

In 1995, Margaret Phelan and Beryl Bedford did a wonderful job editing the following 64 page booklet which included many illustrations and sketches by pupils. Thanks to Rosemary Gibbs who scanned it for the web.

## Kidderminster High School

# MEMORIES OF A SCHOOL

### The World Around

The world in which Miss Bennett established her school for girls in 1868 at Broomfield Hall was very different from the one we now know just over a century later. It is enlightening to set down a few of the major changes and innovations, especially those which happened in the earlier years, and to think about what the world without them might have been like.

1865: Bill passed requiring 3 drivers in steam traction engines and for a man with a red flag to walk in front of each vehicle. A speed limit of 4 m.p.h. was imposed.

1888: County Councils set up in Britain - and what importance they have had for education ever since.

1894: Manchester Ship Canal opened - increasing trade and mobility of goods.

1895: Marconi sent a message over a mile's distance by wireless. Rontgen discovered X-rays. Freud published his first work on psycho-analysis.

1898: The Curies discovered radium - and the field of study of radio-activity began.

1899: The Boer War began. 1901: Queen Victoria died.

1903: Speed limit in Great Britain raised to 20 m.p.h. First controlled flight in heavier-than-air machine by Wilbur and Orville Wright.

1906: Liberal "landslide", first Labour M.P.s appeared in Parliament. The Movement for Women's Suffrage became active. Vitamins discovered.

1909: Old Age Pensions first paid to over 70's. The first Model 'T' Ford and the beginnings of cheap cars. Bleriot made first cross-Channel flight.

1912: K.H.S. moved to Chester Road site.

1914-18: The First World War. 1918: School leaving age raised to 14.

1919: The Peace Treaty. Alcock and Brown fly the Atlantic. 1928: Women enfranchised on the same basis as men.

1939-45: The Second World War.

And so to the years either experienced by or known from family memory by most who were pupils of K.H.S. in the years which remained to it. As that world had changed so had the school, under its wise and far-sighted Headmistresses, moved along and prepared its pupils for a more competitive and open world than the many generations of women before them had known.

## IN THE BEGINNING

The school started when Miss Catherine Bennett who was Headmistress from 1868 until 1903 came to Broomfield Hall with Miss Ridley from a country parish in Shropshire.

In the first edition of the school magazine in 1914 she wrote:

This school which began with seventeen pupils (boarders) would now be considered very old fashioned and probably inadequate for modern requirements. We had as time went on about thirty boarders, and with day pupils an average of from eighty to one hundred pupils; the boarders came mostly from country places in the Midlands, at that time quite unprovided with suitable schools for girls. Many of these girls coming from quiet country homes did really excellent work, and learned to esteem at its right value thoroughness and steadfastness of purpose. I remember many efforts to instil into our pupils' minds a desire to excel in needlework, and the joy with which our garments were sent up for examination and criticism. It was in those early days we first tried to have a Kindergarten, and I remember how difficult it was to overcome prejudices and induce the parents to send their young children to be taught by this - to them - unknown system, which seemed to many of them to be merely organised play. And yet of those little boys who made their first beginning in the Kindergarten, we know of many who are now doing good work in the world in various ways: three are in Holy Orders, one a Cathedral Organist, some have gained good positions in the Navy, others distinction in the legal and medical professions, others are doing well in commercial life. The girls who passed through the Kindergarten went on to the High School, and we did not fail to note there the results of their early training.

It was at Broomfield we began to send in pupils for the Cambridge Local Examinations, and at first we were much assisted by the Rev. L. B. Penley. The Cambridge Examinations replaced the now forgotten College of Preceptors' Examinations, and all of these were useful in setting for us a standard and giving us an ideal for which we had to work. In art and music we also used examinations to help us to work.

In 1888 it was thought desirable to effect changes in the constitution of the school, and to make some really big effort to bring it up to date and make the school more efficient than was possible under existing circumstances at Broomfield. After many anxious consultations and discussions, the old school was merged into the new High School under a Council, of which the first Chairman was John Brinton Esq., always a good friend to the High School. We began the autumn term of 1888 with 74 pupils (73 from the old school). As time went on our numbers grew, and we reached an average for the year of 100. At the time of my resignation in December 1903, we had 101 regular pupils in the High School and a few others who came for special subjects. At this time Miss Ridley took a house in Blakebrook for boarders, while the High School was transplanted to the house then known as Needwood. We had the advantage thereof numerous classrooms and music rooms, a good-sized Kindergarten, and a fair-sized hall, in which the girls could assemble, and thus enable us to do more to foster the corporate life of the High School. Here the High School had its home till 1912, when it moved again to its present splendid buildings in Chester Road, and the hopes of many years were at last realised. It was in those early days of the High School that Mr. Wadely and the Miss Skerritts did so much for us in music. We had Senior and Junior Singing Classes, a very creditable Orchestral Class, and we managed to work successfully with the younger children on the method of Mrs. Curwen's "Child Pianist", which at the present time is much used in London and other places. With some difficulty I persuaded the Council to build a gymnasium, and we were fortunate in finding suitable mistresses who put the work on good lines. The apparatus used was Swedish, of the very best type then in vogue. In games we had tennis, hockey and basket-ball. We made an attempt to get cookery taught in the High School, but for lack of time and a suitably equipped room for lessons we eventually gave up the effort.

It would be impossible for me to set down in writing all I remember of those struggling times - many of my old and valued friends tell me how happily they look back to them. I am glad to think that the new High School is so splendidly equipped, and possesses such a devoted Headmistress and strong staff.

In January 1904 Miss Constance Jordan became Head of the school for eight years and another hundred and thirty pupils passed through it. It was in the middle of this time that the County Council

took over the school and Miss Jordan was set the difficult task of welding into one a Pupil Teachers' Centre from the School of Science and the existing High School. This imperfect amalgamation caused an abrupt breach of tradition.

Miss Jordan's attitude to life can best be gauged by the advice she gave to the girls of K.H.S. a little while after she left them, in the first issue of the School Magazine:

"Train yourselves to do your work first. Train yourselves to be punctual, not merely by the clock, but punctual also in carrying out plans. Train yourselves to be absolutely honest. Train yourselves to say a good, round 'No', when you are face to face with wrong-doing. "

## **EARLY DAYS AT CHESTER ROAD**

Miss Y. G. Raymond took up her duties as Headmistress on January 17th, 1912, when the pupils numbered 85 compared with 315 when she retired in 1933. Miss Nicholson who was second mistress joined the school at the same time.

The school moved from Proud Cross to Chester Road South on September 19th, 1912 and was officially opened by Lady Dudley on October 3rd, 1912.

In her last report at the Prize Giving on July 14th, 1933, Miss Raymond said, "In 1912-13 we were visited by His Majesty's Inspectors, Mr. Baldwin gave away our prizes, we formed the choir and the Sixth Form (then Fifth Form) Literary Society; the Houses were founded, Miss Nicholson gave us the House Cup, and Mrs. Ellis Talbot the Gymnastic Cup. We joined the Midland Tennis League; Swimming was added to the curriculum. We held our first Sports. You will not be surprised to know that five new mistresses were needed in September, 1913. Just before the war the first number of the School Magazine was published.

I pass over the years of the war. (From the reports of "The Patriotic Society" in the Magazines of 1914-18 it is apparent that the staff and pupils all gave whatever help they could. One remarkable instance given in a report of 1917 was the collection of horse chestnuts in the first half of the autumn term begun by the Lower School and taken up by the three Houses when over half a ton was collected which released a quarter of a ton of grain. Miss Raymond said the "conkers" were used for making alcohol needed in high explosives, and for this purpose they took the place of grain.)

(At the time of the 1918 Prize Giving three girls were resident members of London University. N.B. Oxford University did not award degrees to women until 1920.)

In the last year of the War the school which had been slowly rising from 100 to 200 pupils shot up to 300 and we began our Commercial classes in order that girls of a non-academic bent might stay at school and get some general education whilst they began their special training for clerical work.

Overcrowding at school became bad. I suggested to the County Council that we should take The Firs just opposite the school; so on November 6th the Kindergarten pioneers occupied the ground floor of that building which was leased as a combined Junior School and Kindergarten for seven years.

In 1922 when we came back from our summer holidays our numbers reached 315. The annex we now call the Bennett Building was not ready, so I took a school-room in the Baptist Chapel in Lorne Street and Miss Quayle, an ex-pupil, rejoined us as a mistress. The Geddes axe chopped our new extension into two. Half of it was ready by the end of 1922; we had to wait four years for the rest of it. (There were cuts then!) In the Bennett Building we now have house room for the Junior School in five class-rooms and a Library, to stock which Mr. Albright generously gave us £100. Once settled in the Bennett Building we relinquished The Firs and bought Stanmore as a Boarding House. Our last change of accommodation occurred in 1930 when extensions provided an Upper VI room, a Form V room and Lower IV.

From 1927 to 1931 we worked constantly for the Scholarship Fund, which the Old Girls have been good enough to call after me, not because I gave the money for it, but because I took part in causing

other people to do so. Queenie Waldron is the first of, I hope, many worthy holders of our Scholarship. She has struck out a new line and is studying Sociology in London University.

During these last years, School Societies have further increased; the Historical and Geographical Societies have an intermittent existence, the Musical flourishes and our youngest effort is one which I feel sure my successor, Miss Oldfield, herself a practised linguist, will especially cherish, that is 'Le Cercle Francais'.

To turn to the academic side: we have had an average of two Degrees per annum for the past thirteen years, and we are delighted, in this our majority year, to have three girls who have gained Scholarships to the University.

The Higher School Certificate is a difficult examination. I am a believer in girls taking it in their stride, so almost everyone who has been for two years in the Sixth Form, if her work is not disorganised thereby, is sent in for it. She does the work for it - if she passes, we are very glad - if not, her career has been decided upon independently of this result. About half the girls pass (this year there have been five); those who do not get the Full Certificate get a variety of Letters of Success for subjects which bespeak a reasonable achievement beyond the stage of Matriculation.

The School Certificate of the Joint Matriculation Board seems to suit us excellently. They have really made the examination fit the child as far as we are concerned. Since we began it some years ago we have sent in 101 girls of whom 100 have passed. The average number of those who take it and pass throughout the country is, I see by last night's Debate in the House, 70%."

### **A PUPIL OF THAT TIME**

MARJORIE RIVERS (nee Elcock)

Her school days began in 1924. She remembers that on arrival at school the first thing one did was to change one's outdoor shoes. In assembly the maturity of the prefects who wore their hair neatly rolled on the tops of their heads in buns made a deep impression on the younger pupils.

Lunch time for those who stayed at school, was an orderly meal. Two long tables, covered with white cloths were placed in the hall. In addition to the packed lunches which had to be wrapped in a serviette with a safety pin and paper showing the owner's name, the table was laid with plates, tumblers and knives. For this they paid five shillings a term. School dinners were also served in the dining room; often part of the meal was cooked in the morning cookery class.

Sometimes they used the Town Hall for the annual Prize Giving. All the recipients of prizes wore white dresses; some entertainment was given to the assembly of parents and friends with the performance of songs by various forms. It seemed a very impressive ceremony to her, the first time she went when the Countess of Plymouth presented the prizes.

Charts recording weekly marks were kept in the classroom: A's, A's, B +s etc. Five consecutive A's or A-'s merited a half day's holiday. This did not prove to be very satisfactory so the half day holiday was dropped.

It is of her journey to school that Marjorie has the most vivid recall....

#### School Journey

Whatever, you might ask, is so remarkable about a school journey that it can be written about?

When the autumn term began, at the beginning of the school year, and the form registers were made up, the information necessary was, one's full name and address, and in addition the means by which one came to school. Some came by bus, some by train, some cycled and others who were fortunate to live near, walked. My answer always provoked amusement.

It was in the September of 1924 that I became a pupil at Kidderminster High School, an event that would have been an extremely happy one, had it not been for the fact, that at the beginning at any rate, I was to be a weekly boarder at the school's boarding house "The Firs".

It is hard to realise in this modern age of fast travel and diminishing distances, how difficult it was to cover the short distance of five miles to and from school, on a daily basis; Shatterford, then, was a truly rural place, with very limited public transport. The few buses on Thursdays and Saturdays ran to serve the needs of shoppers. Very few people possessed a car; those who did were usually farmers and they often preferred some kind of truck which could be useful on the farm, to the conventional car. Thus it was, that after a rather unhappy time as a boarder, one of these farmers came to my rescue. You might say, why not cycle? That didn't appeal to me in the least. The road presented a long, mostly uphill climb on the return journey, and it was very lonely. There was no Milk Marketing Board, no central dairy so each farmer, who so wished, took his churns of milk into the town each day, the milk being distributed among the various milk sellers.

My rides started in a small truck, with a very genial farmer, who was never late, and who deposited me safely in the Bull Ring with plenty of time to walk through the town to school. I say safely, but there was always one anxious moment each day, to be experienced on the way - The Round Hill, as it was then, was made up of a series of bends, the bottom one of which had a blind corner, where the road dipped quite steeply. As we approached this bend, my driver would swerve across the road to the right hand side and then, solemnly, with elbows on the wheel, produce pipe and matches, and proceed to light up. Never once, did we meet another vehicle, during that performance. Hence my entry in the register - "Comes with the milk".

Getting home was a different affair. I joined with the Bewdley girls, who used the railway. At Bewdley I had to wait for the Severn Valley train. There were very few passengers on it, and I would be the only one to alight at Arley. From the station I made my way down to the riverside. In the winter when the evenings were dark, it was not particularly pleasant waiting under the lamp on the quay, for the boatman in his cottage opposite to see me. I don't think he always relished the fact that he had to leave his tea, and bring the ferry boat across the river for just one person. Sometimes, what I dreaded most, happened. He sent his son, a youth, not many years older than I, to fetch me in a small boat. The Severn waters flowed swiftly and always looked dark and menacing, and added to this was the knowledge that I couldn't swim. Painful cramps in my feet had made learning difficult.

Did those unfortunate beings who waited for the boatman Charon to ferry them across the river Styx, feel the same apprehension?

Now there faced me the two-mile walk up the lane. It was such a familiar road that it held no fears for me. I very seldom met anyone, and the only sounds were the scuttling of small nocturnal animals in the hedgerows, and the munching of the cattle in the fields alongside. However, I did have one very anxious moment, one evening. Suddenly, I could hear the sound of a horse's hoofs coming towards me. The night was very dark. Should I stay where I was, where the grass verge was fairly wide and the ditch was deep, or should I cross over to the high holly hedge on the other side of the road? With my school hat pulled over my face, I pressed my body into the holly hedge, and the galloping horse passed by on the side I had just vacated.

Home was a more welcome place than ever that night.

## **A NEW HEADMISTRESS**

In the magazine in 1962 Miss M. C. Oldfield, Headmistress from 1933-55, wrote:

Any attempt to compress the events of 22 years at Kidderminster High School into a few pages of print, must inevitably produce only a sketchy picture of what seemed at the time a period of quite far-reaching change and considerable development. By 1933 the school's traditions had been well and truly established by Miss Raymond and her staff, and were to be followed by a time of consolidation and further expansion. Many of the developments were pleasing, but some brought with them a certain yearning for the present conditions to continue. How sad it was, for instance, to see the lovely trees in front of the school axed to make Chester Road safer! Perhaps, too, we were a little nostalgic

when the historic gym from Proud Cross was replaced by a large modern rainproof one with showers, and the Stanmore Boarding House was closed.

Numbers rose steadily from 300 to 450 and further accommodation became essential. The one Science Laboratory gave place to three, equipped for Physics, Chemistry and Biology; the office became a Sick Room, used for Medical Inspections and as a Dental Surgery! A new Kitchen, Domestic Science Room and Dining Room increased our comfort, and a full-sized stage gave additional opportunity for dramatic productions. (How clearly those early plays, "Quality Street", "Lady Precious Stream" and so on, can be recalled). By 1937 we could accommodate 335 girls and their parents in our own Gym-cum-Dining Room, instead of hiring the Town Hall for Prize Day, and on Coronation Day the whole school sat down to tea there presided over by the Mayor. That year, too, a small group set out for Paris on the first of many excursions abroad. The interest in Geography was greatly enhanced in 1937 when the school joined The Ship Adoption Society and correspondence with Captain H. W. White and the crew of the M.V. Rothley began. This, too, was the year of the first of the O.G.A. annual dinners.

For some years the school had no full-sized hockey pitch, until the Local Education Authority rented for us the Shrubbery Field in the Birmingham Road, owned by the 7th Worcesters. Later this was vacated when the L. E.A. bought a field in Borrington Lane - quite a walk from school for those without bicycles! Interest in swimming and the number of life saving awards gained, increased enormously when we ceased using the old reservoir and could enjoy the new Town Bath in Castle Road.

The months passed smoothly by until suddenly in 1939 before the summer holidays were over, all teachers were recalled to their posts to face the problems created by a declaration of war against Germany. A.R.P. trenches were dug in our grounds as a protection against air raids, cloakrooms were reinforced with steel for shelters and several kind neighbours lent us their cellars (complete with boiled sweets!) in which to take refuge if necessary. Staff and senior girls formed a rota for sleeping at school to do fire watching and a Garden Club began to grow vegetables for us. Food rationing began; and to our astonishment 230 girls badly wanted to stay at school for dinner! Evacuees arrived from King Edward's, Birmingham, from Smethwick and Clacton-on-Sea. Outwardly, the timetable changed little; but now the letter A on it invariably meant, not Arithmetic, but Agriculture; B, beet singling, or checking bullets at Tomkinsons. Several boys from Hartlebury and King Charles joined our VIth Form, and we welcomed refugees from Nazi Germany. There were camps for fruit, flax and potato pickers. We had to face a shortage of text books and our domestic problems multiplied. The appointment of a Housekeeper greatly relieved us of some of these.

In spite of all our problems, we were spared so many of the grave anxieties experienced by other schools, in particular in Kidderminster, the bombing of the newly built Harry Cheshire School. We felt proud to be able to play a small part in the National Crisis. The school became a Rest Centre for bombed-out people from Birmingham. Between 90-100 staff and girls took up various forms of National Service. By the end of the War, £18,984 had been collected in the school for National Savings, and 1,451 garments had been knitted.

In 1940 the school was honoured by a visit from H.R.H. The Princess Royal, on the occasion of her inspection of an A.T.S. Unit which took place in our grounds. The smallest girl in the school at that time will well remember that visit. (This was Mary Wehner nee Crane.)

Of the many economies which the war period necessitated, one turned into a major success. The secretarial girls succeeded in typing the School Magazine which could not be printed and their copies have been carefully preserved in the archives. The war period saw the beginning of a Swimming Bath Fund (later used to provide hard tennis courts and benches in the grounds) and also the germ of the Parents' Association, when they undertook to manage the School's Secondhand Clothing Scheme. Strangely enough, in spite of the stress and strain of war, the School Medical Officers found that children became "taller, heavier and more robust than before", a fact which they attributed to school milk and school dinners!

### **Changes Ahead**

As at the close of the First World War, so also towards the end of the Second, a revolutionary new Education Act was passed. In 1944, Kidderminster High School became a Grammar School and we were told that our Kindergarten and Junior Department must close. The gradual disappearance of all

these little boys and girls at the end of each year was hard to bear, and when peace-time came again, we had to adjust ourselves to a somewhat different kind of school and to face changes brought by the Act to our Governing Body, our examinations and our holidays!

By now numbers had reached the point when to found a new House had become imperative. A valiant body of volunteers undertook to form Clent House with St. Kenelm as its patron. Several Forms had to find accommodation on the other side of Chester Road at Holm Wyckham and Pelham Lodge. It was obvious that once again more accommodation must be provided. Backed by the recommendations of H.M. Inspectors after a General Inspection, the L. E.A. decided to buy the lovely house and spacious grounds of Hill Grove, whose wonderful cedar tree proved some compensation for trees lost so many years before. Into the house the VIth Form, Art and Music Departments and Library moved with alacrity. The beautiful grounds made an ideal setting for a charming performance of "Comus "and for the first O.G.A. children's party. Transporting 4,000 volumes from the Bennett Building to Hill Grove Drawing Room by a chain of hands was a major achievement. The acquisition of Hill Grove squash court gave us an opportunity quite unusual in a girls' school. The possession of the whole of this wonderful site made us prepare plans for all kinds of further development. It was perhaps fitting that when we celebrated the Coronation of Elizabeth II, the theme of the pageant chosen should be "The Heritage of English Culture".

It was in 1941 that we held our first Commemoration Day Service in St. Mary's Church, where so many more friends and parents could join us and it was there that we gathered on October 31st 1952, to pay tribute to Miss Raymond at a memorial service.

The early 1950's seemed to bring us breathing space to reorganise and classify forms, to comply with the demands of the new General Certificate of Education and the higher standard now required, and to cater for the increase of numbers in Form VI. With renewed energy we began to travel to Winter Sports, Field Centres, archaeological expeditions and we welcomed our first French Assistant under the Ministry of Education scheme.

That much has been left unsaid is regretted and most of all that it has not been possible to mention by name individual successes and achievements, nor all those officials, governors, staff and girls who contributed to the success and happiness of our school and who have been so vividly remembered throughout these recollections.



Moving the library to Hill Grove House 1950 - Samantha Mould

### **THE PUPILS OF MISS OLDFIELD'S TIME**

Gwen Gregory (nee Norris) was at the school from 1935-40. She remembers sitting the scholarship exam in the old gymnasium building on the covered playground and after passing that hurdle having an oral exam with Miss Oldfield and also Miss Leigh.

At morning assembly one day the school was reprimanded by Miss Oldfield for walking out of prayers in a slovenly fashion. If this happened again they would not have the usual piano accompaniment by Miss Wood, but would have to march out in an orderly way, quietly - no chattering.

To Gwen, who came from the country, the plays given by some pupils for the enjoyment of the rest remain a pleasant memory. A visit to the pictures was a rare treat. At home they had either a crystal set with headphones - heavy -, or a wireless with wet batteries which needed frequent recharging and later with dry batteries which did not last long so listening was severely restricted.

She was interested in the correspondence and close association the school had with the Merchant Vessel Rothley and Captain White. There was a board in the gym corridor for news of the Rothley.

The note attached to her 1939 report made a big impression:

"The school asks for the co-operation of the parents with regard to money and personal property. Pupils should not bring money to school except on the special days fixed for the payment of certain subscriptions and fees. As far as possible season tickets for bus and train should be obtained in order to avoid loose money being brought to school. All necessary loose money must be kept in a purse round the pupil's neck and not left in any pocket. The school will make every endeavour to see that property is not lost but cannot hold itself responsible for any such loss." M. C. Oldfield.

If those staying dinner at school wanted to go into town they had to bring a note from their parents stating the reason, and pupils having time to spare between the end of the school day and bus departure were kept in leaving them just time to get into town to catch the bus - so no time for hanging about town.

There were remedial exercises for the flat-footed and round-shouldered which took place during morning assembly.

#### **24th January 1995      K.H.S. MEMORIES      Shiela Hodges (nee Jacobs)**

I started at K.H.S. in 1932 as a child of 5<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in the Kindergarten. It was situated at the far end of the Bennett Building and had two classes in one large room. This room could be divided when necessary by a brown flexible screen which looked like vertical waves when it was open. It was rolled up when not in use.

In the Kindergarten I learnt to print - I could already write copperplate having been taught by my grandmother who was born in 1865 - and to read and calculate. There was little apparatus of the type thought essential today, but we were well taught in small groups and we worked hard under the firm benevolence of Miss Bale and afterwards the dignified Miss Johnson.

Registers were very formal. We all had to sit quietly and answer our names. One boy constantly refused to answer his name. One day the teacher in desperation looked him firmly in the eye and said, 'Absent'. At which he looked firmly back and answered, 'Don't be silly'. Even then, children spoke up for themselves.

Boys were admitted to the school up to the first form where the children went at about the age of nine (after that many boys went on to the Preparatory Department of King Charles I School). At K.H.S. there was Form 1, Form II and at Form III more girls joined the school on 'The Scholarship', although paying pupils at £4 a term were still accepted. There were two parallel forms further up the school: IIIA and IIIAlpha, Lower IVB and Lower IVBeta, Upper IV1 and Upper IV2, Lower V and Lower VM (M for Modern - pupils did Typing instead of Latin), Upper V and Upper VM, Lower VI and Upper VI.

Then (as later with Miss Renwick) Miss Oldfield took R.E. with the third forms to get to know them. I noticed one day in the Bible that 'Lord' was printed all in capital letters while 'God' had only a capital 'G'. I was never a child to be reticent, so I asked Miss Oldfield why this was so. She admitted she did not know (surely very advanced behaviour for that time) but told me she would find out. About a week later she sent for me. Her messenger was Miss White, the school secretary, who was tall and very brisk. As she hurried me towards Miss Oldfield's room I had to run to keep up with her. When I arrived I complained very loudly that by running I had been forced to break the school rules. Miss Oldfield



simply smiled and explained the point I had queried. It is unfortunate that I cannot now remember her explanation.

The school was very happy, very strict, and very concerned about 'tone'.

There were three Houses, Chad, Clare and Cyniberht, so each House was able to compete against each of the others in matches, music and drama festivals and sports. Uniform was rigidly enforced, gym tunics with girdles, square-necked blouses in white with tiny blue squares and thick black stockings in the main school. Later blouses and skirts were allowed in the sixth form. Blazers were worn in school until I was half way through my time, when cardigans of standard design were allowed. Purses had to be worn slung around the shoulder. Hats were worn on all occasions outside school, blue velours in winter, cream panamas in summer. In summer, thin dresses of blue, pink or green were worn.

The most hated rule was about socks: even in summer every girl over five feet in height or who had reached Lower V had to come to school in stockings, however hot the weather. I had the honour to lead a Lower V rebellion against this rule, and after that it was not actually withdrawn but was blinked at. A small victory for combined pupil power.

It appears, perhaps, that I was a rebel. I was far from that. Usually I was a willing conformist, a hard worker, and a real lover of the school, and eventually I became Head Girl - a position I very much enjoyed and which gave me a taste for decision-making which has never left me.

When I left K.H.S. to go to University I found my education had been much wider than anyone else's. In Lower VI we had learnt First Aid and Home Nursing and all the Senior School had had Friday afternoon Clubs where there was a wide choice of subjects and activities pupil led and very practical - this was far in advance of most education of the day.

I received all my school education at K.H.S. and was a pupil for 13½ years - incidentally, I have never worn navy blue since. Later, and under Miss Renwick, I taught Mathematics at the school for a further eight years. I can honestly say I enjoyed every moment of it.

An afterthought... I find I have headed this account in the way we were taught to head examination papers!

Do you remember?

Colours of Exercise Books

English	Red
Maths	Pale Yellow
Biology	Deep Wine
Science	Dark Red
History	Dark Green
Geography	Black
Latin	Blue
Scripture	?
Rough Notes	Dirty Green - the book was long and thin.

Are these correct? Can you add to this list?

### **Margaret Phelan (nee Pugh) (1938-1944)**

I was at K.H.S. as a pupil during the War years. Others have described these times, but omit some things which remain vividly in my own memory. Weaving camouflage netting during one's dinner time is one of these. The large nets, a little like square tennis nets were hung from the rafters of the covered playground, or maybe we fixed them to ropes which were fixed from rafters. It was then our task to weave the brown, green, fawn and black hessian strips in and out of the netting. The finished nets were urgently needed by the Eighth Army in the desert we were told.

And then there was that association which we were urged to join 'Les Amis des Volontaires Francais' and we were asked to 'adopt' a Free French sailor, writing to him and sending small gifts if possible.

This would not only help one who was probably quite alone in this country and unable to contact his home and friends, but would also benefit us, helping to increase our knowledge of the French language. We had small tricolour badges with the Cross of Lorraine on them. My sailor was a boxer; he didn't seem to do much sailing, but he wrote me the sort of letters a young teenager of that era associated with a Frenchman. I never met him much to the relief of my family, but it was a long time before I recovered from being addressed as 'Ma Douce Fleur des Anges'. Nor do I remember how I replied to Miss Billam or Miss Chalk asking if writing to a French sailor was helping me with my French.

And who remembers the formation of the Sixth Form Club? I was on the steering committee which met with representatives from King Charles, Hartlebury and Sebright. We discussed the form the Club would take, and one fellow said that he thought it should be an all-embracing Club. Unfortunately for me I left K.H.S. soon afterwards and so don't know if this came to be so!

### **Betty Caswell (nee Edwards) (1942)** **My First Day at Kidderminster High School**

It is over fifty years since I passed my scholarship examination for Kidderminster High School. In June 1942 I was summoned to the school for an interview with Miss Oldfield who was Head at that time. This was preceded by a written work paper at which she had presided, I remember.

Right from my first viewing of her, I found her dignity and bearing to be quite amazing. (She was ex-Roedean School for Girls). She never appeared quite real to me, although I enjoyed talking to her on rare occasions.

At this particular interview I found her to be friendly, but probing. How many in my family? Did I share a bedroom? What books did I like? Would I now choose a book from her study bookcase? What careful psychology was being employed here? What did she need to find out? Was she looking for good grammar school material, or perhaps, was she looking for a basis for the training of a future young lady? Miss Oldfield's "gels" were certainly known in the town. They could be spotted walking neatly in twos in full school uniform, never eating in the street, never shouting loudly in rough voices, and no, not ever to be seen leaving school without the school's dark navy velour hat in winter or the white panama in summer, fixed firmly on their heads. On the headband were embroidered the words "Gratias Hodie Agimus" (Today we give thanks).

How proud we were, my friend Aud and I, when we set out on our bikes on that first day in September 1942 to start on our secondary grammar school education togged up in our "gear" - the pleated gymslip with a girdle, the square-necked tobralco blouse, thick black knickers with cream knicker linings and the black wool stockings. All were covered by a dark blue gabardine mac and suitable headgear. I cannot recall what shoes were actually worn but the small purse on a cord round the neck had a special fascination. It was edged round with our House colour. Mine was in purple representing Cyniberht House. I had "swanked" around in it many times before the big day and had also donned the uniform and slung the strong brown leather satchel on my back in anticipation of this starting day. Valuable clothing coupons had had to be used for this outfit so mother didn't approve of this "swanking". I might dirty the clothes before takeoff, she worried.

Well, Aud and I were keen, if nothing else, on that particular morning. No thoughts of hard work, homework, or exam sessions entered our heads. Our uniforms and our bikes with baskets fixed onto their fronts were enough at this stage, and to meet the other girls of Form 3A was a treat indeed that we were looking forward to immensely.

About half a dozen girls were already ensconced in the classroom when we new ones arrived. They appeared a little on the "snooty" side when we were ushered into the classroom. They were "paying pupils" and had come up from Form 2. I have had many years of friendship with one of them - Margaret Froggatt. I met her recently and we chatted on as though it was yesterday. What memories we shared of K.H.S. but more of that later.

For the moment I wish to tell you of that special day. The assembly was a great surprise. We were seated on the hall floor in rows waiting for the school to assemble - our classroom opened on to the

hall itself and was situated next to the staffroom - that Holy of Holies - where we never once entered in.

But now our attention was riveted on the scene gathering before us. Much older girls looking for all the world like goddesses to new little third formers, the House-Heads of Chad, Cyniberht and Clare were lining up on the stage. They were later outshone by Miss Oldfield herself who, at a given moment, emerged from her room at the side of the stage followed by Miss White, her secretary. Our Head then mounted the few steps that led her up onto the stage and along to the centre table in full flow of cap and gown. Impressive.

By this time we had all risen to our feet to be greeted with 'Good morning, gels' to which we suitably replied. Assembly had begun. Gwyneth Hopkinson, the Head Girl, read the lesson with such poise. (She wasn't real, I swear). This was followed by Miss Wood on the piano with the school choir in excellent voice. We youngsters were impressed with such a performance specially when the school song "Land of Our Birth" was rendered to mark the first day of term. Girls of eleven in those days could be quite over-awed with such activity.

And so after returning to the classroom, text and exercise books were issued to us by our form mistress, Miss Hutchinson (all the staff were Miss this or that). Now we were ready for a break of milk and buns. (I can still savour their bland texture even now.) All was impressive - the queueing, the eating and drinking with no rough asides of chatter. Ready now to change our black strap ward shoes into our outdoor ones and to go quietly into the playground where we strolled in leisurely fashion in twos and threes. It was here that I encountered Dorothy Fathers and Jean Jarvis (bosom pals and much older girls) coming towards us and happily chatting.

At the school dinner, yet another astounding experience was to be savoured - we had no dinners at junior school. We sat on forms and were served potatoes boiled in their skins accompanied by bacon and lentil pie. Strange food this, as was the 'scab and matter pudding' (a sort of boiled jam roly poly). All this food was in exchange for a blue token given in at the entrance to the dining hall.

The remainder of the dinner hour was spent in exploring the grounds of the school. The covered playground, a seesaw and a pleasant woodland area seemed fun in exchange for the small playground of our junior school. The woodland area had trees for scrambling over and little hidey holes of scrub for housemaking.

Gymnastics with Mrs. Gethin was our afternoon activity on this first day - balancing on a fixed bar and climbing ropes were unheard of at our junior school. I remember rather enjoying this tomboy side to my day, our square-necked deep blue gym shirts and black knickers giving us ample freedom of movement.

And so we moved on through our first day, my friend Audrey and myself sticking together, as they say, but we have stood the test of time and are together in our thoughts of K.H.S. in World War II. It seemed in those years that our schooling was far removed from the bombs and devastation. We were just vaguely aware by radio of 'happenings', and also by our gasmasks that were always with us.

We enjoyed entering the grand world of secondary grammar education in the 1940's. It was so vastly different from our closely narrow junior school of the 1930's. Fascinating memories come flooding in of young immature girls so unlike the sophisticates of 1995.

## **THE FIRST POST-WAR PUPILS**

Pauline Bland (nee Blaiklock (1946-51)

I arrived at Kidderminster at the age of 11 years in the winter of 1946. My brother and I had attended 10 schools, the last two being in Scotland and it was whilst there that I had sat the "Scholarship". This had been arranged when the Headmaster of the primary school I attended realised that my father would probably be transferred back to England. I took the examination of Middlesex County Council and also the Scottish "Control", which I took a year early.

The day after our arrival in Kidderminster, my mother set off firstly to the Grammar School. Without hesitation the Head, Mr. Drake admitted my brother, who was only months away from his School Certificate. However, the High School was not to be so accommodating! When we arrived, Miss White took us into her office and told us that Miss Oldfield was off sick. Miss White said that as the transfer had not been received, she could not let me start. It was three and a half weeks before I was allowed to start; for me three and a half weeks of worry and anxiety.

Despite this worrying start, I settled in very quickly. My previous school had been Ayr Academy, an enormous school with mixed classes of six forms to each year. The High School seemed so much smaller and friendlier. I had hated P.E. and art in Scotland; now, although not gifted in either, I really enjoyed them. In fact after a couple of years I was given a white belt although I am convinced that I did not merit one.

At the start of the Lower IV year, I was moved from the A class into the Alpha. I had made friends and now I was being moved. Miss Oldfield reassured my mother explaining that it was for my "good". I soon made new friends.

The next five years were very happy indeed. I left in 1951 after a year in the Lower VI. I really had no ambitions and stayed in the VI to do the Secretarial Course.

So many memories come to mind:

The Gym Competition held every spring.

Indoor shoes and Cash's name tapes, together with the frequent inspections of our kit.

The dinner hour bus, which travelled round most of Kidderminster, allowing pupils to go home for dinner if they wished.

The long line of buses in front of the school each afternoon waiting to take girls home to all parts of North Worcestershire.

Dinners in the Gym with the staff sitting on the platform.

The annual Commemoration Day Service when all the School walked to St. Mary's Church. After the first two years we all had to wear black stockings and these were kept aloft by some weird and wonderful ways!

The annual Prize Giving when we all worried what our mothers would wear.

Hockey on the field at Somerleyton. We often had to remove cow pats before we could play!

The Blue Book and Black Book being read out by Miss Oldfield at School Assembly. (The Blue Book recorded excellent work and the Black Book the opposite.)

I think I must have been rather a nuisance to most of the staff, but I always respected them and held them in high regard.

When I was in the Lower VI (I think) I used to help with putting out the chairs for the dinner tables in the Gym. One day I was picking up the chairs and putting them in the doorway (from where the other helpers put them by the tables) when I swung around too enthusiastically and the chair went straight through the glass door. With fear and trepidation I went to the School Office to report what had happened. I entered when the light went on expecting to see Miss White. To my horror, Miss Oldfield was standing there. I explained what had happened and to my complete surprise Miss Oldfield praised me for going to tell them about it! In some ways, Miss Oldfield was unpredictable.

A lot of girls used to cycle to school (despite the 1/2d. bus fare to the Station!). Each morning we would dismount at the bottom of Station Hill and walk up pushing our bikes. In the evening on return from school we would zoom down the cobbles - quite a bumpy ride. One day I was with a friend who wasn't on a bicycle so the two of us got on mine. I was on the saddle and she was on the pedals. I had told her to stop at the Station and get off, but regardless, she carried on and down the Hill we went - passing three members of staff who were walking down. I spent sleepless nights as I honestly thought I might be expelled. Only one member of staff reprimanded me and that was to say, "If you hadn't shouted so much, I wouldn't have seen you!"

I was in the last year that sat the School Certificate in 1950. I am quite proud of that! The Board stipulated that entrants had to be 16 years old by the 31st December of that year. There were three

who weren't old enough so they were allowed into the VI Form and took their "0" Levels the following summer. It must have been quite difficult for them.

Looking back, I would change my attitudes towards school and I hope that I would have left school with more ambition. They say that if you educate a woman, you educate a family. I became a full time mother and feel that my family did me proud.

### **Barbara Spokes (nee Hardy) (1946-52) Mixed Salad Days**

When someone invites our reminiscences we should certainly oblige because someday soon the younger members of our family will be heard to mutter, "Not that old story again!" and they'll be talking about our stories.

In the 1950's discipline was quite strictly enforced and there were few surprises if one didn't conform; I suppose this gave us a sense of security. An early lesson was that somehow 'they' usually found out the awful truth, so it was probably better to forestall the wrath to come by owning up.

The subject of uniform always seems to crop up in conversation with contemporaries. Seemingly it had been devised to be as unattractive as possible. The school tunic was particularly unfriendly to the adolescent shape and the velour hat needed much illicit doctoring to be remotely flattering. My hat was the first thing to go on the day I left, and I must have been at least thirty before I could wear navy blue again.

If there had been such things, we would have killed for track-suits. The icy-cold lessons on the netball courts and distant hockey field, with short sleeves and short socks offering scant protection from the Worcestershire winds, are a never-fading memory. No wonder I always preferred summer games, especially when we acquired Hill Grove House and the tennis courts. There the sun was always shining, the scented roses always in bloom.

In retrospect I am aware that our teachers' approach, in common with the times, was largely instructional; we were like Dickens' "little pitchers" there to be filled up with facts. How was it then that many of the staff helped us to think for ourselves in spite of the constraints of the syllabus? Perhaps they were an independent-minded lot too!

Someone made a pretty good job of the time-tabling. When I've contrasted the work we covered with that of similar schools of the time we definitely seem to have had the edge in variety and scope. There were topics we didn't cover: twentieth century history wasn't offered and twentieth century literature seemed to stop with Siegfried Sassoon. Human reproduction was perhaps not considered suitable, only that of rabbits. Technical design would have been interesting but, again, unsuitable for young girls.

Perhaps the biggest contrasts between then and now, however, were in the ceremonial of school life. This has diminished considerably in modern halls and classrooms. "In the old days" every day began with assembly, sitting on that floor and gazing upwards to the higher beings: staff, prefects and not-so-heavenly choir. After the mini-service and, often, reproving address we were dismissed, moving in approximate time to one of a selection of marches.

Every lesson began with the class standing to wish the teacher a good morning or afternoon. Some schools and teachers continue this practice but, as pupils move around more often than teachers, the custom has almost disappeared. Grace before meals is not said in many schools now, as it was then. I remember the excitement generated by Commemoration Day, Prize Day and House Days. We had to wear white blouses with House ties instead of the usual blue check when the yearly ceremonies took place. The competition amongst Houses was quite strong, reaching a peak on Sports Day, perhaps the only time restrained yelling was accepted and BOYS allowed on the premises.

One of the highlights of my time at K.H.S. was the day we moved the Library to Hill Grove. Books were sent along the human conveyor belt from the school building to a splendid new room on the ground floor of the house. It must have been quite hard work, passing the books along by the hour but it didn't seem so to us. The sun shone, we were able to chatter and we had no lessons. About the only other time we were able to match this feeling was post O-levels when suddenly life was carefree

and the future stretched ahead invitingly. Nowadays, young people often leave school as soon as exams are finished, not allowing for a welcome, relaxing interval.

The school helped to foster my lifelong interest in music, through my own inadequate piano playing, concerts in school and opportunities to go to performances outside school. I wonder how many others recall hearing Louis Kentner and Menuhin and seeing Rudolf Schwarz conducting the B.S.O. at Birmingham Town Hall.

Other highlights were visits to Stratford which included seeing John Gielgud in "Julius Caesar" and Richard Burton as Prince Hal in "Henry IV Part I". I wonder if our teachers realised how much the young and fetching Richard Burton cemented our interest in Shakespeare!

The ceremonial gave a pattern to the year. The stages of our school career had clearly defined milestones.

I wonder if any of my ex-pupils will be writing potted memoirs at some time in the future. They will be lucky if, like me, most of their recollections are pleasant and amusing, and if they too can look back with affection.

#### *TODAY WE'RE STILL THANKFUL!*

*Memory plays tricks, or so they say....*

*How much was work? How much play? When life was a dream the livelong day*

*And we shouted "Hoorah!" and never "Hooray!"*

*Once we were new and the prefects were old, Incredibly grand, mature and bold. "No running in corridors!" we were told, And no dodging showers, however cold.*

*Meekly in lessons we innocents sat,*

*Puzzling the meaning of words like "begat".*

*"I don't want to learn French!" the brave one had said, Taking the path no angels dared tread.*

*As years passed our feelings were rather love / hate, Strict rules and dictates a part of our fate.*

*Ways that we had of not quite obeying*

*Were many and varied - and more I'm not saying.*

*But the five or so years will stay with us ever By what we achieved mediocre or clever.*

*Many the friendships we would not now sever. Education for life. "Old Girls forever!"*

*Barbara Spokes (nee Hardy)*

Barbara has mentioned Hill Grove House which was acquired by the L.E.A. in 1948. We have an interesting account of the grounds when it was part of a private estate.

#### **Hazel Grant (nee Thorpe) (1943-48) Life at Hill Grove House in the 1930's**

I well remember the day in 1937 when we arrived at 171 Comberton Road. My father was to become head gardener for Mr. & Mrs. Charles Anton, owners of The Victoria Carpet Company, and we were to live in the house provided on the Hill Grove Estate.

I seemed to have spent most of my first year being my father's 'shadow' as the under-gardeners called me. After only a few weeks' attendance at Lea Street School I fell ill with a series of childhood illnesses, mumps, measles, etc., due, according to Dr. Digby Griffiths, to my having left the healthy countryside for the industrial air of a factory town.

My father's main delight at Hill Grove was the row of greenhouses, the most numerous in the area at that time. As well as the usual grapes, nectarines and peaches, he grew oranges and lemons from the pips, and in the plant hothouse he had a collection of rare orchids. As a child I loved the hot steamy atmosphere in every glass house, and played endlessly with the tiny frogs and water boatmen on the edge of the water tanks in each house.

In those days the area of the estate was larger than today. It extended from the edge of Comberton Road to Hill Grove Crescent. The area of the all-weather sportsground, where my husband now referees hockey games, was then the kitchen garden with many fruit trees, including a mulberry tree whose dark squashy fruit made a sticky mess of the surrounding ground. The long wall at the back of

the houses in the Crescent was the soft fruit area with raspberries, gooseberries and strawberry beds, all carefully netted to keep off the birds.

The wood around the estate was much denser then and contained several rookeries. Once a year my father organised a shoot and we all had rook pie for dinner.

The rose garden was quite lovely in those days, and I remember helping my father tie in the stragglers on the wooden pergola supports. The standard roses were around the outer path, and tiny moss roses climbed the brick walls. I don't think that it is just imagination but those old roses such as Albertine smelled much more fragrantly than today's longer lasting blooms. In the centre of the rose garden was a goldfish pond with huge pink water lilies. This was Mr. Anton's favourite place, and I recall his telling me about his precious fish - all in an accent (was it Scottish?) that I barely understood.

The area along the wall was the herbaceous border, always full of colour and of bees. This ran down to another fish pond and the wide lawns and cedar trees of Hill Grove House. One year the snows were so heavy that my father had to call the men in to make wooden props to support the lower limbs of the giant cedar - then over a hundred years old.

Once a year Mrs. Mary Anton, who was the town's first woman Magistrate, a very public-spirited lady and a leading light of the Temperance Movement, opened the gardens to the viewing public. I believe the entrance money went to the local hospital. The ornate metal gates and railings at the bottom of the main drive were removed later to support the War effort, and this entrance has long been disused. Mrs. Anton was also the author of a cookery book, and so was very interested in growing and using her own fresh fruits and vegetables.

Unfortunately, my father decided that he couldn't face the restrictions imposed by wartime conditions and needs. No heating was available for the greenhouses. We actually used the boilerhouse as an air-raid shelter at that time. And I think that having to plough up his beautiful lawns to grow potatoes and cabbages was the last straw for him. So we moved on.

I have many happy memories of those years spent at Hill Grove, but do sometimes wonder if Mrs. Anton, a Governor of the Girls' High School, would appreciate the changes which have now been made to her beautiful gardens.

### **Peggy Guest (nee Summers) (1941-54) Musical Thoughts of K.H.S.**

The Music Department comprised Miss Wood and Miss Wells, who taught class music and private pianoforte lessons, Miss Newbold pianoforte, class music and recorders, Miss Cundliff and Miss Carter private pianoforte, and Miss Fitzgerald violin and viola.

There were two choirs - the juniors and the seniors which were both taken by Miss Wood, rehearsals taking place after school until 4.30 p.m.

The school orchestra rehearsals were held during the dinner break in the main hall. These were taken by Miss Fitzgerald. When I joined playing my clarinet, the first pieces we rehearsed were Haydn's London Symphony and the Minuet by Boccherini.

Many girls took piano lessons in school time and the piano rooms were situated at the top of the stairs on either side of the balcony in the main hall. They were quite small and all had double doors, the inner one being covered with bright green felt material - to absorb the sounds! Associated Board examinations were also held in these rooms.

Later, two large houses, situated opposite the school in Chester Road, were acquired for school use and the art and music activities were transferred to rooms in Holm Wyckham. A gap was cut in the front school wall to enable pupils to cross the Chester Road for lessons!

In 1948 Hill Grove House was acquired for school use and the music and art departments were again transferred across the road to a much more luxurious building standing amidst fine grounds. A long

room - the full width of the house - was used for class music lessons, orchestra and choir rehearsals. There were five small teaching and practice rooms for instrumental lessons.

By this time Mr. Kenneth Farmer had been appointed as string teacher and orchestra conductor. The orchestra, led by Sally Tudge and Pat Griffiths, was required to perform at all Speech Days and also at the local schools' music festivals held each year under the direction of Mr. Benny, the County Music Adviser.

I recall one particular concert when the whole school learnt to sing "The Heavens are telling" from Haydn's Creation. This was accompanied by the school orchestra.

The choir was also required to sing at the annual Commemoration Day Service in St. Mary's Church, and in alternate years there was either a school play or concert which involved choir, orchestra and soloists.

Another musical event I recall took place in the grounds of Hill Grove House, when the choir and orchestra performed in the production of Milton's Comus, which was staged in Little Scotland, a wooded area of the grounds.

Looking back at these musical activities, I can recall much enjoyment gained from all these events and although resources at that time were quite limited by today's music teaching standards - no C.D.'s, tapes, keyboards, gamelans! - the accent was very much upon instrumental and choir work, and music was a very important part of our school life.

#### **Barbara A. Freeman (nee Woodroffe) (1950-53)**

My first encounter with Kidderminster High School was in 1950, when I was 13. It was a traumatic period of my life, having to leave Monmouth School for Girls (because of my father's job), where I had started in 1948 with five long standing pals from Ross-on-Wye. These friends I had been at school in Ross with since we were all five.

I started in the middle of my second school year and was placed in Lower IV Alpha, Miss Dracass being our form mistress. My parents did not move immediately from Ross; therefore, I had to stay with very dear friends who lived at West Hagley. It was a very new world to me; Kidderminster was such a 'large' place. Miss Oldfield put me in the charge of Jennifer Goodman, from Hagley. She met me at the bus stop each day and made sure that I arrived safely at school and of course saw me safely back to Hagley at night. This only happened for a couple of months; my parents then moved to Kidderminster. I was taken under the wing of Jane Cartwright and Rachael Owen in class and I suppose I did begin to settle, though I was not too happy at first. I was very hurt one day when another member of the class told me I had a funny accent!

After a while I became very involved with the music side of school life. Miss Wood was my piano teacher; she soon found out that I could sing contralto and I was roped into the school choir; also I enjoyed being in the recorder group. I think the most amazing memory was the Saturday morning when a few of us took the Grade V Higher Theory Exam and Miss Oldfield invigilated. I realised that morning that she was quite human after all, as she passed a large box of chocolates round at the end of the exam!

I hadn't been at K.H.S. very long when the great move to Hill Grove took place. The wonderful facilities, both for art and music, and that craft room in the old kitchen. I think the most exciting event was the moving, by human chain, of the library books. I can remember exactly where I stood. I was about half-way along the main raised path between school and Hill Grove, looking towards that wonderful cedar tree. I think we must have stood in our positions for most of the day as there were so many books to be moved. I loved the facilities for sketching we had in the grounds, such as the rock garden and rose garden. We were so very lucky.

I was never very keen on sport. I must admit I hated hockey as I had played lacrosse before. The thought of going down to the hockey field at Comberton on what seemed to be always cold, nasty, foggy days! Afterwards I used to cycle home along a muddy dirt track, which used to be very lonely and murky (now Offmore Farm Estate). This brought me out on the Birmingham Road (Husum Way).



Although not a sporty person, I did enjoy playing tennis on those lovely courts at Hill Grove. I never much liked walking in crocodile to the Swimming Baths. I don't know if we used to go all year round but I do remember walking down in a terrific snow storm. I never felt less like swimming in my life!

I used to enjoy Domestic Science with Miss Edmonds but often think about the pantry which used to be scrubbed clean at almost every lesson. I expect other forms did this also. It must have been super clean and free of all germs! I also made my first fashionable dress. It was red and I felt quite proud of myself.

## ACROSS THE ROAD

**Susan Dobson** (1943-55) recalls one of the large houses across the Chester Road.

The house had coal fires in the large fireplaces with high safety guards round. We made sure we picked a desk near the fire for the winter and spring terms. You had to get there early to "bag" your desk on the first day. It was then your space for the term. The desks were wooden with ink wells and sloping heavy lids. The table and seat were in one unit joined with sturdy runners. They weighed a ton to move but were very comfortable and warm to sit on.

The music department was upstairs in what must have been a huge main bedroom. Miss Newbold was in charge here.

We enjoyed drama in the turret shaped attic which was an ideal venue for creativity of every kind. I can also recall the only arithmetic lesson I ever saw the point of. We walked round the large garden which was planted with vegetables measuring its length and width with a real chain measure.

Our second form mistress was Miss Quayle, who encouraged us to have a hobby and collect some kind of object. She suggested matchboxes as an example and showed us one she had received from Egypt with lions on it. Never an original spirit I decided to collect matchboxes. I begged for the lions for a whole term before she gave it to me. I still have it along with many others collected over the next twenty years from all over the world.

Travel to and from school was normally by train, bus, cycle or foot. Station Hill was full of navy blue uniforms, velour hats in winter and straw in summer, both notable for the chewed elastic under the chin. You could free-wheel down Station Hill, lose your hat down your back and catch your name called by every member of staff you passed to "put your hat on properly, Susan Dobson". With a clear run down the hill building up to a good 35 m.p.h. it was possible to free-wheel the length of Green Street to the bend before the Worcester Road island. It was also a miracle none of us broke our necks on the cobbled sets or ploughed into the back of the huge drays plying up and down from the station yards. On May Day the horses were always decorated with flowers and their polished brasses gleamed gold in the sun.

A select handful of girls who went home for lunch used the dinner hour bus. It cost all of an old penny for the privilege of riding round the whole of town with twenty minutes in the house to wolf down a meal and hurry back to the bus route. From school it went down Station Hill, past the Central Cinema, up Vicar Street, along Mill Street and up to Proud Cross. It went left along Blakebrook and Sutton Road and progressed up Sutton Park Road, down Bewdley Hill and back to Proud Cross.

The return trip completed the circle again, then down the Butts, Mill Street, High Street, Worcester Street and back up Station Hill to school. You could stop the bus anywhere on route. We would often see how far we could walk ahead of our usual pick up point before it caught us up. It was a nightmare if you missed it though, as we had no idea of the time and invariably arrived very late in the afternoon. We got to know the regular drivers and conductors very well over the years. It ceased in 1954 when numbers dropped to about four.

The result was a late introduction to the school meals service. I can't recall the good meals of which there were plenty. The horror of sago and semolina stays with me now and I can truthfully state I have never touched either since.

In later years with the purchase of Hill Grove House the school grounds were enhanced dramatically. My memories of the rose garden and a shrubbery to rival any in Jane Austen's novels are linked to young womanhood, the relative freedom of the sixth form and time flying all too fast towards adult responsibilities.

## **STAFF MEMORIES**

Mrs Phyllis Hudson (nee Stoker) (Staff 1947-73)

My first recollection of K.H.S. is of arriving in deep snow for an interview in March 1947, having travelled from Yorkshire in a blizzard the day before and stayed in Birmingham overnight. I remember thinking how small the school looked as I approached, compared with the one in Wakefield where I was currently teaching.

In September I took up my post teaching R.E. and some Latin in the department headed by Miss Blencowe, a much loved and respected teacher and a fine scholar; I owed much to her in my first year. After Miss Anita Rowlands came to take charge of Classics I became Head of R.E. and we shared a very happy partnership.

That first morning in September also remains vividly in my memory, as I was overwhelmed at Assembly by aching nostalgia for the school I had left and where I had been very happy. The absence of boys and male staff was strange, K.H.S. being the first and only single sex school I had experienced. The nostalgia soon passed in the warmth and welcome of a wonderful staff and friendly atmosphere in the school.

The acquisition of Hill Grove House and grounds was an asset which made one feel privileged to work in such an environment and more than made up for the inconvenience of commuting between straggling buildings, especially in bad weather, until the new block linked the main school with Hill Grove.

I recall the day when the Library at Hill Grove was ready to receive the books from the room in the Bennett Building, and Miss Margaret Millen efficiently organised a human chain to pass the books along. For the last eight years of my teaching career the post of Librarian fell to me and was one which I loved, although combining it with being Head of R.E. was demanding. My initiation as Librarian was somewhat fraught. Two days before the Autumn Term began I went to Hill Grove to do some preliminary work to be greeted by a flood at the far end of the Library! Water had leaked from a water tank upstairs and descended into the store room and lower shelves of the first bay. What a beginning!

The Library, with its elegance and pleasant outlook, was conducive to study; it was also - on cold days - a refuge in the dinner hour for many of the young who sought its warmth but had no desire to study. It also provided a delightful setting after school hours for staff parties held on special occasions such as the departure to pastures new of one or more members of staff. One memorable occasion was the celebration of Miss Oldfield's 21st anniversary as Headmistress, when many former staff were reunited with us.

1951, Festival of Britain year, was marked by an expedition of many in the school to London. I accompanied a group, who did not go to London, on a tour of Brinton's Carpet Factory, an instructive, interesting and incredibly noisy experience.

With Miss Renwick's arrival a big drive was launched to raise enough money to complete the Swimming Bath Fund, the culminating effort being a Grand Bazaar in the Town Hall, raising over

£1000, a huge sum in those days. All who took part will surely remember the display of Easter Bonnets paraded from school to the Town Hall.

All life has its less pleasant side and one would like to have been spared e.g. dinner and bus duties (the latter particularly on wet days), the persistent worries over items of uniform (one recalls the period when it was fashionable to have an underskirt hem showing below the dress but which was considered unsuitable for uniform), and the resistance by girls to the removal of their beloved cardigans in the most sweltering weather!

My most abiding memories will always be of the staffroom fellowship, the general friendliness of pupils, happy times shared, goals achieved and much valued relationships forged, many continuing beyond schooldays. As I think of the many spheres in which K.H.S. pupils have made their careers and of the unselfish and often distinguished ways in which they have served the community wherever they have settled, I am proud and grateful to have been given the opportunity to spend so many years at K.H.S.

### **Miss Margaret Davies (Staff 1952-76) Miss Marky Davis (Staff 1955-73)**

Memories of first days at K.H.S. are very clear. At my appointment interview Miss Oldfield asked about my experience of producing school plays, to which I replied that I had been a stage manager, but not producer. "Oh, that's all right," she answered.

On the first day of my first term I received a slip of paper bearing the brief message "Dress rehearsal, Dec....."!

Rehearsals were difficult, as all the dining tables and chairs had to be lifted off the stage and put back again afterwards, a time-consuming and tiring activity.

The play was "Richard of Bordeaux", a sensitive study of Richard 11's character and situation. As always, costuming the play was difficult, without a wardrobe or finances available - but wonderful help came from the needlework department. Two fabrics were reversible - a bright gold or silver on one side, and a sombre colour on the other. We laughed at the line, "You are a turncoat, Mowbray", when "he" reappeared wearing "his" costume inside out.

However, we were ready on time and memories are vivid of Susan Hill as she played Richard so sensitively and movingly in her cream tunic with red velvet trimmings on its wide hanging sleeves. The effectiveness of Mary Northover's rendering of Lord Oxford, Robert de Vere, was evident when I saw two second year pupils re-enacting Robert's self-accompanied love song, during a lunch hour. Maudelyn, Richard's devoted secretary, was performed by Glennis Walford, a remarkable achievement by so young a person.

It was 'remarkable' to find in the school so much talent and support so immediately. Glennis continued to develop her innate love of drama; years later I heard her talking on the radio about her own nationally famous "Bubble Theatre". Well done, K.H.S.

It was not long after this that Miss Marky Davis opened the eyes of pupils to the world beyond school, through field work for fifth and sixth formers, and through the Field Club for younger people. They visited points of geographical interest in the area, and went as far afield as, for example, London, the Wye Valley and Tintern Abbey, Bath and Whipsnade Zoo with the Field Club.

Two stories stand out especially in memory. At the zoo Annabel, a pupil, was very surprised to see an elephant eating her new leather gauntlet glove, but took this very philosophically saying, "Well, one glove is no use to me, you might as well have it too", as she handed the second glove for the elephant's consumption.

The visit to London was highly successful, the group getting special attention from the M.P. Gerald Nabarro at the Houses of Parliament. The coach driver was invited to share the tour of these buildings. The shock on this occasion was to discover, afterwards, that the coach had been impounded, the driver having to chase after it, and retrieve it for the sum of £5.

Chad House introduced the idea of service to the community when they made contact with the children at Pelham Lodge. Later they "adopted" the girls at Astley Hall Special School, to be joined by Cobham House, who felt that boys, too, should be included. The prelude to the Astley Christmas party was the very generous preparation of a large box of Christmas presents, including knitted garments, for each child. Mr. Washington, for many years, took on the role of Father Christmas. However, after Christmas, when older K.H.S. girls went to help at Astley School at weekends, they found some of the girls' pretty hats and caps on the boys' heads, and the girls wearing sober, masculine balaclava helmets!

### **Margaret Phelan (nee Pugh) (Staff 1959-80)**

In the autumn of 1959 my husband was serving abroad with the RAF and my young son had started his schooling. I saw an advert in the local paper for a part-time Lab Assistant at K.H.S. and so I applied. It would suit me for a year until my husband's overseas duty was completed. It did suit me and I stayed on for twenty-one happy years. It wasn't such a different school when I went back to what I had known, although life seemed much easier without the wartime restrictions. It could still be a very chilly place in winter. Do you remember how we used to light all the Bunsen burners in the north-facing Physics lab when conditions were very cold?

The laboratories were then just as I'd known them, solid oak benches with drawers and so many names and messages written or scratched on and in them. Vandalism! I was not amused, but was abashed when we came to empty the old Chemistry lab early in the 1960's and found a name which was very familiar to me writ large on the underside of one of the drawers!

Those early years in particular were enjoyable, and somehow I seemed to acquire a reputation for expertise in unexpected ways. Projectors! Microphone and amplifiers on Prize Giving days. Why did something almost always go wrong? Even when the equipment worked perfectly, the speaker would move to the side. They obviously did not like a microphone in front of them! It was balm to my heart when at the first Prize Giving I attended at the new King Charles School there was a gasp as the guest speaker stood up, and the microphone seemed to sigh and wobble down off its stand! I concluded that a sub-section of Murphy's Law operates at School Prize Givings.

Nuffield Science came into the curriculum in the 1960's. Lab life began to change. After the first flush of innovation and preparation and experimentation it became, at least from the Lab Technician's (please note change of title) point of view, lacking in the challenge and need to invent and innovate which had been such an enjoyable feature of earlier work. It became much more standardised and less interesting as far as I was concerned.

Life in the school was always full of variety, and going back to projectors, I still have a vivid memory of a very VIP lecturer, an Italian, I believe, who spoke about some famous mosaics. Everything was ready. I was on duty by the film projector, and some child dashed in late and tripped over the connecting cable. There was a loud crackle and a blue flash!

Fortunately, the problem was soon put right by a rewiring of the plug. I don't recall much of the lecture, but at the end, this gallant gentleman advanced towards me, thanked me profusely, grasped my hand and kissed it. The only time in my life when such a very romantic thing happened, and it had to happen before an audience of three hundred and more gawping and giggling schoolgirls!

Life wasn't all honey. It could be very hard and intensive work at times, but I prefer to recall the fun and laughter of the many years which I spent at K.H.S. And of course the many very good friends I made there. Sharing memories of K.H.S. has added something positive to my life.

### **Miss D. C. Everett (Staff 1945-73) The School Guide Companies**

There were two thriving companies when Miss Everett joined the staff - the 12th Kidderminster Guides run by Miss Kearsley which met on Wednesdays from 4 - 6 p.m. and the 11th which met on

Fridays from 4 - 6 p.m. and had been run by Miss Bannister until July 1944 and had then been kept going by its senior patrol leaders until Miss Everett took over as temporary Captain in January 1945. She was to "hold the fort" on other occasions including a period as Captain of the 12th from Summer 1951. Eventually in Autumn 1956 when neither company had a Captain the two combined as the 12th.

Many Guides were awarded their First Class badges and several the Queen's Guide Award. Quite a number of the older Guides helped with Brownie Packs and Guide Companies in the Division and some later became Warranted Guiders.

There had been no Guide camps during the War, so for the first camp in July 1945 the school companies joined with the 13th Company and went to Pensax. From then on they camped each year, at first locally at Pensax and Kinlet, then further afield mainly at Cardigan Bay and Borth. In 1961 the camp at Bulth Wells was the last Miss Everett took. There were also weekend camps and some Guides attended international camps.

Some of the Guides were chosen to be part of the guard of honour for the Princess Royal at Spring Grove House. In 1957 members were at the Guild Hall in Worcester when the Chief Guide, Lady Baden-Powell, was the guest of honour at the County Rally marking the centenary of the birth of Robert Baden-Powell. In May in the same year Princess Margaret was loudly cheered when she drove close to the school Guides at Hindlip.

Each year members attended the County Guide Service in Worcester Cathedral and took part in parades on St. George's Day and Remembrance Sunday with the Scouts. Why was the weather so often inclement?

### **AND A FEW SMILES**

The staff were not always concerned with the serious side of life and could find amusement from some of their pupils' misunderstandings. Here are some howlers from the book kept in the Staffroom:

It is now a fully qualified frog one inch long.

An angle less than 90 degrees is "A Cute Angle".

(On a third form noticeboard) "Prefect - please excuse violins as they have all gone to a hockey practice."

Spirogyra reproduces in 2 ways - accidentally and deliberately.

Question: Que fait Monsieur Lepine? Answer: God fait Monsieur Lepine.

For growing cotton there must be 200 frost-free days in June, July and August.

Assistants in food shops - all food should be picked up with tongues.

On his voyage, Magellan met cannon balls with painted faces.

### **MISS RENWICKS DAYS**

#### **Memories good and bad**

**Janet Hughes (nee Tolley)** (1960-67)

Memories: 1960

Wet afternoons - and the chaos of bus queues in the hall.

Stools in the labs. Being fined for breakages of pipettes, tubes etc.

School dinners - I remember the weekly cost of 1 / -; the excitement of salads, lifting the lettuce to find what was crawling underneath! Wishing we had butter instead of marge on the bread.

The sixth form common room and the record player someone brought in. Did we ever play anything except "Groovy Kind of Love" by the Mindbenders?

The years of fund raising to get the swimming pool. The ghastly regulation black swimming costumes, with caps in House colours. Wanting to leave the water when a thunderstorm was very close, but being told that the faster we swam the more chance there was that the lightning would miss.

Public humiliation of wrong-doers being made to stand in the middle of Assembly - e.g. for having visited the Flamingo Cafe after school.

Skirts had to be no more than 2" above the knee and stockings had to be 30 denier - both were checked on.

Commemoration Day Service - being in the choir was no real advantage. We were still squashed up in the pews.

The twice a year report book. Having to write parents' names and address on the envelope.

Sitting on the floor in the front row of the balcony during Assembly and dropping little bits of fluff and paper onto the girls below.

### **Rosemary Dorman (nee Watkiss) (1961-69)**

There were three streams in my year : K (lower), S (middle), H (higher). I was in S. We had strict school uniform: navy blue pleated skirts, blue and white 3/4 sleeved blouses, navy 'V' neck pullovers with stripes round the 'V' in House colours, fawn socks, black indoor and outdoor shoes, navy knickers, blazers, duffle coats and navy hats in winter. We had white blouses and House ties on special occasions. I still have my school scarf and the Sixth Form Prefect's beret with tassel and green House tie.

House Days were special because the teachers wore gowns. I used to love them.

The school had a strong musical bias. There was a choir, and a madrigal choir which I was in and which sang at the Eisteddfod. There were piano and clarinet lessons and an orchestra.

We had red school reports twice a year. I still have mine with class positions.

When I was in third or fourth year a new building was built with large glass windows and water under it.

I remember being told always to walk on the left of the corridor and steps. No running.

We had lots of homework. Certain subjects were set each night. When our exercise books were full, they had to be taken to a teacher at a small store who checked them and gave out new ones. Text books had to be covered in paper to protect them. We supplied our own dictionary, tables for mathematics and Bible. We covered our Bibles in cloth and embroidered the front. We also made a P.E. bag in sewing.

### **TOWARDS THE CLOSING YEARS**

#### **Anne Allen (nee Bent) (1962-67)**

It was very exciting to be going to Kidderminster High School - my Mum had been there before me. It was a sign that I was doing well .... I had passed my 11+ !

Thinking back today, snippets come from my memories:

That blackened lung that put me off smoking for life!

The still reflections in the pool under the classrooms, only disturbed if you kicked a pebble in.

Miss Marky Davis telling me to use capital letters - I had done but some were large and some were small.

- The darkness of the coat peg area when all coats were hung up .....and the smell of polish.

My peripatetic flute teacher whose bright red wig always slipped a little further back when he scratched his head (which was often!)

The smell of the new mown grass wafting through the open windows in the elegant art block.  
Sunning oneself on the grass bank below the art block.  
Always being on the fringe of a 'gang'.

Showering after games and gym - aren't there some different shapes and sizes?  
The forbidding atmosphere of the small hall where the Headmistress lived where I had to do a detention once or twice. The long white socks which I wore long after everyone else was in stockings.  
The small bottles of milk with silver tops which we drank with straws at break time in an open concrete hut by the playground.

That light airy corridor, sloping upwards, where all the House notices were pinned.  
The walk along Chester Road North to the Land Oak to catch the bus back to Blakedown and home.  
The boys from King Charles to be admired in secret (walking carefully behind).  
The coldness of the first swim in the outdoor pool.

### **Alison Hargreaves (1967-74)**

K.H.S felt like a very important place to me in 1967 when I started there. The atmosphere was vibrant, bustling, well maintained - an altogether solid establishment with standards that were simply frightening.

I missed the intimacy of Lea Street Primary School, the friendly dinner ladies, the more sensible sized assemblies. Everything was so impersonal at the High School. On top of that I felt a snob since many of my friends had gone to Sion Hill; they didn't have to put up with the torment of having their hats whipped from their heads when they walked home.

The hats, although novel for the first week, soon got tiresome. What a ridiculous design we used to think, felt air hostess hats which came off in just a puff of wind - and the corduroy berets that followed didn't seem much better. I did, however, like the open necked blue striped shirts with 3/4 length sleeves, and the navy jumpers with the House colour bands around the 'V' necks and cuffs. I also liked the choice of colour and style we could have in summer dresses; they just had to be in yellow, pink or green Tootal stripes. As for the indoor shoes - the tan sandals with diamond-cut shapes down the front - they always made my heels bleed since I had such ridiculously narrow feet. The outdoor shoes, however, suddenly became 'The In Thing' when fashion decreed that "Flo boots" (I believe from Florence in The Magic Roundabout) were all the rage!

The shops where we bought our shiny new uniforms were, I remember, Attwoods, Jackies and Gladys' of Station Hill. Gladys seemed to be about 70 when we shopped there and she has only recently retired I believe! The others have long since gone.

Hats were worn at all times outside school, nail varnish never; skirts shouldn't be too short or too long and could be checked at any time by Miss Marky Davis' ruler! White shirts and House ties were to be worn on House Days. Blue aertex shirts and navy knickers were to be worn for gym (first the cotton variety that seemed to grow bigger and bigger every time they were washed, then came the advent of the slimmer fitting and hence more flattering nylon pants). Culottes and aertex shirts for hockey and netball, and very fetching black regulation swimming costumes were de rigeur in the well chilled swimming pool. Everything had to have a name tape and it all had to fit in your boot bag (which hopefully had your initials sewn on it for easy identification). Stockings or grey socks were allowed (NOT white) and the new rage - tights, which were almost exclusively American Tan, were also allowed although frowned upon due to price and possible one-up-manship I suspect, and tan dress-overalls were regulation in Science lessons.

In fact, everything was regulation which is why we looked so neat and uniform and possibly why we felt as if we unquestionably belonged (whether we liked it or not!)

Much of this seemed intimidating at first, tedious and unnecessary later but perfectly acceptable now. I wonder why. Perhaps it's my rose tinted spectacles!

N.B. There is no ? after the above 'why' because Mrs. Harman told me so in 1968.

## AND AT THE END

### Miss D. J. Renwick (1955 - 1976)

I first saw K.H.S. in snow. I am not by nature a great lover of snow but when it fell more or less incessantly during that week at the end of February 1955, it made the school grounds and buildings look so beautiful that I fell in love with them at once. With several other candidates I had been summoned to be interviewed for the post of Headmistress and to my delight and considerable astonishment, I was appointed from September 1955. Though I had only previously lived in this county as an infant, I am Worcestershire born and so felt particularly happy about my appointment.

My first, and lasting impression of the school was its friendliness. In 1955 many members of staff - Miss Billam, Miss Leigh, Miss Quayle, Miss Whitaker, Miss Wells and Miss Wood for instance - had taught at K.H.S. for many years and it must have been infuriating for them to have an inexperienced bumbler arriving to try to run the school. They could have been very difficult to handle - but they were not! They were outstandingly kind and helpful and I have always been grateful to them. My predecessors, Miss Raymond and Miss Oldfield, had established many fine traditions - steady hard academic work, high standards in music, art and sport - and a sense of service to the community, carried out partly through the House system. I felt I had much to live up to and tried to follow where they had given such a distinguished lead.

Miss Bennett had started a girls' school in Kidderminster in the 1860's, and she had established such a reputable institution that it was taken over by the County Education Committee and moved to its present site in Chester Road South in 1912. In 1962 therefore we celebrated its Golden Jubilee. The official opening had been performed by the Countess of Dudley on October 3rd, 1912 and every year we held our Commemoration of Benefactors Service on or near that date at Kidderminster Parish Church. Canon Sladen, Vicar of Kidderminster, was also Chairman of the K.H.S. Governing Body for many years. Thanks to him and to the kindness of succeeding vicars, it became a tradition to hold the service at the Parish Church. Luckily, our mass migration there on foot almost always took place in lovely autumn sunshine and I have happy memories of 21 "Commem" services.

To celebrate our Golden Jubilee we began by inviting a party of "girls" still living in the neighbourhood who had been present as schoolgirls at the original opening, to come to School Prayers on October 3rd 1962. Throughout the year we had several big social events - an O.G.A. dinner in school for instance. We also decided with some trepidation to raise £6,000 to build an open-air swimming pool. In those days £6,000 was a much more impressive sum of money than it is today. Our Chairman of Governors, Mr. Harry Cheshire, doubted whether we could ever raise it - but we did! - by dint of bazaars, appeals, competitions of every kind over a period of two or three years. The swimming pool came into use in 1963 and proved a great boon in summer time. Teaching of swimming and diving and House swimming sports were held in it; and by issuing "Family" tickets to the K.H.S. families for the summer holidays, it was in use then as well. (At that time we really could not contemplate the expense of building a covered pool but it is good that the Governors of the present school have now provided this amenity for all the year round use.)

As we celebrated our Jubilee the County Education Committee decided to enlarge our buildings. A new classroom block - now known, I believe, as the Renwick Building - was built, linking the main school building to Hill Grove House, and a new Gymnasium with changing rooms was added. A kitchen was provided so that our meals could be cooked in situ, instead of being sent up daily from a central kitchen in the town. The Oldfield Hall, no longer required to act as a hall, a gymnasium and a dining room, was improved and lengthened with a fine new stage and the old changing rooms for games became "green" rooms for the stage. Later on, we acquired a Sixth Form Common Room at the back of Hill Grove House. We bought the shell of a "prefabricated" house, such as the Government put up after the Second World War as temporary accommodation in an emergency. When not divided into several rooms, it was a good size and we furnished it as best we could with gifts from parents and others. It proved a popular, if not very elegant, addition to our buildings. Unfortunately, after a year or two, due to an electrical fault, it burnt down one winter night when it was



empty. However, the Education Authority replaced it by a rather better temporary building and even provided some new furniture, so that we felt we had benefited in the end from this disaster.

And so the years rolled on with their regular timetable of annual Prize Livings, House Days, Christmas festivities, concerts, plays and the inevitable real and "mock" examination sessions. The number of pupils staying on into the Sixth Form rose. A Careers Service to back the County Careers Department, was established by Miss Marky Davis and continued by Mrs. Jones and the system of sending our Fifth Year girls for work experience after their G.C.E. examinations, became standard practice.

I have many happy recollections of these years. Difficulties did arise inevitably - girls were not invariably angelic - but details of such difficulties have faded from my mind. I can only record some of the happy and successful events which occurred during my 21 years at the school. Every Christmas I think nostalgically of school festivities, beginning with the Toy Service when a multitude of toys and children's books were given by pupils and staff for distribution to children's homes in the area. Each year two fine Christmas trees - one for each Hall - were given by the Parents' Association and beautifully decorated by our laboratory technicians. Then came the Carol Service, the First Year party, our Christmas dinner and the vast distribution of Christmas cards through the incredibly original "post boxes" displayed by each Form in the Front Hall.

I remember School Concerts, lectures and dramatic productions. Miss Hugh Jones produced a most enjoyable 'Hansel and Gretel' by Humperdinck in 1956. Miss Margaret Davies produced some splendidly acted plays - I remember particularly "Lady Precious Stream" and "The Silver Curlew". Regular fire practices had to be held. At one practice two girls were missing from the roll call. They had seen a cat prowling round the guinea-pig pen which then existed outside the Bennett Building and they assured me, "We couldn't leave the guinea pigs, Miss Renwick, we just couldn't."

I remember many pupils with their variety of characteristics, abilities and potential. The service given by some older girls at Lea Castle Hospital, Sunfield Home at Clent and other institutions was generous and unselfish.

I remember, above all, the teaching staff with affection and great gratitude - especially the Deputy Heads, Miss Everett, Miss Tucker and Miss Bedford. But a school life is not entirely run by teachers and pupils. The secretarial and ancillary staff, our caretakers, groundsman, school meals staff and cleaners, all played their part willingly and good humouredly. I met many generations of parents and the Parents' Association was very generous and interested. I always enjoyed visits from past pupils. At first I was somewhat frightened by members of the Old Girls' Association but later they became my firm friends and it is good that with Miss Bedford's help they still continue their activities with loyal enthusiasm.

In January 1975 a very severe gale brought down the 200-year old cedar tree which stood in front of Hill Grove House. It was uprooted and fell on to Hill Grove House. Its crown went through the roof and through the floor below it, landing rather incongruously in one of the Lower VIth classrooms. Fortunately, it was holiday time and the building was empty. Hill Grove House was restored but we were sad to see the last of the cedar tree. Though already slightly damaged by previous storms, it had been a fine and stately landmark in our grounds. Fortunately, we still had the rose garden, the magnolia outside the squash court and the witch hazel in Hill Grove gardens.

In the 1970's, like most secondary schools in the country we were faced with an uncertain future as the concept of "comprehensive" schools each serving a particular zone, and the abolition of the 11+ examination were widely discussed. A first plan to introduce comprehensive schools in our area in 1973 was vetoed by the Department of Education and Science, but after a change of Government a new plan was drawn up. It was decided to merge the three existing grammar schools - King Charles I School, Queen Elizabeth's School, Hartlebury and the Girls' High School - and thereafter to bring in a non-selected entry each year of pupils from the east side of Kidderminster. The age range was to be 13 to 18. The new King Charles I School opened in September 1977 on the K.H.S. site.

The aim of comprehensive education to give fairer and more equal opportunities to all pupils was a high ideal. To introduce it so quickly turned the whole concept into something of a political football, however, and a slower and more experimental approach would, I feel, have been wiser and less

stressful. Although many single sex secondary schools were happy and successful communities, it is probably better in modern times for girls and boys to be taught together throughout their formal education, sharing the same facilities and learning not only from their teachers but from each other.

Gratias Hodie Agimus was a happy choice for the K.H.S. school motto. There was a great deal to be thankful for in the life and traditions of this school from 1912 to 1977. Perhaps some of its ethos has been absorbed into the comparatively new but now firmly established King Charles I School.

### **AND FINALLY -**

The story of K.H.S. is not just the story of a girls' school isolated from the world around, but of a school always affected by the change and development in political thought, public attitudes and the improvement in communications and transport during its quite short life. Above all it should be seen as a vital part of the surging movement and struggle from the latter part of the 19th century for the emancipation of women and the betterment of their lot both in public and private life. Some may think that one of the chief successes of this struggle took place at the Sheldonian Theatre at Oxford in 1920, when for the first time that University awarded degrees to women.

The doors of masculine privilege were opened as never before, and there was from then on a steady flow of educated and well-qualified girls and women to follow on. Was this not due, in no small part, to those brave women like Miss Bennett who had pioneered and fought for full and equal education for girls?

When you see it in this context, then more than ever you may feel like saying -

Gratias Hodie Agimus

### **KH.S.'s SUFFRAGETTE**

Since compiling these memories the death has occurred of Mrs. Bernie Crossland who taught at K.H.S. during the years 1946-1972. She died at the age of 88 on March 21st 1995 and was the last surviving suffragette. Her obituary appeared in several national newspapers.

In 1914, when she was seven years old, Bernie accompanied her mother Eleanor Beatrice Higginson and other suffragettes on a march through Preston in Lancashire. Wearing a large purple cloak, she took the place of a woman who could not face the opposition they would encounter. When they reached the market, they were pelted with cauliflower stalks by the men. Bernie's mother told her not to throw the stalks back because they would only provide more ammunition.

Bernie took a degree in Geography and a Diploma of Education at Leeds University. She not only taught her subject in schools but also gave talks about the campaign for votes for women. By displaying her mother's medals, blood spattered sash of purple, white and green, release papers from Holloway prison, where she was held under the Cat and Mouse Act, and a letter from Mrs. Pankhurst Bernie made her audiences vividly aware of the bravery of the women who strove for and won the vote.