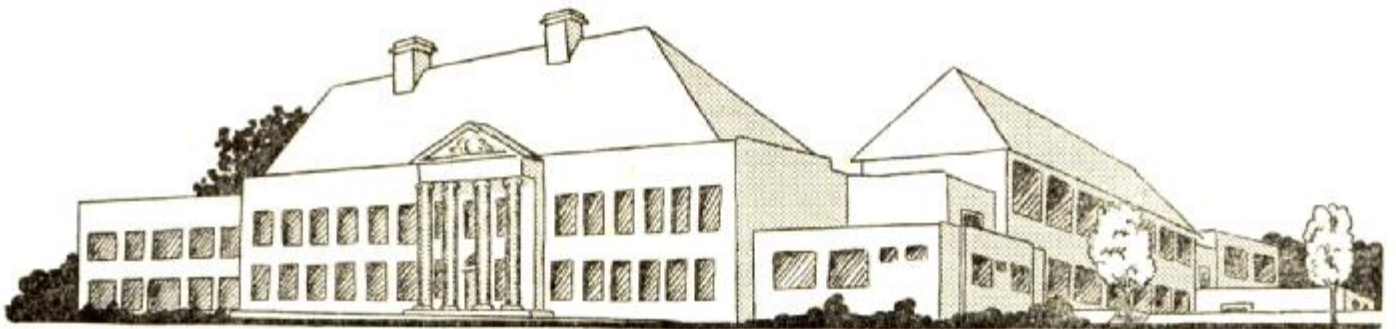




THE HISTORY OF MILHAM FORD SCHOOL



THE HISTORY OF MILHAM FORD SCHOOL, OXFORD

IN THE BEGINNING - IFFLEY ROAD AND COWLEY PLACE

The current imposing building alongside Marston Road, with its spacious grounds offering sweeping views down to the city, was not the founding site of 'Milham Ford School'. The story begins sometime in the 1890s (probably 1893) when two young sisters, Miss Emma and Miss Jane Moody, started a fee-paying nursery school in the drawing room of their home in Iffley Road, for the children, both boys and girls, of their friends and acquaintances. By 1898 the school was expanding and the Misses Moody moved the school to a cottage in Cowley Place on the bank of the River Cherwell below Magdalen Bridge. The school took its name from the ford opposite, known as 'Milham Ford'. Milham Ford was used in the past to take stone across the river for building Christ Church College to avoid damaging Magdalen Bridge. There used to be a 'Milham Bridge' here which was demolished in the Civil War. The mill and ford in the past are preserved in the old Milham Ford crest, with its exhortation to 'follow the gleam'.

Boys attended only until 10 years old but girls stayed until older. In addition there were a small number of weekly boarders. The photograph of the school pupils and teachers in 1903 shows the small boys in the front row in their 'sailor suits'. Students wore straw boater hats with 'M.F.S.' written in gold on a blue band.



Milham Ford School students and staff in 1903

In 1904 the Moody sisters sold Milham Ford School to The Church Education Corporation, the Board of Education then recognised it as an 'Efficient Secondary School'. Miss Catherine Dodd was appointed in

1905 to the position of Headmistress and this was held jointly with her role as College Principal of Cherwell Hall, a training college for women teachers. The original cottage was incorporated into a new larger building opened on that site for the school in 1906. The foundation stone from this original school can be seen in the front wall of the later 1938 building on Marston Road. In 1909 the preparatory department was founded.



Milham Ford students outside Cowley Place



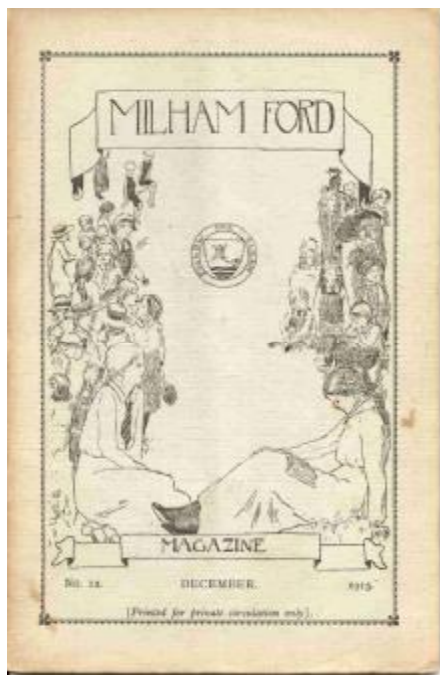
The Art Class at Milham (Edwardian times)

In those days all the teachers were female and unmarried, the curriculum subjects included : Bible Study, English Language and Literature, Classics (Latin and Greek), French, German, History, Geography, Mathematics, Arithmetic, Chemistry, Botany, Drawing, Needlework, Nature Study, Class Singing, Drill (organised marching) Games, Cooking, Housewifery and Laundry Work. Fees were charged, and the cost for a term during the time of headmistress Miss Joan McCabe was £3 15 shillings. Additional subjects could be taken at extra charge such as Piano, Harmony and Musical Appreciation, Dancing, Elocution, Swimming and Life Saving. Great emphasis was placed on the healthiness of outdoor activities such as Hockey, Cricket, Tennis and Netball. Fresh air was thought essential in the classrooms and windows were open at all times, even in winter! The school uniform was of dark blue material, with a white sailor hat and School ribbon, or a blue cap with the school badge. Shorts were unheard of and girls had to wear their gymslips for all sports games including gym (floundering over the horse and climbing up ropes). After World War I, army huts and other wooden buildings were added at Cowley Place. Lessons took place in the Main Building or in one of the wooden huts - the Black, Brown or Pink Hut, and Home Economics (Domestic Science and Cookery) lessons were taught and school dinners eaten, in the Headmistress' house in The Plain. Girls walked in a 'Crocodile' up and down the Iffley Road daily. Going from hut to hut for lessons in bad weather was a particular trial - girls had to change from outdoor to indoor shoes each time they entered a hut, sometimes meaning 10 changes a day! Imagine how this was in the rain and snow of winter. As was the case of the majority of schools, Milham Ford was closed for the two weeks at the height of the influenza epidemic in 1918.

By this time, the size and reputation of the school had grown. There were two boarding houses; Milham Ford House and De Noailles Hostel, situated in Iffley Road from 1918 until 1935. See the photograph of 'the Art Class' from this time. Miss Beaver, who spent 33 years teaching Chemistry and Science at Milham after joining in 1928, remembers the staff room was a boat on the river and the teachers used to have their lunch in punts. No lab assistants in those days - Miss Beaver had to work every Saturday morning, preparing the next week's apparatus. The school magazine had first appeared in 1910 and it detailed the girls' activities in academic success, sport, music, drama, visits, charity work and even the bulb show winners.

In 1916 there were 105 pupils, but by 1921 the numbers had reached 245, which included 17 boys in the prep

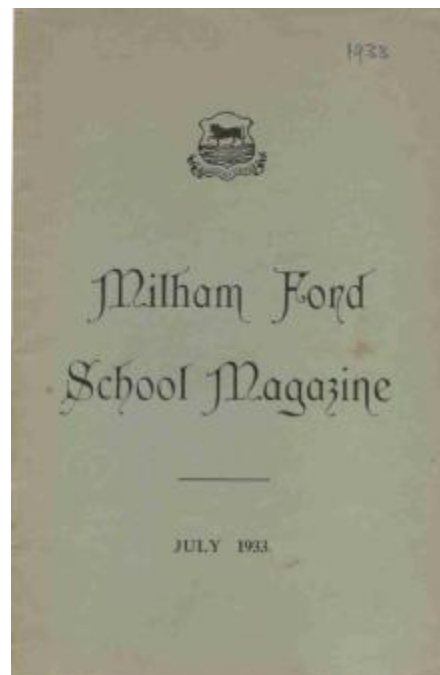
department. In 1923 Milham Ford School was sold to the City of Oxford - thus becoming its first Girls' Secondary School, still charging fees, but with an increasing number of free scholarship places. Due to increasing numbers, the Board of Education insisted no pupils under 10 be admitted, so the Prep. Dept. (including boys!) disappeared. By 1928, plans had been made to move the school to a new site, but the slump of the early thirties delayed the new building. Boarding ended by 1935, with the closure of the two hostels.



1915



1929



1933

The school magazine for December 1935 has the headmistress Evelyn ('Bill') Bailey starting her piece explaining to the girls that in 4-5 years time they will be entrusted with the vote (which women then had at age 21). Her worry was how to equip girls for this responsibility. She said:

'I read the other day a definition of Education as "a training in the capacity to make decisions", and it seems to me profoundly true..... ..there is the momentous choice for each - shall I, on leaving school, take the first job that offers, or shall I sacrifice some independence and leisure and money to train for a career that may be worth while? Here is the real test of the extent to which you are educated, if you are able to make a deliberate and wise decision.'

Poems featured frequently in the school magazine. The following is particularly appealing:

TO A CHRISTMAS TREE

O
Thee,
Bright tree,
So very green,
Of all trees queen,
Your lights and candles glow
While on the ground is snow.
Round you the children dance in glee
And on your branches gifts I see,
For me?
O tree
That cannot be
For to my woe
You tell me no!

by Joan Wimbush and Joyce Muston (in the Lower VI) 1935 school magazine

MARSTON ROAD - A NEW SITE FOR A SUCCESSFUL GIRLS' SECONDARY SCHOOL

The increasing number of students meant that Oxford City Council needed to look for a new site and in 1931, marker stakes appeared in farmer's fields (which had previously been home to pigs, and in part a Victorian rubbish dump) to the east of Marston Road. After many delays caused by the financial problems of the 1930s, building work proceeded slowly. Thus it was not until 1938, that staff and students could move into the magnificent new Milham Ford School building (designed by the city Architect, Douglas Murray) on a spacious, sloping 16-acre (5.7 Ha) site bounded by Jack Straw's Lane, Marston Road and Harberton Mead. The opening was on March 8th 1939, by H R H Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone. After the opening and speeches, the 300 girls, conspicuous in neat uniform with white shoes, lined the drive on either side, cheering the royal car as it departed with the Princess inside. The new building was in an unaccustomed rural setting, as was observed by the Headmistress, Evelyn Bailey, writing in the school magazine for 1939:

'I shall never forget the buttercup fields that lay spread out at our feet this year. For weeks they lay like a golden flood that crept up to the edges of our playing fields: they shone like sunlight, even when the skies are grey. I think you must have all delighted in them'

These buttercup fields subsequently disappeared under the housing estate built along the Marston Road, and the only places a 'golden flood' of buttercups can still be seen are in Marston meadows near the river and in Milham's own grounds, where the 'meadow' adjacent to Harberton Mead, contains a precious remnant of these ancient un-improved pastures.



Photograph taken during the construction of the new building off Marston Road

The original foundation stone of the school in Cowley place was moved to the new building and inserted in the wall behind the truck in the photograph of the construction in progress.



Portico showing the Oxford Crest and cotswold limestone Ionic columns

The imposing front entrance of the new building has a triangular stone portico containing a carved Oxford crest, with the ox and the ford central, and with an elephant in chains on the left opposed by a beaver in chains on the right. Four tall elegant cotswold limestone Ionic columns surround the front door. This entrance was, in these days, never to be used by the girls; nor were they allowed to use the main staircase up from the oak-panelled entrance hall. All the red brickwork of the original 1939 building has the attractive chevron or diamond pattern, adding to the striking symmetry of the frontage. The Lombardy Poplars along

the Marston Road were newly-planted slim saplings in 1939.

The girls were also dissuaded also from the un-ladylike activity of rolling down the grassy bank in front of the building -although this was obviously very desirable!. Inside the school, rules were equally strict. Girls came to the school in the second or third form (age 10 or 11). There were only two streams - Forms A (mainly academic) and B (Cookery and Needlework instead of Latin). Thus: 3A, 3B, Lower 4A, Lower 4 B, Upper 4A, Upper 4 B, Lower 5 A, Lower 5 B, Upper 5 A, Upper 5B, Lower and Upper 6th.

The main building is laid out in a square, with classroom blocks to the north and south of the west facing frontage. The large, mahogany-panelled Hall completes the eastern side. The central enclosed lawn area is known as the Quadrangle. The attractive neat lawns with rose borders and rockery were immaculately maintained, as were all the school grounds and pitches, by Head Groundsman Mr Hunt and later by Mr Fred Pitter, who spent the majority of his working life at Milham. Caretaker Mr Griffiths moved from the old school in Cowley Place to the new school, where he was immediately faced with all the problems of the war years.



Croquet in the Quad

The gym was a building extending north from the hall, now used as the current school dining room. The original use explains the sport observation gallery over the current canteen serving area.

THE WORLD WAR II YEARS

A few months after the official opening in 1939, war was declared. Milham Ford School escaped the worst effects of the war, such as air-raids. The threat of bombing and gas attacks meant every girl had to bring her gas mask to school and was sent home if she forgot it. There were air raid practices, involving evacuating all staff and students into the large underground concrete air raid shelter, which still exists behind the cycle sheds to the east of the school buildings. It is 45m long with very thick concrete walls and the internal chamber is zigzag in form (the better to resist bomb blast) with 7 galleries. At every turn of the zig zag were 3 chemical toilets screened by a curtain. The girls must have been crammed together on the uncomfortable wooden benches and lessons in the shelter must have been difficult, especially as they also had to learn not to laugh at the rude noises which came from the sides of the gas masks as they breathed.

Part of the grounds were dug up to help the war effort by the growing of vegetables ('Digging for Victory'). Cabbages were grown by the girls on top of the air raid shelter and in the borders and had to be eaten in school dinners, complete with caterpillars! In the holidays some girls had to go on 'Fire Watch' duty - looking out from the school roof overnight. There were difficulties getting enough coal to heat the school. From 1940 - 1944, 300 girls from Burlington School, Shepherd's Bush, London were evacuated to Oxford and shared the Marston Road building. The two schools operated a shift system (Milham girls had the morning, 8.30am-12.30pm, Burlington the afternoons) and the overflow went to the Cowley Place Building. There were shortages of paper and books. Books became ever more dog-eared and tatty and had to be extensively shared. The Old School in Cowley Place was finally sold to St Hilda's College, Oxford University, in 1958, for £14000.

Paper shortages meant the school magazine was reduced in size and print to a slim coverless newsletter and from the 1944 edition comes this snapshot of Milham of the time by the Headmistress, Evelyn Bailey:

"About one o'clock on a June day, I looked out of my window on a familiar sight - the green field sloped down to the red roofs of Marston Road and beyond rose the grey towers, and still further the low green hills of Cumnor and Wytham. The foreground was coloured by many figures in blue and white, disporting themselves according to fancy: a good many sought to relieve the recent pressure on their brains by the time-honoured method of standing on their heads; some were at tennis or cricket; one earnest Form was practising its gymnastic table; some merely stood and stared. It was a pleasant scene of relaxation. Above, in the windy sky, Allies planes buzzed and droned almost unnoticed."

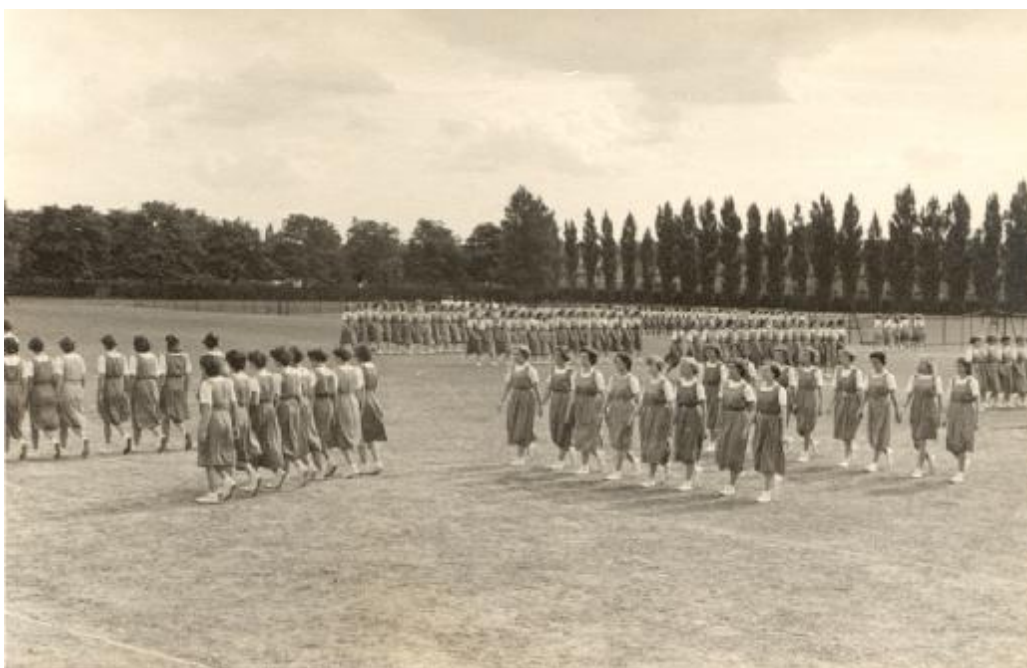
During the 1940s most students were on scholarships awarded as a result of the 11+ examination, however there were still fee-paying pupils and others supported by various firms or charities such as the Freemasons. There was a hierarchy of form captains and sixth form prefects with a Head girl who helped the staff in many ways - supervising classes during staff meetings, doing regular cloakroom and dinner duties, encouraging orderly movement around the school.

Up to the end of the war years, academic achievements and especially University degrees awarded, were recorded on large wooden 'Honours Boards' on the walls near the Hall.

MILHAM BECOMES A STATE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

In 1947 M.F.S. became part of the new state system of free secondary education as a girls' 11-18 grammar school. All fees were abolished and all places awarded by the 11+ exam. Miss Mary R Price became headmistress in 1949 and firmly established the high reputation of the school in its new status.

The 1950 school magazine has delightful cartoons drawn by girls. They convey the impression that both Miss Price and the P E staff were sticklers for discipline and expected the highest standards and level of commitment from the pupils. The leading article from Miss Price starts by explaining to the girls that soon they would be facing new types of exams called the 'General Certificate of Education' (GCE) which would have two levels: 'O' - level and 'A' - level. 'A' - levels, of course have survived to this day. Much sport appears to have been played and there seems to have been a lively interest in cricket as well as the usual netball, hockey, gymnastics and tennis. A sports day in the 1950s would have been preceded by the famous 'Milham March' where all the girls marched in groups around and up and down the playing field (to the music of 'Colonel Bogey') before the sports began.



The 'Milham March' - photo taken from the school building, looking over the field to the centre of Oxford

Sports included: High Jump, Throwing the Cricket Ball, Broad Jump, 100 yards, Flower Pot Race, 220 yards, Potato Race, Obstacle Race, Three-legged Race, Hurdles, Egg and Spoon Race, Stilts Race, Sack Race, Slow Bicycle and Relay. Music, Drama and Art all flourished. Music encompassed a Senior Choir, Junior Choir, Orchestra and Madrigal Singers. Croquet was played by the staff in the enclosed lawn in the centre of the school buildings known as the Quad. This is now a very important wildlife site, due to the huge range of wildflowers that survived in the lawns from the original farmer's fields and which tolerated Mr Pitter's careful close mowing.

In the netball team photograph it is possible to see the young Lombardy Poplar trees at the bottom of the school field which later matured to become Milham's landmark boundary with Marston Road for so many years. The netball team are wearing the uniform of the day - white shirt with tie, navy blue gym slip with sash at the waist. The uniform was completed with blazer and straw boater (called a 'basher') worn as shown by the sixth formers in the photograph taken in the quad. 'Bashers' were cream when new and became browner with age, so it was always clear if a student was a senior or a junior by the colour of the hat!

From the 1950 school magazine comes this little poem by a third former (the present year 9):

FISHES

Fishes are such funny things,
 They cannot fly, they have no wings.
 Fishes are peculiar creatures
 They have no delightful features.
 All they have are gills and fins,
 Some are caught and put in tins
 By SHEILA KNIGHT, IIIA



Netball team from 1949-50



Girls in the quad wearing 'bashers'



Girls going home from school, 1956

Expansion of the school meant more space was needed. In 1956 (our Jubilee year -Milham's 50th Anniversary) the school saw the completion of most of its new buildings including the new gym, extra laboratories and art area to the north. 'Valhalla' (home of the gods) was a room built opposite the current physics lab which was reserved for the prefects only. The 'Crow's Nest' was a room with big picture window looking out to the south of the school, over the car park. This window was lost when the new Drama room was added over the toilet block. On the ground floor in the north corridor, the present room 10 was named 'Kontiki'. A new music room was built out to the east at the back of the school in 1963.

The Jubilee model of Milham Ford School in the form of a large 1 metre square iced Birthday Cake must have been a spectacular sight. It took four months to make by a Mr Pickering and was big enough for everyone in the school to have quite a large slice when cut on 30th May 1956. The carved wooden library

cat arrived as a Jubilee gift from the Milham Old Girls of the time. Carved by a Mr Nicholson, it has been loved by many girls over the years and it inspired this poem:

*I came from a land,
From a witch's realm
I was cut from the tree
From the ancient elm.
I was made, I was formed,
By a carver planned;
I was shaped, I was smoothed
By a master hand
From a rough block of wood
Came a tail, came a nose,
Lithe body, sleek fur,
And eager pose.
Can you guess what I am?
Not a mouse, not a rat,
I am larger than they-
I am The Cat.*



By Margaret Derry, U4J, School Magazine 1957-58



Staff photograph on the school front steps from 1960 school magazine

At Milham there has always been a strong tradition of supporting charity and in doing charitable work. In the 1960s girls regularly visited Old Marston Residential Home and held lunchtime talent shows or girls v. staff games matches to raise money.

Fundraising skills were put to good use for another purpose - for years, students at Milham had been wanting and waiting for an outdoor swimming pool. Numerous cake sales, jumble sales, raffles and other activities raised £1420, which together with £4000 from the Local Education Authority, enabled the pool to be finally

dug in the area in front of Milham Ford Cottages. It was first used by Lower Fourths, elegant in royal blue costumes, who braved the icy waters (59 degrees Fahrenheit) on May 12th 1964. On July 2nd 1964, the Chief Education Officer, Mr Garne, arrived to officially open the pool.



The official opening of the swimming pool from school magazine of 1963-64

Miss Price energetically promoted girl's education on a national basis, as well as raising the aspirations of M.F.S. pupils. She encouraged the further development of the sixth form, symbolised by the opening of the Sixth Form Building (now the Milham Centre) on the east side of the main car park in 1968.

MILHAM BECOMES A STATE COMPREHENSIVE UPPER SCHOOL

The grammar school years came to an end in 1973 with the beginning of the re-organisation of schools to the comprehensive system. In 1972, Oxford City Council had proposed that along with 'comprehensivisation', Milham (and also Oxford Boys' School) both change their character to become co-educational. This was met with much opposition; and a petition signed by 1000 people to the Secretary of State for Education (then Mrs Margaret Thatcher) was effective in causing the rejection of the proposals for change and the single sex-option for boys and girls survived.

As well as becoming a comprehensive, Milham changed from taking students from 11-19 years old to taking them from 13-19 years old, i.e. it went from being a 'secondary' school to an 'upper' school in line with the re-modeling of education in city schools to the three tier system of 'First', 'Middle' and 'Upper'. The first comprehensive intake of 210 13-year olds walked through the doors in 1975. From taking only the most academic girls, Milham was now open to girls of a wide range of abilities and therefore had to provide a new range of courses. In addition there were 2 years of major building work (mostly finished by 1977) to remodel and extend the school premises to meet its new role. The extension to the north of the main building gave spacious room for Art, Craft and Needlework downstairs with Mathematics, Geography and Geology upstairs. The new Drama room and new History room were built out over the two toilet blocks to the south side. Numbers on roll increased to around 730, meaning the school was full to the brim, and human traffic

jams filled the corridors at change of lessons. Lack of space during the rebuilding necessitated the teaching of some lessons in terrapins on the main car park.

The Head of the time was Miss Winifred Laws - a firm believer in the comprehensive system and an enthusiastic promoter of a broader curriculum at all levels in the school. She encouraged the school to acquire its first minibus, enabling more outside visits. She promoted the residential attendance of third formers (Year 9) at such outward-bound centres as Glasbury and Yenworthy enabling them to experience activities like caving, pony trekking, hill walking, rock climbing and camping. The Duke of Edinburgh scheme was increasingly popular. In the '70s sponsored walks aided the charity 'Shelter'.

"We did caving today, and apart from being scared stiff, thoroughly wet and muddy and getting stuck half the time, I really enjoyed myself" - entry from diary of girl at Glasbury, school magazine 1969-70

There were many field trips, especially for Geography with Mrs Hayes, where the Dorset Coast, Tenby, Malham Tarn and Dale Fort in Pembrokeshire featured memorably for many students. The school magazine had by this time become the 'School Record' with full details of such exciting trips:

We thoroughly recommend a geography field course not only for its geography but as a way of life - an opportunity to study in depth without interruptions - an opportunity for students and staff to discuss on common ground and to get to know each other better. ...an opportunity to do the unusual - like walking in pitch darkness along a bumpy cliff top in the pouring rain at midnight to the next rocky bay or eating sausages cooked on a bunsen burner in the Biology lab on the last evening. - an opportunity to cooperate and live together in harmony and friendship. This way Geography becomes alive..." pupil comment from School Record 1975-76

As well as dealing with a school in transition, Miss Laws had also to cope with reorganisation of local government and the country's economic crisis of 1975-76, both of which had repercussions on schools. Young science teacher Gloria Woodward (later Mrs Tolputt) joined the staff in these busy days - one of two Milham old girls from the '60s to come back as Milham staff members (the other being Sally Etheridge who came back to us as Mrs Sharpey - Learning Support Assistant and later Careers coordinator and Connexions adviser).

The Curriculum of the 1970s was full: French or European studies, Latin or Classical studies, Spanish, English and Drama, Mathematics, Religious Studies, History, Geography, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Art/Craft, Music, Home Economics, Needlework, Sports Studies, Typing. Most courses led to O-level (Ordinary level) or C.S.E. (Certificate of Secondary Education). For the first time there were less academic courses like Social and Community Studies, Combined Science, Parentcraft and Commerce. P.E. included gymnastics, trampolining, swimming, athletics, tennis, rounders, hockey, netball as well as arrangements for golf, archery, riding, squash, judo and fencing. Keep-fit and later aerobics were popular with Mrs Jean O'Loughlin. Community Service was established and the Sixth Form had General Studies with a full programme of outside speakers. The uniform was navy blue skirt, a navy, blue or white blouse, navy or blue woollen sweater, white or blue socks and 'suitable' shoes. In summer a dress of the school material (available from Debenhams) was worn. P.E. was carried out in navy skirt and gym knickers, a white aertex blouse with white plimsolls or training shoes. A navy purse belt was allowed for money and dinner tickets. Sixth Formers had the privilege of no uniform and being allowed out of the grounds during their lunch hour.

The '70s saw another revolution at Milham - the first male teacher to be employed in the history of the school. Mr John Whitley joined in 1973, to teach R.E. and Classics. He recalls he was always called upon to

be a parson in the Sixth Form drama productions, although his most memorable appearance was as Fagin in 'Oliver'. He was of course quickly followed by Mr Cliff Paul and Mr Geoff Moore, and many others since.

After 40 years of dedicated service to the Milham grounds and notably his care of the cricket pitch, Mr Fred Pitter retired in 1979. The playing fields and borders were never again so well looked after! The 1980s saw the demise of the O levels and C.S.Es and the introduction of the new G.C.S.E. examinations. In the mid '80s Headteacher Janet Edwards started the frequently-produced school newsletter 'Milham News' as a replacement for the annual school magazine.

In 1984, the front lawns to the south were changed by the addition of a spectacular sculpture known as '**Helios**' - a sundial as well as an art form (one of six sculptures set up in the grounds of Oxford schools at that time). The Sculptor was Barry Mason and the money for the sculpture came from various sources including the Gulbenkian Foundation, Rank Xerox and the artist himself. It is a three part structure, oriented exactly north-south and made of various heights of Portland limestone pillars. The three stone 'arcs' tell the time of day and the angle the sun's rays shining down at midday at midsummer, midwinter and the autumn and spring equinoxes.



Helios the sundial. This photograph shows only the two largest of the three stone arcs. Notice the sunlight shining through the gap indicating the time is approximately 1.00pm.

SIX INTO FIVE WON'T GO!

The role of Milham Ford in the education system of the city was questioned in the 1980s. Schools were subject to severe financial constraints and demographic change meant that falling numbers of students were available to enter the six Upper Schools in the city from 1985 until well into the mid '90s. Spare places in schools would be unavoidable, but the biggest problems were perceived to be for the Sixth Forms, which might have become so small as to be unviable in the smallest schools. It was mooted that the six upper schools be reduced to five (or even four) through mergers or closure and all the published possible school re-organisations involved the disappearance of Milham as an entity on the Harberton Mead site. The then Milham headmistress, Miss Alice Wakefield, was a strong supporter of the benefits of single-sex schooling for girls and campaigned on many grounds for the single-sex option to be still available. She ensured the school flourished internally whilst the debate and controversy about the organisation and number of Oxford's Upper schools rumbled on until 1988. Uncertainty over the Milham's future meant that numbers on roll decreased, whilst campaign stickers proclaiming '*Six into five won't go*' proliferated on cars of Milham campaigners.

At one point in 1986, Oxfordshire County Council actually voted to merge Oxford Boys' School and Milham Ford on the Milham site (with separate-sex teaching). However the Education Secretary (Kenneth Baker) rejected these proposals in early 1988, meaning that Milham survived unchanged and the schools debate ceased for a while. The solution to the small sixth forms was found in the creation of the Sixth Form Centre in the former Cowley St John school buildings in Cricket Road, where students from any city upper school could study minority A levels which could not be offered in their own schools.

Within Milham the early '80s saw curriculum changes and more involvement in the local community. There were numerous visits abroad and fieldwork opportunities. Many students will remember History fieldwork visits to Coalbrookdale in the Ironbridge Gorge with Miss Di Shaw. Drama increasingly flourished and there were many spectacular productions under the guidance of Mrs Barbara Greasley (see the list at the end).

Joining us in 1987, the subsequent Milham headmistress, Miss Elizabeth Higgins, guided the school through the sweeping changes of the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS) where the school became responsible for its own budget, the National Curriculum, S.A.T.s (Standard Assessment Tests), League Tables and an OFSTED inspection in 1995. In 1988 the Third Form became Year 9, Fourth Year 10 and so on up the school to the Sixth Form which are now years 12 and 13. There was a debate in the early 1990s as to whether Milham should become a Grant-Maintained school, but Milham carried on unchanged. It was Miss Higgins who welcomed the hundreds of former pupils and staff back to the school on June 26th 1993, to share in the Milham Ford Centenary Celebrations.

The 1990s saw Milham become host to a small private Montessori Nursery school 'The House at Pooh Corner' who occupied room 9 and took children from ages 2 to 5 years. The little ones especially enjoyed playing in our beautiful grounds and taking part in the school sports day in the summer. The nursery allowed Milham students to experience working with young children. The '80s and '90s saw more charity work - the school 'Ran the World' and laid a mile of pennies for Ethiopia. It supported Comic Relief, ran Macmillan Cancer Care Coffee mornings and wore its blue jeans regularly in the 'Jeans for Genes' appeals.

The retirement of History Teacher Miss Di Shaw in 1995, after 31 years service to the school, may take the record as the most spectacular one in the school's history. Arrangements were made for her to arrive on her very last day in the Unipart/Fox FM local radio station helicopter, with the whole school out at the front to see it land on the field.

ALL CHANGE IN THE GROUNDS

In 1989, enthusiasm for wildlife and green activities saw us taking a hard look at what we actually had on site and the beginning of the catalogue of species that continues to this day. Geography teacher Mrs Audrey Hayes oversaw the digging, lining and filling of the first pond in the corner by The Church of St Michael and all Angels on Jack Straw's Lane. Biology teacher Mrs Joan Coleman extended this theme by organising the digging and lining (by messy clay-puddling) of the second pond in the marshy zone beyond the tennis courts in summer term and holidays in 1996. The swimming pool developed cracks and had to be filled in during the early '90s as the cost of repair and upkeep became prohibitive. In 1990 the first Bee Orchid flower arrived on the school playing field and was spotted by biology teacher Dr Judith Webb whilst running the 'EcoActivists' student's conservation club during 'ACE' (Alternative Curriculum Enrichment) sessions on Wednesday afternoons. The subsequent removal of this Bee Orchid to the protected haymeadow area, adjacent to Harberton Mead, enabled it to flower and start to build up the large population on site today. Bee Orchids and Pyramidal Orchids, along with 68 other wildflower species and rare fungi, are even found in the Quad in the areas that used to be croquet lawns.



*The newly made clay-puddled school pond
with students from 'EcoActivists', 1996*



*Drawing of Bee Orchid
by Tracy Bayliss, year 13, 1995*

This was the start of the serious development of the grounds as an environmental teaching resource and an important wildlife area for Oxford City. In 1995 there were so many Bee Orchids that the first 'Orchid Open Day' was organised by Judith Webb on 11th June when, for the first time, members of the public were allowed in the grounds of Milham to tour the spectacular wildflower display and appreciate the Helios sundial. In the winter, Bee Orchids that sprouted on the pitches were transplanted with much effort to the marginal meadow areas. Orchid Open Days have been more or less annual events since 1995 since then, with the exception of the year when a large young tree planting programme of oaks, hazels and crab apples was undertaken in November 1998. This was in conjunction with the 'Forest of Oxford' organisation and involved year 9 pupils and the children from the on-site pre-school Montessori nursery. This tree planting was urgently necessary as many of Milham's landmark Lombardy Poplars had become unsafe through disease and had either been blown down in gales, or been reduced in height for safety reasons. Along Marston road, the poplars have been replaced by Limes and young native Black Poplars, and a row of Hollies and a special 'Millennium Oak' (seedling from an ancient oak tree in Shotover Forest) were planted in 1999. The school achieved an OSCA (Oxfordshire Special Conservation Award) and the Rover Environmental Trophy for the wildlife work on site.

RECENT YEARS

In 1996 Mrs Gloria Walker was appointed Headmistress (the first ever Milham Head to have been married and with a family) and her enthusiasm and drive made the achievement of the prestigious 'Investors in People' award possible for Milham. The school newsletter became 'Milham Matters' - a lively and accessible mix of news, views and celebrations of successes. Milham Ford had become a vibrant, multicultural school with increasing student achievements.

From Computer studies first appearing on the Curriculum in the early 1980s, Information Technology (IT or ICT) teaching had now expanded and the whole of rooms 31 and 32 were taken over by computer networks. From three separate sciences, at GCSE, the curriculum changed to the Dual Science teaching scheme. 'A' -

level Physical Education was offered. Rugby training was experienced and skiing trips were popular.



Netball in year 10, 1999



Miss Higgins and staff entertain, c.1995

Drama was increasingly successful with Miss Fizza Hussain promoting the participation in the International Theatre Festival at Grenoble in the sixth form for those doing Performing Arts. Uniform now allowed navy trousers as well as skirts and navy sweatshirts with the MFS logo had replaced the woollen jumpers. Asian students were allowed to wear the navy Shalwar Kamiz. Whilst reciprocal arrangements in the Sixth Form had always meant that some boys from Oxford Boys' School or other city upper schools came to Milham to study selected 'A' Levels like Business Studies, P.E., Geography or Biology, it was now agreed that boys could actually enroll at Milham in the Sixth Form. Those that did transfer completely saw the benefit of a smaller, caring school in vastly improved grades.

1996 saw the arrival of Mrs Lynn Winkworth in the Library and over the next 2 years she accomplished its complete reorganisation and computerization to a modern Learning Resource Centre (connected to the Internet) that was bright, cheerful and welcoming. This resulted in a huge increase in its use by staff and students.

In July 1999 Oxfordshire County Council moved to consult on a plan to reorganise the city schools to 5-11 primaries and 11-19 secondaries. Under this plan, by 2003, all the 10 remaining middle schools would close, along with one first school and Milham Ford. Most first schools were to expand to primaries and there were to be only five large secondary schools in the city with over 1000 students each (some with up to 1800 pupils). The single-sex option was seen as no longer necessary. The other single-sex school in the city (Oxford Boys' School) had become co-educational in 1997. Milham staff and students campaigned strongly for the school to stay open, thus preserving the single-sex option, but the go-ahead for reorganisation (and with it, the eventual closure of Milham) was confirmed in 2000.

Mrs Anne Peterson took over as Head from September 1999 in these difficult times (having previously been Deputy Head). A calm, positive and determined Canadian, she has seen the school through the enormous stresses occasioned by the threat of closure. Renown for her rapport with students, fighting spirit, sense of

fun and especially for her spectacular school assemblies which regularly over-ran into the afternoons (who can forget the one where she hit baseballs down the length of the hall, or the helium balloons) she kept the students working hard and achieving highly. In this she was helped and supported by Mr Steve Jones, who became Deputy Head in addition to being Head of Science.

Mrs Peterson worked just as hard at keeping the staff happy and secure in uncertain times. The OFSTED inspection report of 2000 was better than we could ever have expected; and the 2001 result score of 58% of year 11 students achieving 5 A*-C grades in their GCSE examinations was the highest the school has ever had since the beginning of this type of examination. This has culminated in the school being given a 'School Achievement Award' in 2002 for showing year on year improvement in performance for the three years 1998-2001. This is remarkable, considering the huge staff changes of the past three years; and the large additional amount of work involved with the introduction of the changes at 'A' Level (the new AS levels for year 12 and A2 courses for year 13 plus Key Skills). To quote a past Milham Headmistress, Miss Winifred Laws speaking in the 1970s ..*"Buildings and courses are important, but people matter most"*. It seems as much true for Milham Ford in 2002, as it was then.

After 110 years, Milham Ford School could not wish to finish on a better note.



The Milham staff on the front steps of the school, June 13th 2002. As one staff member commented '....you could say - these are the ones who finished it off!'

Milham Headteachers and dates of service:

1890s-1904	Misses Emma and Jane Moody - founders
1905-1917	Miss Catherine Dodd
1917-1931	Miss Joan McCabe
1931-1949	Miss Evelyn Bailey
1949-1966	Miss Mary Price
1966- 1978	Miss Winifred Laws
1979-1986	Miss Alice Wakefield
1986-1987	Miss Janet Edwards
1987-1996	Miss Elizabeth Higgins
1996-1999	Mrs Gloria Walker
1999-	Mrs Anne Peterson



C. I. Dodd



J. S. H. McCabe



E. J. Bailey



M. R. Price



*Standing, left to right - Miss Wakefield, Miss Edwards, Miss Higgins, Miss Laws
Seated - Miss Price
Centenary Celebrations 1993*

SOME NOTABLE MILHAM DRAMA PRODUCTIONS AND DATES

1917	Alice in Wonderland
1918	(or so) She stoops to Conquer
1938	Pilgrims Progress (first production in the 'New School')
1941	The Gondoliers
1956	Tobias and the Angel (Jubilee performance)
1959	Richard of Bordeaux
1960	The Winter's Tale
1963	Alice (staff production with Miss Price as the Red Queen)
1964	Twelfth Night
1968	Amahl and the Night Visitors
1969	Dido and Aeneas
1970	Noyes Fludde
1972	Our Town
1973	Pygmalion Blood Wedding
1975	Alice in Wonderland
1979	Joint production with Oxford Boys' School of Stainer's Crucifixion
1981	Oliver
1982	How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying
1984	Oh! What a Lovely War
1991	The Boyfriend
1992	Calamity Jane
1994	The Crucible
1996	The Diary of Anne Frank
1997	The Lord of the Flies
1998	Faust
1999	The Bathtub (at Grenoble)
2002	Arabian Nights and Macbeth



EDITORS

Dr Judith Webb

(Biology teacher at Milham since 1987, Staff Governor and worker for wildlife in the Milham grounds)

With much assistance from the Archive Celebration- Reunion Committee:

Mrs Pam Feast (Old Girl 1952-1959)

Mrs Audrey Hayes, nee Haywood (Geography and Geology teacher at Milham from 1959-1991)

Ms Heather O'Connor (Business Studies teacher at Milham since 1992, Senior Management Team and Staff Governor)

Miss Diana Shaw (History teacher at Milham from 1964-1995 and supervisor of the Milham Archive)

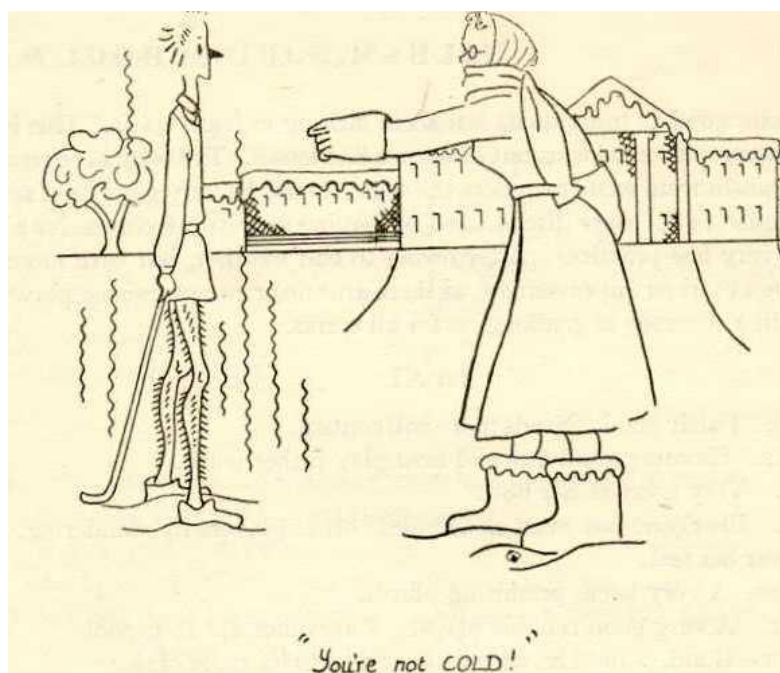
Mrs Sylvia West (Governor)

Mrs Lynn Winkworth (Librarian at Milham from 1996-2001)

June 2002, Milham Ford School, Harberton Mead, Oxford, OX3 0DF

SOURCES

All the information in the text is from the school archive of past Milham magazines and other material and from conversations with staff, old girls and their written memories for the Centenary in 1993 and the Celebration Reunion in 2002



Two cartoons from the school magazine in 1950