha. Most of the girls were, as described at the time, Red Indians (the native Americans) with the exception of half a dozen, including me, who were missionaries. I'm not quite sure how the missionaries worked into the story, but we arrived near the end, so there was much tedious waiting around in the classrooms, though it was a good opportunity to get to know the girls in the 'opposite' form.

The whole performance was organised by the music teacher, the elderly and diminutive Miss Down. She had her music room in the room over the NE porch of the banqueting hall, accessible by a narrow staircase on the N wall with a tiny landing outside the door. One day the missionaries were taken up there to rehearse their pieces, and Miss Down asked me – very nicely – not to sing as I was out of tune and put the others off. This wasn't surprising, since I'm more or less tone deaf, incapable of singing in tune, but it really really hurt. I recall biting back tears. I became very self-conscious about singing, and even now never do so in public. I wonder how parents of today would react to such a request from their daughter's school? After this *Hiawatha* became a bit of a drag for me. I don't enjoy acting, I hated the thick greasy make-up that the art teacher Miss Weaver applied to everyone, it brought me out in spots. I think I avoided taking part in any other performance while I was at the school.

Regrettably, in IIIA1 I didn't get on with Miss Davies who was nearing retirement and strict. She taught us for French, which I was terrible at. I honestly think she didn't like me, and I certainly didn't like her, and behaved badly at times. With hindsight I have a feeling that she thought I was as stupid in other subjects as I was in French. I didn't do that well in the school exams in the summer term. My uncle died unexpectedly the weekend before they started, my auntie was ill in hospital at the time, and my cousin with her husband and three children age 6 months, 2 and 3 suddenly came to stay with us. The house was bursting, my parents preoccupied and I did no revision. My results in English, Science, History, Geography, and, oddly, Scripture were fine, but I failed French. Most people passed all the exams, I was worried and felt guilty about failing.

Old Palace in the Sixties

by Liz Davenport 1960-1968 Part 3/13

So the next year, when I moved up to IVB1 and we were put into sets for some subjects, I ended up in set A for English and C for French. Because I was poor at French I was judged unable to start Latin, and ended up in the D set who had to do extra English. Nobody, including my parents, questioned why a girl who was in the A set for English needed to do extra English. The rest of the girls in the D set had much, much worse overall exam results in IIIA than I did. My father did express the opinion that, in his experience, poor performance at French was not necessarily an indicator of inability to grasp Latin. But nothing was done, I did extra English, but not any extra French which was really what I needed, though I'd have hated doing it.

Generally, IVB1 was a much happier year for me. We were in the first classroom on the ground floor in Newcastle, IVB2 were upstairs next to the biology lab. Mrs Farries was our form teacher. She was warm, easy-going, rather vague and no good at keeping control. Prep last lesson on a Friday was a riot. I recall laughing until there were tears in my eyes. I also had lots of reports for bad behaviour.

At that time the school penal system operated as follows. Minor transgression (lateness, talking when told not to, forgetting PE kit etc.) = 1 report. If you managed a month without getting another report then it would be wiped out. Three active reports = 1 conduct detention. This entailed a visit to Sister Fenella to be reprimanded, having your name read out in assembly, losing a point for your house and a visit to your house captain to apologise. The detention lasted at least an hour on a Wednesday evening so your parents found out, and all offences were noted on your end of term report. Girls who arrived late, after registration, incurred a half hour detention on the same day.

There was also a reward system – stars. Teachers graded work from C- to A. Five A- marks in a row, or three As, earned you a star. Again a visit to Sister's office at 1:55pm to present your little notebook, which recorded reports and stars, for signature. Plus a point for your house and your name read out in assembly. In due course the inevitable happened, and I arrived in the corridor outside Sister's office with both a detention (I think for wilfully not doing my scripture homework corrections) and a star for Chemistry. You can guess what she said... why don't you put the same effort into Scripture as Chemistry? But that was a few years later, when I was in VB. I always felt that the school put less emphasis on good work than bad behaviour.

I was in IVB during the very bad winter of 1962-3, when about a foot of snow came on Boxing Day and stayed until March. I recall taking my dog out in the Christmas holidays, walking in snow deep enough to go over the top of my wellies. So I had cold wet feet and soon a red line on the back of my legs where the top edge of the damp rough welly boot had rubbed my skin. Then I went back to school and was teased for the red lines on the back of my legs – we wore socks then. I was a touchy teenager. I have no memory of any problems in getting to school because of the snow, or school being cancelled, or leaving early because of snow. The buses just seemed to run.

Founders Day was an intimidating experience when I started at OP. All the girls lined up in twos, wearing their school hats and with a buttonhole of Michaelmas daisies. The choir lead the long crocodile, in their white veils, held on with hairclips, and the head girl was up front, carrying a cross. We practised processing into the Parish Church. It was very carefully planned, there was even a wet weather route in through the rear of the church, which we used on one exciting occasion. Another time the normal exit from the school through Lower Chapel Room and down the steps from the rear of the Chapel was closed, and the entire school snaked through the cloakrooms in the basement.

On the day we lined up in the playground, clothes were checked, especially skirt lengths and hats. The staff were there, in gowns and mortarboards or smart clothes. Did those without degrees feel they were underdogs? Did those with degrees bemoan the cost of hiring their robes? We marched slowly, out through the entrance to the churchyard by the chapel, across to the west entrance of the church. (It was just the Parish Church then, not a Minster). Then we processed in singing the hymn 'At the name of Jesus'. I have no memory of the service, but we went out to:

Jesus, glorious prince of angels
Of thy angel chief we sing
Countless are the shining legions
He is ruling for his King
Michael, Seraph, Great Commander,
Who upon the dragon trod
Eyes of lightning, voice of thunder
Cry aloud "Who is like God?"

When the last great trumpet sounding
Bursts the graves of all the dead
He will bear the mighty standard
Cross of love, and cross of dread
Down upon the Mount of Olives
Where the suffering Jesus trod...

Old Palace in the Sixties

by Liz Davenport 1960-1968 Part 4/13

At my first Founders day I worried about the first verse, up to then I'd thought it was St George who dealt with the dragon. I suppose I accepted it later. Maybe there was more than one dragon. I know that the Duke of Newcastle effectively founded the school in 1889, when he bought the run-down Old Palace and gave it to the sisters. However I have no recollection at all, over eight Founder's Days, of him ever being mentioned on the day. The service seemed to focus on St Michael, the patron saint of the sisters. Maybe I wasn't paying attention.

After the service in the afternoon the prizegiving occupied the evening of Founder's Day. We had to go home for tea and then return, which must have been a nuisance for those who lived a long way from the school. In my first couple of years it was held in the old Civic Hall on Crown Hill; I have no memories of this. Then we moved to the newly built Fairfield Halls, which were lovely. Spacious, warm, light wood and very comfy seats. Sister Fenella would give a speech, which normally ended in appeal to the parents not to allow their daughters to take Saturday jobs. The visiting dignitary would present the prizes, and then give a speech. So for a brief moment I met Lady Fisher of Lambeth (wife of the former Archbishop of Canterbury) and another year the Archbishop himself, Michael Ramsey. Thank you very much, your Grace, was carefully rehearsed. Old Palace taught me how to address archbishops! Sadly, I've never needed to do it again. Only one of the visiting speakers stands out, but I don't recall his name, or job. He was probably a bishop, as he turned up wearing gaiters, which were a bit old fashioned even then. At the time a popular TV series was All Gas and Gaiters, a sitcom about the clergy in a cathedral city. The bishop proceeded to give a speech which mentioned this and made the parents laugh, the staff laugh, and the girls laugh. It made such a change, the speeches were usually so boring. Also it was quite an achievement making us all laugh, given the very disparate groups. I'm not sure if Sister Fenella laughed though.

I recall being taught Biology, Chemistry and Physics as separate subjects in IVB1. I'm not sure this happened in IIIA, I think it was General Science. I hoovered them all up, I loved science. We had the slightly dotty and oldish Mrs Walker for Chemistry, (known as Batty Walker to us girls) lovely young red-haired Mrs Parkinson for Physics (who set me on my career path) and elderly and formidable Miss Barrow for Biology. Or maybe Miss Ensum for biology? I know I had both these teachers at various times, I think Miss Ensum took me for O level. She was nice - young and very slim, with glasses that constantly slid down her nose, and continually had to be pushed back up. Also she wasn't very good at keeping control of a couple of dozen chatty teenagers. An innovation in science around this time was the appointment of a lab technician, to support the teaching staff. Mrs Southernden was a lovely friendly person, who could be found in the prep room in the Chemistry lab, and who would talk to you like a grown-up.

Miss Barrow smoked a lot and Mrs Walker hated smoking. She set up an experiment to demonstrate to us girls the perils of smoking. I recall a long chain of glass apparatus with a condenser, and a pump at the far end. Mrs Walker used to cadge a cigarette off Miss Barrow, poke the end into a glass tube at the front end of the apparatus and light it. The apparatus smoked the cigarette, as the pump at the far end sucked the air through. The smoke was cooled and all the tarry residue separated out in the condenser, forming a pool of thick black gunge. Mrs Walker then pointed out to us girls that this was what happened to our lungs if we smoked; they would fill up with black tarry gunk. Miss Barrow survived to retirement and beyond though...

I was in IVB the year a certain group of four young men from Liverpool shot to pop star fame. I recall girls in the playground at breaktime, looking at pictures in a magazine and trying to identify John, George, Paul and Ringo. Pop music was new in the sixties, it was something my mother's generation had never experienced and she couldn't get to grips with it, widening the gulf with her already difficult daughter. Actually, if I wanted to do something there weren't difficulties. I recall realising when in IVB that if I wanted to study Physics my maths had to improve. So I put lots of effort in, and with help from my good and kind teacher Mrs Collings I found myself going up a set the next year.

Autumn 1963 found me in IVA2, again with Mrs Farries as class teacher. This was unusual, you normally didn't have the same form mistress two years in succession. Each year the two forms were allocated in what appeared to be a random way. So on returning to school in September, after the long summer holidays, the first thing we did was to go into assembly and Sister Fenella read out the names of the girls in each class. There was a tense minute or two when you waited to find out if you'd been separated from your current best friend that year. Of course, the school used this shuffling as method of clamping down on troublesome friendships. In this first assembly of the year we all had to sit on the floor and wait while Sister read out the endless names. It was hard, cold and uncomfortable - and a squeeze for everyone to get in. Luckily we weren't asked to sit in assembly very often, though they happened each week. Sister read out the names of all who'd got stars and detentions, and games results etc., and then swept out, and we went out for the morning break.

Old Palace in the Sixties

by Liz Davenport 1960-1968 Part 5/13

I don't remember the exact details of the school timetable. We had to wait in the playground until the bell went at 8:40am, then went to the cloakrooms (no talking) and on to our classrooms for any notices before prayers. Lessons started about 9:15 or 9:20am, after prayers. I recall five lessons in the morning, each about 35-40mins long, and a morning break of 10-15mins. We finished for lunch at 12:40pm, and afternoon school started at 2pm, with three lessons, but no break. When school finished at 4pm we had to go to our classrooms to be dismissed by the class teacher, and we had to sing a verse of a hymn. We usually took it in turns to choose this. At the start of each year we had to copy out our timetable onto a standard form, with a column for each day, and details of the subjects for homework each night at the bottom of each column. It then had to be taken home and signed by a parent, to confirm that they knew how much homework we should be doing. My recollection is that we had about ½ hour to an hour per night in IIIA, increasing to 2½ to 3 hours at GCE level. A little more was set at the weekend. I also recall being slightly shocked to see a friend forging her mum's signature onto this form. She'd forgotten to take it home, it was due to be handed in signed, and her mum had helped her by supplying the signature for her to copy! The reason I was shocked was that this girl's parents were regular and committed churchgoers... people and religion are so interesting.

My mum was strict and very concerned that I did my homework properly. She was a nineteen-fifties stay-at-home mum and tea was always ready when I got home, so my energy levels were boosted, and then I had to start straight away. I wasn't allowed to do anything else until homework was done. Usually I did it at a desk in my bedroom. But I remember one day in November 1963 I was in the living room, lying on the floor with my homework, and when I started the radio had classical music on, which mum liked and allowed. The door was ajar as mum was in the kitchen, listening to the music. Then she heard talking on the radio and came in to tell me off for changing the station. I said to her "I haven't touched it, it's a newflash, President Kennedy has been shot."

IVA2 was in Hatton, and IVA1 just up the corridor in Stafford. Hatton had a rear wall that was essentially a rattling glass partition. It might have had two radiators but frankly in winter it felt as though it didn't have any. I don't know what the problem was with the heating system, but the water in the radiators was lukewarm all the time. I guess the insulation was poor and the boiler not man enough for the job. I honestly think that in cold weather the ambient temperature in the school would have been below today's legal minimum. In winter most girls wore an extra pullover under their school blouse, and gloves. The staff wore coats all the time, I don't think we were allowed to. All my life I've told the story of how cold my school was to anyone who complains about poor heating – if they'll listen.

The toilets weren't brilliant either. They were housed in a single storey block between Gloucester and the stairs leading up to Hatton and the Oak Room, next to the entrance to the cloakrooms in

the basement. They weren't well cleaned or maintained, often they were out of order and there wasn't soap by the washbasins. Sometimes you had to look in two or three unpleasant cubicles before finding one that was usable. One perfected the art of hovering. They did have some nice big mirrors, either side of the door, with a large radiator close by. Lots of the more fashion conscious girls spent ages in there in the lunch hour, doing their hair. It was the era of backcombing, and the wash-houses, while smelly, were slightly warmer than the playground, especially if you hugged the radiator. So many girls congregated in them in the lunch hour. The toilet cubicles didn't have individual bins for disposing of used sanitary towels. Flushing them was forbidden (possibly a cause of some of the more unsavoury cubicles) and in the sixties fewer towels were disposable anyway. However, there was an incinerator for getting rid of them. This was located opposite the mirrors, in full view of all the cool girls preening their hair. It clanked when you used it. Many, many girls felt upset and embarrassed as they did so. Why no parents complained, and nothing was done about this in the eight years I was at the school, I don't know. Maybe no-one in authority ever went in there, or thought about the design of the room.

Breaktimes are worth mentioning. In those days girls up to and including VB (now year 10) were expected to spend the morning break of some 15 minutes and the lunchtime break out in the playground (unless the rain was very heavy, when staying in the classroom was permitted). The time was largely spent chatting. Those on first dinner went to the dining room straight away when the bell for the end of morning school went at 12:40pm, and second dinner started at about 1:20pm. I can't remember which years were sent when, though I recall being on second dinner when in VB. Dinner was strict, you were expected to be silent when one of the sisters swept in to say grace - Lord, bless these gifts for our use and ourselves to your service - and there was a mistress on duty. They had a rota, both lunch duty and (separate) playground duty. Thinking back, this can't have been popular in the staff room, but it did maintain a good standard of behaviour. This was before the days of teaching assistants and dinner ladies. An older girl was allocated to each of the folding Formica topped tables to supervise and serve the food – which wasn't very good. Some staff were very strict and insisted that all food allocated to the table was eaten. Others just expected you to clear your plate; nothing was to be left unless it wasn't edible. I recall some mashed potato with cold uncooked lumps in it. Ugh. And cold pink coloured semolina and an episode of fig-flicking which resulted in some detentions for those involved. You could also bring your own packed lunch and eat it in the dining room. In the end my mother succumbed to my endless pleadings and allowed me to take a packed lunch. She was worried that I wouldn't have a hot mid-day meal.

Old Palace in the Sixties

by Liz Davenport 1960-1968 Part 6/13

After lunch we'd go out into the courtyard under the oriel window in the Guard Room, and then under the arches to the playground. The school caretaker, Mr Pithouse, had his workshop under the arches. The maintenance staff seemed to consist solely of Mr P, a grey-haired older man who was permanently clad in a faded blue boiler suit. I suppose he coped singlehanded with all the problems of a Grade I listed building occupied by 500 girls. You'd see him conferring with Sister Fenella. I recall an incident concerning Mr P, I think when I was in IIIA. If I remember rightly he left the keys to his workshop in the door, and one very naughty girl locked it (luckily Mr P was outside) and dropped them down a drain. He couldn't get back in, it appeared no-one had a spare set of keys. Of course there was a massive inquisition of the whole school to discover the culprit, we were kept in and subjected to an address from Sister Fenella, who was very pained about the poor behaviour of some of the girls.

IVA brought the privilege of attending morning prayers in the school chapel, rather than the banqueting hall. Because St Paul said that women must cover their heads in church, we had to wear our school hats in chapel. We filed in and stood silently in rows in the body of the chapel, while the staff took the seats in the pews. We waited for Sister Fenella to start the service. She appeared through the door that linked to the nun's rooms. We were always curious about their accommodation, and it wasn't until years later that I realised how small it was. Just a few rooms shared between the two or three resident sisters.

By the time I'd progressed to prayers in chapel I'd developed an interest in architecture. Indeed, a life long interest, something that the school gave me and I'm incredibly grateful for. I was so lucky, the style of every period from the Saxon (maybe) to Victorian was there, with the wonderful mediaeval Banqueting Hall and Guard Room. When I was about 21 or 22 I made my first visit to a Cambridge college chapel, and realised I'd seen it all before, every day I was in the senior school, in that magnificent chapel - even down to the oak carving at the ends of the pews. Nowadays I sometimes visit a church and spot a coat of arms I recognise from the old archbishops.

A note on the school hat. I'm not a happy wearer of hats, I have a mop of very thick hair and find any hat hot and uncomfortable after a very short time. The school hat was agony for me, both the brown velour worn in the autumn and spring terms and the Panama in the summer. The latter was just as hot as the felt hats. My brown hat soon developed a fold as I tucked it in my bag once on the bus home. Not wearing the hat was a major transgression at the time, I certainly picked up a few reports when I was caught by prefects and maybe a detention too. Standards of clothing and

behaviour were much stricter then.

As we grew older there was pressure to attend the confirmation classes held after school. Then girls who had been confirmed were encouraged to attend Mass in chapel at half past seven on Thursdays in term-time. It was always called Mass, not Holy Communion. Not being C of E, I never attended. Going to individual confession was also encouraged for the confirmed. The religious teaching was thorough. On Founders Day and Ascension Day and, I can't remember, was there another occasion? the whole senior school squeezed into the Banqueting Hall for sung mass. With hats on, of course. The celebrant was Father Buckwell from St Michael's, West Croydon. He strode in wearing an elaborate chasuble, sometimes accompanied by an altar-boy. How this young man felt on being eyed by some 300 teenage girls is not on record. The school sang their way through, from the Kyrie to the Nicene Creed to the Sanctus and Agnus Dei, and the slightly sickly smell of the incense permeated the hall. Occasionally there was a diversion as a girl had to dash out, or even fainted. I admired the elaborate Anglo-Catholic ritual, loved the music, but couldn't engage with it as a form of worship. God seemed remote, uncaring, unapproachable, and probably cross with you for behaving badly. At the end Father Buckwell swept out, rapidly whisking his server away from the girls, and we returned to lessons. Like Miss Barrow, Father Buckwell was a keen smoker. I recall seeing him waiting outside ready to celebrate mass, in his elaborately embroidered vestments, furiously dragging on his last cigarette for an hour or so. The solemn parts of the ceremony were often punctuated by loud throat clearings and coughs from Father B.

In the autumn term the Christmas Fair was held, to raise money for the Restoration Fund for the historic building. Each class had a stall and on the day all the girls were expected to do a half hour stint serving, supervised by the form teacher. The type of stall e.g. toiletries, groceries, cakes, was randomly allocated well in advance. Girls were then expected to donate goods for the stalls, a different one being chosen each week. There was also an overall theme - I only remember the Scottish fair - and we had to decorate the stalls accordingly (lots of painting stripy tartan). Initially I was quite excited by it all, but the enthusiasm wore off as I moved up the school. In fact it did for everyone. I recall the older girls being told off in assembly, as they'd brought far fewer contributions for the stalls than the Prep department.

Old Palace in the Sixties

by Liz Davenport 1960-1968 Part 7/13

If I remember rightly, the school Missionary Society, which supported the USPG*, also had a stall. Missionary working parties were held after school in the run-up to the Fair, supervised by the awesome Miss Hills. We cut up old Christmas cards to make gift tags and bookmarks, and did other craftwork to sell. I remember at one of these meetings, when I was in IVB and Miss Hills didn't teach us, she asked me what I wanted to do when I left school. I said 'do science at university' and she replied that you had to be very good to do that. I felt a bit put down, and kept quiet about my aspirations after that.

Apart from academic subjects, we did art, needlework and domestic science. All very suitable for girls. I wasn't artistic but enjoyed art. We went to the studio (above the Oak Room) where Miss Weaver (a pleasant lady with a very large bust) reigned. She recognised my level of skill, was always nice to me and art went well. My work was never good enough to feature on the walls of the studio! Domestic science, which we started in IVA, was very different. Mrs Walker took it all very seriously, I hated it. I was resentful because only girls who didn't do Latin took DS, and I hadn't been given the chance to do Latin so was stuck with learning how to wash up. Incidentally, the domestic science Mrs Walker was different from the chemistry teacher Mrs Walker (even though cooking is only a branch of biochemistry).

Needlework was another area where I lacked the necessary skills. The teacher Mrs Bibby was blunt and pragmatic. She came over to me as a bit unfriendly, and made it clear that she only wanted the best girls going O level needlework. But she said that her job was also to teach the rest of us basic sewing, which meant being able to make a dress. We had to buy a pattern and material, cut it out, and use a sewing machine to sew all the pieces together in the correct way. An incredibly valuable life skill – while I've not made many clothes, I've done lots of repairs to my own and my children's clothes, which helped the family budget. Thank-you Mrs Bibby! Once I stopped doing needlework and grew a little older I realised that she was a pleasant and down-to-earth lady. Incidentally, later she became the mother-in-law of my friend Karen Perrott from primary school.

Class music lessons with Miss Down provided a change from academic work. The principal aim of this weekly 40 minute session was to practice the hymns for the following week, and any special forthcoming occasion, like sung Mass or Founder's Day. As we grew older, we chattered more, and poor Miss Down struggled to keep control. She was assisted by the pianist, Mrs Herbecq. The two ladies were friends who shared a house. Mrs H endeavoured to help by playing loud chords on the piano, to little effect. Unkindly, we all used to laugh at her. The only

memory I have of not singing hymns in these lessons was when we learnt Handel's 'Silent Worship'.

School trips were arranged. While at OP I went to Lambeth Palace, and with the History Society to Lewes in Sussex. This was organised by Miss Beall and we had a quiz sheet to fill in as we explored the town, which I really enjoyed. Another interesting visit, also arranged by Miss Beall, was to the Houses of Parliament. We went in the parliamentary recess and were able to enter both the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Mrs Parkinson took us to the London Planetarium and Madame Tussaud's, and Mrs Holden to the Wellcome Research Labs. Theatre trips I remember include The Merchant of Venice at the Old Vic, and a day visit for local schools on a special train from east Croydon to the Shakespeare Memorial theatre at Stratford on Avon. I remember quite a bit about that day, but not which play we saw! When I was doing science in the Sixth Form we had some tickets for the Royal Institution Christmas Lectures, given by the Nobel prize winner Sir Lawrence Bragg.

Academically, the end of IVA brought options as we decided on which subjects to study for O levels. I happily ditched art, needlework and domestic science and opted to do physics, chemistry and biology as separate sciences. As I recall we were sent home with a sheet detailing three or four groups of options. Everyone had to study English, Maths, French, a science and religious knowledge. There was an option for academic girls who were inclined to arts subjects, and only wished to take one science, normally biology. There was the three sciences option, and also the practical group which included needlework and domestic science. The only languages taught were French and Latin. I continued to study both history and geography though at this point it was possible to give up one of these. Economics wasn't taught at all, design technology and theatre studies and many more subjects were unheard of at OP at the time.

* USPG=United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, formed by the merger of the UMCA (Universities Mission to Central Africa) and the SPG (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) while I was at OP. Carefully explained by the sisters at the time, it was very important to them, and I've remembered it for 60 years!

Old Palace in the Sixties

by Liz Davenport 1960-1968 Part 8/13

The autumn of 1964 saw me in VB2, class teacher Miss Miller. She was new to the school, I think recruited on the retirement of the senior French mistress Miss Page Brown (Mlle Page Brun). She was rather thrown in at the deep end in being given a form to look after immediately on arrival. However, consideration for others was part of the ethos of the school, and ingrained in us from the start, so Miss Miller had lots of help.

The teaching staff at the time, all female, were interesting in that they pretty well all fell into one of two groups. First, those aged over fifty, long term career teachers, either graduates or very experienced, and largely single ladies. The only changes in this group were caused by retirement. Second, the under thirties, a good few being new graduates in their first teaching post, both single and married ladies. The churn here was much higher. The school employed very few teachers in their late thirties and forties. Miss Miller fitted this group, as did Miss Beall, the history mistress (and mistress of sarcasm) and maths teacher Mrs Farries. She was unusual in being a full time teacher, but married with children.

I'll always remember Miss Miller, she helped me tremendously with my bête-noire, French. For the previous two years I'd been in C division with the eccentrically dressed and rather arch Miss Knight, and I usually failed the exam. But by now I realised that I wanted to do Physics at university, and everyone told me that to get in to any university I needed to pass O level French. I'm not sure that was strictly true, but my options would have been pretty limited. I thought it was totally unfair, but started to make a bit of an effort. With some help from Miss Knight I got myself promoted to the B French set when I entered VB. This was necessary as the C set didn't take O level. I think Miss Miller had been tipped off about me, or she saw me struggling, and had a heart to heart with me. I was absolutely amazed, because what she said to me was unlike anything I'd heard from the teachers before. They were usually cross about my poor results, and I was exhorted to work as hard as possible to attain as high a mark as possible. God expected good marks. Miss Miller was so different. She pointed out that I wasn't very good at French, but I needed to pass the exam to do what I wanted to do. But I only needed to get a pass, that would be absolutely

adequate. A pass would be good enough, everyone would be happy if I did that. I should focus on scraping up 40 marks. So if I got 38, I just needed to think where I could have found 2 more marks to pass, rather than worry that it wasn't the 76% I got in biology. Even more important, Miss M was going to help me to scrounge these marks. Her strategy worked, I have a grade O pass in French at O level! Miss Miller provided a huge amount of support to me in the two years

leading up to O level. In future years I discovered and came to love France, I just wish I could speak the language.

I think it was in VB that the school developed the PE programme. I recall having to do dancing (not a success for me, I'm an elephant) and the excitement of lacrosse. We all went in the bus to what I think were the Whitgift playing fields in Coombe Road, and learnt how play. I remember being taught 'cradling', which I never really got to grips with. We were told it helped the ball seemed to stay in the net of the lacrosse stick, but I thought it managed this anyway. We wore almost knee length thick woolly dark green divided skirts for PE. Slightly scratchy. Our tops were white aertex shirts; mine lived in my shoebag in the cloakroom for the term and stunk when taken home for washing. Singing, French and games – I was useless at the lot of them.

The summer term in VB brought a use for the needlework skills taught earlier by Mrs Bibby. We didn't wear the regulation plain green summer dresses, we had to make our own, you couldn't buy them. I think it was meant to make the older girls feel a bit more grown up, as it gave us a bit more choice. The options were a check material in pink, blue or green. You chose your own pattern, though this had to be taken to Mrs B for approval before you (or your Mum/Gran/Auntie/Mum's friend) made the dress. The other nice thing that happened to me that term was that I was made a white ribbon prefect. VB's didn't have public exams that term, unlike VA and the VIth form, so some of us were appointed to replace the proper prefects who were tied up with exams. I was genuinely surprised – I didn't fit in well with the religious ethos of the school, especially the Anglo- Catholic doctrine. I felt that the nuns didn't approve of me because of this, so didn't think I'd be considered suitable.

I remember the pound, for lost property, and the tuck shop. In both of these places money passed from the girls to the school. The tuck shop was obvious, though I only remember going there once a week or so. Was it not open very often, or did I just not have any money? They sold soft toffee bars in waxy paper for about a penny, and REAL waggon wheels in big yellow wrappers, not the tiny pathetic imitations you get nowadays. The pound was a good system, over the week lost property (often PE kit) got dumped in the cupboard under the stairs to QER, and at the end of the week it was opened, you could go along at the end of the lunch hour and reclaim your item on payment of a small fine (6d? 1s?). I think either the prefects or VB were involved in organising the opening. It's a great system, modern schools don't seem to bother.

Old Palace in the Sixties

by Liz Davenport 1960-1968 Part 9/13

There were extra activities that popped up at intervals, disrupting the regular school timetable. I've mentioned sung Mass, which took at least half the morning. The annual swimming gala at Croydon Baths around the corner was another. This took out the whole morning, we all had to go and either swim or cheer. It was a noisy and somewhat more relaxed event. Swimming was the only sport I liked, so I enjoyed the weekly visits. Each summer term the whole school had to sit down and write the 'Old Palace Essay'. The theme was fairly open, a composition about some historical aspect of the school. I was interested in history, and enjoyed it, and had some success. I also recall a party for the girls in the younger forms. I think this had been successful up to about 1960, but now the girls were more sophisticated it didn't work so well. One year, I was in either IVB or IVA, we had a film – Bambi. We were all too old to enjoy it as children, and too young to see it from an adult viewpoint, so it flopped. Mr Pithouse was in charge of the projector.

The year I was in VB we had the school photo, an event which happened every five years. I still have my copy. The whole school was neatly arranged in tiers facing the photographer. The staff were all sitting on chairs, with junior girls cross-legged on the ground in front of them, and two rows of girls of varying heights standing behind them. The next line of girls were a bit higher up, as they were standing on stools fetched from the dining room. The dining room tables were pressed into action next, with a row of girls standing on them. Finally the back row, those highest up, were perched on stools placed on the tables. As a result some of the topmost girls, mainly VBs, look a bit glum. The stools weren't very wide, there was some flexibility in the tables underneath, and people moved... it was an uneasy experience for some, especially if you thought about the 5ft drop behind. There might have been some worried faces at the next governors meeting if modern health and safety legislation had been in force then. I was fascinated by the camera, it rotated round so the photo appears as a uniform strip, and wasn't distorted at the ends.

Each year there was a parents evening, for parents only to discuss their daughter's progress with the teachers. My parents hated going. My father just hated going out anyway, he'd had enough of people at work all day, wanted peace and quiet in the evening, and my mother was just all worked up about the whole thing. When I was in IIIB they just didn't go, and the next day Miss Martin asked me why, and I took the message home that they were expected to turn up. So in IIIA they just went to see Miss Davies, the class teacher, anticipating a full report on my progress. She only told them how badly I did in French, expecting them to get reports on the other subjects from the other teachers. So that year – and every year after - my mum came home in a panic about my French. It took me several years to get the parents sorted out and attending fully as required. Even later in the school they'd dodge speaking to teachers of subjects I did well in, focusing on my bad points – I suppose mum thought this was more helpful. I recall one year, either VB or VA, when my mother, as she often did when displeased with me, just didn't really talk to me for a day or two. I said to my dad, 'what have I done wrong? My exam marks were OK'. He said 'she's got herself in a state about your French. Worried you won't pass. Just ignore it.' Mum was

excessively anxious, always worrying about me, and I was definitely a difficult daughter. Unfortunately my mum's constant anxiety rubbed off on me; it took me a long time, long after I left school, to develop confidence.

At this time, as well as worries about my work and behaviour, mum had another big worry looming – boyfriends. I had many lectures from her on how the worst possible thing I could do was to have what was then called an illegitimate baby. I don't recall much practical advice on how to avoid this, except abstinence. No boyfriends. It certainly wasn't covered in school. I later discovered, talking to many women of my age over the years, that their mothers were obsessed with the same problem too. On the subject of sex education at OP, I don't remember having anything more than the talk in the chapel in IIIA. Those of us who did O level biology covered reproduction by mammals for GCE; the mammal studied was the rabbit. I don't recall any discussion of contraception, though around the time I reached the sixth form the pill was becoming available.

Soon I was in VA1, GCEs were looming, and now my class teacher was the formidable Miss Hills. A strict disciplinarian, a devout Anglo-Catholic, one of Fr Buckwell's flock at St Michael's West Croydon, a tall well-built lady whom no one argued with. She reigned over the geography department and her classroom, Queen Elizabeth Room. For the upper school, all geography lessons were taught in QER. In about 1965 she had secured new desks, tables with drawers so that maps could be spread out flat. We were taught to take care when using the desks as they were highly polished. Miss Hills checked regularly for any scratches on the shiny new surface. One day one of the girls in her class returned to her desk at the end of the day to discover that a very naughty occupant had scratched a rude word on the pristine surface of the desk. A four letter word of Anglo-Saxon origin that was first used on TV in the Swinging Sixties. Us girls all knew what it meant, but were a bit worried that the spinster church-going Miss Hills might not. The girls who discovered it debated whether to scratch a little more and convert it into the name of a fairy in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', but decided that was a bit risky. So Miss Hills was told, and was very, very angry, Sister Fenella was told, and was very, very pained that girls would behave so badly... I think we were all kept in. We knew who did it, I'm not sure if the staff ever found out.

Old Palace in the Sixties

by Liz Davenport 1960-1968 Part 10/13

I found Miss Hills a good teacher. In fact, the vast majority of the teaching at the school was good, even if you didn't necessarily like the personalities or styles of the staff. Miss H provided the impetus (fear) needed to get us working for GCEs. I think she genuinely tried to be a good Christian. When I talked to her on a one to one basis, I felt she treated me like an adult. She clearly suffered badly from arthritis in her knees, but climbed the steep stairs to QER daily, and always knelt properly in chapel.

I once – only once - saw her lost for words. She had chosen to back up one of Sister Fenella's talks on how Saturday jobs were a seriously bad thing (because they distracted you from schoolwork and good exam passes). One of the girls in the class, M, came from a family with either separated or divorced parents (this wasn't talked about much at the time) and lived with her mum. M was up at the top of the Saturday jobs league, with a weekly well paid and busy job in Boots in North End. We all rather envied her. She was away on the day of Miss H's pep talk. At the end her best friend put her hand up and said 'Please, Miss Hills, M has a Saturday job because her mum's on her own, she doesn't have much money, and M's trying to help her mum. Isn't that what Christians are meant to do?'

There was only one chemistry teacher at OP, Mrs Walker, and she retired in the summer of 1965. The school then had trouble recruiting a replacement. I think the younger girls had lessons from the rest of the science staff, but the GCE year had Mrs Middleton. At the time she had two small daughters, and just came in for a half day or so to teach us. So Chemistry came in a hunk, on I think Friday mornings. The sixth form had to come in the evenings, when Mr Middleton (who I think was a college lecturer) came in to teach them. The problem was solved the following year when Mrs Holden joined the staff to teach Chemistry.

VA also brought the privilege of being able to spend lunchtimes in the library. This meant no talking (another school rule... no talking in the cloakrooms, during fire drill, on the way to chapel in the morning, during assembly...) but the chance to get some of the pile of homework done before going home. We were now in the exam year and working steadily through the GCE syllabus. Another school rule I remember is the one about no eating in the street. One of my friends discovered that kissing one's boyfriend while wearing school uniform was also verboten, though it wasn't on the list of rules! She was spotted on the way home by the eagle-eyed Miss Hills and given a personal telling-off. The regulations about uniform were strictly enforced, especially on the length of skirts at the peak of the mini-skirt era. The limit was two inches above the knee, girls had to kneel on the floor for this to be checked.

In the Easter holidays 1966 Miss Beall organized a school trip to France; a few nights in Paris and a few more in the Loire Valley looking at some of the chateaux. My parents agreed I could go, and delivered me to East Croydon station on the first day. I suppose about 15 of us went, supervised by Miss Beall, Miss Miller and Miss Ensor. I recall sleeping on camp beds in a hostel in Paris, attending a service at Notre Dame, and being somewhat bemused by people casually wandering in and out during it, almost as though they were not taking it seriously. I also remember the excitement for us girls of going to the Champs Elysées in the evening. It was dark, we stopped at a café and had hot chocolate, and travelled back on the Metro. I remember lots more too, but there's not room...

We were expected to write up the French trip in the form of a 'scrapbook' – an account of what we did with pictures. I still have mine. Miss Beall was fond of this idea; each year she'd stop teaching us any history for a few weeks. She'd give us a topic to investigate, like the Hundred Years War, and we'd have to spend each lesson researching it and doing a write-up on the subject. She gave us some general guidance, and marked the work at the end. I enjoyed the chance to study on my own, though some girls found it difficult. I suppose the aim was introduce us to learning independently, which would be needed as we moved into and beyond the sixth form. Of course it was a great opportunity for Miss B to catch up on her marking. She had a strong distinctive personality, and a more modern outlook, getting us to discuss current affairs in history lessons.

At the end of May the GCE exams came. First the French oral, which terrified me, despite the visit to France. We'd all practiced the likely answers, I could tell the examiner *je suis fille unique, j'ai les cheveux bruns et les yeux marrons* etc., and could reel off the sights of Paris and the Loire valley in French. However, when I got to meet the examiner in Lower Chapel Room, he'd clearly had enough of the tourist spots of France and could see I had brown hair and eyes. He asked me 'Les autobus de Paris, comment sont-ils différents de ceux de Londres ?' I gulped. I managed 'En Paris, ils sont verts, mais en Londres ils sont rouges' and the examiner nodded encouragingly. He obviously wanted to know more about the buses, but I didn't know how to say single or double decker, which was the only other difference I could think of. Luckily we'd recently done about the Eiffel tower, and its three levels – or étages in French. Miss Miller had told us to do our best and guess, so I told him 'En Paris, ils ont un étage, mais en Londres ils ont deux'. The examiner beamed from ear to ear, and I, who was expecting to fail, got a B (there were 3 grades of pass for the oral, A, B and C).

Old Palace in the Sixties

by Liz Davenport 1960-1968 Part 11/13

The main exam period lasted about 10 days. We were allowed to revise at home for the whole week before the exams. I recall most papers being 2½ or 3 hours, and on some days we had a paper in the morning and again in the afternoon. If you didn't have an exam, you were free to stay at home. We did the exams in the Guard Room, at the high square desks moved down (I think) from Panelled Room, and possibly elsewhere, I'm not sure. I found them too high for writing comfortably, my arm ached all the time. I never thought of complaining though. I only remember a couple of things about the exams themselves. First, the compulsory question in Geography, where you were given an Ordnance Survey map and had an hour for the answers, was far too long. It was a fault on the part of the examiners, there was just not time to answer it properly. Secondly, I struggled with the French translation. I figured out that it was about people visiting an inn in the mountains in France. I worked out that the --- was cold in the mountains. I had never seen the word --- before (nor can I remember what it was now!) Again I took Miss Miller's advice to guess – what could I think of that was cold in the mountains? Geography came to my rescue here, I knew it was cold at night in mountainous regions, so I put that the night air was cold in the mountains. Later I discovered that it was the welcome to the travellers that was cold. Bit of a faux pas. Miss M let me down that time!

After the exams, before the end of term, we had to write our address on an envelope, so the results could be posted out. I'm pretty sure that we were expected to provide the envelope and stamp too. I suppose there was some discussion of A levels to be studied for those who planned to say for the VIth form. I do recall there being a debate, started I think at the annual parents evening, about whether I should do GCE Latin in the VIth form, so I could apply to Oxbridge. Having missed out on Latin years earlier, I was not enthusiastic, especially as after a bit of research I discovered that you could read physics at Cambridge without GCE Latin, though not at Oxford.

I had many friends over the years at OP. The main ones, which I suppose I'd define as girls I met up with out of school as well as in school, were Mary Peacock, Jean Cooper, Barbara Wheway, Lindsay Sturgess, Penny Jagger, Heather Arnold, Diane Finlayson, Susan Bettle, Avril Pizey, Denyse Moore and Christine Dyer. In VB and VA I was great friends with Penny Jagger, but she left after O levels as her parents were moving to Watford. We both had typical teenage greasy skins, and lots of spots. Together we agonised over whether and when to squeeze them. Penny was against, she said it'd leave scars, I was in favour of getting rid of the horrible pussy gunk. Barbara was a friend throughout the school. She was the large and somewhat untidy daughter of devout Low Church Anglican parents, and was good at maths. We kept up on leaving school, and in her twenties she decided to join the Church Army, and moved to Liverpool. Then one day I had a totally unexpected letter from her mother, to say that a month or so earlier Barbara had died from a cerebral haemorrhage. It was so sad for her family, who also had a disabled son.

The long boring summer holidays after the GCE exams passed slowly. On results day (though we didn't call it that then) my mother called out to me that the postman had come. I rushed downstairs, the envelope was face down on the doormat. I still have it, with the thin computer printed results slip inside. Wow! I'd passed the lot. My parents were happy, I was happy. I'd scraped through French, thank you so much Miss Miller. It would have been awful to need a resit in the lower VIth, where I now moved. I can't even remember who was the form mistress, but we had Upper Chapel Room as our classroom. I do recall the pleasure of lots of time spent on Chemistry with the new teacher Mrs Holden, Physics with Miss Blakelock, and Maths with Mrs Perry (Applied) and Miss Farr-Cox (Pure). No more French, which was a massive relief. No more English, a relief. Though I was an avid reader at the time, and didn't find English hard, I didn't enjoy the detailed analyses required in English Literature, nor the constraint of spending so much time on just a few books, plays and poems. There was so much more to read and enjoy. No more History, Geography or Biology? I found all these subjects interesting, I could have enjoyed studying them at A level, it was just that I wanted to do Physics, Chemistry and Maths more. Academically, the only blot on my landscape in VIB was the compulsory weekly lesson of religious knowledge, though we did study other religions with the young(ish) Australian Sister Marcia.

Sister Marcia was a breath of fresh air amongst the stiff and solemn nuns. Sister Fenella and one other sister were always in residence in term time, and often a second sister too. I recall Sister Bride (old and grumpy), Sister Mary Ursula (ditto) and Sister Marcia, who was wonderful in comparison. She was modern in her teaching style and encouraged discussion. It was she who explained to us that the Mediterranean did not have permanently hot sunny beach weather; she'd been there in winter when the wind was freezing and it had snowed. Generally I didn't feel that the nuns were very happy, they always appeared to be striving hard to meet their goal of service to God. Life for them appeared to me to be restricted, serious and dedicated, with little time for pleasure, even simple pleasures like time to read a book or watch TV. A life of sacrifice. But I suppose I didn't see the whole picture of everything outside school hours.

The sixth form was much, much better than the senior school – which in turn I had enjoyed more than my junior school. I really loved the freedom to study the subjects I was interested in, and the smaller class sizes, working with other girls who were interested too. I'm the sort of person who likes to delve into things in depth, and I found it more relaxing to be able to spend time on subjects I enjoyed. I didn't find the A level courses particularly harder than GCEs, for me academic work didn't really become tough until the third year at university. Also all the girls had grown up by the time they reached the sixth form, and there weren't the tight friendship cliques of earlier years, when girls in one group could be bitchy to another. We had all matured and made more relaxed friendships, discovering things of mutual interest with someone who we'd barely talked to when lower down the school.

Old Palace in the Sixties

by Liz Davenport 1960-1968 Part 12/13

For me chemistry was fun with the new teacher Mrs Holden, who treated me like a grown-up. I enjoyed the practical work, and in physics too. Maths was broadening out. Mrs Perry was a new part time teacher. She was in her thirties and I suppose a future trend-setter – a married woman with two young children and a career. She was friendly and sympathetic, and worked us through useful things like vectors and forces and projectiles and billiard balls banging around. Pure Maths with Miss Farr-Cox felt more intimidating, due to the somewhat remote personality of the senior mistress. The frosty Miss F-C was nearing the end of her career and kept her distance from her classes. However at one point she did unbend sufficiently to say that the syllabus had changed, we now had to learn about complex numbers, and she had to dig out her notes from university and do some revision over the summer holidays in order to be able to teach us the next year. I'd never thought about this before – teachers having to keep up with the syllabus? Us girls assumed they just knew it. Miss F-C's cramming was obviously successful, because in the autumn we all quickly got to grips with complex numbers.

I think there had been a visit from the school inspectors a few years previously, because the new sixth form common room was erected by the time I reached the lower VIth. We could go there at break and in the lunch hour and drink tea and coffee. The PE syllabus for sixth formers was improved too, to give us a wider range of activities. So one morning a week I took the bus direct to Streatham (whoopee! we were allowed to miss prayers) to the ice rink. Here I learnt to ice skate competently – to go forward and backwards, and to stop (that's actually useful) and even started on simple figures. In our first year attending OP was awarded a prize from the ice rink for the best behaved school taking classes there. There was an extra cost involved for my parents, though other options were badminton (which I think was free) and horse riding (more expensive).

While in the sixth form I recall a further session of not so much sex education, more education on relationships. A local doctor, Dr Margaret White, came to talk to us. She was actually the mother of Elizabeth White, who left after IIIA1, she took the exam for Cheltenham Ladies and I assume passed. I guess her mother's busy career meant it was easier for Elizabeth to go to boarding school. All I remember Dr White saying was that she once went to a party and spotted a man she instantly fancied across the room. She manoeuvred to talk to him and discovered that he was a complete idiot. I wonder how many conversations OP girls have had with men like this, desirable or not, in the lifetime of the school? It must be billions! Another afternoon we all crammed in to hear a talk about VSO, (VSO=Voluntary Service Overseas), Sister Fenella was very keen that everyone should attend.

The year in the lower sixth soon came to an end. I was appointed a school prefect for the next year; I was proud of my silver Maltese cross badge, which I still have, though I've never worn or cleaned it since I left OP. I regularly buffed it up with Duraglit when I was at school. My friend Sue Bettle was head girl, and Heather Ryan Hatton House Captain. The first year of providing a sixth form common room had hit some glitches. Regrettably, the girls were not too good at keeping the place tidy, so like most communal areas, no-one took responsibility and it was a tip. Hence it was decreed that VIA were also to use the common room as their classroom. This meant that our form mistress, Miss Farr-Cox, visited twice a day to take the register, and we had to keep the room tidy, and it meant that it wasn't our room anymore. However it was nice to have somewhere to sit and chat to your friends and drink coffee, excellent practice for the years to come in higher education.

Indeed, these years were almost upon me. The staff at OP had a rather nasty trick of threatening girls in the lower sixth that bad behaviour would impact on the headmistress's report on their UCCA form (UCCA=Universities Central Council on Admissions). Soon I was filling in my form. Pencil first, then ink when it had been checked. It was on paper, online didn't exist then, nor did we have to provide a personal statement. I put down six choices for the BSc Single Honours in Physics – Bristol, Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Nottingham and Manchester – for entry in October 1968. I'd rejected the idea of applying to Cambridge on the grounds that I reckoned I had a 1 in 3 chance of getting in, and as I'd have to take the entrance exam the term after A levels (it was a seventh term paper then) I wasn't interested. I'd have to take a gap year, return to school for a term and there was a 2 in 3 chance I'd end up where I could have been a year earlier. By this time I was desperate to get away from home, all my university choices were at least 100 miles from Croydon! Actually, I think my parents were relieved to see the back of their difficult daughter too.

The autumn of 1967 saw me setting off alone on several train journeys, to suss out different universities and for them to suss out if they wanted me. I found travelling alone on the train a bit scary, but I needed to prove my independence, to myself and to my worried mum, who was finding it hard to let go. All the universities were great, I was offered a conditional place at my first choice, Bristol, if I achieved a B in Physics and a B in Pure Maths. I accepted that and I think Nottingham, who asked for 3 Es, were the backup. Only Birmingham and Nottingham interviewed me, the other visits were just for show rounds (though often the staff chatted to you, asked your name etc.) In fact I'd passed A level Chemistry at Christmas with a grade A, to free up time to do S level Physics in the summer, so by the time the exams came I felt I had a good chance of going to Bristol.

Old Palace in the Sixties

by Liz Davenport 1960-1968 Part 13/13

The exams happened soon enough. In May I had a 3 hour physics practical, and the 3 hour S level paper, which I remember taking in Jane Dormer. My friend Heather Arnold was doing S level English, together we sat on opposite sides of the table and scribbled away that morning. Next, in June, there were three lots of two three hour exams, in each of physics, pure maths and applied maths. Then it was all over, but we still had to attend school. Some time went on the school production, the senior English mistress Miss Botterill was putting on TS Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral. I wasn't in it, but I recall sitting backstage and pulling the curtains for rehearsals, and listening. It set me reading TS Eliot in the future, I hadn't encountered any modern poets - or authors or playwrights - for GCE.

Then it was the final prayers in chapel, photos with friends, the last assembly, the ultimate school song (though I didn't sing) and I was no longer at Old Palace.

So what did the school give me, what did I take away when I left in the summer of 1968?

First and foremost, I feel I had an excellent education in the key subjects for further study at University. I've never felt poorly educated compared with my contemporaries at University, and later with colleagues at work. I'd say that the Oxbridge graduates I've met are often more confident and sometimes quicker in answering than I, but I'm just as good at problem solving. My general education is good too. I'm very, very grateful to both my parents and the school for ensuring that I had such a good education.

Secondly, I received something very unusual, an extremely thorough grounding in the principles of Anglo-Catholicism. As would be expected from a church school, the sisters also provided a strong moral compass, and endued us with the ethos of Christianity.

Finally, I was taught some valuable and important skills for life; to work hard, to pay attention, to do things properly and to persevere. Linking with the Christian ethos, I was taught to consider others.

I do, however, feel that my education lacked breadth, even considering the standards of the day. I wish, not necessarily for me, but for other girls, that there had been more choice in languages, and also the options in dance and drama that now exist. Home economics was taught, but economics wasn't. Why? Personally I would have loved to have the opportunity to do computer science and design and technology. What about classical civilisation and geology? I felt I was hemmed in, almost literally, I had to do needlework, and with the endless scripture lessons, when I'd have much preferred to explore these other subjects.

Was I happy at Old Palace?

I made some good friends that have lasted a lifetime, and I had many happy times with them at school, largely spent in chatting, like all teenage girls.

I happily learnt physics, maths, chemistry, biology, geography, history, art, and to a certain extent, English. All science lessons were a pleasure.

I didn't enjoy RE, music, games, DS and needlework, and I absolutely struggled with French.

I also worried about work, marks, being told off, getting on with other girls, especially the cool ones, my spots, and about my out of school clothes on the few occasions when we didn't have to wear uniform.

You can't expect to be happy all the time, but I have to say that later in my life I have felt much happier than I did when at Old Palace.

Finally, no account of OP between 1950 and 1974 would be complete without a word on the Headmistress Sister Fenella. I think everyone was in awe of her. If you were in trouble she never said much, but wore a pained expression. She smiled occasionally, but like the other sisters, always gave me the impression of not enjoying life much, of continually striving. Her face was lined, she always looked pale, worried and stressed. She entered the second half of her twenty plus years as headmistress while I was at OP. Academic standards were definitely rising, and she must have led this, though us girls were unaware. I have no idea of how she worked behind the scenes and interacted with her staff. I would say that I was more aware of her promoting Christianity, through comments at assembly and in leading prayers, than of her role in aspiring to academic success. The aspect of her leadership clearly visible to me was in religion. She also very strongly emphasised the importance of good behaviour. I don't think I realised until I left school about her Oxford degree in the 1930s, her grandfather, George Saintsbury, the reviewer, critic and professor at Edinburgh, and her maternal great-great-great grandmother the celebrated actress Sarah Siddons. It would have been most interesting to talk to her about her family, but she came over as a remote, deeply religious, rather distant and self contained person. And finally, I would dearly love to know why she left the order of the Sisters of the Church on her retirement.

Old Palace in the Sixties and Early Seventies

by Jane Williams 1964-1972 Part 1/3

Who was your favourite teacher?

Well one of them was a nun, that was sister Marcia. She had to change her name to Sister Audrey for some strange reason. And she looked old to me, but she was probably only in her 40's, and she was Australian. Before she entered the convent, she had a sports car and a boyfriend and things like that, she was very willing to talk to us about that, which was quite amazing in those days. And then there was a biology teacher called Mrs Wright, who was just superb. She gave me a lot of biology, I didn't do terribly well, but I loved it. Sister Fanella was in charge - she was the boss. Some of the nuns were excellent, some of them I have fond memories of them, and a couple of them weren't.

I know that every teacher that taught me has stayed with me as I've gone through my life.

I've taken up painting, but I was thrown out of my Art class, which I was doing for O Level. We had to do a still life with a vase of daffodils and I painted the sheet yellow and put some orange blobs on it, and called it Daffodils in Abstract, the teacher said 'that's not what we were really meaning', and now I love painting. In English I used coloured pencils and pens to write with. I still hear my teacher when I'm reading now, and that's nearly 60 years later. It is a long time, to still hear her and all their voices. If anyone says their name I can hear their voice in my head.

What are your favourite memories of Old Palace?

The memories of the comradery between the people I was at school with, it was a very strong sense of comradeship and that comes into the school song. It really was very appropriate the school had the song to sing.

We had prefabs in the playground, and I can remember falling asleep in lessons, in the prefabs, as they were so warm, really hard and fast asleep. In some lessons, I wrote in different coloured pencils to keep myself awake it was so boring and it worked- everybody knew about it in the class, I think I was on the naughty side of naughty when I was at school.



Students, including Jane, dressed as nuns for a pageant

Old Palace in the Sixties and Early Seventies

by Jane Williams 1964-1972 Part 2/3

What was the naughtiest thing you think you did?

I had an email, saying “You must tell them about when you sat under a desk for the whole lesson.” People would dare me to do things, and I did, I don’t know why, how ridiculous is it to sit under a desk? I can’t remember the name of the classroom now, but it was where the tuck shop was, under a stone archway and above that there was a little classroom. It was very small and it only held about 8 people and I was doing Religious Knowledge at A’level and New Testament Greek. Nuns used to teach theses subjects, (Sister Marcia, who I really loved) and somebody dared me to sit under the table. The table was a big round table, and somebody dared me to sit under it and I did! I was grossly uncomfortable; I don’t know if she knew I was there, but she kept putting her feet on the chair, and we didn’t know she used to sit with her feet upon the chair. I could see all of her stockings - it was grossly embarrassing! She never mentioned it and she never told me off, but she never did anything like that.

Another day we had a pageant and I was dressed as a nun, and in the photograph everyone else looked angelic but I was leaning on a broomstick looking a bit naughty. I was dared to go round Croydon and get on a bus in the habit, which nobody knew I did. It’s a good job the nuns aren’t there anymore; I probably won’t sleep tonight because Sister Fanella is going to come and get me! I went around Croydon in this habit and was amazed, I remember, how differently I was treated. I was only 14 or 15. People were really courteous to me and helped me on and off the bus, I think because you can’t tell how old a person is when they have a habit on.

Did you ever get caught?

No! We had another teacher called Miss Spencer, and she taught us French and I’m sure she was a lovely woman but she didn’t have much strength to her. When in the 3rd form, I don’t know what stage that is now, we were 13 or 14 which is a very difficult age for a teacher to teach because you don’t know if you are a child or a woman and I think it affects your behaviour. We were all naughty in that class. And we used to flick pencil covers up the class when she turned around to the board, and the idea was to see how many times you could flick before you got caught with people passing it back. Well, the poor woman didn’t deserve the lack of concentration we gave to her lessons, but I didn’t get caught during that either and I wasn’t alone doing that.

My best friend wouldn’t have done that. She was in a different set than me; I was in the bottom set for French. I suddenly realised that when I’d get to the sixth form, if I got into the sixth form, that if I didn’t do any work I couldn’t get to sit next to my best friend. In the space of three months, I went to Croydon Library every day and worked my socks off and caught up with everything and got through my exams. Which staggered everybody!

I keep in touch with my best friend. We meet occasionally at the alumni, and though we haven’t see each other for years, we have a flurry of Whatsapp messages, and then it will go quiet for a while. So we are regularly in touch. It’s interesting because we have been talking about books recently and discovered we both like the same book, we both like the same TV programs and have similar interests. Even though she lives in Ascot and we are up here in North Wales, it’s interesting to see how we have developed the same interests, from being so close when we were at school.

Then a couple of people left school and they say they weren’t expelled. The rumour was that they were. One was expelled for dancing up the aisle in chapel we think. They did have very successful careers, one is a theatre producer in London now, and is still working at a great age, and still producing plays.

Where did Old Palace take you – what did you do after your A Levels?

When I applied for university, I was filling the forms in and Miss Bottril, who was the year teacher for us, came into the common room and said, ‘What are you doing Jane?’ I said I was applying to the university to do Applied Social Studies, and she said ‘Oh I wouldn’t bother; have you thought of nursing?’ I hadn’t thought of anything really, and I was reading a magazine called “Travel While You Train” and it suggested to join the army to train as a nurse. I seem to recall going and signing up at Blackheath, at the Army Recruitment Office there, and coming home and telling my parents that I had signed up. I’ve always been head strong. I started my nurses’ training in the Army, and that was a real culture shock. I stayed about 8 months and then I left.

I transferred to Yorkshire, as my parents had retired there, and I trained as a nurse and I did 23 years clinical nursing, then I did my first degree, and then I did a Masters degree. I didn’t carry on to a PHD, although I was offered to do one, so I had a long academic career then.

So, from being really naughty and wasting a lot of time, I discovered myself in my 40’s.

Old Palace in the Sixties and Early Seventies

by Jane Williams 1964-1972 Part 3/3

Do you have any photos of your friends in uniform?

No, it's very interesting but we didn't take photos like that. We didn't have mobile phones; now we photograph everything and we're so used to doing that, but photographs were taken on very special occasions, very much posed for, a bit like Victorian photography. You lined up and looked very serious. I wore the uniform which was a brown blazer, with a brown box pleated skirt, which was just absolutely horrendous. It was designed so that no boy would want to look at you.

We also wore brown hats, and I remember at the end of term we all threw our hats in the air, then stomped on them on the ground on the last day. We wore a boater in the summer, quite fashionable now, it wasn't like the Cambridge boater it was more like a helmet, like soldiers wore! We wore a cream blouse and bottle green tie.

The skirt had to be measured, you had to kneel on the floor, and it had to touch the floor, while you were kneeling. So, we rolled our skirts over as soon as we left school, about 12 inches, because it was fashionable to wear a miniskirt. We all looked like we had big fat tummies with short skirts on.

Nobody had pierced ears, nobody. I had my ears pierced when I was 28 it had been a long dream, to have pierced ears. No make up, nothing. We were extremely unattractive, probably that's why we haven't got any photographs like that. People who went to Croydon High and St Anne's used to look so good because they wore navy blue, and we wore dingy brown. I've never worn brown since, I can't go near it, it's a colour I loathe, I associate it probably as a bad memory, because I loved school, I really enjoyed the friendships. Obviously I treated it as, not a laugh, but I didn't study as much as I could have done but it gave me the propensity to study, and I know it did that.

We had posture badges too, has anyone mentioned those? We had to sit up straight and then walk around the Banqueting Hall in a circle at the end of PE and Miss Fisher would award Posture Badges at the end of term, and I never, ever, got one. It was my dream to get a posture badge. It was green with a gold P on it.

What does it mean to you to have been an Old Palace student?

I think it at the time, I wouldn't have thought this, but looking back on my life it's had a profound influence on the person I have been, and the person I have become, and the motivation I have, for life. I'm still working now, as a Bereavement Counsellor, and I'm involved in so many different things that Old Palace gave me the confidence to do. It was very strict and harsh in some ways, so I am quite obedient and I quite like rules. I disobeyed them all when I was there, and it means an awful lot to me, because when we all got the email saying the school would be closing, it was a profound grief to everybody, because it's had such an important roll for so many girls in Croydon. It's very short sighted and sad there couldn't be another remedy.

I'm so proud to have gone there.

Do you have any messages for the students who are in their last year there?

I hope my story is inspiring for people who maybe haven't done as well at school. Those who don't go straight on to university and take another path. There's something there that you could do. I firmly believe that we can all do anything we want – I really do believe that.

I worked in a university for 20 years, and I had so many different roles, and I loved retraining to do different things. I've done research, and I know that all goes back to the Old Palace foundation I had, very definitely. Good luck to you in whatever you do, go for it!

Old Palace in the Seventies

by Veronica Barnes 1970-1977 Part 1/5

To begin, I would like to say that I used to “train my brain” by memorising lists - I don’t have a photographic memory - but thought training my memory would be a “good thing”. Hence, to this day I can remember all the surnames of those in my first-year class (Year 7) - the registration used to be taken by our teacher, Miss Humphries, by surname only which was unusual for a girls’ school at the time. Who knows, perhaps our teacher had come from an all-boys school - we didn’t enquire.

Here’s my class list, 32 names +1. I am still in touch with those marked with *: Anne Aldridge, Veronica Barnes (Lacrosse player - G.K. For school and Surrey), Alison Blake, Caroline Brothers*, Julia Browne*, [Sarah Brown - in the parallel class and a good Lacrosse player], Pamela Chappell* (my “best friend” who sadly died of cancer 3 years ago), Sara Collins*, Carole Daniels*, Premula Dharmaratne, Tineka Dunscombe (became a model - p3 of The Sun when in the 6th Form!!), Susan Farminer, ? Ford, Janice Green (a massive David Bowie fan!!), Margaret Hart, Sarah Hawkins (Lacrosse player), Nicola Hill (Nikki) (great Lacrosse player 1st. or 2nd Home for school and Surrey), Linda Knight (Lacrosse player), Julie Ladds, Alison Lowther, Ruth Luxton, Sarah Miles, Della Mitchener, Susan Nail, Julia Parker, ? Perry, Lynda Robinson, Elizabeth Roff, Rosalind Schroeder, Paula Uwins, Fiona Ward* (Great Lacrosse player), Catherine de Whalley, Susan? Warlock, Sally McNeill - an excellent Lacrosse player and was a pupil in the parallel form.

Another list is the 8-period MONDAY TIMETABLE in my first year (Yr. 7) in 1970:

ART (taught by Miss Weaver)
ART
(1st. Break)
MATHS (taught by Miss Rackham)
ENGLISH
SCRIPTURE (taught by Sister Mary Ursula)
(Lunch break)
FRENCH
MATHS
DANCING (taught by Miss Fisher)

I have many favourite memories from my life at Old Palace. Being able to play the piano and

the organ (I took Music A-level), I was called upon to play the hymn in Chapel on several mornings, as well as sing in the Chapel Choir. When the whole school assembly took place in the Banqueting Hall, I usually played the piano at least twice a week - I had plenty of practice playing the long “Going Out Hymns” eg. “The Church is One Foundation” because if the school hadn’t all made their exit by the end of the final verse, the choir continued from Verse 1 again!!

I also have very fond memories of volunteering to help Sr. Mary Ursula and Sr. Fenella (Head Mistress) with the tours of Old Palace on Saturdays. My mother used to assist too. There was always a surprised look on visitors’ faces when they descended to the Undercroft for their tea at the end of a tour - a realisation that they were entering a former dungeon, where the floor had to be lowered in a previous century in order for us to be able to have our school dining space. There was always a wonderful aroma of baking scones from the school kitchen beyond.

In my first year at OP we had Double Art timetabled first thing in the morning after assembly on a Monday and before the first break. We enjoyed being in the oak wood panelled Art Room up a creaky flight of wooden stairs from Lower Chapel. We also enjoyed it because we could take our time sitting at our easels having a good chat about what we’d done over the weekend.....well - that is until Miss Weaver, our long-suffering Art teaching told us that the talking was too loud and to stop!

I remember learning History in my first year with a lovely petite lady, Miss Coombes. To me, she looked like someone out of Roman times herself, with her greying hair neatly plaited and positioned in a circlet around her head. Having two long plaits to my waist myself, I was fascinated as to how she kept her plaits up there on her head with no visible hair pins!

I enjoyed learning about early history in the first year.

I vividly remember Miss Coombes taking us for our first Latin lesson in 4B (Year 8) in a large oak panelled room close to Lower Chapel near to the Guard Room. As was the custom, we all stood in quiet respect when a teacher walked into a classroom. Miss Coombes opened the door and we instantly stopped chattering and stood in silence. As she walked towards the teachers’ desk she said, “Ambulo” - as she sat she said, “Sedeo” - she stood up again and said, “Surgeo” and walk towards the door to leave saying, “Revenio”. We were all still standing, mesmerised. Our first and very memorable Latin lesson had just taken place.

Old Palace in the Seventies

by Veronica Barnes 1970-1977 Part 2/5

Even though I gave up Latin before taking the O-Level (GCSE today) I always appreciated being able to translate the Latin words in the Chapel stained glass windows as we were singing in Chapel Choir: Horta Clausa; Ecce Ancilla Domine.

Sr. Mary Ursula used to take us for Scripture in my first year. She was a lovely, caring Sister, full of cheerfulness and life. I remember getting a good mark for my first neat homework - but she made a written comment in my book to “please brighten up the heading.” I duly did so with coloured felt pens and plenty of cloud burst swirls around the title. What a wonderful way to ensure pupils found Scripture homework fun. As a Music teacher myself for 44 years I appreciate the subtle tactics used by the very professional staff at Old Palace.

I never forget one very amusing April Fools Day moment when, in our first year, we all decided to go to assembly out of the portacabin fire exit. We were in high spirits. But we were equally amused when we returned to our class later to find that our teacher, Miss Humphries (who taught Needlework) had tied all our chairs to our desks so we couldn’t sit down until we’d removed the string. Very sporting.



Photo taken in about 1984 :
Three Lacrosse playing friends from
Old Palace meeting up at an Anniversary party: Linda, Pamela and Veronica (left to right)

In my first year I can remember walking as a class to have Swimming lessons at the old and very dingy Croydon Baths, underneath the flyover near Dingwall Road. I disliked having lessons there as we had to share a cubicle to change - and there was hardly enough room for one girl let alone two, especially when trying to dry off and pull shirts and skirts and jumpers onto still-wet bodies after a lesson. My plaits were always soaking wet too; the white swimming hats we wore didn’t cover my hair sufficiently and therefore I made little puddles of water behind each chair I sat at during afternoon lessons!

I know that Lacrosse lessons were not a favourite of all my fellow pupils - but a group of us really enjoyed the challenge of the sport, and later went on to represent the school in teams and for Surrey Schools Lacrosse too. At school we used to have coaches to take us up to the “Siberian wastes of Purley Way” to have our lessons with Mrs Ireland, Miss Haynes and Miss Fisher on a Wednesday afternoon, I think. I still have my lacrosse stick and the lacrosse ball I won in the “term skills challenge” which used to take place on the netball courts in the mornings before school and at lunchtimes. The grown-up daughters of my best OP friend Pamela Chappell (who emigrated to Australia and sadly passed away 3 years ago) keep their mother’s lacrosse stick in pride of place as they know how important the sport was to her and it is their link with her.

I have a fun memory when I was in my Lower 6th. Form Tutor group with Mrs Hodgkiss (1976) - it was Lent and we were raising money to put into the CARITAS charity box. We decided that we would be fined if we swore! Or rather, said bad words. I vividly remember one Monday morning at registration we were invited to put any monies we thought we owed into the charity box after the weekend. We watched, astounded, as Mrs Hodgkiss emptied her purse of loose change! How many words was that, we wondered? Our tutor said that her contribution was just for her bad thoughts over the weekend! We all laughed together.

During one gym lesson in the Banqueting Hall with Miss Fisher, we were working on the apparatus when I noticed there were two people manoeuvring the old upright piano out of the door from the small upstairs practice room above the stage. I used to have piano lessons with Mrs Caffyn in that room and knew the upright well. I stopped doing my gym to watch the awkward removal operation. You can imagine my shock and dismay when I watched the piano summersaulting over the wooden balustraded bannister and crashing onto the stage below. No one was hurt, only the old piano!

Old Palace in the Seventies

by Veronica Barnes 1970-1977 Part 3/5

Another memory from my first few years at Old Palace was the need to wear “Indoor Shoes”. However, these were never changed to outdoor shoes when we had frequent “bomb scares” in the 70s and had to exit promptly onto the Netball Courts at the end of the road. The phone call warnings from dissident factions must have been quite frightening to take for those working in the Office. We just waited for the firemen to dash around from the local station and do a sweep of the buildings before allowing us back in to our lessons.

One fire drill turned out to be the real thing: some 6th Form pupils had accidentally set fire to the wooden work bench during an experiment in the ground floor Physics Lab. at least we were well drilled in escape plans!

One of my favourite lessons was in L4 or U4 (Year 8/9) when Miss Bottrill, my English teacher, explained about writing the Pageant. It was all very exciting and I was to be involved as a Tudor lady-in-waiting. Miss Bottrill mentioned that she had gone to Lambeth Palace to glean information for the script about the Archbishop’s “country residence” in Croindene (Croydon’s medieval name). On being brought various books and texts from the library to read, she was told that she may have great difficulty in deciphering them due to the writing being in Old English. She reassured the Lambeth staff that it was just as well she had studied Old English and Medieval English at University! We were all delighted to hear that.

In my Upper Sixth, I studied Music, Geography and Biology at A-level. I really enjoyed doing practical dissection in Biology. After a pre-lunchtime practical session in one of the Biology labs, I hadn’t quite finished my frog dissection, and so left it set out on the board on the middle bench of the lab to return to it later in a free study lesson. But, on my return, there was an A-level Maths class taking place in the lab. I knocked on the door, entered and apologised for my intrusion saying I hadn’t realised anyone would be in there at that time. Mrs Allibone looked over the rim of her glasses and promptly said, “Neither did we!” I continued at the bench, quietly dissecting, throughout the Maths lesson!

Two special trips come to mind: The first is a wonderful Sixth Form Geography field trip to the Lake District one very cold February. We were studying river flow in Seatoller, near Seathwaite, the wettest known area of Britain. It rained so incessantly that the faint lines printed on my writing paper on the clip board under the plastic sheet “ran”. That session was abandoned. No one was worried.

On another day we hiked up, in deep snow, to Blea Tarn, high above Derwent Water. The pine trees and small farm house at the Tarn were nestled in a picturesque snowy blanket. After drawing a field sketch we were encouraged by our cheerful teachers on our long walk along a glaciated valley towards Derwent Water. What better way to move swiftly than to sing a silly song about elephants? We were soon making great strides to our destination.



Veronica (right) with her Old Palace friend Pamela (RIP 2021)

Old Palace in the Seventies

by Veronica Barnes 1970-1977 Part 4/5

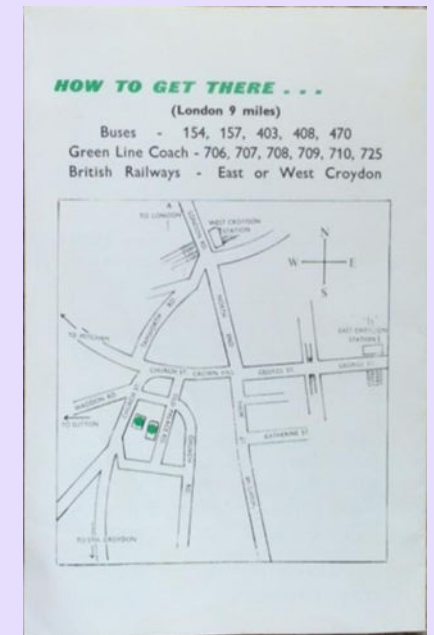
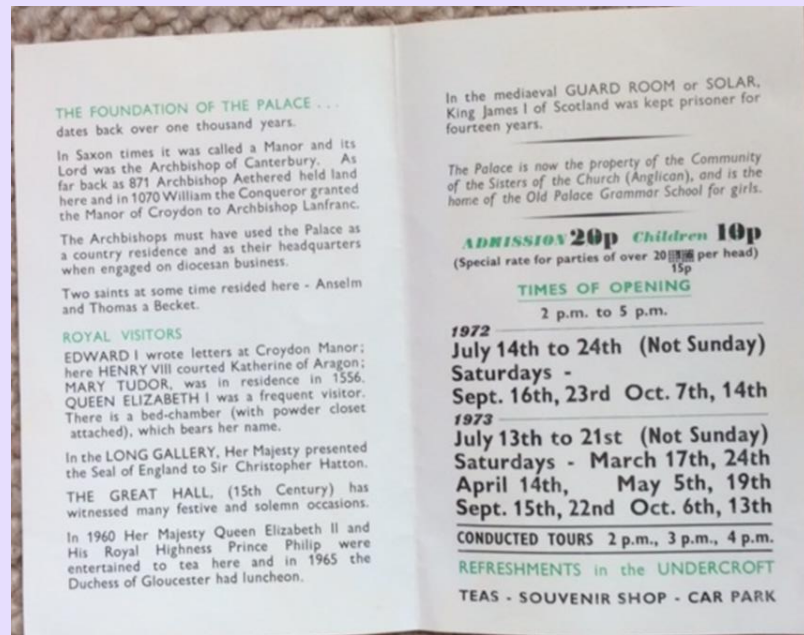
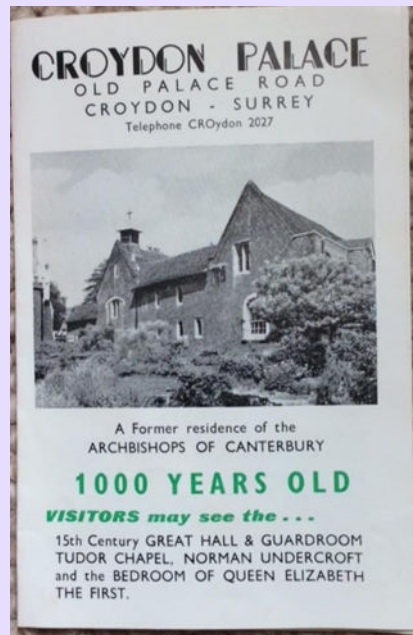
The final trip I made with the school was with the choir to the International Eisteddfod at Llangollen in July 1977. Our Director of Music, appropriately named Miss Bell, had a great musical reputation at her previous school and an automatic entry for a choir to sing in the Youth Choir section of the competition. We decided our choir uniform would be in red, white and blue, Union Jack colours. As one of the choir leaders I organised enough yardage of the blue, non-crushable material for the long skirts we were to wear. We could make our own, or ask someone else to assist. We wore white blouses of our own choice and topped this with red chiffon scarves.

At the Opening Concert in the Grand Marquee, we learnt that Princess Anne was to meet representatives from the choirs performing that week. I was lucky enough to be chosen as the OP choir representative to go on stage. I remember the princess was expecting a child at that time and she wore a comfortable-looking, cool, flowing dress. I also remember the heat of the stage lights as we waited for her to arrive.

We thoroughly enjoyed our competition performance but were up against tough opposition. We came 7th. on the 7th. of the 7th. '77 (07/07/1977).

As we walk around the Eisteddfod showground we were treated like celebrities, being asked for our autographs by young children visiting for the day. I remember watching a Spanish choir and dancing group, dressed in vivid orange and green colours, performing in the main street in the town. They didn't speak much English and I certainly didn't speak any Spanish but I found out from one of the young men that they were musicians from the Basque area of Northern Spain and this was the first time they had been allowed to display their Basque flag in public without fear of being arrested for dissent. It was a political education.

Old Palace Tour Brochure after Feb 1971
when the U.K. changed to decimal currency:



Old Palace in the Seventies

by Veronica Barnes 1970-1977 Part 5/5

The naughtiest thing a member of my year did at school was when we were in U4 or L5 (Yr. 9 or 10). One of our year let off a stink bomb towards the end of Assembly. Staff knew it was someone in our year group and so we were the last to leave the Banqueting Hall. You cannot imagine how quickly the dreadful bad-egg, sulphur smell permeated up the stairs to QER (Queen Elizabeth's Room) and throughout the whole of the Tudor building. The staff were waiting for someone to confess. But we were all very tight-lipped. We were eventually allowed to leave for our morning lessons. Not until later that day did the culprit own up. I know who it was - but my lips are sealed.

Towards the end of one term, when I was in the Sixth Form, I learnt from the Head of Music, Miss Bell, that the music of the School Song had been “lost”. I had permission to search Laud's Pew at the rear of Chapel, and rummaged in vain through boxes of sheet music. We thought there was a plot by the staff to eliminate the song for some reason. A group of us were so determined that the song was still going to be sung at the final assembly that I was “volunteered” to work out the melody and harmonies and write it out on manuscript paper a few times - we did not have access to a photocopier then!

After our excellent rendition, the staff realised our determination and the original music was miraculously re-discovered for the following end of term! The power of positive persuasion.

Old Palace supported the values of courtesy, fair play and determination which I had learnt in my primary years. At OP we didn't have good facilities within the school grounds for playing lacrosse and yet we learnt our skills well and several of us made it into the Surrey 1st team and U16 team.

The professionalism of the music staff gave me the grounding to want to develop those skills and to become a Director of Music myself. I was given many music responsibilities in the sixth form, including playing in assemblies both in the Banqueting Hall and on the lovely little organ in Chapel. Also, I played the Croydon Minster organ for one memorable Carol Service in my Upper 6th Year. That was a great responsibility.

Because we were taught by professionals who loved their individual spheres of teaching, Old Palace teachers gave us, their students, this same love of learning in a safe environment, where no one was compared to anyone else - we were all individuals and had our individual strengths.

After taking a Music Degree and further Post-Grad teaching qualification, my first teaching job was at a girls school in Hertfordshire, where I taught pupils aged 8-18 years old. That was a wonderful, happy start to my long teaching career - which only just concluded when I retired in September 2023.

Old Palace in the Seventies and early Eighties by Henrietta Rowsell 1973 – 1983 and 2008 – 2019 as an instrumental teacher Part 1/4

I am one of a small number of alumnae members who returned to the school to teach although the latter was by default, not by choice, after Croham Hurst went bust (I will try not to bad mouth the Whitgift Foundation for their part!)

What are your favourite memories?

Without question, the music. When I attended my first Founders' Day, proudly wearing my three fresh Michaelmas daisies, wrapped in soaked tissue and silver foil, on my blazer lapel, I can remember vividly being totally transfixed by the Senior Choir. They marched down the aisle of Croydon Parish Church (now The Minster) in time to the music of At the Name of Jesus, white veils framing their faces (veils similar to those worn by nuns, not the bridal type!). When they sang acapella later in the service I honestly thought they were angels and I was in Heaven. I wanted to be one of them and I didn't want them to stop.

Miss Bell (yup, really!), my O Level Music teacher was awesomely brilliant. I still have a letter she wrote to me after she retired saying, "whatever you do in life, never, ever give up on your music as you have a true talent for it." I still have many handwritten arrangements of hers and most of my happiest times at school were undoubtedly in the Senior Choir (Years 10 – 13) and in her classes. God rest her soul.

As a teacher I was honoured to be part of the total dream team in the Music Department of Mr Gareth Hemmings, Mr James Hargraves and Miss Pauline Stone. Not only are they three outstanding musicians, we also had many, many laughs. On one occasion, Mr Hargraves burst into the Mr Hemmings' office where he and I were having a conflagration, and just RANTED where every other word began with f. So we just sat there, whilst he let it all out, then he suddenly broke off, apologised to me, then IMMEDIATELY went back into auto-rant. It was excellent.

Not as excellent as one of my early morning flute lessons with a Year 10 student who had to have lessons out of school time. She came in all flustered early one morning because she hadn't finished her biology homework and was all over the place, flute kit over her shoulder, biology text book and exercise book in her hand. I calmed her down, told her to finish off whatever she needed to do whilst I got her flute together and music ready. Monumentally grateful to 'flute mummy' she sorted it all out and took her place back at the music stand. I wandered over to the

table and picked up the now abandoned biology text book and said, "well, let's see what Year 10 biology looks like in the twenty-first century then" and, quite randomly, flipped the book open.....only to be confronted by a diagram of an erect penis with instructions on how to put a condom on to it. Just my luck. "It's only 07.45," I exclaimed, "that's far too early to be dealing with THIS!" The student said nothing for a while, then spoke softly, "you only have yourself to blame, Miss Rowsell. Your own curiosity got the better of you." She wasn't wrong.....

The ambience. When I joined the school, the sisters of the church still lived on site. There was something undefinable about their calm presence and I suspect you will have many of my generation remember Sooty, their tail-less black cat, who would wander about and boy, had you scored if he chose YOUR classroom to potter into! Mrs French and the tuck shop was another vivid memory where we would squash into where the staff room is now, purse belts emptying in exchange for little packets of edible delight.

The whole place has a remarkable atmosphere, particularly of an evening or after a gig when everyone has gone....To this day, I cannot walk past the stairs at the foot of the Guard Room without running my hand over the banister and the ball on the top of it – this probably makes me a very sad person who needs to get out more.

The smell. I've worked in many a school and they all have a unique pong (usually of sweaty, hormonal teenagers lol) but the old part of Old Palace, just reeks of history and all things Tudor. There aren't many people who can say they took their Pure Maths A Level (I cried all the way through it and STILL don't understand all that x^n nonsense) in a room Queen Elizabeth I slept in and in those days the joists of the bed were still clearly visible. QER, at that time, could still be accessed by stairs running parallel to the Banqueting Hall, boarded up now but still there (sadly the ancient spiral staircase that led up to QER/Gallery is long gone once the H&S police got wind of it). Geography text books were piled high in the little room at the back of QER that we were told was the Queen's 'powder closet' but we soon realised that was just a polite way of saying, "that's where the Queen pooped out of the window!" The Chapel will always be dear to me – I was confirmed in there in 1978 and sang for many, many occasions as a girl.

Old Palace in the Seventies and early Eighties by Henrietta Rowsell 1973 – 1983 and 2008 – 2019 as an instrumental teacher Part 2/4

When I was in the sixth form I'd play the piano in there every morning just for my own sanity, then, as a teacher, I ran workshops and gigs and performed with my recorder consort for Heritage Week to members of the public. Special times.

The Christmas Fair. This was BIG business and it is a tradition I was very sad see go. The fair was always held on the first Saturday in December and school shut at lunchtime the day before for preparation (oddly enough, this did not have a detrimental effect on my 'learning' – argh, don't get me started....!) Parents would come in on that Friday afternoon and help create the most magical stalls and displays. Each year saw a different theme – Scottish, French and Robins are the three I remember the most. Oh the hours of learning Scottish songs – “there's nae luke aboot the hoose, there's nae luke at a', there's nae luke aboot the hoose when our good man's awa' Dear Lord, I don't think we'd get away with that now. I spent hours creating massive versions of Toulouse-Lautrec's 'dancers' (they were prostitutes for goodness' sake!) with my fellow A Level Art students, that we plastered the walls with....

The Arts Cup. Held biannually, this house competition rotated between Drama, Art and Music and the latter when I was in 6b (Year 12) was my first forage into music teaching. We were pipped by half a point by Stafford (I'm a Hatton girl) and I've never cried like it! When I joined the teaching staff this is one of the traditions I tried to get reinstated and extended to include dance but I was shouted down by the hierarchy.

What were your favourite trips or lessons?

In the Dark Ages when I was a pupil at OP, trips were so few and far between I can't really remember many, although I do remember most of the Senior Choir going away to take part in the Llangollen Eisteddfod but, being from a working-class background, my parents just couldn't fund it for me.

I spent most of my life in secondary school away with the fairies with a processing issue that would be easily identifiable today but fell completely under the radar back then. As such, I would doodle my way through most lessons, making up stories in my head rather than deal with the joys of amo, amas, amat or the merits of equatorial rain forests, but I can still recite

the properties of a circle, tell you Newton's equations of motion and quote the first verse of the Gospel according to St John, all of which have come in jolly handy as a music educator.

Maths. Oh cosmic. Miss (Lilian) Rackham – a TOTAL legend (and a fine viola player!), old school in tweed and sensible shoes. Just brilliant. Catchphrases I still use with my best friends from those days. For example:

“O is a letter,” should you dare not to call 0 nought

“If you've come here to talk, you can go out!” I am not ashamed to say I have used this MANY times myself in group-teaching situations!

“ x can be any number you want it to be, from plus infinity to minus infinity” accompanied by Miss Rackham stretching her right arm out as far as it would go then repeat with her left.

“Hilary MULLer, will you factorise for us?” Oh God, my bestie. Her Dad was Swiss so the surname was actually pronounced Muller as in Muller Light but Miss Rackham insisted it was MULL as in Kintyre. Hilary was numerically challenged (something we find most amusing now her youngest son has about 85 PhDs in physics etc.) so I'd whisper the answers to her from under my hand whilst she turned a nice shade of beetroot. Did Miss Rackham realise? Of course she did but she never said a thing, bless her. We loved her.

“No talking in your neat books” If you can work that one out, well done. It would frequently be seconded by, “now come on, girls, you know you don't talk in neat”....priceless. I think this had something to do with on-the-spot tests or transcribing scribbles from our rough books into something resembling proper writing in our exercise books.

Old Palace in the Seventies and early Eighties by Henrietta Rowsell 1973 – 1983 and 2008 – 2019 as an instrumental teacher Part 3/4

French. We were in 3 sets A, B, C in Year 9 then a 4th was created for Year 10 where I was demoted from B to C. I was devastated but it was the best thing ever. There were only 8 or 9 of us in this new set taken by the amazing Miss Hensman who had a bit of a short fuse and could be liable to bang her fist on the table if we were messing about. Back in the day, the oral part of the exam was not rehearsed, topics were not known in advance and we were examined by an external examiner whom we had never met before. It was horrendous! But Miss Hensman, spent all her lunchtimes with us doing conversational French, role-plays, and giving us example story boards that we had to describe. She'd nibble away on her sandwiches whilst we (one to one) stammered our way through. She was wise and I think we all ended up outperforming those in the set above us.

I must add here that not all lesson memories are positive. There were certain teachers who could make your blood curdle with one look from 50 metres. I don't think anyone would have dared spout on about 'pupil rights' to history teacher Mrs (Margaret) Hodgkiss as we really did prefer to wear our kidneys on the inside. I can still tell you that double history after lunch on Mondays just filled me with total fear and don't get me started about awful lacrosse lessons over at Wandle Park in sub-zero conditions wearing boots that leaked...character-building, no, utterly traumatising, yes!

What were your naughtiest moments at Old Palace?

Me? Naughty? Never. Never got a single detention! Although...

I bunked off swimming. Repeatedly. There was no pool on site back then so it was everybody stuffed into a coach and hoicked down to Crystal Palace. Not only was I rubbish at swimming, I was overweight and hated getting changed afterwards in communal areas when I couldn't get dry and my socks and blouse would stick to me uncomfortably for the rest of the day. So I stopped going. I just refused point blank. Got away with it – the PE staff had long given up on me – so I used to just watch. The plus side was getting to see Duncan Goodhew and Chris Snode train (google them – the latter was every teenage girl's dream...!)

I stole my veil. Yup, after my last Founders' Day in 1983, instead of returning the item that

secured my status as choral goddess, I nicked it. And yes, I do still have it.

Swearing. Surely not? OK, so I got bellowed at my Miss Haynes (PE – poor woman, she must have despaired of me) for saying 's****' in the long jump pit. In those days, our pit was where the cathedral building is now, opposite the staff car parking area adjacent to the prefabs that were form rooms for Vb (Year 10), also used for some class music lessons. To be fair to me, because nothing was locked up in those days, someone's dog had obviously wandered in and taken a dump in the pit nice and ready for some unsuspecting child to land on. That person was me.

How did Old Palace shape you and your future?

16 years old and faced with the dilemma of taking Music or Maths for A Level which clashed in the timetable so you couldn't do both.

"Well, let's face it," said the Head (Kathleen Hilton – bet you've seen her name crop up a few times!) fixing me with that look, "what will be more of use to you in life, Henrietta? Mathematics. So that's that decision made". After school I dropped out from reading Mathematics at Exeter in the first term, fell into Marketing then completed my advanced study as an instrumentalist before becoming self-employed as an instrumental teacher, workshop provider and teacher-trainer.

I was a pretty good pianist, Grade 8 at 16, but always loved the sound of the flute. One day I was sitting in a free period in the Guard Room when I heard an AMAZING sound wafting up from one of the instrumental teaching huts that were in the quad between the chapel, Undercroft (where the staff room is now), Lower Chapel and the Guard Room. I knew I just HAD to play that tune – which I found out was Debussy's *Syrinx* – and so my parents bought me a cheap, nickel flute for my 17th birthday. I was playing within a day.

Old Palace in the Seventies and early Eighties by Henrietta Rowsell 1973 – 1983 and 2008 – 2019 as an instrumental teacher Part 4/4

So, did OP shape my future? Well not really, although Syrinx was a lucky moment perhaps. Because I kept my head down and was incredibly conscientious, it fell completely under the radar that I struggled academically. However, I got prizes for my “scholarly approach to theology in the sixth form” (still have them!) and also for creative writing which remains a passion and I am determined to write a novel (34,000 words so far!). I was bullied by girls in the year above me, one of my peers was expelled for drug dealing in Year 8 (!) and another was stabbed whilst leaning up against the netting on the netball courts. By the time I left, OP was becoming an academic machine, leaving no room for creatives like me, although I still got 4 A Levels which, in 1983, was pretty rare.

I felt a total failure much of the time but redeemed myself as a teacher I think. My own experiences made me better equipped to provide wise counsel to many a student in the sanctity of PR4. When I left in 2019 (I am now a lock and weir keeper on the upper Thames – total antidote to teaching, although I still freelance) one of my pupils who wrote to me, totally distraught, said, “thank you for giving me my music. It is who I am.” That kind of sums it up – ‘success’ and ‘achievement’ aren’t necessary synonymous with academic prowess, having a big house or driving a flash car. Life should be about being the best versions of ourselves we can be, being content and we should largely just accept people for how they are. It is the constraints of the (broken) education system that prevent this from happening. Perhaps my own experiences at OP have drawn me to this conclusion but, in my work as a teacher-trainer, my views have resulted in many a ‘lightbulb moment’ with those I train.

It saddens me greatly that the closure of a school that most definitely has its place in the market, was completely avoidable but sadly predicted by me well over a year before the announcement.

For those of you who are left, carry on doing what you do, love it and savour every moment knowing you mark the end of a remarkable tradition that should never be forgotten.



Images from the school website June 2025

Old Palace in the Seventies

by Karen Sayers 1973-1980 Part 1/2

My earliest memory is of being in Miss Coombs' form, 3A. I remember Miss Coombs in her green car which we called 'the tank'. She was very short and could only just see through the windscreen! Miss Coombs' hair was grey and she wore it in a plait pinned up and wrapped around her head. She always wore suits.

Sister Fenella and Sister Ursula were at Old Palace when I joined. I recall Sister Fenella teaching us religious knowledge. We drew a picture of a peacock to show the beauty of nature.

I remember Mrs Farris who taught Geography. We were rather mean to her and threw erasers at the board sometimes when her back was turned. We also brought alarm clocks one day and set them to go off during the lesson. It was rather cruel as she was easily upset.

My favourite teacher was Mrs Hodgkiss the History teacher. I loved history and still remember the vaguely musty smell of our history text book. When I was about 16 I went on a school trip to Paris and the Loire Valley. Mrs Hodgkiss was one of the teachers with us. On the final day we had some spare time and she asked me where I would like to go. I chose the Chapel of St. Denys. The girls had to share hotel rooms, three to a room. There was one double bed and a single. I remember being told I kicked when sharing the double bed!

Miss Magson was one of my favourite teachers, although I believe she was only at Old Palace for a year. She was very intuitive and realised that my home life was somewhat difficult. Miss Magson was our form teacher and English teacher. I remember in a drama class we cleared the desks to one side when studying Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'. Miss Magson asked us to link arms and make the shape of a boat and imagine being tossed on a stormy sea. It was a very innovative way of learning in the 1970s and we enjoyed it. When Miss Magson left, a rumour circulated that she had been asked to leave because she was too modern.

I also liked Miss Weaver, the Art teacher. Art was a subject I enjoyed. Miss Weaver was gentle and helpful. Miss Brown, one of the Latin teachers was very pleasant, but I struggled with the cases and declensions. I was allowed to give it up before O Level. Strangely, since leaving school I have studied Latin on four more occasions and gained a distinction!

Miss Haynes, the games teacher, was never impressed with my sporting ability. I did not mind aerobic exercise to music which was introduced during my time at Old Palace, but never took to team sports. I particularly disliked lacrosse because of the way the ball came flying close to your head. It didn't help that there was a lamp in the Art room bought by the parents of a girl who had died after suffering a brain haemorrhage after being hit by a ball, to remember her. I used to run around the lacrosse pitch slowly trying not to look as if I wanted the ball. This generally worked, except when I got told to join in by Miss Haynes!

For a while we used to get a coach up to playing fields at the Croydon Aerodrome. I remember being pelted by sleet when playing and then going into freezing cold changing rooms.

I preferred swimming although I was not particularly good. We took a coach to Crystal Palace baths where we practised front crawl and breast stroke. We also took lifesaving badges. Girls wore different coloured swimming caps depending on how good a swimmer they were. The caps were white, red and pink. I believe white was worn by the best swimmers.

After failing my Maths mock exam I was allowed to skip one games period to do extra maths, set by Miss Rackham. This was not communicated to Miss Haynes and she came to the Guard Room (library) where I was doing my additional study and frogmarched me to Miss Hilton's office. There it was confirmed that I was allowed time for extra maths. I wasn't that keen on maths, but preferred it to lacrosse!

My best friend for years was Jo Hemsley. She had extremely curly hair and was very creative. Jo and I opted to play table tennis at the YMCA in the 6th form when we were given a greater choice of sports. She always used to win and I took secret lessons from a friend's brother, which meant I beat her sometimes. We met a couple of boys at the YMCA and went out with them a few times. I remember they came down to the school gates and we got told off for talking to them at break!

Old Palace in the Seventies

by Karen Sayers 1973-1980 Part 2/2

Later on my friends were Gillian Baly, Emma Dennis and Kathryn Stewart. I am still in touch with all of them. I remember Jo, Gillian and I used to play cards at break and lunch time. This was frowned on as it was a church school and if we were caught we were told to stop. We played mainly Black Jack and never gambled.

I was a bit of a rebel at times and often got told to button up the top button of my blouse and pull my tie up. We had to wear our hair up if it was long, but I used to keep the bands as far down my bunches as possible. We were meant to keep our hats and blazers in the cloakroom, but as I had a long journey home I kept mine in my school bag with my blazer so I could go straight to the bus without going to the cloakroom first. After a while, the brim of my hat would not turn up. Teachers used to tell me to turn it up, but it would always fall down again fairly quickly!

We had to remember to bring in the equipment we needed for lessons. If we forgot our protractors for maths or needlework for sewing we would get a report. Three reports and a girl would get a detention. I got some reports, but managed to avoid getting a detention!

When I started at the school we had indoor and outdoor shoes. We kept our indoor shoes in a bag in the cloakroom and changed into them when we arrived. My year was the first year that we were allowed to wear our own clothes in the 6th Form.

I recall there was some building work while I was at school. There was great excitement among the girls because two of the builders were young and good-looking. I still remember that one was named Russell. That's the impression having men on site made!

I loved the ancient buildings and sense of history at Old Palace. I particularly liked the Banqueting Hall with its high roof and large windows. Another favourite was the Guard Room which served as the library. I loved the chance to sit there in free periods using the books to write my essays. One year our form room was Oak, which has now gone. It was a strange room carved out of a bigger space and was not square!

I was unusual, and did not want to leave school as I enjoyed the chance to learn without the pressure of having to earn a living. I was studying subjects I loved – English and History – and had great friends. My time at Old Palace was one of the most enjoyable in my life and I treasure my memories.



Image of a crumpled Old Palace school hat

Old Palace in the Seventies and early Eighties

by Kirstie Gibson 1976-1983

I was a student in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As a first year there were 3 classes in the prefabs opposite the garden, now long gone. I think in the second year we were in Stafford classroom - that was half of the long gallery with the other half being Hatton classroom. Stafford was my favourite classroom and I got to sit by the window. This was colder but you got better light and could watch the comings and goings from the first-year prefabs if you got bored. I remember it was cold and you could see the pavement through the floorboards by the bursar's office. You could buy a thick green jumper as part of the uniform and my mother insisted on buying this item of clothing and that I wore it in the winter. It was warmer, but I think I was the only person in the universe that actually wore it for any length of time as it was pretty uncool. I remember the excitement of getting kitted out with school uniform in a shop in George Street opposite the current tram stop at the side entrance of now closed Alders. Part of the kit was also a vivid green science overall.

I spent another year in prefabs in the old car park. The windows got misted up and there was thick, stale and stuffy smell in the air after 2 or 3 hours in the prefabs. The floor was also spongy in places. I don't remember minding the prefabs as they were warmer than the main building.



Picture of Old Palace in 1980

Sports education was sort of cobbled together. Nothing like today with the facilities in the Pickford building. We had the outdoor tennis netball courts and the main hall was used for gymnastics and high jump. There was a small sand pit in the old car park used for the long jump and shot putt. Otherwise, we had to trek to Wandle park for lacrosse and running. This meant getting across the busy A236 and climbing over an old railway bridge. For swimming we had the luxury of a coach trip to Crystal palace sports centre when it was fully open and functional. I remember that swimming an Olympic length was quite tiring, and the water was cold. The diving pool was much better and warmer. I was an early consumer of junk food and used to buy crisps from a machine on the way back to the coach as I was usually starving.

Exams were usually a big event. I remember sitting a Maths A level exam in the Guard room and getting distracted by people chatting in the small courtyard. The door through from here to the main building also used to squeak and slam. I sat O-levels in the Great Hall and one time some drops of water fell on my page of black ink scrawl. Fortunately, because it was black indelible ink it didn't run much and had to be dried off. There was also always dust and felty stuff coming down from the wooden hammer beam roof as I guess it was difficult to keep it dust free.

I remember for A levels there was a massive paper printed spreadsheet laid out on the tables in the Guard room that you checked to make sure you were entered for the right A levels.

The homework cubby holes were still there the last time I visited in 2020. Perfectionistic people like me used to keep an eye out for their marked books and word would go around when the books were back.

The building became part of your existence. There were steep steps in places, for example down from the end of library beside the toilets and in the science block. You definitely had to concentrate walking around the place. For me the oldest and most atmospheric areas were that steps down from the old Art room leading to the tiny music room that then joined the back of the chapel. The chapel steps would have had Elizabethan clergy and courtiers tramping up and down and were also quite steep. In our day the Undercroft, now the much larger staff room, was used as a dining room. I remember a very unappetising beef burger and much nicer sponge puddings prepared in a tiny kitchen next to the main entrance door.

Old Palace in the Eighties

by Jo Barcock (née Scott) 1982-1990 Part 1/3

When did you attend old Palace?

I joined in what is now Year Six and then I went into the senior school and stayed there until the end of school. So I did my levels and then went to university.

I think my parents were hoping that if they sent me there a year earlier, I was more likely to pass the exam and to see the score. It's quite an expensive way of doing it, but that's what they chose!

What are your favourite memories of being at Old Palace?

Gosh, there's so many. I'm still in touch with some of my my friends from Old Palace.

And what's interesting is we all have very different experiences and some of them don't have great memories. They found it too strict, too formal, whereas for me, I have nothing but good memories generally.

It's very easy to have fun and be a little bit naughty and break rules and do things that you're perhaps not supposed to. And I think when you look back as adults, you really do chuckle to yourself.

I remember in Year One, now Year Seven, we had a lot of building work. When I went to Old Palace, it was nothing like it is now. When I was there it was a lot of prefab buildings. I came back a few years ago for a careers fair that I was helping out at and I couldn't believe it. It's amazing - all the buildings you've got now are incredible.

So we had the original main building, the banqueting hall, the guard room. All of that and the original Chapel. But other than that, we had prefabs – temporary buildings. They got really hot in the summer and really cold in the winter.

I was in choir and took part in orchestral activities. We used to spend quite a lot of time in the school in the evenings and playing in concerts.

My headmistress was a lady called Miss Hilton, and her nickname was Hitler. She would send us to school in the winter when there was snow outside. Every other school in the borough was closed, but she would still send us to school, and it was definitely character building. We had so many prefabs and the pipes were built really shallowly because it was temporary. It was so cold one day that all the toilets froze and I remember all that was the only occasion she actually closed the school.

We used to have three prefabs next to each other opposite the office, on the other side of the playground area. There were gaps beneath the prefabs and my crazy friends and I decided for some reason that we would have races underneath the prefabs. They were on mini stilts and there was a gap underneath of about 2 foot, so not much. Enough for rats to go under and foxes. We used to have races from one end of the prefab to the other in our green overalls. So we'd have our school uniform on and our green overalls for science over the top and we'd have races because we weren't supposed to. We'd have a couple of students either end looking for teachers, and we would crawl literally on our hands and knees like they do in the army, just plow from one end to the other through the mud. I remember the leaves; the stink of goodness knows what! On one occasion, somebody said that teachers were coming. And I remember seeing the teacher's feet and ankles moving. We were waiting to be found but we never were found. Actually, I don't they ever found out what we were doing, but we did this for weeks and weeks.

Did you ever see a ghost at Old Palace?

Of course, we all knew that it was haunted. We used to call the ghost the Green Lady. I think she's actually called the Grey Lady, but we would call her the Green Lady. She is still called the Green Lady now. We would always try to find her. And in fact, in sixth form, my tutor room was at the top of the steps where she used to appear. We never saw her but we were always, when we were in places we shouldn't be in the evenings, trying to find her and that is very much a strong memory.

Old Palace in the Eighties

by Jo Barcock (née Scott) 1982–1990 Part 2/3

Do you have any other memories from your time at Old Palace?

It's not a great memory, but I remember in Year Six we had a fish tank. We had we used to have animals in those days and we had Guinea pigs. We would take it in turn to take them home at the weekend, and we also had a fish tank with some fish and we had responsibilities. I remember one term I was voted "fish girl", so I had to look after the fish and the problem was we had a bit of an incident and most of them died. And I remember I had to flush his poor fish down the toilet. I think it scared me for life to be honest, but I remember the teacher. It was terrible, but I had to do it. We had a snake as well, a pet snake in the classroom one year.

Also, I did Biology as one of my A levels and we had our biology field trip. I'm sure nowadays you go to somewhere a lot of posher, but we went to Devon and we were there with some other schools and some of the other schools had boys, you know, which was very exciting.

We were all in sort of dorms and we used to hang out with the boys without the teachers knowing because we weren't allowed to and I remember 1 occasion and I was in and one of the dorms with two really good friends of mine actually still really good friends.

We were in dorms and we had two of the boys from the boys' school come into our room after dark and of course that was forbidden. And I remember we were just chatting. I think we were playing cards and then one of the teachers turned up to check on us and she knocked on the door. So we had to get rid of the boys and the only the only place we could put them was in the wardrobe. So they were hidden the wardrobe and we sat there, obviously pretending we're playing cards and reading books. She came in, quizzed us and as she left, we realized actually the wardrobe wasn't a wardrobe. It was a hanging space and in front of it you had a curtain, but the curtain didn't actually touch the ground so you could see their feet. So you could see there were two boys from their shins downwards. She didn't realize because fortunately, the door opened onto it. We were really lucky. I think we would have been in a lot of trouble had she realized.

I remember the gallery in Chapel. There's a cut out where supposedly Queen Elizabeth's dress used to fill that hole. The semicircle on the gallery at the top, and the idea was that so she could stand forward. They had a gap like an extension, so that her dress could go forward so she could get near the front.

A really good friend of mine, my best friend at school, sadly died the year after we left and went to university, but her sister went to Old Palace as well. She's got a really interesting story because she ended up being working for the Met Office and being a weather girl.

We did have the Queen visit as well. I remember meeting the Queen and I had my photograph in the Daily Telegraph and my Nan had a copy of it in her lounge.

What was the naughtiest thing you did in school?

I was quite a good girl, but there were a couple of occasions when I was naughty and I mean naughty for Old Palace.

We had a biology teacher that no one really liked, I think I was probably doing my GCSE when I had her. It's sad now I look back and I think "Poor woman." But she wasn't very popular and we used to cover our textbooks and writing books in those days. And we covered them in wrapping paper or newspaper or something like that, just to protect them. And I remember that I had my biology book and I put newspaper over it as we did the beginning of term. For some reason I decided to write on the front "I hate Mrs She is a silly old cow." It was fine until one day she's walking through the classroom and she spots it. When she spotted it, I was just thinking, "Oh my God, Oh my God. I'm going to be in so much trouble!" I still remember the day the look on her face. She was almost tearful and I think it was actually quite an important lesson for me around feelings and that even teachers can be actually upset by some things sometimes. I thought I'd get a detention, but I didn't. I was lucky.

There was one other occasion when we were in one of the classes in the Eves, QER, but it was off to the side and it was snowing and we were just messing around and we made a lot of snowballs and then brought them up to the classroom at lunchtime. It's quite small classroom and for some reason I decided to open the window. And I saw down on the ground, it was a walkthrough between that building and the back. I saw who was a Spanish teacher at the time. She was walking and I decided to lob a snowball at her from a great height and of course she turned around and saw me and I was dead. I think it's probably the only detention I got, and that's probably the naughtiest thing I did.

I was pretty good otherwise.

Old Palace in the Eighties

by Jo Barcock (née Scott) 1982-1990 Part 3/3

How did your time at Old Palace change you?

If you ask my mum, she would absolutely say it was worth every penny. It gave me a confidence and while I think I probably get a lot of it from my mum and dad, she always says that in her eyes Old Palace gave me an inner confidence. Not in a showy way, but in a self-assured way.

She also would say that it gave me a really, really strong work ethic. I definitely have that. And it also made me quite stubborn. When I was at school at Old Palace, all my friends and family were going to Oxbridge. I was never going to go to Oxbridge and it was never on the cards. I was a mid-range student really. So when I decided when I was about 14 years old that I wanted to become a barrister, my head mistress basically said that's never going to happen because you are never going to go to Oxbridge. And if you don't go to Oxford or Cambridge, you never can be barrister. I think that gave me the thought “I'm going to prove her wrong!” I say that my mum now and laugh about it. I think at the time it was a hard thing to hear, but it absolutely pushed me into proving her wrong and I did. So I think that definitely shaped me. That was more about the headmistress and her attitude than others.

The thing about Old Palace, and I'm sure it's the same now, is it's such a small community and you can be unlucky. You can be amongst people that you don't really connect with. I was really lucky and had some great classmates who I really connected with. We really looked after each other and looked out for each other. I also was fortunate in that I did a lot of extra-curricular stuff and part of that is because my parents encouraged it. I did choir and orchestra and all these additional things and I really enjoyed that. And again, I think that really shaped me as a person.

So yes, I think it's about work ethic, being determined, perhaps having a bit of an inner confidence. And just having people around you that are supportive because it can be quite a tough environment. I think if you're not particularly academic, you can go through school feeling like you're failing, and that you're below average and that you're not nearly as clever or capable as your friends.

It's a different world now that we live in and I think people are a lot more aware of diversity, inclusion and you know, everyone brings something to the table and I think it's just not overlooking that, which is great. Old Palace is much more diverse and inclusive than when I was there.

The other thing about Old Palace is that I had so many opportunities to do incredible things. In choir, we got to sing at, Festival Hall, at Saint John Smith Square. We sang at Canterbury Cathedral. We did BBC choir of the year one year and things like that, that were incredible. Every Christmas we'd be in this fantastic show at the Royal Festival Hall and I look back and I tell my girls about it. I think “Wow, really, we did that at school!” Again, it's all part of what I've taken with me. Those experiences really do shape you.

Mel Peart, Anne Mitchell, Susan Middleditch
Rome Trip October 1975



Old Palace in the Eighties

by Lisa Flynn 1982–1990 Part 1/8

Prep School

In 1982 I joined the prep school from which I have fabulous memories. Our teacher Miss Walker was so lovely, and we had an abundance of animals to look after. I fondly remember George the grass snake and the delightful guinea pigs. There were two privileges I remember we could be given: bell ringer and doughnut monitor! I loved going around the class making a list of who wanted a doughnut at break time and collecting 10p from those that did. I'd then set off to the kitchen based down in the dungeons and put in the order for the class. Then at break time I'd head back to the kitchen and collect a large bowl of fresh jam doughnuts the smell even to this day brings back those happy memories. What I was not so keen on though was the brown knicker checks - imagine that rule these days!!!



Old Palace in the Eighties

by Lisa Flynn 1982–1990 Part 2/8

Senior School: Break times

On moving up to the Senior school those happy memories continued. I was in 3A1 which was a portacabin on the far side of the playground opposite Miss Hilton's green door! I had a lovely group of friends, and we would have a lot of fun at break time, looking back now it seems a bit odd; but we would wear our purse belts on the outside of our jumpers followed by our green science overalls and then race each other crawling underneath all the portacabins that lined the far side of the playground. If we weren't racing under the huts, we would be playing elastics with a huge piece of knicker elastic that we'd buy from the haberdashery at the bottom of Crown Hill. There would be loads of us jumping on the elastic at the same time.

We got brave as we got older and actually went as far as touching the Green door for a photo, very scary as just the other side was Miss Hilton a very formidable headmistress!



Old Palace in the Eighties

by Lisa Flynn 1982–1990 Part 3/8

Lessons

My favourite lesson was Chemistry with Mrs Dale, she was an inspirational teacher and had a huge influence on my decision to study Chemistry at University. Maths was my biggest challenge in the senior school, it took me a while to adjust to the teachers and lesson format; but with Mrs Kingdom and Mrs King's support over the years I went on to study A level maths. As we were the first year to do GCSE's the A level syllabus had not been adjusted and so a huge thanks to the teachers and extra maths classes, they provided to ensure we got through the exam.

Lessons that made me laugh out loud the most were needlework, we made ra ra skirts and pyjama's, I was so bad at working out the patterns and the sewing machine. Also Domestic Science (aka Food Tech), I remember the time we made tomato soup and one pair forgot to put the lid on their blender and the kitchen quickly became pebble dashed in chunks of tomato. We did love to wind up the teachers I seem to remember! One year we had a science teacher who chose a style of teaching that was not landing with us all so well especially the weekly tests. There were three classes across the year group and sometimes we would pretend we had already done the test and that he had muddled us up with another class. The laugh out loud part was when he used to take the register of the other class and each of us would calmly answer yes to names that were clearly not ours and as easy as that we'd get away with it and no test!



Old Palace in the Eighties

by Lisa Flynn 1982–1990 Part 4/8

Games

Old Palace back then was not a particularly sporty school, we did have games lessons and I did enjoy them. We had to walk to the public Wandle Park to play lacrosse and for athletics, however we could not do any javelin or discus as far too many dogs in the park. Back in those days there was no rule on cleaning up after your dog, so you can imagine that running around the track or lacrosse field sometimes involved a few little jumps and turns here and there to avoid anything unwanted on your shoe! It was very exciting when an old car park was tarmacked over and a netball and tennis court created just for the school to use.



Old Palace in the Eighties

by Lisa Flynn 1982–1990 Part 5/8

A little bit
naughty.....

- There were disgruntled teachers when they couldn't access the staff room in the morning - We'd taken it over and locked them all out! We had a sleepover sporting our lovely PJ's from needlework!
- QER was a fantastic room for a secret post GCSE party in June 1988!
- 6th Form Review - Dick Whitgiftion April 1990. It was brutal , those poor teachers!



Old Palace in the Eighties

by Lisa Flynn 1982–1990 Part 6/8

Special Occasions

- The Queen visited Croydon in 1983 and I was lucky enough to speak to her, she came for the opening of the Queens Gardens
- In 1989 we celebrated the Centenary of the school. An incredible experience at school and Canterbury Cathedral.



Old Palace in the Eighties

by Lisa Flynn 1982–1990 Part 7/8



Thank-you for inspiring me to achieve my BSc Hons in Chemistry (2i) and
my successful career as Senior Director at Pfizer

Old Palace in the Eighties

by Lisa Flynn 1982–1990 Part 8/8



Goodbye Old Palace

Old Palace in the late Nineties and early 2000s

by Hannah Wilson 1995-2002 Part 1/2

What are your favourite memories of your time at Old Palace?

I have loads of good memories. I did lots of drama when I was at Old Palace and lots of different plays and quite a few Shakespeare plays. I was in lower sixth when I had them quite a good part. I was Layettes who gets to do lots of like battles and it was amazing. The old palace drama teacher got someone from the Royal Shakespeare Company to come in and teach us how to do the fight scenes. And we did it. We performed it in Chapel, and spent a few Saturdays practising these battles with swords there, which was pretty cool. And then I did lots of other plays and lots of music as well.

I played the cello and when I was in year seven, I got to perform in the Fairfield Halls for the first time. We had this really lovely head of music who was really supportive. But when I was in year seven, I was absolutely tiny, and I had this massive cello and just looked a bit ridiculous, but she was really, really encouraging. And everyone else in the senior orchestra was much older than me, but she, gave me the chance to play at the Fairfield Halls, which was cool.

And when I was a bit older Old Palace had a concert with Whitgift at the Royal Albert Hall in London, which was very, very cool! We also did lots of music trips. I went to Venice on a choir tour and did another tour around Germany. There were lots of really great opportunities at Old Palace.

What was your favourite trip?

There were lots of really good ones. The first big one I did was when I was in year nine, we went to Italy on like a classics trip. The Latin teachers organised it and that was joint with Whitgift and we went to Rome and Pompeii and Sorrento and climbed up the Mons Silvius. That was a very, very good trip. I was 13 and it was the first time I'd been away for a long time without my parents. That was all very exciting.

Equally the trips from with the orchestra and with the choir, they were really amazing. We got to sing in Saint Marks Basilica, which was a pretty impressive. I think I was 15 or 16 at the time and that was very exciting. Though back then the head of music was Mrs Jewell, that she later became the head teacher, that she was really great at organising breaks and music trips for us.

What was your favourite lesson?

Oh that's hard. I studied History at university and all through my time at Old Palace I loved History and I love the fact that the school had such amazing history as well and I had some really good History teachers.

I had loads of great teachers at Old Palace. The only subject I really didn't like was Maths. I had a very scary maths teacher called Mrs Colbert. I was in year seven and she terrified me. But I mostly enjoyed lessons.

What was the naughtiest thing you did at school?

I didn't have much opportunity to be naughty because my mum was Head of Biology at Old Palace the whole time I was there. So for seven years, my mum was teaching at the school and was quite a well-known figure and anything that I did would get back to her straight away. There were some little things like we used to sometimes sneak out at lunchtime and go to McDonald's which we weren't allowed to do until sixth form, but we did it when we were younger. And when I was older, on some of the trips, we were maybe a little bit naughty going out when we weren't supposed to. But on the whole, I would say I was pretty well behaved. I never got a detention, and when I was there, it was really quite a strict school.

We had to wear this horrible brown uniform at the time and we had these long brown socks that we had to wear pulled up to our knees at all the time. And if you were caught with your socks crumpled around your ankles and not pulled up, you got in trouble for it. And you could even get a detention for having your socks not pulled up. So it was pretty strict and I just been at my local state school before coming to Old Palace, which was not strict at all. So that was a big change, suddenly coming to this really strict school.

We used to have to have our locker keys on the piece of string around our neck. We had lockers in a locker room underneath downstairs. We had to have the keys literally tied on a piece of string and hidden inside your shirt. And they would do these checks randomly once a week, maybe in registration. They liked to make sure we all had our locker keys. So, I'm sure I got in trouble for not having my locker key and that sort of thing. But in general, I think I was a bit too scared to do anything really naughty.

Old Palace in the late Nineties and early 2000s

by Hannah Wilson 1995-2002 Part 2/2

How do you think Old Palace shaped you?

In lots of ways I would say. The primary school I went to was very, very different and I was the only person in my year that went to university, whereas Old Palace was obviously very academic. And so I think if I hadn't gone to Old Palace, I might have taken a very different course in life. And I only really went to Old Palace because my mum was teaching there and back then if your parent was a teacher you got a big reduction on the fees. I think if I hadn't gone to Old Palace, who knows what I would be doing now.

It certainly gave and it definitely like fed my love of history. I studied history at Oxford, which wouldn't have been possible without Old Palace for sure, and actually even at my Oxford interview for that they asked me about something I was passionate about and I spoke about the history of Old Palace because I while I was at school there was quite a lot of research being done about the history of the buildings and connections to various monarchs. And so I've been quite involved in that in my own time. My love of history came through Old Palace and while I don't work in history now (I work at Cambridge University), my office is in the 14th century building and that's probably because it reminds me a bit of Old Palace.

I work at Pembroke College, which is part of Cambridge University, and I run a leadership program for students who've come to Cambridge from underrepresented backgrounds. Some of them are from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, some of them are refugees or young carers and some have disabilities, and I give them extra support. Some of them need quite a lot of support with their confidence and others need me to help them with careers stuff. It's, an amazing job. They're all incredibly bright young people. They have potentially very bright futures, but just need a bit of supports and overcoming some constraints that that they face.

What was the choir uniform like?

It was even weirder than the ugly brown uniforms - we used to have to wear these white shirts and long red skirts with veils, which were a bit like a nun's habit. I think that it was a historic thing from when it used to be a church school, a long time ago. It was really odd - it looked a bit like The Handmaid's Tale.

What do you remember about the buildings?

The Cathedral building was built while I was there and it was built as a prep school, but it took them ages to build it because part of the planning permission was that they had to use traditional building techniques. So they had to use Tudor building techniques, and they were building that place for pretty much the entire seven years that I was there. It took forever.

Old Palace in the 2010s

by Nkeiruka Whenu 2011-2017 Part 1/2

What are some of your favourite memories of your time at Old Palace?

One of them was definitely orchestrating a Battle of the Bands. I did this with a small set of friends, and then eventually it expanded to my entire year group, which was about 80 people. It was really fun, because it was anyone with a musical inclination who maybe they did or didn't study Music or were practicing an instrument. We all came together and performed. And it was really interesting, because we did marketing, we made posters and we put them up. Some of the years we did it as a charity fundraiser, which was interesting. We got some teachers involved as well. I remember Mrs Freeman, who was my History teacher. I loved her so much. She got involved at one point. And the entire year group bought tickets for this one lunchtime, and they were our music crew. And it became sort of a tradition, because I think out of the five years that I was there, I think we did it on three of them, so often enough for people to say, "Oh, Inky (they called me Inky) Where's the next one? When's the next Battle of the bands?" That was just nice.

I think it was also really cool, because we ended up getting from the music room to the main hall at one point. So I think it was an understood event; it was an event that teachers began to expect, and even though we overran sometimes, people who were then late to their classes weren't necessarily told off because they understood why they were late. So that was quite fun to have built a name, not only for myself, but a thing for my year group. So I hope that people reflect on that.

What kind of student were you?

I definitely think I might have made life a bit harder for some teachers, but I think, at the end of the day, my grades were quite good. I was very confident in myself around that time. I'm sure it must have been quite hard for teachers to think "You're being very disruptive, but you do have good grades." I remember sleeping in class a lot. I was always very tired. I was always up late reading or playing games, and so that would transform itself into not being particularly attentive during classes. I slept in history with Miss Freeman, ironically, maybe that's why I love her so much! I feel like I did in DT, although I really love DT, and I was very active, and obviously it's a subject where you have to have your wits about you, because otherwise you might hurt yourself. Sometimes I slept in French, definitely French. I loved Madame Poirier. I've continued my French, even though I didn't study at A level. I've continued and

consolidated it, because Madame Poirier was such a good teacher to me, and I think she was really happy with, the outcome of my grades and I was happy to have made her proud as well. So she was a very strong teacher.

Miss Peate was my English teacher and one of my favourite teachers as well. She definitely gave me a love for English. I really loved reading and writing. I wrote in my spare time, but I think Miss Peate was a very pivotal force in getting us those higher grades. Everyone who I speak to about Miss Peate speaks very fondly of her and really appreciated her teaching.

Did you go on any school trips?

I didn't go on many, but one I do remember is going to Reykjavik in Iceland. We climbed glaciers. We saw geysers. Those are really cool. There were lots of natural formations. And it was really nice to get up close and personal with them. I don't remember why I was on that trip, because I was not a Geography student. I don't even remember if it was Geography only, but I really enjoyed it because it's different. I don't think many people get the opportunity to walk on glaciers and do all these things. So that was quite nice, even though it was incredibly windy and rainy there. I wanted to see the northern lights, but we didn't.

What was the naughtiest thing you ever did at school?

The naughtiest individual thing, I don't know, but I know I was incredibly disruptive across Science. My Chemistry teachers and Biology teachers were not fans. I remember my Physics teacher. I forgot all their names, but I have their faces imprinted in my memory. I would talk to friends just a bit more than other people, to the point where even some of my classmates would be say "Inky, please!" I enjoyed every single one of my subjects, so it wasn't out of boredom or anything necessarily. I don't know. Maybe I engaged with the information and with my peers in a different kind of way. But I definitely loved all of my subjects that I chose at GCSE level.

Old Palace in the 2010s

by Nkeiruka Whenu 2011-2017 Part 2/2

I was always late. I was always late to school. So detentions became just sort of a regular thing. I spent a lot of time with Mrs Smith! My mum and Mrs Smith ended up becoming friends, which is really awkward.

In Year Seven, so fresh in Old Palace, there was a miscommunication between one of my friends and me online, which became interpreted as cyber bullying. And I was completely flabbergasted, because I thought “What is happening right now?” So I got lots of detentions for that, and then on top of that, many detentions for being late. So in Year Seven alone, I think I had around 52 detentions, which was insane. I was there all the time. I don't know why I've kept that number in my mind. I think I got maybe 21 from the cyber bullying thing, just that. It was just online teasing in my mind, but and being late.

In the final few years I had a number of different detentions as well. But I enjoyed detention because I like reading, and you basically just had to read. So I felt it was great. It wasn't really an issue for me or doing homework. At home, I have three younger siblings, so it wasn't always easy to find peace and quiet to just study. So I would do homework in that period. I was almost sad to leave the detention because it was just peaceful, and often I was the only one there.

How do you think old palace is shaped you?

In many different ways. I went on to study Computer Science, and my Computing teacher, Mrs. Burdett was really instrumental in that, as well as the male computing teacher of the other class, whose name I forgotten, unfortunately. And I wonder if there was a teacher I had before Mrs. Burdett as well, in Year Seven. I think I was really vocal in that class, along with a very close friend of mine called Amber Wentzel, and we really loved Computer Science together, and we would like make websites and stuff. We didn't know at the time that what we were doing was actually quite advanced for the age range that we were. Now I make websites, but with actual professional frameworks. So that was lovely.

What clubs and extra-curricular did you do?

I was a Digital Leader, and a Prefect. I did Polyphonic. That was fun - with Mr. Hemmings. Through polyphonic, we did some really cool things, like have choir at really nice places whose names I forgot. In the final years, I established a Further Maths Club, which was really, really fun. As much as it doesn't sound fun. It was an after-school club for Further Maths, with no teachers, just us, sharing and talking to each other and helping one another. And I think it was a very different vibe when there wasn't an adult around, because we were still very serious, because we wanted to succeed at our GCSEs. But it was just more fun, and everyone was doing

their own thing, and we had food, and it was really nice and very helpful.

I was always in the library, in the Resources Room. I really enjoyed it up there - just using the computers and writing. I was doing my own personal writing on that as well. It was great having access to a computer in break times and lunch times and it was also quite instrumental for me.

Where did you go after Old Palace?

I went to Nonsuch for Sixth Form and I did enjoy I there. I missed my Old Palace friends, of course, but I think I was also ready to move on. I think I was in a really weird position, because I thought that I'd been too naughty with the teachers, so I wondered if they'd support me if I stayed. I really enjoyed the camaraderie of Old Palace, the kind of culture that there is here, of Polyphonic and going to the church up the road. It was a really nice community, which is why it was so sad to go.

In Nonsuch I managed to try new things. I did a lot of musical theatre. I did dabble in that at Old Palace, but there were people who had already made their names, so they were often chosen for those lead roles. And I thought, “Okay, let me go somewhere else and try that there.” So I did musical theatre at Nonsuch and Gospel Choir. I don't know I really liked the choir vibe from Old Palace. So I've moved that forward in my life. When I was at Old Palace, I did the Whitgift summer school, which was, arts-based, and that was quite fun. I did it with some friends, and it was nice.

I didn't get into my university of choice. However, I think I definitely made the most of it. I was involved in everything I possibly could be involved in. I had a lot of leadership roles within clubs like ACS, African Caribbean Society, Gospel Choir, Writing Society, Computer Science Society. I studied Computer Science and Software Engineering and I'm thinking of doing my Masters even now, whilst I'm working. I have so many interests, maybe I'll do a Masters in Neuroscience, maybe Psychology, maybe AI who knows?

Now I am a software engineer at Canonical, who are the makers of Ubuntu, and I also have my own business called Web 3Z in which we make Web Three Easy. We introduce tech enthusiasts and young professionals to emerging technologies such as Web Three, Quantum Computing and Blockchain through courses, a technical blog and a wider community. We're starting to partner with other businesses to bring workshops and boot camps to their audiences. That's what we do; tell people about the tech that is out there, how they can use it, familiarise them with that so that we can democratise access to emerging technology.

*Thank you to everyone who contributed to this book.
We want these special memories to live on after the
closing of Old Palace.*



*Thank
you*