

## THE ELMS [1]

The Elms house was built in the early to middle 1700's, some alterations were made in the early 1800's and the exterior was refaced at the same time. It has an early 1700's wooden staircase in the entrance hall and turned balusters. One of the ground floor rooms has a marble fireplace and panelled walls. (1990 Listed Buildings). It was owned by Lord Berners before becoming a school. He leased it out to various gentry.

S9 The wood staircase and turned balusters in the 1930's. [2]

S3 The marble fireplace and wooden panelling in one of the ground floor rooms in the 1930's. [3]

In 1920 James Arkell, solicitor of Highworth, and the Public Trustees of the Faringdon Estate entered into an agreement with Berkshire County Council to lease out the building known as the Elms with its gardens, stables and outhouses; including an adjoining paddock and right of passage through the gates at the end of the roadway and a passage leading from Gloucester Street. The Lessors to retain all timber on the site and the right to inspect the premises to see if it is being looked after. The lease was for 14 years at a yearly rent of £100 payable half yearly from March 25<sup>th</sup> 1920. The County Council to be responsible for the painting of the outside of the building and also of the interior which was to be done with 3 coats of white lead paint and to grain and marble any part that is usually grained and marbled. The Council had to look after the sewers, water pipes, locks, fastenings, boilers, grates and stoves. The gardens to be kept in order and properly planted. No structural changes or alterations to be made to the building without previous consent from the Lessors. The house must be used for a dwelling house, a Pupil Teacher Centre or Secondary School only. The County Council must insure the building against loss or damage by fire at the sum of £2,500. The Lessors will carry out all structural repairs.

S6 The grounds belonging to The Elms in the 1930's. [4]

S25 The front of the school facing onto Gloucester Street in the mid 1950's. [5]

S26 The front of the school facing onto Gloucester Street in the mid 1950's. [6]

The school was opened to serve the north-west of the County, but as the population of the area was small and scattered this was regarded as an experiment. There was accommodation for between 60 and 70 girls and a residence for the headmistress. There was a hard tennis court and also arrangements for hockey, cricket and swimming. There was a covered recreation room which was used for dinners, drill and indoor games. Arrangements were made for a bus service from Wantage with picking points en route. Subjects to be covered were:- Scripture, English Language; English Literature; History; Geography; Latin; French; Maths; Science; Drawing; Class Singing; P.E.; Cookery; and Needlework. Pupils to be admitted from the age of 10 years and continue up to 18 years. The school prepared pupils for the Oxford School Certificate Exams and the Oxford Higher School Certificate Exam, Girls over 12 years were not admitted unless they were able to take their place with girls their own age. The school opened with 18 pupils.

S98 The hard tennis court in 1985. [7]

S106 The cricket pitch in 1985. [8]

In 1921 Berkshire County Council signed an agreement with Dorothy Beck, spinster, Head Mistress of Faringdon County Girls school, to let the three rooms on the first floor and one room on the upper floor for her use and for her use of the kitchen. The tenancy to commence on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1920 and the rent to be 15/- a month and £1 per annum for the use of half of the garden. Gas, water and fuel to

be paid by the Council, and each to pay half the cost of electricity. When the tenant ceased to be employed by the Council she should quit the premises and leave them in good order.

S15 A bedroom/attic rented by the headmistress, 1930's. [9]

In 1925 there was the appointment of a new headmistress, Ruth Bartels. Her salary to be £500 per annum. She was contracted not to have unexplained absence, but have sick pay if ill. By this time the school roll had grown to 46. The pupils got together and issued a Faringdon County School for Girls School Magazine and the first one I have seen was for 1928-29.

1930 Miss Anstace Moore became headmistress and there were 63 pupils.

S1 A classroom in the 1930's. [10]

S4 A classroom in the 1930's. Note the old fashioned high desks. [11]

In 1931 there was a Staff of 5 – Miss A. Moore, Headmistress; Miss H. Barnes, Miss G. Matthews, Miss K. Pengilly, Miss G. Williams. There were 2 visiting mistresses for Cookery and Dancing – Miss M. Williams and Miss M. Lane.

S115 The pupils learning cookery. [12]

In July 1931 the County Council agreed that the school had firmly established itself in the area and had 69 pupils. This meant that the buildings were no longer adequate and required additional facilities. It was agreed that the site should be purchased from Lord Berners for £2,250

During 1932 new buildings were being erected due to the rapid increase of pupils. By now there were 7 classes – one 6<sup>th</sup> form, two 5<sup>th</sup> forms, two 4<sup>th</sup> forms and two 3<sup>rd</sup> forms. The pupils were playing rounders, tennis, hockey, and netball. Ex pupils kept in touch with an Old Girls Newsletter and annual gathering. Ex pupils were at University, Physical Training College and Secretarial College. Some had become clerks, florists and chemists.

S2 The entrance hall to the school in the 1930's. [13]

S11 The Library room just having had shelves put in for the books. 1930's. [14]

S12 The Library with its books on the shelves ready for consultation in the 1930's. [15]

The Faringdon County Girls school pupils were divided up into sections called houses. These were called Drake – colour red, Grenville – colour yellow and Sidney – colour blue. (Roper – colour green, was added later). The school initiated the formation of a Faringdon Guide Company.

S109 The Library in use. [16]

1933 The Headmistress was Anstace Moore with a staff of seven. Each of the staff taught more than one subject, in some cases three or four. The Subjects taught were English, History, Geography, French, Oral French, Maths, Botany, Arithmetic, Drawing, Latin, Geometry, Art, and Biology. There were 85 pupils at start of September 1933. New buildings were being built. In October 1933 the school had a full inspection by the Board of Education. The Governors were Mr Carter, Mrs Bourne, Rev Dunbar, Brig-Gen Higgins replacing Mr Heavens, Miss Burrows, Rev Carey-Ward.

In 1934 Berkshire County Council decided that the experiment was a success and bought Knighton Close containing just over 3 acres, from Lord Berners at a price of £500. This was to be used for a playing field. Mrs Bourne gave the school a pony named Strawberry and a mowing machine. Mr Allen-Stevens & Mr Liddiard lent rollers and horses all to improve the field.

Map showing Knighton Close. [17]

1935 The school has its own grass tennis courts and was soon to have a new hockey pitch and cricket pitch in the new field. Bazaar held, followed a month later by an Open Day.

S35 The back of the school in 1985. [1]

S37 The back of the school in 1985. [19]

1936 & 1937 The Number of pupils rose again, now there are 97. The girls performed a play in June. Pupils and teachers planted 21 trees in the field. Some of the older pupils were taking the Royal Society Drawing Exams.

1938 Again the school required new buildings as the numbers had increased to 100 pupils. The building of these extra facilities began in summer. These were a large hall equipped for gym and acting; shower baths; laboratory, Art room; classroom; Domestic Science room.

S114 Pupils at their needlework. [20]

S133 The stage in 1958 [21]

S91 The Hall 1985. [22]

1939 In July the new school extensions were opened.

S135 The staff in about 1938 Back L to R. ?; Miss Peggy Church; ?; Mrs Gwynneth Tucker. Front - ?; Miss Lindsay; Miss Anstace Moore, headmistress; Miss Sturdy; Miss Rainsford. [23]

By 1940 Pupil numbers increased again to 150 partly due to some evacuees. 24 girls and 3 members of staff from the West Ham High school were billeted at the school and have a parallel IVb form. Miss Millins left, new staff were Miss Bacon, Miss Liddiard and Miss Cockrell (back after a year in Africa & Australia)

In 1941 there was a rapid growth in pupil numbers to 205 girls. This entailed many changes. There had to be two dinner sessions with Form II still having to go into the Boarding House. There was a form in the Barn, one in the Lab and one in the Art room.

S113 The Science laboratory. [24]

The Green room had to be used as a cloakroom, the VI form working room and even a Form room. New members of staff – Miss Reed from West Ham High School, Miss MacLean and Miss Mills. There were 17 girls being accommodated in the Boarding House.

S110 The Art Room 1985 [25]

During the war to help with the War Effort staff and boarders worked at the Trekkers Shelter where evacuated children came for a meal and medical inspection. Mothers and babies often arrived unexpectedly at odd hours. Two children stayed for several months. One was baby Margaret who was a constant source of interest, sometimes posing in her pram as a model for drawing. The other was 2 year old Rita who kept everyone lively and even escaped into the Market Place on one occasion. Pupils at the school made lovely toys and clothes for the evacuees' Christmas party and also helped to decorate the tree. More senior pupils helped in the Food Office filling up names on new Ration Books.

There were various competitions during the year – The Gym Competition, the Shakespeare Competition and Sports Day. In May pupils went to Stratford to see Romeo and Juliet and in June to Oxford to see Dear Brutus. The fact that the pupils were still going on visits to the theatre in War Time is remarkable. The Old Girls' association still met in December although many people were missing owing to the war commitments.

1950 Plan of the school

[26]

In 1956 Miss A. Moore retired and went to Devon where she died in 1983. In the following year Miss A. J. Towns became headmistress.

S134 The School Badge.

[27]

In 1964 two of the staff and 30 girls joined the HMS Devonian on a Classical Cruise, another group went in March 1966. 6<sup>th</sup> form girls attended courses at various places. Expeditions to Bath, Berkeley Castle, Buscot Park, Littlecote Manor and Culham Laboratory took place. Senior girls attended conferences on different subjects national and international. Visits to theatres were enjoyed by the pupils.

In 1968 & 1969 Girls attended Biology, Geography, Maths and Technology courses. Theatre parties went to Oxford and Stratford and pupils undertook various visits to Universities and Colleges. School pupils produced Hansel and Gretel.

1974 Miss A. Towns became an Associate Head of Faringdon School in April when The Elms amalgamated with Tollington School to form Faringdon School, a co-educational comprehensive school with pupils from 11 to 18 years old. The Elms was used for the 6<sup>th</sup> form pupils. Slight adjustments had to be made to the Elms site to accommodate the boys. Pupils did not move from one site to the other but staff had to do so. Two years later Miss Towns left as Associate Head of Faringdon School. Also Miss Grizel Bell, who had worked in Faringdon for over 34 years left. She was in charge of P.E. and Deputy Head 1966-69 at The Elms.

1985 All pupils moved to the Fernham Road site.

Some memories from Lillias Dewhurst, now Cooper.

To attend the school girls had to pass the 11 plus exams. For those that lived in the villages around Faringdon there were other schools at Abingdon and Didcot to choose from besides Faringdon. The Faringdon School had a good reputation in the 1940's 50's and 60's. It was run by Miss Moore and later by Miss Towns. Girls from the villages had to travel by bus, - the cream and brown ones from Tappins Coaches, which meant, in some cases, quite a long journey calling at villages en route and taking about an hour. There was a bus prefect on each bus and her job was to make sure that rules were obeyed and that all girls that got on the bus in the morning were also on the bus at night. No food was to be eaten but writing and singing was allowed. The girls got very good at writing on the move. There weren't any cars picking up or delivering the girls to the school so there was a line of coaches at the school entrance in the morning and evening. Girls either caught the coaches or walked to school. Miss Grizel Bell, who taught P.E., was the teacher that supervised the bus departures and so was very well known to all the girls

S103 The school photograph of 1932/3. Only 21 girls on it! They are wearing the school uniform. {28}

Before attending the school the girls had to be equipped with the uniform – grey pinafore dress with a blue and white checked shirt, a gym outfit (known as 'the greys'), gym tunics and matching knickers, and white plimsolls for indoor sports and black ones for outdoors.

S93 P.E. in the hall. Notice the gym tunics and matching knickers. [29]

The tailor set up shop in the head's office and everything seemed to be a bit too large to fit properly but 'we would grow into them'. Hats had to worn at all times.

Each day began with an assembly in the main hall and all the girls had to wear their white plimsolls for this in order to protect the floor. Some girls' parents objected to this assembly so they went into the cloakrooms in the Green Room next to the hall. After assembly pupils followed their timetables, although each class had a form room there wasn't much room to leave stuff, so girls had to carry the things that they required each day around with them.

S92 Musical movement in the hall. [30]

Form rooms were in the Hut next to the netball court, and the Barn besides being in the normal part of the school because of the number of girls that attended.

1950's plan again.

There was a school nurse and she supervised medicals, polo immunization and TB vaccination and of course the hair inspection.

Each girl had a bottle of milk at morning break, the crates were kept in the covered way although in winter they were put by radiators to keep them from freezing. The dining room was not big enough to take all the pupils at once so there were two sittings. The food was all home cooked and very good.

S116 The dining room laid out for lunch. [31]

No girl was allowed out of school without special permission and hardly anyone went home for lunch even if they lived locally so pupils had to amuse themselves in the beautiful grounds.

S105 Lunch hour. [32]

S107 Lunch hour. [33]

A swimming pool had been wanted for years but that didn't materialise until an outdoor pool was built in the grounds around 1958. Before that the girls had to board coaches to take them to Buscot Park to use the pool there. That was horrible as it was cold, dark and slimy, with little red worms which would cling to the swimming costumes if the swimmer stopped still. Swimming was much more pleasant when the swimming pool was built, although as it was outside, the weather had to taken into consideration.

S152 Netball team. Notice the shorts. [34]

As the girls got older the uniform changed and the grey pinafores became pleated skirts and in summer there were blue and white gingham dresses. Shorts and sports shirts were only worn by teams playing for the school.

Every year a Sports Day was held to which the parents were invited. There was inter-house competitions but displays were put on for the visitors. Shower facilities were limited and everyone had to use communal showers which took a bit of getting used to.

S96 Using the outside apparatus. [35]

Another annual event was the Prize Giving Day when parents were invited and a speaker came to give a talk. There were prizes for progress and achievement in scholarly subjects and a prize for girls who had good posture and poise called the posture girdle.

At the end of each year the girls had to pack up all their books into parcels using strong wrapping paper and string or tape and they were stacked in the cloakrooms in class order. The parcels often got moved or dislodged in the yearly cleaning process and so it was an anxious time in the new year to see if your parcel could be found and that all the books were there.