Margaret Dora Higginson
1918—2009
Part two

Shared Memories

And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered;
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;

A memoir of the woman we knew as Margaret Dora Higginson, aka Hig, the Hig, Higgy, MDH and eventually, simply Margaret to those of us who were blessed with her lifelong friendship. We hope to publish the "Margaret Memoir" in quarterly instalments beginning in October 2010 through to June 2011.

These pages have been put together by a small team of Old Girls, mostly drawn from her personal papers, some unpublished. There are letters, poems, public speeches, essays and journalism to dip into, all flavoured with her characteristic humour and generosity. And also reminiscences and tributes from those who appreciated her as a person, as much as a teacher who made us the women we are today.

Elaine Lever (nee Kelsey)

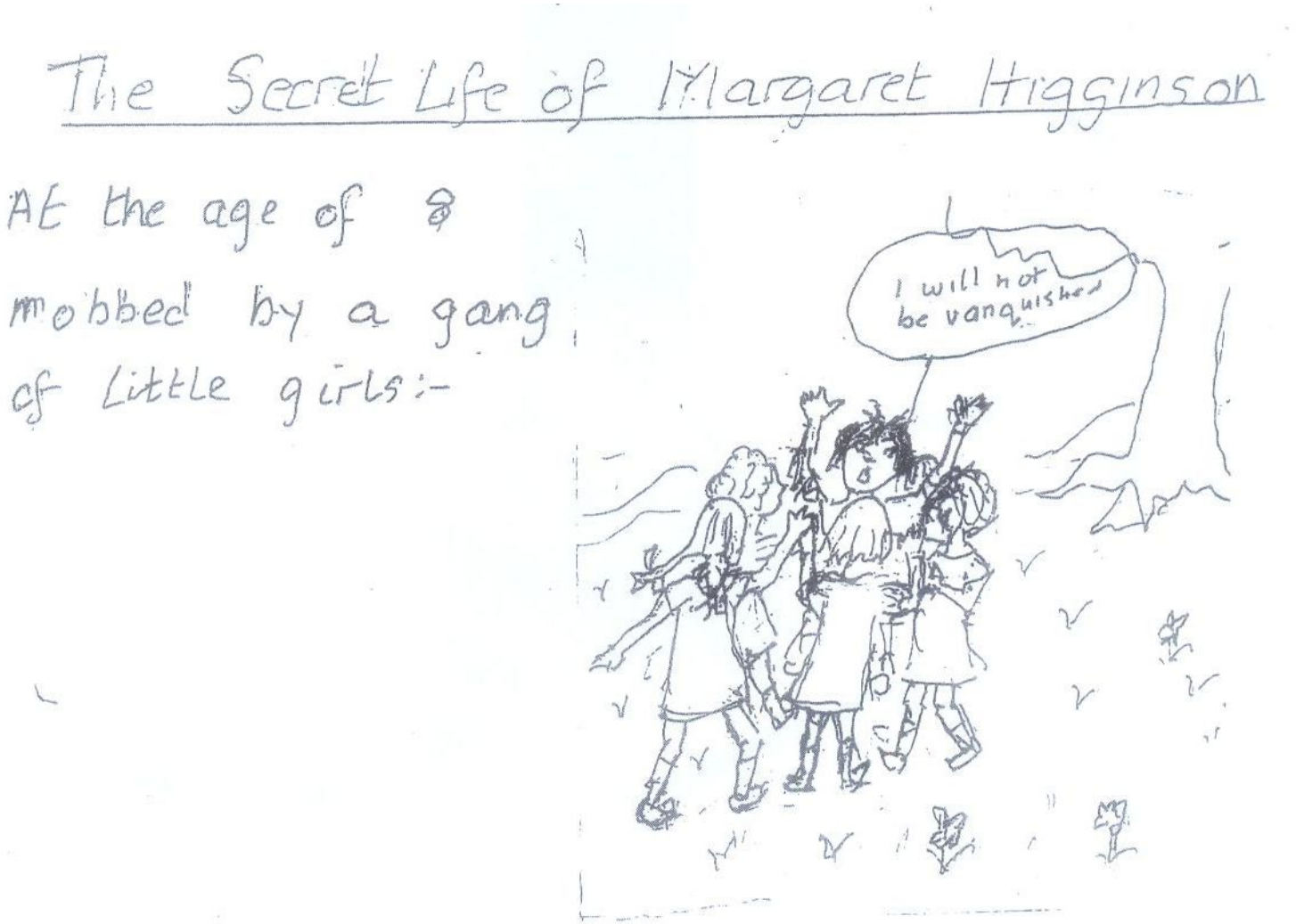
Contents

Cartoon series by Ceridwen Higginson

With characteristic energy and much affection, Ceridwen Higginson – Margaret's dear and lifelong friend, companion at Oxford and cousin by marriage to Basil Higginson- commemorated Margaret's 80th birthday in words and pictures.

Line-drawings are accompanied by witty, apposite captions. The humorous, inventive series of comments is given added interest and appeal with copies of relevant photographs. As well as providing Margaret herself with what must have been considerable amusement and pleasure, this delightful sequence of events from her life compiled by someone who loved her and knew her well presents an insight not only into areas of life that have not been public knowledge but also into a lifelong friendship.

Here are some gems from the hand-written illustrated record. JH



Great Reader :-

Ceridwen communicates her own wit and her good humour in the next comment. In this remark, we are also given a further insight into the close relationship that the two girls enjoyed as they grew up together. The fact that Ceridwen produced the drawings and commentary when she and Margaret were in their eighth decade confirms the quality of the friendship.

Great Shopper and Sharer (with the author) "How many wine gums can you get for 1d.?"

Great Patriot:-

"And Crispin Crispian shall neer go by
From this day to the ending of the we
But we in it shall be remembered,
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers"

The lines quoted by Ceridwen are from Shakespeare's "Henry V". She uses these words because the famous Battle of Agincourt so memorably noted in the play was fought on St Crispin's Day, October 25th, Margaret's birthday - a fitting birthday for one so immersed in the study of English literature

PRIZE PUPIL –

– BUT

cerebral weight inhibits

BOUNCE.

Great Walker and Talker!–

School,

The World,

Life, et al

were discussed.

Oxford, and World War Two

Margaret and Ceridwen sat the Oxford Entrance exam. together, fortified by hot water bottles and tea, provided by the kind Miss Lees. Both were successful and both gained a place at Somerville College. These were halcyon days and towards the end of her life Margaret described her time at Oxford as “lovely”, “marvellous”, “wonderful”. She particularly enjoyed the companionship and warmth at Somerville and especially being a part of a “lovely group of friends”, who used to read Shakespeare aloud in their dressing-gowns. “The Somerville spirit brought us together.” One of this group was Winifred Brown who remained a lifelong friend and with whom Margaret was still in contact in her 91st year. Winifred became a Unitarian minister and is still staunchly independent. Independence was also something Margaret greatly relished when she moved from home to Oxford.

Margaret and friends at Somerville College

The time that Margaret and Ceridwen spent at Oxford is chronicled with photographs. This one shows Margaret with Oxford friends and contemporaries sitting by a blazing fire, Margaret on the right-hand side of the fireplace in a chair, others seated or kneeling on the floor. It evokes nostalgia in any Bolton School Old Girl who has ever visited 63, Albert Road West – particularly at Christmas time when one gathered round the fire, Margaret in her blue armchair – for carols, cocoa, home-made Turkish Delight and talk.

“She described Somerville as ‘plain living and high thinking’”

She was also deeply appreciative of the tuition she received there and was full of admiration for their tutor Mary Lascelles, who was a “born aristocrat” and “Jane Austen come to life”. One (including Margaret) was always in awe of Miss Lascelles and her formidable reputation is underlined in an obituary of 1995 which Margaret had kept amongst her papers. It is worth catching the flavour of this obituary, since it is exactly how Margaret described her.

“The mixture of awe and anxiety that she inspired remained undiminished even once it was intimated that a pupil might call her by her Christian name. Invitations to tea (at precisely half-past four) in her north Oxford house were received with greater alarm than supervision sessions because they meant more opportunities for blunders – not only the fear of solecism but of spilling jam on the white tablecloth (and it always did spill), or drinking one’s tea too quickly, or the awkward question coming just as the scone had been bitten into: “Do tell me, which do you say, relatives or relations?”

The Library at Somerville (top) and Darbyshire Quadrangle (bottom)

Margaret and Ceridwen alone

However there were other distractions to be found in Oxford. Very soon after Margaret's arrival at Somerville a message came to say that a Mr Higginson was waiting for her downstairs. (No question of gentlemen visiting female students' rooms in those days!) Margaret apparently felt her heart sink, since her first thought was: "Surely my father hasn't followed me to Oxford.!!" She went downstairs with many misgivings. The visitor was not, however, her father, but her cousin Basil Higginson, from Preston, who was a student at Merton College. Margaret had not seen her cousin since childhood so they were virtual strangers. They didn't even speak the same language – she reported that he had a northern accent, little guessing that her ear would be similarly assailed many times in future years!

There is evidence of cycling in the country as well as country dancing, which took place during the Oxford days. Ceridwen recalls, with her nice sense of humour, that Margaret also makes friends with her cousin from that *"reprehensible, socialist, Republican family in Preston.."*

Margaret and friends at Somerville

Basil's arrival at Somerville was in fact auspicious. It was not long before Margaret introduced her cousin to her best friend Ceridwen and the inevitable happened – Basil and Ceridwen fell in love. Ceridwen's health at this point was not good and daily life was a struggle. The arrival of Basil in the scene was a turning-point and according to Margaret "Ceridwen came to life. It was like a flower reviving in water." Margaret spoke with great remembered delight of their wedding and her closeness to the family never diminished. She became godmother to their first child, Rosser and took a keen interest in the lives of all the children, when Rosser was followed by Jane and Deborah.

Margaret's time at Oxford was not entirely devoid of male company and often a friend of Basil would make up a foursome. But of course study was the main order of the day and Margaret was rewarded by gaining a First Class degree in English. She then spent a year in the Education Department and here too covered herself in glory, by obtaining Distinction in the course. EP

Mary Lascelles

Margaret enjoyed her "magical years" at wartime Oxford, and fully appreciated the unusual and distinguished mind of her tutor, Mary Madge Lascelles, later Vice-Principal of Somerville College, and at that time thirteenth in succession to the throne of England. An awe-inspiring elegant figure with raven-black hair and piercing blue eyes, she had been among the first Jane Austen scholars of the 20th C to find beneath the surface gloss a deeper understanding of human nature. She had also focused critical attention on what would become known as Shakespeare's "problem plays" with a ground-breaking study of "Measure for Measure." When asked why she chose that particular play, she replied "because I hated it so much."

Margaret always spoke of her with an affectionate respect that indicates real intellectual and emotional rapport. Those students who graduated with a First as Margaret did were usually encouraged by their tutors to stay on to do research for a Doctorate. Did the question arise for her? If it did, we know the answer; she chose the DipEd rather than the DLitt, and set her feet firmly on the path to teaching. Perhaps seclusion in the ivory towers of Oxford never appealed to one of such energetic compassion, especially at a time of national emergency.

"Formidably well-read, and not only in her own field of literature"

Had she chosen the path of scholarship, she could certainly have made her mark, for
Margaret personified what Dryden said of Shakespeare: she had “the most capacious soul.” She saw reading as an interactive experience demanding concentration and commitment before informed comment. She expected the same of her students, and thought me quite capable of reading and reviewing Toynbee’s mammoth “Study of History” in a weekend.

Here is part of a TES review of “Milton Criticism: Selections from Four Centuries” edited by James Thorpe, which she may have written, though we cannot access their archive to be sure. In style it resembles her all-embracing approach and certainly suggests her breadth of scholarship. The scope and scale of the book and its usefulness to students are praised and some of its omissions are noted..
“..it concentrates attention too exclusively on ‘Paradise Lost.’ Little space is given to the works which truly reveal Milton as a man—the sonnets, ‘Samson’, and above all, the prose. One could read this book through without suspecting that this austere stylist was also the author of prose torrential and headstrong, as unlike as possible to his strictly-disciplined verse…(This Satanism is still disastrously reflected in our syllabuses with their emphasis on Books I and II at the expense of Milton’s grand design.)”

There is a sharp comment on the inability of even the most eminent of Victorian critics such as Matthew Arnold, to look below the surface,
“.. commending Milton as a bulwark against ‘the flood of Anglo-Saxon commonness.’ Blandly discounting the obsolete content of ‘Paradise Lost’, he sees ‘the power of poetry’ residing in the ‘refining and elevation wrought in us by the high and rare excellence of the great style’ of which Milton is supreme exponent. So one might praise the façade of a great cathedral behind which lay vacancy. And this about a poet who, in spite of his impersonal manner, wrote beyond all others out of his whole self, who believed that a poet ‘ought himself to be a true poem.’”

A short poem in MS dating from this time and with only three alterations, indicates that Margaret herself was also capable of much more than the delicious pastiches included later. EL

The sum of minutes is too small,

The jealous gold too quickly spent,

And wonder’s gone beyond recall

If time’s the only measurement.

A single moment must suffuse

The swiftly-widening gulf of age,

Or, agonised with joy, we lose

The song-bird with the cage.

Letter to a Friend

A delightful pre-war letter dated 8th January, 1939, and sent from Sutton to a close friend comes across in a lively, engaging way.

There is a fresh, open and warmly affectionate approach to the recipient.

Margaret outlines, with some self-deprecation, the events surrounding her London 'debut in society' in what she refers to as a 'rich week'. Her acute sense of observation of detail delivered in a wry, humorous tone brings to life an evening at 45, Park Lane attended in a borrowed coat (there is no mention of the dress that Margaret wore...). With some exaggeration for comic effect, she relates aspects of the awesome occasion, comments on the waiting footmen, the named dignitaries and 'glassy', 'decorated' environment in which she finds herself.

All this is skilfully drawn together as, for the benefit of the reader's imagination, she identifies herself as the focus of an amusing incident. Having made her entrance, been announced by a flunkey, Margaret finds that in an instant, her 'party bag' flies to the floor, disbursing itself of its contents under the gaze of all present

The nature of the piece and the familiarity of the recipient is such that Margaret reflects on everything: on the amazing environment... on the people around her (including her two friends and fellow party-goers)...

Later in the letter, Margaret refers to her father, 'Daddy', to the political climate, to her cousin Basil's visit and to some of her prospective social events.

The reflection and the commentary are entirely characteristic of Margaret's written style as well as of her own handling of situations and events. So is the ending of the letter: an injunction to the friend to bring back certain items - in quite a peremptory tone!

36, Cavendish Road,
Sutton.
8th Jan:, 1939.

Dear Winifred,

How I wish I had more time to describe this rich week! Oh, what a letter Mme de Sévigné might compose upon it! You will immediately guess that it has been a dissipated one, and so it has. I think I had better state, before I enter on the Social Gossip, that I have made 8 pages of notes on 'Germany Pushes South East' (they took ages), and that I took a life of Swift to the Conference (to the horror of Margaret and Palma) and Collins's poems to the theatre, and that I designed the dragon for my lamp-shade on the back of the Conference Order-paper. If that isn't economy of time, what is? But all said and done my work is woefully behind-hand. And Barbara laments that she only does three hours a day! Three hours of Barbara is worth six of me.

Oh for a Muse to sing my début in Society! (Which was the comic Muse?) I shall certainly never forget it! I have hardly stopped laughing yet. I wish it could have been televised to Nantwich. Now I have roused your curiosity I will begin at the beginning. Well, we set off from Sutton all dressed up, I masquerading in Ruth's fur-coat, but unfortunately spoiling the effect with a pair of shoes under my arm and an umbrella, because Ruth commanded me not to get it wet. However, I found Margaret would no more set foot in a bus than an aeroplane, so in spite of my poverty we drove off from Victoria in a taxi. You can imagine the consequence with which Margaret said '45, Park Lane'. But pride goes before a fall. The driver did not seem impressed; and when we got to Park Lane he couldn't find the house, and said the Dorchester must be built on top of it. After turning round twice in the middle of Park Lane we infuriated Palma and saddened Margaret had to soil their delicate

feet in the puddly road and arrive on foot under the eyes of half a dozen flunkeys. But they really should have put out the awning and the red carpet! Well, we dropped our gear rather ignominiously in a cloakroom and stepped into the vast shining hall. It reminded me of taking a first step on the ice. Everything was very glassy and decorated here and there with enormous tall footmen, very handsome, in evening dress and scarlet waistcoats (just to distinguish them from the guests). We advanced up the broad marble staircase. Half way up Margaret gave a little cry. (Palma was carrying it off like a duchess). I don't know to this moment what had happened but she had a small piece of elastic in her hand and I thought some intolerable disaster was impending. (So it was, but not for her!) However, all seemed well and we reached a magnificent landing surrounded with cabinets full of jade and so on. On our left was the smallish room in which the Reception

was actually held. There weren't, I should think, a hundred people there, but it was bang full, for we were late. At the door stood a magnificent flunkey with a super-Oxford accent to announce us. Miss Burness and Miss Harcourt got safely through Scylla and Charibdis, but just as Miss Higginson stepped forward, wishing she had a prettier name but thinking herself the Duchess of Devonshire at least — I hope you are hard at work imagining this scene of splendour — just like a Puritanian palace on the films you know — what happened? Just at that instant, as though by necromancy, the bead handle of Miss Higginson's party-bag flew to pieces and out on the floor rolled about twenty pennies and halfpennies, two safety-pins and a return ticket to Sutton. Imagine the clatter! Miss Higginson hides her diminished head by grovelling on the marble floor where she is joined by Mrs Tree, her hostess, who was very sweet. (The flunkey's back-bone was quite unbendable!) And thus I made my entrance into Society — right under the eyes, let me add,

of the Oxford group. For two things I have never ceased to be thankful a) that it wasn't Margaret, who would have died on the spot, and b) that it was such a blameless, though proletarian bagful. Supposing it had contained all the elements of an artificial face! And you, my dear Winifred, destined me for a political hostess! I can tell you, someone thought of you even in Park Lane. What an inspiring thought!

When I had once got over the introduction I quite enjoyed myself. Of course most of the company was really quite as unused to Park Lane as I was, though I must say Hugh Fraser went splendidly with the decorations. There were one or two bigwigs there, a Lord and a Cabinet Minister (Oliver Stanley, of whom more anon) But to the chagrin of Margaret and Palma, who expected to pass the evening in elegant conversation, we were shepherded into the private cinema (which reminded me of a pantomime décor) and shown a lot of short films, mostly National Government propaganda ones which have just been made. Strange to say, I was far more impressed than Margaret, that earnest Conservative. I thought they were very naturally and discreetly done. And some of the bits about Slum-clearance and Distressed Areas and so on were very interesting. However this won't interest you. After this we went into yet another room, full of marble swans etc: where we were supplied with food which looked suspiciously like Lyons'. Margaret was still further disappointed by the absence of intoxicating liquor (but I fear this was economy rather than principle.) I devoted myself gallantly but self-righteously to two lost-looking under-dressed girls from Liverpool, who proved quite friendly and knew this Grove, your next-door neighbour — the daughter of their local minister.

I am afraid the saga is almost at an end. I resumed my umbrella and shoes, the badges of the bourgeoisie, and we had a taxi called for us by a footman. I liked the footmen, they weren't a bit obsequious. I expect they thought we were a funny lot anyway. Isn't it sad to

think, at least I thought so on Victoria's grimy platform, that nobody looking at us would know what scenes of grandeur we had figured in? Moral: worldly glory passes etc: Well, it is fun to have been to Park Lane once in a lifetime. But I don't think I could possibly live on Jamille with marble swans and cabinets of jade, not to mention footmen. That house would look terribly old in the morning. It needs crowds of brilliant dresses and flunkeys and lit chandeliers to come to life. It's a fine background. By the way, Basil says young Sassoon is at Merton, and seems to like him very much. I wonder if Siegfried Sassoon is a scion of Park Lane? They are Jews of course. It's nice to think of some Jews being prosperous. We hear there is a family from Vienna in the next road to us. They left in March, and seem to be very rich. The boy has been at Harrow for six years. Now he wants to become a Christian, so we heard of them through the Vicar's sister. She says they are a charming family.

What a sudden change from Park Lane to Vicar's sisters! I am not sure that Thursday wasn't characterised by an even greater event than Wednesday. I made a speech. A real speech, I had to get up to the front and face them. It was pretty awful, even though it was a smallish room. I was trembling like twenty aspens, and then that terrible paralysis of the brain comes over you. I hadn't any notes either. From all this you might conclude I made an impressive oration. I didn't. It was expostulatory, repetitive, and rather pathetic, I should think, and it can't have lasted five minutes. They must have been sorry for me, they gave me quite a hearty clap (led off by the Hon: Hugh, who has kindly instincts). The subject, of course, was the usual vote of confidence in the Government's foreign policy. I am sorry to say it was

rejected by 14 to 10. It wouldn't have been if everyone there could have voted. The best speakers but not the best arguments, I think, were on the winning side. I suppose I was trying to supply a little adverse passion in my usual appeal for thinking of people instead of governments and rather metaphysical axioms of generosity necessarily producing good in the end. But what did make me really rather pleased with myself, was that Oliver Stanley, who had been there all day and spoke at a secret meeting in the evening, but I don't think this is secret, not only referred to a point in my speech but his whole address seemed to me in my conceit a sort of perfect edition of mine, with bits extra of course. Anyway, I felt he was looking at it in the same way. You won't be surprised after this to hear that I was greatly impressed with his sincerity and wisdom, and though he didn't give us grounds for any great specific hope I can see more light than I did before. The moderation and experience and depth of anyone like that (I am sure he is a war-hater) is refreshing after Oxford.

Well, the Conference wasn't entirely between Mr Stanley and me as you might think. Hugh Fraser made a magnificent speech against rich M.P.s. He really seemed to be sincere and didn't overdo the flowers of wit. I was quite startled. That resolution, of course, was passed unanimously; so was one for raising the Old Age Pension — rather foolishly, I thought. It was very sweeping. I didn't go on Friday. Altogether it was, as they say, stimulating. I thought the standard of speaking and self-possession was very high, with notable lapses like me. Margaret's little speech against National Service was mentioned in the Telegraph (Miss Burness, Manchester' — won't she be furious?).

I won't tell you much about the theatre because I hope you will see 'The Corn is Green'. I loved it. I don't know when I have

enjoyed a modern play more. It is lively and serious, and the characters are exquisite. If you do see it you will know why I so like the schoolmistress. Emlyn Williams is absolutely natural. It is rather carefully toned down from the emotional height it seems to be reaching for – Ceridwen thought this was a fault. I don't know. Miss Wood's brother is quite pleasant but I think a bit self-consciously gloomy. He wasn't very responsive, though we did begin talking poetry in the second interval. I daresay longer acquaintance would make him quite confidential.

Basil is here for the week-end from Oxford. Yesterday we had a very lively tea and ping-pong party with Anthony & Ceridwen. And today we are going up to Ceridwen's. They have a rather famous old Welsh minister staying with them, Rhonda Williams, so I hope they miss well. It is almost settled

was about the Lakes, but poor Ruth would prefer Tune to the Spring. Poor blind Basil has been delivering one of his usual lectures to Daddy, this time on Thomas Aquinas. Daddy maliciously draws him on, pretending not to know. Basil can be a pedant. I am sending you one of Daddy's leaflets of reviews. We had an order from the Malay States the other day! Observe the 'News Review' next to the 'Record'! We didn't send them a copy. There has been one really revolting review in the I.C.F. Journal, inspired by Daddy's arch-opponent. It is really personal and vindictive. It ends 'We have heard all Mr Higginson's stuff before, and it does not matter, for it is dead.' It leaves out all his qualifications from the title and does not say where you can get it.

Monday morning.

You needn't have implored me to tell you about Park Lane. You much misjudge me if you think I could leave that out!

I must write no more, because I began this week by wickedly staying in bed till eleven. How dare you read Hume & Gibbon? You have no idea what my ignorance is. You seem to be becoming more Conservative than the Duke of Wellington, but I partly agree with your sentiments. Or is it that you want to nail our flag inescapably to a decrepit mast? You will be surprised to hear that I saw you last night. Mr Cotes showed us the film (in colour) which he took when you and I were there. It isn't at all bad, but rather dark. Of what inestimable value it will be to posterity!

My last instructions: bring back your blue costume & your purple dress and don't make any more addle-headed omissions in your wardrobe. Also bring back the journal (with back-numbers) and the novels.

Auf wiedersehen,

Margaret.

MDH reaches the chalk-face

Margaret's first teaching post was at Wycombe Abbey, an independent girls' boarding school in Buckinghamshire. This was wartime (1941) and privations were felt everywhere. The headmistress was apparently very parsimonious when it came to serving school meals and one often went away hungry from Top Table. Margaret used to think "If I ever become a Head I'll be more generous with helpings." – and she was….. Those of us who have been on the receiving end of large helpings of school lunch (which we didn't necessarily want) will testify to this.

Wycombe Abbey was a temporary post and Margaret moved then to a completely different environment – a co-educational school in Yorkshire, Sowerby Bridge Grammar School. Yorkshire appealed to her sense of the romantic and she was breathing the same air that her beloved Brontes had breathed, but another move was imminent.

In 1943 she went to **Bemrose School** for Boys in Derbyshire and it was here that she had an enormous influence on lads from families where grammar school education was something very new. Through the study of English Literature she opened their minds and hearts in a way which would to some extent set the course of their lives and certainly careers. These were of the generation of young men who were called up at the end of the war, and who sent her letters which had been filtered through the censoring apparatus in case they contained sensitive information. EP

Her lessons must have been fun as well as inspirational. Here is a clever parody she wrote for the boys. We wonder who Attenborough was?

At Bemrose Boys' School c.1945

Now in that place there was a company
Of yonge folks that went on a journey,
Of whom were several that wolde sport and pleye
With their felawes throughout the livelong day;
In special was one- his name I wot-
That carped and japed- I gesse he was no swot-
And eek when him thought men took no keep,

He wolde in window-mirrour peer and peep
To combe his lockes; but for to speke of hair
He could not with another wight compare-
I trow he was a martyr or a saint,
For round his face, dischevelee, sans constraint,
His hair as any halo stood out stiff-
*He was a shipman, fit to rule a skiff-
Yet wel I woot, shipmen been seldom saints-
He to the parsoun oft made his complaints.
This parsoun was a ful faire comely wight
With rolling gait and eyen stepe and bright;
Wel coude he thump and in the pulpit roar
As any bull-calf, if the people snore.
Him cam withal a thin and pointed youthe-
To speke with great sentence ful wel he kouthe;
And sith he cam from London(as was pleyn)
That great cite, no wonder was, certain.
Another eek coude in disputings shine,
But he was prickly as the porcupine,
And that was scathe; ther cam wightes mo
That unto studie hadde long y-go
And spake French ful free and fetisly
(After the scole of Bemrose-atte-Derbye)…
And then a merry and an elvish sprite,
The one koud talk, the other one koude write.
An olde wyf hadde they with them for the nones
She was y-dyed with red ink to the bones,
Eche night she studied as the lerned owle-
She was more wys than that sagacious fowle.

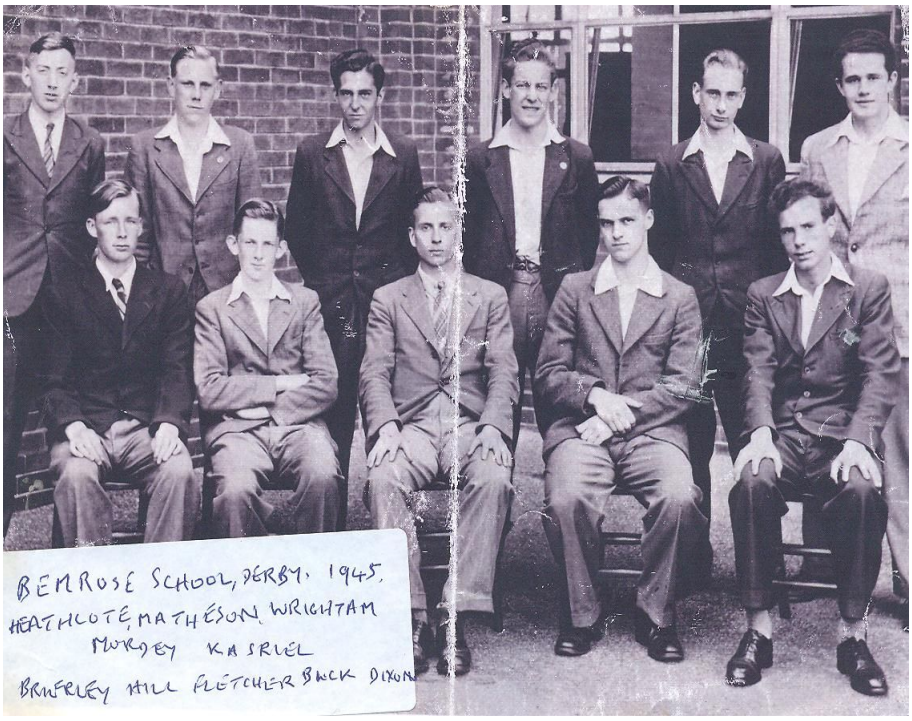
But for to tellen yow where that they wente,
Or whence they cam, or what was their intente,
I cannot telle; but when the road was rough
I saw them turn aside- they were not tough!
To goon with the wind was al hir leste,
To goon against the wind they did deteste,
So few, that nolde lette for storm or rain-
I kan no more; my wit is small, certain…..

The Ghoste of Geoffrey Chaucer

* Written in the margin is the name Attenborough

In numerous letters in the **Biographical Material** one can read how much they counted on Margaret for advice, whether in career aspirations or in criticising their poetic efforts, and it is clear too how seriously Margaret took this responsibility. She wrote to them encouraging, berating, cajoling. She sent them gifts (often books of poetry) when a special occasion arose. She put them in touch with other friends of hers. (Was this the start of her famous "connecting" system? How many us have her to thank for careers enhanced and friends made for life!) Margaret's "Bemrose Boys" responded with remarkably frank and open accounts of their innermost feelings, their encounters with "young females" and this often on flimsy airmail paper bearing the stamp of the Army Censor.
This was true devotion.

That she could also call them to order when they were at school (and after!) is also clear from the letters and reminiscences. John Brierley and Kenneth Varty, who both had distinguished careers in education kept in touch with Margaret up to the end of her life, and both acknowledged their debt to her. John Brierley says: " She was a brilliant teacher and I owe much to her influence in those far-off days. In his book " In the Shadow of the Means Test Man" he writes of his time in Margaret's English lessons: "My blustering arguments were countered by steady ascending logic like pegs driven into a rock face. She has remained a critical friend throughout my life but at that time she was a thorn in my side which hurt and deflated my ego." John wrote recently: " I do miss her in spite of her digs at me. She belonged to a group of women who had strong beliefs. It was a privilege to have known her and to be taught by her."



Bemrose Boys

"Above all she was a superb teacher"

Kenneth Varty writes; “ I always found her lessons and tutorials to be attention-gripping, and her observations and comments about life outside the classroom stimulating and illuminating.” Kenneth also remembered an occasion when he bumped into Margaret twelve years after their last meeting. He had recently been bereaved and Margaret responded with great kindness, inviting him to tea and talk. Kenneth retains a deep affection for Margaret and travelled down from Glasgow just a few years ago to visit her in Albert Road West.

Bemrose Farm Camp

Incidentally, in a letter dated September 1944 one of Margaret’s correspondents commiserates with her on the fact that a flying bomb had hit her parents’ house in Sutton. This writer also remarks: “I can also remember your saying you are succeeding or otherwise engaged in a series of efforts to do the job normally filed as the work of hefty specimens of the sex originally modelled for toil.” One can only surmise on the nature of this ‘toil’ but a clue may be found in a photograph, dated 1943, which has the heading ‘Farm Camp’ and which shows a youthful Margaret with three friends, one of whom appears to be holding a rake. EP

My favourite photo of MDH , about 20 years later, shows her shovelling snow off the lacrosse-pitch, surrounded by a gaggle of juniors in large gaberdines and those awful pork-pie felt hats happily later superseded by the maroon Para-type berets. I chose it for the anniversary edition of the school magazine in 1957. EL

What is certain is that Margaret volunteered with the Red Cross Society and obtained certificates in Home Nursing, First Aid (1940) and was also awarded a Certificate of Loyal Service by the American Red Cross. This was “ in recognition and appreciation of more than one hundred and fifty hours of faithful and loyal VOLUNTEER service to the members of the Armed Forces of the United States of America making use of the facilities of the American Red Cross in the British Isles.” (April 3rd 1945)

Margaret's next move in the teaching world was to **St. Paul's Girls' School** in 1945 and she spent nine happy years here teaching girls of high intellectual ability.

St. Paul's Girls' School

It was in this period that she met Vera Brittain, the mother of Shirley Williams and of course Shirley herself was to become a lifelong friend. Shirley Summerskill and Shirley Conran also came under Margaret's care at this time. They were a spirited lot and it must have been quite a challenge to have them as members of one's form, but of course Margaret was equal to the challenge! There was one occasion, however, when she was taken to task by the mother of a pupil, who invited Margaret to her home in order to give advice on how best to discipline teenage girls. Margaret accepted this advice with good heart and the two became firm friends. She often told the story against herself and was very appreciative of the help she had received. EP

The following extract was sent by Madeleine Zimmerman (now Madeleine Simms). It was her homework at St. Paul's, in the VII form (Lower Sixth), with Margaret's corrections in red ink.

English Appreciation
Dedicated by the author to the recipient of this Sonnet

I would not write this, did it not rest with me,
(But if it did, there'd not be much I'd do)
Thus, as it is, the fault doth lie with thee
(Already it has ta'en an hour or two.)
"Scorn not the sonnet," Wordsworth once did say,
Emphatically I reinforce the plea,
Therefore, deal gently with this, on the day
That thou returnst it, lest I then should see
My masterpiece held up to mocking mirth

O wasted hours devoted to creation!
When author only can assess its worth,
And not another being in the nation.
If this doth pain thee, then once more I plea
The fault of this doth solely lie with thee.

The critic, Sonneteer, has never frowned,
Her nature's gentle – even her red ink
Is of a delicate diluted pink.
'Tis true the thing hath not a trumpet sound,
Here is no strain soul-animating found –
(Indeed, the strain of being obliged to think
Seems to have made the vital spirits sink)
But still with temperate praise it shall be crowned
Etc.,etc., ad lib..
(supply the sextet yourself!)

Here is another of the pastiches that Margaret did so well. We wonder which member of staff she had in mind?

<u>At St.Paul's 1953.</u>

There was a schoole-mistresse in that place
With spectacles on nose and pale face-
It was almost a spanne broade, I trowe-
For sure her braine was nat undergrowe.
She knew wel al the knowledge that ther is
In the great Encyclopedia ywis.
She coulde parse and analyse and spell,
Make columns, paragraphs and verse as well.
Sterne was her voice and piercing was her glance;
She was a strict one to give penaunce
There as she wiste her pupils lazy were,
Or lost their books, or were not quite all there.
A wretched N was all the mark they got,
And "Write out 50 times withouten blot!"

"She had strong views on how she wanted girls to be educated"

Yet, if were any maiden diligent,
Kindly she was and wonder pacient.
But grete harm was it, as it seemed me,
That on her browe such wrinkles hadde she,
And shoulders rounded from excessive toil.
She was a one to burn the midnight oil
Doing corrections; verily I think
If you should prick her, she would bleed red ink.
Yet was her bread not al withouten jam:
It is full faire to be addressed as “Ma’am”,
And have your books royally y-bore,
And go through swinge-doores all bifore.

The least “jammy” part of teaching life is the dreadful duty of producing reports at all too regular intervals; often it’s not much fun receiving them either. I’m not sure when this parody was written, nor for whom, but the name says it all. EL

“……went off with a shattering report……..
TERMINAL REPORT.

Name: Avril ffoliott Class: Upper Middle

In English Composition she
Has shown originality.
Her spelling is her own, indeed.
In Latin she declines with speed.
Her spoken French is rarely pure-
Needs practice- ear is insecure.
In Mathematics she takes pains.
(She thinks cube roots are sugar-canes)
She has not yet digested pi.
Though marks in history are not high
This girl is trying, (so much so,
She’s the most trying girl we know!)
At Dancing she has made great strides.
She shows an aptitude besides
For painting (on the human skin).
She should not drop the violin.

We sum her up as Very Fair-
(Her prospects in the marriage-mart
Are excellent- should not lose heart.
She is a girl who should go far,
Say Jericho or Zanzibar),
And to conclude, we should prefer
Always to turn out girls like her

In addition to her daily work at school Margaret helped out during this time at a girls' youth club in the East End of London. The contrast between these two vastly different aspects of her experience is recorded later in this 'issue' in an article she wrote in 1952.

Margaret had however a romantic yearning for the north of England which was soon to be satisfied. She had always loved the "Wuthering Heights" feeling of bleakness and wildness and was delighted that Ceridwen had married a man from the north (albeit Lancashire!) As a frequent visitor to her beloved relatives, Basil, Ceridwen and their children in Cockerham she had got to know Lancashire, and this must have prompted her decision to put in an application for a post there. It has been recorded elsewhere how when she arrived at Bolton School she was amazed at what she found and almost turned tail. However the hike up the Pike helped matters along and she was offered and accepted the job. What happened next will be recounted on our next issue. It will feature 'The Bolton Years'. EP

High Withens, Near Haworth

"Margaret... had come to Bolton in a spirit of mission"

Margaret had a passionate interest in **girls' education** which developed early and a long essay which she wrote in the Sixth Form will appear in a later issue.

Twenty years later, when a headmistress herself, she reviewed Josephine Kamm's double biography of Miss Buss and Miss Beale, pioneers of the girls' education battle, "How Different from Us". EL

THE REVOLT OF MISS BUSS AND MISS BEALE

Modernizing education for girls

By MARGARET D. HIGGINSON
(Headmistress, Bolton School)

DAVID COPPERFIELD'S Dora, it may be remembered, could never add up the grocer's bill and died, apparently, from a mere inability to hold on to life. She would have exhibited no such weakness had she attended the North London Collegiate School, which she could not have done, for it was founded in 1850, the year of her demise. One might almost say that that decisive date marked the beginning of the end for all the Doras: ever since then feminine imbecility, though still useful on occasion, has been losing its charm and power.

This truthful and entertaining book ("How Different from us" by Josephine Kamm. The Bodley Head, 25s.) tells the double story of Frances Mary Buss and Dorothea Beale, two women who between them changed the way of life and mental outlook of half the English nation. When they started work, Miss Buss in London in 1850, Miss Beale at Cheltenham Ladies' College in 1858, there simply was no secondary education for girls in the modern sense. A few boarding-schools, expensive in direct proportion to their frivolity, taught superficial "accomplishments", but any approach to real knowledge was regarded with horror by parents. ("Gentlemen do not like brains in a woman, you know"). The old healthy tradition of housewifery even for great ladies had died out in the new-rich Victorian atmosphere and no new studies had come to fill the gap: hence the intolerable frustration and boredom passionately expressed by such a woman as Florence Nightingale. The vapid system of female education perpetuated itself, because the teachers had a vested interest in keeping it as it was. How could they teach what they did not know themselves? Their usual qualifications were that they were gentlewomen, and decayed.

Miss Beale and Miss Buss were both fortunate in that they got the only good training then available, scanty though it was—the lectures given for ladies at the Queen's College in Harley-st, by a group of benevolent gentlemen. This intellectual stimulus and the sympathy and encouragement each received from a cultured home enabled these two great women to break through the vicious circle, but they both remained much occupied with the problem of recruiting and training teachers, knowing that to be the key to the whole problem. Their passionate devotion to their profession, which may look a little comical nowadays, was necessary and right. No one who was not full of fiery conviction could possibly have won their battle. Now that it is all over, we can hardly conceive the opposition and inertia which they encountered:—the predictions that "we should have half the young women in the country in brain-fever or the lunatic asylum" if they were allowed to enter the Cambridge local examinations; the meanness over money. In 1870 £60,000 was raised in a few days for a new Boys' School in the City of London, where of course boys' schools already existed: an appeal for girls raised £700 in three years. However, not for nothing was "We work in hope" the motto of the North London Collegiate School. And there must have been exhilaration in the air as gradually the victories came. Fortunately Miss Buss, though easily dejected, had keen powers of enjoyment. She was not above a little natural gloating, as for instance on that great day in 1890 when "Miss Buss read prayers as usual, but her mind was not on the task: her feet tapped the floor and she looked as though she was about to break into a dance." And why? Agneta Ramsay had just been placed above the Senior Cambridge Wrangler. A long way from Dora and the grocer's bill!

High idealism

Meanwhile, Miss Beale at Cheltenham was creating an atmosphere very different from that of the jolly, bustling, but rule-infested North London Collegiate School. When Mrs. Kamm turns from Miss Buss to her it is like leaving the wash of a busy little paddle-steamer to follow in the smooth wake of a gliding yacht. A much purer intellectual than Miss Buss, a more complex character, a profound ascetic, she was putting into practice a vision of aristocratic and dedicated learning. Silently the ladies moved (silently they still move) down the long Gothic corridors of her College; attentively they listened to the Saturday Scripture lesson; they caught from her, the impressionable ones at least, a high idealism and an absolute self-control. Not for her any vulgar manifestations of glee over academic or any other success — she deplored examinations and quite forbade competitive games. Yet she was not a tyrant and she was capable of changing her mind.

The two ladies are known to an irreverent world mainly through the rhyme from which Mrs. Kamm's book takes its title.

Miss Buss and Miss Beale
Cupid's darts do not feel,
How different from us,
Miss Beale and Miss Buss!

Yet this is an immortality as unfair as that of King Alfred and the cakes. In fact their strongest suit was their femininity. "What struck us most was their perfect womanliness . . . why, there were tears in Miss Buss's eyes!" (That was the way to make your point with a Royal Commission in 1864!) Miss Buss, in particular, was warm-hearted to the last degree, loving to be mistaken for Mother as she tucked up sleepy boarders, and even giving at her own expense a ball in Cambridge to which "all her girls, their brothers and friends of their brothers" were invited. There was no prudery nor lack of affection there. Miss Beale was much more ethereal, but she too was attractive—beautiful as a girl and receiving her last proposal of marriage at the age of 50. Unfortunately, it did not come from either Plato or St. Augustine, the only men whom she might possibly have considered eligible.

Remarkable adaptability

Their genuine immortality was, of course, in the schools they founded, for the whole structure of modern girls' education derives directly from their examples. The North London became the model for many day-schools (it is for instance explicitly named in the foundation deed of Manchester High School) and later the prototype of all the Maintained Grammar Schools for girls. Cheltenham's influence has been less tangible but just as universal. Our own Bolton School has felt it, for Miss Meade had been a girl (not, one suspects, an entirely submissive one) under Miss Beale.

In curriculum and tone the girls' schools naturally emulated the boys' public schools — how else could they establish their serious claims but by submitting to the academic tests by which boys' schools were judged? Some people think they followed the masculine intellectual pattern too far (but then girls' schools are equally criticized to-day for not teaching enough Science!) What is certain is that they have been remarkably adaptable to new demands, ready to experiment and responsive to the social climate. The lack of ancient tradition has not been altogether a handicap. Moreover, because they all started together the girls' schools have never been divided by any subtle distinctions of status, and teachers circulate freely among them. The Headmistresses' Conference, started by Miss Buss and Miss Beale in the former's sitting-room in 1874, to-day gives exactly equal attention and respect to the Heads of Cheltenham and of the latest Secondary Modern. This unity and comradeship comes down to us directly from the early days and no single legacy of Miss Buss or Miss Beale has been more important than the living friendship between them.

On a similar topic, Margaret read and reviewed for the Observer a pamphlet “small and light but containing as many fertile ideas as a dandelion-clock has seeds,” published by the Dept. of Education at King’s College, Newcastle in 1952. Do not be misled by her title “The Recovery of Feminine Values.” Just read the text. EL

Observer, 1952

The Recovery of Feminine Values

By Margaret Higginson

LIFETIME ago, a sense of ardour and exhilaration animated the newly nded schools for girls. ading the memoirs of the neers one shares the thrill of ing admitted to the Oxford cals and the ultimate ecstasy Philippa Fawcett's First s Honours. "Bliss was it in t dawn to be alive." More- r, one is aware that somehow y preserved the graces. "What ick us most," said the Royal mmissioners of 1865 about ss Davies and Miss Buss, "was ir perfect womanliness. Why, re were tears in Miss Buss's s!"

The need to prove women's acity soon compelled girls' ools to educate to a masculine cification, but the time has eady come to consider some lely felt misgivings—a self- icism which is not a sign of reat and weakness but of maturity l strength. Five people interested girls' education from various ndpoints have recently collabor- d in a modest pamphlet*—small l light but containing as many tile ideas as a dandelion-clock has ds. One might easily quote from sayings with an oddly Victorian vour—for instance, "Too much ellectual work damages a woman's minine nature"—and the authors certainly deprecate the pressure of the grammar-school curriculum and that constant demand for the processing and packaging of knowledge which results from the examination system and early specialisation. They believe that girls need more freedom to choose, to browse, to "understand human life and relationships."

*

YET although this pamphlet stresses a view of woman's nature so old as to be something of a novelty, it gently asserts something really far more revolutionary than the old claim that women could do anything as well as men. Feminine values and attitudes, it says, both in personality and in the community, have been calamitously depreciated, and men, too, are deprived and unbalanced by this one-sidedness. Tennyson said: "The woman's cause is man's"; these writers say, in effect: "The man's cause is woman's." They see our "predominantly masculine" world as "an aggressive and acquisitive society, the result of knowledge without love"; and it is love, the "creative response" to people, sympathetic imagination, uncalculating service, which they feel girls' education ought especially to nourish. But not in isolation. They look favourably on mixed schools, and the one masculine contributor "can think of nothing more potentially dangerous than a thorough differentiation of girls' education from that of boys."

They want to replace the dated and irksome rivalry between the sexes by co-operation such as already exists in much social work and could exist in administration and government. They observe in passing that the Welfare State has been staffed largely by the surplus women. They desire not a superficial blend of "feminine charm and masculine efficiency" but a deep creative concern for people. To the observer of externals, Eleanor Rathbone might not perhaps seem the epitome of *l'éternel féminin*; nevertheless she, with her fathomless care for human suffering and for the family, seems such a woman as they have in mind One might add a dash of Captain Brassbound's tamer, the bland Lady Cicely. Perhaps the Quakers, with their long tradition of mutual respect between the sexes (one of the roots of an influence out of all proportion to numerical membership), best show how such an ideal co-operation might work out in practice.

Let it not appear, however, from these illustrations, that these writers advocate only the most ascetic high-mindedness. Rather the reverse. But in reacting against the masculinity of "The Women's Movement" they also oppose the other unsound reaction against it which has developed the false-feminine, the two-dimensional figure on the hoardings whose friendships begin with gin and are nurtured by nylon, whose soul-affinities are revealed in the choice of a cigarette, to whom a hat makes all the difference. They realise that "escape into artificiality of living" is the "most natural defence" against a world of insecurity; but escapism will not do: "The hardest thing we have to do in education to-to-day" is to make the young "understand real situations and develop the power of choice."

*

SINCERITY, courage, compassion, understanding — these are fine attributes and should indeed be cultivated. One might add gaiety. And perfect though she may become, there will always be one thing asked of woman which is not required of man—a mild duplicity, an art concealing art. Not long ago, a popular newspaper printed an article on "The Perfect Girl Friend"; after excellent advice on points of etiquette and breeding it dealt tersely with conversation: "Not above School Certificate standard." Jane Austen put it still more memorably: "If a woman have the misfortune of knowing anything, she should conceal it as well as she can." As the beauty-advertisements say: "Achieve the natural look."

* "The Education of Girls." (Department of Education, King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1952.)

MDH had strong feelings about what she saw as wasted opportunities, and luckily they found an amusing if pointed outlet in the following poem. Margaret Timms evidently intended a career in advertising after St.Paul’s and English at Somerville College. Goodness knows how she found the courage to tell Margaret Higginson! But I doubt if she ever told Miss Lascelles (see verse 3). You would need a flame-proof suit for that! (EL)

“She encouraged us all to have views on every topic”

For Margaret Timms SPGS 1954

Endowed with health and adequate grey matter,
Fostered beneath a wing as broad as Strud's,
Simply to say "Sarong makes figures flatter,"
Or sing the praise of Sylvan's silky suds.

Firmly admonished both by Pa and P—k,
Tenderly nursed by Jk and Hg and Ha,
Just to proclaim that "Kangol does the hat-trick,"
O tell the world how crunchy Kellogg's are!

Nourished by purest academic waters,
Last, cut and polished by the Delicate Lass;
What is the guidance she will give her daughters?-
"You can't do better than a glass of Bass!"

To spend a life in whisking candy-floss up,
A sticky, sugary unsubstantial mass!-
"Where women talk, you'll hear them whisper 'Gossip'-
"She found a husband when she changed to Tress!"

Hers were the by-the-million-longed-for chances,
She the most finely-sifted fortunate seed!
Her final aim? To catch the casual glances
Of futile vanity and foolish greed.

Forgiveness for the starved, the feeble-minded,
Who think there's nothing hard cash can't buy;
But here's a treachery not even blinded-
Knowing the truth to propagate the lie.

PS Although I like pronouncing general doom,
There may be one exception to the rule-
Just make more money for Lord Leverhulme
To plough back into Culture (Bolton School).

(Perhaps Margaret realised on reflection that teaching itself is a form of advertisement, for a wider range of products? EL)

Margaret had an immense respect for the ways of life of people whom she might have been expected to pity. In a book which undoubtedly influenced her philosophy of life, “South Riding”, the young and ardent headmistress desperately wants to “rescue” her one bright pupil from a very poor home, forced by the death of her mother to give up school for the drudgery of bringing up her younger brothers and sisters. She reluctantly accepts the word of an older and wiser woman that “it simply wouldn’t do” to uproot her from her position and responsibilities.

MDH would never have assumed that she “knew better” what was good for the girls of the East End club where she helped out in the grim 1940s. For these girls and so many like them, “girls’ education” was a relative term. EL

'Club Girls of East London'

This article, written in 1952, is, like so many of the pieces written by Margaret, sensitive, shrewd, visionary - full of apt observation and prescient in such a remarkable way.

On reading it, one is immediately able to see how her social awareness and keen sense of responsibility for the needs of the individual characterise the embodiment of her later position as Headmistress of the Girls' Division.

Margaret captures the essence of the girls about whom she writes. Her own background gave her, perhaps, the objectivity she required to stand aside to reflect and comment.

Somehow, in writing, she manages to do two things. Margaret assesses and remarks on the philosophy and lifestyle of her charges. She also, in a kind of dual application, measures these East London girls against their 'luckless contemporaries still mewed up in schools'.

As ever, Margaret sees potential in the girls; she sees potential in what they could do for themselves and potential in what the very

“We were constantly exhorted to make the most of our opportunities”

contemplation of their state could do for those who, in spite of being particularly intelligent, are, she infers, suffering and anxious.

In character with all Margaret's best pieces, this article bears witness to a wistful, reflective mood. It could be seen as a cameo that had a foundation of significant influence upon the practical realities of being a headmistress in a school where the lot of her pupils had been 'cast in so goodly a heritage'. JH

Club Girls of East London 1952

By MARGARET HIGGINSON

THEY are in general slight, delicate-featured, and pale beneath brilliant make-up. Their faces in repose are blank until occasion stirs them to vitality. They love noise and movement and are uneasy in quietude. Their hair, washed every Thursday (often in homes that possess neither bath nor hot water), is expertly curled. They wear platform shoes five inches high. They favour pencil-slim skirts and "drape" jackets of a peculiar long cut not seen elsewhere.

Their stockings, when they wear them, are the latest in black-heeled nylons; they sport ear-rings, bracelets, choker-pearls, and enormous plastic handbags (each containing its wad of beloved photographs). Their whole appearance suggests a longing for beauty expressed in the only way they understand. But their crimson finger-nails are often black-rimmed; with the instincts of a Helen or a Cleopatra they have to live in the ugly, inimical, unglamorous backparts of London.

Home, Sweet Home

Yet the inhabitants of the most elegant cities have no more love of their own places. The girls want to stay where they are. Chigwell and Hainault are all very well, but "I couldn't leave our street." "When I marry I must live next to my Mum." They do not seem to covet even the new flats. No place is more intensely conservative, in a social sense, than the East End of London. These girls are passionately united to their social group and can scarcely exist apart from it.

This warm, almost hysterical attachment to the home, observable in boys, too, surprises people accustomed to the outward stoical independence of the Public School adolescent. What others would find intolerable, sharing a bed with mother or sister, becomes the assurance of security. Family affection is intense, and pocket-money lavishly given and spent Indeed, present-giving remains a tremendous East End institution. A group of children on holiday first use all their money buying presents for the family, going to those chain stores they are familiar with at home; then they write home for more money—and generally get it.

Personality

These teen-agers are almost all in jobs of a repetitive and mechanical kind. They make our button-holes, fell our seams, solder our paint-brushes, count our football-coupons. Expecting to marry somewhere around twenty, they never complain of the nature of their work, just as they never complain of the nature of their schooling, though both are probably uncongenial. They have no articulate critical faculty. What they do react to in the strongest way is personality.

They prefer an unhygienic little workshop to a large airy factory, even an unpleasant boss to a highly trained personnel officer. School reminiscences, for instance, are largely dominated by "my nice teacher" with scarcely a mention of what she taught. Sometimes they say: "I wish I was back at school," but always it is a wish not for more knowledge but for the kindly security they found there.

On Impulse

Middle-class standards of young behaviour scarcely exist in this world. You act on impulse. If you feel like going to Club, you do; if you don't, you don't, even though you know your absence may ruin a rehearsal or choir practice. This, to the conventional, sounds shocking and exasperating, as indeed it is. Yet there are so many compulsions in these young lives from the moment they first go to work at fifteen, and so few chances for either body or mind to wander away from this ugliness, that an irresponsible independence is natural to them. But they have no ambition to travel and they do not desire mental liberation. Very few of them read at all, although in schooldays they enjoyed "Little Women" and possibly "Jane Eyre" and "Rebecca." A "book" to them is a woman's magazine, and to read a page in one of these is for them a rare achievement.

Both boys and girls of this type, up to the age of twenty and perhaps beyond, will apparently find enjoyment and satisfaction in a children's comic. Lack of concentration shows everywhere. Television, for instance, is in vogue as the symbol of social prestige, but no one seems to look at it for long at a time nor have any comment to make on it, unless to disparage "all those plays."

Here and Now

All this is a disappointing outcome of years of educational effort. And yet there is some sense in it. What are art and literature but shadows of life? The East End girls are interested above all in life itself. A trip to Southend means more to them than the Odyssey. They live intensely in the here and now, and they know time is short. They see that beauty fades swiftly after marriage in that district; they have none of that slow approach to maturity and expectation of reaching their zenith after thirty which is the lot of a luckier social group.

They are realists. They would like their boy-friends to be more considerate and gallant, not to go "on the beer," and so forth, but they take what they can get, and to attract the other sex is the only form of success and distinction open to them. One of them summed up perfectly what they desire: "I want a working chap who'll be kind to me and the kids."

So fulfilment must be emotional or nothing. Nature, art and thought scarcely exist for them: their world is all human beings. They are never bitter towards those with better chances; indeed they feel a benevolent pity for their luckless contemporaries still mewed up in schools. "They don't see life, they don't."

The young daughter of a distinguished Labour M.P. came to visit such a Club. Afterwards she said, "They all seem so *contented*. I can't make it out." The educated idealist looks for the spark of divine discontent and is disappointed not to find it. Such contentment seems to him brutish. But so long as our society demands uncreative automatic labour from so many of its members, perhaps it is fortunate that those members do not desire to think. "A peasant," said Dr. Johnson, "has not capacity for equal happiness with a philosopher." He might have added, "nor for equal suffering and anxiety." Perhaps it is the troubled, thinking minority who need the sympathy. Our civilisation seems to require super-normal intelligence at one end of its scale and sub-normal at the other, and while this is so these young workers will remain with some of their gif unripened and their instinctive lo of beauty frustrated or vulgarised.

It's obvious that throughout her life, MDH was concerned with how society could achieve "the Heineken Effect" on those young people whom universal education apparently could not reach. There is a note of great practicality and useful suggestions in two articles she wrote c.1956 for the BEN, after reading "Some Young People" by Pearl Jephcott. EL

Wasted Youth? 1 and 2.

Wasted youth?—1

c 1956?

THE ERA OF "COULDN'T CARE LESS"

By MARGARET HIGGINSON

Miss Higginson, now headmistress of Bolton School (Girls' Division) has had a good deal of first-hand experience of youth clubs. This is the first of two articles in which she takes the occasion of a new publication on the subject to enlarge on some of the problems. The second article will appear on Friday.

MOST people enjoy a glimpse of other people's lives, however ordinary—perhaps the more ordinary the better: hence the attraction of documentary films, or the popularity of "The Archers" and "Mrs. Whittle." I know an eminent, grave psychiatrist who is a regular subscriber to Woman because, he says, the letters on the back page reveal to him the common mind; most people do not even bother to make that excuse.

Anyone possessed of this entirely proper human curiosity will find interest beyond that of mere fiction in a book called "Some Young People," published by Allen and Unwin at 12s. 6d. It has been compiled by Pearl Sephcott (already well known as the author of "Girls Growing Up," and "Rising Twenty") and is the report or a "study, sponsored by King George's Jubilee Trust, of adolescent boys and girls in three areas, with special reference to their membership of youth groups." Although it is admirably objective and offers statistical evidence for every point it makes, the book is obviously the work of sympathetic investigators and abounds in vivid sketches of background and individual character.

The three areas chosen as typical were these: Part of a North London borough, full of factories and of old houses, mostly decrepit and overcrowded, where "the interviewers encountered only one youngster who had a whole house for his home"; a very small, compact section of a respectable artisan district in Nottingham; and a scattering of villages in Oxfordshire. The last-named presents the happiest picture, for although Youth Club facilities are not very ample, one may question whether they are desperately needed where children have reasonable space and scope, especially for outdoor life, and grow up comparatively well-integrated with the adult community. It is the lack of these two things which makes clubs necessary elsewhere. They are a modern attempt at answering a modern problem—how to give growing-space and direction to adolescents growing up in an industrial society which gives them ample money and leisure, and very little idea how to get satisfaction from either.

A total of 335 of the 939 boys and girls (all between 14 and 17 years of age) were members of youth organizations of all kinds (about the national average). Not all of these were very faithful members and, typically, many of them tended to leave at 15 or thereabouts, when the majority left school for manual work of some kind. Those who did join groups were, on the whole, the more intelligent ones and included more than a fair proportion of grammar school pupils, in spite of homework. It is, of course, comparatively easy and certainly pleasant to attract these types, of whom one can demand a high standard and real co-operation as in the uniformed movements.

The "unclubbable"

No one would wish for a moment to depreciate these high-quality organizations; but the hardest job of the Youth Service is to make and keep contact with those who seem to be "unclubbable." I need hardly say that by this term I do not mean those few admirable youngsters (the rare bird-watchers or fishermen or music-lovers among "Some Young People") who need no club because they have their own constructive pursuits; but that very large number who are gregarious yet more or less anti-social; given to fits of violence yet habitually apathetic; full of herd-instinct yet suspicious of leadership; bored to death yet unwilling to seek active occupation; often truculent yet at heart desperately lacking in confidence. As this book sums it up: "The lusty free-of-adult-control street life that the critics of youth organizations so applauded was largely a case of can-kicking, bottle-breaking, corner-congregating, cinema-queueing and bits of horse-play between the sexes. Some of the youngsters admitted that so much free time bored them but they didn't know why."

At this point it is natural to ask, "Is this the result of universal education?" It is much more the result of depersonalized industrial civilization and of a general mood of "couldn't care less," but it is true that in the years of adolescence the less intelligent type of boy or girl may react against school. "Kids' stuff" is the final dismissal. (Nostalgia for the happiest days of your life is a phenomenon of adult life only.) It is certainly fatal for a youth club to take an openly educational line. Anyone who thinks he or she could put across raffia-work and General Knowledge quizzes in the kind of club I have in mind might learn a lot by making the experiment. Indeed, in a sense, school tends to inoculate against the youth organization. After the school's first-rate equipment and tuition the club's amateurish efforts at cookery or pottery may seem small beer.

A magic word

It was easier perhaps to meet the need for direction 50 years ago, in spite of the vastly better conditions of to-day, because then the need was felt and acknowledged. But it is to-day we have to contend with and by to-day's methods; for if there is one magic word with these boys and girls it is "modern." No organization which does not appear to be "modern", both in appearance and activities, stands a chance. Yet underneath it all the objects of desire are much the same as they have always been, and very good ones, if rightly pursued: for the girls, satisfaction in personal relationships; for the boys, prestige in physical activities and success at their jobs. Of what is really quite new in the world to-day—for instance, democratic responsibility or the vast extension in opportunities for women—most of these adolescents are oddly unaware; and this Report notes a characteristic paradox when it mentions, soon after their passion for modernity, "the narrowness of the world in which certain families moved, and their hostility to new ideas and to new habits of any kind." It is this voluntary confinement which the outsider finds distressing—this determination to spend one's life, as it were, in a room with all the windows shut.

Wasted youth?—2

THE NEED FOR LOCAL LEADERSHIP

By MARGARET HIGGINSON

In this, the second of two articles, Miss Higginson, headmistress of Bolton School (Girls' Division), deals further with problems facing the youth clubs. She puts the case for a stronger bridge between the clubs and local grown-up life and writes of the need for adults to take a more active interest in the welfare of adolescents.

IS there any effective way of dealing with the problem of the "unclubbable" boys and girls which I outlined in my previous article? The book from which I started, "Some Young People," by Pearl Jephcott (Allen and Unwin, 12s. 6d.) is an analysis rather than an answer. The answer, in fact, does not exist, or not in anything that can be reduced to a formula. I have seen it given, once or twice, by a quite exceptional personality. This is necessary because the club leader is backed by none of the sanctions and compulsions of school life. "The point is, that the boy joins voluntarily and, if he finds the discipline too rigid nothing on earth will keep him there."

Irresistible energy and eternal patience are the leader's minimum stock-in-trade. But above all he or she must actually *like* these adolescents, however unlikeable, rowdy and unreliable they may be—no other motive will do. It is no use wanting to improve them or neutralize the danger they may constitute to society—you have to like them for themselves. Not, incidentally, to pretend to be like them—they know that is insincere.

Security and responsibility

Such a leader, however good and even successful, has a very lonely job. One of the best points in this book is its plea for help from parents and others who come from the members' own background, even if only in small and practical ways like washing up in the canteen or lending a hand with the woodwork group.

Far too much Youth Work is left to the conscientious, serious-minded middle-class. Conscience and serious-mindedness are all very well and have worked wonders in the past, but boys and girls of this "unclubbable" type will not take them neat. So far in English history, a sense of social security has always been followed by a sense of social responsibility; the greatest single need of Youth Work at the moment is not money, not even trained leadership, but simply the extension of that sense of responsibility to those who have now for the first time achieved comparative security. The success of many Parents' Associations attached to schools suggests that there is much goodwill and energy waiting to be tapped for club-work as well.

Nothing tells more in a youth club than the co-operation of the local community. Ultra-conventional in proportion as their mental and social outlook is limited, these adolescents care enormously for the opinion of their own world, and they long to be considered as adults. There should be a bridge between the club and local grown-up life. (This is where the churches have, or should have, the advantage).

Indeed, this concerns far more than youth clubs. Much might be achieved if adults in general, and particularly young, vigorous, successful people, would take more trouble in the ordinary relationships of life to set a clear standard and to help and understand the adolescent who often puts on defiance or indifference to conceal a sense of insecurity. The last words of this book are very much to the point: "The spark which first lights up the possibilities of leisure more often than not comes from the friendly concern of one older person for an individual boy or girl."

Girls more difficult

"Some Young People" makes it plain how much easier it is to run a club for boys than one for girls, and how in mixed clubs boys usually get the lion's share—partly because public opinion is apprehensive about the uncontrolled energies of boys but concerns itself very little with the aimlessness of girls. Boys are naturally addicted to gangs and groups, and their main interests (sport, mechanical matters, etc.) are objective and easy to share. (Also they continue to be shared by grown-up men and so provide a friendly common denominator between varied ages and social classes.) Girls care far more about personal relationships, and these can divide as well as unite.

It must be confessed that girls come out of this survey rather badly; very few of those questioned lay claim to any independent interests. Practically all have only one real leisure-time occupation—courting.

Their much-noted addiction to all things "modern" does not appear to have rendered obsolete that rather old-fashioned pursuit. (Courting, of course, is an occupation for two, but the boys concerned are usually outside the 14-17 age group.) It has its ancillary interests in the cinema and the dance-hall, but it has not, oddly enough, any connexion whatsoever with an interest in cookery, housecraft, etc., of which the girls may have had all too much practical experience. It is the glamour and status rather than the reality of marriage which attracts them. (Indeed, in my own experience, what would seem a promising experiment in a girls' club of discussing the design of new flats, schemes of decoration etc., fell quite flat and the only enthusiastic members of a cookery group were a couple of boys). This preoccupation with emotional life is, of course, partly due to nature, but even more to the social milieu; it is bound to be so where early marriage, or at least "going steady," is the only accredited form of success. The working-class world is the chief stronghold of social conservatism; and in these districts of Nottingham and London at least the horizon is almost as narrow for girls as it was 50 years ago.

But the horizon is not very wide for any of these young people. Only a small percentage of those interviewed ever read "a thick book"—though they mostly manage the Sunday papers. The boys' interests, where they have them, are mainly utilitarian or sporting. (I myself have often watched boys of 18 absorbed in Dandy or even The School Friend). They reveal little but a blank indifference to the speculative, the imaginative, the political, the religious aspects of life. Other parts of the country might make a better showing. The crowds emerging any evening from the Technical College suggest that Bolton would. Nevertheless, the problem is a national one.

I was reading this book in a railway carriage which happened to contain three boys within the 14-17 age group. One was a bright-faced cadet from H.M.S. Conway (his only reading was Radio Fun). The second was from a secondary modern school at Macclesfield; with rapt concentration he nursed a little brown box with holes in it that contained two tropical birds he had been all the way to London to buy; the third, with the badge of the Scripture Union in his lapel, was playing chess with himself. Exceptional? Probably. But after reading this book one is rather glad to think there are exceptions.

Tributes to Miss Higginson

There have been very many tributes paid to Miss Higginson, particularly during the last twelve months, some of which have already and appropriately been published in this year's issue of the Bolton School Old Girls' magazine.

We now include on this quarter's website, approximately in chronological order, the following:

First from Martine Osorio (née Jellinek) who was obviously most impressed and greatly influenced by MDH.

MARGARET HIGGINSON –My recollections

"Higgy" was our greatly respected and slightly feared class teacher for 2 years and English teacher for 4. Of course she taught me far more than a love of a great range of English literature. We were a fortunate year who were not driven by the O Level English literature curriculum, since St. Paul's made the wise decision of reducing the number of exams we took at that level, so that we could cover a far wider selection of literature.

As class teacher, Higgy introduced us to first hand democratic experiences through class councils and debates. She also encouraged us to have an interest, care and involvement in society far beyond our privileged Paulina experiences. It is not really surprising how many of her ex pupils took up careers in the "Caring professions".

Many 21st century educationalists would approve of Higgy's choice of punishment, which was not to write the time-wasting 100 lines. I was frequently detained after school to learn a Shakespeare speech or new poem. She did however resort to that most cruel arsenal of teachers' weapons, sarcasm. I still blush remembering her marginal comment "What a surprise!" beside the dramatic end of what I

I had no idea how young Higgy was and was much abashed at her anger when I asked her “Did you use a bathing machine?” I believe she was 28 at the time and soon afterwards became the youngest headmistress of a girls’ grammar school!!

I visited her in Bolton and was saddened to learn that in retirement she lived 10 minutes away from my son in Yorkshire. Had I known I would have been delighted to renew our friendship. Without a doubt she was the teacher who had the greatest and most valued influence on my life and of whom I still ask myself “What would Higgy have made of this decision or action?”

Next, from Jill Balcon, wife of Cecil Day Lewis, the then Professor of Poetry at Oxford University

In the 1950s Cecil Day Lewis visited Bolton with his wife Jill Balcon. During his visit he presented the prizes and gave the address at the Girls’ Division Speech Day. In consequence his wife wrote the following letter to Miss Higginson; unfortunately the beginning of the letter has not been located but the rest is worthy of publication.

Mr. Michael Lever, chairman, (left) with Jill Balcon and Cecil Day Lewis, professor of poetry at Oxford University, at the poetry reading evening arranged by the Pleiades Society at the Miners' Hall, Bolton, last night.

“We came home immensely stimulated and moved by all that Bolton gave us. We shall not forget it. Much of our work and many of our journeys are unrewarding to the spirit. Bolton and your School made one feel that there were the people who were the very backbone of all that is most admirable.

With grateful thanks,
Jill Day Lewis

“She was undoubtedly a major influence in my life”

Finally extracts of letters from four people of more recent times:

Both of them (Margaret and Dorothy Greenhalgh) made such considerable contribution to the life and achievements of G.D. Many of us have much to be grateful for as they brought such colour and encouragement into our lives. They will always be remembered with both admiration and affection. (Sheila Stocks)

She was a brilliant teacher and I owe much to her influence in those far-off days. She remained a friend since schooldays.

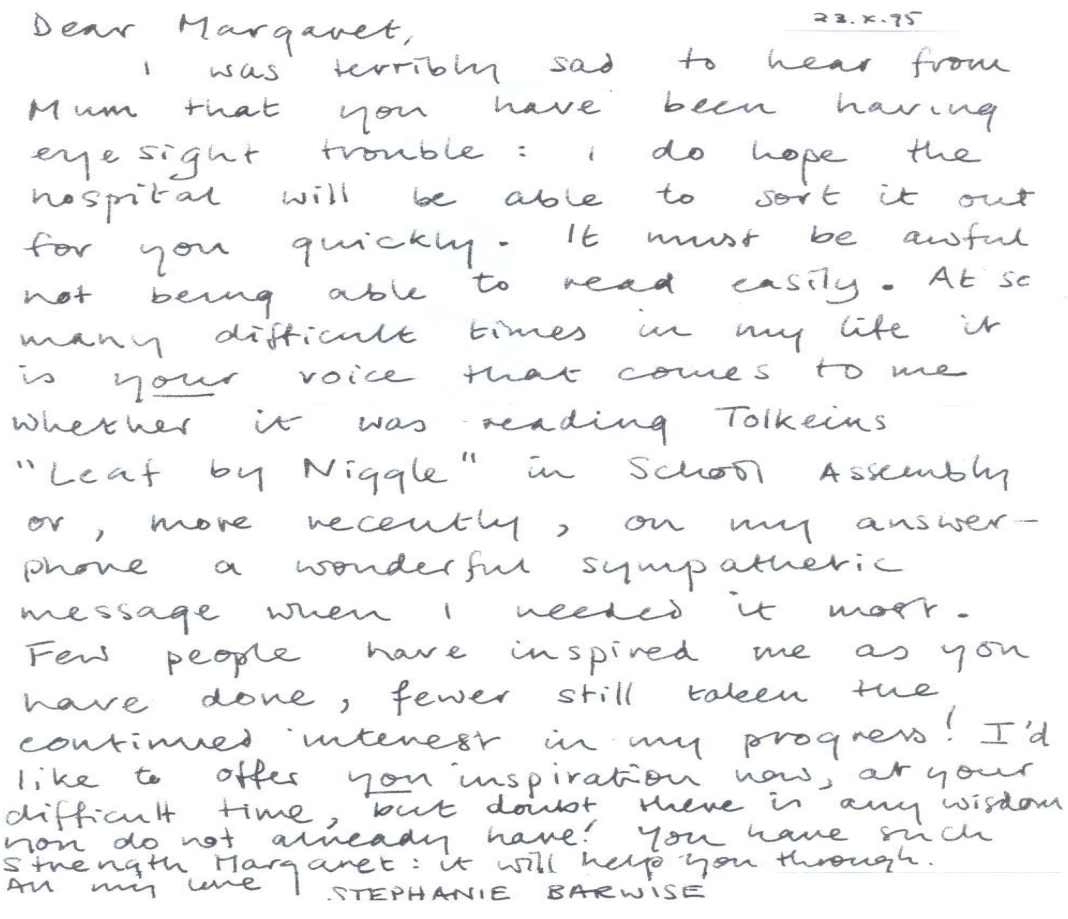
MDH was a great influence on me – an ever critical friend. It is true that next to a parent, a schoolteacher is a powerful influence, mostly for the good.

I miss her letters and her voice – sometimes quick to retaliate to a remark she didn't agree with, but always good value.

(Dr John Brierley)

How much we all owe her is incalculable. We shall all have so many memories of her – her impact on us all is considerable.

(Julien Harvatt)



Dear Margaret, 23.x.75

I was terribly sad to hear from Mum that you have been having eyesight trouble: I do hope the hospital will be able to sort it out for you quickly. It must be awful not being able to read easily. At so many difficult times in my life it is your voice that comes to me whether it was reading Tolkeins "Leaf by Niggle" in School Assembly or, more recently, on my answer-phone a wonderful sympathetic message when I needed it most. Few people have inspired me as you have done, fewer still taken the continued interest in my progress! I'd like to offer you inspiration now, at your difficult time, but doubt there is any wisdom you do not already have! You have such strength Margaret: it will help you through.

All my love STEPHANIE BARWISE

It will be clear from the above that the tributes we have received come from many quarters. Margaret had indeed friends in many parts and in our next publication there will be a further selection of tributes.

GES.

It’s been difficult to select from the wealth of material available for this issue. In the next episode of Margaret’s life, the early years at Bolton School, we really shall be “spoilt for choice”.

In the next issue....

More newspaper articles, original writing, tributes, illustrations and a continuation of the biography from Margaret's arrival at Bolton School.

The archive working committee from the Old Girls' Association gratefully acknowledges the numerous contributions from a wide variety of sources connected with the family, life and work of MDH.

Every effort has been made to preserve the integrity of the extracts used, to ensure accuracy and to respect anonymity where applicable.

If any Old Girl (or indeed anyone else) would like to offer reminiscences or anecdotes about Margaret we should be very glad to receive them. Please send them to:
Carol Haslam at Bolton School or email them to: CHaslam@girls.bolton.sch.uk