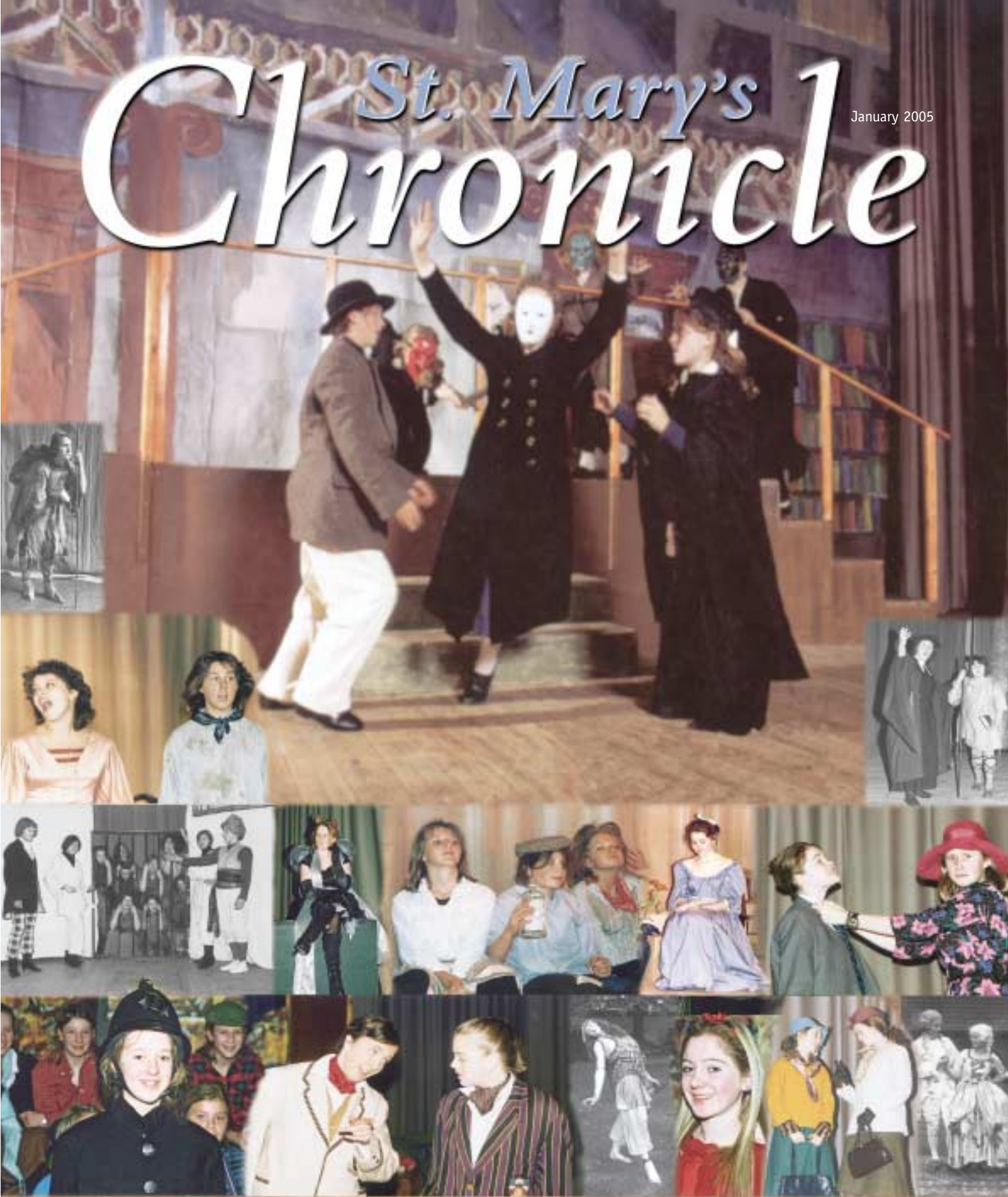


St. Mary's Chronicle

January 2005



SMOGA News



School News





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GOVERNOR PROFILE: SIR JOHN CHRISTOPHER F MONTGOMERY CUNINGHAME BART

Having been educated at Fettes College and Worcester College, Oxford I completed two years of National Service. From there I moved into the financial world and have been an investment banker ever since.

After becoming a Director of Morgan Grenfell in the 70s, I decided in the early 80s to work for myself putting together a number of venture capital type deals, the most successful of which was in the powered garden-tool industry. By the time the company was sold to a Japanese corporation, it was the third largest producer of petrol-powered trimmers in the US market. Other interests have included drilling developmental oil/gas wells, specialty chemicals, real estate, specialty metals, software for the medical market and reorganizing a small privately-owned bank in the Isle of Man and new computer technology.

I am a churchwarden of the local village (population 340) church. We have just finished completely re-roofing the church and in spite of that the church finances should look very healthy by the time I have finished my term of office. Until about three years ago I was a Governor of Cuddesdon Theological College, and I am on the finance committee as well as being a Governor of St Mary's School, Wantage. My three daughters all went to St Mary's and thoroughly enjoyed their time there.





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January 2005

Dear SMOGs, Girls, Parents, Staff, Ex Staff and Governors

'If she believes in herself . . . she will fly'

I saw this quote in the magazine of St Mary's Diocesan School for Girls in Pretoria, South Africa, with whom we have very close links via the Convent, and thought that it was perfect in summing up everything that St Mary's teaches us during our time at the school. The ethos of St Mary's is to encourage girls to be kind, caring and considerate, consequently, the friendships that are formed here last for many many years. As Chairman of the Old Girls' Association I am always amazed at the strength of the old girls' network, it really does last a lifetime. St Mary's also teaches us to have self-belief, not a cocky arrogance, but a belief that anyone can achieve anything if they want to. Whether a girl is a scientist, linguist, historian, artist, musician or sportswoman every achievement at St Mary's is noted and praised. Just by reading this 2005 Chronicle you will see reports on a range of reunions, successes at school and in the work place and proof that the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in SMOGs via the Yellow Pages (see page ???).

I am often asked what exactly the SMOGA (St Mary's Old Girls' Association) does, other than produce an annual magazine and send out a monthly email! Well I can assure you that we are a very busy (and dedicated!) group of Old Girls who are determined to provide the following;

- A forum for the Old Girls to keep in touch and network via the Chronicle, a website (www.smogs.co.uk) and monthly emails (please get in touch if you would like to receive these)
- An opportunity for current girls and recent leavers to find work experience or get careers advice
- A Head's Fund which helps fund those girls in school who are unable to afford to go on school trips such as Choir or Lacrosse Tours
- A Bursary for daughters/granddaughters/nieces of SMOGs
- A Travel Scholarship open to all Old Girls for any 'worthwhile' travel whether in the UK or abroad

The biggest piece of news and source of much speculation, in 2004, has been the future of St Mary's. I am pleased to say that we can finally give you some firm answers (see page ?? for full details), however in very simple terms . . . St Mary's is moving to a brand new site, Challow Park, just the other side of Wantage (very near the convent), which will be ready in Autumn 2007. A few years ago the Community donated the freehold of the current site to the School giving us the opportunity to explore various options with regard to the future of the school. Many people assume that because there used to be 300+ girls at school and now there are 220+ we must be about to close. I can assure you that we are certainly not closing and have no intention of doing so! The explanation is actually very simple. Due to various recent pieces of legislation there are now very tight regulations on size of rooms/number of girls in rooms/number of girls per bathroom etc. (gone are the wonderful large dorms we used to have!!). Due to an inability to expand within the present site we have had to reduce the number of dorms and therefore our maximum capacity. The new site will obviously give us much more space and opportunity, however, we are not intending to expand significantly – St Mary's prides itself on being a small school.

It is with great sadness that we have said goodbye to Chris Bullmore, the Development Director at school. Many SMOGs have had contact with Chris over the past few years and he (along with Isabelle Barber) has been instrumental in building and updating the SMOGs database. Those of you who have met him or spoken to him will no doubt agree with me when I say that he will be sorely missed by the SMOGA. Anyone wishing to make contact with school, whether it is to update your address details, find an Old Girl, make a donation, or anything else please either email me (and I will forward it on to the relevant person) or telephone school and ask for Clare Boheimer or Isabelle Barber. By the end of this term we will have appointed someone who, amongst other responsibilities, will be the SMOGA contact and we will let you know who they are ASAP.

Finally, a special mention must go to the SMART exhibition which is being held in London in early July (see page ?? for full details). This really is an event not to be missed so please put it in your diaries NOW!

I do hope that you enjoy reading this 2005 Chronicle, thank you very much indeed to all those who have contributed to it, and I look forward to seeing many of you over the coming year.

With best wishes

Victoria Humphries (Riches, 1988)
 Chairman SMOGA

SMOGS SNIPPETS

All SMOGs are now 'filed' under the year that their year group left St Mary's. For example, if you left in 1981 after O'Levels, you would be called a 1983 leaver, as that is when the final person in your year group would have left.

If anyone would like to get in contact with any of the people below (or any SMOGs), then please do contact Victoria Humphries (details on page 1)

Zandra Powell (Kennard, 1958) – I am an army daughter and army wife (same regiment!) and have been stationed in Malaya and Germany. Our last posting was in Dorset where we settled for thirty years. We moved home four years ago to the family estate in Northamptonshire. Daughter Louise Holborow (SMOG), her husband and three little boys have done up and finally moved into the family home so we are occasional babysitters and school runners! Have done the normal slightly eccentric things that SMOGs do; Pony Club instructor, RDA instructor, now teaching water colours, walked 500 miles on Pilgrims Way to Santiago and other long distance walks and rides on horseback throughout England and Scotland. Acquired four SMOG stepsisters on my father's fourth marriage (Loopy Kennard) and frequently see lifetime friend Juliet Oswald (McLaughlin) – life very busy!

Penelope Worsley (Fuller, 1959) – The Karen Hilltribes Trust was set up in memory of our third child, Richard. Richard went out in his Gap Year for six months to install clean water systems with the Karen hilltribes of North West Thailand in 1990 when he was 19 years old. His purpose was to live and work with another culture and to experience the differences and their struggles. He loved every minute of it and hoped that one day I would help the Karen people. He went on to join the Light Dragoons but was killed in a car crash when he was 24 years old in 1996. The Karen people dedicated a water system to him deep in the forests and I went on to set up the charity to encourage other young people to get involved, as he had done. Now we send 40 people to Thailand to teach in the schools and install water systems and to get involved in a number of other

projects. We are helping the Karen people to help themselves to develop their own cultural, educational and economic infrastructure. It is very rewarding to hear of the wonderful experiences our volunteers have and how it has changed their lives for the future. I live with my husband in York and have three other grown up children plus four grandchildren. The head office of the charity is attached to my house. We have a shop selling the traditional crafts of the Karen people including woven cloths/bags and silver jewellery. I give talks to the general public. The work keeps me very busy and I travel three times a year to Thailand to see our projects. It is now a global charity attracting interest from the US, Australia and Asia. It has filled a big vacuum in my life. www.karenhilltribes.org.uk

Camilla Hipwood (Fane, 1976) – I am living in Gloucestershire between Tetbury and Cirencester. I have two children – Rose (18) who has just started at Bristol UWE reading English/History and Sebastian (16) who is in the Lower VIth at Shiplake College. We are all busy campaigning at the moment against the Government's proposed ban on foxhunting. My daughter is also about to start helping a friend of ours who is standing for a seat in Bristol against a very anti Labour MP! I am in constant and close touch with Charlotte Westbury and our "gang" all keep in touch as often as possible – Bella Birdwood, Louise Goodall, Henrietta Spencer-Churchill and Nikki Wasserman. I also occasionally see Caroline and Jo Bell (that was!) I am working part-time for Lane Fox in Cirencester and do a lot of work for our Pony Club.

Brucella Newman (1984) – I was in the same year as Sarah Edgedale, Celestine Bridgeman, Marina Ogilvy and Sheira Rhys-Davies but due to a family crisis, I left a year early and completed my A Levels in London. Since leaving, I embarked (by accident!) on a 12-year modelling career (a very long, drawn out 'accident'!) and since then have completed a BA Hons in Media Arts with Radio Broadcasting. I am now sitting for an MA in Film. I have a wonderful son, Solomon, who is six. It would be wonderful to catch up with any of the old girls mentioned above, if at all possible (Brucella66@aol.com).

Katharine Pooley (1984) – Just to let you know I married in 2002 in Hong Kong. Having lived in Asia for 15 years I moved back to London this June with my husband (no kids yet) and opened my Home Interiors shop "Katharine Pooley" at 160 Walton Street, London SW3.

Nicola Ceccolini (Cottrell, 1985) – As I have been totally hopeless on any sort of update since I left, a quick resume of the past 19 years (oh my goodness I feel old now!) . . . after Wantage I went to Durham University and read English and Philosophy for three years and had a wonderful time. I then came to London and haven't left since! Started working at TV-am as a post-production secretary, moving onto crew co-ordinator and then ended up at TWI where I am now a senior(!) production manager working on a variety of different productions. I now work part-time as I am married to Luca (yes he is Italian, the surname is a bit of a giveaway!) and we have two children; Alessandro aged four and Sophia aged 19 months (who has just started walking, at last!). We live in Acton in west London and have recently moved to a bigger house which we are slowly doing up. Funnily enough I bumped into Rosie Raven in the fabric department at John Lewis only last week! I am still in touch with Rebecca Hindle (Hurst) and Louise Church (Bratt) who are both godmothers to my little ones. They are in contact with Ruth Wilson (who I know got married last year), Elizabeth Holland (also married!) and Sophie Ridsdale (Hobhouse). I always enjoy reading the newsletters, although news from our year is always a bit scant! I was very sorry to hear of Mrs Webb's death – I am sure there must be many SMOGs who will remember her fondly – she was certainly one of my favourite teachers.

Shaunagh Aluwihare (Orme, 1985) – My husband, children and I have been living in Sri Lanka for five years now and we love it. We have two children a boy named Benjamin age 10 and girl named Lelia age six. They go to the British school in Colombo and are thriving here. I am working for a shop called Barefoot, which makes toys, bags, clothes in amazing brightly coloured handloom cotton cloth. I design the clothes for the company and have a small hand in doing some of the



weaving designs for clothes. Barefoot (www.barefootceylon.com) is more than a shop as we also exhibit artwork in our own gallery at the shop and have a wonderful outdoor cafe in a secluded leafy garden, and a fantastic bookshop. It's a wonderful job in a very creative environment.

Above is a photo of myself and family which was taken about two years ago, its the best one I have of all of us!

Louise Gorsuch (Burlington, 1986) – I married an American I met at Oxford University while studying for an MPhil in Business and moved to Northern Virginia near Washington DC nine years ago. I stay home with my two kids – Emma five years and Belinda three years – and look after my much loved old horse (who attended my wedding and travelled to America with me!). Two years ago I became a citizen and last week I voted in my first Presidential Election . . .

Emma Logan (Moyle, 1988) – After nearly 10 years in South Africa, my husband and I moved back to Cheltenham last year, just before the birth of our son Jack. It's been easier to settle than we thought, though obviously miss many of the good things such as the bush and decent help in the house! I've been writing articles for Cotswold magazines, mainly about sport and spent the summer doing media and PR work for Gloucestershire County Cricket Club. Having vowed never to work in cricket again after the World Cup, it was actually lovely to get back into it again. My husband being a Natalian is surprisingly loving England and is working for O2. For fun, he has also been commentating on South African Racing on Sky TV's *At The Races*. He spent the summer playing lots of cricket for the South Wales Hunt, which was great fun and enabled us to meet lots of nice people. My sister Lizzie (who now has two sons) and I have become the

Gloucestershire distributors for a home-delivery, organic baby food company called *Truly Scrumptious* and I am expecting my second child in April 2005.

Victoria Humphries (Riches, 1988) – Jeremy and I are still living just outside Bath, but have just embarked on a major eight month building project and are currently living in a mobile home on the building site (not great in mid winter and when Humphries junior is due in just over two months!!). Work wise, still the usual; lots of motivational talks and after dinner speaking based on the North Pole trip that Mum and I did a few years ago, running personal development courses for both companies and individuals (includes interview training and coaching on 'first appearances') and of course all my St Mary's work – I seem to live there! I have seen a fair bit of Zoe Pettman (Notley), Helen Starkey, Suzannah Trotter (Estcourt) who is expecting her second child three weeks after me and Clare Hazell (Bosley) – no one has any major news, but all are on good form! The reunion in October had a good turnout and it was great to see Alex Hopkinson-Woolley (Molyneux), Amabel Rogers, Zoe, Nicola Evans (Duncan) and Sophie Mather who seems to be rapidly climbing the career ladder at Visa.

Ali de Lisle (1990) – I'm living in London, Fulham, and working in the city for a CEO of a large FTSE company in the city, a very busy role which I enjoy a lot. My sister Clare lives around the corner from me and is a teacher at Eton House and also runs her own cooking company called Groovy Grub – she arranges parties for children and teaches them to cook! I see a lots of Gemma Ohlson and Lucy Stroud (Mahon), Gems is always on cracking form and I have been on a couple of excellent and wild holidays this year, Gem works at Barclays where is she is a very successful Event Manager. Lucy Stroud (Mahon) lives with her husband, Alex, and her two gorgeous little boys – Harry (my godson) and Ollie in Wandsworth. I am in touch Linnie McCubbine (Yuill-Walker) who lives in Barnes and has two divine kids called Maddy and Charlie. Cleone Inglis-Jones (Musson) is now living in Cambridge with her husband Valentine while he trains to be a Vicar with their children Oscar and Daphne.

Kirsty Sprawson (Macmillan, 1990) – Thea Alice was born 14th May 2004, a sister for Matilda (who is three). I am living in Clapham with my husband Rupert and planning to return to work at the National Portrait Gallery in the spring.

Candida Mead (Newson-Smith, 1990) – I am a retired Investment banker now and have set up a Personal Training business in Fulham, which is lots of fun and a great lifestyle change. If anybody wants a personal trainer they should get in touch! I have been married to Simon for four years, but no babies as of yet!

Camilla Sykes (1990) – I have become a beach bum in Tarifa, south Spain

Atalanta Miller (Georgopoulos, 1990) – My news this year is that I have had my third baby and still cannot quite believe that I am a Mummy of three. Little Alexia, four months, has followed quickly after Constantine who is nearly two and Sophia now six is helping me look after the babes. All my little ones are lucky enough to have Wantage mates for Godmummy's and this way I get to see a bit more of Sophie Tait, Antonia Cordingley, Gemma Ohlson and Lucia Cannon! I am still working at my Dad's Ship Broking office part time and still dreaming about being a writer one day . . . I think that ambition is on hold until the nappy years are over and I don't want to miss out on the little one's growing up. I've been in touch with Kate Driscoll who has also had a little boy called Jasper and she is travelling the world with him meeting her hubby in every port while he sails in a competition. Evelina and I get together as well when we can with her little girl Aimee and she and Costi have fun together. Sarah Adams has also just had a little girl, Amber so with Antonia's two girls and Sophie's two there is a wonderful new generation of trouble meeting up and getting into mischief. I haven't done any really exciting travelling or anything like that recently but I may be taking part in an archaeological dig on the island of Syros where my family comes from originally. We think there may be some unfound Cycladic treasures and have received funding and permission from the Greek government to have a dig. If anything exciting emerges, I will let you know about it.

Hester Witt (Morley-Fletcher, 1990) –

In April this year I got married to Bob Witt, who had romantically proposed to me in Venice a year ago. We're living in Gloucestershire in a small village in an old cottage, which I love. I left my job a couple of months ago as I'm hoping to set up my own shop locally selling jewellery and offering hat hire. However, the competition for shop premises is unbelievable so it may be a while before I find my own shop. So in the meantime I'm doing freelance marketing work and generally enjoying life!

Lucinda Burghes (Armitage, 1990) –

Can't quite believe that I'm coming up to my first wedding anniversary in a few weeks time, it was an amazing day and made all the more special with numerous SMOGS in attendance including Charlie Ford, Anna-Louise Sankey and Kate Rugge-Price as my bridesmaids. I have finally qualified as an acupuncturist having spent four years trudging up to York at the weekends to complete the course – yes, there was a college in London but hey, why take the easy option? I am now practicing from my home in Balham and about to start in Holmes Place and I'm loving it. I'm still headhunting in the City part-time as well so life is a bit mad as I try and keep the various plates spinning. Have just returned from trekking in Ladakh for a couple of weeks which was amazing although a bit chilly trying to pitch our tent at 5,000m and -15C, and I thought DofE was too much like hard work!

Rebecca Ayton (1990) – I am now living on a boat on the Grand Union Canal. I recently sold my house and gave up my job as a senior lecturer in Newcastle as I found the current administrative burden in higher education to be intolerable (that and the fact that 50% of the population now attend Uni and are clearly not up to it !!). I am now self-employed and run a consultancy, my clients are very diverse and range from National Governing Bodies of sport to individuals who are training for certain sports events etc. I travel all over the world to work and have recently enjoyed time in South Africa, Luxembourg, Germany, USA and, as a holiday, St. Lucia. Last weekend I attended staff coach training for the ECB at Lilleshall and will shortly

become one of very few female staff coaches in the country. This weekend I will be made President Elect of the Swimming Teachers Association, a charity of which I have been a trustee for some six years now. That about sums up me so far! Always busy, but still have lots of time for my adorable nephew, my demanding animals and of course my family! I used to keep in touch with Jemima (indeed she and I holidayed together several times) but since I moved, I have failed to keep in touch with her. I would love to hear from her and other friends such as Marisa, Felicity and Rozzie.

Hattie Morley (1990) – I am working at *The Bill* still (with a bit of a headache today – we won Best Drama at the National Television Awards last night so much celebrating and smoozing last night!). Having started in the Casting Department I am now working with the Executive Producer and Head of Production developing new ideas for future Drama within Talkback Thames Television whilst overseeing the whole production process for both *The Bill* and the Channel 5 soap *Family Affairs* . . .

Louise Daly (Harrap, 1990) – I am living in Battersea with my husband Dermot and two children, Caroline four and George three. They are just about to go to school, Great cannot wait!! I see a lot of Lucia Cannon, she just got married to a great guy called Mark saw a lot of SMOGS at the wedding. Busy hunting at the moment and taking my clothes off in Brighton to try to save it!! Never had the biggest of frontage and children do not enhance it! Centre fold of the Daily Sport not to be too proud of.



Jane Clark-Hutchison (1990) – Jemima Gurney (Lezard) had another son Conrad earlier this year, a brother for Boris. Hester

Witt (Morley-Fletcher) was married in April this year and is currently embarking on a very exciting entrepreneurial venture. Katharine Ugeux (Lewis) was married in August this year and is a highly successful strategic consultant flitting between Singapore, New York and London. Rose Dawson was last seen in the House of Commons. Serena Beckett, after returning from a round the world trip, continues her jet set life style to remote Scottish Islands as part of intriguing work assignments, based in London.

Rachel Wawn (1992) – I seem to keep bumping into SMOGS from all years at the moment, wherever I go, which is lovely, there is always a connection and a good catch up as to what we've all been up to. Although I've been away for much of it, I was at Charlotte Nelson's and Lucy Pease's weddings in the summer and both occasions saw a large gathering of SMOGS, with husbands and sometimes children, taking over the dance floor. Nellie has settled down with her furniture designer husband Nick just outside Winchester and Lucy Pease, newly qualified solicitor, has settled near Newcastle with her accountant husband, Bennet. We were just at Minsi Cordingley's wedding to Nick Rucker last weekend at Temple Church and they have settled in Battersea and have just jetted off to the Maldives for a week followed by Sri Lanka for two weeks on their honeymoon – great way to spend Christmas and New Year! SJ Lewis is engaged to Joss Muirie and will be getting married in 2005, which leaves only a few of us singlies left! Emily Nelson (Ohlson) and her husband Bob, had a boy called James on February 28th. Lucy Bryant (nee Mason) had her second son, Harry, early on this year and she and her husband James have moved back from Northern Ireland and will be based near Swindon for the next couple of years. Vinny Plumstead (Carr Smith) has had her second, a son called Harry, she and her husband Jules are living in Clapham. Charlie McGill (Wake) married to South African, Clive, has had her second daughter, Lilia Rose, about three weeks ago, in early November. Vicky Buckley Sharp (Wildman) is expecting baby no two in February. She is married to Ben

Buckley Sharp and already has a son called Luke who is nearly three years old (SJ's page boy next year!). Sophie Bathgate (Mogford) owns Sophie's Steak House in the Fulham Road, is married to Ed and lives in Chelsea. Chantal Darbyshire is back in London, with her American husband Bob Ferrini Jnr, working for Advertising firm BBH. Alex Forrest is still working, very successfully, for Carlton in Oxford, and can be seen reading the news and appearing on Home Truths. Diggy and her husband Tim are about to move to New York, she will be leaving behind her very successful flower business, ElizaB which she set up with her cousin Libba. Annabel Abbott (nee Partridge) is now headmistress of her school, all rather frightening! Eugenie Hanmer is still working, very successfully in fashion in New York. Sara Scanlan (Stevenson) is married to Patrick Scanlan and lives in North Wales and have a daughter called Robin – Digs, Mogs and SJ are all the proud godparents.

Georgie Fuller (1993) – I am currently working for myself *Georgie Fuller Creative Design and Decoration* so I do everything from painting and decorating flats and houses, colour consultations, furniture painting and specialist paint finishes. I have a great team of people who all specialise in different areas (carpenters etc) so it is good fun. I have just bought and done up my own flat and before that lived with Catherine Sermon for four years but still meet up on a regular basis. I also see Auriol Walker, Charlotte Maxwell-Lyte, Mel Taylor, Olivier Forrest, Ali Bailey-West and Alice Faulkner on a regular basis. I am pleased to say my year are starting to get married at last we were a little worried considering the year below are all married off!! My cousin Alexandra Holmes (Fogs) has had her second baby called George who is very sweet. I saw Rebecca Amesbury (Skipper) at Christmas time whilst she was over from the States where she lives, exactly the same as ever even after six years!!

Caroline Tuke-Hastings (Emmet, 1994) – Just an update on my news . . . Still living near Cirencester with my husband Charlie and daughter Ella who is going to be two next month and keeping me very busy running around after her! My second baby is due mid January, which is very exciting and looking forward to the new arrival. Feeling huge already!! Just got another puppy so my life is being turned upside down but loving living in the countryside. We had great fun going to Georgie Mackay-Dick and Auriol Walkers' weddings this year. They both looked amazing on their special days and have married wonderful men. Cadie Aspray (Ling) organised a team for a great day of Dragon Boat Racing at our local sailing club for charity and our team came second, which was fantastic fun. I have Annabel Carver, Anna Polson and Georgie Balmaine coming to stay this weekend for a girlie weekend, which will no doubt be filled with laughter and chat of the old days!!!

GREAT OAKS

Following our request for further information about Great Oaks in the June 2004 Chronicle, the following letter was sent in . . .

Great Oaks was owned by my grandparents, Leslie and Madeline Garton, in the 1930s and my parents were married from there in 1936. I can remember visiting as a small child in about 1940. My grandfather died at about that time and I think that the house was sold fairly quickly, but to whom I do not know. The enclosed photograph of the house and garden was taken by my father in the mid 1930s.

*Gilly Bateman
(Her daughters, Helen and Fiona
were at SMS 1978-1985)*



CAN YOU HELP?

If anyone can help, then please do contact Victoria Humphries (details on page 1).

Niece of Beatrix Potter . . . School has received the following email – we have helped as much as we can (especially re. St Katherine's), but can any of you help with any other information:

“I am working as researcher for an American academic writing a new biography of Beatrix Potter. In about 1916 Beatrix Potter (by then Mrs William Heelis) started paying for the education of one of her husband's nieces, Esther Nicholson. We think she attended a boarding school in Wantage – her descendants call it St Catherine's, which I can find no trace of, and I wondered whether it was St Mary's? Esther went on to Somerville, Oxford, in 1918. Do you know whether school records of old girls would go back that far? And, if so, whom should I contact to find out whether Esther Nicholson was an old girl? Someone might even know about St Catherine's...”

Joanna Casey (Bryant, 1971) – I would love to hear from any of my year who live near Cheltenham as I don't know anyone

who lives round here as I've only been in Cheltenham for a year.

Cathy Thomas (Brown, 1971) – I saw in one of the newsletters, information about quite a lot of the people I was at school with, like Janetta Otter Barry, Henrietta Sweeting and Diana Charteris but I have never seen anything about my friend Gillian Fitzgerald. She left school the same year as me, did her A levels, then moved to Hong Kong. I lost touch with her and everyone else I was at school with in about 1973 so I'd love to hear any news of her.

Gaynor Stuart-Burnett (Irvine, 1958) is trying to find Carol Egar(?) (Hazard) and Mary Cooke.

SMETS

The SMETs (St Mary's Ex Teachers) seem to be meeting up more and more often – I get regular updates from Mary Kitchin and Pam Clark. Both comment on what fun it is and how many people seem to attend! Old Girls are always talked about and both Mary and Pam have asked me to pass on their best wishes to everyone.

CLASS OF 1973 REUNION

Thursday 11th November 2004

It is 7.30am and I am in my Pilates lesson. I look through the French doors and over the balcony at an intensely blue sky and the deep terracotta bricks of the Kensington Grosvenor Hotel opposite. The weather is glorious and it bodes well, for today is our Class Reunion after a break of three decades. First two of us, then gradually more of us, have been chiselling away to gather up our whole class into a lunch and afternoon. I have been feeling sick with nerves for two days. My teacher is discussing sotto voce how it is possible to create arches in your feet through exercise. I am jettisoned in a nanosecond to a large low wooden building; there is a smell of parched wood and socks, the sun streams through the window highlighting the dust motes and sitting on the floor is a group of small girls with a gentle but determined nun – brown gym knickers, black gusset shoes and mottled thighs. It is 1964 and I am in my Remedial Class at Great Oaks where most of my life-long friendships were formed, and perhaps even my fallen arches were improved.

The morning speeds on, suddenly it is 12 o'clock and the suspense is beginning

to bite. All the telephoning, emailing, explaining and cajoling – it must be worth it for an afternoon of nostalgia and indulgence. Were we too forceful with some people or perhaps outright bossy as one former classmate has made perfectly clear. Should the past be left to sleep on quietly – after all there had been some emphatic refusals. I have a moment's regret for the three or four people we haven't been able to trace and glance at Victoria Mather's piece from the proceeding weekend's papers – unbelievably on The School Reunion complete with St Mary's, Nuns and Ding Dong – is this a sign of approval sent from God? We three wait at the top of the stairs – Liza who has lent her house and everyone in it, to prepare the lunch and deal with thirty-odd women; Ding Dong and I who have acted as bloodhounds. It is beginning to feel like an out-of-body experience. The doorbell goes and they start to arrive – we stand fascinated and amazed as our friends from so many years ago flood into the room – sometimes it takes a few seconds to adjust to the fact that I am looking at exactly the same face, but veiled by thirty years of life. Who on earth suggested named badges? I am seeing so many spontaneous smiles and laughter, and feeling such warmth and mutual interest. Long distances have been covered – even from America – days of work and study have been given up and

support networks for children and dogs have been summoned. I can see we are in for a long and interesting afternoon and the tension drops away. Loud chat covers everything from hair colour to children. Everybody looks so good! From nowhere a photographer appears, organised by our hosts – is there no end to their generosity? We take chairs into the garden square and squint into the (unfortunate) winter sunshine – the final result is not dissimilar to some of the old school photos we have been giggling over before lunch. We are all bound to remember the one person who isn't with us, and Susie's smiling face is a gentle reminder of how lucky we are.

At five o'clock we are saturated with the past and present – I start to fret in case I haven't managed to talk to everyone. Each person is fascinating, their story so compelling – and yet we have all reached today by a similar road; the rocky times bravely borne, and the good times truly enjoyed. I can't help myself from giving credit to the CSMV. I retreat to my car and consider the ties that bind our quasi sisterhood of shared schooldays – another landscape long ago before avocados, holidays abroad and technology; when today's obsessions of money, health and food were simply not discussed. We have all agreed to run a repeat in five years.

Olivia Stirling (Waller, 1973)



1987-95 REUNION

In October 2004 there was a SMOGS reunion for leavers from 1988 to 1995 organised by Victoria Humphries (Riches, 1988), Rachel Wawn (1992) and Ali de Lisle (1990). We decided that it was about time there was something organised officially and we thought it would provide a good opportunity for people to catch

up with those from other years as well as do a little networking – you never know who might be doing what these days! So, we pooled our resources as party organisers and chefs and hired The Conservatory at Ransome's Dock in Battersea and charged a small price to cover costs and provide drinks and delicious nibbles (if I do say so myself). There was an excellent turn out from most of the years and all of the wine

that had been bought was consumed, in true Wantage style! A great evening was had by all, if the chatter and noise, and some very merry people at the end of the evening who need a lot of encouragement to leave was anything to go by. In fact, everyone seemed to have had such a good time, that we may well organise another one in 2005, if we can be persuaded!

Ali de Lisle (1990)



Mary Bayliss (Bridgeman) and Juliet Alderson (Winlaw)

Invite You (1956 Leavers) to a St. Mary's Reunion

on Monday 27th June 2005

at Sheepbridge Court, Swallowfield, Nr Reading

at 12.00pm

Please bring your own picnic. Marquee, tables and chairs provided.
Husbands/other halves/friends welcome.

RSVP: Juliet (Juby) Alderson
33 Apsley Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 2SN

0117 973 5780
juandant.bristol@virgin.net

HATCHED, MATCHED AND DESPATCHED

ENGAGEMENTS

Vanessa Kennedy-Scott engaged to David Senior

Charlotte Beale engaged to Thomas Porter

Alex Atcherley engaged to Justin Brennan

Cecilia French engaged to John Westmacott

Sophie Clarkson engaged to Nigel Oakes

Jane Clark Hutchison engaged to James Totman

Joanna Boreham engaged to Edward Hatley

WEDDINGS

Emily Ohlson married Robert Nelson on 28th September 2002

Annabel Bromhead married Richard Keigwin on 19th July 2003

Victoria Beharrell married Nick Waring in July 2003

Caroline Cargill married Richard de Basto on 27th February 2004

Joanna Kennedy-Scott married John Barnes on 1st May 2004

Alex Walker married Simon Young on 8th May 2004

Gilly Morgan married Ben Morrell on 29th May 2004

Arabella Hardy married Rufus Bird on 19th June 2004

Olivia Forrest married Charlie Bradshaw on 3rd July 2004

Helen Thompson married Mike Whelan on 17th July 2004

Georgie Mackay-Dick married Henry Fox on 7th August 2004

Rose Buxton married Nicholas Smail on 21st August 2004

Lucy Barrett married Desmond Kavanagh on 25th September 2004

Auriol Walker married David Horne on 2nd October 2004

BIRTHS

Camilla Apponyi (Anderson) a son, Sándor, on 24th December 2003

Lizzie Philip-Sorensen (Moyle) a son, Frederik William Baltzer, a brother for Nils, on 6th January 2004

Fenella Fitch (Beauchamp) a son, Stanley Arthur, a brother for Lily and Jack, on 7th February 2004

Charlie Spencer (Paddison) a son, on 22nd February 2004

Philippa Eustace (Warre) a daughter, Eva, a sister for Bill and Linus, on 12th March 2004

Rebecca Jones (Ellis-Jones) a son, Frederick Somerset, on 19th March 2004

Fleur Strong (Cavenagh-Mainwaring) a son, Guy James Peter, on 24th March 2004

Sophie Barber (Fraser) a son, William Angus Priestman, a brother for Emily, on 25th March 2004

Stephanie Sorgo (Hudson) a daughter, Katarina Ann Elisabeth, on 31st March 2004

Jane Smedley (Whitehorn) a son, Samuel William, a brother for Martha and Rosie, on 2nd April 2004

Rachel Stanley-Evans (Pooley) a daughter, Elsa, on 5th May 2004

Susie Loose (Harding) a son, Alexander James Carrington, on 10th June 2004

Lavinia Plumstead (Carr-Smith) a son, Harry, on 13th June 2004

Rebecca Griffiths (Highton) a daughter, Amelia Charlotte, on 17th June 2004

Atalanta Miller (Georgopoulos) a daughter, Alexia Christine Eleni, a sister for Constantine and Sophia, on 18th June 2004

Romilly Wyatt (Williams) a daughter, Isabella, on 27th July 2004

Jane Selden (Varley) twins, Oliver James and Isobel Rose, on 21st November 2004

Juliet Twining (Creedy) a son, William Peter Joseph, a brother for Louise, on 4th December 2004

RIP

Ann Otter-Barry (Evans) died on 3rd November 2000

Rachel Shaw (Ingleby) died in 2001

Anne McBurney (Charles) died on 15th February 2002

Jill Vanrenen (Swabey) died in October 2002

Perdita Marston (Williams) died on 10th September 2003 aged 90 yrs

Annabel Ricketts (Lea) died on 3rd November 2003 aged 58 yrs

Alison Wright (Readman) died on December 4th 2003 aged 81 yrs

Roger Clayton-Jones (*School Chaplain*) died on 2nd January 2004 aged 64 yrs

Juliet Turner died on 13th January 2004

Margaret Cary Field died on 22nd January 2004 aged 101 yrs

Rex Whitworth (*Chairman of Governors 1985-1995*) died on 22nd May 2004 aged 88 yrs

Katharine (Kate) Margaret Lang (Alcock) died on 26th May 2004 aged 91 yrs

Elizabeth St Barbe Anderson died on 20th July 2004

Sylvia Tapp (Malet) died on 2nd October 2004 aged 79 yrs

Marigold Cross died on 16th October 2004 aged 76 yrs

ALISON WRIGHT (READMAN)

May 2nd 1922 – December 4th 2003, aged 81yrs

Alison Wright was the co-author with R. B. McCallum of *The British General Election of 1945*, Britain's first book of psephology.

This study of electoral behaviour, published in 1947, was an immediate success. 'The work has been done with the utmost care', wrote the reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement*. 'So scrupulously impartial is the approach of the authors that the reader will hardly be able to infer their own political views and affiliations'. The work of McCallum and Readman began the renowned series of election studies at Nuffield College, Oxford, and inspired future generations of political researchers.

McCallum had the idea in early 1945 when he was walking to Nuffield, then on Banbury Road, to attend a meeting on research proposals. He was motivated by the view that Keynes's *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* had misinterpreted the election of 1918 and that voting behaviour after the Second World War would have to be analysed correctly to prevent any myths from being formed. His first full-time research assistant was Alison Readman.

'I had expected from Nuffield, by the law of probability, a Labour Party girl.' He later wrote. 'I did not expect this elegant young lady, daughter of a colonel of the Scots Greys . . . She was, as might have been expected from her origin, a Conservative. This, on the whole, suited me . . . We had very few differences in our work. She concealed with ladylike care her bottomless contempt for the Liberals. We only quarrelled when I devoted some pages quite seriously to Scottish Nationalism'.

McCallum relied very heavily on his amiable and efficient research assistant and co-author; two other assistants were

dismissed from the project. *The British General Election of 1945* is still in print more than 50 years later and was most recently reprinted in the 2001 in the United States.

Alison Violet Readman was born in Holland Park, London and was educated at St Mary's, Wantage, before going to St Hugh's College, Oxford, in 1939 to read philosophy, politics and economics. Her studies were formative and she took a first before spending two years working on Sudan as a research assistant to Margery Perham at Nuffield.

This led to her seminal work with R. B. McCallum, after which she moved to the War Office to work for her former tutor Frank Pakenham, later Lord Longford, in his private office as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. It was there that she met Claud William Wright, who was working in the private office of the Secretary of State for War and they married in 1947. As was the habit of the time, she stopped working.

That same year, two years before her first child was born, she was offered a fellowship at Somerville College, Oxford, but she turned it down, believing that she would be unable to combine it with her role of wife and mother. Later she worked on a book that was to combine a study of moral philosophy and contemporary ethics, but prolonged bouts of ill-health meant that it never came to fruition. Instead she devoted herself to her family and to work in the community, and from the late 1970s she chaired final selection boards for the Civil Service. An elegant writer with a style of admirable clarity, she also wrote occasionally articles for the Sunday broadsheets on family matters.

After her husband retired and moved to the country, she chaired her local Conservative Party association; she was a magnificent cook and a splendid hostess. Severe arthritis and cancer made her later years hard.

She is survived by her husband, four daughters and a son.

KATHARINE MARGARET LANG

April 19th 1913 – May 26th 2004, aged 91yrs

Kate Lang – known as Margaret or 'Bart' to the family and Kate after her marriage – was proud to come from a conventionally English upper middle class pedigree. On her GP father's side, the Alcocks had been big Staffordshire potters in the 19th century, of which she was hugely proud. Products of Samuel Alcock and Co are in all the great porcelain collections such as the V&A, the Bowes museum and, of course, the Stoke on Trent museum. But the pottery had ended in the late 19th century and the family seemingly switched overnight to become doctors, founding the Stoke on Trent Medical Institute.

Her family on her mother's side, the Beardmore's, were from Kent and London and were peppered by links with the Church of England. By a coincidence, however, a family member had

baptised John Wesley and, as a young girl, Kate went with her mother and older sister Stella to present the bowl in which that baptism happened to the Wesley museum.

She was born and raised in the family home at Lincoln where her father set up his plate. One of her feats was to climb from the bottom of Lincoln hill to the top, along walls and house roofs without going on the ground – something which terrified her mother but of which she was hugely proud even late in life. She could be fiercely courageous. But also she loved botany, learning from her countrywoman mother, the joy of flowers and always till the end relishing changing seasons, and managing to make small posies at all times of the year. One of her earliest memories was of tying up her father's puttees when he donned his First World War uniform. He served in Palestine, going into to Jerusalem before General Allenby to check the safety of the water supply. She also learned to spell 'posthumous' by the age of four, so many times was the word used and seen. ►

► Katharine Margaret Lang (*cont'd*)

She was sent to school at St Mary's Wantage, like her mother, Stella and their 'baby' sister Monica, and became Head Girl. She retained proud links till she died, loving the Old Girls newsletter (latterly by email) till two days before she died. Unusually for women, she went to University – St Andrew's, chosen it was joked so that Frank Alcock, her father, could visit Kate and Stella occasionally to play golf at the same time. There she read classics and then converted to PPP. But her real interest was music, becoming for the rest of her life a good amateur cellist, playing in chamber and orchestral works. She then went to the London School of Economics, to do a post-graduate diploma in social policy under Harold Laski and then went to work in a Mission in Bermondsey, the Time and Talents, which still exists.

She entered paid employment in the then new profession of Personnel, working at Owen and Owen in Liverpool, and ultimately in the Army & Navy Stores on Victoria Street, London. Her post-university life was dominated by friends and music – playing and going to concerts. This was cut short by two things: being diagnosed with a suspected TB gland (which took her off work for a year – at the end of which she cycled round Brittany) and the War. She enlisted and went into the ATS, becoming head of the celebrated Kinetheodilites (the 'Kine's') unit which tracked V1 and V2 bombs. She put this unit of 400 staff together, at the request of the War Office, working tirelessly, and as her adjutant Priscilla Lane (who herself has just died) said "she was formidable...welding a group together which worked right across Southern Britain...fiercely defending her 'girls' and ensuring they got the best treatment possible such as transport and warm and dry accommodation." 15 years later, her children as young men were setting up their first bank accounts in Lincoln (a branch she banked with from childhood to death!), only to find that the bank manager had worked with Kate in the war, and he told them she should have had a medal. The boys knew nothing of this role until then, later finding out that she had indeed been mentioned in dispatches for her war role.

In the war she met Antony Lang and they were married in uniform in Lincoln in June 1942. After the war, two children Simon and Tim were born, and they all went to India in two bouts, in Madras and Bombay. When they came home finally in 1956, they lived in Middle Green near Slough, Buckinghamshire, and Kate began a totally domestic time, learning to cook for the first time. Until that moment she had always had others to cook for her, but typically within a short

period of time, she was giving talks on the BBC's Woman's Hour giving advice on the joys of pressure cookers or the thriftiness of sprats!

She became a typical 1950s housewife, and proudly so. She did it with panache and style. For two years, Kate became a teacher of the children of travellers in the local school, but this ended when they moved to a new job for Antony in East Midlands. They moved to King's Cliffe in Northamptonshire where quickly she built a full life of music, friends, and family. She was a marvellous hostess, running a big house beautifully, and quickly her life became again centred on her music, the Church and gardening. She was a true Edwardian in that she always kept in touch by letter, keeping lists of who had been in touch, writing long letters. Antony and she made two visits to Australia to see their grandchildren, Matthew and Andrew, and others to the USA.

In amongst all this, she always did the Times crossword every day, retaining her love of words, grammar and syntax to the end – she picked people up on their language right to the end! Life at King's Cliffe was altered on Antony's death on New Year's Eve 1996, and for the next five years she lived alone, with support from her family, neighbours and the village. The house was always open, being central en route from the shop to the post office. Even when physically infirm, she went to the USA to see a grandson's graduation. But eventually, she came down to London two years ago to live at Norclyffe a residential home just at the top of Wandsworth Common. This period she took to with characteristic bravura, saying that this was a "new challenge and a new phase in my life". She liked institutional life, as she said; she had had decades of it throughout her life. She enjoyed the wonderful care and social life at Norclyffe enormously.

Besides Norclyffe, London life was the occasional concert trip to the Wigmore Hall and seeing Rostropovich at the Festival Hall for the first time, walks in Spencer Park and visits to and from family and friends, peppered by trips to local restaurants (of which there are many!), which she loved. She went for holidays to her younger sister Monica in Beaconsfield. She particularly loved the visits from her grandsons and step-great-grandchildren. Quickly making contact with St Mary Magdalene church, she first tried the Sunday services but found it too busy (!) and preferred the quieter Tuesday communion service to which Liz brought her. This period only ended with her going to St George's where she spent three and a half months, with great dignity and fortitude. She much appreciated the care, not taking it for granted.

ELIZABETH ST BARBE ANDERSON

Elizabeth joined St Mary's in the 50s and was only there for a year or so, however she was one of the most active SMOGs I have ever known, and was regularly in touch with both me (writing one of her many letters only a couple of weeks before her death) and the school. She will be greatly missed.

ANNABEL RICKETTS (LEA)

August 19th 1945 – November 3rd 2003, aged 58yrs

Annabel Ricketts, who has died aged 58, was an exceptionally creative and stimulating architectural historian, both as a writer and a teacher.

She discovered and opened up a particularly rich seam in her study of the evolution of private chapels in Protestant country houses during the 16th and 17th centuries. She broke new ground in linking the development of the chapel's location, exterior appearance and internal decoration, setting these attributes in the context of changing historical and liturgical circumstances, and of architectural and artistic fashions.

Her interpretation of the chapel at Chatsworth (completed in 1694) was particularly illuminating. She demonstrated that this chapel, far from being the supreme expression of aristocratic pride, represented a carefully considered exposition of Protestant doctrine. As such, it was intended as a direct riposte to the perceived Roman Catholic excesses of Charles II's and James II's new chapels at Windsor and Whitehall respectively.

At the beginning of her period, Annabel Ricketts showed how the pre-Reformation chapel gave way in Elizabeth's reign to a more austere Protestant model. Indeed, at Longleat, completed in 1580, the space provided for a chapel was not fitted up properly until the 17th century, while at Montacute, finished in 1601, there seems to have been no chapel at all. At Hardwick, prayers were said on the first-floor landing; at Hunstanton, the family used the stairwell while the household gathered below the balusters.

Annabel Ricketts went on to describe the revival of the private chapel, and of pre-Reformation architectural features, as a result of the High Church movement of the early 17th century. By contrast, for 20 years after the Restoration, dignity and restraint were the watchwords in Protestant chapel building, following the model set by Christopher Wren at Pembroke College, Cambridge. Not until after 1680 did decoration in Anglican chapels begin to acquire a confident identity of its own, independent of pre-Reformation influence.

Annabel Ricketts was able to illustrate these developments with a mass of fascinating and sharply observed detail. Yet her remarkable scholarly achievement was fashioned upon a youth that had given scant indication of academic bias.

She was born Annabel Ophelia Clare Lea at Stourport-on-Severn on August 19 1945, the daughter of Robert Lea, the second son of Sir Sidney Lea, 2nd Bt, and of Valerie Domville, the elder daughter of Sir James Domville, 5th Bt.

Annabel suffered an early loss when her mother died in 1948. Although always a voracious reader, she never did justice to her intelligence at Downham School, nor later at St Mary's, Wantage. A spell at St Clare's, Oxford, was dedicated, as she admitted, to "roistering", so that she failed her English degree. She did, however, become a tennis player of near county standard, deploying a fiendish undercut forehand. She was also a keen sailor.

Only in 1967, when Annabel Lea became secretary to St John Gore, at that time Adviser on pictures to the National Trust, did she begin to discover her metier. In 1971 she left the National Trust and moved to Italy, working at first as a tutor, and later becoming assistant production manager at the Scala Instituto Fotografico, near Florence. There, she continued to develop her passion for architecture. There too she met Simon Ricketts, with whom she returned to England in 1973.

They married later that year, had a son and a daughter, and created a particularly happy life together. Not until 1985 did Annabel Ricketts complete her degree in the History of Art at Birkbeck College. From that time onwards her life was crammed with academic endeavour, though her many non-academic friends were never allowed to know quite how hard she was working.

Her confidence, clarity and enthusiasm made her a superb lecturer and teacher. In 1993 she spent some months as visiting lecturer in Architectural History at Rockford College, Illinois, returning to become Head of the Department of Fine and Performing Arts at the British American College at Regent's College, London.

Besides undertaking a heavy lecture programme herself, Annabel Ricketts created several successful courses, and assembled a talented team of teachers. She earned the warm regard of her American students, who were usually new to Europe, not least for the trouble she took to show them buildings away from London.

As her reputation spread, she became in increasing demand as a lecturer at symposia and conferences, as well as at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Courtauld Institute, University College London, or back at Birkbeck. Yet Annabel Ricketts still managed to find time for her thesis on private chapels. In addition, she wrote *Michelangelo* (1991) with Lucinda Hawkins Collinge, concentrating herself on the artist's architectural achievements.

As well as writing for academic publications, she was an occasional reviewer for the Arts pages of *The Spectator*.

Annabel Ricketts possessed a complete integrity which made her greatly valued and loved. Incapable of artifice, or of striking a false note, she was always ready to enliven proceedings with some piercingly honest and witty sally.

Earlier this year, with her thesis almost completed, and the prospect of more time for writing and lecturing before her, she had appeared to be moving into her academic prime. Then, in August, she was diagnosed with a cancer which destroyed her with remorseless speed and virulence. She supported the ordeal with extraordinary courage, never condescending to self-pity, and showing concern for others rather than for herself.

Even when capable of working for no more than 10 minutes at a stretch, she continued to put the finishing touches to her thesis. Just before the end she was able to read the opinion of Maurice Howard, Professor of Art History at the University of Sussex, that her work would be "a cornerstone not just of future studies of the country house chapel but of all studies of building in the early modern period generally".

SMOGS YELLOW PAGES

Animals

Serena Perkins (Pease, 1982)*Pet Nanny*

Pet care in the South West London area
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or www.petnanny.co.uk

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Rachel Stanley-Evans (Pooley, 1992)*Rachel Pooley Creations*

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WORK EXPERIENCE AND CAREERS ADVICE FOR CURRENT AND OLD GIRLS



The SMOGs database has a wide range of Old Girls who are happy to offer advice and work experience to current pupils, recent leavers, job changers etc.

If you need help, please get in touch with Victoria Humphries (details on page 1) and she can put you in touch with the relevant person.

Industries covered include . . .

Accountancy
Art
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Fundraising & Event Management
Insurance
Law
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Makeup
Pharmacy
Photography
Physiotherapy
Politics
PR
Property
Psychology
Publishing
Sports science
Steel
TV Production

NEWS FROM THE COMMUNITY

Sister Brigitta is resident in our Infirmary – St Raphael's Wing – where she continues to live an active life and to receive visitors. She much enjoys visits from SMOGs.

Sister Anne Julian has a fruitful ministry of "Spiritual Direction and Retreat-giving". Sister Honor Margaret continues to exercise her priestly ministry, chiefly at the Convent, though she had a week's chaplaincy at Tewkesbury Musical Festival, and she still plays the organ and enjoys life! Sister Deirdre Michael, at the Convent, has just completed ten years as Oblates Sister, and this has included a much blest visit to South Africa to co-ordinate plans for our very committed Oblates there – this has been necessary since the Community's withdrawal from South Africa after a hundred years there. Sister Enid Mary, also at the Convent, retired from her role as Secretary of "Wantage Overseas", and is now working on the archives of the Community's time in India. Sister Valeria, from her Convent base, is the Associates' Sister (so far there are only two more recent Old Girls who are Associates), and helps on the Guest Wing. (SMOGs don't forget you are most welcome to stay on our Guest wing.) Sister Louise, well into her eighties, is a magical gardener.

Sister Phoebe Margaret is at our house in Smethwick, West Midlands, where she enjoys living in a multi-racial area, and, as a priest, helping in local churches. Sister Hilary still ministers at St Paul's Cathedral, where she is a member of the Pastoral Team. In our home for the elderly, St Katharine's House, Wantage, are Sister Jean Frances, Sister Margaret Elizabeth and Sister Eileen – there is a lot going on down there! In addition to the work mentioned above, most of us ex-teachers are quite involved in the rewarding ministry of "Spiritual Direction" and Retreats.

Sister Valeria

TATLER

PRESS RELEASE FROM TATLER MAGAZINE...

In Tatler's first annual Schools Awards, announced on 3rd November in London, St Mary's School, Wantage, Oxfordshire won the Best School Food award.

The award of a giant silver spoon was collected by Diane Cheshire, one of the school chefs. As Simon Davis, the presenter of the awards said: "I'm relieved to say that we didn't have to sit through 150 portions of toad in the hole and treacle pudding to judge this award. We left the pupils to be the judges.

This is a typical day's menu for pupils at our winning school.

Breakfast: Porridge, cereal, fruit compote, toast, plus full English breakfast

Morning Break: Hot chocolate, buns, cake, biscuits

Lunch: Vichyssoise, Smoked haddock fish cakes with a chive sauce, salad bar

Afternoon Break: Toast, crumpets, fruit

Supper: Minced beef enchilada, roasted chicken leg with a mushroom and tarragon sauce or Spanish omelette

Sounded pretty damn good to us. If that's the standard, next year we might just do a tasting."



REVELATION20 MADE BY THE GIRLS FOR THE GIRLS

This 50 page publication is in aid of Macmillan Cancer Relief Nurses and is totally non-profit. All proceeds of the magazine will go to this UK charity which works to improve the quality of life for people living with cancer. Crammed with fashion, along with this year's essential looks, beauty, interiors and art, Revelation20 comprises of glamorous shoots in locations across the country. The latest clothing collections and accessories by Ralph Lauren, Jenny Packem, Jimmy Choo, Mui Mui, Cabbages and Roses, and Gap, plus creations by St. Mary's textile students, are featured. This external textile project has been created, edited and styled by a team of six students in the upper sixth who wish to give something back to a charity which gives so much.



Please do support us by
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one-off publication.



MESSAGE FROM THE HEADMISTRESS

As the end of term draws ever nearer, I look back on all that has happened since the last issue of the Chronicle and I find it hard to believe that we have packed so much into the last six months. I suspect that St Mary's operates in a different time zone that actually gives us forty-eight hours in a day rather than just the twenty-four that the rest of the world enjoys!

After celebrating the success of the GCSE and A level results in August, we began the Autumn term with a new sense of purpose that has not waned. We have been privileged to welcome Father Christopher Huxtable and his family to St Mary's as he takes up the post of Chaplain. We began the term with the whole school community coming together to celebrate Fr Chris' induction by the Bishop of Reading who has become a firm friend of St Mary's having visited us again in November for an inspiring Confirmation Service.

There have been a number of other staff changes during the summer. At the end of August, Miss Evans decided to take early retirement after twenty-four years working in the boarding team. However, we have not allowed her to slip away quietly and have invited her back next term so that the school can say a proper farewell. Chris Bullmore, the Development Director, has also moved on from St Mary's. He has contributed enormously to the School over the last four years and will be much missed, but rest assured that your contact with the School will continue to be smooth!

We have seen a number of changes on the academic front; a two week timetable, new courses in Drama and ICT. Girls in various year groups have been on visits to the V&A, the National and Saatchi galleries, the Clothes Show, a Philosophy Conference in Oxford, Cheddar Gorge, Coventry Cathedral, and a Poetry day at Victoria Palace. The Drama department are busy rehearsing for next term's school play *Trojan Women*. Year 12 have just completed work experience at an ever diverse range of placements; at one extreme two girls went to France, accompanied by a member of staff, to work in a primary school, whilst at the other one girl spent the week at the Times, even getting her name in print on two articles.



Sue Sowden, Headmistress

Weekends have been as busy as ever. Our sportswomen have had some significant successes on the field. We wonder what the County teams would do without the large contingent of St Mary's players – this year we have seven first team players and eight in the U15 team – we may be a small school but what we lack in quantity we certainly make up for in quality! Other activities have included visits to the Newbury Show, Fireworks at Newbury Racecourse, Year 10 Social with Winchester, St Hilda's Social when we were superbly entertained by the girls themselves, Paintballing, a Circus Day, Craft workshops, Line dancing and swimming at the Coral Reef. We have had DoF practice expeditions for both Bronze and Silver level (by walking, cycling and canoeing!) and the World Challenge team have been busy raising funds.

On the culinary front, school food has improved considerably since some of you were at St Mary's. However, we have now had external verification of the fact with the school winning the Tatler Best School Food Award 2004!

As for 2005, watch out for news of *SMART*, the St Mary's Art exhibition in the final week of the summer term to be held at a London gallery for which huge thanks go to Mrs Wentworth-Stanley for the organisation. We will also have to say some goodbyes in 2005, amongst which will be Mrs Woodhouse who has been appointed Headmistress of Abbots Bromley School for Girls as from September.

Of course, I could not finish without mentioning the exciting news that St Mary's will be moving to a new purpose built school within the next three years. I am sure that many of you also feel a sense of sadness and have fond memories of the school in its current location. However, the heart of the school is the people in it, both past and present, and the school will be wherever the heart is.

I am pleased to report that the heart of the school is in excellent health and brimming over with vibrancy!

Sue Sowden

WW2 MEMORIES AT ST MARY'S WANTAGE

I arrived in the middle of term in 1940 or 1941 as the day school I was at in Basingstoke was bombed. As there was no petrol, we used to come back to school on the train from Reading to Wantage Road Station. When my parents visited me they had to come by bus to Newbury and then another to Wantage, and back. What a trek and sometimes in Parents' Day clothes. The gym was taken over, I think, as a canteen and the swimming pool as a biscuit store. We were allowed out on bicycles in threes and used to go to Harwell to buy cherries. Life at school was quiet and away from it all – which was what my parents wanted. Most of the good teachers were called up – the best of the rest was Miss Beck who was a brilliant history teacher. From time to time, we heard news of war casualties, brothers or fathers of fellow pupils. We all longed to leave school and join the WRNS. As there was little or no social life even at home we were all very unsophisticated and by today's standards, young for our age. It was a happy time and I made good friends who have remained friends to this day. I am now 76.

Elizabeth Young (Potter)

1942

At the age of only seven I was accepted as a boarder at St. Gabriel's House, the junior house of St. Mary's School, Wantage. Teresa Ransom (Smith) and I thus spent two years in the first form. Because of rationing it took contributions of clothing coupons from my entire family to have enough for my uniform. My cloak reached almost to the floor and I believe I used it until I left St. Mary's nine years later.

Arriving as a new girl the day after the school year began, my mother and I took the little tram (shortly to be condemned as scrap iron for the war effort) which connected Wantage Road station with the town centre. The regular school train from Paddington was usually met by double-decker buses. No Horseless Carriages for us such as the students have at Hogwart's School!

1943

Bedtime routine included setting out white sweater, wellies and gasmask on a chair at the end of your bed. I only



remember one middle-of-the-night air raid drill. We were awakened by a clanging bell, quickly donned items from the chair, all filed downstairs, and out into formation in the garden at St. Gabriel's. We were quite disappointed that Sister Norah-Mary was in her full habit – we still did not discover what sisters' night attire might be!

The swimming bath was emptied of water for the duration of the war and was then filled with boxes of dog-biscuit-like hard tack, which we were told was to feed the entire town in case of emergency. There were many icy-cold days in winter when it was decided that we should run 'swimming-bath and back' before breakfast – occasionally the nice custodian used to give us bits of these things – actually quite tasty!

Double-Summer Time was instituted which meant that we younger girls were still given bedtime around 8 p.m. as usual, although it was daylight until around 11 p.m. We used to watch the lucky St. Mary's girls outside playing tennis till all hours. Of course, blackout rules were enforced after dark – one memory of this was the major reaction of matron when rude words were discovered scratched into the black paint of a curtain-less window – some naughty girl had climbed via the loo-tank on to the windowsill and done the deed. We never heard who had done it!

It was notable that I was never aware of any food shortage, thanks I imagine to dedicated kitchen staff, although the menus of necessity were pretty basic! We always had warm buildings and even three 'two-inches of water bath-nights' each week and one 'hair-washing' per fortnight.

1944

My most memorable experience took place during a weekend when my parents visited. After Sunday lunch at the Bear Hotel, we set off for a walk to the Aerodrome, which was out beyond the convent as I recollect. We were watching planes take off towing gliders, and one headed directly for our vantage point where I was standing on a stile for a better view. In retrospect, I realize that it must have been loaded with soldiers on their way to the Normandy Invasion. It rumbled aloft barely above that stile, and our heads. Amid panicked shouts, I jumped down and lay flat on the ground – phew!

1945

A final memory is of picnicking on strawberries at teatime of Parents' Day – while listening to the totally unfamiliar but wonderful sound of church bells ringing across the town. The war in Europe had ended.

Diana Moriarty (Blackburn, 1953)

I left SMS in December 1939 and the Cheshire Regiment was stationed in Wantage. The School felt that we should, in some way, entertain the men . . . and so, as Prefects, we went down to the Victoria Cross Gallery in Wantage to help run a canteen on a roster until such time as we had converted the gym into a canteen. On Wednesday nights the Staff, Maids and Prefects would dance in the hall with the men. I did a drawing for the School magazine of the various boots and shoes of types that were seen on the floor on Wednesday nights. On Saturday nights, we had E.N.S.A. shows in the hall and on the back of each seat we supplied the men with packets of five Woodbines, which cost 2d. a pack.

I used to sing in the choir until I got little notes from Sister Irene saying "Don't sing too loud because you're singing flat" so I resigned from the choir and became the Verger and near the beginning of term I was walking round the school with Sister Rachael and some of the men. Sister said, "Jane, I'm sure these boys would like to have a look at the Chapel" to which I replied, "I don't think we can do that Sister, because there are no blackouts in the Chapel." She then replied with "I'm sure it won't matter for a few minutes." At the Chapel, Sister Rachael said, "I'm sure some of the boys would like to come to Mass on Sunday, wouldn't you?" to which there was a deathly hush. But, on Sunday, a lot of them did appear and I had to find some way of fitting them in!

Those are my main reminiscences of that time. I was taking my School Certificate and had I had three more marks in either History or Divinity, I would have passed, so I put my failure down to the Cheshire Regiment!

I keep in touch with Sister Denzil Onslow, Elisabeth Brown (Driver) and Elizabeth Gorst (Cross).

Not really connected with the war, but another memory of my last term, was that the Art Mistress had to leave due to sickness and I was put in charge of the weaving Room, which was at St. Katherine's. One day Sister Catherine came round with Bishop Sheddon, who used to take Mass on Monday mornings to relieve Father Gardner, and Sister said that the Bishop was very anxious to have one of our tweeds, which he told me was to replace his brother's old shooting Ulster. I showed him a swatch of tweeds and he chose a nice check one. I asked him how many yards he'd want and he replied that he would have to ask his tailor and come back to me. The answer was 16 yards and so I started. Occasionally the Bishop would come and take an interest on the Monday and he'd want to try his hand at weaving which was disastrous!! His checks, instead of being half an inch square, were beaten down to half the size. I had to unpick all his work when he had gone. I spent many hours trying to get it finished before the end of term and did so. I took it to Sister Catherine rolled up on a stick and she said I should take it down to the Vicarage to present it myself. The Bishop wasn't immediately available so his two Curates and Housekeeper undid it and it hung in festoons in the hall. And that was the last I heard of it.

My only claim to fame was that I played tennis for the School at Queen's Club my last three years which meant that each year I had a different partner – they were Mary Manson-Bahr, Diana Crewe-Read (Robins) and Diana Hett (Boden).

Jane Kenyon (Bennett-Evans, 1939)

Britain had been at war with Germany for a year when, at the age of eleven, I arrived for my first term at St. Mary's in the autumn of 1940.

The country had survived the trauma and miracle of Dunkirk that June; the Battle of Britain raged during September, to be followed by the Blitz, in which most of our big cities were bombed nightly. Thousands of people lost their lives, and thousands of buildings were flattened, at this most crucial time, when England was unprepared, at its most vulnerable, and expecting a German invasion. The

extraordinary thing was, though, that with the war raging round us in a most dramatic and often horrifying way, Wantage seemed entirely untouched by it; we never heard an air raid siren, let alone a bomb for the entire length of the war. We lived in the green cocoon of the Downs with neither sight nor sound of the war until one June day, in 1944, when suddenly wave after wave of English and American planes, their undersides painted with black and white stripes, flew over us, on their way, as we later discovered, to the D Day invasion of France.

When I think about it now, I realise that for the staff and the nuns these were incredibly anxious times, and I am sure that they must have decided that their job was to make our lives as unworried and free from fear as was possible at that time. I think they mostly succeeded; the downside being that although we were probably neither particularly shallow nor heartless, we were undoubtedly fairly ignorant in the matter of war. But then I must say that the teaching at the school at that time was altogether pretty uninspiring; it was as though being passionate or even excited about something was a little vulgar and dangerous, which I suppose precluded any proper discussion about the war, for I don't remember there ever being any; what I learned about the war and the reasons for it I learned at home. But many of the girls had fathers and brothers who were fighting, and some whose fathers or





brothers were killed, wounded or imprisoned; for them the war was very real indeed, and when someone went home because of a family tragedy, the rest of the school mourned with them.

But I think, and I am being subjective of course, that St. Mary's at war was more or less the same as it would have been had there been no war. There was rationing, naturally, but we never went hungry, and our culinary expectations were fairly low; Elizabeth David was not yet part of English culture, and most English food was notoriously dull anyway. St. Mary's contribution to the war effort was to empty the swimming pool and fill it with biscuits. I had visions of graciously handing out packets of Rich Tea to the starving populace of Wantage, and was slightly disappointed that the need never arose. I think we all had pieces of knitting which we were doing to keep our men at the front warm; balaclava helmets, socks and mittens, mostly. All were cast off so tightly that any poor chap who had survived so far would almost certainly have died of gangrene had he been the unfortunate recipient of one of our garments.

We lived in a way that would be unthinkable now; two baths a week; our hair washed every three weeks and our clothes changed not nearly often enough. Our stockings (Fawn Sylkester) were so thick that they came back from the laundry ironed.

I have made it sound drab, which is unfair, because I remember most of it with great affection, and any drabness that there may have been in the day to day teaching was more than made up for by the services in Chapel which were wonderfully full of life and light and incense and plainsong and vestments and the scent of Arum Lilies. I adored it. It appealed to my sense of drama, fulfilled a huge spiritual need, and gave me a sense of the numinous, which has never left me.

The nuns were at the heart of the school, of course; they had a great sense of occasion and they liked to celebrate, whether it was Corpus Christi, Ascension Day, one's Confirmation and First Communion, Easter (for which we remained at school, unless it came very late), or, one year, the fact that a horse belonging to the father of one of the girls

had won the Gold Cup (a whole holiday). Now I come to think of it, though, I don't remember celebrating the end of the war. I expect we had High Mass and a picnic up at the Monument . . .

Evangeline Evans (Banks, 1946)

The first thing we noticed on returning to school in September 1939 was the closing of the swimming pool; apparently, it was being used as a food store. Then gradually the maids left and we had to lay tables and clear away – also we had to fill our own cans of hot water for our rooms (only the room in the then new block, Willow, had running water). Maids in brown uniforms with beige caps and aprons used to put a can of hot water outside the door when the 'Rising Bell' was rung. In the evening, the can was put on the washstand. At breakfast and tea, the butter was marked into seven portions (there were seven at each table) and then there was a bigger plate with the communal margarine. Due to sugar rationing the jam or marmalade didn't go far but we were allowed to have our own jam or marmite or most enviable, a carton of Fry's chocolate spread. On the whole the food was good (children weren't so fussy then) and there was always enough, the only meal some of us disliked was scrambled egg made with dried egg powder (eggs were very much rationed).

There was one air-raid scare early on in the war. We all had to go down to the ground floor (I think in Willow) in the middle of the night taking our gas masks and an eiderdown or blanket and sat in rows with our backs against opposite walls. I don't remember what we did and I don't think we were in the least afraid, the whole episode was rather fun.

There was no going home during term time and there was no such thing as Half Term. Parents could come on a Saturday or Sunday, mostly mothers as I suppose the majority of fathers were in the services. Some managed to come by car but I think most people came by train. There was no possibility of going anywhere very far, but in those days, we didn't expect it. It was a great treat to have Sunday lunch at The Bear Hotel, the Blue Boar was second choice.

All the form rooms had 'blackout boards' for the window and even the glass 'port



hole' windows in the doors were boarded up, there was no more peeping through to see what was going on from the passages. Sweets were given out on Saturdays after lunch. We had to queue up by the dispensary and a matron would let us help ourselves from our termly store (brought back at the beginning of term – about 5\– worth from the local village shop) and these we put into a small paper bag. Some people had rather super sweets such as a Mars Bar or Kit Kat.

The uniform changed for the 1939 intake from navy blue tunics, white shirts and tie to a heathery coloured tunic and blue round collared blouses. However due to clothes rationing, those with the old uniforms were not obliged to have the new ones. This gave a rather motley appearance to the girls en masse, but it was considered rather superior to have the old uniform.

The only outing was on the Feast of Corpus Christie, 2nd July, when we went by bus (it wasn't called a coach then!), to the Downs for a picnic – a real treat – we were very unsophisticated in those days.

A bit later the gym was closed. I have a feeling for an ammunition store and we used the hall (quite new then) and the various climbing racks were moved there. Sometimes the seniors had to dance with the soldiers who were billeted in Wantage.

They had to take off their army boots and dance in their stockinged feet. The dancing was the waltz, quickstep or foxtrot. We had no idea how to make conversation and nor did they!

In 1940 and 41 quite a few people didn't return to SMS – most those from Wales and Cornwall. Some girls had brothers in the Navy. I remember someone in my form's brother was lost at sea and another who didn't know for weeks that her brother had survived when HMS Hood was torpedoed, he was one of the only three who were rescued. With the excitement of this news, a half day holiday was declared, but the prefects suggested to the Sister Superior that we didn't think it right when all the rest of the crew had died. I think we didn't have it but am not quite sure.

Some of the staff left to join the WRNS. Miss Sims who taught Geography soon came to visit the school looking extremely smart in the officer's uniform. Miss Bates, the Head Matron, known as Bellows because she bellowed out strict orders, came back as an ordinary wren but entertained us strumming out popular was songs on the piano in the hall.

Anonymous



Surgeon Vice Admiral Sir Godfrey Milton-Thompson KBE FRCP

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6th form

teaching
refectory

chapel

teaching

deputy
head

head

Dear SMOGs

You will all be aware of the exciting news of a move for St Mary's School, and I have promised to keep you fully informed about developments. I am delighted to tell you that we have now signed options for the purchase of about 40 acres of open land at Challow Park within walking distance of the town centre of Wantage.

This gives us the space to build a brand new school that will provide splendid buildings in line with modern trends in education and also maintain the heritage of St Mary's for generations to come. You will appreciate that this wonderful idea is dependent on our obtaining the necessary planning permission, but initial conversations with the authorities have been encouraging. We shall apply for outline permission before Christmas and would envisage a successful outcome in February/March of 2005. Beyond that, we hope to be in a position to move the school to its new site during the summer holidays of 2007.

At the same time we are concluding negotiations with two property companies for the sale of our present site, and we shall do our best to ensure that subsequent development is in harmony with the immediate environment. In particular, we expect that the chapel will be retained either for worship or as a community centre. We are, of course, very sorry to abandon our splendid music school, but that has now served a whole generation of girls and the music in the school has flourished as a result.

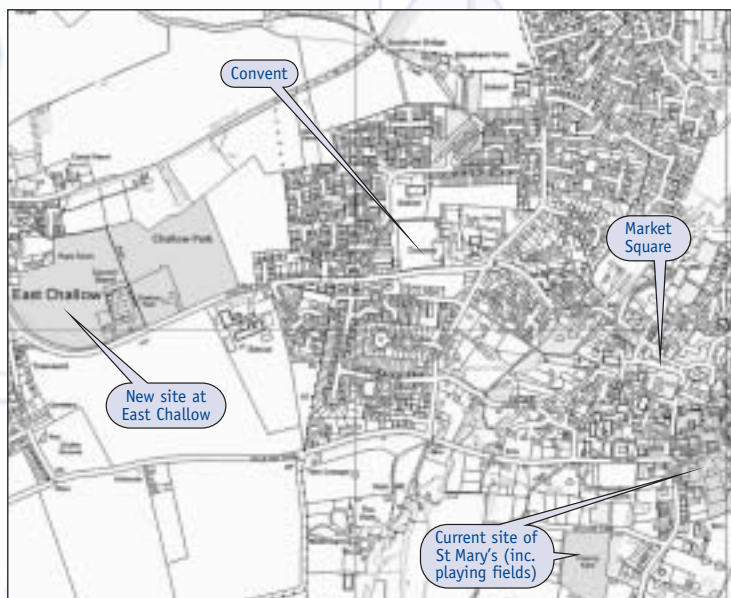
St Mary's has a very long association with Wantage and we intend to consult the local community at every stage. The groups who make use of our existing facilities will be invited to use our new buildings and we shall seek their advice as our plans develop. We are also determined to ensure that the move does not cause any disruption to the girls' education; the Headmistress and her staff will continue to regard that as their first priority.

Do please feel free to contact me or Victoria Humphries if you have any questions or comments about these exciting developments.

Yours sincerely,
Sir Godfrey Milton-Thompson



East Challow Park – existing house



access

swimming

change

sports



SMART

St Mary's Art (SMART!) – SMART IN LONDON will be an exhibition of visual art (including landscape gardens, textiles, ceramics and architecture) at the Arndean Gallery, Cork Street, London from 5th – 8th July, 2005.



People linked with St. Mary's will be invited to submit works of art to a panel for exhibition. The panel will decide which works will be on show. The panel will also judge a school competition. This will be divided into three categories: pre GCSE, GCSE and A level art. The winners of each category will be exhibited at the show. The panel will be made up of artists and art critics.

Dates and Timings

Daytime viewing

- **5th-8th July 2005**
Please feel free to visit the gallery at any time during the day (10am-5pm)

Evening viewing

- **5th July 2005**
Launch Night (by invitation only)
- **6th July 2005**
School Night (by invitation only)
- **7th July 2005**
SMOGs Night (all SMOGs plus guest are welcome, but especially those who left in the 50s and 60s – for further information on that reunion please contact Sue Riches, sueriches@smallplace.co.uk or 07947 063419)
- **8th July 2005**
SMOGs Night (all SMOGs plus guest are welcome)

RSVP

- If you would like to attend on the 7th or 8th, please contact Victoria Humphries, victoriahumphries@berrymead.co.uk or 07836 733163, for further information, tickets and timings as RSVPs will be needed to give us an idea of numbers for catering.

Submissions of Work

- To submit a piece or pieces of work please contact Lucy Taylor by April 30th 2005 (lucy@spaceships.co.uk or 69 Milson Road, London, W14)
- Any work sold at SMART will be subject to a 30% commission
- There is no charge to exhibit, however all potential exhibitors must guarantee to find a sponsor for the event by the end of April (in any of the categories listed below under sponsorship)

- Judging for the exhibition will be in central London in early June – judges will want to see original work, not photographs
- To exhibit you must be a current pupil (see Miss Hughes), a SMOG or linked to SMOGs/St Mary's
- Please note that the size of exhibits may be restricted due to limited space in the gallery

Sponsorship Opportunities

- An A5 (approx) 'glossy' brochure will be produced for SMART and sponsors are invited to take out full (£250) or half (£150) page advertisements in full colour
- There is also the chance to 'sponsor' a case of wine for £50 with your company named in the brochure as a sponsor
- Major sponsors – we are looking for a company who would be interested in sponsoring the launch party (Tues 5th) or any other night

Wine Merchant urgently needed

- If any SMOG or parent has a link to a wine merchant who would be prepared to give us a deal and coordinate all the wine in exchange for excellent publicity do please get in touch
- This could be a fantastic opportunity to become a major sponsor

Fundraising

Whilst SMART is not specifically a fundraising event we are hoping to raise significant funds for school. It is intended that any money raised will be put into a SMART fund and something will be bought for the new chapel. To almost all SMOGs (St Mary's Old Girls) the chapel is the one building that evokes memories of all that St Mary's stands for; with the school moving to a new site in 2007 we wanted to take this opportunity to buy something that will link 'old with new'. However, nothing has been decided and all suggestions are welcome!

This exhibition really will be the most amazing event – Art has always been of an exceptionally high standard at St Mary's and what better way to show off our talent, than by having an exhibition which would give the Royal Academy or Tate Modern a run for their money!!! Please do spread the word to SMOGs and those linked, about the chance of exhibiting and (almost!) more importantly, please help us to find sponsors as the more money we can raise for school the better the gift we can buy for the new chapel. If you want any further information, please do contact me on victoriahumphries@berrymead.co.uk or 07836 733163, and I look forward to seeing you all there.

THE WRITING LIFE

DAPHNE WRIGHT – ALIAS NATASHA COOPER

Who, reading my English report from Great Oaks in the early 1960s, would have thought that I would ever become a novelist? Sister Margaret Clare wrote then: 'Daphne needs to read more widely – her written work shows lack of vocabulary and general knowledge. Her Grammar has improved.'



Looking back to the scared and puzzled child I was, I wonder what I would have thought then if someone had told me that decades later I would have had more than twenty novels published, chaired the Crime Writers' Association, and travelled all over America and Great Britain to speak about my work. Journalism, broadcasting and judging literary prizes

have also come my way, as have a whole lot of other extraordinary experiences.

It's not that I'd never thought of writing novels, even at that stage. As with many of my colleagues, my ambition to write was formed almost before I can remember anything else. The difficulty was that I was dyslexic. In the late 1950s and early 60s,

the condition wasn't understood, and children who had it were generally classified as 'slow readers', or simply dim. Wherever I go now to speak in public, I meet other adults who had the same problem and grew up, as I did, without any confidence in their obvious intelligence.

From the novelist's point of view, dyslexia has a paradoxical benefit. Although it may make it hard in the beginning to put your ideas on paper, it forces you to become a watcher. You have to keep your eye on other people all the time in order to decode their behaviour and make sense of the world that often seems hard to understand. There could be no better training for any writer, but it's particularly helpful for a crime novelist, who has to dig deep into human motivation and inexpressible emotion.

Perhaps to balance the dyslexia, I had a lot of luck, first in having a novelist for a grandmother. She, Catherine Wright, had had five or six books published in the 1930s (giving up only when her literary agent embezzled his authors' royalties) and she was full of fascinating information about the business of being a writer. She also encouraged me to believe in myself. It is one of my greatest regrets that she died while I was still at Great Oaks. I wish she could have known that I would one day make it. I also had a wonderful English teacher at St Mary's in Miss Seddon, who provided yet more encouragement and a good deal of bracing. She demanded – and usually got – the best work of which we were capable.

My other piece of enormous luck lay in having such supportive parents. They knew I wanted to write and when I left full-time education they funded me for nine months while I tried to produce a novel. That attempt foundered on my own ignorance. I realised quite quickly that I simply didn't know enough, but it wasn't my lack of experience of life that put me off; it was my belief that there was some officially sanctioned way to write, which I had not learned. Years later, after a decade of working in publishing and then producing my own fiction, I now know that any method is legitimate. In the beginning I had to trick my mind into work by scribbling notes for what I might later write. Soon I would find myself almost imperceptibly shifting from notes

to the real thing. I couldn't believe any genuine writer would work like that.

Getting a job in publishing was both a help and a huge deterrent. My first editorial task was reading the slush pile – that heap of unsolicited manuscripts which grows daily in any publishing house or literary agency. At first it was fun, but it became a grind as I ploughed through the illiterate and idiotic effusions of people who had clearly never read a novel before they set out to write their own. More painful to deal with were the intelligent, carefully structured, well-written scripts that were unpublishable simply because they had no life. After reading too many of both kinds I had to put my own work aside. Every passage I composed would conjure up a picture of a young editorial assistant like me writing a sarcastic report on it.

As I climbed the career ladder, eventually becoming editorial director, I came to see that published novelists are not the demi-gods I once thought them, or even particularly special. They are simply people with a certain skill and a lively imagination – and an absolute determination to write, whatever the setbacks they encounter. Acknowledging that made me decide to try again. This time it worked.

My first novel, *The Distant Kingdom*, was set during the Afghan War of 1839–42. It was published under my own name here and in the States, and in several translations. Although it was a relatively conventional historical romance, it ought to have alerted me to the fact that my chief interests might be better served by crime fiction. Perdita, my exceptionally gentle heroine, becomes involved in the retreat from Kabul, during which she takes a knife and stabs the Afghan who has just mutilated her husband. Re-reading the passage in which she has to scrub the blood from her nails, I can now see exactly where I was heading. But it took a while to recognise it at the time, and I wrote five more historicals.

The first of my crime novels, which are all written under the pseudonym Natasha Cooper, were fairly frivolous and involved Willow King, a civil servant with a secret double life as a pseudonymous romantic novelist. I was only half-way to the place I should have been all along. With each new book, as I did more and more research

into real crimes and explored my own and other people's feelings about alienation, violence and the dangerous workings of unexplored emotion, I came to see that I had to move on again.

The main character of my current series is Trish Maguire, a barrister in her late thirties, whose mixture of brains, warmth and anger at any kind of bullying or injustice pushes her to fight all sorts of crimes. So far, there are six novels in the series, and the latest, *Keep Me Alive*, was published in hardback last summer by Simon & Schuster. The paperback is due out in July 2005.

Trish and the novels take me to places I would never have gone without them. The oddest was probably Brixton Prison, where I once spent a fund-raising night and, more or less sleepless, thought up the plot for *Prey to All*. The resulting novel would have been a lot poorer if I hadn't had the experience of sharing a 6' x 10' cell, which contained bunk beds, wardrobe, basin, table and loo, and heard the door locked on my cellmate and me. We knew we were there only to raise money for the Macmillan Cancer charities and that we would be getting out next morning. Even so, it was a shocking moment, and it taught me a great deal.

Other things Trish and the novels have brought me have been just as educational but rather less uncomfortable. Without them, I would never have found myself dining at the Oxford Union before taking part in a debate on the release from prison of James Bulger's killers. To be invited to a place like that to speak about a serious subject on which I feel passionately was an extraordinary privilege. I'll never forget it.

Writing novels isn't only the fulfilment of a childhood dream. It also brings me into contact with all kinds of people on both sides of the law, and it takes me to amazing places, in fact as well as in my imagination. I can't think of a better way to make a living.

You can find more information
Daphne and her work from
her website,
www.unusalsuspects.co.uk
Click on authors, then on
Natasha Cooper.

ART OUTDOORS

Why do art outdoors? During the four years that Miss Hughes encouraged, cajoled, begged and guided me in an attempt to pass 'A' level Art (now at last completed . . . if you're reading this, Emma Byrom, I made it at last) the one thing above all else that she emphasised most of all was the importance of getting out there and actually drawing or sketching at first hand.

However, as anyone knows who has tried their hand at Art, this is one of the hardest things of all, since the self-consciousness



one feels can be almost impossible to deal with. Remembering this difficulty, Miss Hughes has yet again provided her support and backing, this time to 'Art Outdoors', a completely voluntary club for anyone taking Art GCSE or A level where the aim is, quite simply, to go out and draw.

We go for the hour and ten minutes of lunch, usually in the minibus, packed lunches kindly provided by the kitchen,



find a nice spot, and draw/paint/sketch. New Artist in Residence Mr. F. O'Neill provides expert help should anyone require it and the landscape provides everything else. Whilst obviously aware of the benefits to students work, the main reason for this Club is that it is really nice. Thanks for helping me get the 'A' level, Miss Hughes.

Marc Ives

WORLD CHALLENGE HONDURAS

Some of you may have heard that a team of St Mary's students are off to Honduras in July. What many of you may not be aware of is why!

The expedition is organised by the World Challenge Expeditions Company who have many years of experience in running expeditions to the slightly more obscure parts of the world, places that are often not even a part of the gap year trail. The company has a strong belief in the very real value of outdoor education, and those of you who know me, will know that I am also a subscriber to that view.

However, this is much much more than the adventurous expedition of a lifetime. All members of the team, including myself, will face a steep learning curve, which could, and should, include a great deal of learning both individually and as a team. The World Challenge ethos is very clear and whilst it provides every member of the team with opportunities for self-discovery, it also offers every member a chance to be a leader.

To take a group of school aged young people to an off the beaten track destination is all very well and there are

certainly plenty of adventure type activities available; including mountain trekking, white water rafting and scuba diving, but there is another side to this expedition which is all about learning to give as well as to take. Many readers will remember Hurricane Mitch, which hit in 1998 but what they may not be aware of is that countries such as Honduras are still trying to pick themselves up from this calamity. Hurricane Mitch had tragic consequences for the population of Honduras and there are many rebuilding projects going on still as a direct result of it.

All World Challenge teams take part in some kind of community action project wherever they go in the world. The team are given freedom to choose what kind of work they would like to take part in. Our team have decided that they are going to do voluntary work in an orphanage whilst they are out there. This will probably include some decorating and renovation work. We will certainly be using skills that we already have as a team in order to try to help others and to give something back to the country rather than just stumbling through it.

The girls have been working very hard to raise the funds for this project. They are raising money on an individual basis with which to pay their way, but at the same time, they have been doing a number of team fundraising projects in the form of running the daily school tuck shop, car washing and sponsored runs. They are currently working towards a themed meal with an auction of promises. A large proportion of this team raised money will be taken with us to the orphanage and either used for events whilst we are there or added to their very empty coffers for future use; either way, please remember that next time one of the Honduras team approaches you for sponsorship or trying to persuade you to buy a ticket for one of their events, you will not be paying for a plane ticket for a jolly, but, instead will be contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of some of those young children in the orphanage.

I am preparing for July with a mixture of excitement, anticipation, trepidation and downright fear, but at the same time as I work with the team and watch them develop, I know that we are all going to have a fantastic time . . . Watch out for the next instalment!

Tanya Lee, Sixth Form Housemistress

(Editor's note – if any readers would like to make a contribution to this very worthwhile trip, please email Tanya Lee at t.lee@stmarys.oxon.sch.uk – thanks)

KLQ 2004

PHOTO BY MATTHEW HICKFORD

“Where is the world carried on the back of four elephants?” Not a philosophical question posed by the latest A2 exam paper but one that needed an answer at the Kid’s Lit Quiz (KLQ) this year; a major new children’s literature quiz.

A Year 7 team from St. Mary’s went to the regional heat of the KLQ at Abingdon School to compete with 19 other Year 7/8 teams. Quizmaster, New Zealander, Wayne Mills in his distinctive purple shirt and top hat was there. Wayne started the KLQ in New Zealand over 10 years ago and has now expanded worldwide with events held in China and South Africa as well as the UK. The KLQ has 10 theme-based rounds of 10 questions and the questions require a breadth of knowledge of children’s and teenage fiction as well as an ability to think laterally.

Georgie Bellhouse, Hattie Dinger, Eila Purvis, Lottie Wellesley and Ro Wilkinson

gained the best scores in the school heat and were chosen to make up the St. Mary’s team. Finding their places in the Charles Maude room at Abingdon, the girls initially had to look at the titles of the 10 rounds and decide where to play their joker and double their points. Should it be Dogs, Beasts or Roald Dahl? After some discussion, it was decided: Roald Dahl.

The first round got underway with visual questions linking Greek mythology, classic literature, overseas tales and the inevitable Harry Potter. 10 questions later and the



answers are collected in for marking. Wayne continues with spot prizes on a literary theme during the breaks between rounds that keeps the level of excitement and anticipation high as anyone can win. Local authors, Julie Hearn, Katherine Langrishe and Mark Robson were on hand to talk to during the interval and to sign copies of their books. Nearly three hours later and it was the final round – Roald Dahl. Our team did well and really enjoyed the chance to be with so many other local schools thinking about books. We hope to enter next year with two teams, building on the experience we all gained this year. So when you are asked “Where is the world carried on the back of four elephants” or “Which God is in the shape of a tortoise?” think Terry Pratchett and the Discworld series of books.

*Sue Robertson, Librarian and
Caroline Prior, English Department*

CHESS

An article in the national news recently suggested that chess, played by such luminaries as Madonna, Lennox Lewis and Bono, is the new rock ‘n’ roll. Whilst this may be a little fanciful, it clearly reflects chess’ recent attempts to popularise this ancient game of strategy and tactics. UKCI (United Kingdom Chess

International) now advertises the game with the slogan ‘It’s cool, it’s deadly’. However, there is much more to the game, and the game’s appeal. Whilst UKCI comments on chess’ cognitive benefits, this is only a small part of it.

Certainly, the evidence that it improves ‘concentration, logical thought and analysis’ is fairly self-evident, and yet there are other equally valuable social lessons to be learnt from the game. Firstly, as with all games, it teaches people to have a sense of the importance of certain situations having rules which, if not obeyed, render the game unplayable and unenjoyable. It encourages individuals to be competitive and yet to win with grace and to lose

with equanimity. Most important of all, it is a friendly game, which can be played by people of all ages . . . which leads neatly onto St. Mary’s Chess Club, where pupils from Year 7 to Upper 6th can, and do, pit their wits against each other. It is this aspect of the club which is the most satisfying, since this term alone Year 7s have been found competing against Sixth Formers, Year 8s against Year 11s and all manner of other combinations.

Is it the new rock ‘n’ roll? It probably isn’t. It’s just a great way to test your mind in a different way, to compete against someone you might not normally come across, and to take your mind to a different place.



SPAIN

Post GCSE sixth form preparation, or as it has become known in school, "Spain"! If you did not know the meaning of this rather odd entry into the school calendar you may be forgiven for asking something like "what, the whole of it?"



I thought that I would take this opportunity to explain what the year 11 post GCSE trip is all about. It provides a combination of things, which range through from recovery from the GCSE exams to a journey of self-discovery and a look at future expectations.

It may seem rather ambitious to aim to achieve all of this within a week; in fact, we do not pretend to. What we actually aim to do is to continue the girls' education far beyond the examination hall. The ethos of St Mary's Sixth Form is based on encouraging the development of independent young women from within the safety of the school environment. By the end of the Sixth Form, a St Mary's girl should be able to face anything that the world throws her way and she will cope with that challenge in a style of her own. The post GCSE trip marks the beginning of this progression.

The girls are faced with challenges which they may or may not have come across before; the new aspect of the challenge is working together with others to overcome the odds and to achieve. The opportunity is for self discovery and a girl may start to recognise whether she is a natural leader or a strong team player; both are very necessary to modern society, an early recognition of her own ability will enable a girl to achieve much before her peers nationwide have even stopped to consider where their own natural talents lie.



The range of activities throughout the week is designed to appeal to all interests and so follows through a wide spectrum of creativity on the one hand through to adventure on the other. Everyone is given the opportunity to take part in every activity, which also teaches an invaluable lesson of patience and tolerance!

The actual venue of Spain is perhaps a little irrelevant to what we aim for. However, the centre, which we are currently using, has been selected because it is able to offer a wide range of activities, with a skilled team of staff on site. Much of what we require is within walking distance of the centre itself (I have spent too many so called activity weeks sitting on a coach for much of each day not to appreciate this aspect!). The girls may find themselves dangling from an abseil rope or a zip wire in the morning and then in the afternoon in the kitchen learning how to produce a traditional Spanish meal with which to feed everyone at the centre that evening. On another day, they could find themselves trekking up a mountainside and spending the night in a mountain refuge with no telephone signal (it is amazing what a calamity that particular aspect is!). The majority of St Mary's girls will have been horse riding before. However, not many of them will have experienced a mountain trek on horseback with a quick dip in snowmelt at the end for refreshment; neither will their cycling experiences have taken them off road in quite this way before!

I could go on, but this article is not meant to be a day by day timetable of the week. Instead, what I hope that I have portrayed is that the education of our girls does not end when the pen is put down at the end of the final exam.

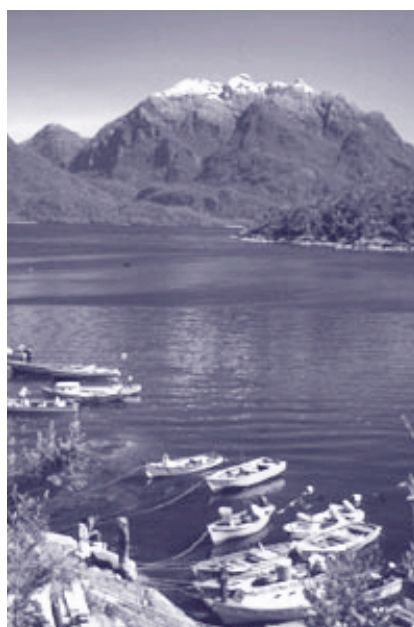


*Article and photos by Tanya Lee,
Sixth Form Housemistress*



RALEIGH INTERNATIONAL CHILE 2004 – CONTINUED . . .

In the June Chronicle, I said that I would tell you more about the projects that we got up to on the Raleigh Chile 04A Expedition and a little bit more about being a member of staff on expedition, so here goes . . .



As you now know Raleigh International is a youth development charity that inspires people from all backgrounds and nationalities to discover their full potential by working together on challenging environmental and community projects around the world. I have to add here that the Raleigh expedition I undertook as a Venturer was the best part of my Gap year. It provided me with the greatest challenge, learning opportunity and as a result the greatest enjoyment because of the enormous sense of achievement, simply because a Raleigh expedition offers you one of the most powerful development processes. The combination of working outside your normal comfort zones and the real pressures of the tasks on expedition facilitates personal development at a rate unmatched by any classroom learning – and that goes for Venturers and staff.

The expeditions are set up for the Venturers and they are the most important component. Hence, the success of an expedition is determined by what the Venturers gain from the experience. However, this success depends to a great extent on the calibre of the staff running it.

Raleigh have been running expeditions around the world for over 20 years and in that time over 20,000 Venturers have taken part; learning skills; meeting and working with new people; gaining insights into different cultures; facing up to fears, worries, challenges and themselves; in short “developing”. The potential of the expedition experience is vast. It is an intense period of time in which the weeks fly by, but to ensure that there is time for reflection the staff are trained in basic developmental skills to help the Venturers put their experiences into context.

The Raleigh experience is not just for 17–25 year olds and interestingly the greatest source of applications for staff comes through word of mouth. As staff, you have a great responsibility both for the welfare and the realisation of the Venturers expectations and this provides you with a challenge as well; exhausting and frustrating at times but ultimately rewarding and fulfilling too.

As members of staff on expedition, you are required to combine the skills of leader, facilitator, counsellor and

instructor, needing to be open minded, highly adaptable and responsive to an often quickly changing environment, which is a difficult balance at the best of times! The job involves having a close understanding of the state of progress of your project, the energy levels, health and enthusiasm of your venturers, combined with working long hours, decision making, problem solving and relationship management. At all times staff are required to lead by example – but it must be remembered that there is plenty of fun and enjoyment to be had in doing that. I have found both my experience as DEL and as a Venturer equally rewarding at the different times of my life and my development.

As DEL, my primary role was to manage the expedition with the Expedition Leader and to deputise in his absence. My specific responsibility was for the daily running and discipline of the expedition and for managing the staff team of 40 plus. This involved the design and implementation of the staff and venturer induction training programmes, coordination of casualty evacuation procedures and the day to day management of the expedition field base, as well as providing one to one feedback to the staff and being there as a counsellor and advisor for them. I was also responsible for the allocation of personnel to project sites, coordination of expedition transport, accommodation requirements and the management of the expedition communication system. It is an extremely hands on role, as are all roles on an expedition, requiring me to utilise planning skills, problem solve on a continual basis and motivate the expedition staff. The Expedition Leader and I got on extremely well, which was crucial to set the tone of the expedition, and we were able to run it with a good firm management style combined with an enormous sense of fun. When you're working 24-7 for four months, it does get stressful and tiring at times, so you need to be able to rely on a good sense of humour; otherwise you'll never make it through sane!

Here are some quotes from past Venturers about their expedition staff:

“The Volunteer staff on my school building phase were just fantastic. They

were a great team because they led by example and kept their sense of humour, even when the work was tough. We cared so much about the project because they did too. They helped bring the group closer together and we still have reunions, I hope we always will”.

“From teaching me backgammon to bread baking, diving to door making, I learnt a wealth of skills from the volunteer staff responsible for my development on expedition. Their strength of vision and sheer determination, especially when faced with challenges has inspired me to do the same on expedition and after.”

So, what did we get up to in Patagonia?

Well, I have outlined the various projects that we undertook, to give you a flavour of the expedition below. It all starts with an intensive training period of two weeks for the staff before the venturers arrive. After which all 180 of us were then in field base for a five day induction for the Venturers before 11 groups deployed out to their first phase, all in different directions. Each phase was roughly three weeks and there was a two day changeover back at field base in between each phase for people to catch up, get clean and dry, have a bit of down time – but not much – and then begin preparations for the next phase. The expedition ended with about four days ‘wash-up’ period back in field base, and of course lots of activities and a few parties to end the expedition in style!

ADVENTURE PROJECTS

Sea Kayaking

After undergoing extensive training by qualified instructors, Venturers undertook journeys by kayak, exploring the beaches, islands and coastline of southern Chile. This was a physically demanding project, but one that offered many rewards, including close encounters with dolphins and sea lions. The challenge came not just from the paddling, but also from living and working in close confines, hemmed in by the high water and the dense temperate rainforest.

Trekking

All of these projects were led by experienced mountain leaders and began with short treks so Venturers could build

up stamina and fitness and be trained in all the skills required to live in the wilds for a period of three weeks. The terrain was rough, weather changeable and challenges many, and emphasised the importance of teamwork, making this as much a mental challenge as a physical one. Each trek offered a distinct landscape and challenge, with the opportunity to meet campesinos, sample asados and live beneath the stars in some truly wild landscapes.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION PROJECTS

Sendero de Chile

Continuing the fantastic work of the last two expeditions, this group worked alongside a local guide on an ambitious project coordinated by CONAMA (the national commission for the environment). The plan is to build the 'Sendero de Chile' – a mountain trail running through Chile from Visviri (border with Bolivia and Peru) to Cabo de Hornos (Cape Horn) in the far south.

Senderos

The other sendero projects were in three of the most beautiful, remote and unspoiled national parks in southern Chile, with hanging glaciers, swimming in ice cold lakes, fishing in the rivers and building paths, bridges and look out points with CONAF park rangers.

Glaciology projects

One group travelled to the world famous Laguna San Rafael (where I went to visit them and on the way back got stranded for 24 hours with my Chilean fishermen and had to be saved by a catamaran – but that's another story) and the second group worked on the remote Colonia Glacier, which flows off the northern ice cap. Both groups worked with scientists collecting moraine samples, which will be used to calculate how the world's climate evolved thousands of years in the past.

COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Puerto Tranquilo

The little town of Puerto Tranquilo lies four hours south of field base, perched on the edge of Lago General Carrera, the second largest lake in South America. Here Venturers became involved with

local community group 'Entre Rios' to design and build a children's play area within the town plaza.

As well as improving the square, venturers also repainted the local 'bomberos' (fire station). Tranquilo offered a fantastic opportunity to become involved in rural Chilean life, playing football with the locals, visiting homes to sample mate and visiting the primary school.

Manihuales

Using funds generously donated by the Albert and Florence Smith Memorial Trust, this project completely overhauled a community building in the town of Manihuales, on the Carretera Austral. The Church owns the existing building, which was in a state of disrepair. They granted a rent-free lease to PRODEMU – the foundation for the promotion and development of women – to convert a number of rooms within the building for community use. The rooms were converted into a library, a pastoral room and training rooms to be used by PRODEMU to undertake capacity building activities with women's groups, including hairdressing and leatherwork.

Puerto Gaviota

Perched on the edge of Isla Magdalena off Chile's coast, the inhabitants of the tiny town of Puerto Gaviota (Seagull Port) make their living from the sea. The community is without roads or electricity and life in the town can best be described as basic. It rains for much of the year, but when the skies are clear, the scenery is dramatic.

Raleigh secured funds from Associated Newspapers to construct a medical station for this fragile township – which will be used by visiting doctors and dentists on the regular 'ronda medica'.

*Rachel Wawn was awarded a
SMOGs Travel Scholarship in 2003*

TRAVEL AWARDS



This is just a reminder to let all SMOGs know about the Travel Scholarship. When it was established it was primarily aimed at the UV1, however as more and more people are having later 'Gap' years and sabbaticals from work, we have opened it up to any SMOG of any age. The only criteria are that your travels/adventures are 'worthwhile' – they can be UK based or worldwide. Interviews are held annually, in November, however for special cases we can award money at different times of year. If you would like to know more, then please do get in touch with Victoria Humphries (details on page 1).

Travel Awards given out in 2004

Tamara Jenkinson – £350
UK (September 2004)

Camellia Zhang – £250
Germany (Easter 2005)

Lizzie Campbell-Preston – £250
Canada (Easter 2005)

Claudia Meek – £125
Florence (Jan 2006)

Belinda Allen – £125
Peru (Nov 2005)

Frances Shorten

Kenya

My ambition in life is to become a teacher, so what better way to spend my gap year than teaching? To raise money for my travels I worked at a local prep school called Cheam, where I assisted in class, taught sports and worked the photocopier! Although it was hard work and not great pay I had a fantastic time there and gained experience in teaching. It also helped me grow in confidence for my next stop – teaching in Kenya.

When the time neared for me to go off for six months to live in Africa I was terrified. I was not looking forward to it at all! I did not know a soul going and obviously had never been away from home for so long. Waiting to meet my fellow volunteer teachers at the airport was fairly daunting, it still had not hit me what I was about to embark on.

I went to Kenya with a small, charity-run association called VAE. There were a total of nine volunteers, so it was completely different to the large sized groups of AV. VAE deals with the poorest of the poor schools. We were living in ultimate rural Africa, far from any form of civilisation. This organisation prides itself on letting you get on with teaching, without lectures on how it should be done. Admittedly, at first, being chucked in the deep end was scary, but with hindsight, I can recognise that it was the best thing for me.

My house was in the most picturesque valley in the world with breath-taking views all around and it overlooked my little school. Out of the four schools that VAE worked with this year, mine was the most developed, thanks to a previous volunteer who had raised a huge amount of money, which enabled the mud hut classrooms to be rebuilt. Even so, it was way below the standards that we would expect. With over 250 pupils, similar to Wantage, there were only six or seven teachers to go around so not all classes could be taught at the same time. The teachers spent most of their time outside lazing in the shade instead of teaching their lessons. This was where we came in. The children were so eager to learn but it was difficult to communicate as English is their third language. The language barrier proved a problem at first but, by the end, we could get through to them by acting and writing down instructions! We taught all subjects. Due to the recent change in the law, primary education has been made free for all in Kenya; this meant that we

could be teaching the alphabet to a 25 year old as anyone can now attend school!

Teaching materials were very rare; even if they were donated the teachers would pocket them for their own children. I took out a selection of colouring pens, paper, a rounders bat and ball etc, which were all highly appreciated by the children. It was so rewarding seeing them smile and laugh.

My house was a very long walk from our town, Gilgil, so we got fit with all the hiking up and down steep hills. Our town was not up to much either! It was atypical shantytown with a lot of corrugated iron and dust! However we were always welcome because not only does VAE help the local schools but also it helps clean up the street boys' act. Simon Harris, my boss out in Kenya, does a huge amount with these orphaned boys who have nowhere to live and no money to buy food. 10 years ago they were drug addicts, walking around sniffing glue – today they are VAE volunteer's guardian angels. It was so lovely to belong to a community and feel so welcome. We were constantly being invited into people's homes and given hideous meals that we were obliged to eat – such as goat's intestines and dried blood! Back at our mud hut, the food was slightly better, but only slightly! We lived on a diet of potatoes, rice and cabbage day in day out! We employed a house girl from the village who instantly became our best friend. Living without electricity, running water and meat did challenge us greatly, but by the end we had grown to love it. However, the long-drop loo was not so great, especially as it had four unwanted inhabitants – bats!

In between the two terms that I worked at my primary school, I had a month off, so I travelled around the beautiful country of Kenya. We went on safari, to the coast, up to the north and back again. It was a brilliant month although accommodation wasn't the prettiest! It was certainly good preparation for my next stint in South East Asia – but that's another story altogether!

I would definitely recommend teaching in Africa or any third world country during a Gap year. VAE is not for the faint hearted, as it really was pretty hard at times. However to have a good gap year I believe that you should have the good, the bad and the ugly times to make for an enriched experience. I have been so lucky to have such a successful gap year; I just can't believe how quickly it has flown by! ■



Having left Wantage in 2003, I have had the most amazing gap year ever. I spent three months of my gap year with an organisation called Quest Overseas. An intensive three-week language course in Ecuador followed by four weeks voluntary work in one of Peru's largest shantytowns. The finale was an exciting six-week expedition for the depths of the Amazon Jungle to the breathtaking peaks of the Andes.

Early one morning in January this year I found myself at Heathrow airport with one large backpack surrounded by 17 other equally nervous looking people all waiting to check in. After 17 hours of flying, we finally arrived in Quito, Ecuador, which was to be our home for the next three weeks. It was a great opportunity to get to know a bit of the country and the people we were with. Four hours of Spanish every morning could be pretty demanding. However, the tutors went out of their way to introduce too us the many varies aspects of Latin American life and culture and we found ourselves salsa dancing, sampling guinea pigs (which I wouldn't recommend!!!) and visiting local markets. While at the weekends we saw waterfalls, volcanoes, jungle and beaches. After these three weeks had flown by we began our next phase – the children of Villa Maria Project.

Villa Maria is one of the largest shantytowns in Peru and I have to say that it was a very large culture shock! 'Living it rough' was certainly part of the experience. We were living in swimming pool changing rooms for a month with no electricity and no running water! We were working in partnership with CEDRO and The British Community Trust, working in the interests of the indirect and often forgotten victims of poverty and drug abuse – young children! We had two, three-hour sessions per day with kids coming from dozens of communities; we literally had hundreds of children to play with, all with an endless supply of energy. We played every activity under the sun such as football, swimming, arts and crafts, theatre, and just having a "big brother or sister" to have fun with and make summer a time to really look forward to. Then the inevitable comes, somebody shouts out "swimming pool" (we had two Olympic size swimming pools in the complex that we were working in) and the hell breaks

loose – those kids will queue all day! A trip to the pool in the sweltering summer heat is the icing on the cake for those little terrors! I have been a boat, a submarine and a climbing frame all at once – tiring work but more than worth it when you see the smiles on their faces. Villa Maria was such good fun, incredibly rewarding however, there was one thing that I did find very hard and that was the language barrier that occurred!! Although the language course was very useful I did find that my Spanish was not up to a standard that could communication fully with the children and I often found myself saying phrases that the children would find hysterical – I dread to think what I was saying!

The four weeks at Villa Maria flew past and before we knew it, it was time to say goodbye to the children and staff whom we had formed such a bond with and time to begin our third and final phase – The Andean Expedition. Covering thousands of kilometres through the desert, mountains and jungles of Peru, Chile and Bolivia. We found ourselves up in the cool breathtaking Andean plains through to the humid forests of the Amazon, finally arriving on the awe-inspiring Inca Trail and to the lost city of the Incas – Machu Picchu. This six weeks was the best of my time in South America and I really wish I could do it all again! From the moment we landed in Lima, Peru we never stopped. Every single day we were seeing and doing something totally new and different and exciting! I couldn't go into detail about every place I visited, as I would be here for ever but I can say that every place was equally spectacular!

These six weeks was to test not only our endurance but also our cooking skills! Let me tell you now that cooking for 17 people over two small tranjas is no easy job especially when you have been walking all day and it is dark and wet! No pressure, of course, apart from trying to fulfil the appetites of 17 ravenous people!

Over six weeks we visited a huge amount of places, some of them being, Ballestas Islands, the Nazca Lines, the Colca Canyon, salt plains, ice climbing in Bolivia, Amazon Basin in Rurrenabaque, pampas, Lake Titicaca, Inca trail to Machu Picchu! I enjoyed every single one of them,

Sophie Kearns

Ecuador and Peru





Machu Picchu

however I have to say that the Inca trail was definitely one of the biggest highlights – although one of the most challenging! We got up early on Good Friday morning to start the trail, starting it in rather an unusual way by white water rafting for 20 km down river. It was great fun, all dressed in hideous outfits!! It was then that we eventually found ourselves at ‘kilometre 82’ where we began the Inca Trail.

Over the next four days we found ourselves walking long distances, doing nine hours a day solidly uphill for our second day! However, the views were amazing and we found ourselves surviving ‘dead women’s pass’, aptly named because of the shape of the hills either side of the path! For our last day of the trek, we were

up at 3.45am ready to make it to the sun-gate before hundreds of other eager trekkers. After shovelling down some cornflakes from our Tupperware, we set off into the pitch black. The agony of all the walking was worth it when we reached the sun-gate and cracked open the champagne as the mists cleared and Machu Picchu was revealed for the first time!

I have never known three months to pass so quickly and though I travelled on afterwards, if it wasn’t for Quest Overseas it is likely I would not have been able to enjoy it as much as I did!

It was an invaluable experience and those three months taught me a lot about culture and different aspects of another country, one totally different from my own! ■

Harriet Colville

Kenya

After a few manic months of constant work, it was finally my time to head off on my gap year trip, which was to be the most amazing four months of my life. After some rather chaotic packing, I met the rest of my group, (approximately twenty of us), at Heathrow airport to fly to Nairobi, Kenya, where my teaching project would begin. The flight took us eight hours; there were pangs of nervousness and excitement as we eventually landed in Nairobi City, the capital. We were all quickly bundled into this cronk of a bus and driven to Naivasha, where our orientation course begun. Here we got the chance to meet others in our group, learn a few phrases from the local language, being Swahili and to make us aware of matters such as health, safety, teaching ideas, customs and to acclimatise to living in Africa. Once we had learnt the basics, we got back on our fun bus and drove hours into “the bush”. Now I might remind you that travel in Kenya is slightly on the wild side compared to England. The roads for a start are not smooth; in fact, every few metres there are huge craters, so you cannot possibly expect to have a quick nap on long journeys, that is simply out of the question. Overtaking is another frightening experience, but somehow you convince yourself that the driver has you in safe hands.

On Africa Asia Venture, AV, the organisation I went with, you teach and live with a partner, but there are always

other AVs at nearby schools or a short journey away – short being 2-3hrs drive!! I taught at Tiluet Primary School which is situated in Kericho, known as the land of tea, it was so beautiful, I can still remember the distinctive smell of the air. On our first day of teaching, the whole school gave us a huge welcome, which made us feel at home almost immediately. These children feel so privileged to have a mzungu (white person) teaching at their school. Everyone was so smiley and respectful towards us and it really makes you think, back at home we are so selfish and take our luxuries too much for granted. The majority of the pupils have no material possessions; hardly any of them even own shoes or can afford to buy a pencil. I taught four subjects; English, Art, Social Studies and Sport to two classes. My first few lessons were slightly daunting especially having forty noisy children, ranging from all ages, all gawking at you, but once you get to know them, you cannot get rid of them. In fact, by the end of the term I felt as though some were as close as siblings. Art was great fun, however, they really have limited equipment over there, luckily, I had brought over a few bits’n bobs. In one particular lesson, we made paper sunglasses, which they adored and literally wore them for the next three weeks. We also organised many sports matches against neighbouring schools, which they thoroughly enjoyed.



We would teach during the weekdays, however on weekends we would generally travel to different parts of Kenya at our own expense, visiting lakes, towns, forests and seeing other AVs at their schools.

At the end of our teaching attachment, which was three months, we had another month to travel with our group before flying home. We chose to go white water rafting down the Nile in Jinja, Uganda, which was spectacular, and then we all headed to the coast where some of the world's most beautiful beaches lie. After topping up our tans, we all met in Nairobi where we were taken on a safari across the Masai Mara. Here we saw animals such as lions, elephants, cheetahs, leopards and buffalo as well as birdlife. We also got to visit a local Masai village to see how they lived and survived. The safari lasted eight days and was included in the overall

package price. Most people flew home after that, but myself and six other people in our group went to Zanzibar for a week, which lies on the East coast of Tanzania. Here we snorkelled, swam with dolphins and went on dhow trips.

Just before I flew home, I went back to my school to say goodbye, which they all really appreciated. My time in Kenya was a wonderful experience for me. I learnt an awful lot about the Kenyan civilians, their way of life, culture, friendliness, poverty and their language. I made several friends out there who I am still in contact with but sadly had to turn down one over-friendly Kenyan who offered me a marriage proposal!!

I was extremely grateful for the SMOGS travel donation, which helped towards the cost of my trip. ■



One SMOG – Two Weeks – Four Countries

The Sisters

Some sisters smile and slowly

*Their dark bodies sway down slate-floored
Halls. Sandles squeak.*

A solid life, time-measured and ignored.

This is an order of teachers,

An order of women who work.

*I played between them, the strict
pattern of the days a comfort.*

The ring of matins, ring of vespers,

Ring around the roses lightly

Sang me into summer and away.

Rituals, like pipes are easy to pick

Smoke rings float in the warm eve

Lying in the long grass

Heedless of mosquitoes

I wandered into a future

Worldly, weighted

Reluctantly mine.

Above is a poem that I wrote some years ago. Nostalgia and hindsight distorted the truth somewhat. In fact, I am a SMOG who left a year before final A levels to attend an international school in Spain. After sitting my A levels, circumstances and adventure led me to follow a young teacher to California. I was able to return once for a visit in 1976. My parents have made the journey on a fairly regular basis, although with age it is now becoming hard for them to do so. Before this visit, it had been 20 years since I had seen my sister.

“You have become too American”, says my mother. She struggles with some words that are unfamiliar, with my accent, and truth be told, with my slightly overbearing nature. I was American before I was American, I think. However, in spite of the deep roots that I have established in the rural community where I live, the call of my origins had become increasingly loud. One of my co-workers offered to give me all her transferable frequent flyer miles to make the transatlantic flight possible. So, it was a bold spirit that led me to ask, on an early summer morning of this year, if the Travel Award Committee might consider helping with the travelling expenses for the European leg of the journey. Honestly, I did not think that they would consider helping with such a personal pilgrimage, but I sent

Tamara Jenkinson

Europe

the e-mail and forgot about it. It was exhilarating when I heard back from Victoria Humphries about six weeks later. It is definitely not usual to fund such a trip, but the committee asked if I could come and speak to the girls about my life experiences and write an article as a way to reciprocate.

I was eighteen when I immigrated to the United States. Since that time I have married and re-married. My husband and I live on the homestead where I have lived for 30 years, with our nine-year-old son and my 17-year-old daughter. I am employed by a Catholic Organization as a social worker. After my first marriage ended, I returned to college and eventually graduated with both a Bachelors and Masters Degree in Social Work. During those years I was often reminded of the very good academic foundation that I was privileged to build at St Mary's. I think my experiences at St Mary's were also a key part of my having chosen a career that involves working with vulnerable people. I still remember the dresses we sewed for children at the CSMV missions in Africa. I remember having romantic notions about becoming a missionary. Perhaps, in a way, I have.

My first night in England I stayed with an elderly couple in London who are lifelong friends of my mother. My mother and I met for a few hours at their flat in Notting Hill. My mother was actually flying to Spain that very same day to finalize the sale of her apartment there. We were to meet up in Spain a few days later so this goodbye was not too hard. It was so good to sit with her in the breezy kitchen. I was reassured by her apparent good health, and her equanimity in the face of my somewhat hectic timetable. My mother is, and always has been, a generous person who accepts people with very little judgement.

The next day, I flew to France to visit my father and his wife who live in the foothills of the Pyrenees, and whose house I had never seen. The flowers and the garden were still lovely in mid-September. We felt the pinch of time as I only had three days to stay. My father and I have always laughed easily together and this was no exception. When my father left me at Pau Airport, I pretended to read my book as I waited in line for the baggage check. I

was hiding tears. Next, I flew to see my mother again and reunite with my sister in Spain. She has lived there for the last 10 years. The small village of Gaucin in Malaga is home to many ex-patriots. It is beautiful in the white washed way of southern Spain. My sister and I spent a lot of time chatting and catching up on news of children and mutual friends. Again, the difficult good-byes. No dry eyes.

My next destination was the home of Bridget O'Keeffe in Co Limerick, Ireland. She is the one who taught my brother and sister and I before we went to boarding school. She stayed with our family until I was 13 years old; at which time she returned to Ireland to marry and raise five children of her own. It was with great joy and immediate familiarity that we greeted each other. At the age of 72, she continues to work on the dairy farm that she and her husband worked together until his death about four years ago. We spent time talking of the old days and looking at her albums from that era. I was made to feel right at home and again, I was loath to leave.

The last appointment of my trip was a visit to Wantage with one of my best friends from school, Julia Purser-Harris. Julia picked me up at Gatwick and we drove to Wantage together. So much to say, so little time! We hardly stopped talking all day long. I was impressed with the sisterly ease we felt with each other, in spite of many years without any connection at all. These are the kind of life-long friendships we made at St Mary's. There was a deep sense of familiarity about being at the school again together. Renovations have not detracted from the handsome interiors. Certain unidentifiable smells took us back in time: the chapel, the library, the smell of the bricks themselves. Suddenly, life appeared so very short. Just yesterday we were here in our striped summer dresses, skipping or swimming, or jumping the wall to go buy fish and chips. Then and now, St Mary's remains much the same, I think. Speaking with the girls, I was reminded of the restlessness that overcame me in the last year of school, the "Call of the World", and the sense of adventure that infused my dreams. I have very fond memories of the nuns who taught us. They helped us to have vision for our lives. This visit left me feeling grateful that my particular vision has endured many wrong turns and is still in the making. ■



Tamara Jenkinson



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