DOWNE HOUSE SCRAP-BOOK

1907–1957

DOWNE HOUSE
SCRAP-BOOK

CONTENTS

Introduction. MISS MEDLEY — page 3

In Retrospect. MISS WILLIS — 3

APPENDIX. *The Order of Silence* — 19

1909–1919. MISS MORGAN-BROWN — 20

1924–1956. MISS BATE — 26

I. *The First Terms of Downe House.* NAN (WOODALL) NAPIER. 1907–1910 — 29

II. CATHERINE (GODFREY) BEDDINGTON. Left 1911 — 31

III. ROSEMARY (BRINCKMAN) BAGLEY. Left 1916 — 33

IV. ELIZABETH (BOWEN) CAMERON. Left 1917 — 35

V. JOCELYN (ASHLEY DODD) BABER. Left 1920 — 37

VI. PIPPA MILFORD. Left 1926 — 44

VII. BETTY (CRAWFORD) STUDHOLME. Left 1926 — 45

VIII. PRISCILLA (HAYTER) NAPIER. Left 1926 — 48

IX. ANNE (BRADBY) RIDLER. Left 1930 — 54

X. JACOBINE (MENZIES WILSON) SACKVILLE-WEST. Left 1938 — 56

XI. RUTH ASPINALL. Left 1939 — 59

XII. HONOR (DE SALIS) WESTMACOTT. Left 1943 — 62

XIII. JANE (MARRIOTT) DE FALBE. Left 1945 — 65

XIV. JULIAN McMASTER. Left 1946 — 67

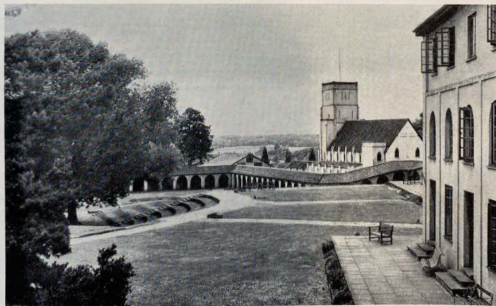
XV. GILLIAN (HEATH) HOLLAND. Left 1947 — 72

XVI. JENNIFER GOSSE. Left 1950 — 75

XVII. ALISON LINKLATER. Left 1951 — 78

XVIII. ELIZABETH KENRICK. Left 1954 — 81

DOWNE HOUSE, DOWNE, KENT. 1907–1922



DOWNE HOUSE, COLD ASH, NEWBURY. 1922–57

Introduction

MISS MEDLEY

THE suggestion that a collection of early and recent memories—a Downe House Scrap-book in fact—might be a pleasantly appropriate way of marking the first fifty years of the school's life, and of paying tribute to Miss Willis, was first put forward in the *School Magazine* for 1955. (It seemed a suitable way for a school that is proud to claim among its Old Seniors such people as Elizabeth Bowen and Anne Ridler to celebrate its Jubilee.) The idea met at the time with disappointingly little response. If it stirred memories, it gave little impulse to write of them.

Then Alison Linklater undertook to write to Old Seniors who represented different generations, and who might be expected to remember the school that they and their contemporaries knew, and without too much difficulty, to record those memories. Their impressions make up the greater part of this book. They are arranged in chronological order, but they make no pretence to be a history. They are as various as their writers, though there are some qualities—generosity of mind, perhaps, candour, appreciation of people and their diversity—that may be thought common to them all. Some reach back in time to school days that are now a distant landscape, and these are the memories that have about them some of the enchantment of distance, and some of the harmony and proportion, too, that it imposes. There are other records of a past so recent that detail still looms sharp and angular, and the irritations that time has not yet made tolerable, still smart. Both have a place in a total impression that is to have any kind of completeness.

It is hoped that these recollections may give pleasure; that they will serve to suggest, at least, what Downe House was like in the first fifty years of its life, and that, as all good reminiscence does, they may evoke more.

In Retrospect

MISS WILLIS

AS this is to be a scrap-book and not a history, you will not expect a record of the school, but just snippets and patch work.

So many Downe House girls have asked me to tell them about the early days of the school, that, as its fiftieth year approaches, I must try to recollect the past and to see why I wanted to start a school and what unconscious influences moulded my plans. It is not easy to choose a beginning because, as every historian knows, one fact emerges

from a previous cause and is in its turn the begetter of a new event. Of course the first influences were in my own home. From my earliest years I had listened to my father talking about education and discussing problems with my mother; to both of them sincerity was the foundation of their opinions and actions and they were singularly free from conventions. Books, music, and art were an essential part of their lives. My father was one of the first Inspectors of Schools, and had a natural gift for teaching. I remember being taken as a small child to one of his schools, where in a moment he lifted a class out of the stiffness and boredom of an inspection, into excited interest in their own countryside. He was such a scholar himself that he expected us to take in anything that he read to us—Shakespeare, Molière, Prescott's *Ferdinand and Isabella*, Dickens, and Thackeray were all read aloud to us in the evenings—certainly before I was twelve years old, and I had read all Tennyson with enthusiasm before I went to school at thirteen.

To school I had to go, possibly because I had had too much education at home, and I was beginning to want more independence. Everything at home centred round our edification, and we were shown beautiful scenery, architecture, pictures, and museums, and told what to appreciate in music until it developed in me an obstinate refusal to show any interest in anything.

I was such a rebel that I was sent to Brighton, to what was then a modern boarding-school, Wimbledon House, now called Roedean, to find my own feet and to learn discipline.

The Misses Lawrence were Unitarians and my parents chose this school as they themselves had reacted from the mid-Victorian Low Church teaching and were determined to save us from any narrow Church of England influence. With the tiresome perversity of a child I disliked the Unitarian teaching and form of worship and I was very much attracted to the devotion and dignity of the High Church so that later on, when I left school, I decided to join the Church and to choose my own interpretation of the Christian faith.

For me life at school was rather a struggle for existence. I look back and realize my own failings—my lack of discipline, my untidiness, and unpunctuality and, in a school based on boys' public-school tradition, my complete inability to play games or to succeed in any form of athletics. I thought myself cleverer than the average girl and learned about all games and athletics so that I could criticize and report matches in the school magazine, and this gave me certain privileges, which I enjoyed. Following the Arnold tradition, the Lawrences gave the elder girls a great deal of authority and we learned by somewhat bitter experience how to manage younger and defiant members of the school. I owe my old school very much and above all the courage to tackle difficult situations calmly, but I bought my knowledge in a painful way, as I had no guidance and nobody's particular interest. Schoolgirl adorations were then the established custom in every school and I remember the scent of flowers in the sixth-form studies, as young admirers brought their gifts to their special favourites. It was a silly but emotionally satisfying devotion and it wasted a good deal of time, energy, and money.

School life developed my critical faculties and I recognized the difference between the life at home, with intellectual and artistic standards, and the artificial life at school, which did, however, develop initiative, independence, and a sense of responsibility.

I remember seeing a sublime sentence written up in the gymnasium at Osborne, in the old days when the youngest members of the Royal Navy were trained there: 'There is nothing that the Navy cannot do.' I think that I left school with something akin to that confidence though I was quite aware of my own shortcomings.

Somerville College was such joy after school life that I spent my time reading anything but history, which was my subject, and I made delightful friends and loved Oxford.

At the back of my mind there was a very vague plan that some day I would have a school where each individual would matter, where life would be normal, and relations between people would be easy. Even at college I remember opposing vehemently any attempt to place people in categories and to divide them into dons and students of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years. We were all individuals and we must mix and we could be friends with people of any age. Authorities were quite prepared to support this theory in college but at that time few women students dared to carry this plan of general friendliness into the men's colleges. We were carefully chaperoned, so that any social occasion fell perfectly flat as far as most of us were concerned. Teaching was the normal sequel to university life and for seven years I taught in various schools and my plan to start a school on new lines began to materialize.

In 1907 Alice Carver and I decided to start this new venture. She and I had been at school together and she had all the gifts that I admired but did not possess. She was very athletic, an international hockey player, with a fine face and beautiful eyes, and she had a north-country belief in reticence and severe management of the young. Unfortunately she was constitutionally far from robust and she became so exhausted by school life that she had often to retire to bed or go away to rest during the short time that she managed the household.

We were always hampered by lack of capital as we each contributed only a preliminary £1,500 towards expenses, and even in those days this did not go far. We had to find a house spacious enough for a small school, but inexpensive to run, with enough land for a playing-field and a garden to enjoy. Downe House, Downe, near Orpington, Kent, fulfilled these requirements. It was a family house, with the splendid tradition of Charles Darwin still lingering there and occasionally a few devout followers of Darwin came to visit the Sandwalk and his study and the laboratory, which he built but never used. His work and his character were a great inspiration to us as time went on. The integrity and imagination of the scientist and the family affection of the Darwins made an atmosphere that I hope permeated the school and gave it a certain dignity even when it was very young.

In September 1907 the arrival of our first pupil, Nan Woodall, was a great event and we collected two girls to be her companions, a first cousin of mine, Hilary Willis, and

Dulcie Travers from a Chesterfield school. They could only stay for a term and we were left wondering what would happen. We had a small staff, Miss Heather, Miss Collins, Miss Lane, and myself and only one pupil to teach. Fortunately Mrs. Moore and her daughter Alice and a small son Ralph came to live with us to fill up the empty rooms, and before long, Cordelia and Augusta Burn, the daughters of the Rev. Andrew Burn, later Dean of Salisbury. Then we began to feel like a school and all school pursuits were followed enthusiastically.

Miss Heather was then and always the best teacher in the school. In 1907 she was a busy woman, teaching in a school at Westerham as well as at Downe House and acting as secretary to Sir William Crookes—also editor of the *Chemical News*. She was a scholar of Holloway College and had taken both a science and mathematics degree, and had invented and patented a form of gas in which food could be preserved without freezing. Slim and active, with bright hazel eyes and an enchanting smile, she avoided all our efforts at sociability and came and went in all weathers from Greenstreet Green, sometimes on foot and sometimes driving a much-loved pony.

Miss Lane was the beauty of the staff. She had long golden hair and a beautiful figure and encouraged all athletics and gymnastics. Before we had a gymnasium, gymnastic exercises and what I called drill happened out of doors, generally on the old-fashioned tennis-court. Games were not much fun until there were a few more girls, but cricket was practised on the lawn and some sort of hockey began very soon.

There were other diversions, even acting, and the first play in July 1908 was written by a friend of mine, Beryl de Zoete, on the theme of new ventures and plans. Rip Van Winkle, a young man full of original and unpopular ideas and modern music, met with nothing but failure and contempt. As in the old story, he slept for a hundred years and woke up to find his ideas accepted by everyone, and his songs known and loved by all the people of the young generation.

The people of Downe village were always invited to our actings but they were not particularly interested in a girls' school and the old vicar, Mr. Finden, shunned us deliberately. It was not easy to take the children to the village church to listen to the man who shut the church door against the Darwin family. I used to send the school out before the sermon but this was considered too childish a plan and we did finally decide to build our own chapel and to hold services suitable for a school community. Religious teaching was very puzzling to me as I knew that there were Sunday schools, but I had never been to any and though I was a member of the Church there was a great deal that I didn't understand. Perhaps that helped me to sympathize with the even greater ignorance of the children and I had to think out my personal beliefs again and again in order to answer their questions. My own questions were sometimes met with unexpected answers. 'What do you mean by Conscience?' I asked one extremely naughty child. 'Oh I know', she said, 'it's the little voice inside you which says "Quite right" when you've done anything.' The question that always came up in Sunday classes, as a matter of course, was—'Do horses go to Heaven?' I always said that I hoped so but I couldn't

give them a certain answer. In the early days of this century the enormous influence of 'Nannies' could be felt. Nanny presided in the nursery and taught the first rules of manners, cleanliness, and morals. It was worrying to a child with hiccups when Nannie ordered it to say 'Pardon' and mother was horrified at the use of the word. That was typical of many of the nursery habits and though Nanny's supremacy was shaken when school life began, there was often a return to the nursery during the holidays and Nanny would condemn the free ways of school, where a measure of freedom was allowed on Sundays. Times have changed and the cosy nurseries and the autocratic Nanny no longer exist; the mothers have more say in the bringing up of their children and they can no longer take manners and morals for granted as they used to do, and there is no place to which children can be banished when their behaviour becomes atrocious. Fathers do not always realize this added burden in the home and they feel that they often have to take the second place, even the third, as minding children and cooking and cleaning make a heavy day's work for the young wives. I believe that this will all settle down during this generation, and I am proud to see the health and happiness of the grand-children of the school.

But I am not thinking now of present and future Downe House pupils, I am looking at the past, and the distant past, when we had very unsophisticated children to teach, and as I look I see that they were, on the whole, not well grounded academically, and rather plain, with hair glossy and straight, brushed back very firmly and plaited (sometimes rather frivolously into two plaits). Brown stockings were worn for games and black in the afternoon (a plan which ensured changing), and the same green djibbahs, copied from Roedean, that Downe House still wears. I tried to alter the djibbahs and to design something less difficult to make but the new tunics were banned and new girls were advised to get 'the right sort of djibbah' and not the new sort, 'quite like other schools'. Do not blame me if you find djibbahs distasteful. My first pupil, longing for a complete school uniform, begged me to choose a school coat and I decided on purple blanket coats, made in Northern Ireland. These and the purple felt hats that the school wore made the little school look quite an institution and incidentally the purple and green of school colours represented Scottish heather, as both Miss Carver and I were half Scottish and proud of it. Perhaps they were unfortunate colours to choose as they were the colours of the militant suffragettes and we were law-abiding members of a Suffrage group.

Life was certainly more Spartan in the early days. Cold baths in the morning and 'rub downs' after games. Walks were quick and were looked upon as training for games and these were played keenly. We were never quite as good as Roedean, Queen Anne's, or Wycombe Abbey but we could beat the majority of girls' schools at cricket and hockey and tennis, and that cannot be done without practice. We were lucky in having several girls, for instance the Mallams, who came from boys' preparatory schools and they set a good standard.

From the first term, Downe House has appreciated music in every form, hearing it

and making it, and the Music Club (or Society) was started by Miss Aimée Tizard (later Mrs. Willett) and has persisted triumphantly ever since, and for the last forty years we have had the help and inspiration of many musicians. Miss Read and Miss Gunn and lately Miss Fairbank, Mrs. Wertheim, and many others have encouraged the different sides of music with all the generous assistance that they could give. Downe House Music Colours have been a coveted honour and we are proud to have Dame Myra Hess as an honoured member of this Society.

The Sketch Club was at first called the Arts Club and was started by Miss Hensman, who was for many years our enthusiastic teacher, and the work was carried on by Miss Bedford, Miss Dorothy Willis, Miss Hickson, and many other artists, to the great enjoyment of those with artistic gifts. It would take too long to describe all the different societies, but the Science Club, started by Miss Heather, was the most serious and enterprising Society. Papers were read by members and, after hard work, they relaxed and always ate Fuller's walnut cake for tea.

Downe House was fortunate in its staff and there was a sense of vocation in teachers which made life very pleasant even if strenuous. It was fun to do things together and no one contributed more than Miss Morgan-Brown, who had been a pupil of mine when I was teaching at Roedean in 1902. She was and is a fine personality, clever, capable, sensible, and had grown up in a preparatory school with a great headmaster, her father, Mr. Cyril Morgan-Brown. She was ready to cope with any mischief without losing her refreshing sense of humour. From acting in plays (I remember her success as Mrs. Malaprop) to discovering the perpetrators of crime, she could always be depended upon. When she left us, to go back to teach in her father's school, we felt lost, but others came to carry on the work. In 1912, after Miss Carver had finally left the school, I was looking for a teacher of geography and found Miss Nickel, who was then assisting Dr. Sayers in the electrical treatment of rheumatism. She was always a mysterious figure. No one will ever know where she came from and she herself had obviously taken a vow of silence about the past, and we knew only vaguely that she had lived in Russia and had taken a medical training in Paris in order to help the poor people on a family estate. After some tragedy, which involved her family, she had come to England and was preparing to take a medical training in London. She was also an inventor and had patented a metal tire, possibly the precursor of the bulldozer wheel. Her arrival at Downe House changed her plans and, though she continued her work in London, she soon devoted herself to the school and came to live there. I realized before long that she was little use as a teacher, but she was a skilled craftsman and could inspire people in every practical way. In everything she did there was a touch of genius and equally an inability to complete a bit of work. She had learned from everyone she met and with quick response she could pick up hints from every fine workman. As the numbers in the school grew she quite naturally assumed the part of handyman and then builder, and one by one rooms were added to the old house and in 1914 the Chapel was built and dedicated. There was always an original touch in Miss Nickel's work and in her

methods. She could use any tools, but insisted on keeping them in her own control and somehow she persuaded men to work for her just as she chose, often through the night if she wanted to finish a job quickly. The school always rushed round at the beginning of a term to see what new addition she had contrived, and until she left the school in 1946 she was in charge of all the buildings, drains, water-supply, furnaces, and electricity. No Downe House girl will forget her small masterful figure, always dressed in an overall from head to foot and a grey felt hat which was never taken off. The grey felt hats were made for her by Scotts in Piccadilly and she would never have dreamed of wearing any other—nor would she ever have worn the convenient slacks, which workers find more convenient nowadays. Her standards were fixed and she had a deeply religious side, though she interpreted her duties in her own way. When I tried to persuade her to attend her own Roman Catholic Church, she would say, 'The Lord has been a carpenter and He knows that jobs have to be finished. He will be with me, even if I can't get to church'.

Driving with Miss Nickel was always hair-raising as she had never become used to driving on the left-hand side of the road and I still marvel at our escapes from disaster in the first De Dion-Bouton car we possessed. She taught me to drive in 1912 and I have never been so frightened in my life. Fortunately there were no driving tests in those days and cars did not go very fast. Thirty miles an hour was quite exceptional and a noisy 15 m.p.h. was generally expected.

There was so much change and growth in the first years of the life of the school, that no one could rest on laurels—the laurels had to be won and there was little appeal to precedent and tradition, though everyone had her own idea of what a school should be. I was determined not to have the conventional 'schoolgirl' at Downe, using rather silly slang and recognizing only trivial loyalties. Probably the slang existed, but I had no 'house system' to break the school up into rivalries and feuds. Even now when the school numbers are over 250 there are no separate houses and children have to mix with everyone. Dormitories and tables in the dining-hall were and are chosen without regard for special preferences but a careful selection was made so that cliques were avoided, though friendships were made naturally and easily, without any fear of breaking House regulations.

The round tables in the dining-room provided an opportunity for general conversation and the heads of the tables were expected to encourage this and to keep order—not a very easy combination. One head of a table assured me that cheerful conversation invariably went too far and voices raised to carry across a table naturally created disturbance, and there was nothing to be done about it.

This may account for the fact that Downe House girls are always ready to talk and can get on with anyone. We were fortunate in the first generation, who were friendly and well mannered and quite fearless. As they became elder girls, the newcomers followed their lead instinctively and accepted their standards. As I look back on the early activities, I remember most vividly the fun and good training of the Guide Movement,

which was the special out-of-school activity of the lower forms. This is not the place to discuss the growth of the Guide Movement, which as everyone knows was an off-shoot of Lord Baden-Powell's Scout Movement. He had a genius for training young people and his plans have never been superseded, but he had, and he expected to have, a never-ending supply of young men and women who would give up their spare time and energy to training boys and girls in independence, responsibility, knowledge of the country-side, courage, and alertness. His methods are excellent and the emphasis on camping will be appreciated by all normal children. Downe House enjoyed many years of Guiding and Miss Croft was the mainstay of the Movement in the school. She trained many girls who afterwards became Guiders in their turn, but the Second World War brought this to an end at Downe House. Young women now have little leisure time and less inclination to give up this time to younger children, and Guiding as well as much voluntary social work has been gradually given up. The Movement still goes on but in a limited way and it may be that some day Baden-Powell's methods will be adopted by an enlightened educational authority and will become part of the regular school curriculum; but this may be its death blow.

It is tempting to write about the curriculum we chose and the various forms of stimulus, from 'stars and stripes' to festivals of music, competitions, exhibitions, plays, and even examinations. All have their place in school life and serve to persuade the reluctant will-power to exert itself, but I wonder whether we did enough to reward effort and to penalize wrong-doing individually. We did not have prizes and though there were some consequences of misdeeds, they could hardly be called punishments. The school was rather an easy-going place and I relied on the common sense of girls to obtain order, though I did not expect them to be angels. On the whole this worked and I was not a formidable or very self-confident headmistress, so that children, parents, and staff consulted me very freely and I could talk over future plans and even present problems without difficulty. In fact I enjoyed meeting parents and still have many friends among them. I remember one parent coming to me with the sensible remark that she was looking for an imperfect school that would suit an imperfect child, and I saw that she realized the futility of believing in a perfect system in which children could be turned out patterns of behaviour and knowledge, sometimes lacking initiative. Such a system fortunately does not exist, but it still lingers as an idea in the minds of people who have forgotten their own childhood, and who want a fool-proof method of obtaining docile pupils. How much there is to be said about instruction, but in the main it is like feeding children. Prepare the food as well and as scientifically as you can, you have to make it acceptable to children as they are the people concerned with the process of assimilation. In my own case I used English literature as my chief material for lessons as I myself enjoyed books, poetry and prose, drama and fiction, ancient and modern, and I think that everyone in the first generation loved reading and being read to, and many of them wrote with considerable success.

A Poetry Society, later called Literary Society, a constantly changing body with

different forms of activity, will be remembered. May Cannan (Mrs. Slater) was one of our first poets and she wrote delightfully about Oxford.

While the school was still very young we had several miming plays, with spoken verse to interpret the plot. Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* of Patient Griselda was the first and I remember Isabel Marshall (Mrs. Law) as the heroine standing before her jealous lord in the ragged clothes she had worn as a girl, with a look of perfect humility and dignity. Another out-of-door play, *Aucassin and Nicolette*, a medieval romance, acted in 1914, was more ambitious and full of incident, with the refrain—'Thus say they, sing they, tell they the tale' between the episodes.

The mound in the garden at Downe House could tell of all these very amateur productions, but they were all well spoken and acted with real imagination.

With all these signs of independence and energy, I did not flatter myself that Downe House was a finished product or of educational importance and there were many experiments undertaken with some reserve both by staff and girls. I had as wide a curriculum as time would allow and tried to give girls an interest in every side of life. Nowadays 'current events' are a recognized part of the school syllabus but I had never attempted to explain the modern situation before and I could not make up my mind where to begin. Never have I forgotten a comment of one girl to her parents. 'We are doing current events now and Miss Willis has got to the ancientest Egyptians.' Nowadays examinations have set their heavy hands on the syllabus and classes have to concentrate on the subjects required for the General Certificate of Education. Leisure hours are few, so that it is not always possible to advise girls 'to read round a subject'.

I could enlarge on the trials of teachers at the present day but this is not the place to do it, though I have enjoyed writing a dissertation on examinations and have reluctantly torn it up. After the First World War we realized new conditions in our world and we felt that a domestic science course was necessary for girls leaving school. There were few training schools in those days and we started this new branch in a house near the school, but it was not a great success as Downe House girls needed a change of environment and those who came in from outside did not always absorb the Downe House outlook. I remember Christine (Collier) Raikes, who was a newcomer but fitted in admirably and later became an artist, but as the school increased in numbers, the domestic science course had to be given up.

Our first introduction to musical festivals thrilled the school, as in early days there were competitions between different schools and Downe House was often successful. Miss Gunn and Miss Read led the school from the easy communal playing and singing to more ambitious music. Looking back I find myself saying, 'What fun it was', and now when I go back to Downe House I find the same teachers inspiring and encouraging the younger generation and I hear them saying, 'What fun it is'—and time has as little meaning to them as it had to us in the past.

During the First World War numbers had steadily increased and in 1918 we were attacked by the horrible influenza germ that killed more people than the German army.

It was before the time of sulphonamides and penicillin and it was terrible to see girls so desperately ill, with little help from medicines. We can never forget those who died, Mildred Wellby and Margaret Howard, and there were many who seemed to struggle back to life with great difficulty. Our doctor, Dr. Tennyson-Smith, did everything possible and every member of the staff was helping to nurse or to look after convalescents: but the epidemic was world wide and it was impossible to get the assistance of trained nurses. Gradually the school returned to its normal routine and the second phase of Downe House started.

We felt that we had outgrown the old house in which the school began, with all the additions and improvements made by Miss Nickel; we were over-crowded and the vicinity of Biggin Hill aerodrome made Downe a much noisier place than it had been. The countryside was changing and the strawberry fields near us brought hordes of strawberry-pickers from the East End, a more dangerous invasion than the hop-pickers. We spent much of the holiday time in 1920 and 1921 looking for a new home for the school, and we wanted to find it in a country place, on a hill, not too far from a town but not in a suburb. In April 1921 my sister Dorothy went to Cold Ash for a week's holiday and wrote to tell me that there was a house for sale, with a good view and quite a lot of land, but unfortunately it was too small. We wanted rooms for 100 girls and 20 staff and this house, the Cloisters, had only 36 rooms and two large halls. I was attracted by the idea and when I saw the place I realized that it could be the nucleus of the school that I wanted.

Miss Nickel was full of suggestions and plans and rather against the better judgement of those who advocated the choice of a 'stately residence', I bought the Cloisters, with the help of a gift from my Uncle Alec Crawford and a mortgage from Mr. Scrutton. So many legends have grown up round the founders of the Cloisters, that I must give a short account of the society who planned and built this House of the Order of Silence (see Appendix).

By 1921 the house was empty and only one delightful sister remained, Sister Eve St. Andrew, who showed us over the place, with the two small houses which Miss Curtis had built for herself. The first house was later turned into the school house. The second, called Ancren Gate (after the home of Mother Julian in the fifteenth century), she had designed herself and had forgotten to include any staircase until the house was built, so that those who live there now will know why the stairs are dark and difficult. Miss Curtis had great ambition for her Society, and expected it to revolutionize society, but in fact the house was built during the war and was occupied in 1917 by many people who felt that they had no concern with the war, so that in 1918 when the war ended, they felt free to disperse and hence there was no money with which to pay interest on the mortgage; and in 1922 the estate was sold to me by the mortgagors. Miss Nickel spent three months there getting the house into order for the school and in April 1922, on a cold snowy day, we moved in and the House of Silence became Downe House, as I felt that the earlier name would be inappropriate. I brought with me a large white

Samoyede dog, which I had bought at Farningham when peace was proclaimed. Peter was the first of a series of Samoyedes, generally very friendly and pleasant dogs, but they had no opportunity of dragging sleighs so they gave themselves exercise by vainly chasing rabbits and, as they were not as intelligent or well behaved as Downe House girls, we were continually going out to find these wandering animals. Miss Nickel loved them dearly but was always anxious about them and would never run the risk of losing them. My memories of the Samoyedes always include calling, calling, calling for them in vain and then about midnight the two or three dogs, covered with mud, generally trailing leads, would stumble in, to be met with a loving welcome and heaped plates of meat.

For the first year of the new Downe House the main trial was the lack of water. We had been assured that there was a never-failing supply from a well, deep down in the middle of the drive, a most alarming place as Miss Nickel used to appear out of the well-room like a jack-in-the-box as motors drove up to the door. But after a dry summer we were faced with a shortage of water and we decided to sink a new well. We had recourse to dowsers and found that many of the girls and staff could divine water almost as well as the experienced dowser. A stream was found close to the present Concert Room, but Miss Nickel had other ideas and insisted on the well being bored close to the water tower already in existence.

The first borers failed to find water and gave up the struggle, but finally the water was found in a chalk basin about 500 ft. down. It was hard water but there was a wonderful supply and the Newbury authorities followed our example and tapped the same water lower down the valley. They put a reservoir close to the school and we now use both this water and sometimes the water from our own well, which has to be pumped up by our own enormous pump.

The expenses of the new Downe House were great and we lived on an overdraft which increased every year until the war brought an end of building. There was always an anxious moment in August when we did not know whether we dared to sign a cheque and then the fees for the next term came in and saved the situation.

When you look round Downe House and realize that only the small building in the centre, the four rooms of the school house and Ancren Gate existed in 1922, it is not surprising that we found it difficult to meet expenses and the real marvel is that Miss Nickel should have planned and supervised all the buildings that now exist. I remember seeing her perched on walls or climbing on roofs or measuring out new class-rooms. Some people thought that her building might be rather unsafe, but when the kitchen was increased by six feet last year, the builders found it almost impossible to destroy the wall that she had erected and her calculations were invariably correct.

To the school all this new building gave the appearance and atmosphere of pioneer work and there was no settling down to a neat and orderly pattern. We sometimes wished that we had a house which could be well warmed and easily managed, but I wanted a school in which people had to walk about in the open air between lessons and

this meant that the buildings spread over a wide space of land, exercise was forced on the unwilling and fresh air was of necessity blown through class-rooms and lungs.

When we were first installed we used to have Chapel twice daily and on Sundays in the open cloisters, and it was sometimes cold, but no one was the worse, perhaps we had fewer colds then than we have now when the heating is more adequate.

Our elderly vicar, who used to come to the cloister chapel every week to celebrate Holy Communion, used to murmur, 'This is indeed truly primitive' and imagined himself celebrating in the chilly catacombs below Rome. I am afraid that it was hard on the staff, and especially on foreigners. At that time we had a truly wonderful French teacher, Mademoiselle Agobert, who struck awe into her pupils. Stories abound about her teaching and her violent efforts to rouse and hold the attention of classes. Her methods were drastic and more than two mistakes necessitated the return of the work. Her standard was perfection and the grammatical slackness of the ordinary young English girl was anathema to her. She would show them that this would not do, and most lessons used to end in tears. Occasionally the ordeal was too severe and a pupil would be sent out of the class for ever—but those who stayed learned a great deal of French and took part in many French plays.

In fact the chief actors went to France, to St. Omer, Boulogne, and Valenciennes and acted Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* and his *Les Precieuses Ridicules* before French audiences and I was obliged to introduce them in a French speech, which I learned by heart and repeated with fear and trembling in each place. To my great surprise the efforts of Mademoiselle Agobert and the school brought me a French decoration and I am now Officier d'Académie française and entitled to wear a purple ribbon in my buttonhole.

It was a great reward but it entailed considerable strain, as besides the preliminary speech, I had to talk French to mayors and officials, who had come to welcome the brave English schoolgirls. With all her gifts of teaching and her love of drama Mademoiselle Agobert was not the easiest of people to live with, and though we were very sorry to lose her just before the Second World War, life was easier and the children led a less harassed life and perhaps more French was learned by more children under the guidance of Mademoiselle Chapoulou, the present head of the French department.

During the ten years before the war we were fortunate in having some very distinguished teachers, among them Miss Rowntree, Miss Sanderson, and Mamie Poore (an Old Senior) all living at St. Peter's. They were responsible for much of the history and literature and Latin in the school, and especially to Miss Rowntree the school owed a masterly résumé of current events every week. Miss Sanderson had a great gift for drama and a glorious sense of humour, and together they wrote the most wonderful plays, to entertain the school. I call to mind a splendid skit on the work of a dictator and a play in which Miss Croft and Miss Hannay were lost on a desert island and tried to educate the native girls on Downe House lines, but they all fell in love with the sailor in charge of the party, a role ably acted by Miss Sanderson. The Historical Society in 1934–5 spent a long time collecting all possible information about Guy Fawkes, and Miss

Rowntree and Miss Sanderson wrote a thrilling play on the evidence the Society collected. The members of the Historical lived in the Popish plot for many months and almost felt themselves participators in the crime as they learned more about the persons concerned.

Downe House had also another brilliant and inspiring teacher, Mr. Sharwood Smith, ex-Headmaster of Newbury Grammar School. He could not bear to settle down in idle retirement after a most strenuous life of teaching classics. What amazing lectures and talks he gave to his pupils! At Newbury he had trained some of the most intellectual scholars of this generation and at Downe House he gave as generously his knowledge and his wisdom. He made his pupils and his friends (and I was proud to be one of them) feel that their opinions were worthy of attention and appreciation. His long lean figure used to be a familiar sight, walking up and down to the school and he was as much beloved as respected. The elder girls were unconsciously influenced by his liberal ideas and he helped them to think for themselves on both political and philosophical questions. Several Greek plays were translated by him for performance at Downe House and he coached actors and produced the plays, which were intensely interesting and moving.

In earlier years I had myself attempted to produce *Antigone and Alkestis* and it was a joy to me to see his scholarly productions and to watch the plays performed in a really classical way.

Another joy that I had was the beginning of what the school calls ballet. No professional dancer would allow this name to be used for the dancing plays by the whole school at Seniors' Weekend, but to me they were a great delight and we owe the first ballets to Miss Jordan, who had learned from Mrs. Goossens and then developed her own plans of original dancing. Every year a new ballet is still thought out, practised, and performed when the weather permits, on the grass lawn in the cloisters.

The massed gymnastics, which also took place on Seniors' Weekend, has changed from almost military precision into free-movement, but it has not lost its attraction.

It would take a volume to mention all the people who have built up the tradition of Downe House but one more person must be named and never forgotten, Madame Aganitha Houlberg, who had been nurse in my own family when she was a young girl, coming straight to us from a Swiss village. She had married from our house but came to the school after her husband died when her sons were grown up. She never lost her Swiss accent and her Swiss practical ability was of the greatest use in her care of mending and of acting clothes, and I remember her impatience when girls would not claim their unmarked garments. She loved us all, girls and staff, and after staying at Hill House for a time, she moved into a cottage of her own through the kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Francis and died there to our sorrow in 1948.

Downe House past and present will know what I mean by 'Jaws', which took place at the end of each term? The name sounds formidable, but both name and custom started before 1917, when the school was beginning to grow up. I invited the leaving girls to come and see me on the last day of the term and it was a sad affair discussing the

future and saying goodbye, and rather too emotional a strain. So I decided to have everybody in at the end of term, one after another, as a matter of course rather than a leave-taking and this custom became known as 'jaws', though as I told them, it would have been more respectful to call them 'end of term interviews'.

We always had staff meetings before these interviews so that I had in my head (or on paper) notes on any trouble that had arisen or any praise to give and occasionally the victim had questions to ask. There was always an element of unexpectedness. Had any special wrong-doing been discovered and what would be the reaction? I tried to clear up any misunderstandings and troubles and to explain the reports of work done. It became my custom to look through the written work of each girl during the term and though this took a long time, it enabled me and the child to get a view of the general improvement and of the intellectual standard attained.

I emphasize the point of improvement as I felt that it was very important to develop self-confidence in children even if there were not many signs of progress. Some sense of achievement was necessary, and if lessons were not satisfactory, then some other activity must be found in which the unacademic girl could excel. For this purpose games were important, and cricket was a great help in building character. There were many girls who disliked this game, because they had not the courage or the perseverance to master the technique, and others were debarred from it because some of their men-folk laughed at girls' cricket, and nothing kills as quickly as ridicule: but I believed in it as a good game and allowed the school to have an extra forty minutes in the field on Wednesday afternoons, in order to get time for a match. In the early days of the school hockey was played and later on, hockey in the Lent term and lacrosse in the autumn, but lacrosse became so much more popular that hockey was given up, except by the enthusiasts who used to play on Sunday afternoons.

I am not sure that we were right in the decision to give up hockey; it is a cheerful game for beginners and lacrosse takes a long time to learn. At the same time I recognize that hockey can be a rough game and dangerous to noses and teeth.

We were fortunate in finding at Cold Ash a friend, Lt.-Col. J. Holditch Leicester, who had retired from a very responsible position in the Medical Service in India. He made a shooting-range in his own garden and bought rifles, and before long he trained many girls to be really fine shots. They competed in the Miniature Rifle Tournaments and won prizes (how many spoons they acquired I cannot count) and shields and cups used to appear regularly. Several times they went to Bisley and were congratulated on their shooting. Col. Leicester was a good friend and benefactor and many girls owe him much gratitude for his personal kindness and sympathy and his quite amazing discretion. He never divulged any of the confidences he received.

Another kind friend of the school was Mrs. Francis, who lived next door and taught sewing in the school for a long time. She and Mr. Francis took in a certain number of girls for whom we had no room, and they were invariably hospitable to parents and old girls.

If one can divide the time after the First World War into special periods, the first twelve years were the time of recovery, or attempted recovery, when prosperity sank lower and lower and no economist could invent a plan to stop growing unemployment and despair. The second period was one of anxiety, as the German struggle for existence and desire for revenge gradually crystallized into an unreasonable belief in an almost insane and unscrupulous demagogue, Adolf Hitler. Even decent Germans thought that he had restored self respect and hope to their country, and they preferred to ignore his contemptible lies and his savage attacks, first on the Jewish people and then on anyone who seemed likely to oppose him. This was obviously a preliminary to another outbreak of war and with the country discontented, poor, and disliked by other nations, it seemed as if Great Britain would be over-run without much possibility of resistance.

At Downe House we could only make tentative plans. We invited a day-school, Miss Spalding's school in Queen's Gate, London, to join us in Cold Ash and we got as many Jewish girls and families out of Hitler's clutches as we could possibly afford.

Then Miss Nickel excavated a long tunnel from Downe House to the Concert Room and we felt that if the countryside were bombed, some, if not all the girls, could take refuge underground, and thus save their lives. In case of sudden evacuation, we prepared a bag for each girl containing a little money, some food in a tin and some necessities, so that if flight were necessary, we should not be taken quite unawares.

Of course we offered hospitality to anyone who was left homeless in our neighbourhood, but some queer things happened. We were told that twenty expectant mothers would stay with us on their way to country homes and actually about thirty small boys and some staff appeared, but stayed for only a few days.

It speaks well for Miss Spalding's school as well as for Downe House that we lived in a good deal of discomfort and in close quarters for five years without violent discord. Miss Spalding herself lived with twelve little girls, her sister, and her cook in my house and the elder girls occupied the second floor of the South Wing and Gate Cottage. We had all meals in the dining-hall and we shared our class-rooms, but the schools were kept apart in every other way. To girls who had been at a luxurious finishing school in London, Downe House was almost uninhabitable, but they made the best of it and some of them came to enjoy their schooldays at Downe House.

It was during the war in 1943 that Miss Heather died. Ever since we came to Cold Ash, she had occupied a little room and an office just above the front door and she thoroughly enjoyed her position, looking out on the movements of the school and the approach of parents. She kept a strict watch on their visits to me, as she considered that I spent too much time talking to them and every now and then she would interrupt with many apologies, telling me that there was a personal call from a Mrs. Harris. This always made me laugh, but I knew that I had to end the interview. I cannot begin to describe Miss Heather's work in the school. For a long time she was secretary bursar, teacher of science and mathematics and not only a help to me in every way, but also a guide, philosopher, and friend to every member of the staff. Cups of tea were always

available in her room at any hour of the day or night and she was never bored or tired or too busy to enjoy the latest joke, and there were many.

Two of the white dogs became her special property and we used to go out into the woods with them every day.

In January 1943 I at last induced her to see a doctor and he diagnosed inoperable cancer. Fortunately, in spite of growing weakness, she did not suffer pain for some time, and she was determined to work to the end, so that in August 1943, she began to arrange the next term's time-table as usual, but it was completed by her friend and colleague, Miss Shawe, and the last weeks were full of suffering. She died on 16 September 1943. This was a tragic loss to the school and the staff, and especially to me, but her inspiration is not lost and I am sure that her love of the school remains its great support.

During her last year we discussed the advisability of making the school, since 1922 a limited company, into a public school and we proceeded to take the necessary measures. Girls' schools were almost unheard of a hundred years ago and for a very long time instruction was limited to the 'three Rs'. My great aunt used to go to a school in Brighton, where they wore ermine tippets and were taught how to get in and out of a carriage; 'the gloves and the musical glasses' were studied, but I never knew what that meant. A little music, some callisthenics, French and Italian were also taught and no doubt a knowledge of the Bible.

Such a change has taken place in the instruction of girls that Miss Buss and Miss Beale and even the Misses Lawrence now seem old-fashioned. There is no special curriculum for girls and their talents, whatever they may be, are developed without any consideration of sex. The same examinations are taken by girls and boys and the only difference is that the girls generally leave school earlier than the boys and miss the essential last year or two of study and lack the deeper understanding of the work they had begun.

In some cases girls are given a wider syllabus than boys—music and art are allowed their places—but until there is a real reform of the educational system we shall continue to be a very superficially instructed country.

At Downe House I tried to lead girls on to find their own spiritual way. I think that of all studies Religion is the most important and the most difficult for any teacher. Instruction must be given but never too dogmatically and as far as possible by the Socratic method. Confirmation classes at about the age of 15 were a great opportunity, both for teacher and pupil, and for most of my time at Downe House I was responsible for the religious teaching and for the chapel services.

I remember on one occasion the School Certificate examiner commented unfavourably on the scripture teaching at Downe House because he said that our girls gave their own opinions about parables or miracles and he considered that learning by heart both text and note was the only preparation required, certainly not independent thinking.

My patchwork is ended. I have been reading the scraps provided by other people and I know that while they record the slight conscious memories of trivial incidents, the

authors themselves are the result of their home and school training and I have very good reason to rejoice in them, and they themselves know that each one is remembered by me with special and unfailing affection.

APPENDIX: *The Order of Silence*

JUST before the war an American teacher came to England, as so many others have done, to teach the English the true way of life. Mr. H. Porter Mills had studied Eastern religions as well as all forms of Christian belief and had combined them into a belief in acceptance of truth, through meditation. In his view meditation meant the emptying of the mind and imagination of all conscious activity and the readiness to allow the vibrations of truth to penetrate into the passive but expectant nature. This entailed long periods of time, and Mr. Mills and later one of his followers, Miss Curtis, arranged three separate hours in the day for this so-called meditation. 6–7 a.m., 12–1 p.m., and 6–7 p.m. Mr. Mills returned to America a rich man after all his exertions on behalf of the public, and Miss Curtis decided to continue his practice in London and to have a country home in Cold Ash, where workers could be trained to go out into the world preaching this doctrine of the inner light.

They would lead the simple life, and would be entirely responsible for their own necessities. Clothing was to be made from cloth woven and spun on the estate. Vegetables were to be grown by each member of the community, and no meat was allowed. A uniform dress was worn by all the women members. This, curiously enough, was a long djibbah, with a veil over the head, a custom which possibly came, with other Yogi ideas, from the East. The djibbahs were of different colours according to the status of the wearer.

Beginners were dressed in pale grey, then were allowed to change to green, then blue and, after some time and much meditation, they were raised to a deep pink, then purple, lastly gold, and Miss Curtis, as head of the Order of Silence and the ideal woman, wore pure white, silk in summer and wool in winter.

When farming or gardening were done the djibbahs were drawn up round the waist but usually they were long and rather like saris. The name Order of Silence which they adopted was rather misleading, as they had no particular rules about silence except at the times of meditation and as there were no forms of worship and no doctrinal teaching, there was no need for outward expression or for communal praise and thanksgiving.

Miss Curtis herself gave advice, training, and healing to the community and charged 10*s*. 6*d*. for every quarter of an hour's attention and this could sometimes be given as absent treatment, which may have been less fatiguing than an interview. She seems to have been a person of what is called outstanding personality and if her orders were not carried out she expelled the offender. One of her theories was particularly difficult to follow. She believed that everyone had creative power and by directing this on any

object, the result would be constructive and successful. When the Order needed money, the members were told to direct their spiritual efforts towards obtaining money and when they failed, Miss Curtis ordered them to give up their gayer coloured djibbahs and to return to the pale grey of the neophytes. This caused great indignation, especially among the few who had attained to rose pink, and the gradual breaking up of the Order followed at the end of the war. She herself is said to have had a breakdown and later went to live at Burton-Bradstock, with some of her followers.

MISS WINIFRED MORGAN-BROWN, 1909–1919

FOR me Downe House must always be the old Downe House, the house which, as everyone knows, was once the country home of the Darwin family. Square, white-painted, solid, and full of charm, this house and the old garden always brought the feeling that we, who lived in it now, were a family too.

I came to Downe House in September 1909, two years after Miss Willis and Miss Alice Carver had started the school. That term there were on the staff Miss Heather, who used to walk the four miles from her home at Green Street Green every day, Miss Lane, Mademoiselle Charpiot, Miss Aimée Tizard, and myself. Miss Nickel came just before and Miss Croft shortly after 1914. At the time of my arrival numbers had grown from the solitary Nan Woodall of the first term to about thirty girls.

I had known Miss Willis since schooldays at Roedean, where she had taught me history and a lot of other things! I did not feel a stranger and was not surprised at the unschooly atmosphere. Nothing could have seemed more delightful than that pleasant old house and garden. The place itself was surely exceptional, only seventeen miles from London, yet nearly five miles from a railway station. The country round was completely rural, given up to farming, strawberry-growing, and so on. There were many beech woods, and nearby a chalky slope where orchids grew; butterfly orchids, bee orchids, fly orchids, not just the odd few, but a great many.

The term I came the new Gymnasium had just been put up, the first of the many extensions and additions to the building made to accommodate the growing school. It played a big part in school life as years went on. Miss Nickel was the moving spirit in all later improvements.

The room we used as a Common Room was the famous study, where Charles Darwin wrote the *Origin of Species*. We still called it the Study, and it was there we pursued our humble activities, read, worked, and corrected. The staff had dinner there in the evenings and the meals at the round table were very enjoyable.

Looking back to those carefree days, I suppose that one big difference in one's life then was the domestic comfort which arose from there always being plenty of pleasant, efficient servants. Even during the First World War years I cannot remember any occasion on which any of us needed to help in any domestic capacity. I cannot even recall where the pantry was in the old Downe. Few of us looking back over the years

of a later war could fail to remember the sinks at which we had presided. However, I think we were fairly hardy, we thought nothing of walking the five miles up from Orpington station along the country lanes after a day in London, or through the High Elms woods from Farnborough, and I cannot remember there being many fires to sit over.

In those early days a horse-bus ran up and down from the village to Orpington, replaced as years went on by a motor-bus, and at Downe House by Miss Willis's first car, a green De Dion, with a cane-coloured basketwork pattern on it.

I remember an occasion when this car had been involved in some sort of collision on the way to the station. At the subsequent inquiry Miss Willis was asked how fast she had been going, whether she had been in a hurry, and (very cunningly) had she been ready when the car came round to the door? Her reply, in an outraged voice, was, '*I* ready to start? Why *of course not*'.

The Study faced north on to the gravelly sweep by the front door, on the other side of the house was the drawing-room, with long windows looking into the garden and a French window leading into the glass-roofed veranda outside. In the evenings Miss Willis used to read aloud in the drawing-room, while the school mended, and I recall an occasional Sunday evening hymn-singing here also, once at least conducted by Miss Willis in a manner all her own. She announced that she was going to play the accompaniment. This surprised us all: no one knew that she could play the piano. She called for a suggestion as to a hymn. One was hazarded, Miss Willis found the place, started to play, came to a stop, started again and finally turned round in a most unconcerned way. 'No, that's much too difficult. Think of another one.'

After running the evening mending for a term or two, I thought some sewing lessons might be a help. These were started and were held in my room. I enjoyed them very much. There were loud complaints at thimbles being made compulsory but by degrees the standard of sewing grew quite high. Some wonderful garments were constructed. Doris Blackwood decided to make a white silk blouse, it became known as the 'Heirloom' and never got finished.

My room looked east into the large cobbled back-yard with its chestnut tree and many outbuildings. The dogs' kennels were there; Tiger, a mastiff type, large and muscular with one eye, and Pheena, his inseparable companion. Pheena was small, had very short legs, and rough smoky grey hair, generally covered with mud. These two used to range the countryside together. How she ever managed to keep up with Tiger was a mystery, but she had an unconquerable spirit.

I loved my room and I think I was the only person on the staff who inhabited the same room throughout her career. As school numbers grew, new dormitories or sick-rooms were wanted, with the result that staff had to move out or change their rooms, but I clung to mine. It was on the back-stairs and next to the bathrooms. I feel sure it had been inhabited by a succession of cooks of earlier generations but I loved it. It carried with it the duty of supervising the morning baths. These began at 6.30 a.m. so the office

was no sinecure. There was a time-table and the limit of occupation was seven minutes.

Apropos of this room, the then vicar of Downe had living with him a sister, a rather exciting lady with large eyes, deeply involved in such subjects as second sight, palmistry, and crystal gazing. She was very kind and used to ask us to tea from time to time. At these tea parties a certain amount of harmless divination used to go on, and on one occasion I was told that my success in life largely depended on wearing pale green and living near running water. My mind closed instantly and completely against the pale green, but I thought of the four bathrooms next my room and of other domestic plumbing opposite, and was comforted.

Everyone belonging to those days will remember the Prep. Room, large and bare and full of desks where people worked when not in a lesson. In here, on Saturday morning after breakfast, a forty was given up to the claiming of articles left about during the week. I think the large chest which received these objects is still in existence somewhere in Downe House. It was a sort of bottomless pit within, when one raised the lid, but outside there were dummy drawers, with handsome brass handles. These were periodically wrenched off by over zealous new Seniors searching for more and yet more articles to lay out on the Prep. Room table in accusing heaps.

On the walls hung lists of each form's Stars and Stripes, awarded for good and evil deeds. The Star and Stripe system entailed occasional extra holidays for the form that won enough uncancelled Stars. These were gala occasions. One I remember was spent beagling in a distant parish: the jaunt had been suggested by Kathleen Tristram near whose home the meet took place. We went by train and had a splendid day. The interest was much increased by seeing W. G. Grace among the field. We gazed reverently at the grand old fellow, moving at a slow dignified pace, beard and all, and helping himself over the banks with a long stick.

Another time the party started off on bicycles. I can't remember how the bicycles were gathered together, nor where we went nor what we did, but I do remember most vividly that Doris Blackwood and another girl announced as they wobbled forward that it was the first time they had ever been out on the road. I had taken it for granted that if they accepted bicycles they knew how to ride them. However, I was mistaken. The utmost incompetence was shown by the whole party. Going down a steep hill at a smart pace they achieved a series of collisions worthy of a circus. Crash followed crash, and by the time their turn was over five people were lying in the dust. As the person responsible I was terrified, but by some miracle no one was hurt and all ended happily.

On another occasion we went by car to a lovely spot by a river and spent the day paddling, picnicking, and exploring. On the way home we had two punctures, and, those being primitive times, the driver stuffed the flat tire with a sack and we bumped home on that.

There was no Chapel when I came to Downe: we had prayers in a small room upstairs, very simply fitted up. We went to the parish church on Sunday. In quite early days the vicar was very old and eccentric and the services in Downe church were really

very trying, so we took to walking the two miles or so over the fields to Cudham. Early-morning parties used to take bread and butter with them to eat in the strawberry fields on the way home. Better days came when the old vicar died and a new one was appointed. Sometimes when we arrived at church we found Mark Lubbock at the organ. The family lived at Gorringes nearby and Mary came to Downe House as a day girl.

We all rejoiced when the Chapel was built. Miss Willis took the services and the Seniors organized Saturday parties to dust and polish it. Alice Moore played the harmonium and I recall how amused she was to discover during some cleaning operation that the iron pedals which pumped the air were embossed Patent Mouseproof Pedals.

When Edward VII died in 1910 a great many people from Downe House went up to London to watch the funeral procession. Seats had been taken in a large stand in St. James' Street. We started very early from Downe in two buses, the girls wearing their regulation purple coats and purple straw hats. As we made our way to the stand, we heard someone in the crowd calling a friend's attention to us. 'Look, they must be a soldiers' Orphanage'. Well, the 'Orphanage' reached the stand and I took a party up to the topmost tier of seats. The day was abnormally hot for May and we sat in baking heat waiting for the procession to arrive. The troops lining the route had a gruelling time and men were fainting and being carried off fairly continuously. My neighbour on the roughly made bench was a small person called Aileen Hay, who, bored and fidgetting, finally succeeded in scraping off her shoe! It fell far out of sight into scaffolding, dust, and darkness. I had to go down and find it or bring Aileen home with one shoe. When I got back to our seats Aileen, still fidgetting, knocked over a Minimax fire-extinguisher, which went off. It fizzed and squirted uncontrollably and brought us much unpopularity. The procession itself calmed everyone. It was a majestic sight, the first of its sort in the experience of most of us. Getting out amid the heat and tremendous crowds was an unpleasant experience. We were pushed to and fro as we tried to make our way to the buses which were to take us home. At a moment near panic, we suddenly saw General Shute, Noel Shute's father, tall and commanding, and the big gates leading from Horse Guards Parade being slowly pressed shut against the surging mob. It was a great relief, and everything was all right after that.

Another mass expedition up to London by bus was in the winter. We had been to see *Henry V*, and coming home were involved in impenetrable fog. We spent part of the night sheltering in a wayside chapel. The minister let us in and most kindly produced a tin of biscuits from the vestry. I seem to remember hot cocoa also later on. The younger ones went to sleep in the pews. We were all glad when the fog lifted and the buses started again. We got home about 2 o'clock in the morning.

No account of the old Downe would be complete without speaking of the garden, it suited the house so perfectly. I cannot remember many flowers in it, but it was lovely in a perennial sort of way—big old rose bushes, syringa, and lilac in plenty, and I remember a beautiful jasmine on the wall near the cracked old hard tennis court.

Augusta Burn became part proprietor of a square bed in the kitchen garden, it was full of dog-toothed violets in the spring and was a lovely sight. Alice Moore, by mutual agreement, used to catch the frogs, while Augusta attended to the plants: later on Sazzie Gunn inherited this bed and tended a sweet-briar bush in it. I wonder if it is still there.

The chief pleasure of the garden came from the wide lawn where, opposite the house and crowned with ilex-trees, stood the Mound. Here the summer plays were acted. The lime-tree walk led from the drawing-room end of the house to the greenhouse and the remoter parts of the garden. Several large walnut-trees and an old mulberry stood on the other side of the lawn and beyond them a wide path and the iron railings of the two fields where games were played and an occasional crop of hay was raised.

There were some wonderful summers in those years before the First World War. I particularly remember the summer that Halley's comet appeared. There were long glorious days of sunshine and July nights when the sky seemed full of falling stars. A few privileged people were allowed to set up camp-beds in the garden and sleep out. The memory of it all is rather magical.

In those days A. A. Milne's early work was appearing in *Punch*. The people in those dialogues, Archie, Dahlia, Simpson, and the rest were all very funny, and *Punch* on Wednesday was much looked forward to. Audrey Lucas was in the school at the time and we knew about the cricket matches got up by J. M. Barrie and his friends, many of whom were on the staff of *Punch*, and when Miss Willis told us that Mr. E. V. Lucas had written to ask whether the annual match between his eleven and Mr. Barrie's might be played at Downe House, the delight and excitement may be imagined. The two elevens lunched at the school and admirers had the felicity of sitting through a summer afternoon watching these heroes play cricket. Several times, when writing these recollections, I have wished I had kept a diary. If I had, I could tell you who composed those two elevens. As it is, I can only recall, besides the two illustrious captains and A. A. Milne, the names of George Morrow, Maurice Hewlett, and a cousin of George Meredith. The romance of that afternoon, however, was not soon forgotten.

There were surprisingly few epidemics in the years before the war, but people who endured it will certainly remember the term when measles and mumps broke out simultaneously. Quite a lot of people had both at once. Can one imagine anything more uncomfortable? Audrey Richards and Bitha Bowen brought out a magazine to help amuse the sick. It was called the *Meamper* and the few numbers that appeared were as diverting and clever as one would suppose. It was highly topical and there were illustrations and contributions from others besides the editors. The whole thing was extremely funny and deserves to be remembered.

I have spoken of the plays acted on the Mound in the garden but other plays were produced in the Gymnasium in large numbers. These were more or less ambitious, according to the occasion, Miss Willis's birthday play being the most important. All of them tended to be made up as they went along, the dialogue crystallizing during re-

hearsals. One of these birthday plays was important for posterity, for in it Miss Gunn made her first appearance at Downe House as a conductor. She was the leader of the Pink Peruvian Band, most dashing in a gold laced uniform. I recall, too, some charming birthday lines written by Audrey Lucas and addressed to Miss Willis at the end of one of these plays. They were sung to the tune of 'When other lips and other hearts their tale of love shall tell' and began 'When other plays in other years . . .'. It is nice to think of all the birthdays which have followed and of all the good wishes continuing to this Jubilee Year.

Brenda Mallam brought the house down once with some original musical items. One was a song of robust patriotism in which each verse began 'We don't want a girl from (here a rival school was named)', the rest of the verse was of an insulting nature. I remember one verse ran:

> We don't want a girl from Coed-Bel, from Coed Bel, from Coed Bel,
> They thought they would win,
> but did not, what a sell!
> Oh, what a sell for Coed Bel.

Simple, but eminently satisfactory.

The years I spent at Downe House included the war years, which were grim enough. Sorrow and loss came to not a few at Downe House. Food shortages were severe and I certainly remember a few occasions in 1917 when actual hunger had to be faced. However, it didn't last long and none of us realized, as we chewed the last of a providential but disgusting sack of flaked maize (surely intended for poultry in happier times?) how near the country was to starvation. But the war was not far away, and in the still summer nights we could hear the dull boom of the barrage in Flanders. Who remembers, I wonder, the early morning sewing parties when we knitted or made those queer little ditty bags for sailors in hospital, or the night we saw, far off, a Zeppelin falling in flames through the sky, or the winter evening when some brothers on leave happened to be on the premises and the Seniors went out tobogganing in the moonlight? No one who was there, I know, could possibly forget the thrill of the afternoon when the aeroplane dropped a message bag on to the hockey field. Planes from the tiny new aerodrome at Biggin Hill used often to circle over the games field and we were getting used to the sight and sound of them. On that Friday afternoon an aeroplane came over the field, circled around and finally came down very low and dropped a message bag, a long narrow red bag weighted at one end. It fell in a corner of the field. The whole game threw down its sticks and raced after it. In the bag was this message. 'Dear Hockey girls, Ask your Headmistress if you may come to the aerodrome, we would like to show you round.' (They were evidently having rather a dull time at Biggin Hill.) The invitation was accepted, Miss Willis took the whole party over herself and hospitality was exchanged more than once.

One can really go on indefinitely setting down recollections of things that happened then. There were so many people one liked being with and whose companionship

made the school work a pleasure and whose talents and promise made it feel a privilege to teach them. One can't set down all the well-remembered names, a few are friends still, in the sense that we share the present as we shared the past: others belong almost entirely to the past, but their faces and their sayings, their nonsense and their wit, even their handwriting flash into reality when I think of the ten years I spent at the old Downe. It is hard to believe that those ten years began nearly fifty years ago. Our life there, the work, the fun, the people are not just memories, but a brightly coloured, solid chunk of life and experience, which I for one look back to with a most happy gratitude.

MISS B. F. BATE, 1924–1956

On a blustery day in February 1924 with scudding showers of snow, I bicycled up to Downe from my home on Bucklebury Common and made my first acquaintance with the school in which I have worked and which I have loved for nearly thirty-two years.

Living in the neighbourhood we had heard many tales, often strangely exaggerated, of the Sisters of Silence who had built the Cloisters in the woods at Cold Ash and then we heard that they had been forced to give up and in 1922 a girls' school had taken their place. So I was full of curiosity to see for myself. I arrived on the doorstep at the same moment as a prospective parent and Miss Heather came to me in the drawing-room saying, 'I'm not Miss Willis, she has visitors but will be here very soon.' Miss Heather talked to me for about a quarter of an hour then in came Miss Willis followed by a huge white samoyede, Peter, the patriarch of all the white dogs that followed. While Miss Willis talked we walked to St. Peter's which at that moment was partly Sanatorium and partly staff house.

In May I began my teaching and I came to teach mathematics, not geography; no one took geography in School Certificate till 1925. And what a different Downe House it was then! There was no Chapel, that came a year later, the cloisters ended where No. 14 now is and a pergola covered with deep red ramblers linked them to what is now the vestibule but was then a storeroom. In summer Chapel was held in a corner of the cloisters and the services were often attended by squirrels, in the winter the Gymnasium was used. The passage linking the school house to the Gymnasium was then open to the elements and its roof held up by fir poles, and a bell, rung by the Gymnasium staff at the end of each forty, hung on the tree outside J. E and J both had loggias and a friendly red squirrel used to come into J and sit on the board and play with a piece of chalk. At that time there were red squirrels in the woods but in two years' time the grey squirrels and the dogs had ousted them all. D was a form-room-cum-studio with a litter of paint pots, drawing-boards, and easels occupying the end under the relief map of Europe. K did not exist and the fiction library was roofless with a covered passageway all round and it always reminded me of pictures of the inn at Bethlehem. When it achieved a roof it became the Studio until the present one was built. The present Y and V were the

Laboratory, with one T-shaped bench down the middle, and it was used for other lessons quite as much as for chemistry and as a greenroom for plays. The little annexe at the end contained the fume cupboard, which, when used, sent most of its fumes down into the Gymnasium!

Even this little nucleus of buildings was a maze to a newcomer. I taught my first lesson in F and my second in G, and if it had not been for the many friendly folk to direct me, I do not believe that I should have got any Break that morning or have found my way to the Upper Staff Room where we had it.

I found the other day a photograph of the school in July 1924 in which there were only 101 girls and 17 staff, and though no doubt a few of each were missing, it is difficult to visualize the school no bigger than the present Seniors, Sixth, Upper and Middle Fifths put together.

After that the buildings spread and multiplied so rapidly that it is impossible to remember the order in which they came, first the Chapel, then the 'new' form-rooms S, P, Q, R, the New House, and so on. Each term one came back to find some wall knocked down, some loggia taken into a room, some new room added. The Common Room was the dining-room, at first with round tables, then as more accommodation was needed, long narrow ones, and the kitchen was a small building leading out of the little pantry. The new kitchens came in 1930 and between that and 1933 the dining-hall and South materialized. While the dining-hall was still a mass of scaffolding and iron girders Miss Willis, Miss Heather, and the Seniors had the first meal in it, a picnic supper at the end of a summer term. I remember hectically cleaning the windows in South the morning that the school returned for the Lent term 1933.

Until electric light came to Cold Ash in 1928 we made our own and, as the buildings increased beyond the capacity of the plant, it was quite a usual occurrence to receive a book with a note at the bottom 'lights went out please excuse the rest', and there was one dreadful occasion when they failed in the middle of a School Certificate examination and Miss Heather had to rush down with an army of candles.

In January 1933 we came back to find four delightful 'new children' in Miss Heather's four samoyede puppies who were exactly like cuddly white teddy bears, only terribly mischievous ones as they grew up, with an insatiable appetite for hymn books and cheque books which they devoured while their mistress was out of her room at supper.

The school attained its twenty-first birthday in the Michaelmas term 1928 and the event was celebrated at the following Seniors' Weekend by the opening of the Library by the Duchess of Atholl and that I think was also the first occasion on which mass drill formed a part of the programme. We were blessed that time with the most glorious sunshine and the colourful tunics and the rhythmic movements were a most effective addition to the entertainment. The ballet, now such an enjoyable feature of Seniors' Weekend, was not born until 1932. That was a most disappointingly wet summer term, but it was marked by the opening of the dining-hall and the swimming-bath though the bad weather precluded much use of the latter.

The night of 30/31 December 1933 was a disastrous one for Downe House, for that night the Chapel was badly damaged by fire, but it proved a blessing in disguise for we were already outgrowing the old Chapel, and in rebuilding the antechapel, where the fire originated, was made part of the new Chapel. In her usual marvellous way Miss Nickel rose to the occasion and the rebuilding was sufficiently finished in time for the Confirmation in March, though the roof still lacked its tiles and the floor was still being relaid in the early hours of that morning.

Easter was early in 1934 and Good Friday evening saw the birth of the Geographical. How well I remember that meeting! It had been a warm spring day and most of us had walked to Chieveley and back for the Three Hours Service and were only too glad to sit still and rest our weary legs. There was no X in those days and my form-room, where the meeting was held, was E. Disney Holdsworth Hunt, Ann Dawson, Fenella Boyle, and Frances Pickard Cambridge were the moving spirits. The Geographical was slow to make a start but, in spite of many vicissitudes, it has kept going for twenty-two years and has enjoyed many a happy and interesting evening meeting and many equally enjoyable expeditions, among others to the Witney Blanket Factories, to Huntley and Palmer's, to the Fairey Aircraft Factory at White Waltham, and last year to the Atomic Energy Research Establishment at Harwell. Being a small society it usually joined with the Science Club on these expeditions.

The year 1934 also saw the mushroom-like growth of the Chemistry and Biology Laboratories in the short space of the Easter holidays, and at the beginning of the summer term there was a hectic procession of handcarts and people bringing up the apparatus from the old lab. in time for an inspection three weeks after term began. In those days we had no gas in the laboratories but used methylated spirit lamps and methylated blow-lamps, known as 'Fritz', and much excitement they caused by catching fire and being thrown into the sinks! The gas was installed in 1938 and was indeed an innovation and a blessing.

With the outbreak of war great changes came. Not only were our precincts shared by Queen's Gate but there was quite a number of day girls. The domestic staff gradually vanished to take their part in national service. We no longer 'waved' when we wanted bread or sugar at table but waited on ourselves, and what chaos there was until 'one-way traffic' was instituted, and in the Michaelmas of 1940 'housecraft' began and has come to stay. At night we crept about the cloisters with tiny one-inch lights to our torches and 'blackout' became a nightmare, chinks of light would crop out where they should not. The walls were camouflaged with snake-like zigzags of green. 'Jerry' was often overhead at night but only as a noisy bird of passage. Only once or twice did he drop his mementos in our neighbourhood. Once a stick of bombs fell on Lady Acland's house and Ashmore Green, and once, at the very end of the Lent term 1943, a lone raider dropped bombs on Newbury and then came up and machine-gunned Cold Ash village. That I believe was the only time that the underground passage was seriously used as a refuge, but it was not built until the war was in its second or third year. The

6 May 1945 was a day when we waited on tiptoe to hear that the Armistice had been signed. All day long someone waited by a wireless for the expected announcement and hour after hour we were doomed to disappointment, but at last, as supper was ending, the joyous news came through. Oh! what a holiday the next day was and what a bonfire, lighted by Miss Willis and Miss Spalding jointly, burned on St. Peter's Hill that night!

Gradually war-time restrictions disappeared and peace-time life reasserted itself, but with a difference, for as in the world, so in the school, the outlook has changed. The general pattern of school life, with its work and games, its examinations and its plays, still follows much the old routine, but nowadays everyone expects, and is expected to take, her share of responsibilities and to play her part in the life of the community, and housecraft and such institutions still continue.

We are an independent school with a Board of Governors and at the end of 1946 Miss Willis ceased to be our headmistress, though we often have the opportunity of welcoming her back amongst us, and Miss Medley loyally carries on the traditions of the school.

But our numbers have almost trebled since the school came to Cold Ash and that alone calls for some changes in organization.

Seniors' Weekend has returned to its old festivities and there are still old faces on the staff to welcome back returning Old Seniors, and Downe House is still 'Downe House' with an individuality of its own even if—

> 'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
> And God fulfils himself in many ways'.

I. NAN (WOODALL) NAPIER, 1907–1910

The First Terms of Downe House

FIFTY years may seem a long time to look back to the birthday of Downe—fifty years more full of dramatic events and changes, of happiness and horror than any in history—yet the memory of those first terms is as vivid as the events of yesterday.

Like all houses Downe had its own character, gracious and light with a sense of space and great friendliness, the garden a child's paradise with wide lawns, trees to climb, and a wood to prowl in full of primroses in spring.

To a lanky lamp-post of a girl in that strange garment, a djibbah, school with no other girls might well have been an ordeal but nothing could have been farther from the case. We were a very happy family and I have a shrewd suspicion that I was more than a little spoilt; the staff—five residents and more visiting—were young and gay and the days were full of fun and exciting things to do.

I was an outdoor child accustomed to running wild and I dreaded the restrictions of

school but there were none, and this sense of freedom is still, to my mind, one of Downe's greatest attributes—freedom to develop individually but encouraged unconsciously in the right direction.

Hilary Willis's arrival after two weeks was a great event in more ways than one, for she was not only the perfect companion but the dearest and most delightful of people. I have often wondered why she took to the tomboy that I was but the fact remains that we became fast friends and have remained so all our lives. Music was a bond and when I hear Bach's double violin concerto the picture in my mind is of the dining-room at Downe where we practised and played it together with such joy. In a letter from Canada she has sent her own especial impressions which I have added to mine.

Then came Dulcie Travers to make us three. Poor Miss Willis must have grown tired of the cry, 'When are more people coming?' Little did we know how soon the school would be full and overflowing.

Next term came Alice Moore, gay and full of exuberant spirits and determined to be a great pianist. She has become an accomplished musician, but at that time her repertoire consisted of one piece, 'The Merry Peasant', which she played non-stop at every opportunity. I laugh now, as I am sure she does, to think how we suffered.

We began to think that Cordelia and Augusta Burn were myths. They were always 'coming next week', and excitement ran high when Miss Willis at last went to meet them in London, only to be dashed when she returned empty handed. Well, not quite empty handed because on the second of these occasions she returned with two dolls which we, of course, christened Cordelia and Augusta. However, the myths eventually materialized and were great additions to our family party of six.

I was allowed to have my bull mastiff 'Tiger' with me, an endearing and well-behaved monster till beguiled and led astray by the wiles of Miss Willis's fatally attractive minx Seraphina. They turned our walks into adventures with irate game-keepers, and frantic hunts across country to find the marauders.

There are memories of so many things which went to make those first terms full of happiness and fun. Miss Willis has lost none of her gaiety and humour with the years and it is not surprising that we were never dull. There was the excitement of new developments; the Chapel at the top of the house, which always smelled of flowers and had a lovely peace about it, being amongst the first. New class-rooms were equipped, the playing-field was made, the Laboratory in the garden was opened and here Miss Heather presided over the bangs and smells. What a gifted teacher she was, making even test-tubes and litmus paper interesting, and what an honour to be working in Darwin's own laboratory; Hilary always had the impression that he was perhaps quite close to us.

Miss Heather drove over in her trap and how we enjoyed stabling the pony and harnessing him up for her in the evenings.

Miss Carver was kind and shy and brusque, which did us no harm. She was England's

hockey captain and I was always somewhat awed by the fact and by her salutary, if unavailing, attempts to prevent us being spoilt in those early days.

The advent of sufficient people to play hockey was a thrilling moment and we all thought we should be playing for England in no time: in fact the term after I left we played and beat Roedean's Second XI, no mean achievement for a school of only thirty-five.

On Sundays there was coffee in Miss Willis's room made in a Turkish pot over the fire, and delicious it was; Miss Willis would read till teatime and it was then I learned to love poetry.

In the evenings too, round the drawing-room fire while we sewed and mended, Miss Willis read to us as no one else has ever read except perhaps her father. His visits were red-letter days and his readings of Cyrano never to be forgotten. There were jaunts to the theatre, travelling in a double-decker bus with lively competition for the front seats on top: those drives are a saga in themselves. The country roads seemed to go to the London driver's heads and the bus would take the bit between its teeth and career down the hills and round the corners. Coming home on snowy roads was an exciting adventure; on one foggy occasion we took it in turn to walk in front of the bus waving a handkerchief to guide the driver.

No picture of Downe is complete without the old mulberry-tree on which mulberries grew really black and ripe and luscious and under which we sometimes had lessons.

Last but not least was the grass mound to one side of the lawn which has, for me, terrifying memories, for with the trees as a background it formed a natural stage on which we acted a version of Rumpelstiltzkin written for us by Mrs. de Selincourt. What pain and grief Miss Willis must have suffered to teach me the role of the hero Perequine. However, she must have succeeded against the fearful odds, for I am told it was a great success and to my horror my proud father, in his parental blindness, quite made up his mind that I was destined for the stage!!

The third term brought Cath and Madge Godfrey, whose keenness and enthusiasm for everything were inspiring assets, and from this point Cath, who became a shining light at Somerville, takes up the story.

There was peace and security in those years before the wars or any thoughts of war; surely they will return, but I hope and believe that all we who are privileged to be Seniors, still carry with us through life something of the same indestructible sense of peace, abiding integrity and endeavour which Downe did so much to establish in us.

II. CATHERINE (GODFREY) BEDDINGTON, 1911

PRE-1914: (September 1907, in fact): an old long ivy-covered house, a drawing-room with French windows that led out on to a lawn with a walnut-tree, a Laboratory, surely it was at the bottom of the garden?, a room arranged as a Chapel upstairs. In the wide

entrance hall is one girl (Hilary Willis) watching her sole companion, the new girl (Nan Woodall) coming down the stairs with a poodle, bows on either side of her straight hair. After Christmas there were three new arrivals, in two years thirty-five girls, a big school by then!

In that drawing-room Miss Willis read Browning (by request) to a clustered few; under the walnut-tree Mrs. de Selincourt taught literature and her play was acted; Miss Heather, who drove over in her pony cart, taught chemistry in that Laboratory. (It was where Darwin had intended to work. Evolution, almost modern, still rather daring . . . and dear Miss Heather, fanatically scientific . . . the atom was indivisible then, we had to respect it . . . and girls too had brains and might work . . . this too was then a heretical thought.)

Upstairs Miss Willis read prayers in her grave voice amid the scent of flowers. There was a little dog called Seraphina, who had been taught to speak with a ridiculous cockney accent, and a lovable brindled mastiff belonging to Nan. There were Jersey cows, the Devonshire cream scalding in pans on the kitchen stove, and an old Devon housekeeper who made Honiton lace on a pillow. Miss Carver, brusque and shy, herself an international hockey player, gave coaching in hockey on the wide playing-fields beside the long sandy walk.

In the slender Gallup poll that I have taken of Old Seniors' recollections Sissie Mainprice remembers best the expeditions on the red Tilling bus. Once the bus broke down and toppled into a ditch and refuge was taken in an old chapel and hymns sung. This seems to have stuck in several minds, perhaps because even a bus was daring then, rather like chartering a fleet of aeroplanes for the school now. And also being woken by Miss Morgan-Brown at 3.30 a.m. to go (by bus again) to St. James' Street to see the funeral of Edward VII.

So much for the random memories of those who are now 30, 40, *50* years on. Out of that Edwardian period piece, Miss Willis fashioned Downe House. There was levity in the wonderful history lessons, long before *1066 and All That* had been published and the light touch allowed. But tribute to her eludes me. I hope the whole Jubilee magazine, as this number is, will be full of 'Let Us Now Praise Famous Men' touch. Because she and her work are now famous. Mine is a more hesitant bit of special pleading, to remember that small and gracious beginning. Her room where we often had coffee, was full of books and to me (a natural 'literary') its ceiling was Shelley's 'dome of many coloured glass' and the books that she lent me . . . *Marius the Epicurean* for one, still hold that reflected iridescence. Jocelyn Toynbee, who has had such a distinguished scholastic career, wrote that her love of classical history was awakened at Downe. I suspect that Miss Willis held the key to the locked gates of adolescence.

Those early days were a special time, Nan was a very special person . . . it was all special, the primroses in the Lent term, and Sybil Stewart, with the first grand-daughter now at school, writes of remembering the long walk to Cudham church in the lovely countryside, and Dorothy Liversidge, whom we called Pill, writes of

this too, and there were the Mallams who helped us to beat the Roedean 2nd cricket eleven.

That was wonderful for a *very* small school . . . but in the end was the beginning as always.

III. ROSEMARY (BRINCKMAN) BAGLEY, 1916

CONTRARY to the experience of most people, my first term at Downe House in the summer of 1912 did not leave me with as many impressions as those which followed after; there were few highlights, but there was a general feeling of quiet well-being and a seemingly endless stretch of sunny days. I don't remember anything about the actual school work—I suppose I did not do much! I know, however, that three or four of us 'Little ones' used to go off to bed very early after having had a meal, usually of scrambled eggs, on our own, and that in the dormitory Nurse used to brush our hair for quite a long time when we had reached the dressing-gown stage.

This was the term, too, when we had a craze for keeping silkworms: we used to pick all the leaves we could reach from the lower branches of the lovely old mulberry-tree on which to feed our stock, until one day the unfortunate grubs somehow became entombed in a heap of lime.

Talking of lime—there was the other kind, the highly scented tree which grew on a little rise on the lawn; on Sunday afternoons in the summer we were allowed to carry our tea out into the garden (there was very often home-made blackberry jam I remember) and I used to make my special place under this tree; the lime flowers were always covered with bees, and alas they lay thick on the ground too. I supposed them dead, but perhaps they were only drunk!

I am not sure when I began to think of the staff as individuals, but they did gradually emerge; I thought Miss Carver most gracious and Miss Tizard very pretty, though I recollect that when she married I was astonished that a school mistress should be able to do so.

How well I remember Miss Duncanson presiding over the nightly rites of temperature taking, and the cool wet taste of carbolic on the thermometer.

I remember Miss Heather's unfailing patience, and the confidence which Miss Oliver inspired in us over games and in the Gymnasium, so that one would even dare the perils of long-fly if she were present; I remember the thrill of casting plaster models under Miss Hensman's guidance, the healthy awe I had of Fröken Jarner's fiery enthusiasm for the piano, and the sincerity by which Miss Morgan-Brown made the scripture stories come alive so that to think of the Passion Play at Oberammergau now is still to do so through her interpretation.

I have not the ability rightly to express the atmosphere of Downe House before the First World War, but I think the word tranquillity may best sum it up, although for each

child there were the ups and downs attendant on personal development. The house itself was interesting, partly for its style, and also on account of the associations with its former owner, Charles Darwin; and the garden was delightful; I do not remember that any of it was out of bounds. I know that anyway during the first part of my time there we used to stroll round the kitchen-garden and play in the orchard where the Chapel later came to be built; how eagerly we watched it take shape under Miss Nickel's clever hands, and I think we all loved the airiness of the finished building in which I was amongst the first to be confirmed. Our way of life at Downe was not violently affected by the war though it painted a sort of wash of excitement over things concerning the outside world; the school routine I think remained much the same, perhaps there was even more of a scramble for the morning post when it was put out on the table in the hall, and I believe there were various scares about blackouts when the Zeppelins went over; incidentally I happened to see the two that fell in flames, one at Potters Bar and the other at Cuffley, and well recall the distant thud of the guns at Woolwich, and the faint cheering of some people a long way off in the night.

One year (was it 1915?) two teams from the staff of *Punch* came to play cricket on our ground. Sir James Barrie, Maurice Hewlett, George Morrow, George Meredith's son and grandson, E. V. Lucas, and A. A. Milne were there, and the last twisted his ankle in trying to leap nonchalantly over a fence—much to our rather heartless amusement; it must have been in this year too that an aeroplane flying over our hockey field dropped us an invitation to visit the aerodrome. I was among the lucky ones who enjoyed the outing.

The excitement caused by preparations for the summer plays can never be forgotten; each year when it was fine, the performance was given on the Mound, the natural stage setting on the lawn, and the bustle and strangeness of the day was a thrill in itself; how enjoyable too were the concerts indoors when Miss Gunn and Miss Myra Hess played to us, and the little sketches which the staff sometimes put on. I remember one in particular called *Mechanical Jane* in which Miss Morgan-Brown took the name part and in my eyes greatly distinguished herself. In all these reminiscences I have made no mention of Miss Willis, and that is because for me her presence was a continual influence that pervaded the whole place; from the time I arrived at the age of eleven, I never knew her to fail in going the round of every dormitory where she tucked up and kissed every single child; if it were only for this we should owe her deep gratitude, but it was only one act of kindness amongst so very many others and she personified all the qualities we most admired; she was identified in my mind with fairness and firmness, with human kindness and spiritual strength; in fact, for me, she was—and still is—DOWNE HOUSE.

IV. ELIZABETH BOWEN (CAMERON), 1917

I WAS at Downe from September 1914 to the end of the summer term 1917. This was 'the old Downe House'—final home of Charles Darwin, at the edge of Downe village, near Orpington, Kent. In another sense, it was the *new* Downe House: the school had been in existence for not more than seven years. There were still girls there who had been there 'at the beginning', or from at any rate near it. I remember this interest attached to Augusta Burn, who was in the Sixth Form when I arrived, and to my own contemporary Mary Winkworth—who must, if this *was* true about her, at the start have been one of the very little ones.

To me, as a new girl, the school did not feel new—looking back I suppose that it hardly could have. Even so, I can see it had taken only a short time for Downe to acquire identity and meaning. I found it hard to believe that generations had not been there before me: everybody seemed very sure of themselves—and for some reason, to the comer-in from outside, this was not alarming but reassuring. One was plunged straight, deep, into the middle of *something*. The absorption with which everybody lived—and, with that, the curious, quick, characteristic, psychological pace—made one unselfconscious; or, at any rate, as nearly so as it is possible to be in one's 'teens. The only nightmare at that transitional age is a shifting universe: Downe seemed a deep-set stable one. I remember feeling up against several things, but it pleased me that there things *were*, for me to be up against. Even resistance helped me to get my bearings.

Architectural growth marked the growth of the school in more concrete ways. Almost every term, certainly every year, there was further building activity on the part of Miss Nickel—concrete-floored, metal-roofed annexes, from whose wood-lined walls winter heating drew out a smell of creosote, swastika-ed farther and farther out into the garden. The gaunt passage in which we hung up our purple overcoats and seemed to be for ever changing our shoes, the high pea-green Gymnasium with the stage at the end, the wash-room and the three or four music-rooms already existed when I arrived; the Chapel came into being during my second year—an austere achievement in naked concrete. In a way, I was sorry to have this supersede the original 'Chapel', a white-washed ex-bedroom up on the top floor. For everything slightly irregular, improvised, amateurish about the original Downe was dear to me. I suppose I had from the beginning a sort of dread of anything which could feel like 'an institution'—therefore I feel it a tribute to Miss Nickel to say that her outbuildings had a Kafka-like oddness. Their acoustics, their perspectives, their ventilation were peculiar to themselves. Not less, there was something in an elegant way ramshackle about the main Downe House—one of those vaguely Regency country houses with amorphous, large-windowed, Victorian extra rooms, which suit the vague, airy, flowing landscape of Kent.

I understand that one reason why the move from the 'old' Downe to the present

Downe was made was that, apart from increasing numbers, we girls were beginning to wear out the fabric of the house. (I suppose that the British Association have made it good again.) There cannot, I suppose, even when I left, have been many more than seventy of us, but even so, at release-points during the day and evening, our cattle-like gatherings and stampedings were sufficient to make the structure rock. 'Need you *rush*?' Miss Willis constantly used to say, looking at us with a distaste which concealed affection.

Miss Willis's attitude, throughout, was far less 'Don't' than 'Need you?'. There was always something speculative, detached, about her criticisms, which was probably why they took such deep effect with us. In fact, they were not so much criticisms as invitations—to be taken up or not, as we thought well—to criticize ourselves, plus suggestions (only just not tentative) as to what lines to take if we chose to do so. I recall no feeling that she was 'managing' us. And this power to indicate, to set going, was, I suppose, some part of that other side of her genius—that of the teacher. Her feeling against direct 'instruction' must have influenced her choice of the teaching staff—in the former family sitting-rooms which were Downe class-rooms, I remember having no *facts* drilled into my brain—which did not mean we were not expected to know them. 'Bitha', exclaimed Miss Morgan-Brown, swooping on me in the course of a lesson, 'you are not listening'. 'I'm sorry, Miss Morgan-Brown', I said, 'but I'm still thinking about what you said last.' 'Well,' said Miss Morgan-Brown, 'you must think later.'

Miss Heather was so great a mathematician as never to humiliate the stupid—that is, the stupid as to her subject. Respecting any desire to understand, she allowed for inhibitions which worked against it. She honoured the mind, of whatever kind it might be. Science lessons with her, in the tiny laboratory which had been the final domain of Darwin, were memorable. I imagine that in these days, those afternoon sessions would be called 'elementary physics'. I at least learned how not to blow myself up with a retort—but chiefly the lessons gave occasion for philosophic dialogues with Miss Heather. The Laboratory, with its burners, was also used for the mystic cooking lessons of Miss Nickel—nothing since has ever tasted so good as those beef-steak-and-kidney puddings, infiltrated (under her instruction) by many cloves. Originating—we gathered—in central Europe, Miss Nickel taught us that suet *can* be flavourous. Her brown, belted, monk-like robe (one could not say overall) strongly exhaled a smell of machine-oil. Spying through the windows of the small engine room, on the way to the orchard, one saw, often, Miss Nickel obsessed by her central task.

How taxing it must have been to keep a school 'running', in any or all senses, during the First World War, we did not compute. I cannot imagine the Downe House of my day without 'the war'—Miss Willis's address to us, my first evening, was based on the outbreak, and the thing still was a year short of its conclusive agonies when I left. My generation, accordingly, grew up with a horror of being *bouches inutiles*. I can't claim, however, that the war was borne in upon us the whole time—I don't think Miss Willis intended it should be so. She was in favour of our thinking of everything as transient, including and particularly our schooldays. She reminded us, we would not

be at school for ever. This may be why Downe (so far as I know) has not turned out that saddest of English products, 'the perpetual schoolgirl'.

The greatest crime, as I remember Downe, was silliness. Or it was at least the crime of which one was most aware, as being the most dreary, the most mortifying. Some of us tried to get the silliness out of our systems by travestying it—mock cults, mock crazes, cultivated inanities of speech. The bad thing was to be 'affected' without knowing it—that was, without deliberately affecting to *be* affected. In the main, the view we took of ourselves was drastic. I fancy this did no harm. And we were eased, the school being in the country, by all round us the beautiful superabundant sillinesses of Nature. Lovingly do I remember the cuckoos, too near, too many, too non-stop, making themselves cheap, flumping and battering on the tin roof of Miss Nickel's ultimate masterpiece, the Chalet. Summer at Downe was full of the smells of hay; clumps of azaleas smouldered on the enormous lawn. In the Cudham valley, there were reputed to be nightingales.

I have written about Downe House before, for a Graham Greene collection entitled *The Old School*. My piece was reprinted elsewhere, as 'The Mulberry Tree'. I do not want to repeat myself, so I omit from here what I there said. Actually, there is still so much to say that I could go on for many, many pages before repetition, really, became a danger.

V. JOCELYN (ASHLEY DODD) BABER, 1920

FOR several reasons I was in a singular position. I went to Downe at the age of nine and remained there for eight years.

I therefore spanned a large number of Downe people and staff; I possess a Christian name of which there was no other in my time; and was so small as to be remarkable. It is strictly true to say that when meeting people at Downe gatherings, they were apt to say to me 'Goodness! How you have grown!' until I was thirty-five, or more.

On a January day in 1913 I was brought to Charing Cross to meet Miss Willis and join the school train. I was equipped with all the proper uniform, djibbah by Sheba of Sloane St., purple coat dyed specially at Portrush, and so on. My school rug was green and my night bag purple, to carry out the colour scheme. I had long, carefully done corkscrew curls (put in curl papers overnight) and carried two dolls, one black and one white. I was perfectly composed and very pleased to be going to school.

At Orpington we were met by a horse brake into whose funnel-like recess, under, I think, some sort of canvas roof, we inserted ourselves. Miss Willis drew me and the dolls on to her knee and we moved off.

'I wonder what I am going to do with you', she murmured.

Downe House in Kent (I never was at Cold Ash), the home of Charles Darwin, was long and roomy, on one side bounded by a side road and on the other by a garden and some fields. From the ground floor there was no view but often those deep-set houses

have a pleasant atmosphere. The bedrooms were made into cubicled dormitories, partitioned by curtains on iron rods, the floors were mostly linoleum or anyway bare and the noise of our coming and going was continuous.

Something happened in the middle of my school life about that noise which made a lasting impression because it has always seemed to me that it held a deeper significance than was then evident. Miss Willis called us all into the big class-room and explained that somebody was ill (I cannot remember any more about that) and that quiet was essential. Would we please move around with the utmost care and shut all doors noiselessly. The school wanted to obey this—unanimously. It was not the sort of order which provoked grumblings and grievances. We tried.

We were again called into the class-room and told that the effect was not good enough and that we must try harder. Apparently we responded with just that ounce more of effort and I shall never forget the result. It was quite uncanny, in that echoing uncarpeted house, fully manned, to feel the silence.

The downstairs rooms were class-rooms but the drawing-room and front stairs (which we were not allowed to use) kept their country house appearance. As the years went by there were additions made in all directions until the school grew out of the place altogether.

The garden had some large and very fine outdoor azaleas and a mound upon which many of the plays were acted. Near the house was a large and ancient mulberry, very handy for those wishing to feed their silk-worms. People say that the summers were hotter in those days and perhaps they were. At any rate the garden, the Mound, the Sandy Walk, and the fields played a big part in our lives. We occasionally worked in the garden, we slept in it whenever we could, and we sat on the grass before the Mound admiring our elders and betters doing their rehearsals. One day my particular friend and I had a tremendous fight in the Sandy Walk, rolling over and over and even drawing blood. Miss Willis appeared from nowhere and placidly bade us get up. She announced that both of us forthwith should be provided with boxing-gloves. This was done and for the duration of the craze we drew quite an audience. I have always thought her treatment of this incident was masterly.

There were many singular stripes given in my time, one of which was for eating an apple without goloshes. It meant, of course, that someone had gone out in break, in the wet, improperly shod.

In the morning we were called by a maid who cried at each dormitory, 'Half past six young ladies please'. And for the younger ones there was a maid who oversaw the baths in the evenings. The day was divided very much like any school day, I imagine. After lunch we read in the Gymnasium before going out to play games. When knitting later became a patriotic duty as well as a near mania, I remember that in order to knit while reading, which many did, one had to prove that one could do both properly at the same time.

Miss Carver having left, Miss Willis, in her mid-thirties, was the sole headmistress

and her activities were extremely varied. Besides doing all the administration she taught quite a lot, filled in gaps, coached the actors and acted herself and drove the car. In the editorial for my first term she wrote: 'Parents and friends are warned to take school stories about the motor with several grains of salt! Strange tidings have come back to the school, due to romantic flights of fancy—but as a matter of fact, it has never gone more than fifteen miles an hour and it does not go round corners on one wheel only!'

This motor lived in the stables and was, of course, one of the preoccupations of Miss Nickel. When working on that, on various plumbing matters, and later on amazing building feats, she was dressed in her monk's robe with a packet of Woodbines tucked into the front. When driving the car or even going to London, she assumed a long skirt, a gentlemanly coat, shirt and tie, and a form of homburg hat. I have often wondered what she could NOT do. I believe her languages were prodigious; she understood machinery, animals, building, carpentry, and weaving as we all know. She taught geography and biology. Her history—international—seemed pretty sound. There were rumours in my time that she could play the violin like an angel. But I don't think many people know, though I had experience of this, that she could be both doctor and nurse, of infinite gentleness and very deft.

Of course talk about her was endless, among us and the parents too, particularly as she would never allow herself to be photographed. I have no idea whether there was any truth in the rumours of her exile from Russia and her youth. But since Miss Willis never referred to any of this on her death, I shall not repeat them here. Most of us were devoted to her and had the sense to realize what an interesting person she was.

Miss Humphreys Owen did the housekeeping and was to me a somewhat terrifying stranger about seven feet high. Miss Heather, God bless her, never changed, I think, in looks or demeanour. She was always patient and kind, competent, and of an integrity apart. To this day, when confronted with something difficult, I repeat her words—'Now Jocelyn, I think you should find this quite straightforward. . . .' And because I trusted her, I did. Gym. mistresses, being so attractive and pretty, were continually lost to us by marriage.

Miss Morgan-Brown lived in a pleasant bed-sitting-room near the bathrooms. This was awkward for the little ones because every naughtiness was known to her and she would emerge, a terrifying frown on her aquiline face, and be very severe indeed. None of us then had any idea of her versatility, her energy, or her erudition; nor did we then see in her the utterly delightful friend which we should make when we were older.

Miss Willis's room was mid-way between the West dormitory, where for so long I was with the youngest, and the bathroom–Morgan-Brown area. Up to a certain age we passed her door with a shudder and to be forced to knock at that door was The End. Such terror was probably never known again. I can think of two contrasting moments about that door.

At the age of ten I and my friend of the day stood without, trying to pluck up

courage to knock. We were already snivelling. We had been found out in a misdemeanour which would lead to a major row, not by the Seniors or staff but by my friend's mother. She had written that unless I, the good child, told Miss Willis what her daughter had DONE, the child would never be allowed to come home again. Believing this monstrous nonsense, I had no option. But the terrible fact was that the good child had been heavily involved in the same offence and to reveal one crime was to reveal all. Our fears were fully justified. Miss Willis was extremely angry.

The contrasting knock was made when I was sixteen and a half. Gaily, confidently, I approached the door, only hoping that I would find Miss Willis within and disengaged. I was given a welcome which warms me to recall, to this day.

'For our Forsaken Merman', I said, 'I am doing a dance. Might I borrow your green scarf?'

'Yes of course. What else are you going to wear?'

'Well we thought—it's under the sea, with green net between us and the audience—just my hair.'

It was true that my hair was then very long and thick, but as Miss Willis explained that some fathers might be present, she suggested that I add something to the scarf.

At the end of each term, everyone had to knock when they reached the top of the queue for the 'jaws'. When we were young and turbulent or when older and 'not contributing to the life of the school' or in some other way unsatisfactory, we squirmed and writhed with shame or indignation. But to some, particularly when they had reached the stage of discussing a career, the 'jaw' was a joy, a support, and an inspiration. I suppose it was then that Miss Willis trained her phenomenal memory which allows her now to welcome several hundred of us, in any order and of any age, with complete intimacy and knowledge.

'Ah—Margaret', she would say, 'what news have you about your father's operation? I was so glad you joined the Debating. . . . If you go to Devonshire in the holidays do you think you could go on practising the violin? . . .' and so to more intimate matters. It must have been exhausting for her.

School was quickly established in my mind as a place of which I should never be worthy. Things which at home had been assets didn't go down there at all. I was a misfit. It was not a matter of lessons. I had arrived with well-taught French and the three R's, but I knew quite well that these were not by any means all that was required. Contrary to the majority of autobiographies, in which one reads that school life was one of horror and suffering (probably it was pretty terrible in some boys' schools), I found school life impressive. My sufferings were purely physical. In winter I felt extremely cold and had chilblains. I was greedy but also genuinely hungry. But when I wept in the lavatory on my return to school it was because of these things. I wept for carpeted floors and for my mother's excellent cucumber sandwiches. Many autobiographies refer to the wonderful library at home where the subject had been wont to browse, steeped in Macaulay from the age of three. We had no library at home and

if we had I should not have steeped myself in anything. I should have climbed a tree and pretended that I was Robin Hood.

Again, one reads this continuous complaint about organized games. I know that trudging out on a winter's day to the field was a physical trial at times and an abysmal bore to some. Yet I came to see the sense in creating a team spirit and came to feel exquisite joy in playing a game as hard as I could.

Seniors' Weekend in July 1914 saw a particularly fond reunion. After they had seen the play, which that year was *The Tempest*, and danced, the Old Seniors lay on camp-beds in the Gymnasium and were played to by a remarkable pianist, a Dane, called Fröken Jarner. She was not patient as a teacher and one day she not only rapped me severely on the knuckles with a ruler but gave me a stripe for 'obstination'. This I indignantly presented to Miss Willis when she came to say goodnight—in those days she went round every dormitory and it was far easier to speak to her then than to 'knock'.

'Please—can't I learn with Alice?' I wailed and all the other young joined in with heartfelt cries to the same effect. Alice had so recently been a Senior that she was not yet Miss Moore to us and all of us wanted to learn with someone so kind and beautiful. I can still remember Miss Willis saying almost to herself as she sat on my bed, 'Oh children, you are so silly when I get you these splendid teachers. . . .' Just this situation was always happening with the French staff. We found them comic or eccentric without realizing or caring for their qualifications. (No, my dear Mademoiselle, I don't mean YOU.) It must have been disheartening at times; and it may be so still except that schools like Downe no longer take children quite so young.

The summer term of 1914 was over.

A few days after we had left school the world of our parents was changed for ever. The first shadow of the eclipse appeared which would blot out a whole era in English history and social life.

During the summer holidays of 1914 we had received our *Downe House Magazine*. In the editorial we read: 'The work and play, the triumphs and disappointments that loomed large during the days of peace and summer sunshine, have all passed into an indefinite background. . . . Life has, in a few days, changed for all of us. . . .'

That editorial set the tone for the school for the next four years. It spoke much of service and particularly of the importance of getting on with the dull but necessary job. And while the Old Seniors, fathers, brothers, and husbands did their full share, it was natural and proper that the school should resume the work and play, the triumphs and the disappointments.

Few people, even among the best informed, thought that the war would last for a matter of years; meanwhile the school continued to write patriotic poems unabashed, to knit, to concoct stilted accounts of outings in which food always played a big part. The list of serving officers grew longer and longer; the school was growing too and so bringing in more fathers, brothers, and also husbands. In August 1915 Miss Willis

went to give a hand at a base camp in France and wrote a letter about it, published in the magazine, headed 'With the B.E.F., Dieppe Huts'.

In the spring of 1916 a new book appeared called *The First Hundred Thousand* which was competently reviewed for the magazine by A. L. At this time a troupe of entertainers, raised by P. B., gave their first show in aid of parcels for prisoners of war. This was perhaps my first emergence and very happy and proud I was. I could never act but I could dance and as a dancer I found myself permanently included.

I had mumps that term and found myself in a bed beside a person (why did we say 'person'? Do they say it still?) whose uncle was none less than Haig. I wrote an ode to him and she sent it. Did anyone at Downe, I wonder, write an ode to Wavell, Alexander, or Montgomery? I doubt it.

Early next year 'we . . . heard the startling news of the Russian revolution'. Our troupe gave another entertainment in which P. B. in an imitation of Charlie Chaplin, of which I have a faded photograph, appeared to me to be funnier than Chaplin himself. I elected to do a nigger dance that time, forgot to grease myself under the black and nothing would remove it. I stood in the bath before a concerned audience, including Miss Oliver who helped me with my turns, with black rivulets running down my body and a face as black as coal.

Biggin Hill aerodrome was becoming busy and was very near us. One day an aeroplane flew over the field and dropped a message which said 'Dear hockey girls, will you come to tea?' The sensation was tremendous. When this much-pawed missive reached Miss Willis, she announced that she would accept for the hockey team only. The protests were loud. I never remember so much grumbling and it continued for days. We said the message was for people playing hockey, not the team.

The team went to tea and found that the message had been dropped by an American called Archie P. Dickie. They were shown Sopwiths and B.E.2's; 'also the wireless apparatus'. Some good angel evidently conveyed that the rest of the school was tortured by jealousy and finally all of us reached Biggin Hill and, of course, the most wonderful things to eat. Miss Willis thought that we should make some gesture in return, so the troupe gave a show there too.

It was after our introduction to Archie P. Dickie and the others that we leaned out of the dormitory windows one night and watched an aerial battle. First we saw, very clearly indeed, a Zeppelin, not flying very high, a cigar spotted with lights. Then Biggin Hill got up and gave chase, zooming upwards over the house. We yelled encouragement as if we were watching a particularly exciting match and here, I must confess, that if we gave no thought to the vulnerability of the pilots of that time, nor did we do so in similar circumstances in Sussex in 1944. The village policeman as usual appeared on his bicycle, bearing on the handlebars a jagged piece of cardboard upon which was inscribed in uncertain pencilled letters the words 'Take Cover'. The only cover we took was an eiderdown or a blanket, since we were all in our pyjamas. We actually saw that Zeppelin burst into flames and begin to go down. I could

still point out its course but don't know whether it was the one brought down at Cuffley or not.

By this time the tally of Old Seniors doing responsible war work was impressive, particularly when one considers how much less was available to them than to the women of 1939–45. To the list of relative officers serving was added a good crop of decorations. Conditions were becoming more difficult. An air raid was responsible for postponing a visit from our 'Sunbeams'. These were East End children with whom we were encouraged to become pen-friends. When at last we did see them, most of them were attractive and intelligent. But mine, alas, proved to be a snuffly character of criminal aspect, with her pants coming down and no handkerchief.

'Within the sound of guns', wrote Miss Willis at the end of 1917, 'and tried by public and private anxieties, the School has nevertheless pursued a very even tenor.' We note that 'when Mr. Simms comes down (to give a lecture) there is invariably an air raid'. Our troupe gave an entertainment to convalescent Canadians and helped with a concert in a ward of the Ontario Military Hospital at Orpington. In the summer term of 1918 'no cricket matches could be arranged, owing to the difficulties of travelling'. A Downe person was actually bombed out in London and another was being shelled in Paris by Big Bertha.

Next term came the Armistice. Amid rejoicing comment we find the following:

> . . . we now again can walk at night
> without a fear or yet a fright
> of Zepps a-floating silently
> or German planes which fast do fly
> and bombs all dropping everywhere
> which make you scream and raise your hair.

But, as has been known before and since, the world was not put right in a day.

'It is almost extraordinary', wrote Miss Willis, 'to be chronicling the small doings, pleasures and ideas of the school, while the world is waiting in ominous calm for the crash that seems inevitable. If a "labour war" is to be averted, it will only be by recognizing the true principles of government and the rights and responsibilities of the governed.'

That too might have been written in 1945. But whatever ailed the world outside, my own 'small doings' were going apace. I was out of the incubator and becoming very happy. I was in the First XII and had already been in the Gym. VIII for two years. I joined various societies, made friends, and although I still had no idea how the Seniors thought out their witty jokes or interpreted their serious acting, I had some form of identity which was no longer dependent upon my extreme youth or my size. I was even beginning to grow a very little. I almost carried a motion in the Debating Society 'That the proposed Channel Tunnel is a mistake'.

The school continued to expand and had difficulty in putting up the visitors for

Seniors' Weekend. A shortage of domestic staff began to be felt—that breeze which was to become a hurricane.

During those two years following the Armistice, I found myself in the Cricket XI and the Tennis VI and so on the Games Committee of four. I was also in the Dancing VIII. At the beginning of 1920 I became a Senior and in the Sixth with some people I have never ceased to value. But I think we felt then that we were poor substitutes for the giants of the past. I wonder whether this has happened to every generation. I liked so much that line in 'Salad Days'—'who will give the parties when we have gone?' or something to that effect.

I left at the age of seventeen with a lasting devotion to Miss Willis, Miss Heather, Miss Croft, and certain other of the staff and to the school and find myself in a majority there. I have found in my adult life that if I encounter a Downe person, always providing that she had been happy at school and had been there for a reasonable length of time, I can rely upon our having much in common whatever may be the difference in age. If I hear that she was removed after a term or two through illness; or that she hated Downe; or that she had been sent elsewhere I shall approach her warily. But if she tells me certain facts, even though I have never seen her before, I shall immediately feel that I can trust her, that I can count upon her in certain important attributes; and that with any luck we can laugh together and laugh again.

I have reached a time of life, thank Heaven, when I no longer feel that through fear or fashion I have to camouflage certain emotions.

And so I say plainly, and shall continue to say to the end of my life—

Thank you Downe; and my love to you.

VI. PIPPA MILFORD, 1926

It is not easy to remember thirty years after, but there are still memories of Downe which are vivid today.

I was one of those who started their Downe career the first term that the school moved from Kent. It is not easy to find the original buildings today under the ever-growing extensions.

The drive was there but very much rougher. The woods were thicker and there were no buildings in them except Ancren Gate. In the first few months those who slept there had to grope their way along a dark narrow path, and staff as well as children found themselves in the ditch.

Chapel was held in the cloisters, which was pleasant enough if it was fine, but less attractive if the rain slanted the wrong way, or it was really wintry. Rugs and bottles were often taken in by those who sat on the outside, and Miss Croft's fingers must have been numb as she played the harmonium.

And then the water-supply! Miss Willis had been assured that the water was good and plentiful. But as luck would have it 1922 was a really hot and dry summer. The

well got very low, the drinking-water got browner and browner, and we were reduced to a basin of water between three for a bath. I don't remember that we minded at all. There was not enough water for central heating at first, so we lit log fires in the class-rooms, and I believe it is true that we had less colds and illness that first year than at any other time.

Miss Nickel did wonders in the four years that followed. A Chapel, Gymnasium, Sanatorium, and water-supply all followed each other quickly. And a house in the woods for the dogs must not be forgotten! We ate and danced in the room which is now the staff Common Room, but before I left we had taken the cloister into the room to make space for the rapidly growing number of girls. My memory tells me that there were 99 children when I went and nearly 150 when I left just four years later, but I could not be sure of this. Certainly the numbers grew fast and the buildings leapt up to keep pace.

I am glad to have been at Downe at that time. We grew up with the new school and we took less for granted than those who are there now. Music rooms, a Library, Art rooms, &c., were not there. But we had the fun of seeing buildings added term by term, and you were never sure what you were going to find when you got back.

One last memory. The last day of term and the whole school was in the Gymnasium waiting for the votes for Seniors to be counted. Report reading was over—all the reports were read out to the whole school! Miss Short was playing the piano to calm our nerves. The awful moment came when the names were read out. As far as I was concerned all was well, but I shall always remember that waiting.

I have done a variety of things since I left Downe. Massage, the Fire Service, and now I help to run a school doing accounts, catering, secretarial work, in fact everything that no one else will do. And although my achievements at Downe were very ordinary at least it seems to have educated me so that I can turn my hand to anything. Perhaps that is one of its secrets. It educates, in the widest, broadest sense, and does not push people into moulds.

VII. BETTY (CRAWFORD) STUDHOLME, 1926

THE first memory that is at all vivid when I was a new girl, was of intense cold sleeping at Ancren Gate, going to bed in my bedroom slippers and hoping Miss Croft wouldn't spot their absence under the bed when she came to put out the lights; and of listening miserably to another new girl in the same room sob herself to sleep every night, not—we discovered afterwards—for her home and parents, but for her dogs. I don't remember being terribly happy that first half of term, but a bad start is meant to augur well for the future, and certainly my sorrow when it came to leaving amounted to real anguish.

When I look back and try to remember incidents during my time at Downe I find they are all connected with feeling; small set-backs and little triumphs which seemed vast and momentous at the time but now seem utterly trivial.

The greatest shame I think came when I was quite near the top of the school which

made it all the worse. It must have been during the winter or we would have been writing letters outside in the woods after lunch on Sunday. As it happened I and some friends had appropriated a music room. My fountain pen can't have been working because I carried down a bottle of ink. The next morning after prayers one of the Seniors announced that someone had spilt ink all along the cloisters outside the music rooms, and she would be glad to know who it was. There was a deathly pause which nobody broke. My conscience was as free as that of every other girl in the hall, and it wasn't until I started collecting books for the morning's work that I suddenly realized that the fingers of one hand were badly stained with ink. During the morning break I rushed to look at the marks on the cloister floor. Yes, they started outside the right music room door; and checking up on the bottle of ink I found it half empty with a very loose cap. Covered with shame and confusion I told the first Senior I saw before lunch that it must have been I who spilt the ink. Quite naturally she showed her pain—not that the cloisters were in a mess, but that I hadn't owned up after prayers. It was no good stammering that it had been dark and I hadn't realized. . . .

The games lists had gone up for the afternoon's play. I had to go and find Miss Furnival and tell her I couldn't play because I had to scrub the cloisters. I was given a scrubbing-brush, a bucket of water, and a bottle of 'Milton' and told to go on scrubbing till all the spots had gone. The trail was a long one and I can't have been very good at scrubbing because it took me most of the afternoon and all the young fry seemed to have returned to gaze at me before I'd finished. I've never met 'Milton' since, but if they did produce the stuff in New Zealand, I'm quite sure I wouldn't have it in the house.

Games loomed very large in my youth, so I suppose it wasn't odd that one of my few triumphs was concerned with them. The cricket eleven were playing their annual match at Kingsclere against the team got up by the two Brocklebank sisters. The school team batted first and didn't make any great score. Then came our opponents and by this time quite a crowd of villagers had collected round the green to watch. One of the Brocklebank sisters went in first with another member of the team. We made fairly short shrift of the latter, and her place was taken by the other Brocklebank sister. My recollection is that these two were big strong women, and they knew how to bat in a big strong way. Bowler after bowler was put on to try to get them out, but they treated every ball that came down the pitch alike; with a great swipe they sent it to the boundary, often lifting it far over everyone's heads. There seemed a sort of hopeless invulnerability about them, and the scoreboard showed a shocking number of runs to their credit. I was fielding at mid-on, and after they had been in for what seemed hours, a ball came down only just on the leg side. With the usual gusto, up came the bat behind, and away went the ball straight at me, but miles over my head. Instinctively I put one hand up and jumped in the air, and to my amazement, when I landed, I had the ball in my hand. So surprised was I that, for a split second, I didn't realize why the onlookers were cheering.

It was with exactly the same surprise that I'd discovered the ink on my fingers—which only goes to show what a mutt I must have been. . . .

As I say, most actual incidents seem to have merged into a mist of triviality. Friendships were important, and the staff loomed pretty large on one's horizon. I can remember the music-making and how enraptured I was when the choral society ended their carols with *In Dulce Jubilo* sung in parts as they walked farther away into the dark night, their voices getting fainter and fainter until there was silence. I remember the thermometer queues with Madame or little Sister at the end of them; the expeditions to Silchester and to Savernake Forest with Miss Heather; the performances of the Gym. VIII; being at Mademoiselle's table for lunch; the way Pomade Divine was plastered on every cut, bruise, sprain, ache, pain, or abrasion with apparently magic effect; the woman who talked to us about 'marse and sparse' and told us to hold up our diaphragms; leaping up the steps in the cloisters by the chapel in huge strides; sleeping in Big-Dorm.; Miss Croft's face when I day-dreamed while hand-pumping the organ for her in evening Chapel, and her music just stopped; the kaleidoscopic effect of the whole school in their multi-coloured summer tunics; the glutinous egg dish we had on certain days of the week for the evening meal.

But that which comes uppermost in my mind when I think of Downe are—the beauty of the surrounding countryside and—Miss Willis.

Perhaps it was because we didn't live in real country at home that I so revelled in the woods. Going back after nearly thirty years it doesn't seem quite the same now—so much building has been going on all round. But I'll never forget the road to Ancren Gate frozen stiff with a white white frost rimming all the russet broken bracken; or a huge full moon behind the pines along the drive as you listened to Miss Nickel's voice calling, '*Pe-e*-ter, *Pe-e*-ter' to a recalcitrant dog; or the rides through the Beatrix Potter woods where we used to run if the ground was too wet to play games; or the common where Miss Bedford and Miss Hedges lived where we picked blackberries in the autumn; or the hot Sunday afternoon's sprawl under the tender green fronds of bracken below the Greek theatre with the cuckoo calling in the woods beyond.

And now to put down a few, a very few, memories of Miss Willis. I can remember her, very gay and witty, talking to us Seniors during the Sunday coffee session. I remember her acting every part with such an infectious delight as she read *Nicholas Nickleby* to us in the drawing-room of an evening. I remember her look of pity when I sent in a blank exercise book on the occasion when I could make neither head nor tail of any single line in a poem of Browning's. I can remember her blunt, like a cold bath, when I falteringly told her of some anxiety during one of my 'jaws'; and solemn in Chapel reading the prayers or the lessons; and heart-rendingly sincere in her sermons. I can remember her rising to her feet with great dignity to thank a visiting artist. I can remember with what charm she talked to parents; and above all I can remember her smile.

Of her teaching, one theme stands out over the years. I am bold enough now to

suggest that the whole inspiration of the school was based on it—namely, to encourage us to try to equip ourselves to render service in some shape or form, to whatever community we afterwards found ourselves in. We were given a purpose in life. We were told why we were put into the world. Our least talent was fostered. *And*, not least, we were shown beauty in art, literature, and music.

When the last day at Downe came, and we were bundled into the train for Scotland, I relived every precious day of my last week, every word of my last 'jaw'; and I can remember nursing what I thought then was a broken heart, as I looked out at the flying scenery with unseeing eyes.

VIII. PRISCILLA (HAYTER) NAPIER, 1926

A COLLECTION of reminiscences on the same subject must be obtrusively personal if it is not to be boringly repetitive. I will make no further apology for mine.

I went to Downe in the summer of 1921, when I was twelve years old. Although my naturally scattered wits had been sharpened by an upbringing in the valley of the Nile, I was wholly unprepared for school life. I had read the complete works of Sir Walter Scott, but no school stories. I did not know how to pronounce Jack Buchanan, and I joined the school train at Charing Cross carrying a fern (*Asplenium obovatum*) in a flower-pot. In addition, as I quickly became aware, everyone else in the school wore pyjamas while I still wore nightgowns. But such was the tolerance and humanity of Downe that I was at once and almost continuously happy there.

The old Downe had a calm prospect over Kentish fields, and a large lawn, shaded by an ilex- and a mulberry-tree. In that baking summer of 1921 we ran about on the dried-up lawn in our bathing-dresses and were sprayed with a hose. Behind the ilex-tree was a fine walled garden with fruit trees, in which Miss Ewing, the history mistress, a gentle aloof character who seemed very very old and was probably under sixty, assisted us to find chaffinches' nests. This, and the discovery that I could run faster than most of my colleagues, assuaged my feelings about the nightgowns. The old Downe had previously belonged to Charles Darwin; in the Third Form we tried, unsuccessfully, to feel interested about this.

I had been well taught before Downe, but the lessons of Miss Willis were a revelation to me of what teaching could be. It was as if one had swum suddenly out of a narrow river into the limitless sea. This freedom was not popular with all the parents, and there was a splendidly disapproving mamma from the eastern counties who removed her two daughters on the grounds that they were being encouraged to think for themselves.

After my first year we moved to the new Downe, which seemed to me even more strikingly beautiful than the old. We were surrounded by continuous soft sound, the

fir-trees wept in wet weather and sighed in fine; the wood pigeons incessantly cooed. The Lower Fourth emulated none of these sounds, and were for ever being told to make rather less noise. Added stimulus to hilarity was given by the fact that the house had previously been occupied by an Order of Silence, the lockers still had labels with names like Sister Aloysia and Sister Valeria upon them. All that was lacking was a little animal life; Miss Willis's Samoyedes though plentiful and undisciplined were remote unconfiding dogs. There was a large pool in the middle of the cloisters. 'Dear Harrods,' we wrote, 'please send us three goldfish, all of different sexes, habituated to an outdoor life.' Our parents were electrified by the bill, and the goldfish died almost immediately of over attention. Or perhaps their lives were too complicated, with all those sexes, and they died of headache.

Life, this first summer at Cold Ash, was dominated by the water situation. There was not nearly enough of it, except for the goldfish, and people had to share the same bath-water. The machine which was boring for further supplies chugged night and day; the faces of Miss Willis and Miss Heather wore harassed expressions. Nor were there nearly enough class-rooms; we learnt biology and Old Testament at the top of the water-tower, and it was here that a shameful incident took place.

Our form, or the major part of it, had been from the first almost continuously in hot water, as if, in some previous existence, we had all been tropical fish. A spice was lent to our delinquency by the fact that one of us was Miss Willis's niece. Looking back I feel that our behaviour, though in no way original or charming, was insufficiently sinister to have caused the alarm and dismay that in fact ensued among the teaching staff. From afar it seems innocent and ordinary and was rarely dangerous. At the old Downe, where walks were organized, we would give authority the slip and go down to the village post office to buy a chocolate cock, crack walnuts during French lessons, imitate the voices of eccentric Mums singing in Chapel, or throw mugs of dirty paint water over each other. We made fires in the attic loft with melted candle grease in tin basins, watching with fascination to see how nearly the leaping flames reached to the rafters. We only once set the school on fire, and it burned for a mere five minutes. We put it out unaided, fetching water from the bathroom in jugs while a small heroic contingent remained behind to spit. The episode of the mules was, I think, our first piece of mental cruelty. We were taught Old Testament history by a vague pious lady wearing a peasant blouse whom any child with a spark of decent feeling would have treated with consideration. One fine summer morning on the top floor of the water-tower she told us to write down in our note-books that the Children of Israel had neither horses nor donkeys but relied for their transport entirely upon mules. I was not the only member of the Lower Fourth who had been raised in the gorgeous East and knew how mules were bred. This heaven-sent howler kept us off the subject of Rehoboam for a happy twenty-five minutes and was followed by a major row.

The unselfconsciousness of childhood is necessarily doomed, but its departure is always painful. Very soon after I came to Downe my letters home ceased asking, 'What

is being done about Saad Zaghlul?', and 'Is Hussein watering my apricot trees properly?' and start expatiating with surprise and alarm upon the apparently dreadful state of my soul. I had been faintly aware of being a bad hat, even in the Nile valley, where the presence of Syrian and Cypriot children makes the competition in wickedness unusually fierce, but I had no idea of being morally beyond the pale until I came to Downe. From time to time Miss Willis would suggest, in the most urbane terms, that I should go away and have myself educated somewhere else, but I knew that she was too kind-hearted to press this point.

Our good marks, for work, and our bad marks, for ill behaviour, were read out before the assembled school every Sunday after lunch. Miss Willis had a restrained dramatic delivery that was immensely effective. 'Number forty-five,' she would read out after my name, speaking in a low toneless voice, as if the words were too horrible to utter, 'Untidiness, forty-six, forty-seven, forty-eight, untidiness, forty-nine, being late for Chapel, fifty, disobedience, fifty-one, bad manners to Mademoiselle. . . .' One was properly chastened, for about thirty-six hours.

It is now assumed that children behave badly because they come from bad homes, or are friendless, lonely, or misunderstood. I had no such excuse. My home was serenely happy, and my contemporaries at Downe, once they had said their fill about the fern and the nightgowns, revealed themselves as charming and intelligent characters who have become lifelong friends. I had not even the excuse of boredom. I delighted in school life. The work was easy and interesting and I loved the games. It was all the same perfectly imperative, about once every three weeks, to lay hold of the nearest spanner and throw it plumb into the works. I seemed to have to make trouble, even if it was only in my ruthless determination to be taught Greek, which was not on the curriculum.[1] The truth is that bad behaviour is fun. It is fascinating to raise Cain, specially when it becomes clear that such behaviour is going to get a rise out of every grown-up within range. 'If ever a child was born to annoy its teachers', Miss Willis wrote to my mother, 'she is that one.' I was for ever plodding up the cloisters towards a floor known as Middle West, sent to Miss Willis in disgrace for exploding a balloon in a French lesson, or for whistling and banging my desk during algebra. Such behaviour was boring, childish, and unnecessary, but it still seems to me that the pain and despondency that it occasioned amongst the staff was disproportionate. I was constantly made to feel that my soul was in danger, if not already irretrievably lost, which engenders the desire to have a run for one's money. Miss Willis had an engaging, if inadvisable, habit of taking one into her confidence during the process of a row. I was, she told me, without exception the most tiresome and difficult child she had ever had in the school. At the same time, she assured me, the staff were all very fond of me. These two facts should have been rigidly withheld from me. The capacity of adolescents in happy circumstances for remaining unmoved by adult affection is almost unlimited. They regard it as part of the natural scheme of things, like four square meals a day, and a roof overhead

[1] For which there was no time.

at night. And the knowledge of my unique tiresomeness afforded me a kind of sombre pride, and at the same time acted as a challenge. Difficult? Tiresome? They had not, I decided, seen anything yet.

What I needed, of course, was someone more on the lines of Dr. Keate. The staff could have spared themselves much trouble by playing my activities down, and above all, by not minding so deeply. I should have been kept in, when everyone else was having fun outside, writing out long pages from the stonier passages of Dryden, but Miss Willis had, I think, too great a respect for English literature to employ it for such a purpose.

Imperceptibly, on our way through the Lower Fifth, Remove, and the Upper Fifth, we began to grow up. Less of our free time was spent in throwing balls at each other, in standing on our hands; abstract discussion, of a sort, became the order of the day. 'Superficially,' we would begin, 'you may be right, but fundamentally. . . .' After supper, while we sat in the drawing-room and darned our stockings, Miss Willis would read aloud from Dickens with incomparable skill. We were encouraged to read widely, but our taste in literature tended to be narrow. Miss Willis once asked the assembled upper school in turn, in the middle of a general knowledge lesson, to say who their favourite contemporary poet was. The answer, in 90 per cent. of cases, was Rudyard Kipling. The Upper Fifth, who had a reputation for eccentricity to maintain, plumped for Francis Thompson, Rupert Brooke, or even, in extreme cases, for James Elroy Flecker.

'Would you', we would ask each other, during those endless calm summer evenings looking down over the valley with its toy train and its stiff Noah's Ark cows, 'Would you, ever, really, actually, *be* someone else?'

'Not altogether. I would like to have a mind like Professor Gilbert Murray, and legs like Edna Best.'

'If you had a mind like Professor Gilbert Murray you wouldn't *want* legs like Edna Best.'

'How do you know? You've never been Professor Gilbert Murray.'

'Well superficially, of course, I haven't, but fundamentally. . . . Shall we, after all, play tennis?'

Our confirmation loomed ahead. I had, inevitably, been involved in a tremendous row for exclaiming, 'Oh dash, what a bore', in an insufficiently low voice, on being informed that a confirmation class that evening was to replace a projected rehearsal of *The Rivals*. 'Intellectually,' Miss Willis wrote to my parents, 'she is ready for confirmation, but spiritually. . . .' My parents, who thought me good-hearted, if intractable, were concerned. The candidates, twenty-eight strong, set off for Oxford in a bus. It was a beautiful day, the bus flicked across the Berkshire downs, one wondered whether it was all right to be enjoying the ride. My parents and young sister had come back from Egypt in time for the confirmation; in my joy at seeing them again the issue became very slightly confused. Someone's uncle was a don at Christ Church, we changed into our white clothes in a room overlooking Tom Quad, which was bathed

in delectable March sunshine. Everything, momentarily, became real and made sense, and the Bishop preached a sermon which I remembered for quite ten days.

During the stormy miserable months that followed my father's death, I was treated by all the staff at Downe with exemplary patience and kindness. I tried desperately hard to be good, with results which were wholly disastrous.[1] I became, if possible, ruder, more unpunctual, untidier, less co-operative. I lost all my school books, I never remembered to give in my work, back answers shot from me like rockets. I had a sense of intolerable abandonment; I fought like a tiger against a world where such things could happen. Miss Willis reacted in a calm, kind, far-sighted manner; she assured my mother that I would come right in the end, and that she did not so much mind *what* I was like at school. Her deliverance from my excessive disagreeableness was at hand, and it came from an unexpected quarter.

Downe was, in form at least, a democracy. We were administered by seven or eight Seniors, elected by the whole school. Replacements for the leaving ones were voted for at the end of each term. The results were, as I came to know when I was myself a Senior and assisted in the counting of the votes, sometimes adjusted by Miss Willis. This plan was wholly satisfactory; Miss Willis was supplied with a sort of Gallup Poll of the state of opinion in the school, and the school had the illusion of self-government without the burden of having to live under its grosser mistakes. There was never any canvassing, everyone in a small school knows each other already far too well. But there was plenty of discussion, as the terms drew to a close, and the most down-trodden individuals felt a sense of importance and power. Their votes were as good as the votes of the haughty Upper Sixth.

Even those children who are least susceptible to adult influence can, in the long run, be got at through their contemporaries. When I was fourteen, I had observed with interest that the Seniors of that day, Olivia Noel-Paton, Susan Norman-Butler, Margaret Pryor, Elizabeth Palmer, Cicely Bevan, were persons not unworthy of esteem. They were intelligent, charming, and athletic; they even seemed, in their remote, Olympian way, to be having fun. They seemed able to laugh and to enjoy life without finding it necessary to break a window with a cricket ball every second day, without dropping pillows from upper windows upon the heads of the domestic staff. They were soon succeeded by a lesser generation against whom it was a duty and a delight to remain in a state of constant rebellion, but the impression remained.

In the Lent term when I was sixteen, nearly all the Seniors of the Upper Sixth were leaving, and the choice for next term's Seniors lay between our Lower Sixth, intelligent but unruly, and the Upper Fifth, older, more responsible, and quieter. One evening when I was having a bath I heard two people in the next bath discussing my prospects of election. 'Her?' said one of them, 'I wouldn't dream of voting for her. She can't even control herself, let alone anyone else.'

The speaker was a character universally considered to be of no account, but her

[1] Good behaviour, like bicycling, is more easily learnt when one is around seven.

words were true, and they went home, although I repeated them mockingly to my colleagues. A week later, in her address to the assembled electorate, Miss Willis told us that what the school wanted as Seniors were steady, reliable, helpful characters. Not even my buoyant self-confidence could recognize my self in such a portrait, and I was right. When the votes were counted the Lower Sixth were unplaced. The Upper Fifth romped home on a tight rein.

This triumph of the good citizen made a deep and immensely salutary impression. The new Seniors, though very nice, were understandably nervous; the temptation felt by the Lower Sixth to cry havoc was very great. It was resisted, but the strain began to tell, and I was about to go native once more when I was smartly out-generalled by Miss Willis. 'What the school needs in its Seniors', she informed it, at the end of that summer term, 'is initiative, intellectual curiosity, independence of mind. . . .'

The final year at school is a pleasant time. One has at last come to terms with this cosy, small, light-hearted world. Horizons widen, and friends become greater friends. We began to read Chekov, *Vogue*, a *Short History of Italian Painting*, and the *Origin of Species*; to powder our noses and to speculate about the outside world. So-and-so, we decided, quite erroneously, was certain to get married first. In November, excellently taught by Miss Elliott, I got a history scholarship at Lady Margaret Hall. In 1925 this was such an unusual event that the school was given a whole holiday in celebration. This should have been the climax of my school career, but it fell very damp and flat, like a large piece of snow sliding off a roof. I was aware of being still spiritually sub-standard, and I would far rather have been given my Lacrosse Colours. I had a suspicion, subsequently confirmed, that women's colleges at Oxford were not all that Miss Willis cracked them up to be. The school, however, took the holiday in the right spirit, and eleven people were in bed next day with chills and indigestion.

I owe Downe an immense debt, and I have only one un-serious criticism to make. We were encouraged to talk. To be able to make conversation at table was regarded as a matter of personal prestige. To be dumb was to be a poor fish. The result was that making conversation became, in many of us, an ineradicable nervous habit. To this day, the briefest lull at a luncheon or dinner party is instantly filled by me with remarks of an inanity which startles even my children. Into the silence of any difficult situation, sacred or profane, my voice can be heard uncontrollably pointing out how late the daffodils are this year. This is a grave disadvantage, and it has long been my ambition to award a valuable annual prize at Downe for the most consistently silent girl.

IX. ANNE (BRADBY) RIDLER, 1930

I CAME after the Age of Pioneers, but during what could still perhaps have been called the Age of Improvisation. I had a term and a half of Chapel in the cloisters; then, after the newly built Chapel had been dedicated, we had a percussive accompaniment to services in wet weather, from drip-catching buckets placed at various points. Like Marvell's *Antipodes in shoes*, we carried our mattresses on our heads from Ancren Gate to the House for sleeping out. There were 120 girls in the school; the Library had not then been built, nor the Concert Room, nor the new wing: we sat in the music rooms or in our form rooms, we ate in what is now the Common Room. Tables were round, and at my first meal I was surprised to see the plates pass through a dozen hands, starting on the helper's left, to end up on her right. (Well, what else would you do?) I was also puzzled to find that one could not ask for the butter, but must make an elaborate pretence of offering it to one's neighbour, and hope that she would take the hint. (I believe that this strange convention still persists: whence did it arise? and whence the linguistic—one might almost say existentialist—peculiarity that at Downe things did not *take*, but *were*, the Bun?) Then, the distance was unbelievably blue and still unexplored; the bilberries were perpetually ripe and all cricket matches were played in sunshine; there were red squirrels in the woods; we knotted our counterpanes and slid from the windows at Ancren Gate—sitting round Miss Croft's fire there in the winter provided a taste of home. On summer Sundays you could ask for sausages and take a picnic breakfast with a friend; if you had a garden you might sometimes tend it instead of playing cricket. I liked cricket, but found it a trial to have to play organized games every day.

Speaking of the gardens—there was once a competition, with prizes offered for the best. On the day before the judge was to appear, the owner of one neglected patch picked flowers from the school beds and stuck them artfully into the soil. But the judge delayed her inspection for a week, the flowers were all withered, the deceiver did not win a prize. So, thought I, the righteous are not forsaken. And even if justice was not always so comprehensible in its operation at school, we were in this given a foretaste of the way of the world. That is one of the functions of a school, and Miss Willis rightly wished to make us self-reliant and ready for the unexpected: yet I have seldom found the world at large so unpredictable as Downe House seemed to me then. From the moment when we turned in at the gates to see Miss Nickel among the pines like a piece from a Russian folk-tale, life was full of surprises. One never knew what fresh name might be given to one's form, nor what kind of reward for well-doing or deterrent to ill would be devised; nor, indeed, what subject one might have taken up or abandoned. In my apprehensive and chilblain-ridden early years, life at school was sometimes disturbing, but no kindness can shield the time of growth from pain, and I think that life at Downe as I knew it was on the whole wonderfully propitious to growth.

The years, then, were between 1924 and 1930, and some of the figures or customs of which I speak are already legends to the present generation. But then, are they not legendary also to myself? We can never hope to give an accurate account of our early life: we hold a skein tangled with the contemporary and the retrospective, and can at best only try to separate a few threads of each and allow them to differ. Memory is apt to pick out, like a sundial, the sunny hours of school life, and the prime radiance comes from the figure of Olive Willis—a person whom a new girl once neatly described as 'liked but respected'. Here are memories of those inappropriately named 'jaws', which could last any time from ten minutes to two hours: from my first, when she thoughtfully surveyed the battered toes of my brown shoes and provided me with a banana—'you eat the banana and then rub the skin on your shoe'—to my last, when she thoughtfully surveyed my whole self and uttered a true prophecy: 'I expect you will marry, but not until you are about twenty-five: the young men, they do like 'em *sweet*.' How had she such a store of affection, that the hundred-and-fiftieth kiss she might have given in an evening, was never mechanical? that she made each of us, from the oldest senior to the stupidest or scruffiest newcomer, feel that we were of prime importance to her? Nothing altered that, even though, in the press on her attention, she might sometimes apparently forget that she had taken hold of one's hand, and might walk up the hall between the standing ranks of girls, holding the forgotten hand like a strap attached to one of those perpetually errant Samoyedes, in a firm but absentminded clasp. The most gruelling day, the most tedious parents, could not exhaust her vitality: it seemed to me that she never found anyone a bore. And then there were her English lessons, so full of the rapture of the subject and so unfettered by syllabus, and her admirably musical reading aloud.

I have some old letters by which I have tried to confirm or correct my memory. One gives a different view of lessons, which was evidently sometimes taken by my thirteen-year-old self. 'We have had two rather awful English preps. One was from Miss Wale, we had to write a paragraph on either "Love me love my dog" or "A stitch in time saves nine". I don't know how to write on that, she hadn't explained it in the lesson or anything. The other prep was from Miss Willis for scripture. We had to find certain places in St. Matthew, and taking them discuss the necessity for prayer. I don't know how to do that either.' Another letter describes an enchanting evening when the Musical Society performed *The Pedlar* (music by Martin Shaw, text taken from *The Winter's Tale*) on the lawn outside St. Peter's, in perfect weather that ended in a thunderstorm. I remember the enchantment but not the storm. Yet I discern, through the fog of superlatives in which the young, lacking grown-up cunning, are forced to make their revelations, that those memories of joy—of outings and explorations, of tree-climbing in the woods, of sleeping out in the cloisters ('I slept on the bier Alcestis dies on in the play . . . the Great Bear was just above us . . .'), above all of the talks with Miss Willis and of the music we made and heard with those splendid teachers Miss Gunn and Miss Read—are true and no invention of later years.

X. JACOBINE (MENZIES WILSON) SACKVILLE WEST, 1938

THE present generation at Downe, being too young to be my friends and older than the children of my contemporaries, are unknown to me. But I sometimes speculate about them. Would they remind me of my own generation of twenty years ago? I suspect that, in matters of dress and sophistication, they are far in advance of what we were. Do they, for instance, still submit to thick cotton stockings worn with their private clothes, or have they stood out for nylon? (Not that it was really submission in our case; I don't think we *minded* about them, and indeed their greater resistance to holes and ladders probably recommended them to me at that age.) Do the present generation have their hair, if not permanently waved, at least well cut, or do they wear it pudding basin style or lankly in elf-locks as we did? You had to be very pretty to stand up to the clothes and hair-dressing of our time; *I* was far too fat and not remotely pretty, and whenever I come across a photograph of myself at the age of fifteen I hurriedly burn it. But, if many of us were odd and unattractive to look at, we were supremely unselfconscious about it, and enjoyed a sartorial peace of mind only achieved by me more recently in A.T.S. uniform or maternity clothes. There is probably a good deal to be said for postponing those tortured little cries of 'I haven't *anything* to wear', and 'I simply can't do a *thing* with my hair', until later in life. And I don't know that we should have been very much better equipped for life by virtue of having discovered exactly the right lipstick for wear with a djibbah.

When I look back over these twenty years to my schooldays, I find that I am digging around in a sort of rich compost heap of memories of Downe. I have a general impression of having been very happy. But my schooldays were not—emphatically they were not—the happiest days of my life. On the whole—and I think most normal people would agree about this—it's much nicer *not* to be at school. As a matter of fact, I am teased by a recurrent dream of finding myself back at school, generally unwanted and of undefined status because of my great age, but subject to the restrictions of school life. And although it is undoubtedly necessary, it isn't pleasurable, even at the right age, to have to sew name and number tapes on one's belongings, to do what one is told without much question and to learn mathematics when one is a mathematical moron. I am suspicious not only of the people who were happier at school than they have been since, but of the schools which produced them. I think one should be able to say of a really good school that one was happy there, but not happiest. After all, your school is supposed to help you to grow up.

Growing up is not, of course, an entirely comfortable process—either for yourself or for your elders. You are so unsure of what you are and what you believe that you tend to be aggressive about the views you are embracing at that moment. And my generation were growing up in an uncomfortable period of history, the nineteen-thirties. War in China, Abyssinia, and Spain, the spread of Communism and of Nazi-ism, all

formed part of the background to our schooldays, in much the same way as the fear of the hydrogen bomb seems to haunt the schoolchildren of today. We couldn't help being aware of the deepening anxiety of our elders, and soon we began to share that anxiety in a way which would have been unthinkable in the children of thirty years before. Although we used to say, 'She's so *earnest*', as a term of opprobrium at that time (this corresponded to the 'She's so *keen*', of my later military career), yet we were in some ways extraordinarily serious-minded. We were also so sharply aware of what was likely to happen that I don't think any of us seriously thought that we should be able to emerge from school into the easy untroubled life that many of us might have enjoyed if we'd been born a few years earlier. So we were that much more independent, realizing that however little we might hanker for careers (I personally wanted nothing more than to shelter at home) we were going to have to put up with them. We weren't at all militant about them; I think we accepted them in much the same spirit as we later accepted everything, disagreeable or otherwise, that the war brought with it.

Although we weren't militant about Careers for Women, we were militant about lots of other things. So many new worlds were being opened to us (how wise it was, by the way, to have people teaching at Downe who had done other things besides teach), and we were casting round wildly in them for our opinions. We gathered a great many opinions, and we held them passionately. Pacifism and Socialism were particularly fashionable at the time, I remember, perhaps because the Conservatives were in office. We became very hot and angry over fox-hunting, over whether large sums of money should be spent on the attempted ascent of Everest, and over the usefulness of the royal family. I remember explaining to somebody that it would, of course, be impossible for me to be presented at Court, since I was anti-monarchist. (My mother did not press the matter of my presentation; I believe she almost felt that I might be capable of secreting a small bomb in the folds of my train.) We worried over the failure of successive governments to clear the slums of industrial towns, over the power of advertisers in the national press, and over the fact that Eton was unwilling to accept the brilliant sons of slightly disreputable miners. And that, I think, was one of the very good things about Downe. Your opinions, however violent and immature they may have been, were taken seriously, though not necessarily agreed with. That seems to me to be exactly as it should be; after all, however young you are, it does matter what you think.

Serious-minded we may have been in my generation about a great many things. Yet, when I think back, I realize that we enjoyed also a sort of lingering childishness which was probably a form of relief. When I recall some of the jokes which sent us reeling with laughter round the cloisters, I can only suppose that those who taught us must sometimes have despaired. I can best describe those jokes by saying that Miss Nancy Mitford's reports of the conversation of Jassy and Victoria in *Love in a Cold Climate* have such a ring of truth to me that my amusement is almost agonizing. But whatever the quality of our jokes may have been, we were in no doubt about them; we knew they were exquisitely funny. My memory tells me that during the six years I spent at Downe,

my friends and I laughed a great deal. We also chatted a great deal. This may or may not have been a waste of time; but it established a habit of sociability which I, personally, have never regretted.

Perhaps because we were so sociable, we were very much creatures of fashion; not fashion in clothes, of course—for *they* weren't fashionable as an interest. In our generation it was, for instance, considered boring to talk about games. You might be good at games—even gaining a certain grudging respect for athleticism—but you must not talk about them. On the other hand, if you were good at acting you might talk about it as much as you pleased. It was also fashionable to be musical and impecunious—particularly impecunious. I can remember how dreadfully ashamed I was of my father's large motor-car, whereas my brother (then at his private school) was busily spreading round the story that there were other much larger motor-cars tucked away in various family garages; I think it is quite likely that he also hinted at a private aeroplane and a yacht with twin diesel engines. But my sister and I should greatly have preferred it if our parents had come to visit us in an aged snub-nosed Morris Cowley with a dickey. And we were painfully envious of the daughter of a clergyman, whose father was rumoured to have so many children and so little money that he did not pay income tax.

It was also very fashionable to be what might be called 'a character'. It was high praise to say that somebody was 'rather eccentric'. We looked upon absence of mind and unpunctuality as proofs of intellect. (I myself was, and always have been, pathologically punctual, but I used to force myself to be late from time to time, lest I should be suspected of dullness and conventionality.) We entertained our parents with stories, some of them true, of the curious behaviour of the staff at Downe. We told them that Miss Nickel slept in a bath, with a pile of books for a pillow; that Mademoiselle Agobert threw chalk, books, and ink-pots at us and crashed the blackboard down upon our defenceless heads when we did not know our irregular verbs; that Madame was wont to lean over the gallery of the dining-room dangling some fearful object (say, a suspender) crying, ''Oo is 'e?' and then, in tones of deepening despair, ''E must be *somebody*'. We also, so my mother used to assure me, told her that practically everybody in the school whom we knew and liked was 'quite mad'. In her innocence she believed this, and formed an impression of classes and classes of amiable mental defectives. It must have surprised her that most of us passed our examinations, and that the behaviour of our friends when they came to stay in the holidays was perfectly normal.

I don't know how you could sum up the characteristics of my generation at Downe, except perhaps by saying that we should have been deeply offended if anyone had suggested that such a thing could be done—so individualistic were we. I hope this may mean that it isn't possible to pick out those who were educated at Downe in a crowd of middle-aged women as I (or so I like to believe) can pick out the products of certain other schools by the way they wear their hats, hold their sherry glasses, or greet each other. If it is possible, then it isn't our fault. We certainly did our best to establish our characters, and to avoid becoming what we imagined the average schoolgirl to be.

'What was it like?' we used to ask the lacrosse team, returning from some match at another school. 'Oh, very *schooly*', the answer would come, and there could not be stronger condemnation than that.

XI. RUTH ASPINALL, 1939

SYLVIA HASELL said: 'My father says that it can't go on like this. There's sure to be a war sooner or later.'

In serious moments, such as national crises, we quoted our fathers. Sometimes they were right and sometimes wrong. We knew, perhaps, that their words were not all wise. Nevertheless, the group making toast round the fire in E became suddenly quiet, and the smell of our approaching tea a little less appetizing.

Sylvia's father had been quite right, of course, and on the 20th of September 1939 we found ourselves back at Downe, with seventeen days of war behind us, and an uncertain future. It was my last term and thus the memory of the change-over, with its unique experiments and inevitable difficulties, is all I know of Downe in war-time. But there can never have been another term like that one, and it is very memorable.

My form were no longer in E by this time. We were the Lower Sixth, and had risen to enjoy the exalted heights of C—for a little while. No longer did we sit at desks. We had a table, meditation chairs, and, best of all, an entirely new issue of boards upon which to inscribe our initials, drawings, and whatever—by school standards—slightly risqué poems occurred to us.

But of this, or of the delightful nine days we were to spend in the 'Hallrooms' sitting-room, I knew nothing when, on the desolate and wet 20th of September, I arrived alone, and much earlier than anyone else, to find an empty school. I remember standing in the deserted vestibule inwardly cursing my luck that I should have drawn the wrong side of Bottom South in which to sleep during my last term—a prey to all sorts of doubts. Who would come back? I was seventeen, ought I myself to be here? Or should I have stayed at home to help on the land, in the canteen, or simply with the dusting?

In the end other people came back too, though some did not. From our form we had lost Gill Sankey, Jean Mellalieu, Mary Morrison, Hope Godman, and Margaret Taylor. But there was an unexpected set of newcomers, for many of those who did return brought with them their very little sisters. Cynthia Acland, Francesca Bonsey, and Elizabeth Page were among these, and some of them I remember were only nine years old at the time. To us they looked very small indeed.

Among the older ones, the Seniors, the Middle Sixth, and ourselves, I found much of the same unrest as was in myself. The war effort had started, how could we become part of it?

The first answer was knitting. Everybody knitted. Needles and wool, airforce blue, navy, and khaki, tumbled out of lockers, lay on chairs, piled up in 'Confiscation', grew

in willing hands into scarves, socks, and seaboot stockings. Arthur Askey obligingly brought out a song which ran, 'I'm a little nit-wit, knitting all the day', and it could not have been more appropriate. For we knitted in Break, in Rest, whilst we watched films on Saturday evenings and also during all our lessons. I do not think that our work suffered from it, and certainly the Forces Comforts Funds must have been swelled by an enormous flow of garments from Downe—for our speed was incredible and competitive.

Secondly, we did what was known as our war work. I think there were four different types open to us. Certainly there were lists to be signed. But of the four I can only remember 'the land', for that, being the one I knew something about, was the one I chose. So the lists were gathered in, and Downe's voluntary Land Army set to work.

We picked up eggs from line upon line of chicken-houses. We dug patches ready to receive vegetables for the nation's food-supply, though I, coming from the rich red earth of Devon, regarded the brown flint-laden soil which I turned up with the utmost suspicion. I did not believe that anything would grow in it, and I have never discovered whether it did!

We lifted a field of mangel wurzels too—not the whole field, I think, for it was a very large one—but I remember going down there one afternoon when torrents of rain had put an end to any thought of 'field'. We returned with aching backs, tired, furiously hungry, plastered with mud from head to foot, but triumphant. This was the real thing —total war!

Downe, like England, had been unprepared for war, and if we had our problems, those of the people responsible for the school must have been far greater. Anyone who has ever seen South, glowing like a ship, on a dark night, will recognize the first of these. How were we, who must have borne every resemblance to a hard-working factory when seen at night from the air, to be made invisible? How were all those windows to be darkened?

Darkened they were, almost totally, by the use of navy blue bulbs in the bedrooms, and we, of course, were darkened too.

At the beginning of term we were asked not to try to read by our blackout lights, but the request was quite unnecessary. It was quite impossible to read anywhere in our bedrooms, even in the very middle of the room where a merciful gleam came from the middle of the bulb to form a little pool of light one foot in diameter! Indeed, we could scarcely see one another. It was difficult to recognize Mary Alsop, Elizabeth Home, and Kirsty Mackenzie in the blue-grey faces which looked at me across our room. It was the same for the whole school, but I maintain that it was worse for the poor troglodytes of the wrong side of Bottom South. For Bottom South on the wrong side is never very bright on the sunniest day, and this was winter. What our hair must have looked like I hate to think, for I do not believe that we saw ourselves in the mirror throughout the term!

We were merry nevertheless, and our room possessed one (literally) enormous asset. Elizabeth Home owned a wireless set.

In these days, with wireless sets so much smaller and cheaper, it is probable that many return to Downe every term. But in 1939 they did not. Only a rare and envied few had them, and I think our room was the only one in Bottom South to possess a set.

Elizabeth's was a vast affair, which no one could have ever called portable! It ran off the light, attached by a huge wire which hung across the middle of the room, while lesser wires festooned the walls, to form aerials and earths. Movement was restricted while it was playing, and it was better to sit, or else to lie down, but I am sure that no wireless before or since has ever given its listeners more pleasure. During those, certainly not long, but dark and bookless evenings, we curled up on our beds, listening to Elizabeth's wireless, and I can remember that on nights when the programme called 'Band Wagon' was on, we carried it, with much groaning, into the passage, where it entertained a growing audience.

For a few weeks at the beginning of term we listened daily to another wireless programme—the news. At what time this event occurred I cannot remember, but I think it must have been during tea, for it took place in the dining-room, and there was at that time certainly a 4 o'clock news broadcast. However, these were the days of what was later called 'the phoney war'. There was nothing to report on the news broadcasts and soon these were replaced by a short talk by Miss Willis if anything of note occurred. I don't think that this happened more than once, for nothing of note, from a warlike point of view, did occur. Nothing happened at all, and we walked gaily and foolishly together, singing of how we would 'hang out our washing on the Siegfried Line'. I had left by the time that Hitler began to hang *his* washing all over Europe, so I do not know what Downe sang then.

Like everyone else during the war we took in evacuees. Our evacuees were not quite as other people's. They were not mothers and their children from the poorer districts of the big cities, disorientated, and horrified by the endless silence of the country. They were from London indeed, but they were not London children. They were London young ladies.

Miss Spalding's school from Queen's Gate came to us, as all evacuees came, to escape the probable bombing of London. We were asked to welcome them in a manner fitting to hosts, and I believe that we were friendly enough. We had been brought up to be, by Miss Willis. But somehow our very first view of them in the dining-room, their tidiness and apparent sophistication, gave us a shock from which we never recovered. What their first view of us did to them I alone happen to know, for my cousin was among them. But at the time neither I nor any of the rest of us realized that to the uninitiated a djibbah might seem a very strange garment indeed, or that to Miss Spalding's girls—so much in the minority, and moreover used to living in their own homes, for it was a day school—our noise and abandoned cheerfulness might appear boisterous and alarming. I think Joan, my cousin, was the sole contact between the two

schools, for she spent her evenings and weekends with my friends and me. Otherwise the oil and water situation continued unrelieved throughout my last term. Miss Spalding's school remained at Downe House till the end of the war, when she returned to London and gallantly started again in her war-battered houses in Queen's Gate.

There is not much more to tell. We had air-raid practices of course, and of course there had not then been time to build the shelter, the outward signs of which startled me when last I walked through the vestibule. Bottom South came into its own here, for it had been adjudged at that time the safest place in the event of air-raids. So all we had to do was to stagger out of our bedrooms and sit down upon the floor. It was hardly even necessary to wake up, except for the brief moment of answering to one's name, and our beds had scarcely ceased to be warm when we returned to them.

What happened during the rest of the term and the process of 'leaving' must be familiar to everyone who has ever been to and left Downe. In only one particular did I digress from the usual, and pay tribute to this being a war-time departure. While feeling our way in total darkness *en route* to a farewell party with some of the staff at St. Peter's, I became what must have been one of the very first blackout casualties. I don't know why I should have been the one to walk slap into the iron fire-escape which is, or used to be, nailed on to the end of the house. Perhaps—over venturesome—I was leading. Anyway I received a bump on the head which caused me to see stars for the first and only time in my life, and which left me with a very unicorn appearance for the next ten days.

I have a lump on my forehead to this day left there by the St. Peter's fire-escape. It is the one visible scar I have kept with all my memories of the term that Downe went to war.

XII. HONOR (DE SALIS) WESTMACOTT, 1943

TEN years ago, I nearly threw them away. But yesterday, reading them again, I was glad the diaries had escaped the ruthless bonfires characteristic of a service life. 1940 seems a long time ago until you get back into it.

'Am in cold queue.' (But in the diary I wrote 'quue'.) I suppose I did go to cold queue sometimes, because I remember I used to hope Sister would say, 'Have a bath and come back', which meant that one might get a hot drink. But my great pride was in being one of the tough ones, allowed to wear ankle-socks in the Lent term, and to dry my hair out-of-doors instead of hanging over the fire in the Upper Staff Room, where other people's hair dripped down the back of one's neck. Oh, that toughness. In winter it was the done thing to wear fur gloves on one's hands, but a short-sleeved summer djibbah-blouse, and to scorn those who wrapped cloak over blazer and filled in the cracks with a scarf. Perhaps it isn't surprising that I can remember so clearly the sensation of rubbing chilblains against the edge of the Library tables, or my desk, or whatever surface presented itself.

'Wandered at breakfast.' How could I have forgotten that word, suggestive of a delirious patient, but conveying to me a memory of the tongue-tied new girl, turning her eyes, almost with a prayer, to the head of her table, that she might not be made to wander, and perhaps find that there was nowhere for her to sit until Miss Hughes came to her rescue?

'Tommy went to the San with chicken-pox.' Yes, and Sister bet me 1*s.* that I would get it, and paid me, too, at the end of the term, when I was found surviving.

'Started High Tea, and soup at 8.20.' So we did, but for some reason it only lasted for one term. We used to come down in our dressing-gowns to get our soup, before we listened to the news. The news was a great feature of life during the war, of course, and so was current events, although actually my only memory of them is that I first fathomed the mystery of darning stockings while they were being expounded.

'Did laundry in Choir Practice.' Sad reminder of the undeniable reason why all my children are unmusical. It was part of the eternal fitness of things that growlers should make themselves useful by distributing the clean laundry, while the gifted majority made a more artistic contribution to the school's fresh start on Sunday. There was something rather nice about the quiet, empty buildings, from which one could occasionally hear a line or two of the hymns being sung in Chapel—probably 'God is working His purpose out,' or 'Close by the heedless worker's side'.

'Awful prep-crisis.' No doubt that was when we began to do essays for Miss Poore, and found that they took us at least four forties. Words like 'potential', 'epitome', and 'esoteric' became part of our vocabulary at this time, taking their place beside 'livid', 'wild', and 'grim', which seem to have sufficed to describe most situations and emotions not covered by 'bliss' and 'blissful'. 'Binges', too, occurred frequently, and so did 'blitzes' and of course 'prep-crises'. And the pages of my essays began to be peppered with the pronoun 'one', after Miss Medley had spurned one of us with the remark, 'You are in danger of beginning your essays with "Personally I think . . . .".'

'Discussed Democracy with Miss Joachim. She is rather sorry we are not democrats.' Oh dear! Miss Joachim's mild regrets, however, reveal only one of our deviations.

'Miss Salzer called us heretics.' Could there be a note of complacency in the shameless admission? I hope not!

'Took books down to Hermitage for Mr. Sharwood Smith.' During the war outings were limited, and any excuse was welcome that might take us down that pleasant road on a summer evening, when the wild strawberries grew in the hedges. Besides, we might persuade him to disprove for us that Justice is the Interest of the Stronger. His Plato lessons always left us tied in knots by the Socratic skill to which we were so unequal.

'I think we are going to do a form play. This will take a lot of work-time and I hope we don't.' Unworthy reflection! In the end I thoroughly enjoyed being the infant Sleeping Beauty, in a laundry basket for a cradle, and sporting a pair of borrowed mauve bedsocks.

And work itself wasn't all jam. 'It is hard to believe how bad a day can be. Have got

to take up Latin.' Life must go on, however, even when people discover that there is Latin in their future. 'Did the Drawbridge; looked for purple coat.' Quite separate activities, I imagine, since the smooth grey arching bough of the climbing-tree known as the Drawbridge was no place for wearing purple coats.

'Jumped off the Garden-Room balcony.' I think this time-honoured part of the initiation of a new senior was later discouraged, because we found it too difficult to avoid jumping on Elsie's wallflowers underneath. It was terrifying anyhow. Some of the Garden-Room's other traditional practices were equally questionable. I remember we used to keep our jars of peanut butter and chocolate-spread in the cupboard, with our rulers sticking in them, so that we could assuage the pangs of hunger by licking them between forties. Then when we wanted a ruler we used the edges of the Garden-Room boards.

'Revived Seniors' "Jaws".' I think we did six victims that first morning, and didn't have to do any more for a long time. Though why an unco-operative member of the Lower Fourth should be reduced to tears by the long-winded disapproval of her elders, I really don't know. Perhaps they aren't any more.

'Got everything ready for The Chamber of Horrors.' This was nothing to do with Seniors' 'Jaws'! It was something we did for a fete, and it must have been rather good, as one Early Bed, I remember, retreated after the first few exhibits. I was The Murdered Innocent, in a nightgown daubed with blood, hanging by a rope from a trapdoor in the Garden-Room ceiling. I know the thing I was supposed to rest my feet on was very small, and I had to keep my head on one side all the time, so it was rather exhausting.

'Did Fire-Party.' My only memory of what this entailed is one of sitting in the kitchen eating very new bread and very new cheese, always a valued prerogative of Fire-Party's. But I believe we did check that bathroom windows were shut—or was it open?

'Miss Willis read us *Archie and Mehitabel* after the news.' This was one of the best moments of any Sunday. We took it for granted, of course, that the same voice which inspired us in Chapel, exhorted and instructed us, and addressed us with infinite surprise as 'My *darling* child' when we erred, should finally entertain and enthrall us in the authentic accents of Don Marquis's indefatigable little cockroach.

When I finished the diaries I felt for a moment isolated in time. The present wasn't quite in focus. But the Library, the giant stride, Chapel; the Lent, the summer, the Michaelmas terms were getting out of focus too, like a merry-go-round as it begins to gather speed.

SINCE boarding-school is a part of one's most sheltered past, it is strange, I thought, as I wondered what I should write about Downe, that my memories of it and of the Second World War are inextricably mingled. Thus among my most vivid memories of Downe are the hearing of dramatic news announced by Miss Willis or over the wireless; practice air-raid warnings conducted with enough severity to impress us; Miss Willis's sad, sad face at the High Table on a day she had had to tell some girl of a relation's death in action. These are second-hand childish memories compared with most people's, but they made up nearly all my experience of the war, and it was Miss Willis's special gift to be able to make it seem real and near and terrible; yet, remembering we were children, to preserve our tranquillity. The war was supposed to matter, even when one was at school, just as choir practice, getting your colours for this and that, or being a Senior were supposed to matter.

Perhaps it was this sense of being in touch with the outside world that prevented Downe from being a schooly school in spite of the slang, cliqueyness, and other inevitable, frequently horrible attributes of a girl in the narrow circle of a boarding-school. Also, we were treated more like private individuals than girls in a school—in spite of our green djibbahs. The best and the worst of us spent at least forty minutes every term tête-à-tête with Miss Willis and it was difficult to sink into anonymity with your 'jaw' looming dreadfully or delightfully ahead, or just behind you, still vivid in the mind. Personally, whatever my recent misdeeds, I adored talking to, or being talked to by, Miss Willis. She amused me and flattered me by treating me as though I were already a person capable of listening politely to remarks that sometimes had very little indeed to do directly with anything I was immediately interested in. It was a good way of teaching one to grow up intelligently.

As for our daily life, I liked lessons when they were given by an interesting person. I remember now the staff themselves better than what they taught me, some with great vividness, and affection.

I hated games—although I remember quite enjoying even lacrosse at times as a humble and giggly 'Cassowary'. It was nice of Downe not to pester people who were bad at games. One was allowed to feel one ought to be trying harder than one did, without being left with an inferiority complex for life.

But music I loved, without being much more gifted than I was with a bat and ball. Music with Miss Read was another side of my school life that I won't forget. Slightly nerve-racking music lessons (chorus: 'You must *practise* more you know'); rather killing singing lessons, into which one felt the Demi put her whole soul and robust genius in order eventually to squeeze some charming sounds out of her half-reluctant, half-admiring pupils—whom she would praise as willingly as she scolded. Choir practice also was conducted with passionate intensity by the Demi. Miss Willis intended Chapel to be fun and alive; she showed us something of what prayer meant to her, and

the Demi, whose element was song, helped her greatly, making hymns a vivid and dramatic form of praise.

Then there were the Choral and Musical Societies, and glamorous concerts, above all by Myra Hess, benign, overflowing with sweetness. There were the special occasions, like singing for dear, gentle Robin Milford or, once, for Gerald Finzi, when we went to his house afterwards and played with his children, enjoying ourselves immensely; or carol singing at Christmas to the rest of the school and to living-out staff like Miss Hickson who asked us all in and gave us ginger wine.

Music, however, leads me to visual memories. The interior of two places is particularly vivid; Miss Hickson's small and cosy cottage glowing orange, with firelight, knick-knacks, Christmas decorations, holly. And the Finzis's house, light, white, very new and modern, with children's things about and summer sun streaming through a vast expanse of window. This kind of memory (inaccurate though it may be!) is extremely strong when one is very young. I can see the Chapel blue-carpeted and plain with pale wood, grey walls; the drawing-room with all those cinerarias—blue again, and purple—and the tiny quiet grey church at Marlston where we went to early service when we'd been confirmed, walking across green fields on June and autumn mornings.

Nearest in time, and clearest in mind, of course, are my last few terms, culminating in the awful responsibility of being a Senior. In one's past one had undoubtedly committed crimes, such as mobbing up certain mistresses. I and another once climbed out of a window at the back of our form-room, I rejoice to say, during a lesson given by someone we thought a dull and silly teacher; and indeed, since apparently she didn't have the nerve to stop us, we felt we were entitled to our opinion. We used to flick blotting-paper at each other (nay, at the staff, God bless them!). Now it was our turn to be persecuted when we took prep. forties, trying to do our own work. What a table-turning! But what fun to have the Garden-Room to sit about in, roasting chestnuts from Palmer's Woods and eating peanut butter off the end of a ruler; luxury, after the bleak hardness of rows of desks. We ran and enjoyed societies (these, varied and flourishing, were one of the special joys of Downe, I always thought; Milton and Shakespeare for School Certificate were dull; but in Lit. or Dramatic became explorers' magic). We vied with each other in learning the names of everyone in the school to reel off pat during temperature queue every day in the winter while girls filed past us towards Sister Kite. We were always busy.

During the last summer term there were special treats in store for us because this was 1945, the last few months of the war. We went to Bradfield College to watch their play, and then to their dance, considering ourselves far superior to our opposite numbers in the school evacuated into our midst, because we scorned the lipstick which they tried out on the Bradfield boys. I think in those days we happened to be prejudiced; I know I got into trouble from my mamma for not wearing lipstick at the Fourth of June when we were allowed over to Eton for the day. Still, we got on perfectly all right with the Bradfield boys; I remember a stilted but successful evening (in my case slightly marred

by my inability to claim kinship with a famous pigeon-fancier whose name my pigeon-mad partner discovered I bore), followed up by a series of *billets-doux* which went down well in the Garden-Room. Then there was V.E.-day; we seemed to do a great deal of organizing. I remember Avril Edwards, who was head Senior, made us all work hard, but the details are lost to me except for a wonderful bonfire, which I believe we engineered as a surprise—and did we dress Avril up as Britannia riding on a chariot through the night?

I must end this delightful reminiscing—one could go on for ever! A few weeks ago we ran into Miss Willis at a Downe wedding reception; just the same as ever and delighted that she knew and had educated some of the bridegroom's family as well as the bride. She takes the greatest pride in her school and well she should. She inspired it and, apart from my affection for her (which is quite a different thing), I for one loved it.

Now it is Miss Medley who is running Downe, and under her the school should certainly flourish. She taught me much, and told me a few salutary home truths which I have not forgotten, including a warning that I should end up as a journalist driving a red three-wheeler across the Balkans. Well, I have managed the journalist bit though not yet the three-wheeler in the Balkans! My husband and I have ambitions that way but so far we have only got a four-wheeler—admittedly a red one—as far as Touraine. He doesn't believe in girls' schools as he thinks anyone who positively liked school must be 'soft in the head or simply have had an unhappy home'; so with our baby daughter's future at stake I try to make him realize how much I actually enjoyed Downe. He is beginning to believe me!

XIV. JULIAN McMASTER, 1946

AFTER so many years what is the first thing that comes to mind? Memory is so inconsequent. . . . The smell of pine needles hot in the sun, of green grass dissected by stone paths, of green geometrical buildings. (It was war-time and Downe was camouflaged.) . . . The distant sound of fiddle and piano comes from the music rooms behind the cloisters. It must be a Saturday afternoon in summer because, under surgery balcony, people are drying their hair; there is the gentle rhythmical sound of a jacks ball. . . . In the Greek theatre they are practising *As you like It*, or is it Euripides' *Helena*? Yes—for there is the tall ascetic figure of Mr. Sharwood-Smith rehearsing with them.

And now the wind is in our cloaks as we ride down Hermitage Hill on bicycles to those memorable Plato lessons. Sometimes he would read us a bit of the *Apology*; '"Ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι' he would boom at us across the study lined with books; or we would play at croquet on his lawn, always coming away feeling a little crestfallen, a little apologetic that we should live in such an inferior age. I think that was what he meant us to feel. . . . Back through the summer afternoon, and the pine woods where

enormous pine ants crawled. . . . Ants—there was the smaller breed that invaded our jam pots at tea. (Do people still have their own jam at tea—or was it something to do with the war?) How leisurely those teas were! talking, perhaps finishing *The Education of Uncle Paul* (with Miss Medley's note of warning to unimaginative readers—that made it all the more fascinating). Tea was always informal; blue and white checked table cloths; windows and doors wide open; swallows swooping in and out. . . .

Yet here I am, falling a victim to the mysterious Alice-in-Wonderland tricks memory always plays. Was Downe all leisure, all afternoon, all sunshine, and the smell of pine woods? What about the early days, the awful hollow in the stomach when the train approached Hermitage or Thatcham that grew and grew the nearer one got to the 'sleeping list'. Would it be six other people in 'Hallrooms', all unknown, all terrifying? . . . Or the maths lessons? Those endless forties when the blackboard was covered with meaningless signs, the mystery of the decimal point, 'two bath taps running at the same time', menacing and insoluble; and Miss Shawe, using different coloured chalks to make it easier for us, was tearing her hair in a wild, exciting frenzy at our inability; but that was understandable, numbers could do that to people. It was the calmer, more definite maths mistresses who were to be feared; because, like the numbers, they became cold and menacing. What joy when, on rare occasions, none of us could understand; and no longer alone in that maze of figures you could sit back and listen to that scornful invective turned upon us all. . . . But those occasions were the only bright spots in the sums that I never tried to do, but over whose impenetrable walls I saw my companions leap-frogging; or, in a most tragic and isolated frame of mind, the poems that I might have been writing!

Or there was that awful room in 'Hallrooms' that just would not behave. . . . How odd that this should have been a cause for anguish; perhaps, just because it was the first glimmering of a sense of responsibility.

Moving majestically down corridors and round beds would come Miss Willis, to say 'Good Night'. How well I remember walking with her down that dark corridor of 'Hallrooms' worn out with the first burden of responsibility, the first realization of the incurable 'silliness' of children. . . .

Those moments of anguish were so endlessly long, and yet, looking back, so swift. There were so many miraculous changes of scene. The mere fact of over 200 of us, in green djibbahs, pouring into lunch, broke a little the gloom of the maths lessons, or the future tedium of an afternoon practising lacrosse. There was Miss Willis walking up the centre telling us of the meetings she had been to in London, 'taking-off', as I always remember, Miss Ellen Wilkinson making an angry speech. It never seemed odd that she should address us as one person, while walking up to the high table; nor odd that we laughed as one person, and certainly, genuinely. . . . Or there were those Saturday evenings when she always seemed to wear a long purple dress, and there was dancing after supper. In those days the idea of dancing with a boys' school was very much of a novelty. We danced with each other; sometimes brave enough to pluck one of the staff

from the seats where they sat, casually talking to Miss Willis; or to propel Miss Willis herself, majestic in her purple, round the room.

Or there were the weekends which at least gave the illusion that we could walk as far as we liked—right into the blueness of the view itself . . .; or the early services on Sunday mornings somewhere beyond Downe. We would get up at dawn and bicycle to Yattendon or Chieveley, or wherever we wanted to, to come back past the larks and the cornfields feeling holy and hungry to breakfast. (Until going to Oxford I never realized how well we were fed in war-time at Downe.) Later on, Sunday mornings were blighted and enriched by 'Debating'. It would meet, with Miss Medley, in the Barn before Chapel. Oh, the sinking in the stomach on the rare occasions when one had to propose—What was it? 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder'—and of course it won! And one would go to Chapel afterwards, feeling triumphant if still rather shaky. . . .

I have no very clear memories of the actual lessons of those earlier days; maths and French because they were dreaded; scripture, perhaps, because scripture lessons always seemed to kindle some spark of original sin in the less noble of us. Of all these only one lesson stands out clearly. It was on Edith Sitwell; in P, or was it R?

> 'Tra la la:
> See me dance the polka',
> Said Mr. Wag like a bear,
> 'With my top hat
> And my whiskers that
> (Tra la la) trap, the Fair
> Where the waves seem chiming haycocks
> I dance the polka there.'

Miss Medley was reading it on a summer afternoon, with the bees and the blue sky, and with all the polka in it that it should have. It was my first introduction to Edith Sitwell. Now when I listen to 'Façade', with Walton's music and the author herself, it is of that summer afternoon that I always think.

Memories are sharply divided between those before and those after the 'Garden Room' . . . but here, too, memory is at its tricks, for try as hard as I may I simply cannot remember a time when the roses round the 'Pepper Pot' were not in flower. There was the illusion of stillness at the centre of things. We added sonnets to the board, already covered with those of our predecessors; ate chocolate-spread off rulers; worried about the character of Mary X. who could be a genius; planned entertainments for the school on rainy afternoons—which were usually skits on Downe—and had always to have the white dogs in them and someone as Miss Croft. In the summer, when we sat in Meditation chairs round the Pepper Pot there were those memorable lessons with Mamie; who always seemed to appear from the woods, all sharp and angular, with immaculate bishop's sleeves, and those fascinating elfin eyes, and the rather unexpected Don-like voice. 'Wordsworth,' she would say, and turning swiftly to one of us who was, perhaps, looking rather alien and cynical, 'Sheila, don't look at me with

"fish-eyes" . . . Do you know what "fish-eyes" are?'; and fascinated we would listen to a brilliant analysis of 'fish-eyes'. How right she was!

On Sundays there were Seniors' teas in the drawing-room where everything was purple and blue and puce, and there were pictures of distant mountains and sofas that you could sink into, and where Viney carried up mountains of paper-thin sandwiches; and where Miss Willis seemed always to be wearing her purple coat woven with the white dogs' hair. She would put a spoon into each cup before pouring out the tea; and we would argue about whether you should wash the cups before the silver or the silver before the cups. Afterwards she would go ahead to Chapel and we would fall upon sandwiches we'd been too polite to take before. . . .

And then the session in the little pantry helping Viney wash up, with always the hope that Miss Nickel would come in.

It is sad to think how many people will never know Miss Nickel. She was part of Downe; inseparable from the buildings she had helped to plan; wandering slowly and arthritically amongst them in a wide-brimmed hat, the long cassock, and the short serge coat. Only she understood the drains; only she the mysteries of the Chapel tower and just why it was unsafe to climb. On rare occasions she would talk, in the Little Pantry while we were washing up, of philosophy, of how the barometer worked, of the time she worked with Fabre in North Africa. Her face was parchment-coloured, her eyes deep blue and very penetrating. She smoked and had more than a smoker's cough. We never saw her smile. Yet after talking with her we would feel uniquely privileged. No one knew where she slept, or, indeed, if she slept at all. The school said it was in Miss Willis's bathroom, but it turned out to be on a chair in the front hall.

There were 'jaws' at the end of every term from the beginning of one's career to the end. I could never quite get away from the feeling of being under the judgement seat. . . . Perhaps it was because Miss Willis's study was so small and perched so high above the school; on a level with the Chapel tower, almost in the sky itself; just room for her desk piled high with papers, for the cyclamen that was always at the end of it, for one chair, and one sleeping white dog. . . . How impossible, even in the earlier stages, not to compare the scruffy exercise-books on one's lap with all this bright clarity, this sky, this cyclamen, this being-above-the-ground. . . . The terror of the maths lessons would melt away and up here, at least, the grit of character, of will, would seem much more dear. Even about maths one could be heroic! . . . How many words of wisdom must have been spoken in that room; and yet, how well I remember one particular contemporary of mine (and there were others too) coming out, irate and indignant, because Miss Willis knowing, as she said, that she wanted to be a vet (was it?) had looked at her vaguely and said: 'Darling child, why not be a sanitary inspector' and had proceeded to go into exact and careful details of the training required. . . . And yet, had it really been so vague?

And there was Chapel. It did not thrust itself upon us. It was simply there as part of the school, part of the buildings. . . . We went as a matter of course every morning, and

on Sundays when, lower down the school, we queued up in the cloisters clinking the pennies handed out to us; slightly rebellious in our stockings, although after Sister's very explicit explanation of just why over 200 stockingless feet in a small space on a hot June morning were unpleasant, we dared not protest. . . . But in the evening when Chapel was voluntary, and there were prayers about 'the fever of life being over' and, from the organ loft, they sang: 'Come Holy Ghost our Souls inspire . . .' it meant more than anything else; more, perhaps, simply because it was not thrust upon us. There was something rather Chinese about its just being there; seen, as a building, from every angle of the school; a building that, in the same way that the Chinese paint bamboo branches, we painted from the studio window in snow, and rain and sun.

It is strange, looking back at this period, how little the war seems to have penetrated the picture as a whole. There was that first summer term of 1940, when people were still leaving suddenly and mysteriously to go to Canada or America, but it seemed rather unreal. Much more vivid, to my mind, was Miss Nickel camouflaging the school. She gave the impression of having done the whole thing herself, for whenever we saw her she was working the spray of green paint watched by a group of men. . . . Occasionally, grumbling sleepily, we had to assemble in that particularly cold and sordid air-raid shelter; but this was not nearly so impressive as those endless fire-practices (a part of pre-war Downe) when under the fierce eye of Colonel Symonds, we rescued babies from the room above the drawing-room or bumped each other downstairs tied to mattresses. Perhaps most dramatic of all was the lunch when Miss Willis received a note from the Major-General, or whatever he was, to say that he was having a bath in Bottom West, and that his French Canadian troops had surrounded the school. We were 'confined to barracks', a phrase, I remember, that irritated us intensely; but not before we had had time to see tough swarthy-looking men sitting outside their tents gambling. . . . Or there was the time when the Americans asked 'the girls' to a dance and Miss Willis sent the staff instead. . . . Or Miss Willis's West African pen-friend she acquired somehow by mistake. . . . Or the American observation planes that dropped chewing-gum upon us when we played lacrosse. There was a bonfire on Saint Peter's hill on V.E. night. Probably we were more turned in on ourselves than we would otherwise have been. We did not rush up to London to see Racine or Molière. Perhaps for that very reason the only expedition I remember—when Sketch Club, led by Miss Hickson, went to its first encounter with modern art—left such a vivid impression (it was in Mrs. Behrens's house near Newbury that we saw Henry Lamb's fascinating and elongated Lytton Strachey; and with her the Spencer Memorial Chapel).

I wonder—did life seem, sometimes, a little hum-drum when we left Downe? even Oxford a little disappointing? Reading the *Downe House Magazine*, of so-and-so clearing trees in Africa, building a house, and sleeping in a lean-to, of being a missionary in almost unexplored lands, doesn't it seem that this is the sort of thing we should be doing? Ordinary life is perhaps rather prosaic. And yet this is only superficial. . . .

'Darling child—have you ever thought how terribly boring you must be to the people who bore you . . .' and some glimmer of humour, some spur of will (forged, perhaps, in that small room half-way between earth and sky) will make even the bureaucracy of this peculiarly bureaucratic age lift sufficiently to show the enormous potential of the, seemingly, crushed humanity that lies beneath. . . .

XV. GILLIAN (HEATH) HOLLAND, 1947

How delightful, I thought, to be asked to contribute to the Jubilee Number of the *Downe House Magazine*! How pleasant to recall the years between 1943 and 1947! Perhaps something rather rose-tinted was called for, something in the style of 'The Hill'. 'They stood, where soul meets soul, unfettered by flesh, ten thousand leagues from Harrow.' But that somehow did not seem quite suitable for Cold Ash. Then again, there was the possibility of an Osbert Sitwell type of polish; but I had not had the good fortune to be born towards the sunset of any period. None of my immediate circle were geniuses or fascinatingly eccentric. Art was not the lodestar of my existence.

The answer to the problem came when I gave up trying to be grand, and instead spent a happy afternoon going through a pile of exercise books, whose labels ranged from 'G. Heath. English for Miss Medley, Remove B in P Summer 1943' to the more terse 'Heath. Mich. '47. Lat. Trans.'. At the bottom of the pile was a larger book. It had obviously been one of Miss Croft's bargain offers in stationery, and must have cost a great deal—at least 1*s*. 6*d*. It was encased in grey paper, bound with *passe-partout* to protect the cover. Inside was an intensely factual autobiography. There were no moving impressions of childhood, but the book began with a complete if cryptic list: 'Hall Rooms wrong side, early bed: Ancren Gate attic: Horse Box: Middle South Right Side.' After the early entries, 'Asked me'; after the later ones 'Asked her'. Asked each other what? And why sleep in a horsebox? The autobiography proper now began, and from the first sentence made me blush uncomfortably:

'May 4—Set off from Exeter St. David's, where we met Mary Rawlings, she recognizing me by my wearing a purple hat.' I had not committed the cardinal error of travelling in a djibbah, but to have worn a purple hat, and, worse still, one of those voluminous purple coats manufactured by some firm in Northern Ireland which remained unsold from term to term in Madame's pile of second-hand clothes in the gallery—I could not have made a much worse start. Mary Rawlings was very kind about it, and somehow the hat never featured again on my clothes list. It was really much more suitable as bee protection gear in later years.

Our Exeter train somehow reached Newbury at the same time as the school train from London, and there at the station were the two special buses for Downe with practised members already making certain of the front seat.

When my mother and father had originally been shown round the school, I had been

discreetly left in the drive, so had seen nothing but the swimming bath in mid-winter. This impression of pine needles was now replaced by one of endless steps—and queues. Directly the buses arrived at the school we ran to queue for a thermometer; then for a kiss of salutation; then for Chapel; then for supper; and finally for a bath that was probably achieved by the same prudent people that had secured seats on the bus from the station.

Everyone was very kind, but in the midst of all this excitement and activity the memory of a stamped postcard with an urgent parental request that it should be posted that first evening kept haunting me. I did not like to ask about a post-box, and of course did not notice the little wire cages outside the Common Room. When I had been brave enough to do so and had had them pointed out to me I feverishly overcrowded my postcard and sent it off in the heat of the moment without an address. It reappeared after breakfast the next morning, given out as a 'hush' by a Senior with suitable extracts read out for identification. I claimed it afterwards in crimson anonymity, and wrote a contrite addressed letter home.

At the end of my first term I was put into a form that remained virtually unchanged, except in name, for the next three years. Many of my form were talented at transforming themselves into Butterflies, Spirits of the Wind, or whatever other requirements were urged by the music used for 'floppy dancing'. Those of us who were not so gifted had our moment in the Seniors' Weekend Ballet *Peer Gynt* when we were allowed to cover our hands with harlequin fingers made of rolled-up exam paper, and dash into the Lily Pond uttering gay Norwegian cries. That moment returns to me whenever I hear Grieg's 'Dance of the Trolls' being played. Being a frieze in the *Snow Queen* did not allow nearly so much scope—(Why couldn't one be of that fortunate number who wore purple tights and made repeated graceful leaps into the Lily Pond?). But drama came, though more statically, in *Arms and the Man*. This was the production of Senior Dramatic for Miss Willis's birthday in 1946. Both red coats from the acting cupboard were drawn into service; one for Bridget Johnson, as a comfortable blustering Major Petkoff, cowed by a firm Pam Carter-Braine as his wife; one by Valerie Preston as Bluntschli. Sergius could never throw himself into the part with sufficient abandon, and there used to be tense little rehearsals in the Barn, with Lady Mary Balfour officiating, and an anguished Sergius crying to Louka (Harriet Waterfield):

'Withdraw! Never! You *belong* to me!'

all the while miserably conscious of the stage direction, 'Puts his arm about her'. Lady Mary was the most patient of producers, but Sergius was not happy until he could fade into the wings of the Gymnasium stage murmuring: 'What a man! Is he a man?'

The Importance of Being Ernest a year later was more rewarding from the food point of view. Mary Murdoch as Algernon had a whole plate of cucumber sandwiches (devotedly prepared, with vinegar, by Miss Pavey-Smith) but Ernest could let himself go over crumpets and butter. Elisabeth Parks as Miss Prism wore the perennial

black dress that had featured in every production from *The Rivals* to *Les Dames aux Chapeaux verts*. Entirely crushed by Lady Brackley, poor Prism on being asked to produce 'that baby' retreated in her confusion into the depths of Y beyond the green room.

There were many other moments of great drama. Miss Klotchkoff used to produce plays for our French Division; I have a brief vision of Bridget Goulding casting herself across the Gymnasium stage as M. Perrichon, crying: 'Je m'élance'; and of Dinah Gore as Count Alma Viva wrapped disguisedly in a blue velvet curtain, and hissing 'Appelle-Moi Lindor'. And in Form-plays Rosalind Elliott in the briefest of tunics and a crumpled cardboard crown, unhappily clutching a small gilt harp to her bosom, impersonating, for some curious reason, Louis XIV as Apollo, while a loyal courtier shouted from the wings—'Behold the God!' But the most elaborate production I remember was written by the Seniors, performed by the Seniors, and called *Grand Opera, or L'Argent est la racine de tout malheur*.

CHARACTERS: (again supplied by the invaluable Autobiography)

Donna Lilia Ponda	Duce Pepper Pot
Comte Aqua Toura	Spirita Donna Reada
Don Graeca Theatra	

The music ranged from adaptations of the 'Suscipe deprecationem' from the Bach B Minor Mass to 'I have a song to sing-O!' and the Soldiers' chorus from Faust. The dialogue was at times tortuous. Aqua Toura had at one moment to bring out (as recitative):

'Sir,
May I beg the hand of your daughter
Madame Vestibula Cloistera
Ancren Gatius
Singeria Loggia
Don't run down the banks
Walk in's and Medicine's pleasera—
in marriage?'

Every topical event of the past year was crammed in, and the final curtain fell—well, the final screen was drawn—upon a pile of bodies dying to the tune of 'London's Burning'.

Could Osbert Sitwell or the author of *The Hill* have equalled this?

XVI. JENNIFER GOSSE, 1950

A LUSTRE is a pleasant way of saying five years, so I like to think of my time at Downe House as a *lustre* and three-fifths, thirty-two seasons in all, a little lifetime. Looking at them now, erratically lit up and observed by the unpredictable choices of memory, I find these seasons regiment themselves into disorderly bands, summer leading, not spring.

Only glimpses remain of the earliest summers: bracken up to one's shoulders; cherries for supper, shared out with scrupulous fairness; mouthfuls of chlorinated water swallowed in the swimming-pool while learning to swim; hot nights as early beds when it was hard to fall asleep under the radiant attic roofs at Ancren Gate. Then there were Saturday afternoons spent wandering in the woods among the red tree-trunks and the ants' nests, feet tentative for black adders, those monsters we never saw but that were sometimes captured and nailed to a branch for a warning. There were airless days troubled by flies when those with desks nearest the window looked impatiently at the green valley where Kimber's horses stood head to tail in the shade, looked and found it difficult to think of Pythagoras or gerundives. Then there were undeniably extremely wet summers which even the idealistic memory cannot exclude altogether. There was the Seniors' Weekend when hailstones like mothballs fell during massed Gymnastics until the grass was white, while the countryside round about remained dry and dusty. Sometimes, too, Chapel was resonant with the steady ringing into buckets, as at a milking-time, of the water which the roof could no longer keep out.

One of the summer scenes most clear to me now with all its attendant noises and scents is V.E. night when a great bonfire blazed on St. Peter's hill and we stood round it to sing national anthems, even managing a hesitating translation of the Russian one. The little twisted oak-trees at the edge of the wood were loaded with spectators, and far away on smaller eminences in the valley and on the downs beyond, other fires flared and sparkled.

Among the greatest pleasures I can think of in my summer was that of sleeping out in the Lily Pond on a camp-bed, one of a circle of six or eight, and waking up in the deepest part of the night to see nothing but the black sky full of stars bounded low down by the Chapel, the cloisters and the tree in the Greek Theatre. That utter serenity was so silent that one's ears strained to hear a distant bark or the breeze against the wall, and the dew lay in thick drops on the grass and blankets. The change from the bustle and noise of the day was profound, and yet the place was immutably the same.

I suppose we were on holiday during that melancholy time of year when the leaves turn very dark green and start to wither. By the time that we came back in September autumn was really at hand. The air began to smell of wood smoke, the first marvellous toadstools were coming up, pushing little hats of pine needles before them, and a large group of shy strangers had arrived, looking rather awkward in their new djibbahs and cloaks.

The first frosts at Downe must have been different from other frosts. I remember being much struck by a late rose in the Pepper Pot with a fringe of little white crystals standing out round each petal. I went about for almost an hour repeating to myself

> Sweet rose whose hue, angry and brave,
> Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye . . .

thinking it proof of unusual sensibility!

Good autumn—good dampness rising from the ground to make strange perspectives half lost in mist when we went for walks in 'Field' (which no one openly welcomed but I think most people secretly enjoyed). On wet days the valley came closer, sounds seemed louder, and from the hill-top one could watch the activity of horses and tractors in the brown fields leading down to Newbury.

Learning things somehow seemed easier when our attention was shut into the room by windows streaming with October rain, and many of the things that we read at school which I still remember particularly well were, I think, read in the autumn, and still bring autumn to mind today. This may of course be a special Gothic syrup prepared by assiduous memory! Anyway the autumn at Downe was very important both indoors and out-of-doors.

Sometimes it seems to me that the autumn is the summer of the northern countries, bringing out the latent richness of things, and drawing a response from people in much the same way as, so I imagine, the summer does from races farther south. It might be amusing, if it were not centuries out of fashion, to reflect on our Anglo-Saxon microcosms expanding to enjoy the orderly influence of the October world outside.

Living on top of a hill must have affected us in other ways than the obvious one of unstinted fresh air. There are so many times that I can recollect when I have stood looking down from one or another part of the hill, enjoying both the details and the broad lie of the land. There was an odd sense of detachment in being such a spectator—one was so near and yet in no way participated in the life of the valley. Sometimes we idly watched the trains go by from below the Giant's Stride, sometimes there was something more stirring to see, as when, on a winter's morning from Ancren Gate, we watched a house in flames somewhere beyond the railway bridge. Each window grew horribly and wonderfully red as the fire moved from room to room, and yet up on the hill we could not help feeling admiration as well as pity.

There was once a perfect winter at Downe: perfect not because it was in any way comfortable but because there was nothing lacking to it. It must have been the hard months of 1946–7, when the rain froze instantly on the trees so that one could pull out a leaf from the ice and have a replica, veins and all, melting in one's hand. In the Biology Laboratory we warmed our mittened hands on flower-pots set over candles and felt laudably hardy. For days it snowed, making the cloisters, so white in summer, look the colour of old sheep, and all who possessed ski-trousers were allowed to send

home for them. Then, when at length the sun shone, what a glory of ice and snow, like a bit of the Benedicite!

Several times there were rumours of the Aurora Borealis which sent us hurrying to the gate in the November darkness, but I cannot remember ever seeing anything more exciting or distant than headlamps along the road. I suppose someone must have seen the Northern Lights but I never did, and our headlong flight to the gate was as fruitless as that of the lemmings to the sea.

Most things that I have recollected are out-of-doors, but indoor things were quite as important. In the winter there was the rehearsing of form plays until at last your own Saturday came and you acted before the absorbed attention of people sitting perilously high on chairs which rocked on tables or leaning with stiff neck and elbow from the gallery.

Winter sometimes crept on and on, well into February, even lingering for a day or two into March. Then in the Lent term, walking above the Greek Theatre or standing breathless out at 'Field', one would suddenly smell the spring. Not an easily definable smell but positively of spring. Probably it is heretical to say this in England, but spring to me is not a season at all: it is either very old winter or very young summer. It is mostly summer in retrospect, too often winter in fact. For that reason it comes last of the year in my memory, and I can think of spring at Downe only as a collection of charming odds and ends, the blue tits, for instance, that nested in a canvas bucket in the bicycle shed, or the white and yellow flowers being marshalled in the cloisters before being taken to decorate Chapel for the Confirmation service, or the pair of jays which happily chose to nest in a tree outside the window where three of us with chicken-pox could watch them, or the regrettable detentions thoroughly enjoyed because they were gardening jobs with Jackie the donkey, and above all the ineffably blue sky of March, with the sun doing strange things with shadows to the walls and roofs.

These are my bits and pieces, chosen not for any merit of theirs but because they were most eager to come to my mind. I dare produce them only because everyone who has lived at Downe has a solid fund of worthier memories and one can therefore afford to play with lesser ones. As I see it now, being at Downe was, for me at any rate, not just 'being at school' but living a whole life over in a handful of years. In looking back at past time the sun for some reason seems to have been stronger and the rain colder than they are now, but I partly believe that at Downe they really were so! Certainly at twelve or fourteen years old one had not such a great number of seasons to remember, and therefore each new turn of the year was a fresh delight. In that sense the special weathers I credit Cold Ash with were as I remember them. For the courteous introduction Downe gave me to—yes I shall have to say it—to life, I shall always be more deeply indebted than I can know, and, I hope, always grateful.

XVII. ALISON LINKLATER, 1951

I HAD heard about Downe long before I went there, almost, I might say, before I had left the cradle. Not everyone at Downe can claim to have been very nearly born in Miss Willis's cottage at Lerici. I feel it entitles me to some sort of medal—'Genuine Old Senior, home-grown'. At any rate, it must have had an effect on my unconscious mind, and perhaps it was this that caused me to decide that Downe would be a good school to go to before anyone had particularly considered sending me anywhere. My mother occasionally told me stories of her exploits there, and their background became confused with the strange and familiar backgrounds of fairy stories. You can imagine with what awe I put on a djibbah and entered this legendary world myself. Numinous creatures inhabited it. Somewhere in the woods in a place called Hill House there were Miss Nickel and Miss Willis. From the region of the Concert Room a piano's notes drifted up: that was Miss Read. People still spoke of Madame and Miss Heather. Miss Medley, who, as headmistress, addressed me several times, was so awful that I do not remember actually seeing her until several weeks after my arrival. I suppose her voice must have come to me, as it were, out of a cloud.

The geography of Downe fostered my incredulity. There was a huge galleried hall, which looked and sounded three times a day like a medieval arsenal; there were outcrops of concrete steps and passages which might either peter to an end in long grass or debouch on a broad view of fields and hills; there was a splendid landing called Top West, which commanded the prow-like Chapel and leagues of stormy fields like a ship's bridge; there was a curious road, which wound away amongst the bracken towards Ancren Gate, a sinister-sounding place, I thought.

It was certainly time I was brought down to earth. There came a day when Miss Willis actually appeared, and said, 'How do you do' to us. Carried away by the appearance of someone who to me was a story-book figure I decided that a sense of history was called for.

'I had the queerest feeling', I wrote to my mother, 'that we had gone back a hundred years and that I was *you* at Downe.'

My mother did not take this as a compliment, and the terse reply I received struck a much-needed blow on the part of common-sense. Common-sense was a quality in fact often commended to us. I kept a look-out for it, but only on one occasion did I track it down. A letter home records with admiration that 'Sister, who simply *breathes* common-sense, gave us a lecture on Diseases of the Feet'. That was the climax. I never came so near the real thing again, not even as a Senior, when the word 'mature' began to replace the hateful 'pleasant and amiable' as favourite epithets of approval in my end-of-term reports (the epithets of disapproval I won't record). By that time several of us were cycling down to Mr. Sharwood-Smith every week to learn about Socrates and Plato, and we would push our bicycles up Slanting Hill arguing loudly, sometimes dropping our machines, imperfect copies anyway of some ideal vehicle, sometimes grabbing a

handful of blackberries to sustain our discussion. There was a tingling sense that something wonderful, fantastic, might happen at any moment, if only by uttering a few of those gilded Hellenic names, Thrasymachus, Socrates, or Alcibiades. Common-sense flew away over the rainy valley. Socrates himself might have disapproved.

But not for long. One of the virtues of Downe is that you have to possess a certain practical sense, simply to survive there. Admittedly my pampered generation had a roof over its head; the school was wholly built. But there were difficulties. Cold taps were marked 'hot', clanging buckets lurked in chapel aisles, cloister pavements were slippery in dangerous places, and each place thick with legends of broken arms and twisted legs; even when, as a Senior, you achieved the honour of sitting on a bench running *alongside* the Concert Room wall, instead of vulgarly *facing* the platform, your back suffered the extreme discomfort of having a row of hooks sticking into it, projecting from the coveted wall. Digging or weeding sometimes had to be done. Even this occupation, however, might produce something extraordinary. A couple of us were once detailed to dig potatoes in Hill House garden, and we were supervised in this task by someone whom most of us had never seen—Miss Nickel. This meeting furnished a theme for my conversation for some time.

By this time I had discovered that it was advisable to have something to talk about. There had been a devastating occasion when my neighbour received a few rather dull observations of mine with a short silence, followed by the remark, 'The trouble is, of course, that no one in this school knows how to make conversation.' She was certainly unkind to say this. We nearly all tried, desperately hard, to contribute to the din in the dining-room. A whole table eagerly chattering was most people's idea of social well-being.

It was in the bathroom, however, that the art of conversation flourished best. Bathing was no solitary or private matter. The queue for a bath sat round on the edge, eagle-eyed and resembling the *tricoteuses* of the Revolution in that they frequently knitted and made bitter remarks at their victim if her bathing grew too leisurely. The situation of the person in the bath was pitiable. Not an extra minute could she snatch, unless she managed to hold her audience with an interesting subject of conversation and a glittering Ancient Mariner's eye so that they failed to notice that she was exceeding her time-limit. But on the whole the steam, the flapping of towels, and the clouds of talcum powder, were conducive to geniality. Somehow, too, the epigrams or sarcasms that were unleashed between bouts of teeth-brushing, out of the side of the mouth, sounded better than any other.

Conversation was more necessary than physical ability; ours was not, in general, a 'gamey' era. How many mothers have, like mine, been disappointed to find that their children were not, as they, 'keen as mustard' in the field? I was occasionally embarrassed by my failure to impress Old Seniors, my mother's contemporaries, who questioned me bluffly about the achievements of the lacrosse team. Their questions were the more awkward since I had just helped to found a disgraceful society—an anti-games society! It was called 'The Amblers'. Its purpose was to foster intelligent conversation

to the detriment of physical activity; this meant conversing on the playing-field itself, where one tried to be oblivious of the clash of sticks and ball around one, rather like people trying to preserve a serene atmosphere at a party during the blitz. Very annoying we were too, and it was not long before we were quietly dissolved. Once more we began to dismay team captains with our blundering efforts; one or two Amblers were even observed with secret indignation to be enjoying the game.

For those with a predilection for sitting still no better choice of play could be made than *Lady Precious Stream* which we acted in 1950. There is little action in it. We sat for hours in a row, while tiny caterpillars descended gently on bright threads from the oak-tree on to our hair, and our speeches floated up from the well of the Greek Theatre into the lazy air, occasionally punctuated by a spurt of hiccoughing Chinese music. There was a great deal of sitting or standing altogether in the rehearsals for Seniors' Weekends. Endless seemed the moments we stood in cloisters, letting shafts of sunlight turn us into statues, blinking stupidly at the square green lawn, and its paved diagonals, and the hordes of white shoes marching up and down it with a mesmeric action. Behind us the Chapel settled into the clear sky as though it belonged to it, for Downe is exactly suited to a day of high summer. The sprawling cloisters snuggle drowsily into whatever hollow or ledge they happen to be in or on. Lessons continue, but one furtively puts one's arms and legs where the sun might brown them.

It was like this with lessons; they were sometimes apt to be undermined by the elements, we were so very open to them. I, for one, from time to time hoped that some fantastic interruption or enlightenment would get rid of the need for work altogether. But common-sense said 'Impossible', and had to admit, moreover, that lessons often brought out the excitement of

> unconcerning things, matters of fact,
> How others on the stage their parts did act,
> What Caesar did, yea, what Cicero said,
> Why grass is green, or why blood is red.

It was an absorbing experience to be singing under Miss Read, and feel oneself tuned to her requirements. Often an observation of Miss Bewick's would make me stop, and feel as disorientated as it is healthy to feel when one is seventeen and just about to settle into omniscience and the Garden Room. Even mathematics became slightly more comprehensible when one attacked them in Miss Place's wake ('The hypotenuse is a cloud. Drop a line on to the base of the triangle—blue chalk—rain!') but I never exactly *enjoyed* numbers until I started playing the drum. Then the rest of the orchestra might be concentrating on an exquisite dying fall but 'a hundred and seventy-six, two, three, a hundred and seventy-seven, two three,' was all *I* was conscious of. What did I care for pianissimos? I was waiting for the big crescendo. Miss Gunn's arm would shoot out across the sea of bow-points, and when I brought down my drumstick with a resounding crash, audible in Bottom South, on the kettle-drum which I earnestly hoped was in tune, I felt a spasm of superiority to every other instrument in the orchestra.

My form was by now ripe and ready to fall from the parent tree. Some had already dropped. What if, on landing, we turned out to be greener than we had thought we were? Downe had, I think, implanted enough bounce in most of us to ensure our survival. Miss Medley must have had some doubts, however, for I remember that, as she saw me off to an interview, she said, 'It would be like you to go and do something silly, like forgetting to go for your interview, when you get there, at the proper time....' So I went stiffly, armoured with common-sense, and wary of the world.

I like to think that this was the mood in which I left Downe—business-like; not born yesterday; not to be caught napping—unlike the credulous creature who had entered it. But it was shortly afterwards that I put my luggage on the Taunton train, and then got out, two minutes before it was due to start, to make a telephone call, and . . . well, let us end the story there.

XVIII. ELIZABETH KENRICK, 1954

Conscious recollection, even when it is enforced, is an extraordinarily valuable exercise. All too often, when we neglect to make the occasional mental effort to relive in our imaginations the events and atmosphere of long written chapters of our lives we are left with nothing but a nebulous store of half-truths, fit only as a basis for misplaced nostalgia, or stories of highly coloured exaggeration. As a new girl, I used to supply my geography classes with imaginative and largely fictional accounts of a half-forgotten stay in Australia, and now, when used for the same purpose, my recollections of my days at Downe are in danger of becoming conveniently shadowy.

Oddly enough, when I sat down and endeavoured to practise what I have been preaching, it was all the most prosaic things that sprang immediately to my mind. The smells, repetitive and insistent, which used to be so noticeable at the beginning of every term, and then gradually merge discreetly into everyday life; the bravely hygienic smell of glutinous pink Premiere floor polish on the corridor and bedroom floors, or of my hands after they had been washed with the unvarying favoured brand of soap and dried on a damp grubby roller towel, or of the bathrooms on hairwashing days, or even the unabashed odour of kippers for breakfast. Then the daily round of noises; first the getting-up bell, sometimes vague and apologetic, sometimes as challenging as a cold bath; then the feminine babble and clatter of a full dining-room, at breakfast subdued and sleepily spasmodic, at lunch poised and somewhat formal, at supper competitively raucous; the slamming of rows of music-room doors at the start of a new forty, followed by muffled arpeggios and apologetic sonatas, and the sound of rain on the Concert Room roof, the effect of which never failed to depress me.

But above all, I remember the queues. At school I was always a member either of a list or of a queue; I queued to sign lists which I had queued to look at in the first place. My queueing life underwent a growth and development comparable to every other form

of my public life at Downe. As a new girl I was gently informed about and guided into certain queues which transformed me from a mere name into a human being with a height, a weight, and a temperature. Gradually I learned all the tricks of the queueing trade, such as the knack of inserting myself tactfully at a given point, the fact that I could usually do ten rows of knitting in the average temperature queue, and that queues could be admirable conversational centres. The culmination of my queueing career came as a Senior, when I was allowed to make little queues of my own, in rather the same way that a National Service officer makes a fighting unit out of a motley crew of recruits. A queue could be a real work of art. The raw material was incorrigibly noisy, restless, and rebellious, but just occasionally, with the right blend of authority, physical force, and cajoling, the finished product could be modestly rewarding.

The character of queues at Downe varied according to the prize or destination. Those of an official nature, especially temperature queues, were generally apathetic, and the better controlled they were the more monotonous. They alternated between dumb immobility and a slow shuffling forward movement. Faces were buried assiduously in books or knitting, or staring fixedly at anything in sight; the sanatorium list, the book of the person in front, or the shoes of the Seniors. Watching from the side-lines, one was occasionally rewarded by the opportunity for a fierce 'shsh', or the sight of someone losing her place or dropping a stitch as the queue lurched forward again, otherwise there was nothing to do but listen to the regular recitation of names and conjecture who was the next person due round the corner.

At the opposite extreme were the selfish, frenzied, elbowing heaps of humanity which gathered whenever there was any prospect of bagging seats for any great event; plays, films, concerts—the disease even spread to lectures. To secure the coveted seat, efficient strategy and sheer force were demanded. Everyone volcanoed into the Concert Room through every possible gap in the line of defence, and flung books, scarves, cloaks, or themselves over the maximum number of chairs with the maximum amount of vocal accompaniment. Although I myself got tolerably expert at this nerve-racking procedure, these were the occasions when I felt that I almost hated the entire contents of the school.

In between, there was a host of nebulous queues, usually involving a quick rush to join, and then firm resistance to the inevitable regimentation. We queued in Bottom East for our parcels—what a dark and dreary place it was too—we queued down the cloisters on our way to Chapel, huddled in our cloaks, shivering and chattering, and plodded slowly up the steps to the rhythm of the Chapel bell; at one point, we even queued for our letters, and we were thus deprived of our one outlet for spontaneous scrummage.

Just like everything else this continual queueing became absorbed into everyday life. There was nearly always a solid back in front of me and an impatient voice behind. It could almost be described as symbolic; a school is like one long queue, and at the end

of term the head is chopped off and a new tail is added. This termly loss and replenishment is invariable and almost automatic, but your own place in the queue depends on how skilfully you apply what you learn.

Of course, life was not entirely composed of noises, smells, queues, and bells; there were always the people, and it is the people who will live longest in my memory. However, Old Seniors of a biographical turn of mind and pen are better qualified than I to do justice to the unforgettable characters of Downe; and so I have confined myself to a description of some of her more prosaic aspects, so real and important at the time, and still so vivid and amusing to recall.

PRINTED IN
GREAT BRITAIN
AT THE
UNIVERSITY PRESS
OXFORD
BY
CHARLES BATEY
PRINTER
TO THE
UNIVERSITY