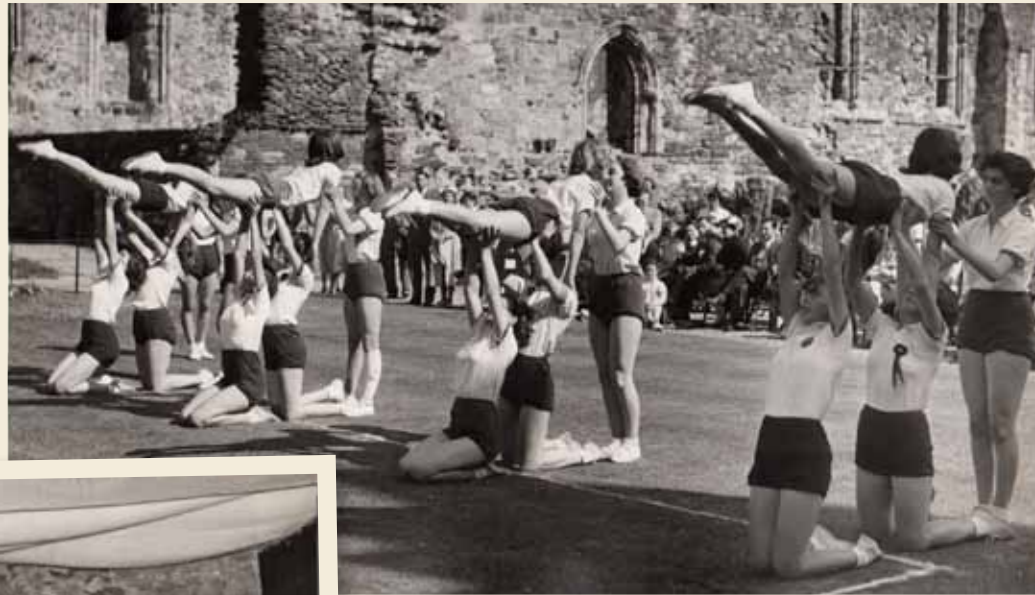


Good Times Are Back

With memories of the war and rationing receding, Battle Abbey was a happy place for the girls to be at school in the 1950s. School magazines show a range of activities were enjoyed, including school plays and sports. Each year some of the girls could also look forward to a visit to Wimbledon.

► Gymnastics display on Sixpenny Lawn, 1951



▲ *Humpty Dumpty*, 1953



► *Little Women*, 1954

Old Girls' Day was another much-loved event in the school calendar. Fanny Beaton, a pupil, gave an affectionate description of Old Girls' Day in 1953.

Unlike last year, Old Girls' Day was a glorious summer day this year, and we were delighted to see so many present – some had brought their children, the youngest visitor being a baby of four months old! During the afternoon, cars arrived continuously, and it was difficult to concentrate on the tennis when girls, whom we had not seen for years, stepped daintily out of the cars, looking very much more grown-up and attractive than when we had last seen them in gym, in tunics with their hair in pigtails.

The annual tennis match was great fun; it was a little too hot to play very energetically, but both teams put up a good fight, the School Team winning. Unfortunately, last-minute changes had to be made in the Old Girls' Team, and this placed the team at a disadvantage.



▲ Old Girls' Day Grandchildren, 1954

After tennis, we enjoyed a very nice tea, and then the girls roamed round the buildings, visiting familiar haunts and indulging in reminiscences of their school life here. The majority of old girls had been at school within the last five or six years and were known to us, so the atmosphere was a very friendly, informal one.

So ended a very pleasant afternoon! Many of us look forward to visiting the school on the next Old Girls' Day as old girls ourselves.

Dr Harry Angell Lane, MRCS LRCP DPH

The death occurred on Monday, 18 April 1954 of Dr Harry Angell Lane, Medical Officer of Battle Abbey School from 1925 to the time the school was evacuated to Devon in 1940. His niece, Helen Sheehan-Dare, wrote:

It can easily be seen how distinguished was the career of Dr Lane and how devoted his service to his chosen profession. But what cannot adequately be conveyed on paper is the deep regard and affection in which he was held by the girls who came under his care during the years that he was medical officer at the Abbey. His death leaves many of us with the feeling that we have lost a true friend and counsellor. He watched the growth and activities of the Old Girls' Club, following its reorganisation after the war, with great interest, particularly the Scholarship Fund.

A Reminiscence

by Lady Carol Edge (née Seyd), 1950-54

At the beginning and end of terms many of us travelled by train via Charing Cross railway station. Our trunks would be sent off a few days before by PLA (Passenger Luggage in Advance). They would be collected from home by carrier and delivered to the school, and vice versa at the end of term. We had seats reserved on the train and it was very exciting. When we finally left school I can remember throwing our school hats out of the window into the Thames as we crossed the bridge coming into Charing Cross.

Matron would check our trunks. The clothes list would be ticked off to ensure everything was there and marked – even the 12 white handkerchiefs which were required. We were allowed a maximum of three items such as photo frames on our dressing tables.

Every morning before breakfast we had to remove blankets and sheets from our beds and leave them neatly folded on the beds. After breakfast before lessons we had to make up the beds again. The Matron was Mrs Stancomb. She was nicknamed Shaky because she would call out, “Shake your sheets!” whilst she supervised us.

There were timetables in the bathrooms. We were allocated two or three baths each week. We were allowed to wash our hair in a basin every two weeks and we dried it with a brush in front of a gas fire. Matron administered the only hairdryer.

On Saturday mornings our laundry was returned and we had a supervised period when we were obliged to do our own mending – lots of boring darning of lisle tights and socks. We also had a weekly supervised period when we had to write letters home. It was not normally possible to phone home.

Each term we had a fire practice – usually just after Lights Out.

Many of us would be wearing hair curlers and tooth braces so we were not a pretty sight. The escape route from one of the dormitories was down a canvas chute which was very exciting.

We had annual inoculations. Possibly this was for polio before sugar lumps came in. We had to line up and Sister would inject us in the arm with the same hypodermic syringes. Between shots, she would dip the needle into surgical spirit, but it became very blunt and painful by the end of the line.

At morning break-time, we had to run down the drive to the Gatehouse to receive a most delicious currant bun. Back at school we were given cold milk with Ovaltine sprinkled on it.

In good weather in summer we all wanted to get a good suntan. At every opportunity we would sit in the sun outside St Mary's and anoint our arms and legs with olive oil from Boots the Chemists. I don't think that suntan creams existed then.

We were taught ballroom dancing each week in the library by Victor Sylvester's sister. In our free time we played records of Victor Sylvester's Orchestra on a wind-up gramophone. We danced the Waltz, the Foxtrot, the Quickstep and the Velita.

We had a school dance with the boys of Eastbourne College. Dressed up in our finery, hair curled, tottering on heels, I can remember lining up like an army before battle in the Abbot's Hall. The boys arrived by coach and filed into the Hall like an opposing army. We were all very shy but by the end of the evening we had danced the Conga upstairs past all the juniors' dormitories. As we descended we were met by our Headmistress, Miss Sheehan-Dare, with a look of horror on her face.



▲ School photograph, 1955

Memories of Battle Abbey

by Harriet Dwinell (née Douty), 1955-56

Harriet came to England with her parents when her father, an American civil servant, was awarded a Rockefeller Award for Distinguished Public Service.

Never did I dream when I arrived at Battle Abbey that September afternoon in 1955 that the forthcoming year would be one of the most transformational years of my life. I was filled with rebellion, a new normal in the United States at that time with the onset of rock 'n' roll music and the celebrity of poets and writers who made up the Beat Generation. What I saw across the Abbot's Hall, massed to greet the American, the first American at the school since the 1930s, was conformity, with all the girls – yes, all girls! – dressed in brown tweed uniforms and lace-up brown Oxford shoes.

Soon, of course, I too was dressed in brown, and the girls sorted themselves out into people who were as individual as could be. Even at this distance in time – more than 50 years – I feel I can name more Battle Abbey students than students from my American high school.

Surprisingly, though, for a peer-oriented American, it was the teachers and staff who loom largest in my memory. In the States in those days, it was not considered 'cool' to do well in school, and the opportunities for athletic girls were

minimal. It was liberating for me to be in an environment that honored both.

I can still see the tears that welled up in Miss Hyder's eyes (English) as she recited from memory John of Gaunt's famous speech in *Richard II*: "This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle...." I can still hear the deep rumbling smoker's voice of Miss Guinand (History) as she urged us to go beyond superficial factors in evaluating Bismarck's contribution to European

stability. I still shrink from the clear blue eyes of Miss Skinner (Current Events and Religion) as she prodded me to explain race relations in the United States, and in particular the violent attack on stage of popular singer, Mr. Nat King Cole. Most of all, I can still delight at the brave bold figure of Miss Scott-Evans

(Needlework), which strutted around the large needlework table, a lipstick-stained cigarette dangling from her brassy colored lips. Miss Scott-Evans snubbed her nose at the same things as we rebellious students congregating in her domain.

Most surprising are my memories of Miss Mitchell, who was elevated to the role of co-principal, along with Miss Gifford, the year before I came to Battle Abbey. Many students, I have learned, preferred Miss Gifford, a formidable intellect and dynamic teacher before her elevation. Miss Gifford frightened me, with her black cape that swirled behind her as she rounded

**I was filled with rebellion,
a new normal in the United
States at that time with the
onset of rock 'n' roll music**

**Miss Gifford frightened me, with
her black cape that swirled behind
her as she rounded a pillar, its corner
protruding like a shark's fin**

a pillar, its corner protruding like a shark's fin. Miss Mitchell was soft spoken, and she always spoke to me about 'the War'. At the time, I couldn't imagine why she went on about a war that had been over for ten whole years, a lifetime to me! But her words made a lasting impact. I returned from Battle Abbey with a fascination bordering on obsession about World War II from a British and European perspective that led me to specialize in Modern European History and Literature at university, having given up upon my return any need to be 'cool'.

I was slow to realize Miss Mitchell's impact. When I returned to Battle Abbey sometime in the 1960s and had lunch at head table with Miss Gifford, I never even inquired about her. But later, after reading in June Parker's *Battle Abbey: the Story of a School*, that a memorial tree had been planted in Miss Mitchell's honor after her death, I hunted down that tree during a visit in 1998 and unexpectedly wept. We never know who or what might touch us.

This 1998 trip to do research for a memoir about Battle Abbey was memorable in other ways. The 1998 school was, of course, vastly different from the one I attended in 1955-56.

At that time I felt we were incarcerated within the thick stone walls of the precinct wall, allowed out only for church and Saturday shopping, and discouraged from any outward show of individuality, which went so far as to specify that only photographs of family members might be displayed. Certainly, no pictures of 'stars' were allowed; indeed, any references to stars or other unsuitable matter was cut with scissors from the daily newspapers placed on a chest in the Abbot's Hall before our eyes would see them.

By 1998 Battle Abbey was co-ed, with day and boarding students who seemed to flow freely in and out of the massive gateway, its heavy gates flung open. Curtains, too, were opened, flooding with light rooms I remembered as dark. Posters of film and rock stars tacked carelessly to dormitory walls created an amiable sense of pop culture. Bright happy faces looked up from study tables now dotting the Library, obscuring the prized parquet floor. I could not help thinking that I would have been so much happier at Battle Abbey had the school been like this. At the same time, I felt that had the school been like this, my year at Battle Abbey would not have been the transformational year that it was.

**Bright happy faces looked up from
study tables now dotting the Library,
obscuring the prized parquet floor**



The educator learns to live for those who come after

unemployed in the 1930s. So it is with Education. Our insistence on the widest possible opportunities for the young can only be appreciated in the light of the narrow University examination syllabus of a generation or two ago and the limited choice of subject and occupation then available.

Time was – and that within my own experience – when all students were debarred from obtaining an Arts degree at the London University save those who could achieve proficiency in both Latin and Greek and in Mathematics, and the average school curriculum was planned on the assumption that “hand” and “brain” worked in opposition to one another, that when one was

In the Light of the Past

by Helen Sheehan-Dare (from *The Gateway*, 1956)

Why do you talk of the past “(in Education)” when things are so different to-day?” The questioner, one of our present girls, was genuinely puzzled.

A volume could be written in reply, but the brief answer is that, without reference to the past, the present cannot be understood. The attitude of the Trade Unions towards possible unemployment might well seem to be the outcome of sheer stupidity if nothing were known of the sufferings of the

in use the other was in suspension! Such beliefs die hard, and we still retain evidence of this strange superstition in the term “worker” (meaning manual worker) as applied by politicians and others, as if the use of the intellect were an effortless pastime, and the high technical skill displayed by the man in overalls had nothing to do with his intelligence; as if somehow his hands were cut off from this and moved automatically.

To whom do we owe our wider choice of subjects for study at school and our better understanding of the co-ordination of mind and body – in a word, our increased freedom in Education? Not merely to the great educational reformers – Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori – but to the humbler workers in this sphere, the teachers and heads of schools who, year after year, gave time, energy, thought and effort to discussions at conferences in order to bring pressure to bear on public opinion so that the rigidity of our educational system might be lessened.

The true educationist must always be the victim of a noble discontent, both as to method and results; he is ever aware of his failures and pressing on to find “a better way”. Like all scientific work, Education must remain a matter of trial and error, a road with an ever-receding goal in view.

With the disappointments, as well as the successes, of the past as guide, and faith, built on these, as companion, the educator learns to live for those who come after and to work towards aims which he himself will never see realised.

Perhaps the question is, to some extent, answered.

Guides

by Philippa Lancaster, Form IVB (from *The Gateway*, 1957)

Guiding in the Summer Term is a very pleasant activity. We have most of our meetings out-of-doors, when it is fine. We begin them with general inspection and the patrols compete against one another. The patrols are called Swallow, Bluetit and Kingfisher.

The object of Guiding is to pass tests and to have fun. You must be very keen on being a guide to become a good one.

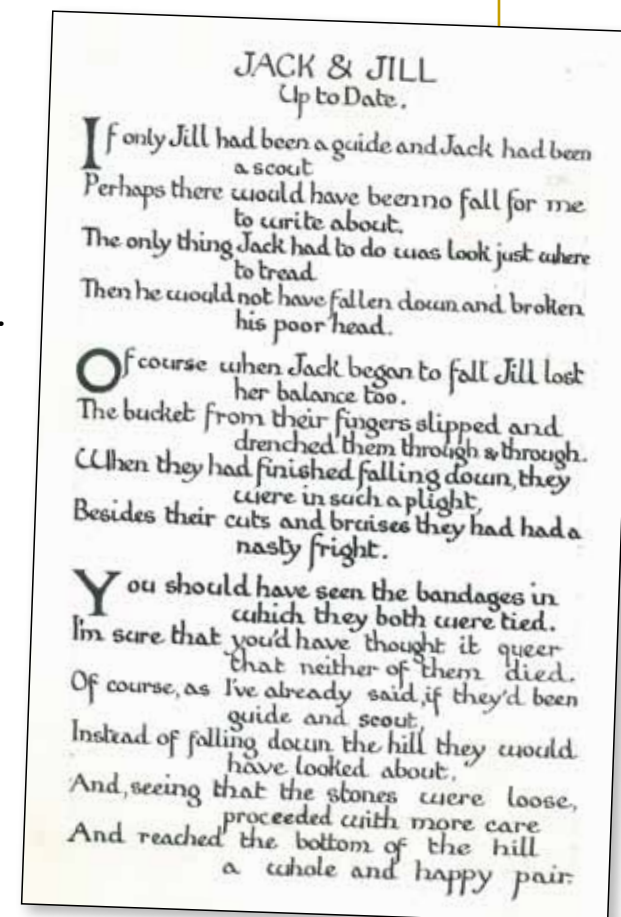
When we have meetings out-of-doors we make fires, try to pass some tests, such as tracking signs, and we play games. Sometimes when the weather is good we have Taps outside. (Taps is our Guide Hymn which we sing at the end of every meeting.)

Indoors we work for tests and badges that don't need much walking, such as tying up a parcel, taking thrift badges, hostess badges and others. Taking tests and badges is fun but hard work is also needed.

The Guide Uniform is very smart and looks even smarter when you wear on your sleeve the badges you have won. You should always have in your pockets, pencil and paper, needle and cotton, button and material, also, of course a penknife. Our ties are made like a sling for use in any emergency.

Last term we had an Annual General Meeting at the Guide Hut, to which the 2nd Battle Guides (that's us) went. Each company gave an entertainment and we sang Jerusalem. At the end of the meeting we all had refreshments. By the time we had finished it was quite late.

We sometimes have Bazaars to raise funds for every company. This year we had one called the May Fair. It was held at the Guide Hut which is in Mount Street. Our Company had an ice-cream stall and from it we raised £2 8s. 4d. Later in the year we will hold more meetings.



▲ An early Guiding notebook

Members of the Staff

This staff list was included in the 1959 edition of *The Gateway*. Although it's not an official one, it gives an interesting insight into how pupils viewed the staff.

MISS SHEEHAN-DARE has promised us a full page photograph for the next issue of the magazine. We prophesy that it will be a "Sell Out Number"

MISS GIFFORD For many years now the director of our studies. She continues to guide us from our first uncertain steps till the day we leave.

MISS MITCHELL Not only keeps the wheels of the School well oiled, but finds time to delight our eyes with her lovely floral arrangements.

MRS. DARE AND UNCLE JACK Mrs. Dare initiates our outer man into the mysteries of a bank account, and "Uncle Jack" sees that the inner man is well and truly satisfied.

MISS GUINAND (*Senior Mistress and History Mistress*) is bent on giving us a background of historical knowledge, in keeping with the school in which we live. She encourages us to regard the "Plantagenets" as friends. She also shepherds her "bunch of wild flowers" (to quote a spectator) to the lectures and outings of the Battle Historical Society.

MISS PORTER (*Art and Craft*) Miss Porter is severing a long connection with the school at the end of this term. We wonder how we can ever be sure, in future, of arriving safely at our

destination. The sight of her at Charing Cross was always most reassuring to the parents. All of us – and especially the members of St. Martin's House, to which she has ministered as a guardian angel for so long – wish her well in the future.

MISS SCOTT-EVANS (*Needlework and D.S.*) continues to make our chances in the marriage market very favourable. Under her skilled tuition fashion plates can be seen pirouetting around the Abbey's ancient precincts, and the delicious aromas that float from Cleveland tickle the appetites of the passers-by.

MISS FENTUM (*French*) is indefatigable in her zeal to make us fluent in the language. She can be seen at all hours of the day in dark corners, drilling the backward in French verbs and conjugations. When not engaged in untying linguistic knots, she may be seen in the Park teaching the Girl Guides how to tie knots of another variety.

MISS PECK (*Mathematics*) continues to instruct us in the intricacies of this subject which to her is as simple as division by two! She is no Latin scholar, however, as she would appear to think QED means "quite easily done!"

MISS SEARLES (*Geography*) spins the globe before us. Thanks to her training meandering in the meadows means more to us now. With our knowledge of the short cuts, "Around the World in 80 Days" will have nothing on us. We'll be there in eight!

MISS SKINNER (*Scripture*) successfully helps us to substitute haloes for horns. It will not be her fault if the world does not become a better place when we go out into it.

MISS MAW (*Latin*) With a sigh of "Et Tu Oxforde" she has resigned herself to the fact that the fate of the Classics now rests entirely with Battle Abbey. Nil Desperandum.

MISS TODD (*Biology*) has made us more aware of ourselves than we've ever been before and we're going to be "choosy" about our husbands.

MISS BUCK (*Art*) Our pint-sized Art mistress is not deterred by the pouting of her pupils from persevering with paints, puppets, pictures and posters.

MISS QUINN (*Music*) "The man that hath not music in his soul is fit for treason, stratagems and spoils" is her creed. Thanks to her training the Abbots Hall rings with sweet song, morning and evening.

MADAME KELLER (*German*) is tireless in her efforts to substitute German for Games, for she is determined that continental travel will hold no terrors for us, and that we will make no German “bloomers”!

MRS. MCCLENAGHAN (*English*) is a mother of four and Irish to boot, so she knows what to look for, and how to deal with it. She is determined to teach us the distinction between what we “may” do and what we “can” do.

MISS SCOTT (*Junior Forms*) has perfected the knack of changing the unruly into angels, and has set a standard of form room tidiness that puts the seniors to shame. She specialises in Nature – looking after tadpoles and the IIIrd.

MRS. CURRAN (*Elocution*) renders us fit for any “Debs” tea party by teaching us to mind our p’s and q’s.

MR. BAUMER (*Music*) After so many years of being the sole “male” among us, seems relieved that he need no longer hide himself in the Music Room. Despite many trials and tribulations, he is the equal of any conjurer in the manner in which he changes bunches of bananas into flexible fingers!

SEÑOR CASTRO (*Spanish*) has come to give moral support to Mr. Baumer and to teach Spanish. We extend our sympathy to Mrs. Van Altren, who has taught us for many years, and wish her a speedy recovery from her accident.

MISS RODWAY (*Games and P.T.*) is not

content with blowing her whistle in the gym and on the field, but wrecks our night’s sleep by blowing it at unearthly hours. She calls it Fire Practice. May our deportment always be as safe as it is under her eye.

MADAME BEARD (*French*) resists manfully the temptation to cover her ears with her hands when we speak French. Despite the number of school lunches she has eaten she still prefers French to English cooking.

Matrons

MISS MACLEOD (*Mackie*) remains cool, calm and collected, and continues to mop up the tears in our eyes and mend the tears in our clothes.

MISS TILL (*Tilly*) Her Army training stands her in good stead when she is exhorting the seniors to have tidy cupboards and when drilling down the unruly in the Library Wing.

MRS. PRING (*Pringy*) Being a mother herself, knows how to insist that we come down to meals with clean ears and well-scrubbed necks, and never wear games sweaters or blazers into supper.

MISS KING (*Queeny*) Though a comparative newcomer among us, has proved her mettle by instilling order into the chaos that reigned in Twin and Firs.

SISTER With thermometer at the ready, and a box of pills to hand. Sister awaits all arrivals at the School with a warm welcome.

Helen Sheehan-Dare and family were planning to retire from the responsibility of running the school by the end of the 1950s. They wanted to ensure that the school would not only continue but also prosper.

Public School Status

by Helen Sheehan-Dare

(*The Gateway*, 1959)

The School has passed through various stages of development and weathered many vicissitudes, including two world wars. She is on the threshold of another phase, equipped with experience and with her traditions firmly implanted. While we have the assurance that those who will guide her path as a Public School care greatly that these traditions shall be maintained, we trust that they will discard whatever of custom may become no longer useful in a changing world.

School Houses in 1958



▲ St. Mary's



▲ St. Martin's



▲ St. Etheldreda's



▲ St. Patrick's



▲ School photograph, 1960