

# **Mrs Patricia Small (nee Wareham)**

## **Memories of St Paul's School 1947 - 1954**

Patricia Small (born Patricia Wareham) was the middle of three daughters of Mr Walter Wareham, Headmaster of St Paul's School from 1945 to 1969.

“I don't know where to start! I was only two when we moved to the School House in Dorking from the school at Albury, so some early memories may not be accurate. I think I was allowed to wander about a lot in the school grounds, so I have memories of the senior boys digging in the school garden in the playing field near the old canteen hut. I'm pretty sure I was taken into an air raid shelter while a lesson went on, so I assume that must have been after the war. Maybe when the air raid sirens were sounded as a test the school still had to practise going down into the shelters. I also remember seeing my big sister Margaret in the field with her class and their teacher Miss Harley, having an outdoor lesson – I think it was acting out the ‘King's Breakfast’ by A A Milne.

There was a bell in the little turret above my bedroom at the School House, and it was rung every morning for about ten minutes before school started. When you heard it start to ring, it meant ‘Hurry up - you've got about ten minutes to get to school on time’. When it stopped, it meant you were late!

Attendance was very important in those days, so there was a banner that was awarded to any class that had full attendance in a particular week. If your class won the little banner you were allowed to go home five minutes early on Friday.

I do definitely remember the heavy snowfall of 1947, when Mr Sayers the caretaker had to dig a path from our back yard across the lower playground to the school. I had just started as a pupil and the snow seemed to tower above me. Snow was quite a feature of schooldays. The big boys always made slides in the top playground and I felt really grown up when I was brave enough to have a go myself – exhilarating speed in your wellingtons. When the weather was not good we all used to gather in the ‘weather shelters’ in the top playground at playtime. It got everyone out of the building and into the fresh air for a while.

I always enjoyed PT out in the playground. When I was first a pupil our PT lessons were four lines and we did exercises to numbers – hands on shoulders, in the air, etc. Very Victorian! But then Miss Norman arrived – young teacher with modern ideas – and everything changed. We still had four teams, but we had our own coloured box filled with small apparatus like balls, bats, skipping ropes and hoops. We had a team corner and were able to catch and throw and undertake all kinds of activities. We warmed up by catching ‘tails’ – coloured bands tucked into the back of our pants. I remember that some of us had to go to the Grammar School one evening to give a demonstration lesson for other teachers. It must have been very innovative stuff. We also used gym apparatus in the corridor. I loved the box and the vaulting horse, but that was when I was in the top class. We did country dancing – just girls – in the corridor, to the records on the old wind-up gramophone. We did ‘Hunt the Squirrel’ and ‘Flowers of Edinburgh’. The records didn't play for long before the mechanism started to wind down and the music slowed, so someone had to give the handle a quick wind to get it going at full speed again. Miss Norman also introduced maypole dancing. I remember going into the copse with Dad and Mr Sayers to choose a larch tree to chop down for the pole. It was smoothed down and painted white. They found some sort of car hubcap for the top and put hooks on to hold the long bands. We used to perform dances at the church fete, which was in the Vicarage garden.

Miss Norman also had us playing stoolball in the field in summer games lessons. I was a sporty child, so I loved all this activity.

I also remember the occasional whole school treat for the Juniors, usually near the end of term, when I presume my father gave some of the teachers time off to sort out their registers – a ghastly job, as everything had to balance. The gramophone was set up in the top playground and the 78s were put on, but this time the music was a march (one was called ‘Blaze Away’). We'd all be lined up in fours and we'd do formation marching to music – up the playground, then wheeling off in twos and coming back together again. I remember it as being enormous fun.

We had some other teachers in the Junior school who were very special. Everyone loved Mr Truscott, a Cornishman with a great sense of fun, twinkling eyes and a false hand! He'd had it blown off in an accident, so always covered the false one with a brown leather glove.

The other male member of staff we all loved was Mr Sayles, the Music teacher. We sang to the schools broadcasts on the radio, with the books to follow the words and

music; lots of folk songs, sea shanties and so on. Mr Sayles introduced some of us to recorder playing – a real innovation. I remember being quite good at it and was chosen with another girl to play at Shalford church fete, as that was where Mr Sayles was organist and choirmaster. People paid sixpence and chose a tune from our list and we played it for them. Alma Cogan (singing star of the Fifties) lived in Shalford and opened the fete, and we played a tune for her. It was one of her songs, 'I've got the bell bottom blues'. Mr Sayles organised a school choir and everyone in it had to wear school uniform for the performance. I remember a lot of borrowing and lending going on, because of course, there were some fairly hard-up families who couldn't afford to buy uniform. But for the performances all of the girls had navy tunics, white blouses, school tie and navy berets with school badge. Not sure about the boys. We performed at the Leith Hill Music Festival in the Dorking Halls, and one very special evening we sang as a choir in Holy Trinity Church in Guildford. I can still remember the words of 'Non nobis domine' and the 23rd Psalm from that evening. This was while the cathedral was being built. Holy Trinity acted as the cathedral church.

When I was younger and in Mrs Burrage's class as a 1st year junior, things were still a bit Victorian. We had double desks, so if your neighbour wanted to stand up you also had to stand as the long seat was hinged. We had handkerchief inspection every morning, when we all had to hold our hankie in the air and lost a house point if we didn't have one. The boys often came without and ended up having them pinned on to their jumpers.

In the top class, girls had needlework lessons with Miss Harwood. She sat on a very high-legged chair. We did practise stitching on small pieces of material, and practise seams. We put four desks together and were able to chat while we sewed, although Miss Harwood was strict, so you didn't overdo it. Later on we did embroidery stitches and made things like chair backs.

The vicar had to come and give an assembly and a scripture lesson each week and we had a scripture inspection every year, when visiting examiners would ask the class questions. Because it was a church school we had to go to the church for important days such as Ascension Day and Empire Day. We walked down, class by class, two by two. Empire Day was a half-day holiday and it was also my father's birthday, so 24th May was memorable.

I remember with some fondness the Christmas treats. Sometimes the whole school would go to the Church Hall, which I think was in Falkland Road – quite a long

walk away – and after tea at long trestle tables, we'd have a film show. These were usually Laurel and Hardy, so we laughed a lot, but best of all was when the film was rewound at the end, and you saw it backwards. We all thought that hilarious.

I remember being taken to the Church Hall to watch the top class children perform a sung play, maybe it was an operetta. One of the songs was about the British Lion in his cage, roaring like the thunder. This may have been when the school was all-age.

Then there was the dreaded 11 Plus. I was hopeless at Arithmetic and I remember my father drilling me on times tables, measures, etc at many mealtimes. I was redeemed by my English and the Intelligence Test (we used to practise that every week in class for the year before the exam) and so was given the privilege that everyone who passed was given – they were allowed to go home to tell their parents the news. My father said, "Now you go home and tell your father" and everyone roared with laughter and I felt so silly. I didn't know what to do, so I rushed out in great embarrassment.

I also remember the whole school (well, the juniors at least) walking to the Embassy cinema to watch the Conquest of Everest film.

The playgrounds weren't always completely asphalted. The lower one was, but there were pine trees near the school on the top one, with bumpy roots and a sandy surface. This sand blew across the asphalt and made it quite slippery at times, so there were often cut knees.

There were 'slopes' to get us from lower level to the top playground, one coming up near the old wooden PT apparatus shed from the boys' toilets side and the other near the girls' toilets. These were long, brick buildings, outside, of course, and the cubicle walls were whitewashed. They were open at the top of the cubicles, but the building was roofed over."

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