

JEAN ASKHAM (NEE) ELLIOTT
1950 – 1956

Staff. I respected the teaching staff and some of them I liked very much. I particularly liked Miss Rickard (Maths) who was my Form Mistress in Form 1a, Miss Godfrey (English), Miss Hulbert (Cookery), also Miss Garner, Miss Williams and Mrs Couldrey who all taught PE and Games. I was a little fearful of the two or three of the older mistresses who could on occasion be rather severe.

Senior Prefects were the Upper Sixth girls. Form Prefects were elected each Term. We had small round royal-blue metal badges and took on some tasks and errands to help our Form Mistress.

Streaming. In 1950 I believe there were around 350 girls at PHS. Two streams ran through the School, an A and B stream; there was one Lower Sixth Form and one Upper Sixth Form – the Prefects.

The Gong. A very large copper gong set on a wooden stand was positioned at the base of the main School staircase and rung by the Senior Prefects to signal early morning Assembly (daily) and the end of each lesson. Fire drill or a fire alarm was signalled by the continuous ringing of the gong when we had to assemble on the asphalt area at the side of the main School building.

School Choirs. I think there were two choirs – a Junior and a Senior School Choir (photo enclosed). I enjoyed singing in the Choir and Mrs Richardson coached and conducted us. We often performed at School concerts.

Drama. Drama was prominent during my time at PHS and Lower and Upper Forms put on plays periodically for parents and friends.

“Persephone”. In 1953 I remember playing a nymph in an Upper School production of “Persephone” which was directed by Miss Saville, the Senior English mistress.

“Alice in Wonderland” was put on by 4th and 5th year girls in 1954 or 1955. Jean Tamblin played Alice, I was The Mad Hatter; I remember it was great fun.

“Androcles and the Lion” by Bernard Shaw was another epic production! (photo enclosed). Miss Watts (English) produced it. I shared the part of Androcles with Frances Berry. This was probably in 1955 or 1956.

Cookery. We were taught cooking skills by Miss Hulbert in our Cookery classes which began in our 2nd or 3rd year. I always enjoyed these lessons and Miss Hulbert was an excellent and patient teacher. We brought the required ingredients to School and were given a demonstration by Miss Hulbert and then set to cook. I cannot remember a great deal of what we made and took home to be sampled by our families, but do recall making lentil soup and I think we made suet pastry and did some yeast cookery. There were one or two girls to each of the large wooden topped cookery tables and the gas cookers (? any electric) were at the sides of the room. At the end of

each double lesson we had to vigorously scrub our tables with soapy water. I still find my School cookery book “The Kingsway Book of Cookery” by Dora Seton, a useful point of reference.

Scripture. Dear Miss Davies with the “earphone plaits” taught us Scripture and Maths. Each week we were given a few verses of the Bible to learn and were tested on it the following week.

Discipline. Discipline was strict but most pupils did not seem to resent it and for me, schooldays at PHS were very happy. We were made to work hard and achieve good results. Homework was given from Form 1 onwards and there was usually plenty of it. We could receive Order Marks from teachers or Senior Prefects. These misdemeanours were recorded and I believe three Order Marks within a certain period meant a Detention. This would mean staying for half an hour after School in the Detention Room, supervised by a teacher. A Detention was also given for poor work or failing to give in homework on time. An imposition might be given during a Detention such as re-doing homework or writing lines, eg 100 lines “I must not eat in the street”. There was a strict out of School code of behaviour and we had to be properly dressed in our School uniform and always wearing our School beret. The ultimate disgrace would have been to be expelled. I am not aware that this happened to any girl during my time at PHS.

SPORT

Tennis. Tennis was taught to all pupils and I believe commenced in First Year. Without playing fields at North Hill, we were bussed to the tennis courts at Seymour Park, Mannamead. I think PHS achieved a good standard at tennis and matches were played against other local schools. Games and PE mistresses at this time were Miss Garner and Mrs Williams with Mrs Couldrey who was part-time and I remember coached hockey.

Hockey. We were “bused” for hockey practice to the playing fields of Farleys Factory at Hartley. The wonderful aroma of Farleys Baby Rusks cooking, permeated the air! There was a 1st XI and 2nd XI and fixtures against other girls’ schools in the Plymouth area. I played Left Inner for the 2nd XI, now called Inside Left.

Swimming. Swimming was very strong in the 1950’s with many girls obtaining proficiency in Life-Saving exams.

Athletics. By 1953 or 1954, PHS was entering girls for events in the Plymouth Inter-School Sports and, if successful, to go on to compete in the next round (Devon Schools), and ultimately the All-England Inter County Championships. In 1955, I remember travelling to Manchester for the “Nationals” as a member of the Devon Schools Team to compete in the 150 yards sprint and a relay. In July 1956, there were 5 PHS girls in the Devon Team when the All-England Schools Meeting was in Plymouth at the United Services Ground (the Brickfields), Devonport. I was once again competing in the 150 yards and 4 x 100 yards relay. Prince Philip took the salute at the March Past of the County Teams. We were very proud to be representing Devon and our School. We had a girl in the Northumberland Team staying with us. Mrs Williams (PHS Games) and I think her husband who taught at one of the

Plymouth boys' schools, encouraged and coached us. Some of us joined Devonport Athletics Club and were also coached by Mr Tony Ward (AAA Coach) at the Brickfields cinder track. Until Mrs Williams' arrival, I am not sure how much emphasis was given to Athletics at our School.

Ballroom Dancing. Ballroom dancing classes for 6th (and 5th) formers were held in the School Hall one evening a week with boys from Plymouth College. We were taught the Waltz, Quickstep and probably the Barn Dance, the Valetta and the St Bernard's Waltz. At the start of the evening, most of the boys sat at one side of the Hall and girls on the other. The music was probably from a record-player.

Death of King George VI February 1952. I think it was Miss Turner, our Headmistress, who came into our classroom during a lesson to break the news to us of the death of the King. I seem to remember that the School was closed for the remainder of the day.

School Trip June 1953. At the age of 13 I went on a School day-trip to London to see the Coronation decorations, a few days after Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation. I recall sitting with my friends in one of the empty stands that had been erected for the many people who had watched the procession to and from Westminster Abbey where the Queen was crowned. I bought one or two souvenirs from the street traders. We travelled to London by train – my first visit and it was all very exciting. We were probably taken around central London on a bus or coach and we had a steamer trip on the Thames (photo encl),

Careers. I remember being impressed that one girl senior to me was to train at Medical School to become a doctor. I thought she must be immensely clever – likewise a Prefect who was to take up law. It was quite unusual for girls to go into medicine, and I believe law. The careers put before us seemed to be mainly teaching, nursing (or hospital related work, eg radiography, pharmacy) and secretarial training. After one year in the Sixth Form, I left to take up a secretarial course at Plymouth Technical College and passed the Intermediate level of the Corporation of Secretaries examinations with RSA diplomas in shorthand and typewriting. A year as a shorthand-typist at the Sun Insurance Office was followed by three years as Secretary to The Clerk to The Governors of Plymouth College and 18 months at the Lord Mayor's Parlour as Assistant Secretary to the Lord Mayor of Plymouth. I then left to be married and live in London.