

Margaret Dora Higginson

1918 - 2009

Part Three



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 These pages have been put together by a small team of Old Girls, mostly drawn from her personal papers, some unpublished.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)



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More of Ceridwen

Margaret's life-long friend and subsequently the widow of her late cousin, Basil Higginson, provides further light relief and shrewd comment on yet more aspects of Margaret's life.

Numerous former members of staff and Old Girls will immediately identify with references to sherry parties and home-made sweets for Christmas - recollections of gatherings at Albert Road West following carol singing activities will, no doubt, call to mind Turkish delight, fudge and jellies in their petits fours cases.

Exhortations to walk everywhere, in town or country, were regularly made (from one, to whom a fondly amusing tribute was made at the memorial service as having had the 'smallest-ever carbon footprint'...) verbally from the platform or in personal conversation. Winter Hill, the Pennine Way and others each received accolades. Indeed, it was as a result of girls walking the Pennine Way that Hannah Hauxwell, the reluctant media 'heroine' of a solitary life in the Dales, came to count Margaret Higginson as her friend.

According to Ceridwen, Margaret's enthusiasms even took in the railway. However, her abiding loyalty was, of course, to Bolton itself. About this particular passion, she was evidently the subject of a good deal of teasing. Ceridwen's relentless, kindly way of poking fun and her friend's willingness to be subjected to it adds yet another dimension to Margaret's life and personal relationships with those close to her.

The line-drawings, in their own context, offer in perhaps a rather an unexpected way, yet more insight into what we already know of Margaret. her personalty and her activities and en-

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Besides a ~~very~~ Education:-

provides for Staff:-

Sherry Parties,

Home-made Sweets at Christmas

provides for Girls:-

Ambulatory Encouragement

"Why do I never see any of you girls on Winter Hill?"

Lots of ~~it~~ for Walking the Pennine Way

Drug Investigator:-

Summons Shame-faced Carlson to escort her to Suspect Pub

(No illustration. Leave effect to your imagination)

Railway Enthusiast:-

"Why I never married; I couldn't find an engine driver

"Save the Settle-Carlisle Line!"

Bolton Enthusiast:-

Tape for Ambience (Winter Hill etc)
Culture (music, theatre)
The Market

(Web - not Bolton wanderers?)

It is entirely typical of Margaret that when describing her move from St. Paul's Girls' School to Bolton School she exclaimed: "Bottom, thou art translated". She felt the ass's head to be appropriate for someone who had never been in a position in authority, never created a timetable, never, as she put it "been the boss of anything".

The move from St. Paul's came about because of her very active social conscience. She was very happy at St. Paul's but felt that she "couldn't live in Paradise for ever" and she also felt drawn back to her northern roots. She saw an advertisement in the Times Educational Supplement for a headmistress in Bolton and so she applied. Her colleagues at St. Paul's thought she had taken leave of her senses but they were indulgent towards her and her strange whim to go and teach amongst the poor barbarians and anyway they had always thought her "rather odd". They weren't sure of the geographical position of Bolton and thought it was somewhere in the Black Country.

So she purchased a black velvet hat for 6/11d (old pence!!) donned a black suit and set off for Bolton School which would have an asphalt playground and bars at the windows.



When she arrived she couldn't believe her eyes. The green lawns, the buildings "like a Cambridge college" the marvellous library all made an enormous impression on her. She felt convinced she would be sent packing after the first day of interviews, and was very surprised when asked to stay for a second day. On the morning of the second day she walked the whole length of Chorley Old Road in the rain then caught a bus to Rivington Pike. When Lord Leverhulme asked her how she had spent the morning she told the committee where she had been and this was clearly an impressive answer – she got the job.

When reminiscing about those far-off days Margaret made it very clear that she had been somewhat overwhelmed at the enormity of the task before her. This had nothing to do with barbarians and uncouth Northerners, but more with the fact that she had never had what today we would call managerial experience, had never been a Head of Department and had certainly no experience of running a school. She felt as though she had an enormous boulder on her back and was especially aware of her inexperience when sitting in her room with the photographs of past headmistresses, each it seemed, with cameo brooch and spectacles, breathing down her neck. Soon after she had taken up office a girl's mother came to see her, took one look at Margaret and said: "Ee, you are young."

But the feeling she had experienced when on her Rivington Pike trip, namely, that she somehow belonged here, became firmly fixed, and she adapted very quickly to her new life. On one of her early visits to the school she spent the day with Miss Dorothy Varley, her predecessor, and remembered how after Prayers Miss Varley would take out a yellow duster and dust the furniture in her room. Margaret was very impressed by this calm and peaceful start to the day – a far cry from today's multitudinous demands made on Heads!

Margaret reported that "the staff were delightfully kind" but that she did nevertheless feel "rather isolated". She said that she did feel a bit lonely sometimes and longed for the camaraderie of St. Paul's staffroom. However she did make friends and of course had much support from Basil and Ceridwen Higginson and their family in Manchester. (On one well-remembered occasion they formed the nucleus of the Head's party at a Parents' Association Ball and Basil distinguished himself by executing a very slick Hokey-Cokey.)

A new era had begun, and it would perhaps not be an exaggeration to say that with Margaret new ways of leading a school had started to be felt. It was not yet time for the Swinging Sixties, but moves towards a more 'modern' way of doing things were being made.

Margaret followed her predecessors in maintaining a quiet and reflective start to the school day and for many Old Girls this is an abiding memory. More disturbing, however, was the morning soon after her first day as Head, when the whole school was sent back to form rooms after Prayers. What had happened?

What dreadful event was to be disclosed to us? In fact, the dread news was that we all, from seasoned Sixth Former to nervous First Former had to write out the Ten Commandments – immediately. Consternation all round and whispers of "Where can you find it in the Bible?" rippled round the form room.



(This, however, could not be compared to the time when a few years earlier a summons had gone out from Miss Varley for all those whose names were written on the cardboard inserts of the table mats in the dining room. It should be explained that in the 50s the Boys' Division inexplicably did not possess its own dining room and so every lunchtime a stream of boys would come into the Girls' Division after the girls' lunch was over. It was common practice for the most forward of both sexes to slip notes into those table mats whose rexine (remember that?!) covers were becoming detached from the cardboard inside, or failing that, to write names on the cardboard. The thrill of horror when this discovery was made by someone in authority can still be felt in retrospect (vicariously, of course..) The boys concerned were sent to Mr Poskitt, that august figure who dominated the scene in the building across the courtyard.)



Margaret was tremendously conscious of the debt owed to the first Lord Leverhulme, who, with great far-sightedness had decreed that the two divisions of Bolton School should be treated absolutely equally. She was very much aware that Mr Poskitt had been at the school for many years and was an established figure in the town but she was also aware that here was a chance to prove that girls were worthy of the faith placed in them.

Many of her friends in Bolton were parents of pupils, and a Parents' Association was formed, which was of enormous benefit to the school. One of the projects carried out under the auspices of the Parent's Association but almost certainly Margaret's brain child, was the distribution of a shilling (pre-decimal coinage again) to every girl in the school with the admonition to go away and make it grow. This was all in aid of the New Wing Fund and again typical of Margaret's desire to encourage girls to take the initiative and a 'can do' approach to problems. She also wanted them not to expect good things just to drop into their laps. Another lasting legacy was the School Song, the text of which is based on Psalm 127 which was set to music by Thomas B. Pitfield. Margaret loved it.



So life proceeded at a regular pace in the early 60s against a background of mini skirts (3 inches above the ground when kneeling) the Beatles' music and a seismic shift in social attitudes. Margaret continued to lead a successful and happy school but inevitably, her conscience began to prick, as it had done in the previous decade. Not content with instigating the Old Girls' Turkey Feast, encouraging girls to visit the elderly, actively supporting an African leper colony, opening up the school gym for a visiting primary school and distributing collecting tins whenever there was a global disaster she felt the time had come to test herself in a less advantaged setting than Bolton School. So after 11 years at the helm she asked the governors if she could have a term's sabbatical leave which they granted, expecting her to repair to a sunlit Oxford college to engage in academic research. Margaret had, however, other ideas. She applied to teach for a term in London and was appointed to the Robert Montefiore Secondary School in Stepney, whose Head was Rhodes Boyson, later the Right Honourable Rhodes Boyson, Parliamentary Under Secretary in the Department of Education and Science under Margaret Thatcher..



On the first evening Rhodes Boyson said to Margaret ominously: "I'm putting you in charge of 3D. It's time those boys met a strong woman." The next morning 30 stropky 14 year old boys strode over double desks to take their seats. They refused to take off their leather jackets and the girls sat applying make-up. This was not quite the atmosphere Margaret was used to in the classroom. However she started as she meant to go on and assumed that they were all innocent and lovely children who wished to learn. By Break she had learnt the error of her ways. She was detailed to teach them History and Geography so used a map of the London Underground to start them off. She described the Robert Montefiore as being a wild school where discipline was non-existent and where the cane was used on girls as well as boys. It was very difficult to keep order as there was no established tradition of good behaviour. A teacher could threaten detention but this was usually pointless as the offenders simply didn't show up, but went home instead.



Such were the problems in the school that Rhodes Boyson had to make a new timetable each Sunday for the following week, since he never had the same staff for two consecutive weeks. His teachers often came from Australia and Canada and were taking in London on their way round the world. There were plenty of jobs available but no consistency and all this of course made teaching there very difficult.

Although Margaret was often driven to desperation she nevertheless enjoyed it and felt it was an education for her. She realised what teachers have to cope with when their pupils have no interest at all in learning. For Margaret one of the hardest things to take in was that her pupils had very little interest in reading. Even "The Monkey's Paw" failed to rouse any excitement and one can imagine her racking her brains to find something they would read with pleasure but which would also stretch them a little. She did have some pupils however who wanted to learn but they seemed to become submerged in the general apathy - apart from one little boy who sat with pencil poised and whose eyes seemed to be saying: "I want to learn."

She took them out of school - to Cambridge and to parts of London where they had never previously ventured. On the way back to Stepney she was horrified when some of the more daring ones walked between the carriages on the tube, then, as now, a highly dangerous activity. Her pupils loved the Cambridge trip and wrote very appreciatively about it afterwards. She had clearly opened their eyes, and their letters when she left are testimony to this. They begged her to stay: "We've had four teachers. Why does nobody ever stay with us?" She must have found this heart-rending. Her replacement at the Montefiore School was a young man from New York, but shortly after his arrival the news from Stepney was that they had "seen him off". On her return to Bolton with her batteries re-charged she decided she would like to be able to enter the staff-room at will, and not just on invitation from her colleagues. (This will be an eye-opener to many readers!) A vote was taken and thankfully it was agreed that MDH should be free to come and go like the rest!

Shortly after her return to Bolton after the time in Stepney a new order was being established across the courtyard. David Baggle was the new Head, and as Margaret put it, he was an "altogether different cup of tea" from the previous one. The Dance Club and a joint SCM (Student Christian Movement) were already in existence but these were probably the only shared activities under the old regime. Now there were joint Sixth Form General Studies lessons, joint A level RE lessons and in general a much more liberal approach to the two divisions doing things together. This led, in time, to a joint venture which was to have very many repercussions and was to be the source of many new experiences and much enjoyment. An account of St. Mark's Cautley, must however wait until the next instalment. EP

Margaret Higginson the journalist. EL

"That woman has been writing to the paper again. South Africa and oranges." So Jenny Jackson's father observed before she even entered the school; MDH wrote frequently to, and for a number of local and national papers. She also read them assiduously, and knew very well the power of ephemera; dating and tracing the original publication is sometimes approximate. She was impressed to learn that Miss Meade, believing that one should be aware of the full spectrum of opinion, subscribed to both the Times and the Daily Worker. (I suspect that like most of us, Margaret initially wondered how any headmistress found the time to read either, then realised how far styles of management had changed with the times.) By 1963, she had been in the saddle, as she put it, at BSGD for almost ten years. She had been allowed to access newspapers since she learned to read, and been a regular contributor to local and national papers since she qualified as a teacher. But now there were many major issues developing for education in general, and girls' education in particular. She felt that sharing her experience might influence future developments and argued her case with all the power at her command. The following pieces date from the 1960s.

“Grammar School Streaming: The Case Against.” TES 10.5.63 shows her grasp of her own “favourable situation”, as head of a girls’ direct grant school for which entrance was by examination and fiercely competitive. The three parallel entry forms, (which used to be 1, A and Alpha), were put into random assortment and called by their form-tutor’s initials. Thereafter, given the general high level of ability, it was not necessary to encourage competition. No form-positions, few internal examinations, no early specialisation (later known as hot-housing), and no streaming of pupils (or staff.)

(At the same date, my timetable as an ex-Oxbridge rookie teacher in a mixed so-called grammar-school consisted entirely of the C-stream and one Sixth Form group who only came my way because nobody else wanted the bother of teaching Swift and Scott. Twenty years later it was still common to find that what little academic material there was in comprehensive schools was entirely taught by the head of department.)



Apart from some necessary setting for maths, French and science, and grouping according to choice of options at the end of Year Three, there was no such thing as the dreaded “C-stream mentality” at BSDG.

Margaret’s insistence on recommending the unstreamed school was based on its “social and psychological” benefits, which she saw as the only firm basis for a sense of success, whether traditionally academic, or in other areas. She was concerned with fostering the happiness that comes from “a sense of belonging” and a feeling of achievement in whatever course the pupil has chosen.

She knew in the words of the school prayer, that not everyone’s lot was “cast in so goodly a heritage” and the article closes by admitting that “it would be impossible to give class-teaching in academic subjects to a group with IQs ranging from 80 to 140.”

(Like all of us in this happy era, Margaret could only guess at the size and variation of ability that was to become the norm for “comprehensive” secondary schools, but her last sentence referring to “the Q stream of a 17-stream comprehensive” was more prophetic than she may have realised in 1963. Jokes about “follow the red light for Greek” sound rather hollow now; you’re lucky to find a school that offers any Classics.)

Grammar School Streaming: the case against.

“The Glamour School” mentions the Crowther Report of 1959; Margaret herself dated it as from the ‘60s. It confirms her core belief in the special value of true femininity, and how to foster it by suitable role-models in the school staff. She contrasts this with “outrageous femininity”, a phrase coined by the Quaker Headmaster Kenneth Barnes to define the “pseudo-adult stereotypes of advertising and television” that enabled “big business” to exploit the vulnerability of the young. (It would later be called “pester-power.”)

(Margaret worried about teenage girls developing a false perspective on femininity; this week, Channel 4 is showing a documentary entitled “Stop Pimping our Kids,” which aims to discredit the High Street chains which currently help to sexualise younger girls by such promotions as a designer-range of padded bras marketed for six-year olds. She would have applauded them for trying to stem the tide of exploitation!)

Academic success was only a part of what she wanted for all of her students who were capable of it; she saw the girls’ school as a “humane and progressive institution”, where “the potential conflict between marriage and a career can be resolved without sacrificing mind or heart.” The best way to demonstrate this was the recruitment of married teachers. (Margaret of course could remember that well into her lifetime, women teachers in state schools had to give up their job when they married.) She ends by reminding us of the real meaning of her title : “The Grammar School is properly speaking, the Glamour School- the place of Gramary, of magic based on the mastery of words.” That is to say, the two words are cognate: identical twins. Two enthusiastic responses from married women teachers are selected from the many that followed. However neither was under any illusion about the difficulties of balancing a career with family life, and the “unwillingness or inability of schools to adapt themselves to the married teacher’s needs”. EL

THE GLAMOUR SCHOOL

by Margaret Higginson

THIS case for the return of women graduates to the schools has been ably put, on grounds of duty and national need, but there is another argument less often used which may be quite as powerful—the invitation to enjoy oneself. The girls' grammar schools have suffered misrepresentation for too long. It is time that someone said, what I believe to be true, that the girls' schools are among the most humane and progressive institutions in Britain today.

Free from the rich but sometimes paralyzing traditions of the ancient boys' schools, they have adapted themselves increasingly to a new world. Among the innovations they have developed, if not originated, one might list imaginative English at the heart of the curriculum, general courses in the Sixth (commended by Crowther), stress on the fine and practical arts, regular meetings with parents, integration with the community through many forms of voluntary service. They have also resisted strongly the evils of rigid streaming, express courses, and early specialisation. Division of 11-year-old entrants into Classical, Modern, and Science sides actually before entry, practised in some boys' schools, is inconceivable among girls.

Their best attraction, however, lies in their easy, secure, and friendly atmosphere. A high proportion of their staff are young and many of them are married or engaged. This certainly ensures that the girls understand the facts of life—not only in the simple sense that a great deal of knitting of tiny garments goes on in most girls' schools today but also in that they see for themselves the potential conflict between marriage and a career and also how it can be resolved without sacrificing either mind or heart. Ultimately the schools will solve their own problems, for a new generation is growing up to accept the double rôle and teaching is seen as the ideal career to combine with family life. Meanwhile there is indeed a gap to be filled.

No honest person would deny that girls' schools today face huge problems. Some they share with boys' schools—examination mania, shortage of leisure, the danger of cutting off clever children from their emotional

roots. But girls' schools are supremely vulnerable to a threat so pervasive that it is hard to define. It is simply the climate of the world, exemplified in the pseudo-adult stereotypes of advertising and television, the image which Kenneth Barnes has denounced as "outrageous femininity," the negation of all tender and genuine womanly qualities. It is hard for girls to see through something so superficially attractive and flattering, backed by all the cynical power of big business and often quite unopposed by the permissive weakness of parents. This is just where wise married teachers can be most useful.

Our critics, of course, can have us either way: we are scolded for failing to produce the supremely important mathematics and scientists or for driving girls too hard. But the world has never been reasonable in its demands on women. They have been beautiful and despised for frivolity; or clever and resented as blue-stockings; or good and dismissed as dull. Now for the first time they can be good, beautiful, and clever all at once. Intelligent girls appreciate their liberation; they realise that with hard work and forethought they can have the best of all worlds and that they can afford to choose their life partner as discriminatingly as their career—indeed that their value in the marriage market with the intelligent (or perhaps hard-headed) young men of today actually rises with their intellectual competence. Far from being pitiable, they are the most enviable of generations.

The education of a girl will always be a more subtle and difficult process than that of a boy. She must be an amphibian, hold two natures in balance yet be one person. Released from the immemorial burden of having to pretend to be a fool, she must still have modesty, sympathy, sweetness. Girls' schools must reflect this duality and so must their staffs.

The Grammar School is, properly speaking, the Glamour School—the place of Gramary, of magic based on the mastery of words. It is through understanding that the grammar schools try to develop attractive maturity—and to have a hand in the process is not a burden but a delight.

letters to the editor

THE GLAMOUR SCHOOL

HAVING taught for the last five years in a large grammar school in North London, the last two as a married teacher, I agree with Margaret Higginson in her article on "The Glamour School" (September 10) that I enjoyed myself, the job, and the children enormously.

Education in girls' schools is progressing by leaps and bounds. The school where I taught was already immensely ahead in ideas that appeared not to have even been considered in my own schooldays, which

after all only ended four years before I myself started teaching. During the time that I taught there were constant improvements—one being interrelation of subjects. Pupils studying Shakespeare for the first time already had been given the necessary background information on Tudor history, so that the whole became integrated instead of being put into separate pigeon holes in the children's minds and never linked up.

Girls in this modern age where advertising constantly compels them to believe that personal attractiveness and the ability to get your man are two of the prime requisites of life are more likely to believe that there is still room for a career where their teachers are attractive, happily married women who obviously enjoy their career as well.

On the other hand, the independent schools should look to their laurels if they are to continue to give the liberal education for girls which they pioneered. Their ability to give their pupils a balanced and complete education is rapidly being reduced by three factors: (1) social restrictions which are in most schools far too rigid; (2) unchanging, and in some cases antediluvian curricula; (3) their apparent unwillingness or inability to adapt themselves to the married teachers' needs—particularly that of a married housemistress with a husband whose career lies outside education.—Yours faithfully,

Jill Edwards,
The Garden House, Tabley Park,
Knutsford, Cheshire.

FULL MARKS to Margaret Higginson for her article. I am a "late entry" to teaching, having started my career eleven years ago, at the age of 39. Immediately after graduation I was married, and spent the next 16 years having a family. When the youngest was 8, I enrolled at a neighbouring university as a student for the Diploma in Education. The grant was ludicrously small and study was even more arduous than daily travel, but it was fun and I finished. I now teach physics in a girls' grammar school and I love it! I enjoy the intellectual stimulus, but the contact with young people is the most rewarding aspect.

Refresher courses and other facilities should make entry into teaching for married women graduates far easier today than it was a dozen years ago. A little courage and determination (such as any mother needs to develop in bringing up her children) can carry even the technically untrained and inexperienced into new worlds of interest and enjoyment, when their children need them less. When you realise that if you don't do the job, then nobody will, it helps to bolster your waning confidence, until you give it a more solid
Yours faithfully,
E. Smith

"The Glamour School."

Letter from Jill Edwards.

Letter from unknown correspondent.

Margaret was well aware that there were changes in the wind that would not necessarily improve the position of women teachers in mixed schools. Old attitudes die hard and long, and unlike Charles II they don't usually apologise for doing so. Her article "The Anti-Feminist Schools" 26.2.66 (TES?) was written before "feminist" had acquired its aggressive colour. She foresaw the creation of comprehensive co-educational schools by merging boys' and girls' schools as disadvantaging women teachers in the competition for promoted posts.

She develops all the points made in her TES article of 1963; minimal streaming, avoidance of early specialisation, stress on general and aesthetic subjects, and the sharing of the most rewarding classes among all the staff capable of taking them.

Her closing paragraph once more quotes the enlightened headmaster Kenneth Barnes, who described women heads of his acquaintance as "unusually generous, objective and well-informed people under whom no one but a small-minded man would fail to serve happily." EL

The anti-feminist schools by Margaret Higginson

THE headmaster of a large mixed grammar school recently honoured me with an invitation to present the prizes. In all its long history I was apparently the only woman ever to have filled this rôle. It was flattering but it was also dismaying. I felt myself a singular phenomenon, like the Great Auk. And I began to think how odd it was that in a school equally divided between boys and girls and with women on its staff who were anything but insipid, it should yet be regarded as extraordinary to think of listening to a woman.

One might accept this as one of the facts of life and leave it at that, as most women do (for they fear making themselves unpopular more than they covet power), were it not that this almost universal attitude vitally affects the future of education and therefore of society itself. Much is heard at this moment about plans for merging schools to blur distinctions of ability; much less discussed is the parallel movement to merge the sexes in mixed schools. There is a general assumption that this is somehow "progressive" and yet it could lead to an oddly reactionary, almost Victorian state of masculine dominance. There are strong arguments in favour of single-sex schools; but one might feel much happier about the rising tide of coeducation if it seemed likely to be real coeducation—that is to say, education where there is an equal balance not only among the pupils but among the staff and above all in the weighting of authority and leadership.

What is really happening, or about to happen, in our schools is a much greater concentration of power in a few hands. Headships will become much fewer and in most schools they will be restricted in two ways. First, they will go to graduates, normally those with grammar school experience (a development I happen to regard as desirable); and secondly,

women heads of grammar schools have been summarily demoted as a part of reorganisation. The number of women heads of mixed secondary schools throughout the country could be counted on two hands. In inner London, where there are three out of a total of well over a hundred such schools, Mrs Chetwynd of Woodberry Down is a shining light, and Walter James, in his "Middle-class Parent's Guide to Education," remarks a trifle indiscreetly that, "One hears it suggested that the LCC have had more luck with their headmistresses than with their headmasters." But even in London both head and deputy are sometimes male and it is surely at this point that a protest should be made.

The 1965 conference of the Association of Headmistresses sent a resolution to local education authorities stating that in mixed schools heads and deputy heads should be of opposite sexes. A number of enlightened authorities do keep this rule or go even farther; Rochdale, for instance, deserves a bouquet because when it converted boys' and girls' grammar schools to coeducation it stipulated that one of the heads should be a woman. But some authorities do not even make the gesture of advertising these posts as open to both sexes. A woman's chances of heading a big department, especially in mathematics or science, are equally slim.

Closed to women

The other day I was congratulating an acquaintance who had just been appointed deputy head of a large mixed grammar school in the South. There had been 160 candidates, he said. "How many were women?" I asked. "It wasn't open to women," he said. Such a policy deeply affects the interest of girls in mixed schools. These top jobs are the decision-making rôles on which depend the whole structure and well-being of our schools.

mistresses and liked them all. There was something to admire in each and variety is highly desirable. But I think anyone who knows schools intimately would agree that there are certain characteristic insights and methods of organisation that arise out of the masculine and feminine outlooks on life. Neither is necessarily better than the other and each may suit one sex; it is generally agreed, for instance, that boys can stand up better than girls to competition and do not suffer so much from being driven. But where pupils are mixed there should be a 50-50 chance of either emphasis prevailing in the school's general policy.

All the characteristics I now list are to be found, no doubt, in some boys' or mixed schools, and conversely may not be found in some girls' schools. Nevertheless, they do tend to be the marks of the feminine outlook.

1. A minimum of "streaming," positions in form, and the like.

(There is no streaming at St Paul's or King Edward's, Birmingham—joint winners of this year's Oxbridge stakes.)

2. Avoidance of early specialisation.

3. Stress on "general" and aesthetic subjects; the belief that a subject does not have to be publicly examined before it is taken seriously. The Crowther Report commended the girls' schools on the width of their sixth form courses; headmistresses wage an unrelenting war with male training college principals who demand A-levels with everything.

4. No hierarchy in the staff room. Girls' schools almost always share out sixth form work among all those able and willing to do it, down to the rawest beginner; whereas one has heard of schools where Mr X takes all the sixth form work and teaches none but first divisions.

Decisions on all these matters must ultimately be taken by those who accept the highest responsibility—that is,

senior mistress whose work sometimes seems so minding; manners arranging the refreshment sports day may not enough weight to influence them. Justice plainly requires a balance of power within school, and equally between schools in the numbers of and women heads. Only if they show their pupils a living model of harmonious partnership between the without which there not seem much point coeducation anyway.

People who would in dissent to this argument assert that there simply are not enough women of the necessary calibre and point to where no applications have been received. Possibly have been such cases, but wonders how attractive post in question was and assiduous were the efforts made to fill it. At the moment we desperately need to attract women to teaching; it is a common sense to wider basis of recruitment and at same time narrow the application.

Charge disproved

As to the old charge that women are incapable of fairly, it has surely been proved in a sphere where authority has been honoured and liberally carried for a century. And running a school happily is much less an administrative than a personal and one in which no form quality is ever wasted. One point one might wish to from those who have a clear view of all the school inspectors, education of university selectors—or the increasing numbers of who choose to work in schools. Or from Kenneth Barnes, a remarkably magnetic headmaster, who in a recent letter to "Guardian": "My impression of the personal quality of women heads of comprehensive schools is that they are unusually generous, objective and well-informed people under whom no one but a



THE MEAD.
WANTAGE
BERKS

TEL. WANTSLEY 137

23rd March, 1955.

My dear Headmistress,

Oh! what temptations you offer me, but I really don't think I can succumb because I am so exhausted in the winter months by travelling about that I invariably get 'flu', and after this year having had to put off 17 engagements because of 'flu', I vowed I would make no more engagements in the winter. Couldn't we leave things like this - if I am ever coming up to Bolton, a place I have never been to and would like to see, I will come and see the girls and speak to the dear things without giving them prizes. Bolton is where most town clerks and borough surveyors come from. The latter are generally brought up in the offices of Bradshaw, Gass & Hope (or is it Pope?).

I will remember your delightful verses and letter.

Yours sincerely,

oh u r e v e n .

The Anti-Feminist Schools." 26.2.66 (TES?)

In less serious mood, Margaret could be charming, relaxed and wickedly witty, qualities much appreciated by Frank Singleton, the then editor of the "Bolton Evening News", author of "The Lakes" (1954) and a kindred spirit in his love of literature, sense of fun and powerful style. They struck sparks off each other in many ways. Under his heading "Leisure and Pleasure" and the nom de plume Uncle Toby (as in "Tristram Shandy"), he discusses John Betjeman's poem "Business Girls" alongside Margaret's pastiche "Mr. Betjeman Takes his Bath", followed by his own parody. She dated this c.1955, soon after her arrival in Bolton, prompted by Betjeman's polite letter declining to present the prizes on Speech Day but hoping to visit "the dear girls" on another occasion. EL

Leisure and Pleasure BEN c.1955

She wrote several series of articles for B.E.N., highly personal, very evocative and whatever the subject, she would always have something memorable to say about it. One regular slot was “One woman’s world” and under her dating of 1963 she wrote of a visit to Ireland. Eire reminded her of “the land of the Lotus-Eaters”, with its “green emptiness.... mile upon mile of shell-sprinkled lonely strands designed by a sympathetic Providence to achieve the grand Irish object of making it impossible to get anywhere quickly.”



then a wild-eyed carrotty boy” whose written style at that stage in his life was so idiosyncratic that “I merely thought the boy was mad.” (She can be forgiven for that; most people who met him at that stage thought the same; he soon grew out of the world of fashionable satire, qualified as a doctor and became the polymath of many a humane and enlightened TV documentary. But some of that original quirkiness animated his later work in the theatre.) EL

The beauty of the countryside is quickly evoked “the melancholy heron spreads his wings over boggy fields scattered with gentian and grass-of-Parnassus.” (She knew her wildflowers) Likewise the Irish character. “Most surprisingly, real Irishmen talk and behave exactly like stage Irishmen.... And they say the commonest things with grace.”

At the same time, she was aware of the tensions then building between the North and the South, though thinking it “a very small and amateur war”, as most of us did in those days.

It must have been summer, for she writes of returning to Bolton “shining in the morning sunlight and gay with cotton frocks.” She was glad that her adopted town had been favourably mentioned by a member of the “Beyond the Fringe” revue, although the reference may have been ironic, given the character of the speaker and the fact that the article was in Punch.

Her article ends with a wry send-up of herself for failing to recognise “one of the few occasions on which I encountered genius,” the person in question being Jonathan Miller,

A Miscellany: Four items

Some miscellaneous pieces comprising another part of the collection of Margaret Higgison’s articles and documents shows her versatility and the breadth of scope covered by her outlook. Such facets of her personality and aspects of her professional life were borne out in her practical application of them. Although seeming to be disparate, the piece clearly contain elements that can be related directly to what we know of Margaret and her philosophy.

The pieces are as follows:

- 1 a newspaper article written by Margaret in 1957 to commemorate the School’s 80th birthday;
- 2 a newspaper article giving an account of the annual prize distribution (Speech Day) at which the guest speaker was Professor Cecil Day Lewis;
- 3 letters concerning an approach to Margaret to consider applying for the headship of a prestigious girls’ independent school - in fact, to her being ‘head hunted’ when she had already been in post at the Girls’ Division for a number of years;
- 4 an article from ‘The Guardian’ written by Margaret in 1965 relating to the time that she spent as a class teacher in a secondary modern school.

Chronologically the first in the series of ‘miscellaneous articles’ is ‘Growth of the school - and its good fortune An Equal Partner’.

Written by Margaret in 1957, it is the last in the series of articles in which she writes of the early days of the school. It coincides with the celebration of the school’s 80th birthday. Somewhat ironically, Margaret’s references to Miss Johnson and to Miss Dymond could be applied to Margaret herself: Miss Johnson is

“... very modern in her emphasis on doing and making things instead of just absorbing knowledge, and on the social side of the school...”

Also: “she evidently grasped the one great advantage which girls’ schools had at this time (as a compensation for their lack of tradition) - their freedom to tackle education in a new way.”

In addition, Miss Johnson had a desire “to maintain a discipline which should be flexible and spontaneous...”

Margaret comments on the “magnanimity” and “foresight” of the first Viscount Leverhulme. She identifies and comments on qualities and characteristics she so readily finds in others that could, clearly, also be ascribed to her. JH



'Schoolgirls told of the Value of Art'

A second piece, thought to be from 'the Bolton Evening News', carries quoted extracts from the speech made by Professor Day Lewis and from the report for the year given by the Headmistress. It reflects the ways in which the girls are encouraged to respond to academic and other stimuli, to be influenced by what surrounds them, to relate to those around them - to be, in short, what amounts to being versatile and well rounded.

In particular, Professor Day Lewis stressed the value of the arts.

"Art was a necessity, he said, because it made one more alive to the wonder and diversity, the comedies and tragedies of life."

"Through art, people were enabled to come to better terms with themselves and with those around them."

His exhortation to the girls is:

"Do set your sights high".

In her report, Margaret also encourages the girls by reflecting on and referring to the well-established ethos of the school so deeply embedded in her own philosophy:

"The idea that clever girls must be useless at games or indeed at any of the arts and enjoyments of life, is a complete mistake. In fact, we find no opposition in this school between the intellectual and the practical sides of life." JH

SCHOOLGIRLS TOLD THE VALUE OF ART

"IT IS A NECESSITY"

"DO not be put off from reading what you enjoy reading." Professor Cecil Day Lewis told the girls of Bolton School at the annual prize distribution yesterday.

Professor Lewis, who is professor of poetry at Oxford University, spoke on the value of the arts in life. There were various attitudes, he said. There were those who believed that poetry, for instance, was a subject for evaluation and analysis rather than enjoyment. There were the "lush yearners" who tip-toed up to poetry as to an altar and who treated the arts as a cross between church and a Turkish bath.

There was the man who did not know anything about the arts, but who knew what it was considered reasonable to like, and there was the highbrow who could not like anything unless everyone else disliked it.

The majority, however, held the view that the arts were good, valuable and useful up to a point "until you come to the more serious matters of life such as getting married or making money." They were considered a luxury rather than a necessity.

"The Arts Council tells us that from public funds 4d. a head is spent per year on the arts. That is not a creditable thing for a country which has produced some of the greatest in poetry in the world."

Art was a necessity, he said, because it made one more alive to the wonder and diversity, the comedies and tragedies of life. Without works of art our imaginations would perish. Artists created objects which interpreted our own experience to us. They clarified human relationships. Through art people were enabled to come to better terms with themselves and with those around them.

"The change and enlargement of your own minds," he told the girls, "will enable you to come to terms with literature, art or music which may at the moment seem difficult. Do set your sights high. Try something a little more difficult. It is through this process that you expand into the kind of understanding which in the end finds these works easy and natural."

"The artist's is a vocation to which many are called," he added, "and few are chosen, but we can all be amateurs, that is, lovers of art."

Outstanding

In her report for the year the headmistress, Miss M. D. Higginson, said the record in work had been outstanding. Out of 24 girls entered for the 11-plus examination, 20 won grammar

cate any attempt to push children beyond their natural capacity, which leads in the end to disillusion and unhappiness."

The greatest achievement of the year, she said, was the winning by the last head girl, Edie Marshall, and by Kathleen Johnson of two scholarships apiece, one at Oxford and one at Cambridge.

In a national analysis of open awards at the women's colleges at these two universities, Bolton School had tied for second place.

Whilst speaking of the university successes, Miss Higginson said it was noteworthy that four scholarship winners had played in the School first teams. "The idea that clever girls must be useless at games or indeed, at any of the arts and enjoyments of life, is a complete mistake. In fact, we find no opposition in this school between the intellectual and the practical sides of life."

"Every girl now assumes, naturally, that she must earn her own living. But I do not think our product is any less graceful and charming for that."

Thanking the staff for their work during the year, Miss Higginson said: "A lot is written about the declining quality of the teaching profession, as if it were a poor second choice in life, but I see absolutely no evidence for that view. On the contrary, it seems to me to go on attracting, as it always has done, some of the best people."

Prizes were presented by Professor Lewis to the following:

FORM AND PROGRESS PRIZES

Ruth Grace, Mary Hopwood, Margaret Spencer, Lesley Parker, Nancy Smith, Carol Taylor, Patricia Wade, Anne Walmsley, Linda Groom, Rosemary Quillman, Katherine Raspin, Geraldine Roper, Janet Weyman, Catherine Chadwick, Wendy Kelsby, Elizabeth Lee, Vivienne Ramsden, Brenda Beckett, Barbara Crosswell, Margaret Holmes, Janet Holt.

SIXTH FORM SUBJECT PRIZES

Lillian Boardman, Domestic Science; Yvonne Conroy, Mathematics and Theoretical Mechanics; Gwyneth Davies, Domestic Science; Helen Howard, History; Brenda Smith, Handicraft; Valerie Smith, Music; Margaret Booth, Art; Marjorie Mootarney, Handicraft; Margaret Gregory, French; Joyce Hutton, Mathematics and Theoretical Mechanics; Diana Haworth, Art; Hazel Bulme, Domestic Science and Handicraft; Elaine Kelsey, English and History; Pat Rodgers, Handicraft; Margaret Rothwell, Physics, Mathematics and Theoretical Mechanics; Ruth Senior, German; Dorothy Taylor, Handicraft; Brenda Weller, Art and Handicraft; Anne Williams, Latin and Greek.

MALLINSON MUSIC PRIZE:

Cynthia Pickavance (senior), Muriel Blackburn (junior).

FRANCES M. RICKETTS MUSIC PRIZE:

Jean Barlow.

VERA GARR PRIZE:

Kathleen Holden.

Abelagh Brough.

MARGARET WALSH READING PRIZE:

Brenda Smith.

Dear Miss Higginson

Every line of your letter makes me wish that I possessed the tongue of an angel or the pen of such a ready writer as yourself, to persuade you to think again. I know what you mean about the inseparable marriage to the establishment, but the whole hope is that we might prevail on someone like yourself slightly to change the image. However, as a fellow Guardian Type, I respect your resistance to the idea, but I am not sure that you won't get another letter on this matter before long, and I do hope that, if you do, you will give it another thought.

The fact is that the job is even harder than the one you are now doing with such outstanding success. The shortage of good people is so acute at this time that one has to hope that anyone who can carry a heavier weight of responsibility than she is at present carrying, would be prepared to consider doing so. I think it is part of the generosity we both recognise in the Principal that made her think you might be able to consider this change for yourself.

Thank you so much for writing in such friendly terms, and good luck to you in all your doings.

A letter.

The third item is made up of a letter in response to one by Margaret's in which she has evidently turned down what many would regard as a very tempting offer. The Headmistress of Bolton School has clearly been 'head hunted' but has responded by underlying her "inseparable marriage to the establishment": the Girls' Division. Margaret's reputation goes before her.

Margaret's versatility is the key element that ultimately demonstrates that degree of breadth and scope outlined earlier in this section of the archive material. JH

Back to the front BY MARGARET HIGGINSON

"SOLLY don't need to learn anything, Miss—
 's got a better waistkin for 'm!" This
 terse summary of the local attitude to education
 was one of the first things I heard when I
 became class teacher to Three D. My pupils'
 attitude to teachers was equally definite. They
 viewed them in a practical and sporting spirit, as
 wild cots presumably view the elders who try to
 break them in, as burding to be barked off. They
 felt their status depended on being the worst
 class in the school. "Everybody says so, Miss?"
 And they cherished their mame-symbols—their
 non-uniform, their eye-shadow, their avoidance of
 physical exercise, their bubbles of bright pink
 chewing-gum.

They were, so to speak, permanently pleased against education. To teachers individually there could be affable, even sympathetic. They would offer kindly advice—"You ought to bash us, Miss—you're too soft!"—but collectively they were as restless as a pan of milk incessantly coming to the boil, if not actually boiling over. The unremitting effort of sheer will that was required to maintain any kind of attention used up most of the psychic energy which ought to have gone into real teaching and left a newcomer frustrated as well as exhausted.

My inefficiency was not to be earned by lack of experience. I had twenty-two years of teaching behind me and for exactly half that time I had been a headmistress, but that was in a girl's district grant grammar school blessed with every possible amenity and privilege. Such a secure and agreeable position tends to give one a dangerous illusion of invulnerability and it was on this account as much as any other that, backed by indignant governors and an ideal deputy head, I put into practice a long-meditated design of teaching English for one term in a secondary modern school. It was a very short time and my retreat was ignominiously secured in advance; still, I learnt quite a lot, even if Three D didn't. "Expose thyself," as King Lear remarked, "to feel what writhes thee!" Find out what Newson is really about. Eat the pudding and prove the theories. And incidentally enjoy once more the camaraderie of the front line.

South Street Secondary School (they no longer call them "Modern" in London) has 700 pupils; though not truly Cremonese, because the intake is partially "cream." It is nevertheless a "first-choice school" and has its "grammar streams." It is a shiny, a stark brick building set in a barren asphalt yard in an area of inner London which, though vastly improved in recent times, is still a ghettolike area. Its population is of very mixed racial origin—mainly Cypriot, West Indian, Asian—and limited educational background; the headmaster did not know of one parent who had been in grammar school, let alone university. The LAG does its utmost to compensate for the inherent defects of an old school in such an area, with, for instance, most generous provision for library and text-book, and, in the arts, music, drama, and so on, with a staff of over thirty (practically all boys) and hundreds or two each year to university—a triumph which seems much more thrilling than the long honours lists of more established schools.

The physical handicaps at South Street are nothing compared to the problem that dominates everything else—the ever-changing of staff. There is a splendid nucleus of mopers whom the children know and trust and, on the whole, obey; there are others doing a good job, who will stay, perhaps, two or three years; but at least one-quarter of the total staff changes from term to term and often from week to week. In four years the headmaster ("I stay because I enjoy 'tosses") has never once had the same staff go

two successive Monday mornings. (This put into sharp perspective my concern over replacing one mathematics mistress in my own school where more than half the staff have served for seven years or more.)

I thought before I went to Stepany, and I think so even more now, that community is the most important thing of all, especially where the children are less clever and often have particular problems of adjustment or handicaps. An ordinary person who will stay and who cares for children is more use than a succession of brilliant scholars. "Oh, Miss, are you going too?" "Who shall we get next?" And of course it is just the kind of thing we need in the grammar schools who are suffering most from the general shortage of teachers. These Kasi End people are not getting their fair share of the married women. There was not one single mother on the staff at South Street (apart from one or two part-timers in the Canteen or Department). The reason is obvious: married women like to teach in the school round the corner and they don't live round the corner. Stepany, I must tell you, is very pretty. Hampstead. Yes, there are a few who could help children whose greatest need, I would say, is for patience, steadiness, motherliness. (All the South Street staff commuted from a distance.)

TIME children were not all like Three D. Although they were all effervescent, individualistic, lacking in concentration to a degree inconceivable in my Lancashire school. Some of the A-stream would have flourished in a grammar school and will no doubt go on to academic successes.

I hated leaving these children as soon, indeed I felt like a deserter. The experience has confirmed my belief that it is the people who choose to teach in this kind of school who should have the prestige and the honors and the OREs. It is also high time to put into practice the suggestion made in the Newsweek Report that special rewards should be given to teachers in downtown schools, above all to those who stay, and that promotion should not be reserved for those who migrated from west to school, gaining "experience." But I also believe that the strongest inducement to women to come into teaching is not special allowances, pension rights, reduction of income tax and the rest, desirable as all these are, but the knowledge that they are quite desperately needed.

It is enough being done to let them know the true disastrous situation at this moment! The parents, whose children are suffering most from the teacher shortage are usually the least articulate in our society, though it by no means follows that they care less. (South Street parents showed great interest in the school.) Few "middle-class" parents are vividly aware of this national crisis, as urgent in its way as any wartime emergency. Perhaps we are all so dangled by the glorious egalitarian future that we do not look very closely at the dirty present—yet this is all the schooling these particular children are ever going to get. Now is it clear how "reorganization" is ever going to put teachers into unattractive areas unless they choose to go there; more likely it will deplete them still further when the path of promotion lies through big new "with-it" schools. To him that hath shall be given" remains the truest of hard sayings.

There are great pleasures and rewards in "South Street," not least in the friendliness of a staff room where every new member is welcomed as a recruit to a hard-pressed garrison. The children, too, have been known to show appreciation. Just occasionally one finds a laurel leaf among the brickbats.

In 1965, her article 'Back to the front' was published in 'The Guardian'. With wry observations and perceptive reflection, Margaret summarises what is, quite obviously, a brave, enterprising foray into a secondary modern school, having left Miss Winifred Pilsbury in her place at Bolton. With twenty-two years of teaching behind her, the fact that Margaret was able to survive a term as a class teacher in such a very different milieu from Bolton School is a tribute to the distinctive and remarkable approach that she had to her work.

Margaret wrote in the article that she saw the strongest inducement to women to enter the teaching profession as: “the knowledge that they are quite desperately needed”. Was it this, we might speculate, that propelled her into that very different area of work and, after only one term, left her with such sharp and fond memories - as well as regrets - concerning her lively pupils?

"I hated leaving these children so soon, indeed I felt like a deserter."
JH

Fig. 1. α_1 - reduced pressure; α_2 - α_1^2 .

$$H_{\text{max}} = H_{\text{min}} + H_0 \left(\frac{1}{1 - \frac{1}{2} \frac{H_{\text{max}}}{H_0}} \right)$$
[illegible]

I hope you like this - another - the last -
set of mail's. I hope it's coming - 4
GPs. I'm sure and the other is sure
enough I think the new set will be
more for "Greece".
I hope there's no problem with
your library.
Love, George

Cecil Day Lewis and Speech Day.

Speech Day was always a very formal occasion, when we all appeared in best bibs and tuckers (that's just the staff, most in their appropriate academic dress; the rest of us were inspected for clean (indoor!) shoes, properly-knotted ties and tidy hair.) As yet we did not have a school song, but the choir would sing instead. It was generally a happy event, when academic, sporting and other awards were made on the same occasion, and there was a general sense of achievement summed up in the Headmistress's Report. Unusually for those days, the individual prizewinners were free to choose their own books. I don't remember anybody's choice being rejected. And best of all, the invited VIP who made The Speech would end by asking for the traditional day's holiday to celebrate our mutual efforts. Margaret was a great admirer of C. Day Lewis, now seen as a "Thirties" poet, forgotten or overshadowed by his more notorious contemporaries. This is the time but not the place for a critical reappraisal of his life and poetic oeuvre, except to say that his was one of those original voices in poetry that MDH recognised and valued. He could be sharply sardonic, on the English cemetery in Rome where Shelley and Keats were buried "Here is one corner of a foreign field
That is for ever garden suburb. See
In their detached and smug-lawned residences,
Behind a gauze of dusty shrubs, the English
Indulge their lifelong taste for privacy."

(But then, he was born an Irishman)

Or lapidary, in an early poem (1925)

“Tempt me no more, for I

Have known the lightning's hour,

The poet's inward pride,

The certainty of power."

Or tenderly evocative, on the Tuscan countryside

“Rosetted oxen move-

The milky skins, the loose-kneed watersilk gait of

Priestesses vowed to Love."

Evidence of widely-ranging correspondence

Margaret evidently wrote to a range of people. Celebrities as well as academics have replied to her obviously interesting, stimulating missives - more often than not containing requests to speak at the Girls' Division, to meet the girls and to visit Bolton.

The television personality and raconteur, Joyce Grenfell corresponded in turn with Margaret very much in the spirit that Margaret must have crafted her original letter. From the light, sincere tone of the response, we draw the knowledge that Joyce Grenfell had been approached in a way that evoked genuine regret at being unable to accept the 'tempting' invitation. JH

Montefiore memories

In April 1965 some of the pupils of the Montefiore School put their feelings about Margaret into writing and the results are amusing, self-revealing and most of all touching. They clearly appreciated Margaret's efforts to broaden their horizons, both by encouraging them to read (of course!) and by taking them out of the school environment to a different part of London and to Cambridge. Who knows what lasting impressions were made on them and what new ideas were planted in their minds, maybe to show fruit much later?

The following extracts are taken from their letters, poems and short essays:

Dear Miss Higginson

I know we are all sorry that you are leaving. I hope you will be happy in your next school that you go to. Thank you for taking us to Cambridge. We all enjoyed ourselves. Thank you for everything you have taught us. I hope you will come back soon and teach us again. We have enjoyed all your lessons, as you have made them interesting and enjoyable. I know you will make the children in your next school as happy as you have made us.

Yours sincerely

HR

5

Besides a ~~very~~ Education:-
provides for Staff:-
Sherry Parties,
Home-made sweets at Christmas

provides for Girls:-
Ambulatory Encouragement
"Why do I never see any of you girls
on Winter Hill?"
Lots of ~~it~~ for walking the Pennine Wa

My gratitude to Miss Higginson

Thank you for all your kindness,

Thank you sincerely,

All our class are grateful for spending our past term in your company,

For taking us to Cambridge and giving us your care.

And the same pupil added a poem for Margaret to read:

The prow of the midnight watchman.

It's dark outside, very dark.

My only light is the light of God, shining with my lamp,

The only sound my ears do trace is the jingle of my keys and the squelching of my shoes.

It's dark outside, very dark.

It is a sad thing you are leaving just when the class is getting to know you better.

Everybody enjoyed working with you although we made a lot of noise

Miss Higginson is our English teacher,

I think some of you would like to meet her,

Back she goes to Bolton School.

Some of us don't like that at all.

We all wonder

Who we will have

We wish she would

Stay to read her poems again.

Back to Lancashire she goes

To her school that she knows.

Good luck Miss Higginson

As you go on your way.

It was nice having you

We wish you would stay.

I appreciate how you tried to help us in every way you could. Take the way you let some of us go to the library and the way you got books from the library.I hope that when you leave you will remember all of us and that you enjoy yourself in everything you do for the rest of your school teaching. It is a shame you are leaving because I liked you.

A Poem

Miss Higginson is going away,

Away from our noise and play,

Perhaps she will come back one day,

And we will be merry and gay.

For the new teacher will be here,

And we will be trembling with fear,

For he will not be as kind as Miss H.

I can't find nothing to rhyme with "H",

All I can say is 'Hurry back and see us Miss H.

Please!



Margaret had enjoyed the term at the Robert Montefiore School, despite some fraught occasions, and she was always full of admiration for those at the more stressful end of the teaching spectrum. The experience had been a very positive one for both teacher and taught and she was always pleased when a girl from Bolton School took up the challenge to teach in a school where life was not so easy.

TO COMMENCE:	
AT THE BUFFET TABLES:	
HOT SELECTION	CHICKEN SUPREME IN A SPRING ONION CRAWY
	AND:
	DICED LAMB & MINT PIE
	POTATOES WITH THE ABOVE WILL BE SERVED AT THE TABLES
A HOT VEGETARIAN OPTION WILL BE AVAILABLE	
COLD BUFFET:	HONEY ROASTED LAMB (Garnished with pineapple)
	TRADITIONAL CHEESE & ONION QUICHE (Served warm)
	WARM SAVOURY RICE
	WARM PASTA IN TOMATO & BASHI SAUCE
TO CONCLUDE:	TOSSED CRISP GREEN SALAD
	GREEK TOMATO SALAD
	THREE BEAN SALAD
	SERVED AT THE TABLE:
A CHOICE OF DESSERT:	
STRAWBERRY & BRANDY SHORTCAKE (Served with a strawberry chip ice cream)	
OR	
WARM DUTCH APPLE PIE & CINNAMON CREAM	
A SELECTION OF CHEESES, CELERY, FRUIT & A SAVOURY BISCUIT SELECTION WILL BE AVAILABLE AT THE BUFFET TABLE.	
TRADITIONAL TEA OR COFFEE (With a selection of petit four chocolates)	

MDH's 80th BIRTHDAY

In October 1998 Margaret was 80 years old, and to mark the occasion, several Old Girls arranged a birthday party for her in the Arts Centre. The guests represented almost all sections of her life friends, family, present staff, ex- members of staff and Old Girls whom she had taught and/or influenced in some way throughout her tenure as Headmistress. As you can imagine this was no silent assembly, but Janet Hathaway nobly brought a sense of order to the proceedings by offering a lovely, thoughtful grace on everyone's behalf. The meal was most enjoyable and the party became a reunion of old friends and the establishing of new ones. For those of you who did not have the pleasure of enjoying the rather splendid meal, or have forgotten the detail, the following is a copy of the menu. Those were the days!

When the meal ended a tribute was paid to Margaret by Deborah Taylor – here is what Deborah said:-

I am sure that all of you were as delighted as I was to receive an invitation to Margaret's birthday. I know you would like me to begin by thanking the organisers, Janet Hathaway, Elsie Peel, and Gladys Sidebottom for all they have done to make this such a brilliant occasion. Not only have they given us a wonderful lunch, but far more importantly, they have made it possible for us all, each one of us members of Margaret's extended family, to share this special birthday with her.

Margaret engenders in me a range of emotions. Respect, indeed awe, is fairly high on the list. As you can imagine I have viewed today with a degree of trepidation. The knowledge that each of you sitting here is thanking her lucky stars it's me and not her is little comfort. I feel the weight of hundreds of Bolton Old Girls on my shoulders. It is indeed a great honour to speak on their behalf.

Margaret and I go back a long way. In 1961, when I was in form 1, I was attempting to draw a bird. Art was never my strong suit and nor was observation of the natural world. I was trying to decide if birds had chins when the door opened and Margaret swept into view.

I had just decided that on balance, birds must have chins, and had drawn a sort of wobble underneath what passed for a beak, when she approached. She looked at my effort - and by now I was in some doubt about the whole matter - and said enthusiastically "that's lovely dear". I did wonder whether she

was not too clear about birds' anatomy either, but from then on I was a fan.

We have had our ups and downs, particularly during my adolescence when I had a great deal of trouble keeping track of my possessions. I am sure that every one of us here has stood in the corridor, waiting for that ghastly light to turn from red to green, and racking our brains to think what she might be wanting this time. I remember a particular games shirt which had been missing for about 2 terms and looked it. Margaret just handed it back, with the tips of her fingers, in absolute silence.

Bolton School under Margaret was a world of Beauty and Order prizes, deportment girdles, white gloves, panama hats and members of staff solemnly measuring the length of skirt from hem to sloping desk. Margaret was able to stand on the stage and decree that consorting with members of the other division in Queen's Park was forbidden. As she memorably told us, in the very midst of the swinging sixties, "when one buffalo rolls in the mud, all the others get splashed." From then on, this particular activity was known to us all as "buffaloing".

Since having school age children of my own I have spent quite some time in the company of headteachers. Margaret is my benchmark and I have yet to meet one who matches up. There may well be exceptions in this room but few modern headmistresses would spend an hour each week reading "The Pilgrims Progress" to 10 year olds? Who would go to hospital every day after school to read "Lord of the Rings" to a sick

pupil? And who would have the courage to leave school for a term to go back to the classroom in the east end of London? The presence of so many of us here today tells her how highly she is regarded.

For myself, outside immediate family, she has been the single most important influence on my life. I am sure that I speak for many of us who are here, and many more who would have liked to be. At happy times, and at sad times, Margaret has been a rock. We had a close correspondence when my father was dying. The poetry which she sent me during those terrible weeks, Wordsworth inevitably, was a mainstay during my "watch o'er man's mortality".

Her impact on so many lives has been immeasurable. She has sent hundreds, thousands of girls out into the world with her values imprinted on their souls. Integrity, industry, compassion, a respect for intellectual rigour. If one could summarise Margaret's teaching into one parable it would be the parable of the talents. Every girl at Bolton School knew how fortunate she was. We also knew our good fortune carried with it an absolute obligation to put our talents to the service of the community as a whole. Margaret is a teacher by precept and by example. Few women can look back on their lives with such pride.

I would like to finish by saying thank you, thank you to Margaret for all that she has done for me, and for many many others, and to wish her a very happy birthday. And to drink her health. To Margaret!

No better tribute could be paid to Margaret than the foregoing – it seems to encapsulate the thoughts and gratitude of so many Old Girls, parents and friends who had the privilege of knowing her, not only as a headmistress, but as a generous, compassionate human being.

The birthday party continued with a rousing chorus of "Happy Birthday", led by Margaret Long, the cutting of a beautiful celebration cake, and much more chatting, until we almost had to be thrown out of the Arts Centre at 5pm, having assembled at 12 noon. GES

Margaret had kept and apparently treasured, many letters of gratitude from parents whose daughters had been helped in many and various ways by her thoughtful generosity. A beautiful letter that I think portrays Margaret's generosity of spirit admirably, was received by her in 1979 from Mrs Barling.

Margaret always spoke of her time at Somerville College, with great affection and was always delighted when a girl from Bolton School won a place there. The following tribute was written by Jenny Croft (Jackson) who is a former student of both Bolton School and Somerville College, Oxford. GES

0161-789.5533

3 Newlands Ave
Peel Green
Eccles
M30. 7LL
July 26th 1979

Dear Miss Higginson,

Just over a year ago you gave to me a priceless gift, some tranquility of mind and spirit and the knowledge that you had some confidence in me, however little I really had in myself at the time.

I cannot afford to mark your retirement with a priceless gift and indeed feel sure you would be annoyed if I attempted to do so. Both the children and I would like you to have something that is a little of us, at which you may glance from time to time and know the mental as well as practical help you have given. We would therefore be honoured if you would accept this piece of glass, which has been in my family for some time, because we feel that to look on beautiful workmanship can also reflect a tranquility which we hope will be yours for the future together with great happiness.

Sincerely, Barbara Barling.

5

Besides a ~~very~~ Education:-
provides for Staff:-
Sherry Parties,
Home-made sweets at Christmas

provides for Girls:-
Ambulatory Encouragement
"Why do I never see any of you girls on Winter Hill?"
Lots of ~~it~~ for walking the Pemmie Way

Drug Investigator:-
summons shame-faced Godson to escort her to Suspect Pub
(No illustration. I leave effect to your imagination)

Railway Enthusiast:-
"No, I never married; I couldn't find an engine driver."
"Save the Settle-Carlisle Line!"

Bolton Enthusiast:-
Tune Bar Ambience (Winter Hill etc)

Margaret Higginson, a southerner, had come to Bolton in a spirit of mission, as she herself admitted, describing her appointment at her 80th birthday party. She saw the job advertised and thought she might bring enlightenment to the benighted (and probably ignorant) north. She expected to find a school with asphalt playground and iron railings. Instead she found a large sandstone building in leafy grounds, with a hammer beam roof in the Great Hall. She nearly didn't stay for interview. What she did do was to take the bus to its terminus and walk out on to the moors – and fell in love with the countryside. She conveyed her enthusiasm to the governors, and was appointed.

She believed in a wide curriculum, including current events, compulsory maths for all Sixth formers, and general studies, organised jointly with the boys' school, hitherto adjacent but alien territory. The general studies included modules on philosophy, architecture, nuclear physics and cosmology as well as cookery for the boys. An organ was installed in the Great Hall, and later a theatre was built. The school took part in schools competitions on the radio and television. She wanted us all to participate in whatever was going on. So, when the school hosted an exhibition of the work of local artists, we were all allowed to vote for our favourite, which was purchased. We also had regular votes for our favourite hymns. She saw the school as a community and wanted everyone to feel they had a part in it.

Formidably well-read, and not only in her own field of literature, but also an enthusiast for science, she had strong views on how she wanted girls to be educated, and this was reflected in all aspects of school life. Not for nothing did she have an elderly aunt who had been a suffragette, and we were constantly exhorted to make the most of our talents and opportunities. She encouraged us all to have views on every topic, and to discuss them. Older girls had to endure lunching at high table with her, where she would fire intimidating questions on topics she considered you should be interested in, from literature, to politics, science and religion. This could be a terrifying experience, made worse by her insistence that all meals should be consumed only with a fork. School toad-in-the-hole and semolina pudding are resistant to this method of consumption.

But it was not just Hig, as she was known, whom you might have to talk to. There was a constant stream of visitors, varying from local dignitaries to the really famous, such as Trevor Huddleston, Bernard Lovell, Fred Hoyle, and both Shirley and Bernard Williams. We all grew up able to converse, and well aware of the issues of the day. We also had well developed social consciences. She encouraged support for many charities, especially in the developing world. The school had close links with a leper hospital in Africa and water projects in India, from which she received regular letters, which she read out in assembly. Closer to home, she was keen on raising money through what she called self-denial. If there was a disaster such as the loss of a trawler, out would come the self-denial boxes on every window sill, and girls were expected to forego buying biscuits at break, or to walk rather than catch the bus home, and put the savings in the boxes. The fact that most people did most of the time says much for her strength of personality, though the school did occasionally go on strike when self-denial came around too frequently.

Her concern for the disadvantaged led her to take a sabbatical to teach in Rhodes Boyson's boys' secondary modern school in Islington. This was a bold venture as it was a change of gender, location and ability range. We were never quite sure what the boys made of her, but she found the experience energising.

Miss Higginson's philosophy is best expressed through the words of the school prayer ("Of those to whom much is given, much will be expected") and the school song, commissioned by her. We were left in no doubt that we had been given much. And lying behind this was the sentiment expressed in the opening lines of the poem that is the song.

*If God build not the house
And lay the groundwork sure
It cannot last the stormy day....*

A deep quiet faith informed all she did, and gave strength to her opinions.

This does not mean she was universally liked. She often seemed very alien and Home Counties to girls with strong local accents, and she was intimidatingly intelligent and intellectual. What it was impossible to be was indifferent. Love

her or hate her (and many people did both) she provoked a reaction, and forced you to think.

Above all, she was a superb teacher. I can recall every lesson she ever taught me, from my first term to my scholarship classes. And unlike many heads, she made a point of teaching each form at least once a term. This meant she knew every girl in the school by name, as well as remembering details of their family. As she herself said, reminding us to recall Jacob and the angel (*And the angel called Jacob, Jacob, and knew his name and had power over him*), to know someone's name is a powerful tool. You don't shout "Stop running in the Corridor." You say "Susan, stop running." It works because not only Susan stops but others who think they too will be identified.

Her care for her pupils extended into their later life. An inveterate correspondent, she kept in touch with large numbers of old girls, offering advice on reading for their children, running local groups, and generally on how to build the New Jerusalem wherever they were. She has even been known to write to husbands, in my case to encourage him to write more letters to *The Times*.

She remained attached to Somerville, where she had undoubtedly been very happy, and in later years was a regular attendee at literary lunches. She described Somerville as "plain living and high thinking", and was always anxious to see the college prosper.

She never married, and had no close family. The school became her family, and she will be sadly missed by all those she inspired, infuriated and influenced.

JENNY CROFT (JACKSON, 1968)

01223 423551

Margaret thoroughly enjoyed visits from Mrs Gill Richards, Headmistress from 2005-2011, and she always showed a keen interest in hearing about what was happening in the school. Margaret felt that they were kindred spirits, chipped from the same block!

Mrs Richards offers the following tribute to Margaret.

Miss Margaret Higginson

It was Carol Haslam who first mentioned to me that Margaret was still in Bolton. She was already a legend in the school and staff who had been pupils of hers still talked about her. It was Gladys Sidebottom, a Governor, who said to me that Margaret would love to meet me. I decided to go and see her just before half term - which I discovered was near her birthday - and I took her some flowers from school. I had been told to stay only a short time as Margaret tired quickly. She was thrilled to see me and said she had been hoping I would find time to visit her.

The next hour and a half passed rapidly as Margaret proceeded to interview me for the Headship of the Girls' Division! I was cross-questioned about changes to the curriculum, pastoral matters and asked did I go over to the Boys' quad to see the buses off! By this time it was nearly lunch time and I knew I must have passed the test because Margaret said to me, 'Now, my dear, a glass of my better sherry, I think. It's in the blue bottle.'

I tried to visit Margaret once a year at least and I am sorry I did not find more time. She was an amazing lady, far ahead of her time in Headmistress terms. She told me on subsequent visits how she had been appointed. She thought she got the job, because when asked by Lord Leverhulme what she had done the day before the interview, she told him she had spent the afternoon on Rivington Pike; apparently, all the other candidates had been in their rooms preparing!

I last saw Margaret just before she died when I took in the examination results to tell her about them. The English results were particularly outstanding and she always took a great interest in what and how the girls were doing. Baroness Shirley Williams was also with her and we had a three-way conversation on all sorts of subjects which Margaret was very much part of, although she had, by then, lost the power of speech.

She was one of the great Headmistresses of her generation, a real academic but with a true vocation to teach.

Margaret had a great respect for Mrs Gill Richards, Headmistress of Bolton School from 2005-11, and felt that they were kindred spirits, chipped from the same block! GES