

HEATHFIELD SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

My name is Brenda Lilian Smith (formerly Brenda Lilian Winch) and I attended Heathfield School for Girls in College Road, Harrow from September 1942 to July 1946. I started in Form 3a (I think Miss Ramsey was the Form Mistress) and left after taking the School Certificate in Upper Va.

Up to beginning my schooling at Heathfield I had been to a number of different addresses and schools, mainly because of my mother's desire to keep me away from the worst of the bombings during WWII. Each school had different teaching methods and when I settled in at Heathfield it was so refreshing to receive steady consistent teaching. My years there were very happy!

At this point I have to admit that I am not on line, but one of our daughters has been researching our ancestry and has been very interested in my schooldays. Consequently she has downloaded information about Heathfield from the Internet. She has kindly offered to pass on some of my memories, so here goes:-

I remember many of the teaching staff shown on the list and on the page of photographs (bottom right) the PE Teacher is Miss M. Buchan and she taught me P.E. and Games all my time there.

I can remember the names of many of my classmates:-

The two girls who were always at the top of the class were Margaret Davies and Julie Brown. Next came Cynthia Algrain, who was a special friend of mine, and I think I was about fourth. I can remember that as we approached the School Certificate Examination time Miss Norris called the four of us in and explained how important this was and that all four of us stood a very good chance of winning the School Scholarship, which would mean free tuition throughout the 6th Form. I knew that I was not really in the running academically and in any case I also knew that I would have to leave that year because my parents needed me to go to work. Needless to say, it was one of the top two I mentioned who did win it, although I cannot remember which.

Another particular friend of mine was Doreen Francis who lived at Stanmore. Others were Elaine Lyons (known as Lay-Lay to her family); Eileen Grieve; Angela Grocott; Pamela Hewitt and Renate Hornung. There was also Paula Thompson who lived at Pinner and on one occasion we went paddling together in the River Pinn. The only friend with whom I actually kept in touch for many years was Pat Jones (who had a younger sister, Colleen, who also went to Heathfield, and a small brother, Alan). I knew her as Pattie and she later went to Australia to work. When she returned she married and became Pattie Killen. We still kept in touch for a while and I know she had a little boy, but when we left the South of England, because of my husband's work, and came North first of all to Cheshire and now to Derbyshire, we finally stopped communicating.

I know I am on that 1946 photograph, but not having seen the full size version recently I have not been able to pinpoint exactly where. My parents did buy a copy originally and had it framed and it was on the wall in our home for many years, but as my mother neared the end of her life she downsized her accommodation considerably and the photograph must have been lost. It would be lovely to be able to obtain a further copy.

I remember the school uniform supplier, Somertons, which was a few doors away from the school on the corner of College Road and Gayton(?) Road. Because of clothes rationing the school uniform rules were slightly relaxed in as much as we could wear second-hand uniform as long as it was within the school colours. Hats were a very obligatory part of our uniform – velour in winter

and panama in summer. I think most of us did not feel they enhanced our appearance, but we learned that if we put a fold along the back, so that the hats sat on the back of our heads, we felt very presentable, particularly when walking up and down outside the boys' school.

I took extra elocution lessons part way through my time at Heathfield, although I cannot remember the name of the teacher. I enjoyed these and learning the poems. We held an Open Day on a Saturday one year and the Elocution Class was required to learn and recite certain poems in unison for the benefit of the parents. It was a boiling hot day and we were in the Library with all the windows open. I still cannot remember the name or writer of one of the poems, but it had a line which read "O Hark! O Hear! How thin and clear, and thinner clearer ? growing...." We had got as far as the "O Hark! O Hear!" part when a loudspeaker from a van below on College Road shouted "VOTE LABOUR....." We had to keep straight faces and carry on, but it made the parents titter.

When once the war ended the Harrow Outdoor Swimming Pool reopened and swimming lessons started for the School. This meant a 20 minute walk to the Swimming Pool; getting changed in draughty open air cubicles; 20 minutes in the pool; changing back into clothes and another 20 minute walk back to school. This was one part of school life I did not mind giving up. We had similar walks for a games lesson – both tennis and lacrosse. I have to admit that I was not greatly skilled at sports!

Wartime austerity meant that photography was not a great priority, but I have managed to find one photograph which must have been taken at a party of one of the girls. Those on the photo are from left to right:-

Pamela Hewitt, Cynthia Algrain, me, Angela Grocott and Renate Hornung.

We look fairly grown up there, so I think it must have been taken near the end of my Heathfield days.

When I left school I worked in a Physiology Laboratory at a London University and tried to gain a BSc Degree at evening classes. Having only studied Biology at Heathfield I was hopeless at Chemistry and Physics, so after a while I gave up and changed to an office job (which was much better paid) and studied shorthand, typing and office skills. I became a Legal Secretary and did this work until I was able to stay at home and become a full time mother.

I married in 1956 and soon after that we moved to a small, basic bungalow in Wickford, Essex. Cupboard space in the bungalow was scarce and so all my memorabilia from Heathfield, such as all the School Magazines, my School Certificate and other Certificates of achievement which I had treasured after leaving school, were stored in an outside cupboard. Sadly, they all got damp and mouldy and had to be thrown away. At the time I was so enthralled with my new life as a housewife with my very own home that this did not upset me too much, but I am very sorry now not to be able to look through these and bring back memories.

We went on to have four children – three girls and one boy. Our son lives in Brussels, but our three daughters and their families live within a short distance of us and we now have grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Finally, as part of the information our daughter downloaded there are pictures of the present Heathfield building with swimming pool and computer rooms etc. I must say how pleased I am to

see that the School is still in existence and has progressed so amazingly, but I also have to say that back in 1942 I was a very timid child (partly through air raids and the many uncertainties there were in our lives) that to be confronted with such a grand building and so many facilities would have proved very daunting. Heathfield, as it was in my time, was just the best place for me to spend those formative years and I am so grateful to all the staff who taught me and to all the friends I made, even though I cannot remember all their names.

Dated October 2011