



RYDES HILL

PREPARATORY SCHOOL & NURSERY

March 2023



Alumni Newsletter

Dear Alumni

I am pleased to finally be able to send you our latest edition; life at School has been incredibly busy in recent months and hence a delay in our publication. We have a great deal to share with you, so hopefully it would be worth the wait! We have two articles in this edition; Miss Boyle has written a piece about some of the oldest photographs we have of School life. Melanie Tyrell and Sarah Lockyer have written a wonderful piece about a reunion 51 years after leaving Rydes Hill. Thank you to all of them for their time in putting these together.

SCHOOL NEWS

Life at Rydes Hill continues to be busy, productive and happy. We have now spent a year in our new Nursery classrooms and word is spreading, resulting in both classes being full for this academic year and our older class (Oaks) already being full for next academic year. Christmas was a wonderful time for us as we were able to be all together for the first time since pre-COVID. The whole School met in the Entrance Hall on the last day of the Autumn Term to sing Carols and for Fr Roy to bless our Crib. The beautiful singing and the chance to all be together brought a tear to many eyes!



Old Photos of Rydes Hill Convent - by Miss Boyle



From the very beginning of the history of the School at Rydes Hill, photos have been taken and preserved for future generations. This carried on a tradition that had started before the war and during St Anne's evacuation to Hatchlands.

Rydes Hill Convent opened at the end of 1945 and the earliest photos we have date from 1946. These can be found in a small, black, non-descript album. Here there are

80 pages of black paper with between one and two (very occasionally three) small black and white photos stuck on with glue. There appears to be no method in the organisation, and it looks as if someone has found a box of random photos and then just stuck them in as they came out. Very few of them are labelled but at some time, someone has dated most of them in small letters on the photos. We cannot guarantee that these are correct but are probably right within a few years. A few have become unstuck and disappeared over the years but the majority are still in situ.



Overall, there are a very few quite small, slightly blurred photos from 1946, a lot from 1947, then a number from 1948-1951. The vast majority were taken outside on Our Lady's Lawn in the summer months. There are no indoor photos so they probably did not have a flash. They range in size from very small to small with 2 slightly bigger ones at the back. With the exception of the last two, they all look as if they have been taken by an amateur on a personal camera. This may have been one of the teachers or even parents. I don't know if any of the Nuns had a camera. Copies of some of these photos were then sold to parents but I don't know how many.

In the main, the photos can be divided into four different groups. There are a lot of class photos that include all age groups and often have a teacher or Nun with them. These are often in front of the old rose trellis which was already in a bad state of affairs. (The remains of the supports can still be seen lying on their side near the



back fence by our entrance. They were recently rediscovered by those children whose parents were Covid key workers and spent a lot of time exploring the grounds). Other groups are around an old stump or on other parts of Our Lady's Lawn. There are a few in fields, which may or may not be part of the extensive grounds or may be on picnics. The vast majority are in summer uniform; initially their own dresses and then the one chosen by Mother Patricia. Just a few girls are wearing gymslips or blazers and hats.



The second group are performances. The first Play – *The Pied Piper*, country dances, concerts etc have all been recorded. Some of them also show the audience. Here the parents are dressed smartly with hats and gloves on show.



There is also a record of sporting events with photos of drill and Sports Day. A rather hap-hazard netball post can be seen at the back of the lawn so presumably the netball courts have not yet been built.



The third group are religious events, which include groups of First Communicants, coming out of Chapel through the conservatory and children gathered round the statue of Our Lady. In those days it was by the clock in the front of the house.



This was later moved to the side lawn and a similar statue has remained there ever since; hence the area still being referred to as Our Lady's Lawn. The Dutch Priest Fr Beenker is clearly seen in several of the photos.





The final group are random photos of children at play, a couple of groups of teachers and one of the house. It is lovely to see the rocking horse which is still enjoyed by the children today, although it is now always kept inside in the front entrance after a long spell in KG. This and another slightly larger one, were both restored almost 20 years ago. The first picture of Rydes Hill Convent is dated 1951 and shows that the sisters have already



stripped the house of ivy but no extensions have been added. The beautiful tree at the front was sadly cut down quite recently due to disease.



In addition to the main subject of the photos, it is possible to learn a lot from the pictures by studying the backgrounds. The beautiful trees are often visible, many of which have since been lost to time. There is a sense of space which we no longer have, as the school is now surrounded by houses. Some of the old statues and urns appear. Peter Pan can be seen on Our Lady's Lawn where it remained until the late 1990s. After



an attempted theft (they only managed to remove it to the bottom of the drive), it was moved into one of our internal court yards to keep it safe. It would be interesting to know if the sisters bought this or whether it was part of the garden when they bought the house. The remains of various urns can still be seen hidden in different corners but sadly none of them have survived the last 78 years.

As you can see, I have included a number of photos from the book but there are of course a lot more. If any old girls recognise themselves or friends or have any reminiscences of the events we would be delighted to hear from you. In addition, if you would like to see any of the other photos, in case you appear, do get in touch. karen.boyle@rydeshill.com





Twelve Alumni reunited 51 years after leaving Rydes Hill - by Melanie Tyrell and Sarah Lockyer

'Dear Rydes Hill Convent School, we bring to you all that we yet may be and yet may do.' So we sang at Prize Giving in the summer of 1971, before bidding farewell to our wonderful Headmistress, the warm and generous Sister Patricia; our form teacher Sister Mary Campion, wise and gentle; Sister Mary Gerald, her nature as fiery and lively as her flame-coloured hair; and all the staff and pupils at Rydes Hill Convent. We had various secondary school destinations, but a good number of us reunited that September at The County (Guildford County Grammar School for Girls, as it was called back then) on Farnham Road, sporting scarlet hats in place of the blue Rydes Hill ones and all rather nervous at the prospect of 'big school.'



Fast forward to Spring 2022, when a group from our year at The County organised a reunion at the school to mark the 50th academic year anniversary of our arrival and managed to contact and invite many other contemporary alumni. It was a splendid opportunity to reconnect in person—and in a couple of cases via Zoom—with ‘girls’ we had not seen for decades and a chance to reminisce about our grammar school experiences. It is hardly surprising that those of us who had also spent years together at Rydes Hill soon gravitated towards one another, and we quickly found ourselves in deep and happy conversation about everything from the St Patrick’s Day celebrations and bringing bluebells for the statue of Mary, to country dancing with Mrs Reed and netball matches. Eager to continue the conversation beyond that event—to share our memories, rekindle our friendships, catch up with all we had been doing in the intervening years—we decided to set up a WhatsApp group. It began with the County School pupils, but thanks to some expert tracking and tracing, we started to reconnect with more and more members of the Class of ‘71 and have been so enjoying not only e-communication but, for those of us who could make it, more chances to meet in person in the Guildford area to talk over old times.



Our lives have taken very different paths in terms of career, location and interests, but we have in common an affection for the School that gave us such a good start. At Rydes Hill, we developed our academic, sporting and creative abilities in a safe and warm environment, where kindness and concern for others were modelled and encouraged. How lovely it has been to join conversation threads in which we remind each other of details of our time there that we may otherwise have forgotten: Singing Together on the radio in the Library, the Holy Shop, entering the Cadbury’s Dairy Milk competition and making Tudor dolls, curtsying to the Nuns, the treat of eating little ice cream bars wrapped in paper, music lessons with Mrs Concannon (with her big dog), drying dishes the Sister Malachy way, taking part in plays and concerts and much more. We have learned about one another’s families, home life, work and travel, shared photos and been amazed by everyone’s adventures and achievements. Most recently, we have exchanged Christmas and New Year greetings and are starting to make plans for further get-togethers next year, including, we hope, a visit to Rydes Hill, which some of us have not been back to for 50 over years! Where has the time gone? Happy Days indeed!



Former Rydes Hill pupil **Belinda Moore** has become the CEO of the Allianz Premier 15's (Women's Premiership Rugby) as she works on moving the business to a stand alone company ahead of a Women's World Cup in England in 2025.

Siobhan Patrick née Fletcher (2002 leaver) and **Nick Patrick** (1997 leaver) welcomed daughter Fiadh at 1:27am on New Year's Day, making her the first baby of 2023 born at the Royal Surrey and warranting a visit from the Mayor! She made an appearance on the Royal Surrey's social media pages as a result.

Fiadh's parents met in Nursery at Rydes Hill and married in 2017. Mrs Norville has shared this news with some of our current Nursery children, some of whom are adamant they will be marrying their classmates in the future!



Kate Woodcock (née Atkins) welcomed her first daughter, Claire Elizabeth Woodcock, in October 2021. Congratulations!



Many old Rydeshillians will remember former Lower Prep teacher (and netball enthusiast) **Mrs Carolyn Gambold**, who emigrated with her family to New Zealand in 2008.

Coincidentally, two other former teachers were on holiday in New Zealand in January this year. Although their paths didn't cross during their time there, they both managed to meet up with Carolyn.

Mrs Lorraine Price was French teacher at Rydes Hill and for a time shared the Lower Prep class teaching with Carolyn.

Tessa Forbes (former Deputy Head and Director of Music) worked alongside Carolyn at Rydes Hill for 17 years.



In Memoriam

Former Rydes Hill pupil Maureen Whitworth sadly passed away at the end of 2022, with her funeral being held at Guildford Crematorium on 12th December. Our thoughts and prayers are with her family.

Many of you with recent connections to Rydes Hill will remember our wonderful Deputy Bursar, Jonathan Parr, who died very suddenly in the Summer. He was an incredibly well loved member of our School community and Mrs Norville was honoured to have been able to read a eulogy at his funeral. The eulogy read as follows:

Jonathan began working at Rydes Hill in 2015. He started as Finance Officer, progressing to Deputy Bursar in due course. Whilst Jonathan had a great deal of experience in finance, he had not worked in a school before. However, it very quickly became evident that he was well suited to the unique set of skills required when working around children and those who teach and care for them.

Jonathan was passionate about his job. When I would take prospective parents on tours we would walk past his office. He would introduce himself as "the money man", but in reality, what he did was far more than that. It is true to say that he kept all our accounts in good check, making sure everything was done in a sensitive manner. However, he was also fiercely passionate about Rydes Hill, what our core values are and how we can provide the best possible education for the children. One entered into a conversation with Jonathan about making changes at the School with caution.

It is only now that we are beginning to touch the surface of the many things that he did for us quietly, without anyone knowing. We weren't aware that he and Suzy (his wife) would come in to 'flood proof' the School before heavy rain. The rain this summer has taught us that lesson. I have no doubt that our list of jobs to fill will get longer as time goes on and we fully appreciate all the 'little' things he did.

Rydes Hill is often described as a family, and those of us who work there all know this to be true. If we are a family, Jonathan was our patriarch. This is not to do with his role in the School, but what he was like as a person. He was incredibly kind and caring. He would be the person that others would go to if there was something upsetting them, or they just wanted an ear. He would offer his views with clear explanation. His incredible sense of humour and fun helped lighten many an occasion, particularly during the difficult days of lockdown. I personally will miss his frequent visits to my office to get a 'decent' coffee, using the chance to share a joke or a suggestion about something he thought would improve the School.

Jonathan was not only loved by the staff at Rydes Hill, but by the parents and children. My inbox has been filled with messages from parents who reflect the same sentiments – Mr Parr was a kind, warm, fair, generous, good humoured gentleman. To the children, it is hard not to notice someone who arrives at School in a different (and very fancy) car each day. They loved him waving to them with his car roof down, and with the coloured lights on his car at Christmas.

I have no doubt that Rydes Hill will be a very different place without Mr Parr. His will not be easy shoes to fill. We will remember him very fondly, for many years to come. We all extend our condolences to Suzy, Joshua, Amelia and all of Jonathan's family. We thank Jonathan from the bottom of our hearts for the years of dedication and service that he gave us, and pray he rests in peace.

