



“Things I shall remember”

By a Leaving Prefect 1927

Read by Felicity Jones, LVI



What is it that brings Old Girls back, sometimes after years away from school, when everyone they remember has left, when the buildings have altered beyond knowledge? Above all, and this is the key to the whole mystery of what it feels like to be an old girl, what do they talk about when one Calne Girl meets another? For until one has tried it, it is impossible to say what it feels like to be an old girl. The conversation of those who come down for the weekends during term is sometimes a guide to what other people remember. But only time will show us what sticks hardest in the memory. There are always certain things, crises as it were, which no one ever really forgets. A “pointed” sermon in Chapel on Sunday evening, a really devastating row in Mark Reading – people remember these if they have had anything to do with them.

Then there are stories, grossly exaggerated as a rule, which are told to everyone who comes down for a weekend, and with much repetition become unforgettable to those who tell them.

Besides these things which are common property for a comparatively large number of people, there are moments which are unforgettable for entirely private reasons. The fight one had to put up not to show jealous disappointment at being turned out of a school team (do boys have those unsportsmanlike feelings, I wonder, or are they the heritage of Eve?) or the intense bitterness of finding oneself unequal to the occasion when the school talks in the dining room before Grace. One does not easily forget these things.

Then there are moments which one never talks about, but hopes never to forget, and things too – the Blue Chapel which I knew for five years will not be forgotten because it is to be cream and oak-panelled. Even the doors, whose square of coloured glass could be rearranged so satisfactorily by looking at them on Wednesday mornings, will be remembered on equal terms with the oak ones, not for their beauty but for their associations.

It is little things full of memories that one remembers. That is one reason why improvements which do away with grievances are sometimes a grievance themselves.

I suppose it is generally realised among old girls that there is a certain St Mary's spirit which becomes entirely a part of everyone who has been here long that it cannot be forgotten and cannot be analysed. It is this which makes it so difficult to express what one feels is going to be remembered. The school life is so much a part of one that it is impossible to pick out prominent things which one feels will never be forgotten.

Chapel, dormitory, form-room, have all become a part of oneself, and although there are attractions about the idea of a larger life, it is more than horrible to have to imagine the school life going on perfectly evenly without one, and one's own place, of which one is more than a little proud, being filled up without the slightest difficulty. This is a humiliating and salutary thought. School affords many parallels to earthly life; but it is quite as difficult to think of leaving as a "gate" to life as to think of death as an entrance to higher things.

[This was an end-of-term essay, never intended for publication, but appropriated by the Editor.]



Memories

By Diana Lee-Browne (née Ford 1953 Leaver)

Read by Eve Jacobs, LV

Looking back on those years 1948-1953 at St Mary's, I can only describe them as 'full on' – life on the run – in fact, I never seemed to walk anywhere, just dashed. In LAX teams, netball teams, tennis teams, end of term concerts, school and form plays, interschool competitions ie French poetry at Bristol – and a swift end at 16, with no A levels to dread. Happy years indeed.

There was not a little misbehaviour. Having to be put in a double room with a prefect to watch over me, dancing naked in the moonlight under the tree at St C's, climbing down a drainpipe from St P's and sleeping on a warm Rachel tennis court. Getting a friend to cut off my long plaits appearing at breakfast with a bob. Letting off a squib into Saturday night dancing in the Hall. Painting the walls of the art room with animals with washable powder paint. Life was fun.

And the legacy? Still leading an active life as a church organists and choir leaders in the morning and singing Evensong with another choir in the evening, and still getting commissions for memorials as a stone letter cutter – St Mary's truly gave me a zest for life!



A leaver's reflection

Lucy Pitman-Wallace (née Pitman, 1984 Leaver)

(This is a lightly shortened version which captures something of the importance of a schoolgirls' experience.)

Read by Elo Ikeneku, UV

As I sleep images flood through my mind. The one that stays with me is of two small figures – one is me and one is Bear. Bear is black and tall. I am small and dressed in grey. The images are from my past, from seven years ago when I arrived here. Fear was all I felt and total loneliness vast as the sea.

Now...the Bear seems smaller, the girl taller, less afraid and somehow more aware. As I listen, I can hear them speak. The girl talks of books, of plays and of work. The Bear... speaks of friends, of joys, of time well spent. The girl complains of essays and proses undone, of LAX lessons, of punishments. Yet the Bear speaks of summer days filled with actors in greens, purple and gold. The Bear reminds her of notes well sung, of poems once read and of ideas caught in inspiration. She shouts for freedom from toil, from constraint, from teachers and from childishness...

As the figures disappear over the hill, I see the girl now a woman...Bear is smaller and greyer... We are not changed people; life is the same; it is just our way of looking at it that has changed. Now our solitude is independence. This place has shown us that we can stand alone...I have the freedom I wished for but that is not more important than the experience I had when I was here.



Madhouse

Oliver Radclyffe (formerly Nicola Wainman, 1989 Leaver)

Published in the 1986 School Magazine

Read by Delphina Philipps, MIV

St Mary's is one of the schools,
In which all of the pupils are fools,
They are raucous and mad
And hopelessly bad
And they like to break all of the rules.

Miss Burns, the unfortunate head,
Was heard, I believe, to have said
“This school is so wild
I can’t find one good child,
Very soon I shall end up near dead!”

From the teachers, the point is agreed
“The school is a madhouse indeed” –
A night on the tiles
Is preferred to their files
And ‘O’ Levels are things they don’t need!

But us pupils don’t see why we should
Be angelic, even if we could
You have to agree
How boring we’d be
If we were so delightfully good!