COLCHESTER COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS
OLD GIRLS'/ALUMNAE ASSOCIATION
NEWSLETTER – Spring 2023



Editor's Notes

I hope you have all survived the worst of the winter – and the rain! The Committee was busy and Jean Johnson organised some events which were enjoyed by all who attended. Jo Edwards took some photographs of our latest lunch at Colchester Institute and delighted in sending this particularly appalling one of me! *(left)* I am pleased to say that I have received some very interesting articles which I am sure you will enjoy. Jo Edwards has been particularly fluent on different subjects, as has Joan Gurney. Joan told me that this "Epilogue" will definitely be her last article but having typed it I am glad to say there is hope for one more!

Please send your own memories comments on the articles in this newsletter - any contribution is gratefully received! Old Girls enjoy reading your memories as they trigger their own but please give them to us!

Information, news, comments, photos and articles for the next Newsletter by 31st October 2023.

Contact details: Liz White: Tel: 01206 522713 e-mail: alangwhite187444@hotmail.com

EVENTS

Fifteen members met for lunch at the Balkerne Restaurant at Colchester Institute in March. Everyone seemed to enjoy the event, although we all mourn the loss of the Colne Room which was cheaper and more informal.

Two more events have been arranged and details have been mailed to those who have previously expressed an interest. There is a Coffee Morning at the Colchester Officers' Club on Tuesday, 18th April, and a Chinese Lunch at Bamboo House on Wednesday, 10th May. If you are interested but haven't received details please contact me.

Jean Johnson
01206 579688

Tina Powell (1968-75)
The wonders of the Internet!

Have you ever wondered how your Newsletter gets to you? For those few who receive a hard copy, it's arguably more straightforward: Liz collates the various items she's been sent for inclusion and puts a Newsletter together; she sends that to the printer, who duly produces the finished article; a box of newsletters is delivered, to be posted off, as needed. What of the many who, instead, view their Newsletter on line?

That's where I come in!

When Liz sends her file to the printer, she also sends it to me. I then set about converting the Newsletter to an online version. As well as ensuring all the words and pictures are there, and will be accessible on a screen, I also have to put in the various links, which enable the reader to move swiftly to where she wants to be. I have to check each link is working correctly, before "publishing" the finished item online. Obviously, though, there's no point having it there, if no one knows about it, so the final part of my job is to e-mail everyone a link, which will open the latest Newsletter. Given the need to protect people's data (which includes their e-mail addresses), those e-mails have to be "blind copies". As many e-mail providers reject anything which is being copied to a large number of people, I can e-mail only 10 people at a time. With a large number of Alumnae on our data base, that's a large number of e-mails to send. Add into the mix that e-mail providers will pull the plug, when they spot multiple e-mails being sent (necessitating my waiting an hour, or two, between batches) you can appreciate this can be a time-consuming exercise.



Last time, there was an added complication. I was in India, for all of October, volunteering at the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts world centre, in Pune *(left)*. Internet connections can be a tad variable in India. Electricity supply can be unpredictable. I managed to publish the online version of the Autumn, 2022 Newsletter, but was concerned I would face challenges getting the e-mails out.

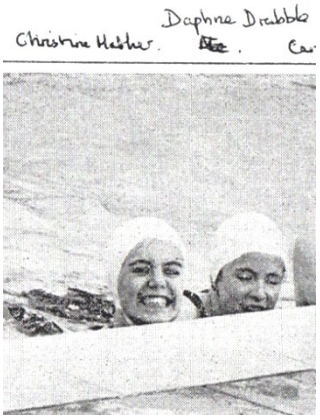
At this point, some of my fellow committee members stepped in, to help. I sent them an e-mail, setting out what needed to be done, but it seemed the task was not as straightforward as I imagined.

As a result, I ended up sending out all of the e-mails: in very small batches, over a couple of days, and seated as close to the wifi router and generator as possible!

Thanks to Tina for her knowledge and ability to do this for us poor less computer-literate souls!

Daphne Jones (Drabble 1958-1965?)

Memories



I noticed that the photo in the last Newsletter was the one from "Colchester Gazette" with our form in 1961 in the new school swimming pool, and the names of the girls written at the top by me *(section right)*. I was then Daphne Drabble. I am sad to report that the girl next to me, Christine Mather, died on 25th April 2021. She joined the CCHS a year or two after the Lower IV from Cleethorpes Grammar School when her father got a new job as manager of a Colchester furniture shop. My mother got friendly with her mother as they were both members of Shrub End Townswomen's Guild and its drama group. At school Christine (Chris) was bright and always achieved good exam results. She was also known for her rather quirky sense of humour. She studied Mathematics at Royal Holloway and later became a Computer Programmer at Draka Kabel in Amsterdam and learnt to speak Dutch fluently. I lost touch with her, but sometimes received news of her through our two mothers. Like me Chris was an only child. I think her husband followed the same career path as she did. They had no children and I think that was their choice. Sadly he died in his fifties and I believe Chris returned to live in Britain around that time. Chris lived in Banbury, although she visited her parents who were still in Colchester. I had left Colchester in the early 1970s and my mother retired in 1974 and came to live near us.

In 2008 Brenda Green arranged a get-together of our year group from CCHS and over forty Old Girls attended. I returned to Colchester for the first time since 1974 and spent a few days in the town and looked around. We also had an evening dinner out with several Old Girls including Chris. I think soon afterwards she was included amongst my friends on Facebook, so I did keep in touch with her then. When she was in her late sixties she married Mikey Walters - maybe at Lexden Church? Tragically just a few months later he was involved in a car crash and died from his injuries. Chris's parents lived until their nineties and one hoped she would live as long, but she was 74 when she died. Stella Christie (Browne) was another girl in our year at CCHS and I believe she will know more about Chris. I don't know if she is a member of the OGA.



To return to Liz's article and sports at CCHS, I will add a few more memories. I started at CCHS in September 1958 when the building in Norman Way had only been open for a year *(left)*. The school playing field was across the road opposite the school for a year or two before the playing field at the side of the school opened. The first playing field then went to the Technical School who travelled to it via a bus. At that time Norman Way had no other buildings apart from the CCHS. Very few teachers drove cars and those few who did parked in the small car park just in front of the main entrance *(see picture above)*. There was an enormous cycling shed just beyond the caretaker's house and few girls travelled to school in parents' cars - most walked or cycled. Several buses brought pupils from further afield and they parked just before the school where Norman Way was a bit wider. There was rough ground in the first stretch by Norman Way and no houses were built there at the time. Beyond the school there were agricultural fields.

I agree about hockey – hanging around on the field and getting cold. Some girls must have liked it and played well enough to form school teams. After a year one could choose between hockey and netball, so I chose netball even though I was not good enough to be picked for a school team. However, later I played netball with Barclays Bank, Colchester. We met every week in the playground of Hamilton Road Primary School (formerly my Infants' school). Some weeks we just made two teams and played each other, but we also played other teams. Cullingfords, the printers and stationery shop in High Street, had a team which we played regularly. We also played the Gilberd Technical School team. That school was then in the building in North Hill that CCHS used until the new school in Norman Way was built. We couldn't play Marks and Spencer's team. They had many young women staff to choose their players from, and were far too good for us! I don't suppose the staff of many places these days plays netball in the evenings.



In my first two years at CCHS we did cross country running once a week. We had a set route. We went off Norman Way on the footpath to Bluebottle Grove *(right)* and then made our way through the path between the Boys' Grammar School playing field and the Education Office, on to Park Road and back to school. The eight school houses each had two teams (Lower and Upper School) of ten per team, and competed each year. It was hard to persuade so many girls to form the teams! I enjoyed it though. In the first year (L IV) I ran the race in time to gain a point for the house. In my second year (U IV) I was pleased to come 17th (out of 80) and earn 3 points for the house. If I could have tried again in a third year and still in Lower School maybe I could have done better, but I never got the chance. The girls voted to abandon cross country running, so it was never done again whilst I was at CCHS.

I did enjoy the gym, especially climbing the ropes, which I could do at speed. The new gym was one of the things which tempted me to choose CCHS.

The swimming pool I loved. I had learnt to swim in my last couple of years at primary school (Years 5 and 6 now). My mother was a non-swimmer and was determined that I should learn. She enrolled me into Colchester Swimming Club, where I joined a class at the Boys' Grammar School. The pool was old, built soon after WW1, and was very gloomy and cold in the evenings. Lessons began with "duck your heads right under the water" - scary. However I did stick at the classes. I also went to the large open air swimming pool (lido style - *left*) on the river by the by-pass. I walked there with a friend from my class at junior school every Saturday in summer - via Balkerne Hill. Primary school age children would not be allowed to go on their own nowadays, but in the 1950s it was not unusual.



At CCHS I swam in a backstroke race for our house - not that I was very good at backstroke, but the others in Plantagenet House were worse. (Yes, I was in Plantagenet House, too). I always went in the pool when there was a chance, whatever the temperature, sometimes very cold. The showers were embarrassing to use. Why did one have to strip naked to go in the shower instead of just rinsing off in a costume and then

change more discreetly in the changing room? I don't think anyone was used to showers in those days. We only had baths at home, and that meant taking one's clothes off. We always missed the showers out at school if we could get away with it. We always hoped that having a school swimming pool meant extra swims in summer evenings after school and also at the weekends and school holidays, but of course that was not allowed. We could not swim without a lifeguard somewhere on the premises.

As an adult our children learnt to swim earlier and better than we could, so my husband and I went to adults improvers swimming classes. Our children's swimming progress depended on length of swims rather than style or stroke. All three of our children swam well (and still do) and our grandchildren have learnt to swim better. The national swimming courses insist on swimming all strokes well. They can all swim butterfly stroke (which we can't) as well as freestyle, breast and back strokes. I continued to swim regularly and more recently did water aerobics, both shallow and deep water. It is only my stroke (I don't mean a swimming stroke!), broken ankle and broken leg which have stopped me. However, I won't go on about that, so I'll stop there.

Diana Childs (Pennick 1953-60)
In praise of Miss Nordquist

You may have read an article by me about Miss Nordquist in a past Old Girls' Newsletter. Miss Nordquist, the fierce gym mistress of the early 50s with white hair, cut in a severe "short back and sides" style and wearing below the knee, navy pleated shorts, which rose up when she bent down and exposed navy directoire knickers, secured firmly to her knees by strong elastic.



It was she who would run down the lined up pupils, ready to begin their gym lesson, rub their backs and shout at some, "you are wearing your liberty bodice *(right)*, go and take it off." She also tied my ankles together with a coloured band, so that my feet stayed together and then made me do bunny hops over a bench in front of all the rest of the class: and showed no sympathy when I fell off the wall bars whilst trying to do a reverse hanging. My goodness, no one would be allowed to attempt such a dangerous thing nowadays, let alone be ordered to do it!

However, I believe that I have a lot to thank Miss Nordquist for. Every girl who entered the hallowed portals of Grey Friars was subjected to a physical assessment and those that were deemed to have problems with their feet were called for remedial exercises with Miss Nordquist. Now, this wasn't an invitation, it was an obligation! It was held during the lunch hour and Miss Nordquist dealt with flat feet, pigeon toes and fallen arches by making us pick up small bean bags with our toes and throw them into a bucket, pull the arches up and pick up pencils with our toes. We were expected to do "homework" on this by practising at home what we had learned.

She also ran posture classes during the lunch hours and this required our walking with books on our heads to make us straighten our spines and walk tall. Debutantes at finishing schools could not have had better instruction. After I completed this course, I was awarded a posture badge, a bar of navy blue enamel with a gold edging and POSTURE written along its length. I wore this with pride on my tie for the rest of my time at CCHS!

Some 70 years later, I am still grateful for these remedial lessons. Although with the passing of time, we are not able to determine how our bones will change in shape, I do believe that Miss Norquist's intervention and remembering to put it into practise, has kept my feet and frame in better order. I don't imagine that she was rewarded with any extra payment for the time that she had to put into this extra work, but I am sure there are others who are truly grateful.

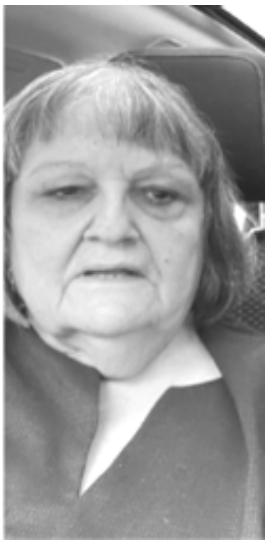
Can anyone else let us know about their time at the Norman Way School?

Jo Edwards (Mabbitt 1960-67)
ROOM WITH A VIEW

Life in Priory Street is rarely dull and what I see from my windows, the front overlooking the street and the back with wonderful views across the valley of the River Lose as far as the University Towers, never leaves me short of subject matter for a regular article in the Civic Society Newsletter. However, this time I am going to tell you about my view from another window, that of the Rose Room at Grey Friars.

A few weeks ago, I was minding my own business, doing some paperwork, when my phone rang. I answered it and a voice said, 'I am sorry to trouble you. My name is Liz. I work for a company called Topical Productions and we would love to come and film you doing the Civic Society survey of BT telephone kiosks. It's for the BBC's One Show'! My immediate reaction was laughter. For goodness sake! It is not long since Toby Walne from the Sunday Mail came, with a photographer, to talk to us about our kiosk surveys.

Perhaps I'd better give a bit of background. In 2018, at one of the Civic Society monthly Coffee Mornings, somebody raised the condition of telephone kiosks in the town. We went to investigate and were horrified to find that 27 out of 44 didn't have working phones. Some didn't have phones at all! We contacted BT, found a wonderfully helpful man who came to Colchester to look for himself and were thrilled to bits when he immediately found a team of engineers to come and sort the problems out. In the two weeks either side of Christmas 2018, the phones were mended, missing glass and Perspex replaced, kiosks were thoroughly cleaned and 3 of our (listed) red K6 boxes were painted. A door was ordered for the fourth, the original having been damaged beyond repair. BT don't check kiosks so we promised to keep an eye on them. Two further surveys were done and faults reported before Covid intervened. I told Liz that we hadn't done one since the end of 2020 but she was not perturbed. Rather caught on the hop, I found myself agreeing. It wasn't until I put the phone down that I really took in the enormity of what I had done!



I found, to my horror, *(left – trying to get my own back on Jo!)* that Civic Society Committee members were either otherwise engaged on the day proposed for filming or camera shy. I was on my own! Luckily, Bob Russell agreed to help me. He was happy about being filmed. I certainly wasn't. The expression 'Hoist with one's own petard' sprang to mind.

Several conversations with Liz followed. We agreed that filming on a Sunday would be sensible and I offered to send her photos of the kiosks I thought would be best. These were chosen for a reason, particularly the two outside Lloyds Bank, opposite the Town Hall, where BT had just applied for planning permission to install a massive, illuminated, BT Street Hub. The film crew were coming from the other side of London ready to start filming at 8am, as was the presenter who, I discovered, was none other than Brian Conley, currently playing the role of Rocky in East Enders. I realised that we would need to meet and sort out what we were going to do first, preferably over coffee, so I spoke to Grey Friars who, extremely kindly, booked us into the Rose Room and agreed to allow us all to park in their car park. What a blessing that was, because the weather on the day was absolutely FOUL!

And so it was that Bob and I found ourselves at Grey Friars with Steve, the cameraman, at 8am on a Sunday, waiting for Richard, the Director, and Brian. The minutes crept by. Steve made a phone call. Disaster had struck! Richard had gone in search of Brian, who, at the last moment on Saturday evening, had decided to stay overnight in Colchester. Easier said than done because all the hotels were booked but he managed to get a room at the George. He likened the experience to a night in Beirut! Getting ready in the morning, he switched the hairdryer on and it blew up! Finding a replacement took time but there was no way he was going to leave his hair unstyled. I chuckled. I had towel dried mine, only remembering to run a comb through it as I drove into Grey Friars' car park!



Once Brian and Richard arrived, the fun began. By this time, the rain had really set in. Grey Friars had given permission for filming inside, so they seated me in the bay window (yes, this was to be my temporary Room with A View). From the window *(right)* there is a lovely view of the red K6 box that stands against the front wall of the hotel. This was to form the backdrop to the later interview. A camera was set up to film me, sitting at the table with my notebook open in front of me, pen in one hand and mobile phone in the other. Another camera, on a tripod, was set up by the kiosk and Bob, coins in hand, was taken outside to be filmed using the phone in the kiosk to call me to tell me that it was working and to describe the general condition of the kiosk. Well, that was the plan. Unfortunately, the phone didn't work and Bob was forced to ring me using Richard's mobile. A rather surreal conversation ensued. I can't imagine that there are many people about who have been filmed, early on a Sunday morning, having a conversation with a rain drenched Knight of the Realm about a urine drenched K6 telephone kiosk!



Eventually, the crew were satisfied and they returned to the warmth of the Rose Room *(left)*, ready to interview me about the Civic Society's phone checking project, our views about BT kiosks and also our views about the new street hubs. I had particularly asked for that

question. Brian interviewed me, having questions fed to him by Richard. Brian is a genuinely nice man, incredibly easy and fun to talk to. The whole interview was very laid back and stress free, in fact, really enjoyable. I have little recollection of what I actually said but, as I was with them for over 7 hours and I doubt that our segment in the programme will be longer than 2 minutes, it really doesn't matter that much!! Following the interview, Brian and I were both filmed having somewhat random conversations in a role play exercise as filming outdoors was not going to be viable. The rain was sheeting down. Bob had to leave but not before he and I had our photo taken with Brian.

Once Bob had gone, we were off to film Brian checking other kiosks and supposedly reporting back to me as I sat in my Room with a View. Actually, as I drove them, I watched from my Car with a View! First to



the (non working!) K6 kiosk in Abbeygate Street *(left)* where, once there was a short break from the downpours, we caused quite a stir. A woman spotted Brian and yelled 'It's Bobby Davro!' He laughed, corrected her and agreed to a selfie with her and her son, who looked slightly bemused! It was here that the crew stopped a couple of women to ask them about the need for public phones these days. One said that they are a lifeline for her as she is in a refuge and has no mobile.

Finally, we went to those kiosks in High St. By this time, the men were asking about a Starbucks. 'No Starbucks', I said, 'What about Greggs?' The reaction was all I'd expected - and more. They flew out of the car as soon as I pulled into a parking spot (I am so pleased I have a blue badge!). Brian returned with sausage rolls (what else??) for me - and yes, for those concerned about my poor Jack Russell, Cooper, abandoned at home, some for him, too! Having eaten their sausage rolls and drunk their coffee, cameras, etc, were grabbed and off they went to film. The heavens opened again. Boy, oh boy, did it rain! The nearest shelter was White Stuff where they were welcomed with open arms as they increased the footfall in the shop hugely! Whilst there, Brian, again, was grabbed for a lot of selfies. More of that later. Eventually, the rain eased off and Brian found his first working phones in the kiosks opposite the Town Hall. As I sat in the car, several people passed me, looking over their shoulders. 'That was Bradley Walsh!' Poor Brian!



We eventually returned to Grey Friars where I left them to make a Zoom call. They had intended to continue on to Enfield for more filming but the rain had caused so many problems they abandoned that. The day that I had been dreading was actually huge fun and I thoroughly enjoyed myself. Steve and Richard (sitting in the back of my car in the photo *(right*) were delightful and Brian was, as I said before, utterly charming. He really went out of his way to make people happy. Whilst he was chatting to three women staying at Grey Friars, who were unbelievably excited to meet him, I noticed another who was sitting with a man who was speaking to someone on his phone. She was also very excited to see Brian so I drew his attention to her. He bounded across the room to say hello. Her companion told the person he was speaking to that Brian Conley was standing in front of him. It was obvious that they didn't believe him, so Brian took the phone from him and introduced himself! It caused great amusement and such joy.

Back to the selfies. That evening, Bob's daughter sent him a photo. 'Look who I met today!' It was one of the selfies taken in White Stuff and was a brilliant photo of her with Brian. She had absolutely no idea that Bob had been with him that morning. He sent her the photo of the three of us. 'Me too!'

The One Show hoped that we could check at least some of the remaining kiosks in Colchester before the programme was aired. During the following week, members of the Civic Society, Sheila, Ged Dickinson, Richard Arnopp and I blitzed the town, checking every kiosk. Our report is winging its way to BT as I write this. It does not make easy reading. Only 18 of the 31 kiosks have a fully functioning phone and most are absolutely filthy. Let's hope that BT respond quickly!