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A Musical Reunion At Hinton Ampner

November 2007

by

Frances Sallis

A Musical Reunion At Hinton Ampner On 7th November 2007.

This year is the 125th anniversary of the founding of Portsmouth High School, a member of the Girls Day School Trust.

The link with Hinton Ampner began at the start of September 1939 when girls aged 5 to 13+ arrived from Portsmouth to take over Ralph Dutton's newly refurbished ancestral home for the duration of World War 2. The older girls up to age 18 were housed at Adhurst St. Mary near Petersfield, the home of the Bonham-Carter family, built in 1858, who were friends of the Duttons.

The former pupils' visit to Hinton was at the invitation of the current Headmistress, Mrs. Jenny Clough, in co-operation with the National Trust's administrator, James Taylor. "Old girls" from as far away as Herefordshire, East and West Sussex, Devon and of course Hampshire descended on the house on a glorious sunny autumn day, to be entertained by current pupils, quizzed about their stay at Hinton and given a delicious cream tea.

My personal journey began in Lancing from thence to Steyning to pick up another OG. We travelled through beautiful West Sussex countryside, glowing with golden beech woods. We went past the entrance to Adhurst St Mary on the old A3 through Petersfield to Hinton village. We arrived early enough to visit the church looking very different inside from the gloomy Victorian interior of my childhood. Then, we had to go to church twice on Sundays, also on Wednesday mornings, dressed in full school uniform, in Winter, outdoor topcoat, socks or stockings, lace-up brown leather shoes, velour hats banded with a broad yellow ribbon on which was pinned an enamel or silver hat-badge bearing Minerva, Goddess of Learning, surrounded by the school motto, "Knowledge is now no more a fountain seal'd"

We wore gloves in which we tucked our one (old) penny collection and carried our own Prayer books. In summer we wore checked cotton frocks and Panama straw hats. Thus dressed, we walked two abreast in a long crocodile the 200 yards to church from the house.

The dark varnished pews and the choir stalls have gone. The

choir no longer exists in the chancel. The garish red-patterned quarry floor tiles with their heating grills have been replaced with smooth creamy stone and the Victorian glass in the chancel has been replaced by two beautiful modern windows whose brilliant colours remind me of the Chagall window in Chichester Cathedral. The church is immensely improved by Mr. Dutton's imaginative ideas. As a child I felt bored and depressed in that gloomy place and the Rector's sermons were not geared to his young congregation. However I loved singing in the choir and we often practised our descants in our dormitories. The hymn Eternal Father Strong To Save always takes me back to Hinton church and reminds me of a little girl who had just been told of the loss of her Daddy on the sinking of H.M.S Hood.

Our way of life then, feels at least a hundred years away from that of my own grandchildren whose ages range from 15 to 22. We worked at our lessons taken in the drawing room which we called the big room. We were taught in the hall, mostly music, the dining room, the garden room and the housekeeper's room. The really little ones were kept upstairs in the attics for sleep and lessons, like a kind of infant's school. In summer we had art lessons in the garden and did our gymnastics on the lawn which we did on the front drive in Winter. It was all gravelled then and painful if you fell down. If the weather was really bad we had dancing lessons in the hall, waltz and quick-step to Victor Sylvester records. In our free time we made our beds, played games inside, such as fives stones, pick-a-sticks, ludo, Jacks, cards, solitaire etc, we put on plays, we read a lot; sometimes parents sent papers such as the Children's Newspaper and more exciting, the Girls Crystal. We ran about the grounds and nearby fields, climbed trees, invented scary stories about a witch's pool and spies who slept in haystacks in the bottom field. We collected rosehips, acorns, sheep's-wool off fences, beech-mast for mock marzipan, all for the war effort. We had our own Girl Guide company led by Patsy Chapman of Bramdean from whom we learnt tracking and field craft. With our science and history teachers, we went star-gazing; finding the source of the river Itchen, we went brass rubbing at Bishops

Sutton and explored Winchester with the Bargate museum, King Arthur's Round Table, St. Cross with the Dole, ruined Wolvsley castle and of course the Cathedral.

We saw the Dole blessed and handed out at Tichborne. We played netball and lacrosse even on a snow covered cricket pitch in winter, and tennis on the croquet lawn. We went for long walks on Saturdays, just four girls together called Walkers, sensible ones I expect, taking a simple picnic to last all day. We never met or thought about any dangers. We had no radios, TV, Mobile phones, iPods or computer games. We looked forward to letters from home and the infrequent visits from parents with cars who managed to save petrol from their ration or else coped with several bus rides needed to get out of Portsmouth to reach Hinton. We picked bunches of primroses in the woods nearby, the head gardener Mr. Gray used to make up bouquets of daffodils for us to give to our parents at Easter. We had little patches of garden to grow our own seeds of lettuce, radishes and beetroot just outside of the walled garden.

Each day started with morning prayers in the big room and ended the same way in the evening, the black-out frames covering the huge windows, comforting and pushing away thoughts of dangers to our families down in Portsmouth. Kneeling on the prickly coconut matting protecting the floor made a nasty pattern on our knees and was a more immediate worry. During this time our teachers had to share their joint bed-sitting rooms with each other as they shuttled turn and turn about between the two halves of our school whatever the weather. I used to hope that the maths teacher would not be able to reach us through the snow drifts but she was a very courageous lady. We were invited into teachers' rooms after supper and sat on the floor to be read to, like a serial, exciting adventure stories or funny ones to make us laugh such as T.H. White's *The "Sword in the Stone"*, a bit like today's *Horrible Histories*.

Now I must return from my memories, to 2007.

After our church visit we collected Mrs. Gladys Trickle from her cottage by the church. Gladys, nee Nicholson and her family

served the Dutton family for many years, her father as estate carpenter, her mother, housekeeper, her husband, gardener and she, as a 16year-old helping her mother with the cooking and other domestic duties, as a parlour-maid waiting on our staff and keeping the house clean and tidy, yet we children were not aware of these good people who helped to keep our lives running smoothly. Since then, over 60 years, Gladys has spent a long time as Church Warden and as a volunteer guide for the National Trust. She comes to see us when we make our annual Hinton visits each June and by now she is an honorary old girl and is able to tell us so much of Hinton life in the last century. So we picked up Gladys and went for lunch at the Hinton Arms, a place into which I had never before ventured. Then we went up the long drive to be met by our current Headmistress whose first visit last June was on the wettest day of the summer when only five of us had braved the weather. Jenny must be of the stern stuff, like our old teachers, to want to return again. Soon the school coach arrived full of excited young girls and some of the Portsmouth based OGs. We were soon seated on gilt chairs in the hall and listened to the three soloists and the choir standing on the stairs as we had done long ago to present our carol concerts holding home-made lanterns and wearing our gaberdine raincoats with the sleeves turned in to resemble cloaks. We had a surprise when we were asked to sing the old school song which we thought nobody would know nowadays. We then toured familiar rooms now so elegantly furnished, the chandeliers showing all their sparkling beauty, no longer covered in great bags of linen to protect them. The Adam fireplaces are not hidden behind plywood cases and the dining room no longer smells of stale food and oil-cloth-covered trestle tables but the Angelika Kaufmann ceiling paintings, restored after the fire are still there as we looked up at them for inspiration at essay writing time.

Then we went off to the old stables for a welcome cream tea and the young girls asked us about life at Hinton. I think they must have been astounded to realise we lived quite happily without today's ipods, mobiles computer games, but then we had no

idea of such things so could not possibly miss them. We never had time to be bored or to get into serious mischief. We had our worries about our parents and I can only be glad that today's children don't have to have those fearful, often hidden, thoughts. We old Hintonites led very close-together lives. We were each other's family and I'm sure we missed each other when we finally returned to Portsmouth but we have all managed to keep in touch from time to time and we are grateful to P.H.S and the National Trust for arranging a special nostalgic day for us. Many thanks are also due to Pat Stevens, now Trish Ferris, who started our Hinton annual meetings in 1995, the first of many happy picnics.

Local people might like to know that Jane Young (Mrs. Atlee), a day girl at Hinton who used to live at Tichborne came to the reunion with Ruth Church (previously from Bramdean). Both travelled up from Devon. In September ten of us met at Hinton to celebrate our friendship with Valdai Walters and her husband who had come from their home in Australia to meet old friends. Earlier in the Spring Trish Ferris had organised for about 30 people to visit a sadly empty and neglected Adhurst, so different from the immaculate state of beautiful Hinton and its gardens and church.

Frances Sallis, 40 Lynchmore Ave
Lancaster W.S. BN15 0PB



Hinton winter 1940
Dorothy Pooley, nee Lewis
Mrs Carter, Frances Sallis, nee Carter
Note the top floors of Hinton, not rebuilt
after the fire. Gravelled drive.
Wearing full winter outdoor uniform
for parents' visits



Spring 1941
A pic-nic and primrose
gathering at 'The Dogs',
woodland near Hinton
Frances, Una Watkins (nee Badcock)
Mrs Carter, Mrs Badcock
and Bonnie, the Badcock pet-dog

Portsmouth Girls' Grammar School

at Hinton Ampner House during World War II

An abiding memory of the evacuated girls was that they were always hungry and, therefore, devised ingenious ways in which to supplement their diet. The girls were given allotments outside the walled garden, facing west, where they grew beetroot, carrots and lettuce that they ate raw to assuage their hunger. In order to prevent the matron finding their 'sloe gin' they hid their jam jars containing sloes up the chimneys! To make butter for their baked potatoes, the girls 'churned' cream poured off their hot chocolate drinks in old lemonade bottles. Staff birthdays were celebrated with jugged hare. Gob-stoppers and 'Swizzles' were purchased by the teachers, Miss Barry and Miss Hooper, from the shop down Hinton Hill with the penny that each girl was allowed every week for sweets. A further penny for the Red Cross and one penny for the church collection were allocated to the pupils weekly.



One particular church service was highly memorable as a mock air raid took place. The rector conducting the service was Canon Milner. He was so taken aback by the sight of the housekeeper wearing a blue dress and that he mistook her for 'some kind of animal'! In the uproar, the girls flung put on their gas made 'the most extraordinary, noises'. Regular fire carried out and the carry their gas masks at all times.



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Music played a significant part in the pupils' lives at Ampner. The house was well equipped with pianos one in the hall, one in a member of staff's bed sitting eventually, one in the attic. Orchestral practice was Thursday afternoon.



Hinton
as there was
room and,
held every

The relationship between the grammar school girls and the villagers improved over time. Initially, the girls were pelted with conkers by the local boys. The shepherds were much friendlier and took the new born lambs for the girls to handle. Mr. Howe cut the wood for the fires and undertook odd jobs around the house. When the girls jumped on their camp beds and broke them, it was Mr. Howe who mended them. He became a great favourite with the girls. At that time, Mr. Herbert Gray was the head gardener at Hinton Ampner. He was requested to ensure that the gardeners girls were not stayed away from the actual building so that the distracted. A major and memorable distraction was the airman on his first solo flight from Worthy Down who landed his aircraft nearby and called at the House for directions!



The drawing room was used as two classrooms with a dividing curtain. The teachers were able to use Mr. Dutton's study as a staffroom but the library was strictly out of bounds and kept locked. The use of Mr. Dutton's private bathroom was also not allowed. The baths that the girls were able to use were painted round with the obligatory three inch line. The house accommodated between eighty and one hundred girls and some of the staff, but not all. A few of the teachers were billeted in the village. One night a doodlebug went down somewhere between Hinton Ampner House and Kilmeston. As paint and plaster showered down on the girls, they were advised to, 'Lie flat and put your pillow over your head. Don't get out of bed!'



The atmosphere in the House was happy and remained so until the school moved back to Dover Court in Portsmouth at the end of March 1945.

Hinton Ampner 1940-1944 by Trisha Ferris

My home was in the heart of Portsmouth close to the Guildhall so air raids were a regular event because of the naval base. I was very aware of the dangers since many homes near us had been destroyed and the school I had attended was just a heap of rubble. Because of this, and like many other children, I was evacuated and started at a new school. For me this was to be at Hinton Ampner House where the junior department of Portsmouth High School transferred for the war years. These days the usual comment is "How wonderful" . In many ways it was, but for a 6 year old being sent to boarding school was very scary. I was very afraid that my parents would be killed so each night I asked God to wait until the holidays and let me die with Mummy and Daddy. Bizarrely, we were sent home in the holidays so were regularly reminded of the dangers of living in Portsmouth!

The interior of the house was not so splendid at that time, all the furniture had been removed and was replaced with school desks and tables, blackout replaced many curtains and bedrooms became dormitories with rows of camp beds. The entrance hall was used for morning assembly, general play area and for concerts and plays. The large drawing room was divided into two classrooms with a curtain which must have made teaching very difficult. The library was out of bounds and Mr Dutton's study was the staffroom. We had our meals in the dining room on trestle tables. The youngest children were taught in the attic. Our playground was the garden. In summer months lessons were often taken out of doors. I remember P.E. on the lawn with us all in blouses and navy blue knickers- quite chilly on cool days! Each Sunday we all went to church wearing our school uniform. I learnt much later from one of our teachers that the same pennies were used each week - an early example of re-cycling! A cheque was given to Canon Milner and he returned the pennies after each service.

As an only child I did enjoy the companionship that boarding school provided. We got to know everyone as we spent so much time together. Nature walks were a particular joy, catching tadpoles at Cheriton and collecting rose hips and sloes. We were taught the names of the wild flowers and had competitions each summer to see how many we could identify. My love of natural history was kindled at that time.

I was asked by a news reporter a few years ago what damage we did. In those days we respected other people's property. Our most frequent crime was talking after lights out and punishment was often peeling potatoes in the kitchen or going to the cellar to clean shoes, both very cold places. Hinton had a legendary ghost so this added to our fears and stimulated our imagination. We did have a few midnight feasts but the fare was limited, toothpaste sandwiches was one example. Sweets were a treat that we had once a week or sometimes after tea. Ovaltine tablets were a good substitute and we ate the beech nuts which were plentiful in the drive.

Looking back I realise that it was a stressful time for us all and it has created a special bond between us. I have remained in contact with many "old girls" and arranged many happy reunions in the last 15 years. My years at Hinton Ampner have had a strong influence on my life and I look back with gratitude at the lasting friendships that were made at that time.



PRE-SCHOOLS AT BRAMDEAN VILLAGE HALL

WOODLANDS KINDERGARTEN- 1985-2002

This school was started in 1985 by Mrs. Linda Turnbull who was unable to find a kindergarten place for her son. She provided the finance for equipment and initial expenses. Two trained teachers, Mrs. Joan Bate and Mrs. Barbara Longlands were invited to run the school. As numbers increased, Mrs. Elsie Jubb joined the staff.

The children were prepared for school so that when they started they were ready to learn and take part in all activities. Interests were encouraged by a weekly table which led to lively participation in bringing items and in group discussion. Imagination and creativity were part of the scheme as well as music, singing and playing instruments.

The fees were kept as low as possible so that anybody who wished could send their child. Owing to ill health, the school was sold in 1997 as a flourishing concern to Miss Emma Brown.

Nearly eight years ago, Woodlands Kindergarten was bought by Mindy Butler and Caroline Butcher and re-named Meon Springs Montessori.

MEON SPRINGS MONTESSORI- 2002 to date

At that time there were eleven children on the register. There are now a maximum of 28 children per session, and 44 children on the register in total! The nursery is constantly evolving, trying to improve, and of the latest educational developments, the introduction of the EYFS (Early Years Stage), which radically changed the way teach children. In fact, it describes a lot of Montessori practitioners have been doing fits in well with the philosophy and teaching. challenge for Meon Springs is that, from 2010, the Government has said that all three year olds should have up to fifteen hours per week free nursery education, but the money the Government will provide to do this means that the nursery would not be able to run as it does at present, as the new finance works only on minimum staff with no extra curricular activities such as ballet, etc. Ways around the new funding structure are being investigated and it is hoped that Meon Springs will be able to continue to offer the high standard of care for which it is renowned.



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The philosophy of the nursery is principally that every child is an individual and should be allowed to develop at their own pace, in a totally child led- environment. Free choice is the key principle of the Montessori environment, and the child will choose to do certain activities only when they are ready. Meon Springs Montessori is passionate about being inclusive and welcomes any child. With this in mind free places are offered to children from the Bramdean and Hinton Ampner community who are unable to pay the full fee each term.

Independence is a key concept, although teachers are there to assist and support the child's learning as well as introduce them to new ideas. Maria Montessori believed children have a certain window of opportunity, called sensitive periods, where they are ready to learn certain things their developmental stage. It is the teachers' Springs to recognize and help the children of these periods of time. The environment depending on job at Meon make the most that is set up in



Bramdean Village Hall is very ordered and as beautiful as possible, with flowers and plants that the children look after. This structure enables the children to explore each area effectively and productively. External teachers come in to teach ballet, music, Playball, French, cookery and give an introduction to classical music; this enhances the children's own learning and provides an exciting and stimulating programme.

A mother went into Meon Springs and said that one Sunday she had been cooking the lunch at home whilst Radio 3 was playing. Vivaldi came on, and her son started going around the kitchen and sitting room putting things away. When she questioned him about why he was doing this he said, 'But this is the tidy up music from nursery, Mummy, so I must put everything away!' Needless to say she was delighted!



Teachers from the local schools often say how much they enjoy having the children who come up from Meon Springs because they have learnt to be independent thinkers and do things without being asked. An example of this was when a teacher was called out of the room for a moment to talk to the headmistress. All the Meon Springs children, instead of sitting doing nothing, or just chatting, got up and took out puzzles and other activities, carried them back to their tables and started working! The teacher was very impressed when she went back into the classroom!

Wildflowers– A Forest School in Brockwood

Children aged three, four and five are welcome to join Wildflowers, including those with special needs provided that their requirements for support can be met. About ten children attend per day, working with two or three adults.

The children and staff meet by the renovated barn, adjacent to 'The Granary' at Brockwood Park, in the morning then go to nearby woods and fields. Mid-morning the children break for a snack and story.

Having been outside for three hours, the children go indoors for a lie-down rest. A hot home-cooked meal is shared, while learning to enjoy healthy food and practise social skills.

In the afternoon, the children undertake an adult-initiated activity, indoors or outdoors.



'Wildflowers' educational practice is based on the understanding that:

- **children have an innate motivation to learn which can be nurtured by the right educational approach**
- **play is a key way in which children learn with enjoyment and challenge**
- **experiences in nature are vital for healthy childhood development**

The children's learning experiences outdoors are spontaneous responses to the season, the weather, their discoveries and interests.

Indoors and in the garden, activities are provided in which the children express their creativity, such as drawing and painting; making collages; modelling and constructing; and making and moving to music.

A sense of care and responsibility is fostered in the kindergarten through adults and children working together. Each term a visitor from another part of the world shares their culture and language with the children.

Information taken from website