

St Gabriel's

The Early Days



BY BRENDA TILLOTSON
2011

These pages are written to remember the early days of St. Gabriel's School and the Sisters who founded it; amazing women who received a higher education at Oxford University early in the twentieth century, started a teaching community, founded a school and cared for us, their students during WW2.

Great forethought was shown by our parents and the Sisters who made an evacuation plan as early as 1938. When the country went to war the plan was put into action. We remained with our teachers

and friends and our schooling carried on calmly.

It would be unrealistic to say we were always content, but our problems were minor. We had times of great happiness, unlike many evacuated children who suffered greatly.

We were given a strong educational start at Mill Hill, then due to wartime circumstances our academic, physical and social education ranged from brilliant to somewhat poor. However, through all the ups and downs we learned to take responsibility for our future education.

During the war we had little communication with people outside of school. We made up for this by inventing pastimes and forming deep friendships amongst ourselves. Many of us developed an interest in gardening which has lasted for the rest of our lives.

Although separated from our families for many months we maintained strong ties.

The Sisters shaped our lives. In the end, we became adaptable, confident, independent women.

Brenda Tillotson

MILL HILL 1929 - 1939



LEFT - SOME STAFF MEMBERS

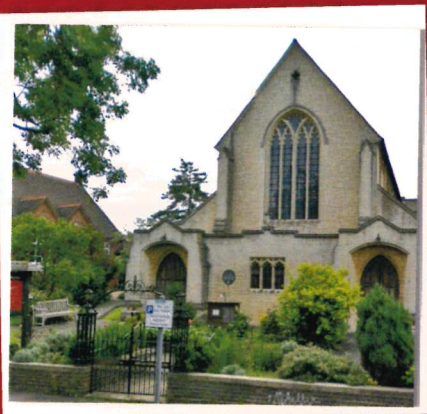
RIGHT - SR DAISY & SR LILLA

St Gabriel's School the first years

St Gabriel's School for Girls, started in Flower Lane, Mill Hill, a town in the London borough of Barnet situated 9 miles north west of Charing Cross, in the ceremonial county of Greater

London and the county of Middlesex. The school founded by Sr. Daisy C.J.G.S, and Sr. Lilla C.J.G.S, the first Head Mistress, started with ten girls in 1929. The Companions of Jesus the

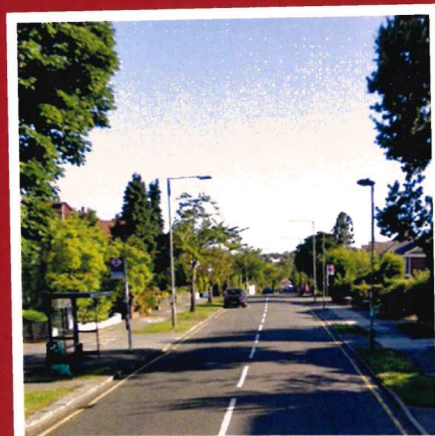
Good Shepherd (C.J.G.S.) was founded as an Anglo-Catholic teaching community in 1920. It was a branch of the worldwide Community of St. Mary the Virgin.



ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH



SPORTS DAY



FLOWER LANE

Most of the Sisters were drawn from families of high social standing, some titled, who gave up their lives and money for their vocation and did not work for wages. The Sisters were well educated with degrees from Oxford University. Sr. Kathleen Mary (KM) was amongst the first women to receive a Doctor of Divinity degree. Secular teachers were engaged on wage terms for special subjects.

From 'The Scheme' for the regulation and management of St. Gabriel's School.

The Governing Body shall consist of not less than 8 nor more than 15 persons hereinafter called Governors, of whom two, that is to say,

1. The Warden and
2. The Superior shall be ex-officio governors,
3. A Companion of the Congregation appointed by the Superior. (For many years the Sisters were called Companions)

The remaining Governors shall be termed ordinary Governors. The first ordinary Governors shall include

4. The Lady Frances Tuffnell,
5. The Venerable, The Honorable S. H. Phillimore, M.A., M.C.,
6. The Reverend Cyril L. Bleden, M.A., M.C.,
7. E. H. N. Dowlen, Esq., V.W. Maw, Esq.,
8. J. Miller Ness, Esq.

The purpose of the 'Scheme' is to get help from business people to control and look after running the School and so let the Sisters carry out the task of education, unfettered by business worries.

The school was in two large houses on Flower Lane, one for kindergarten and transition and one for first to sixth form classes, each limited to 15 pupils.

The uniform was extensive: navy tunics, coats, rain coats and shirts with orange and blue striped ties for winter; blazers; blue check gingham and shantung silk dresses; shorts, shirts, swim suits and sun hats for summer. Hats were worn in public: in winter a navy velour and in summer a white Panama. We wore taupe socks and brown stockings.



THE WINTER UNIFORM

The four school teams (houses) were named Alban, Aidan, Bede, and Chad. Academic subjects prepared us to sit the Oxford School Leaving and Higher School Certificate examinations. Music, (especially choral), visual arts, religious studies and sports were also emphasized. We played netball and tennis on the new hard courts built in 1936 and participated in field sports, grass hockey, rounders and gymnastics. The school was active in inter-school netball matches. In 1938 the full-sized, well-equipped gymnasium was opened. Parents were invited to Sports day, Shakespeare play productions, gymnastics displays, the winter Sale of Work, and the Christmas Nativity Play.



The School in 1933



Our pre war social life

The School Birthday, celebrated at Michaelmas, was a special event. In the morning the whole school attended a service of thanksgiving at St Michael's and All Angels Church in Flower Lane. After lunch the Sisters gave a party for the younger girls where games were played until it was time for tea and cakes.

Senior girls enjoyed trips to France and Girl Guides' camp.

We savoured all of London's exciting entertainment, theatre, cinema, art galleries, museums, ancient buildings, parks, gardens and the zoo. At Christmas, the city was alive with glittering lights as we shopped in the big stores and were taken to the pantomime and circus. In summer, our families went to the seaside, Scotland or the Continent. We were part of the community life of Mill Hill and nearby Edgware. We walked, bused or trained on our own, to be in the city in thirty minutes or in the countryside in five. We played in each other's homes... homes that had a maid and the modern conveniences of the day. We dressed in silk dresses and wore brightly coloured velvet capes for birthday parties. It was a wonderful time and place for a child, spoilt perhaps, but we were aware of the world situation. We saw signs of poverty, beggars on the street and gypsies in the fields. European Jewish families settled in the area and we heard unpleasant stories about Europe from their children.

The threat of war whispered around us. The Sisters prepared. The day we broke up for the 1939 summer holidays would be our last day at Flower Lane. We spent the afternoon tying the school books into bundles, ready to move and had fun tossing the bundles to each other as a test to ensure they didn't come apart.



The School in 1937



Wantage 1938

There were close ties between St. Gabriel's and Wantage in Oxfordshire. The sisters' home and Mother House was the convent for the Community of St. Mary the Virgin (C.S.M.V) in Wantage. CSMV was founded in 1848 by William John Butler, Vicar of Wantage. In the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a spiritual revival in the Church of England, known as the Oxford Movement. Out of the Oxford Movement came the first religious communities, including C.S.M.V, to be founded since the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII. C.S.M.V. founded St Mary's School, Wantage in 1873 and St Katharine's School, Wantage, in 1890. The C.S.M.V. Reverend Mother Superior visited St. Gabriel's every year and I recall the Reverend Mother Superior General for the worldwide Community visiting the School on one occasion.

In September 1938, St Gabriel's evacuated to Wantage. Germany threatened Czechoslovakia, a European war seemed imminent. Prime Minister Chamberlain flew to Germany to negotiate with Hitler. Tragically, Sudetenland was given to Germany. Chamberlain returned to England claiming 'peace in our time.' We left Wantage and returned home for the Christmas holiday.

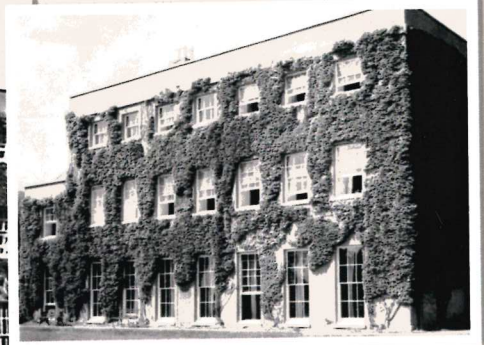
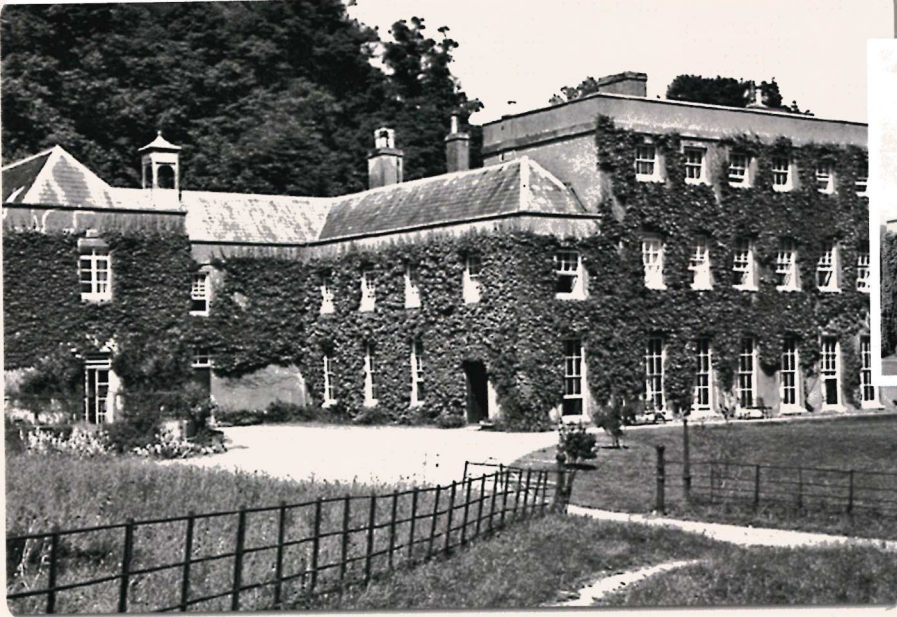
While in Wantage we stayed at the former St Katharine's School which had recently moved to Abingdon to amalgamate with St Helen's School. St Katherine's School was a forbidding Victorian building. The first night we slept in a huge dormitory with rows of

little iron beds and felt like Jane Eyre's Lowood Orphans. Some of us were moved to a large pleasant house on the other side of the road where we enjoyed the rest of our stay. Lessons, netball and choir practice soon resumed. On the whole I enjoyed the experience. I read *The Water Babies* and *Anne of Green Gables*. St. Mary's School invited us to spend a day with them. We watched the girls roller skate on their rink and enjoyed the school's production of John Bunyan's 'A Pilgrim's Progress' in their theatre.



ST MARY'S SCHOOL WANTAGE

WEST OGWELL 1939 - 1942



WEST OGWELL HOUSE 1938

St Gabriel's School evacuates from London.

West Ogwell, Devonshire became part of our lives in 1939. The estate had a long history. In 1086, Ogewille was listed in the Domesday Survey. The manor was then held by Wm. Pictavensis. In 1589, during the reign of Elizabeth I, Thomas Reynell built the original West Ogwell House, with the

assistance of prisoners from the Spanish armada. In 1750, Thomas Taylor built the present house, a modern (Georgian) building with a drawing room, paneled common room, library and additional staircase. Major-General Taylor, CB, Lt Governor of the Royal Military College at

Sandhurst lived at the house in the early 1800s. Daniel Scratton bought it in 1869. The Scrattons brought water to the house, had a cellar full of fine wines, kept a good kennel of pointers, and were noted cattle breeders. By 1890, the estate totaled 700 acres including the deer park.



THE LIBRARY



LADY REYNALL C 1587



THE NEW STAIRCASE

In 1902, the house passed to a cousin, then to a farmer who used it to store farm produce. During WWI, the Australian Army divided the rooms with the intention of making the house into a military hospital. In 1925, it became the Diocesan House for conferences and retreats.

Ruins of the original house's two foot thick walls of unhewn blocks of stone, old well and a bread oven are at the back of the house. A section of the early house remains part of the present structure.

We were enjoying the last of our summer holiday when on September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Again, St. Gabriel's evacuation plan was put into action.

At Paddington Station trains were packed with crying children leaving London. A friend and I managed to squeeze into a compartment and put

THE STABLE YARD



Tiggy my budgerigar and his cage on the luggage rack. As the train left the station and picked up speed Tiggy began to talk. Children, crushed into the small space to listen to him, smiled and stopped crying.

Some eighty St. Gabriel's children, Sisters and teaching staff evacuated to West Ogwell House. I arrived on September 2. The house was covered with brilliant red Virginia creeper. It was warm and sunny and the surrounding hills were beautiful.

Next day at 11.45 am. Sunday, September 3, Mr. Chamberlain, the Prime Minister declared to the nation on the B.B.C. Radio, we were at war with Germany.

The school's cats were evacuated with us. Mrs. Freckles, a tortoiseshell cat, was the pupil's pet. Appropriately a black and white cat named Bertha was the Sister's pet. Bertha continued aloof her life with the Sisters, but Mrs. Freckles took to country life, fell for the farm cat and had kittens in my Girl Guide hat.



THE SCRATTONS



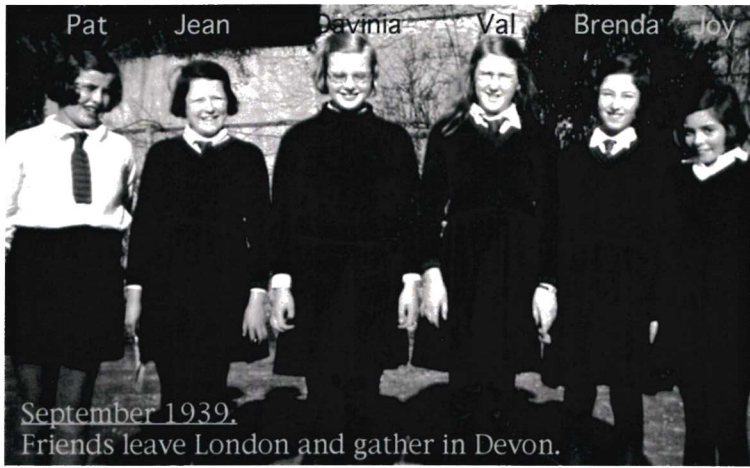
PART OF THE ORIGINAL HOUSE



THE TOWER



THE LAUNDRY



THE FARM HOUSE



THE SCHOOL BECAME VERY SMALL

Our first weeks in Devon continued warm and sunny. Mondays were set aside for outings. Before we set out on an expedition, we had to clean our rooms and mend our clothes. There was endless darning to be done as our socks, worn out from walking, were always in holes. Finally, armed with baloney sandwiches and a package of Smith's Crisps we'd spend the day on the beach at Babacombe, Oddicombe, Teignmouth, Torquay or Goodrington Sands, until barbed wire defenses were put up and the beaches were closed. Then instead, we went on expeditions to Dartmoor beauty spots.

A younger and two or three older girls shared a dormitory. The older girls supervised the younger one's hair washing, bed-making, room tidying and laundry. Each room had a washstand with a large floral china jug, basin and soap dish. We strip-washed in cold water before breakfast, first

breaking the ice in the jug on cold days. Happily there was enough hot water for us to have a three inch bath three times a week.

All was quiet during the first months of the war, (the Phony War). We went home for the Christmas holiday. Many didn't return to St. Gabriel's the next term. Sadly, two of the girls who stayed in London were later killed in the blitz. Lay staff joined the services. With fewer staff and children we became a very small school. Instead of the four school teams we were divided into two, Spitfires and Hurricanes. The sixth form disintegrated. Senior girls either studied on their own for Higher School Certificate or Inter BA or left the school. My class was affected the most being reduced from 15 to 4 in number.



Rationing commenced in 1940. There were plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables in the country. The brown ration bread was better for us than the white bread we get now. We ate bread and dripping, butter being scarce and often rancid.

Parcels from home were opened in front of a Sister. Any sweets our parents sent had to be shared. One day, I received a parcel containing a cardigan my mother had knitted. The parcel felt rather heavy, but thankfully the Sister on duty didn't notice. I took it to my room where I found my darling mother, who didn't abide well rules and regulations, had hidden a chocolate bar in the sleeve.

The house had no floor coverings, no heat, no radio, no newspapers or telephone. I missed communication with the outside world but was somewhat comforted when my father included a 'news of the war' page in his weekly letter to me. In his first war news dated May 10, 1940, he wrote that Winston Churchill had become Prime Minister.

Margaret Greenfield (*Williams*) was a Mill Hill girl who was an 8 1/2 year old new girl when she arrived at West Ogwell on Sept. 2nd 1939. In her 'Memories' she writes:

"My main memory of my first term is of being cold. The early morning walks wearing Wellingtons down to the little bridge and having to be carried back as I was too cold to walk.



I was homesick to the point of being physically sick and at Easter 1940 my parents, stupidly withdrew me from the school. However, by Easter 1941 I was missing my friends and begged to go back to West Ogwell. It was the summer term, happy memories began ..."

I returned to London for the Easter holiday. One of the fathers, who was also our family doctor, had just returned from Dunkirk where he'd driven a brand new ambulance full of medical supplies for many miles through France out to the coast, only to leave it on the beach as there was no way to transport it back to England.



THE LANE TO THE BRIDGE



THE LANE TO THE SCHOOL



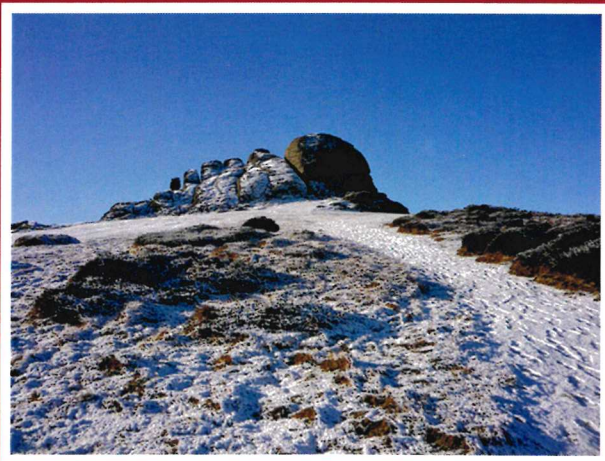
THE SUMMER HOUSE



PINCHERFORD FARM

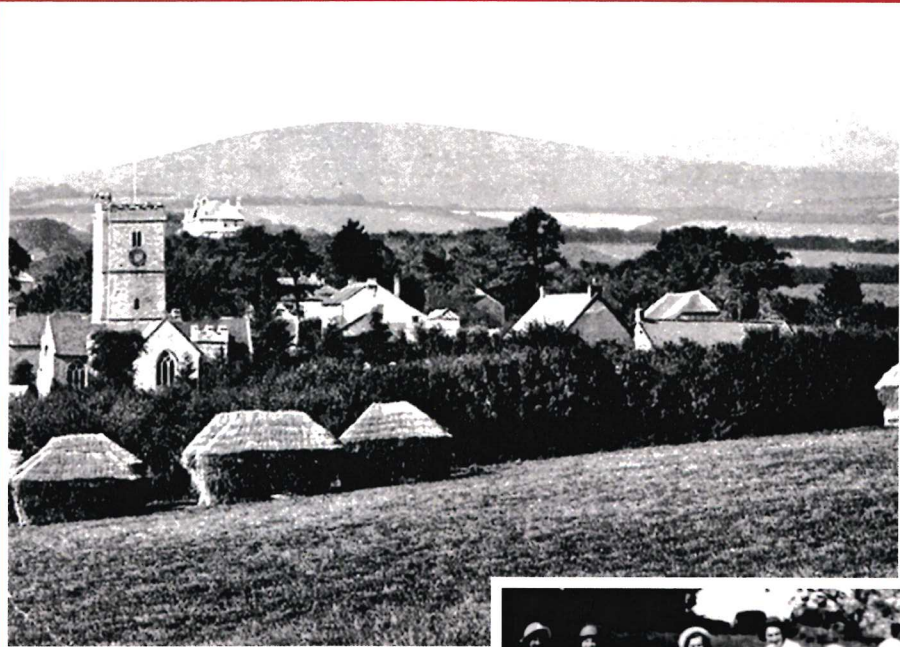


Pincherford Farm near Islington on Dartmoor was the beautiful place where we learned to ride. A young man called Malcolm gave us our first lessons in the paddock until he was called up for military duty. Then we rode the horses up onto the moor where they'd try to roll in the boggy pools or join a herd of Dartmoor ponies. To ride in wild open spaces in cold winter mists or hot summer sun was a wonderful experience. By late 1942 we were unable to ride anymore as the army commandeered large areas of Dartmoor for military manoeuvres.

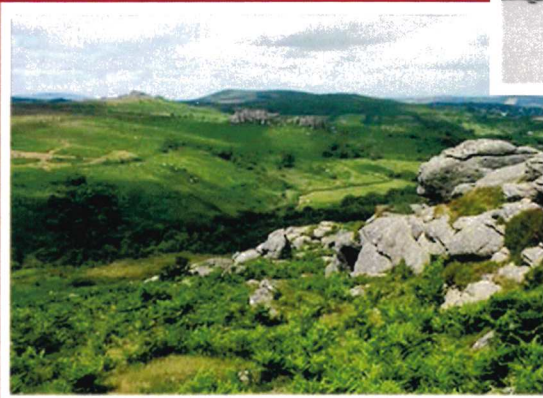
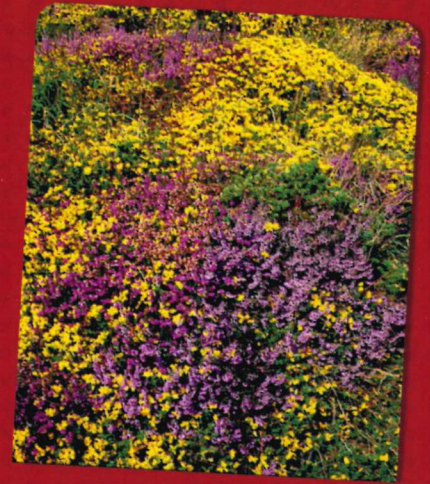


HAYTOR IN WINTER

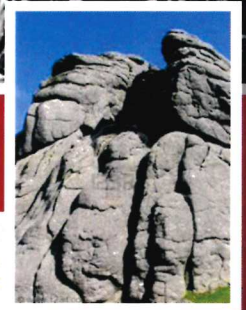




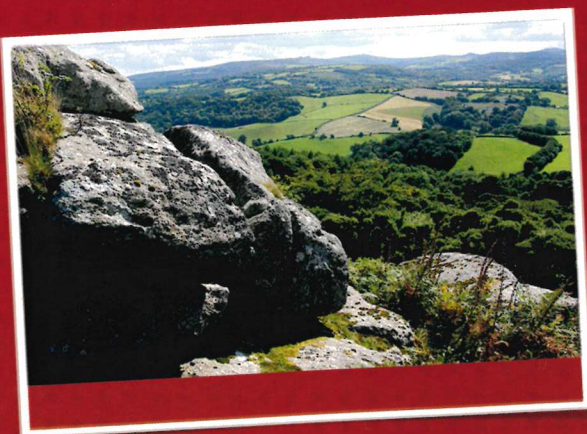
ISLINGTON VILLAGE



HAYTOR



By the 1940 summer holiday things changed, the Battle of Britain had started. The sisters arranged for the children who were spending the holiday at school to stay in Islington, either at a house called Brackenridge or a nearby cottage.



THE ISLINGTON COTTAGE

When we returned home for holidays we found the families among our acquaintances had scattered. We lost friends, could no longer travel freely and barely accepted the black out, rationing and restrictions.

Our carefree social life was gone forever. We felt out of contact; no longer knew the top ten tunes, what was ITMA a War Office Department? No, it was the current favorite comedy hour on the radio.

The blitz began in 1940. We were safe in the country. When the school received a night air raid warning, we'd wake to the school hand bell, grab our gas masks and a rug and run to our allotted

places; mine on the ground floor corridor flag stones or in summer under the stars in the shelter of a large copper beech tree behind the house.

Church bells were silenced during the war but rang out to celebrate the 1942 British forces winning the battle of El Alamein in North Africa. I proudly rang the West Oghwell House bell.

Our dress was casual. No more hats, gloves and dresses, now we wore shorts and sandals or Wellingtons and rain coats as the weather dictated.



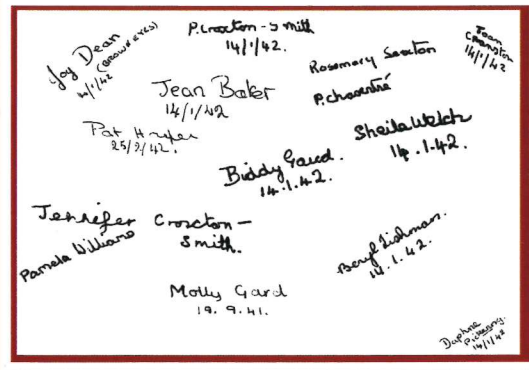
CASUAL DRESS



THE BACK DOOR AND BELL TOWER



BRENDA'S FRIENDS



As well as participating in the usual curriculum, many of us studied for the Royal Academy of Art and Music exams. We continued with the traditional style of schooling until constant staff shortages warranted the change to the Dalton system of education. It was a huge change. We were given a month's assignment for each subject and were expected to study on our own, read and complete the assignments as we saw fit.

I found it daunting to know all the work to be done ahead of time. Rooms were assigned to each subject where we could see a teacher for help. There were long line ups outside the maths room. We found the best way to leapfrog the queue

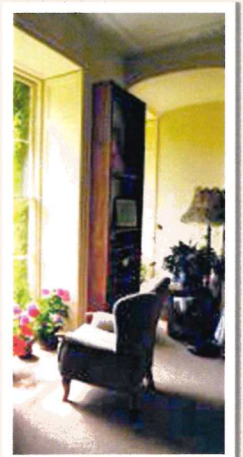
was to assist the younger children in front of us. Thus we learned one of the best ways to learn is to teach.

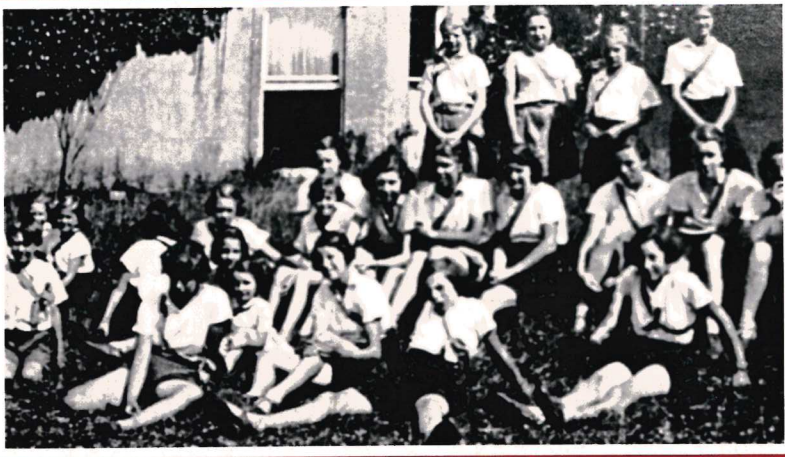
The first term, I had trouble learning Latin. I forged ahead with the subjects I liked, but disregarded Latin which I disliked and fell hopelessly behind and was set early morning extra Latin. The Community's early waker silently woke me at 5.30 a.m. I'd be at my study desk by 5.45. It was winter and despite wearing mittens and boots indoors, I was so cold I could hardly write. One especially cold morning it was Sr. Lilla's (Head Mistress) turn to be the early waker. When I got to the study she'd left a steaming mug of hot cocoa on my desk and a

jar of paraffin and matches ready for me to light the fire she'd laid. From that day, I've been able to keep to a study plan and will always remember this brilliant teacher's act of kindness.

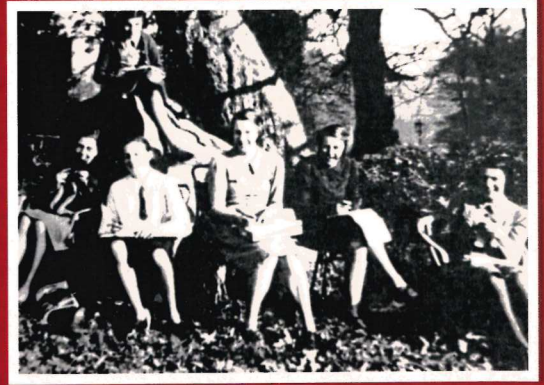
We used slates to save paper; not the slates of our forbears but ones made of perspex on which we wrote with grease pencils. Paper was only used for writing essays, tests and exams. Although a disadvantage, I developed an excellent memory and still find copious note taking unnecessary.

THE COMMON ROOM AS IT IS TODAY





SPORTS DAY 1940



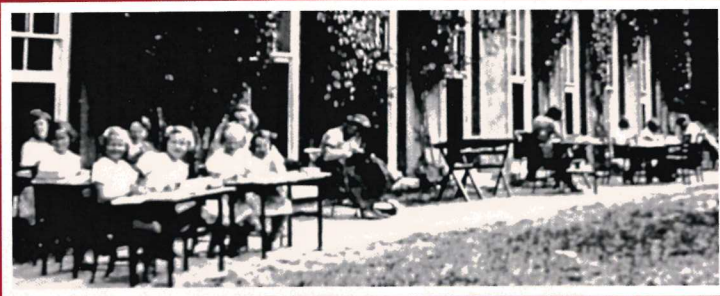
FORM UPPER V STUDY UNDER THE TREES

The sisters believed we should be out of doors whenever possible, to get vitamin D from the sun, counterbalancing the deficiencies of wartime food. In good weather we had lessons under the big trees. In winter we had outdoor activities all afternoon and lessons in the evening. When double summer time came in we enjoyed extra long evenings in the garden.

Netball was played on the grass outside the house, lacrosse in the Deer Park and cricket in a nearby field. We played matches against three nearby schools. We kept up our vaulting skills on the horse and box which came with us from Mill Hill. Each morning we ran a mile before chapel, up the hill to the Deer Park or down the hill to the little bridge over the nearby stream. At weekends we ran cross country races and hiked for miles. We missed the gymnasium and tennis courts at Mill Hill, but learned to love the care free life of the country.



NETBALL



LESSONS IN THE GARDEN





Happy hours were spent in the old walled garden where I planted a rose in the small allotment each of us was given. We made bonfires to burn the piles of weeds we amassed from the wild garden and collected potatoes and chestnuts to bake in the embers. In the old orchard, we picked and ate all the apples we wanted, the best I've ever tasted.

them using our bare fingers. We scythed and baled the stinging nettles which were then stored in the house until the army collected them for some unknown war purpose.

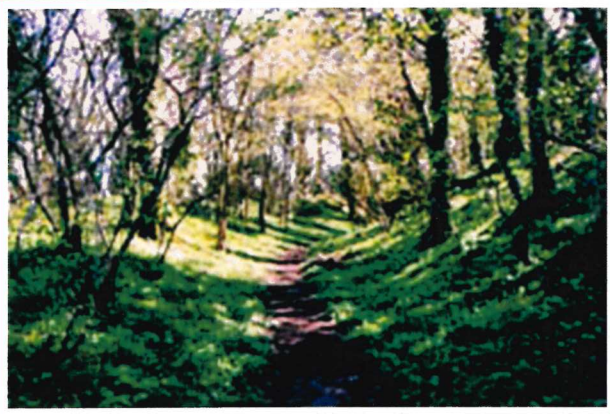
We could light a fire in the common room whenever we wished, if we first collected wood, carried it to the house, and sawed it into logs in the old stable yard.



Scrounges were arranged to collect bilberries, blackberries, sphagnum moss, garlic, and stinging nettles. In the spring we noted where the garlic flowers were, so we could return for the bulbs in autumn and scrape for

To help bring in the harvest, we slaved for two weeks lifting potatoes on a steep muddy hill in the pouring rain. It was the worst job I've ever had.





THE DITCH ROUND THE FORT



DENBURY HILL



THE VIEW FROM DENBURY DOWN



When the snow was deep we searched for abandoned new born lambs and tobogganed down a steep hill on an old door. The sisters taught us the names of the trees and wild flowers that grew in the hedgerows as we walked for miles in the glorious countryside. In spring we climbed Denbury Hill (an iron age fort) gathering primroses to post home. We set beelines for distant points, then found our way there in a straight line over hedges and through streams until water filled our Wellingtons.

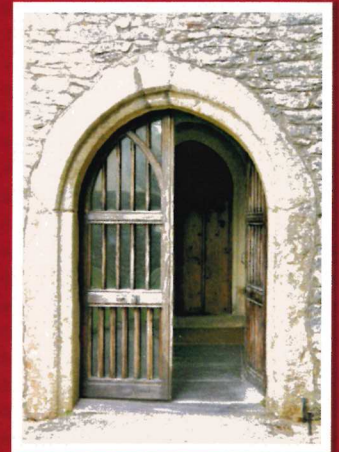
One of the older girls organized a Brownie Pack, while at Girl Guides we learned to light camp fires, stalk and track, commando crawl and to carry out first aid. These activities became so much a part of our lifestyle that it seemed unnecessary to change from one uniform to another.



Those of us from nonconformist families adapted to living alongside the monastic community. We learned to understand and respect Anglo-Catholicism and its form of worship and enjoyed hearing the Sisters chant their offices.

Morning chapel was held each day before school started. On Sunday we walked along a country lane to Mass at St. Mary's Church, Denbury.

The Payne and Leaker families lived in the two West Ogwell cottages. Four of us decided their very small children should have a Sunday School, which we organized. Goodness knows what we taught them. I just remember playing with them in the long grass and thinking the Leakers were appropriately named.



ST MARY'S DENBURY



THE SCHOOL CHAPEL



WEST OGWELL COTTAGES

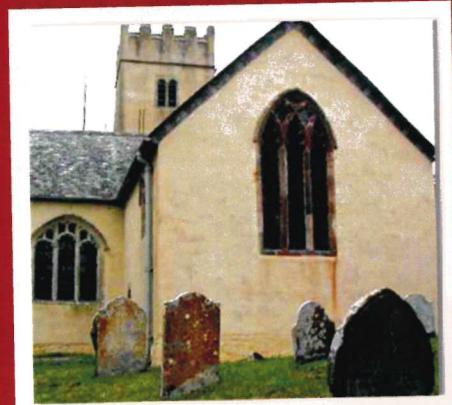
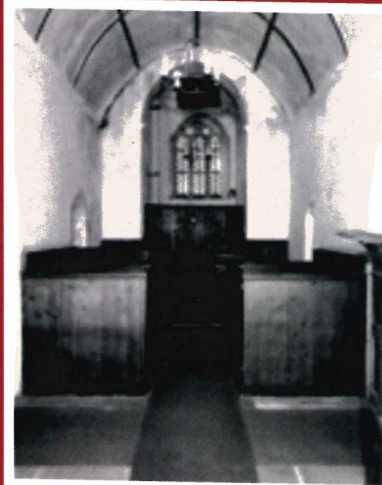
WEST OGWELL CHURCH



In summer, a priest conducted services in the small 13th century West Ogwell Church, which stood in the park of the house. The church remains essentially unaltered since

c. 1300. The tall box pews hid us while we played "Up Jenkins", until the priest mounted the pulpit to give his sermon. Before the sermon ended one of us crept to the

South transept to pump air into the old organ so it had breath for the last hymn.



Apart from German measles, mumps, blistered feet and chillblained hands, we were the fittest we'd ever been. Several girls came down with mumps near the end of a term. Some of us thought if we caught mumps we'd avoid the end of exams. So we sneaked into the sick room and kissed the mumpers. This scheme worked for some but another girl and I came down with the disease late, thus having to sit exams and spend the Easter holiday at West Oghwell.

The Sisters' lives were hard and highly disciplined. They led by example and never asked us to do anything they wouldn't do themselves. Punishment was rarely necessary but if needed, fitted the crime. This happened when one dormitory invited another to a midnight feast. After which, the girls one by one stealthily returned to their own dormitory. When my turn came, I crept along one pitch black corridor, to an archway leading to another dark corridor. When I reached the archway the arms of an unseen silent nun enveloped, held, then released me. I fled while the silent figure waited for her next victim. Nothing was said until supper the following Saturday when the Head stood up and said:

"Earlier this week a number of girls lost sleep. Would they please retire to bed early this evening to make up for this loss?"

We missed the Saturday night entertainment.

Food was rationed. In Devon there was rich creamy milk for our breakfast porridge and fruit and vegetables from the estate. We had some terrible meals like canned pilchards mashed with dried bread crumbs and boiled cabbage which before the days of insecticides was covered with little green caterpillars. We ate wild rabbit stew, boney, but quite good.

The sisters made a special cake for the 1942 Michaelmas School Birthday. I was asked to ice it and was given the ingredients plus two little bottles of colouring. The icing turned out perfectly until I poured in liberal amounts of red and blue from the little bottles. It turned dark purple! I dashed outside, picked blackberries and Michaelmas daisies and covered the purple icing with flowers and berries. I thought it looked wonderful.

Though restricted, our social life was fun. The school teams took it in turns to arrange Saturday night entertainment. Evenings of skits, charades, sardines, beetle drives, dodge ball and country dancing were carefully planned. We invented games. The favorite of these was 'Hide and Seek' in the dark. At sundown the girls on shutter duty closed the old wooden shutters to comply with black out regulations so when the lights were turned out the house was pitch black. It was perfect for our game of hunt and escape through long corridors, ancient rooms and down eerie staircases. We found out about an Army Camp on Denbury field, when our underwear returned from the laundry, not white, but khaki. The camp was built in 1939 for the War Office. We invited the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) girls stationed there to visit us. Half a dozen young ATS came for tea on summer Sunday afternoons. We entertained them to tenniquoit on the lawn followed by tea and sandwiches in the refectory.

We left West Oghwell strong, more independent and no longer spoilt.



Sr LILLA with her sister HELENA QUIRK



FORM UPPERV

ORMONDE HOUSE 1943 - 1948



Sr KATHLEEN MARY
& MOTHER ELSPETH

St Gabriel's School moves to Newbury

January 1943 St. Gabriel's moved to Ormonde House, Oxford Road, Newbury, Berkshire.

Ormonde House was said to have been used by Edward VII when he attended Newbury races. The large Edwardian rooms had ornamental plastered ceilings and central heating that overwhelmed us. There were basins with hot water in each dormitory, which we appreciated after the harsh conditions experienced in West Oghwell.

Four acres of land surrounded the house which had a large formal garden laid out with intersecting horizontal and

vertical pathways, greenhouses for grape vines and a field.

A house on Donnington Square provided an extension for the school.

Sr. Kathleen Mary became the school's second Head Mistress.

The Mrs Freckles and Bertha stayed at Oghwell. We had rabbits and a tame white rat for pets.

It was difficult to adapt to the more formal Newbury life... walking in crocodile and wearing hats on the street.

The school uniform changed to tweed skirts and coats with taupe sweaters and blazers, a requirement made necessary by the shortage of navy blue dye.



The school rapidly increased in size as weekly boarders joined us from nearby towns. Two huts were built to accommodate the increase. The hut at the side of the house was used as a chapel, for assembly, and physical education and the hut at the bottom by the field was used as a classroom and study.

Two lady gardeners with BSc degrees in horticulture from Studley College joined the staff. One large green house was converted to a science lab. where the senior gardener taught us basic chemistry and physics. However, it was never enough to make up for the years of science study we'd lost.

One especially warm summer day, as I worked in the green house, I gazed up at the old grape vine which trailed along the roof seeing the form of the plant and daydreamed of grapes and leaves set in squares, triangles and circles. The following week I sat the design section of the Royal Academy of Art drawing examinations. I opened the paper which set the examination. It said: "Draw a design for the grape set in a triangle"!

Food rationing was at its worst. Jam was either red, green or yellow and all tasted the same. Potatoes and eggs were dehydrated and tasted awful. However Sunday was different. After lunch we wrote letters to our parents. I'd have my pet white rat up my sleeve. Then at four o'clock we'd dash to the kitchen to find tea and hot crumpets with real butter laid out for us to take wherever we wanted.

In summer, gym was held on the lawn. Out came the old box and horse. Athletic activities were held in a park on the other side of Oxford Road. The gym mistress reintroduced inter-school net ball matches and added ballroom dancing in anticipation of our debut into society. We walked on the commons and up to Donnington Castle. The gardeners taught us how to plant asparagus in deep beds, banking the earth around the plants so the stalks stayed tender and white. We even had bee keeping lessons.

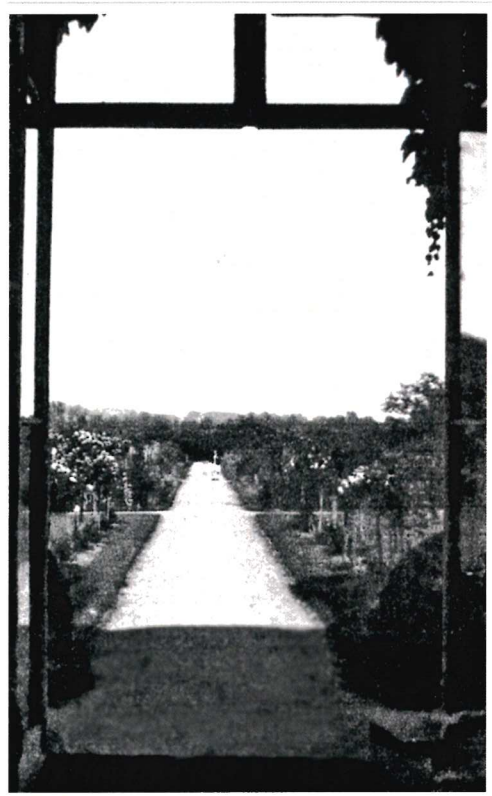
One day we dug up pieces of Roman pottery while digging. An American biology teacher working with us was beside herself when I dug up a tiny glass Roman lady's tear bottle and gave it to her.

On Saturdays we took a bus or hitchhiked to Captain Glover's Stables in East Ilsley. Captain Glover, a retired Guard's officer, taught us to ride. He was very strict and we enjoyed it. One day we were out hacking in the open Berkshire countryside when a U.S. bomber flew low overhead. When it turned and made another pass over us we saw small objects falling from the plane. We cantered after it and found we'd been bombed us with chocolate bars.

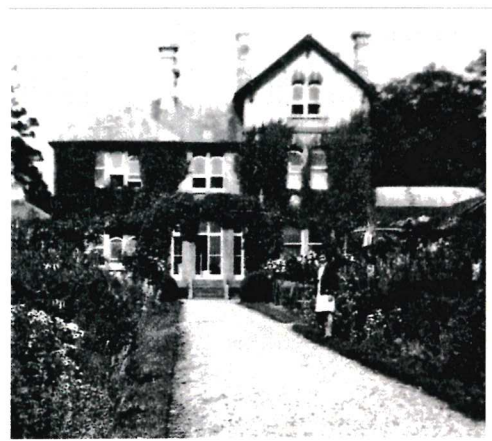
The lay staff were generous with their free time. The music mistress gave me singing lessons and the gym mistress gave me anatomy lessons in preparation for my physiotherapy training.



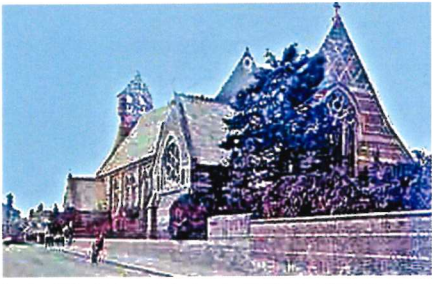
ORMONDE HOUSE



THE FORMAL BACK GARDEN



ST JOHN'S

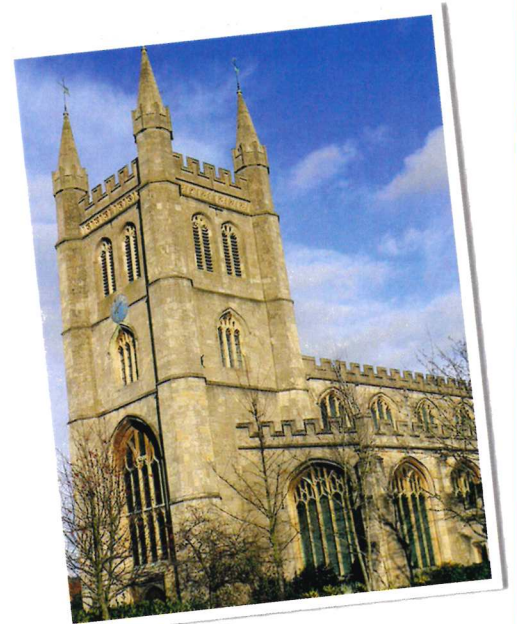
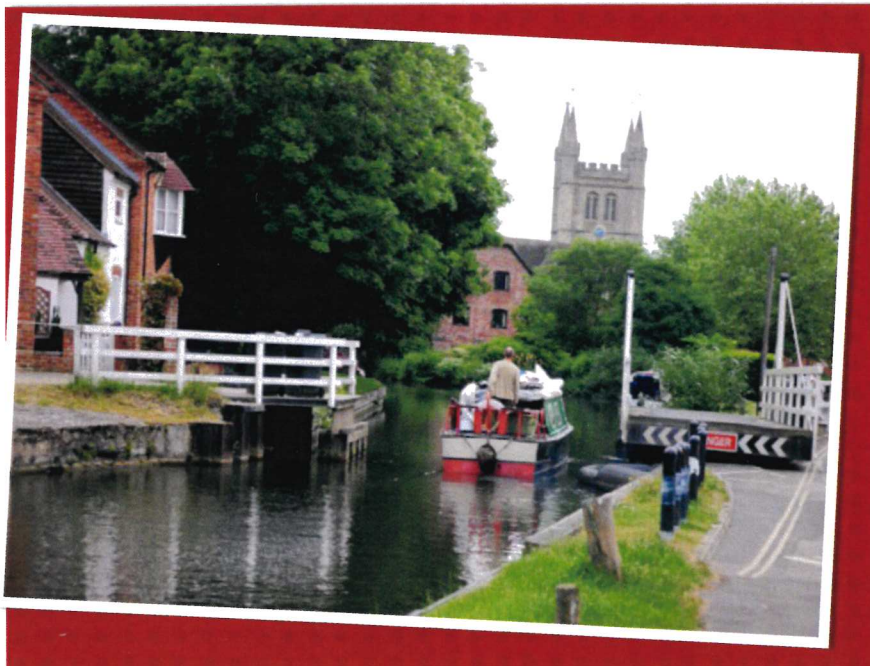


The two semi-detached gardeners' cottages were by the field at the back of the house. Three senior girls were allowed to sleep in one cottage and the young gardeners lived in the other. We loved having the freedom of the cottage with our own front door. Downstairs there was a single room with a piano and a tiny kitchen. Upstairs there was a flush toilet and a bedroom for three. There was no heating. In winter we'd boil water in the kitchen to fill hot water bottles to take to bed. Sometimes we'd wake in the morning to find the toilet frozen over and had to boil more water to pour on the ice before we could use it. For light, we'd turn on the gas and strike a match to the lamp being

careful not to break the fragile mantle.

On Sundays we walked to St. John's Church for mass sung in latin. Saint John's founded in 1859 was rooted in the Anglo-Catholic tradition. On the 10 February 1943, a bomb from a German airplane destroyed the church.

After the raid, our church activities were at St. Nicholas Church. The present St. Nicholas Church was built c. 1509-1533 during the marriage of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. We enjoyed the church's stained glass windows, organ music and boys choir.

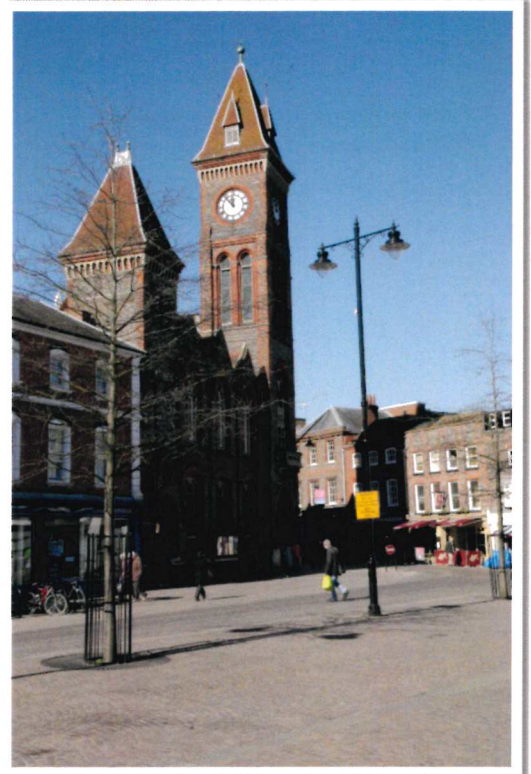


ST NICHOLAS

In 1942 the United States joined the war. By the time we reached Newbury the town was filled with soldiers and airmen. Many were stationed at Greenham Common, part of which was a glider base for the 101st Airborne Division. The men looked different, some were black, most had crew cuts, sun tans and smart uniforms. Long convoys of lorries carrying troops rumbled down Oxford Road past the school. Huge boxes of glider parts came from the United States and were assembled on the airfield. Elliot's of Newbury manufactured the hawsers which pulled the gliders.

During the 1943 air raid attack on Newbury, we spent the night in the cellar of the Donning Square house, where we layed on the floor and made up ghost stories. That was the night St John's was destroyed. Fifteen people died and twenty-six houses were destroyed. Next day, even though we lacked sleep, we were at Ormonde House in time for morning chapel. Later, while having my elevens milk and iron ration biscuit, I saw a five year old day pupil coming up the front drive. I went to see if she was all right. She told me she was late for school because her house had been bombed the previous night and the bedroom ceiling had come down on her bed. When I asked her about it she lisped brightly:

“It was wonderful Brenda. There were feathers everywhere.”



NEWBURY



ORMONDE HOUSE FROM THE BACK

I was surprised to wake early one morning, as in the midst of my Oxford School Leaving Certificate exams I'd been swatting late the night before. A strange noise of airplane engines awakened me. I looked out of the window. The sky was filled with scores of aircraft pulling gliders. The aircraft were painted with three white stripes. That was unusual. The invasion of Europe had begun. It was D-day June 6, 1944.



There were more social events in Newbury. Sports day returned and there was a Half Term break when those parents able to leave their war work, visited. The four school teams were reestablished. In the evening we knitted khaki scarves to send to the troops. We attended a Chopin piano concert at the Corn Exchange, saw the film "Fantasia" and listened to Churchill's inspiring speeches on the radio. Saturday night entertainment was still the highlight of our week but best of all was to be invited to the home of a weekly boarder for a weekend.

Other than three bishops and the school doctor, we were severely deprived of male company. The Bishop of Accra was fat, sniffed snuff and dribbled down his surplice. The Bishop of Reading wore casual dress and was fun. The Bishop of Oxford, the School's official visitor, expected us to genuflect to him. I had long since adapted to the Anglo-Catholic form of worship with candles, incense and genuflecting to the altar but reverted to being a staunch nonconformist when it came to bending my knees to a bishop.

The young school doctor was called when a 'flu epidemic hit us with high fevers and severe nose bleeds. We were smitten until he said he didn't want to be called out again unless we bled a pint of blood. He departed saying not to bother about what we'd do when we left school as we'd marry, become housewives and have babies, well! Despite hanging over basins none of us managed to squeeze out enough blood and never saw him again.

During the holidays we saw London bomb sites, destruction, dirt, and grime, towns with no lights, streets with no signs and long queues at the shops for little food. Nobody fussed, the war dragged on ... was it a bad thing that we had begun to accept these things as a way of life?

The war finally ended. St Gabriel's increased in size as children from Newbury and the surrounding towns and villages joined the few remaining London girls. To accommodate the increase a junior school Falkland St. Gabriel's was established at Falkland Lodge, Wash Common.

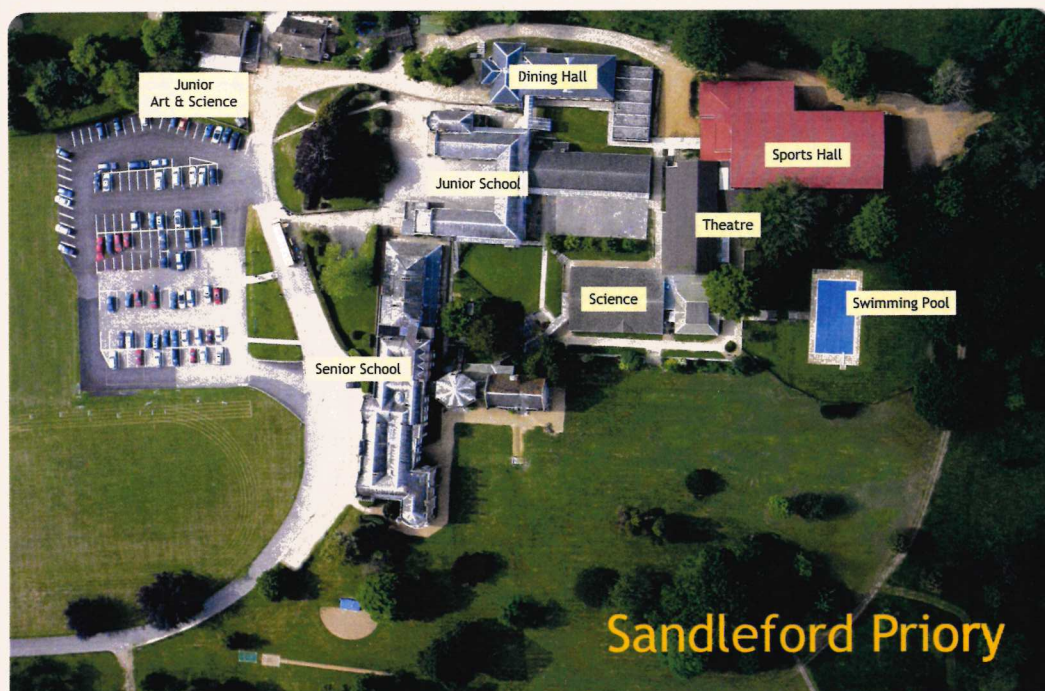


St Gabriel's School in 1946

SANDLEFORD PRIORY 1948



St. Gabriel's School moved to Sandleford Priory for the 1948 summer term, where it has continued to thrive. The Junior and Senior Schools have since increased in size and the buildings have expanded. The school returned to being a day school as it was when it first started in Mill Hill.



What happened to those people and places?

MILL HILL

St Gabriel's Mill Hill was requisitioned for military purposes during WW2. The few remaining students moved to a house on Hammers Lane, where Sr. Muriel was head mistress assisted by Strs Winifred, May and two lay teachers. After the war the Flower Lane property became part of Hendon Technical College (Middlesex University). More recently the property was sold for a housing development.

WANTAGE

St. Mary's School, Wantage, Oxfordshire. The school merged with Heathfield School, Ascot, Berkshire, to form a new school Heathfield St. Mary's. The Wantage site was closed at the end of the summer term 2007 and sold to a developer. The St Katherine's School building was adapted to become a home for elderly women. The buildings were pulled down and replaced in 1969.

St Katharine's House is now a residential care and nursing home for the elderly. St Luke's Nursing Wing built in 1997 was opened by HRH The Princess Alexandra. Under lay administration, they are part of the C.S.M.V.

WEST OGWELL

In 1943, West Ogwell House became the C.J.G.S. Convent. The Sisters were joined by the Sisters of St. Agnes. A wing with a studio, bakery, and sewing room was built on in 1954 with a further extension in 1960. A Chapel was built in 1955 and an additional block in 1967.

Due to a decline in interest in the order and with limited funds available to support such a big house, it was sold to the Gaia House Trust in 1996.

A burial ground on the property is maintained for the Sisters.



WEST OGWELL



SISTERS ENJOY THE SUN



THE CHAPEL



THE HOUSE FROM THE DRIVE



WEST OGWELL CHURCH

The "Churches Conservation Trust" cares for and has completed restoration work on the Church.

PINCHERFORD FARM

The beautiful old farm hotel burned down soon after St. Gabriel's left Devon. It has since been restored.

CJGS

1996 the CJGS moved to Windsor to live and work alongside the Community of St John Baptist.

2001 CJGS and the CSJB moved to The Priory, Begbroke, Kidlington, Oxfordshire.

2011 The community is planning to move to Ripon College, Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire.

NEWBURY

1948 Newbury College took over Ormonde House.

2002 Newbury College moved to new premises and the Ormonde House site was sold for development.

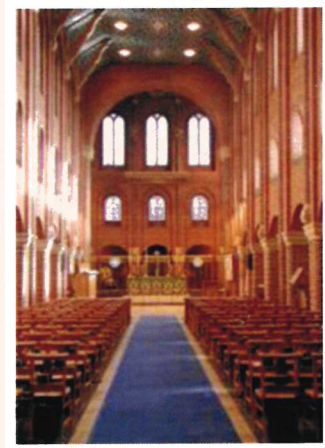
Falkland St. Gabriel's moved to Sandlesford Priory.

The Falkland Lodge site was demolished to build The Gabriels housing development.

1957 St. John's Church was rebuilt.



THE NEW ST. JOHN'S CHURCH



THE PRIORY, BEGBROKE



RIPON COLLEGE, CUDDESDON, OXFORD



PEOPLE

Although only a few of us were able to attend university, most of us received post secondary education, which led to successful professional careers. We had active family and community lives and played a role in the post war reconstruction period, as the Sisters would have wished.

It wasn't until after the war that we became aware that our parents had been involved in vital war work. Fathers had put out fires and were physicians during the blitz, had designed airplanes, plane runways and the Mulberry landing dock.

Sybil Hemmerde, the music mistress at Mill Hill, joined the Ambulance Service at the outbreak of war and bravely drove an ambulance throughout the London blitz.

Margaret Glover, music mistress at West Owell, emigrated to Newfoundland, Canada, where she taught music for many years. She and Joy Marshall (*Dean*) remained close friend. Margaret died in 2009

Mary Purry was the only girl to experience St. Gabriel's life at Mill Hill, West Owell House, Ormonde House and Sandlesford Priory.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brenda Tillotson nee Jones started at St Gabriel's, Mill Hill in 1935 when she was eight years old. She left the school in 1944.

She received her basic education as a

physiotherapist at the Middlesex Hospital, London. She worked in the field of rehabilitation for forty years, treating patients with spinal cord injuries and neurological diseases in Canada, the UK, South Africa and the USA. She spent the last years of her

career as the Director of a large Physiotherapy Department.

She lives with her husband Olin in a small coastal town near Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the following people who have helped me with this project:

Joy Marshall (*Dean*) 1934 - 1944 for contacting alumni, sending historical material and early pictures about West Ogwell Church, Pincherford farm and the School. We enjoyed working together again after nearly seventy years;

Pamela Fair (*Baker*) 1933 - 1942 for her early documents about the regulation and management of the school and photographs of the 5th form girls;

Margaret Greenfield (*Williams*) 1939 - June 1948 for her memories of West Ogwell as an eight year old child;

Patricia Croxton-Smith 1941 - 1947 for her Ormonde House photographs;

The alumni who encouraged me to write this history of St. Gabriel's School. What a joy to be in contact with you all once more;

Iain Fraser, the Maintenance Manager of Gaia House for the history of West Ogwell House and photographs of the house and park as it is today;

Lastly, to my husband Olin for helping me edit these few pages.



WEST OGWELL HOUSE FRONT LAWN