

Mrs Barbara Pitney (nee Wareham)

Memories of St Paul's School 1950 - 1956

Barbara Pitney (born Barbara Wareham) was the youngest daughter of Mr Walter Wareham, Headmaster of St Paul's School from 1945 to 1969.

“My two sisters and I all grew up in the School House as our father, Walter Wareham, was Headmaster of the school postwar until the late sixties when he retired. He had also been an Assistant Master in the mid to late thirties when he obtained the headship of Albury School during the war years.

When I was in class 1B, the first class following the two reception classes, my mother was my class teacher and it is still a great source of fun with my family that my school report from that year is signed M A Wareham, class teacher, and W J Wareham, Headmaster, the child, of course, Barbara Wareham. Apparently it was at the end of that year that my mother, anxious NOT to show me favouritism, put me second in the class and awarding me the Progress Prize. (In every other year I was awarded the Proficiency Prize, first in the class.) She only told me this story many, many years later!

For many years I was in touch with Muriel Harley one of father's staff, Barbara Norman, one time his deputy and a great organiser of English country dancing in the corridor and maypole dancing in the school field, and Jane Everson, the second reception teacher during father's time at the school.

Other members of staff: of course, George Birkin, who I believe was ‘emergency trained’ post war; Tom Truscott, who had a prosthetic hand always encased in a leather glove – as a child growing up in Cornwall he found some explosive....; Harry Sayles, the music master and who instilled a great love of music in me and encouraged me to play not just the descant recorder but the treble recorder too; Miss Harwood who took class 4A; Mrs (known to all of us as Miss) Marsh class 1 reception; and, to me, the strictest of them all probably because she had a widow's hump and was rather small and quick to spot anyone misbehaving, was Mrs Burrage.

Another Harry, Harry Sayers, was the school caretaker and when Pat and I were little we would share our sweet ration with him. We would occasionally find him in the 'stoke hole' as it was called, the room below the school housing the boiler. I was terrified by the size of the boiler and the darkness and the piles of coke. When you are small everything appears so very much bigger. Harry was the salt of the earth and helped my father decorate, repair and generally keep the school tidy and clean.

I remember happy sports days in the school field and the air raid shelters at the bottom of the field and at the top too. Father had an allotment that he tended at the top of the field. He encouraged the boys in gardening, particularly as an Assistant Master before the war, and he also founded the Dorking St. Paul's Athletic Club for the same purpose of maintaining boys' health and interests. He himself was steeped in athletics and was Clerk of the Course at the 1948 Olympic Games.

I returned to the school when it celebrated its Centenary and delighted in being able to fill in questionnaires proffered to me by eager young pupils. The school buildings had changed drastically even then, and when I drove through Dorking six or more years ago I couldn't resist driving up St Paul's Road to look at the house. I was so sad that the garden we loved so much was a car park.

Just before I bring this to a close I do have a very amusing story to tell you about my father and some boys wanting to scrump apples and pears from the garden. His nickname was 'Wiggie'. He was standing quietly in the garden when some boys tried to climb the wall to reach the fruit. One said 'Look out, Wiggie's watching!' and they ran off. Knowing boys as he did, father waited for them to return. He was not disappointed and they did come back for a second try. Just as the first boy climbed on top of the wall father said 'And he's still watching!' They fled

And another story about flying the flag from the school flag pole. It was 24 May (Empire Day in those days). One young mother asked her little one why the flag was flying and we overheard the child say 'Because it's Mr Wareham's birthday!' The child was right – 24 May was indeed father's birthday!"