

# **A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST**



## **ONE HUNDRED YEARS AT THE SACRED HEART: A BRIEF HISTORY**



**A. HEHIR  
2007**



## **Forward**

As the title indicates, this brief history aims to provide a flavour of life at The Sacred Heart during its first hundred years. It makes no claims to be a comprehensive history. The sources used to write this account are indicated at the end. In fact, primary sources were in short supply. I would like to thank the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions in Sturry, Kent, for their assistance. Sister Anne Collette, the Headteacher from 1976 to 1991, also kindly agreed to be interviewed. Bob Thompson, the local historian at the Civic Centre, speeded up my research by pointing me in the direction of useful newspaper accounts. I would also like to thank all those past pupils who returned our questionnaires as well as those who agreed to be interviewed. Finally, I must mention Lynn Lewis, PA to Mary Waplington, who willingly compiled this with me, whilst juggling a huge workload.

A. Hehir, 2007

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## **Introduction**

An article entitled “The Foundations of Life” in the “Town and Country News” edition of July 1934 opined:

“This world of ours becomes a more difficult place in which to live every day ..... Consequently a tremendous responsibility rests on those whose duty it is to prepare the men and women of tomorrow for their future lives. Where the education of girls is concerned the responsibility is particularly great and the task particularly difficult.....”

To ensure the best education possible, therefore, a Catholic convent education was recommended as it specialised in “developing the mental abilities of its scholars while moulding their characters in the best possible manner ..... A typical example of such a school is afforded by the Sacred Heart High School at High Street, Wealdstone, Harrow. It has been established since 1907 and since 1920 has been conducted by the sisters of Notre Dame des Missions .....

## **Beginnings**

Little is known about the founders of this girls high school in Wealdstone, the Sisters of St Chretienne. They had fled from religious persecution in Lorraine, but when this subsided in 1920, they returned to their homeland, having secured the future of the school. In September 1920, nine sisters of Our Lady of the Missions arrived at Wealdstone to take over the running of the school.

This school was situated in a small house known as Elfordleigh, on High Street, Wealdstone, and when it opened on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1920, it received 80 pupils on the first day. Indeed, the demand for places was so insistent that the premises next door to Elfordleigh had to be obtained within two months of opening. Simultaneously, the St. Joseph's Elementary School was started in the old Wealdstone parish hall, and the Sisters also taught there.

The sisters were delighted in October 1921 to obtain a field at the back of the convent: “We thank God, through the intercession of good St. Joseph for this, ..... it is badly needed for the extension of the High School and for building purposes.....” By 1922, both schools were firmly established, the Sacred Heart High School having 123 pupils and St. Joseph's 44.

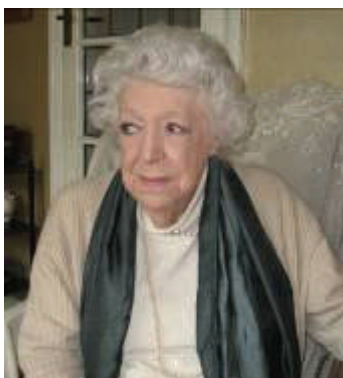
## A 1920s Education



**The Sacred Heart High School in the 1920s**

Wealdstone in the 1920s is described thus in “A Seed Grew”:

“.....a brook ran its babbling course past the convent, and by the principal street. There, too, hawthorn hedges, in the fragrant pink and white of May blossoms, shed their delicate petals like a profusion of confetti. With few streets and houses with rustic bridge over rills ..... Wealdstone presented a pretty rural scene”.



***Mrs Myra Elliot-Smith,  
a pupil at The Sacred  
Heart in the 1920s***

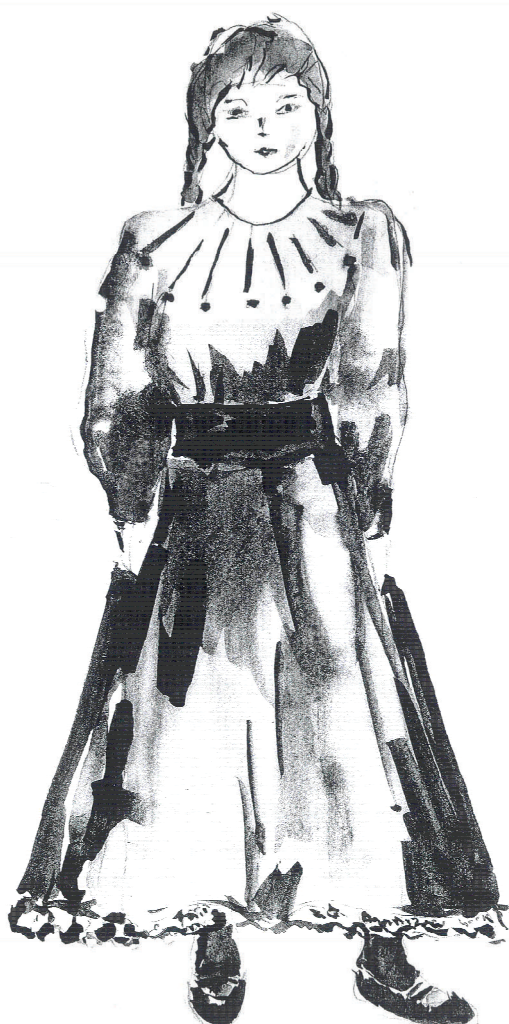
Mrs Elliot-Smith, now resident in Kenton, a boarder at the Sacred Heart School in the 1920s recalls the rural andscape vividly. Her home was in Brondesbury, and boarding at Wealdstone was the modern day equivalent of departing for the countryside. Kenton as she puts it, “was full of sheep”.

She remembers her school days with affection, maintaining that although she did not do very well at school, the nuns instilled in her a “love of learning” which has served her well throughout her life. The teaching in general was not remarkable, indeed much of it was “pretty bad”. Nevertheless there were exceptions. Mother Mary St. Helier was a brilliant Music teacher, and English was a favourite subject, aided by the beautiful voice of Sister Mary St Ethelburga, who was the daughter of a well known actor. The teaching



of history, she thinks, is best forgotten, being “totally expurgated”. Henry VIII, for example, was portrayed as a “dreadful monster” while Elizabeth I was unremarkable! Maths was loathed by Mrs Elliot-Smith, known as Myra Tye Keyte in her schooldays, but P.E. was “brilliant”. The girls did all sorts of things ... including fencing. From her account, the nuns were definitely cultivating a sense of moral purpose in their students. The need for personal discipline and integrity was deemed paramount and was instilled through example. Discipline was firm but gentle: “people didn’t shout”. Yet “no nonsense” was tolerated. Mrs Elliot-Smith

was able to recall the immediate expulsion of a girl who made the mistake of having an ink fight in a new classroom which had been painted a beautiful shade of duck egg blue.



***Artist's Impression of 1920s Uniform***  
(Illustrated by Mrs Jane Ryan)

Interestingly, she maintains that the Sisters of St. Chretienne left their mark in that a considerable French influence pervaded everyday life. Le Goûter (black chocolate and bread) was served at teatime instead of tea and snacks and the uniform was very chic. Girls wore a navy wool dress with a round neck and a pleated yoke, decorated with French knots. A further dash of style was added by a navy sash, bishop sleeves and white, hand crocheted socks. Alpaca substituted for wool in the summer. Blazers were purchased from the best tailor in Harrow, the badge being hand-embroidered. The inevitable Panama hat was worn in Summer, replaced by a felt beret in winter, which the girls had great fun turning into “wonderful, weird shapes”. Subversion of uniform is therefore nothing new.

In 1926 the Board of Education declared in ‘The Education of the Adolescent’ “On efficient care and management of the home depend the health, happiness and prosperity of the nation”. The housewife was the key figure targeted to provided

‘homes fit for heroes’ after the First World War and most women did not challenge this assumption. The novelist Rose Macaulay’s plea of 1923 “Let the house or flat go unkept ..... At the worst, a house unkept cannot be so distressing as a life unlivd .....” largely fell on deaf ears. Mrs Elliot-Smith confirms that few girls in the 1920s had expectations of education leading to fruitful careers. “One’s parents didn’t expect any high fliers”. She left school sometime in her teens to look after a sick uncle. Amusingly, she still recalls an adage of the nuns: “You don’t just open doors, you make an entrance so that your husbands will be proud of you”. The Sacred Heart School was therefore typical of most schools in the 1920s, in its expectation that women’s primary role was to be in the private sphere – as wives and mothers.

## 1930s and 1940s



***Kindergarten, 1930s***

By 1930 the school had acquired new grounds and in 1931 the Convent was able for the first time to give its annual Drill display in its own grounds. An account of the event appeared in the 'Harrow Observer' which remarked upon the "splendid specimens of young childhood and girlhood assembled". Drill was a key event in the school calendar throughout the 1930s and early 1940s; the physical training and dancing display of 1942, for example, was attended by over 1000 people. That physical fitness was a priority is unsurprising, given that there was an epidemic of measles in the school in 1932 and a severe influenza outbreak in the same year, and again in 1933.



***The Older Girls'  
Dormitory,  
1938***





***Photo: Drill, 1930s***

After the First World War, the general financial poverty of Catholic schools was well known. Garden fetes and charity fairs thus became a feature of convent life, to supplement “Reverend Mother’s lean purse”. Money was saved to provide for new cloakrooms in 1938, but the outbreak of war in 1939 meant that the building plans were abandoned. The school log book recalls “on again went the old roof and down went the hearts”.

During the war the sisters tried to provide an atmosphere of normality in an increasingly fraught situation. Life on the home front entailed the well known trials of rationing, the blackout and fluctuating school numbers as children were evacuated to the countryside by worried parents. The threat of bombing was ever present from 1940 onwards, and in 1944 several convent windows were shattered. Fortunately no fatalities occurred. Sheila Ferris, now a 71 year old resident of Hatch End, recalls growing up in Stanmore and attending the Sacred Heart Preparatory School while her father fought in Burma. She told the Harrow Observer how she heard about the end of the war ..... “One Summer holiday I was sitting in the Dominion Theatre in Wealdstone with my school friends watching ‘National Velvet’ ... and half way through, the film was suddenly interrupted with the message ‘The Japanese have surrendered!’ This was a message history and I would never forget”.



The end of the war ushered in a period of change in Britain. There was a feeling that war had to be waged for some good, not simply to prevail against evil. In this spirit, education was reformed, using a tripartite system of grammar, secondary modern and technical schools which were to have “parity of esteem”.

In compliance with the 1944 Education Act, in the following year the all-age school was subdivided into preparatory and grammar schools, the former being situated in two nearby houses. Boarding places were phased out after the war.

In 1946 the High School was inspected and placed upon the list of secondary schools recognised by the Ministry of Education as efficient.



***Music class, 1944-1945***

## **The Early 1950s**

By 1950, when the Sacred Heart High School received an HMI Inspection, the school roll was 281, half of whom were Roman Catholics, aged from 11 to 18. The Sixth Form was very small, containing only eleven girls. The Inspection Report provides invaluable insight into the nature of the school curriculum and teaching and learning at the Sacred Heart in the early 1950s.

## **Curriculum**

The school offered its pupils two courses: the first, a five year course leading to the School Certificate Examination and the second, a general education up to fourteen years of age, followed by a two year commercial course.

The subjects taught were remarkably similar to today's offer, with the exception of Latin and the commercial course: English, history, geography, French, Mathematics, Science, Art, needlework, music and P.E. (R.E. was not examined).

Below are some extracts from the Inspection report which reveal a great deal about how the content and skills taught to pupils have changed over the ensuing half century. In P.E. however, similar constraints still apply!

### ***English***

*The girls can express themselves adequately both in speech and writing ..... and they are able to frame sentences which are grammatically correct ..... Prose authors, apart from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century novelists, are introduced too late. It is not altogether surprising, though it is regrettable, that the four girls who are reading English in the VI form, should be making their very first acquaintance with any poem by John Milton.*

### ***History***

*The scheme is a straightforward chronological one taking English History from 55BC to the age of Gladstone and Disraeli in the first three years. The fourth year is devoted to nineteenth century European History and the fifth to English and Commonwealth History in the period from 1815 – 1931.*

### ***Geography***

*The present course ..... provides a regional study of the British Isles, the southern continents, North America and Europe, while a special study of map reading is made in the fourth year.*

### ***French***

*..... vocabulary, grammar and syntax are very thoroughly taught and dictation and free composition play a valuable part .....*

### ***Mathematics***

*..... Progress would doubtless be accelerated, if the subject matter were made less formal in the early stages. In geometry, for example, the learning of the formal proofs of theorems could well be omitted until later in the course.....*

**Science**

*The Science syllabus below Form VI consists of ..... 'general science' i.e. .... a unified course comprising the elements of biology, chemistry and physics. In form VI the course normally consists of botany, chemistry and zoology; there is no physics at this stage.*

**Art and Needlework**

*It would help forward the work ..... if one room could be set apart for all Art and Needlework classes and if storage of materials could be concentrated within or near to that room.*

**Music**

*The girls ..... sing a few well selected songs with good tone and diction ..... but their repertoire is small ..... and they have acquired little general musical knowledge from their singing .....*

**P.E.**

*The school at present has no playing field ..... the time allowed for Physical Education is below the average in some forms .....*

**Teaching and Learning**

The HMI report acknowledged that the school had some good teachers, who were hard working, loyal and “much concerned with giving the girls a general training in good deportment”. The teaching power of the staff as a whole, however, especially in the delivery of advanced work, was “below average”. Nevertheless, the Inspectors were confident that the staff could make good progress in most academic subjects.

HMI's perceptions about 'good deportment' are mirrored in Avril Collins's amusing memories of her school days. She recalls “wearing a panama hat and soft overshoes to polish the oak floors”. Surprisingly, girls managed to combine work with pleasure in such routine tasks in that “some ..... who were better endowed ..... used to pull in their belts so tight to enhance their attributes”. Girls were forbidden to “go up onto the top deck of the bus – for modesty's sake” and were ordered not to walk more than two abreast in the street. Avril now realises that girls were being trained to be 'young ladies' but at the time she was not consciously aware of such conditioning. Some historians argue that such lessons in femininity could be viewed as preparation for middle class professional destinations.

**Outcomes**

From 1948 – 1950 more than half the leavers obtained clerical posts, while eight became nurses. In common with many schools, therefore, girls pursued traditional 'feminine' careers. Eight girls went on to higher education – none to university. This is not so surprising, however, given that new arrangements orchestrated by the Minister of Labour, George Isaacs, excluded most female school leavers from university education between 1946 and 1949 in order to give priority to ex-servicemen.



## **AIDED STATUS**

In 1953 the sisters applied to the Minister of Education to get aided status for their grammar school. This was refused because of inadequate buildings, so the nuns decided to build a completely new school in the convent garden, at the cost of £130,000. They had to raise this money themselves – a huge task. Their success was commemorated in 1957, when the Archbishop of Westminster, the Most Reverend William Godfrey, blessed the new grammar school in the presence of a large audience. The school was granted aided status on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1957.



*27th June 1957, Harrow Observer*

***ARCHBISHOP IN PROCESSION - Kneeling pupils lined the driveway when the most Rev. William Godfrey, Archbishop of Westminster, performed the ceremony of the blessing of the new Sacred Heart Grammar School, Wealdstone, on Saturday, with his attendant ministers, and led by the Rt. Rev. Monseignor D. Worlock, his secretary, the Archbishop went in procession round the building, sprinkling it with holy water.***



## The 1960s

The rebuilt grammar school was inspected by HM Inspectors from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> March 1962. It is unequivocally clear that the school had made great progress since the Inspection of 1950. The Headteacher, Sister Mary St. Fintan, received praise for her leadership: “..... to firmness in direction she allies a shrewd understanding of the needs of the girls and a keen desire to ensure that in meeting them the school keeps in step with the times. She continues to make a substantial and effective contribution to the teaching of Science.”

### **Science**

The school's performance in Science, particularly at A level, was very impressive at this time: sixteen girls in the Sixth Form were following Advanced level courses, including from one to four Science subjects. This, the inspectors concluded, was “an excellent showing”. Moreover, the school could be proud of the numbers of past students who had pursued scientific careers.

### **English**

English was also a major strength, having been “enlivened” by enthusiastic teaching. Enjoyment was the key to teaching literature and every three weeks a session called “May we recommend” introduced girls to a varied selection of novels. Grammar was woven into lessons and “mechanical English exercises ... (were) noticeably absent”. Girls were encouraged to develop literary style. The school magazine of 1966 provides an illuminating example of this – Jennifer Broomfield's article entitled “The Social Significance of Noddy” certainly aims to ‘strike a pose’.



Illustration:  
School Magazine 1966



**Sr Mary St. Fintan**

*“In writing this exposition upon the social significance of Noddy, the most surprising thing to me is that no-one ..... has ever revolted against him before..... All our present day parkared mods, dashing around on scooters are subconsciously looking for Noddies to bump into, and the mini-skirted girls are searching for Big Ears by whom they can be bumped. What is more, this naked figure has run away from his mother, which easily accounts for the number of troubled adolescents who leave home on a quest for the near-idyllic Toy Town and thus we have the basis of the delinquency problem .....”*

### **The Library**

The school library, run by the Deputy Headmistress, was commended as a place where the visitor could sense “a quiet enthusiasm for books, for reading and for browsing and the girls quite obviously learn ..... to explore the world of books and to derive enjoyment and benefit from them”. Thus were independent learners created!

### **French**

French was a further area of strength. In 1962 there was ‘a wealth of talent’ available for teaching the subject, the senior French Mistress, in particular, was “first rate”. On balance, the staff throughout the school were deemed to be “sound, capable and industrious”, which was praise indeed given the thorough and incisive nature of HMI reports in this period.

### **Curriculum**

At O’ Level almost every girl attempted English Language and Literature, history, geography, French and at least one science paper. About two thirds sat Mathematics and a minority Latin. HMI Inspectors thought that some were feeling pressurised by the heavy examination load, and might benefit from taking fewer subjects. The setting up of an options system was recommended. For entry to the Sixth Form, girls were normally required to have at least five passes at Ordinary Level, and could then follow a course in Arts or Science, or a combination of Arts with Commercial work. Subjects regularly available at A Level were as follows: English, French, Latin, History, Geography, Art, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Botany and Zoology. Interestingly, Science was more popular with students: in 1961 there were 44 entries for Science and Mathematics, compared with 18 in Arts subjects.

### **Outcomes**

There had also been a considerable change in terms of progress to higher education. From 1959 – 1961, fifteen girls went to university to read a variety of subjects, fourteen to technical colleges for courses ranging from commerce to laboratory work, eleven to teacher-training and eleven to nursing. HMI judged this a “very good record”. It is fair to say that in the early 1960s there was little to no discourse about the role of education in creating and maintaining gender roles in society. This was illustrated when the influential school inspector, John Newson, attacked girls’ grammar schools for neglecting domestic skills at the expense of public examinations and training for professional careers.

## **School Life**

The community continued to be an orderly one where the values of personal neatness, courtesy, quietness and industry were effectively promoted, creating “.....pleasant, lively young women”. School dining was orderly and relaxed, due to an efficient system of table service. Most girls ate reasonable amounts of food, but consumption of fresh vegetables and milk was rather low. Nevertheless, standards of dining were judged to be ‘good’.

The school magazine for 1963 contains a diary written by girls, highlighting the key events in the school year 1962 – 1963. Some of these were religious in nature and will be discussed below. Others include a trip to Stratford upon Avon, a visit to City Temple Hall for Sixth form Chemistry students, a debate on World Hunger at Salvatorian, the performance of House Plays .....

“Our Lady’s House ..... won with their “Seven Slaves” but all the plays were very entertaining. Sacred Heart House produced “Twenty Minutes in the Street”, Saint Teresa’s “The Pied Piper” and Saint Paul’s did the “Dyspeptic Ogre”..... “

Sixth formers also attended a conference at Harrow County School for Boys on the Commonwealth and the Common Market.

It can be seen, therefore, that pupils were expected to work hard at the Sacred Heart Grammar School in the 1960s. Pauline Knighton (nee Evans), a pupil from 1961 to 1968, reminisces “..... teenage years are always memorable. There were many anxieties, but I don’t suppose life is any easier for girls today”. School certainly left its mark on her – “sometimes in my dreams, I am in a particular part of the school hall or going up the staircases”.

***Right: Orderly dining (date of photograph unknown, but likely to be c. 1960s)***



***Left: School production of “The Proposal” by Anton Chekov, 1960***

## Catholicity



***The Convent Chapel, 1930s***

In the 1920s Pope Pius XI wrote in his encyclical “The Christian Education of Youth”

“To be (a Catholic School) it is necessary that all the teaching and whole organisation of the school, and its teachers, syllabus and textbooks in every branch, be regulated by the Christian spirit, under the direction and maternal supervision of the church ..... so that Religion may be in very truth the ..... foundation and crown of the youth’s entire training .....”

These words were accepted in their entirety by most Catholic educationalists.

When the Archbishop of Westminster blessed the new Grammar School in 1957, the “Harrow Observer” recorded his words “that it should be the primary objective of every teacher to show their pupils what true beauty was, and to send them forth from the school so shaped and trained that they would be a credit to their family, their nation, and – first of all – to their Maker”. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of parents in achieving such educational, indeed spiritual, goals ..... “Family, school, borough and nation..... were intended ..... in the Divine Plan to work together”.

The sisters, outlining their aims in an article for the paper some ten years earlier, expressed their aims more practically: to give young girls confided to their care the moral and intellectual formation to fit them for their future responsibilities by building their characters on a basis of solid Christian instruction.



How was this “Christian instruction” made manifest in daily life? Avril Collins recounts how daily morning religious assembly brought teachers and pupils together in a moment of prayer and guidance during the 1950s. Girls also attended Mass regularly at St. Joseph’s Church, as well as paying visits to the school chapel. Jackie Hearn (nee Hartney) a pupil from 1975 to 1980 maintains the Catholic ethos “..... was always there. It was the ..... thing I always remember as it was brought into every part of our day – from assembly through to home time. I can remember the nuns especially gently reminding us at every opportunity how our faith affects us and everyone around us at all times. We were always instilled with the belief that our faith would ..... be a great support to us”.

Evidence that the Catholic ethos permeated all aspects of school life can be found in the School Magazine of 1962. ‘The Editor’s challenge’ urged girls to have high standards:

“..... As a young Catholic, you must take your standards from Our Lord. You could ask yourself as you read a book, “Would Jesus read a book like this?” Gazing at a film or T.V. screen you might reflect, “Would I like Our Lady to be sitting next to me now?” Your rule must be: Not good enough for Our Lord,  
Not good enough for me .....



***School Entrance, decorated to celebrate  
the Feast of the Sacred Heart, June 1961***

Advice was also offered about the appropriateness of certain music:

“..... Elvis has changed the lives of many young people ..... they sit around their record player and hear his cheerful voice telling them to “SURRENDER”. THEY HIT YOU HARD ..... Before you know where you are, you are thinking of love in terms of top ten’s ..... there is no doubt that some records are good, wholesome and enjoyable ..... ‘A Deck of Cards is definitely religious .....

The 1963 edition of the magazine contained a school diary for 1962 – 1963 discussed above. Religious activities highlighted were as follows:

**September:** a visit to Coventry Cathedral for the Upper School

**October:** a lecture given by Brother Nassan, a Jesuit, on the Ecumenical Council.  
The entire school watched the opening of the second Vatican Council on television.

**December:** The third form went to the Convent of Jesus and Mary to see a Nativity Play

**January:** Retreats for the fourth, fifth and sixth forms

**May:** a holiday for Ascension Day.  
The Feast of the Queenship of Our Lady: Father Knapp led the school in procession round the playground, saying the rosary and singing hymns

**June:** a holiday for Corpus Christi  
Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus – all took part in a sung Mass in the morning

Some former pupils now express unease with what they perceived to be an excessive amount of religious conditioning. Ann Wilson (nee Halligan) a pupil from 1958 to 1963, says there was “a lot of emphasis on sin and its consequences”. Ursula Evans (nee Hoban), studying in the 1950s, felt that while Catholicism provided a code of morality and conduct, it also “made us frightened to be ourselves”. She was disconcerted when her twin sister, under the guidance of Sister Veronica, thought about becoming a nun. Ursula herself “couldn’t wait to leave to START (her emphasis) my life”. Nevertheless, she went back to school to see Sister Fintan, having graduated from St. Martin’s Art College.

Pupils such as Ann and Ursula were probably in a minority in the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed Ann’s reservations did not mar her enjoyment of school too much .....”I remember my time at Sacred Heart as happy.....”

On the retirement of Sister Anne Collette in 1991, the nuns no longer had any involvement in the day to day running of the school. A shortage of vocations led to this momentous decision. Bernadette Birch (nee Cooper) feels that the first two years of her schooling were “more faith led by Catholicism” than the last. She was a pupil from 1987 to 1991 and believes that the departure of the nuns resulted in this perception.

Most, however, including Diocesan Inspectors, would assert that after the departure of the nuns, the school has continued to ensure that “the Christian Spirit” permeates all aspects of the school’s life.



***Left to right: two Deputies, Ms Sorohan & Mrs Swindells with Cardinal Basil Hume at the time of his visit (1989). On the retirement of Sister Anne Collette in 1991, Pat Swindells became the first lay Headteacher of the Sacred Heart***

## MEMORIES

These Memories illustrate how pupils perceived similar circumstances differently.....

### **Jean Gartshore (nee Sunderland) (1944—1945)**

"We all had to take part in "Hiawatha", the school musical ..... at the Kodak Hall. I felt very uncomfortable ..... The reason I left after only one year was because I felt I was more suited to ..... a practical career. I took the 13+ for Hendon Technical College to study Domestic Science ....."

### **Dr Mary Harvey (1946 - 1954)**

...."The over-riding impression of the school and teachers was that it was based on a strong belief in God, but these beliefs were not forced upon the pupils ..... My memories of details have faded over 50 years. Some friendships made then have still lasted until the present day. I was a shy and not very happy child!

### **Sheila Ferris (1947 – 1952)**



"I remember the death of King George VI. It was my duty that day to ring the handbell to signify the change of lessons ..... I met Sister Julia on the corridor and she had just heard the announcement on the radio. I was probably the first pupil to hear the news".



### **Eileen Morris (1955—1961)**

"Art with Bridget Riley - she is now world famous, but she did tell me off for dropping a jar full of water!"



***Ursula Hoban (left) & her twin sister Patricia, 1958***

### **Ursula Evans (nee Hoban) (1953 – 1958)**

"I have never felt so miserable having to do commercial subjects just because I was not good at Science or Maths ..... Also, to go into this form you were thought of as rather dim. It wasn't a good feeling. My twin sister chose to do commercial subjects as she wished to follow a career in commerce with French – but she was good at Science and Maths .....my life changed under Bridget Riley's teaching. Art was my love and became my career. She helped me and encouraged me to do what I wanted – to go to St. Martin's College of Art in London ....."



**Mary Blackey (nee Halligan) (1955 – 1960)**

“Prior to attending the Sacred Heart Grammar School I was a very nervous, timid student. This all changed and my memories of school were very happy”.



***Sixth Formers by the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the garden, 1948. Angela Twiggs is third from the left.***

**Angela Spencer-Harper (nee Twiggs) (1941 – 1949)**

“..... Life in the convent was very quiet and orderly. We were never allowed to run or shout and I remember once Sister Fintan coming into the classroom and finding me still there after everyone had left. “Angela Twiggs!” she exclaimed, “You’re always last!” I replied “Someone’s got to be last, Sister!” and immediately received a hundred lines ..... “I must not answer back when rebuked”.....”

**Clare Ray (nee Connolly) – (1958 – 1972)**

“We had the first male teacher ..... who taught Music and singing. You can imagine the flap the nuns were in, especially when in the first lesson he walked up and down the rows of girls feeling their diaphragms to check if we were breathing properly!”



**Rosalind Bolton (nee Becker) (1962 -1968)**

“..... the building, the forbidden staircase ..... the photo of the founder of the Order in the dining room, whose eyes “followed” you everywhere ..... I still have friendships made in the years at the Sacred Heart ..... (and) I ..... Have often thought about ..... the effects of convent education .... (they were) ..... mostly happy years .... “

**Photo: Euphrasia Barbier—founder of the Order of Our Lady of the Missions, whose “eyes “followed” you everywhere .....”**

**Marianne Walton (nee Sumner) (1965—1972)**

“I can remember ‘bits’ about every ..... Year .....(of 7) spent at Sacred Heart ..... The uniform was particularly old-fashioned ..... The panama hats were ludicrous and I can remember girls in my class fraying the ends so that they looked like straw west country bumpkin affairs. This was the mid 60s. Mini-skirts and colourful clothes were fashionable. Our school uniform was archaic and most ..... Didn’t want to be seen in it ..... Teaching was all very ‘formal’ .....A school, is a school, is a school and as a child (in those days) you didn’t have any say in deciding which school you went to ..... I was a fairly studious pupil in my years there. I came away with 11 O’levels, 2 A’levels and a competency in shorthand and typing: I can’t complain .....”

**Bogusia Wojchiechowska (1966-1972)**

“..... I always hated having religion thrust down my throat ..... The pressure to conform was great ..... These memories are very strong because ..... I longed for the freedom to express myself and think things through ..... Going to Warwick University was an incredible liberation ..... I could now be myself ..... I was being encouraged to question ..... I remember my mother blaming Warwick for my atheism: Warwick didn’t make me an atheist; it provided the environment within which ..... I .....could ..... be true to myself .....”



**Ann Wilson (nee Halligan) (1958 – 1963)**

“My favourite subjects were Latin, history and Art. I found Virgil interesting. We were a very small class (lots dropped the subject). I enjoyed the political side of history, once we left the Stone Age etc. behind ..... On the whole the teachers were very professional and seemed dedicated to getting the best from their pupils. There were a few exceptions - those who were not naturally sporty were often left out in P.E. and not encouraged to find their strengths in a particular area ..... I remember my time at the Sacred Heart as happy. I cannot recall any bullying amongst pupils.”

***Ann Halligan (front) & classmates, 1957***

**Clare Cronin (1967—1972)**

“Prize for star teacher: Sister Anselma (who became Sister Anne) - she was always very kind to me and was a great Chemistry teacher, plus she took us youth hostelling along with Sister Annunciata (later Sister Olivia); Mrs Zoltowska—made Biology fun, and had an uproarious sense of humour; Miss Fleming ..... inspiring English teacher, (who) told us ghost stories at the end of term. Thanks also to all the people who organised the school plays (Mrs Reese, Mr Oliver et al) - the most fun I ever had in school. We did ‘My Fair Lady’ but I loved watching those done by other classes as well, particularly Jo Jonah. And thanks also to the then sixth formers who ran a drama group after school that we used to go to in the first and second forms.”

**Anne Dewing (nee Bednall)  
(1974 - 1979)**

“My most vivid memories of my school-days are as follows:  
Silver Jubilee celebration—dance, song, open air events  
Inspiring Chemistry teachers  
Feeling very lost in the first few weeks - such a ‘large’ school  
Sports Day at the Roger Bannister sports ground  
Being outside of the ‘in’ crowd, Queen Bee syndrome”

**Judy Breen (nee Wallace)  
(1974 - 1979)**

“I think, overall, the Catholic ethos made the school a very good place to grow up - no bullying, strong morals etc.....

I feel really lucky to have attended such a lovely school, and those years went a long way to shaping my entire life .....—and I’m grateful.”

## **FROM THE 1970S TO THE PRESENT DAY**

In 1976 the redoubtable Sister Mary St. Fintan retired after thirty years of service to the school. Sister Anne Collette succeeded her as Headteacher, and was to preside over momentous changes, most notably the Sacred Heart's change of status from a grammar school to a comprehensive one.

The "parity of esteem" envisaged by the 1944 Education Act was never realised, with secondary modern schools largely being perceived as inferior to the grammar school model. Furthermore, the selection process caused much misery to many pupils and parents when children failed to make the grade and consequently had to attend a secondary modern school. The Newsom Report of 1963, entitled "Half Our Future" highlighted the "unrealised talent" that was being lost as a result of 11+ selection. The Labour government of 1965, therefore, began the process of dismantling the 11+ infrastructure in order to replace it with something different, something that aimed to provide an academic education to all pupils, rather than just the top twenty per cent: the comprehensive school.



There were, and still are, pockets of resistance to this reform. Some clung to their grammar schools, not wishing to lose their focus on a classical academic curriculum, for the brightest pupils. The Sacred Heart and Salvatorian schools initially resisted the call for change, preferring to preserve their very good grammar schools. Ultimately, however, the arguments in favour of comprehensive education prevailed.

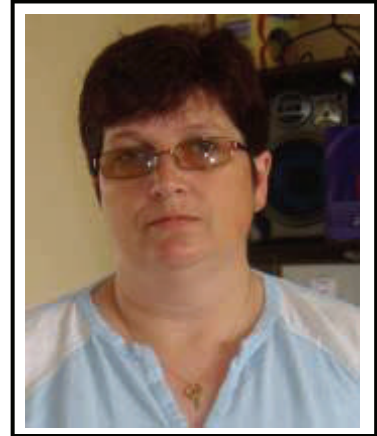
Sister Anne Collette recalls with clarity the problems involved in the transition from a grammar to a comprehensive system. The Local Education Authority was extremely helpful to her in managing this huge reorganisation. The Sacred Heart lost its sixth form, while St Dominic's, hitherto an independent school, was transformed into a sixth form college. Approximately 50 girls from St. Dominic's fourth and fifth form transferred to the Sacred Heart, wearing their own uniform! Furthermore, in 1977 there was no 11+ intake. The primary schools kept their children for another year, while St. Joseph's primary school moved off the site, "slowly" to its new location at Belmont. In 1978 155 twelve year olds were admitted to the new comprehensive school which now had a five form entry instead of the previous two form intake.

In 1978, therefore, half of the school's roll was comprised of newly admitted pupils. A huge increase in staff and a change in the Senior Management structure was needed to cope with the larger school. Some of the grammar school girls found the





transition difficult. Gina Cooper, a pupil from 1976 to 1981, recalls that discipline was not quite so strict after the transition. Sister Anne Collette agrees that some pupils may have felt this to be the case, given the changed roll of the school. In reality however, order prevailed, although in common with many schools, some staff found the shift to comprehensive education difficult. The rigid streaming of the grammar school disappeared to be replaced by a prevalence of mixed ability classes, with some setting in subjects like Mathematics and Science.



### ***Jackie Hearn 1975 & 2007***

Jackie Hearn, a pupil from 1975 to 1980, provides insight into the classroom experience of pupils in this transitional period: “..... I seem to remember most subjects being drilled into us ..... some of the younger teachers did introduce newer techniques and started to make us think more about what we were actually trying to learn.....” On a more prosaic note, she recalls the introduction of the red jumper in the fifth form, on account of the disappearance of the sixth form. She also has an interesting recollection about the coexistence of St. Dominic’s intake with the Sacred Heart girls ..... “We were pretty worried about them ‘taking over’ but as it turned out—we were more like two separate schools in the same building complex for the lesson times ..... We got on with most of the students during breaks etc ..... We even made a few friendships outside of school hours .....”

It is to Sister Anne Collette’s credit that such a transition was managed with sensitivity and aplomb.

The 1970s witnessed a growing feminist critique of school for perpetuating gender constructs of male and female roles. It could be argued that the comprehensive ideal was somewhat undermined by the hidden curriculum which reinforced such stereotypes. Throughout the 1970s there was a national tendency for girls to lean strongly towards the arts, as opposed to the male dominated areas of maths and science. This had huge implications for careers choices and led to initiatives such as Girls into Science and Technology (GIST) in the 1980s. It is fair to say that in our post-feminist era, such gender based choices still give us cause for concern. Vocational courses, for example, often divide students along gender lines and an analysis of sixth form choices at St. Dominic’s made by girls from The Sacred Heart Language College in 2005—2007 reveals a relatively limited uptake of the traditional sciences and maths, although Psychology is very popular. Sister Mary Fintan would not be pleased!

As well as an enlarged school roll, Sister Anne Collette’s period of headship witnessed the admittance of children from African-Caribbean backgrounds. A school photograph of 1970 shows the intake to be overwhelmingly white, and this

did not change substantially until the mid 1980s. Rose-Marie Sorohan was appointed as Deputy Head in April 1988, having previously worked for the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). She noted an immediate difference at the Sacred Heart: multiculturalism had made no inroads into the predominantly Anglo-centric, Christian curriculum. She herself was invited on to a Working Party in



**Mary Waplington**  
**Headteacher 1997 - 2007**

Harrow in the Spring of 1989 to draw up an Equal Opportunities Policy for all Harrow schools which precipitated wide ranging reforms. At the Sacred Heart, change was fuelled by a growing awareness amongst teachers, and crucially by pupils themselves, that black girls wanted their cultures celebrated. In the late 1990s and early 21st Century, St. Patrick's Day celebrations have happily coexisted alongside African and Indian fashion shows. Far more importantly, however, the curriculum has an internationalist dimension across most subjects—particularly English Literature, the humanities and Expressive Arts—that was not there in the 1980s.

The mid to late 1990s saw something of a downturn in the school's fortunes. An unfavourable OFSTED report in 1994 did nothing to improve the school's falling roll situation. Although the school had many good teachers, it was in trouble. In 1997, a new headteacher, Mary Waplington, was appointed, the first step in the reversal of the school's declining fortunes. Key staffing changes, and an insistence on high standards in both curriculum delivery and school organisation affected a transformation, noted by OFSTED in 1999. The Headteacher's vision and leadership was judged 'outstanding' and teaching was deemed good overall, with 60% being good or very good.

Such success soon resulted, once more, in an oversubscribed school. The period from 1999—2004 was one of considerable, measurable, progress. The Governing Body broke with Harrow's admissions policy to enrol students at the age of eleven, a logical move, given the divide between the Key Stage two and Key Stage three curriculum at this very age. The school was granted specialist college status as a Language College in 2003 and in the same year the new Expressive Arts and Technology block was fully opened. A sustained period of improvement in GCSE results between 2001—2004 resulted in The Sacred Heart Language College's

## **CONCLUSION**

In 'A Century of Women' (1997), the historian Sheila Rowbotham comments that ...."women and men grew up in one world and have found themselves in another as the century draws to a close....."

This is certainly true in some ways with regard to education. Girls now regularly outperform boys in all major examination, although it should be remembered that social class still remains a greater determinant of social outcomes than does gender. Yet, interestingly, recent research has concluded that girls' ideal learning environment is one in which the teacher explains ideas in a clear and animated way, and interacts with pupils in an atmosphere of mutual respect. This conclusion asserts that girls learn best when a traditional classroom model pertains, a model that was evoked in the HMI report on the Sacred Heart Grammar School of 1962, and again in OFSTED reports of 1996 and 2005. Academic standards at the Sacred Heart may have waxed and waned between 1907 and 2007, but at their best they have been laudable.

An advertisement for The Sacred Heart Day and Boarding School for Young Ladies in 1938 promised that as well as building up their character 'on a basis of solid Christian education', the girls would be "surrounded by refining influence". This brief history has illustrated how these characteristics have remained a constant in the Catholic education offered at The Sacred Heart over one hundred years. That "refining influence" faces more challenges in the 21st century is undoubtedly the case, in a less deferential society. A "Guardian" article in 2004, entitled "Ladettes rip up the envelope", highlighted the growing trend for some teenage girls to adopt a laddish culture. Furthermore, aspects such as the growth of cyberbullying outside school hours poses problems for teachers in all schools, including ours, undreamt of even ten years ago. Yet teachers should avoid excessive pessimism as there have been repeated scare stories about teenage behaviour at different times in the 20th century.

Catholicism has shaped the ethos of the school throughout its entire history and continues to do so today. The increasing secularisation of society, however, presents pupils with lifestyle options that frequently contradict Catholic teachings. Some argue that this weakens pupils' faith, while others contend that such challenges can serve to strengthen their belief systems. A survey of Year 11 pupils in 2005 indicated that an overwhelming number of the girls continue to believe in the importance of faith based education, and in the school's centenary year a whole school Mission will provide a focus for spiritual enrichment.

In conclusion, it is fair to assert that one of the school's stated aims—to produce "committed young adults" - remains both valid and important in today's society, driven as it is by consumerism and an increasing devotion to the cult of celebrity status.

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