

Kathryn Dodd, nee Jones, (1961-68) sends us this fascinating account of her time at High Storrs:

*"I wrote this piece on my experiences at High Storrs as part of a bigger piece on the socio-psychological effects of upward 'social mobility' on individuals who experience it. I was a working-class child from Pitsmoor, Sheffield and passed the 11 plus. I attended High Storrs Grammar for seven years and went on to do Sociology and Politics at university. I became an academic, specialising in medical sociology, and researched and taught at Leicester University, Coventry University, the Thomas Coram Research Unit and Thames Valley University. The section on High Storrs is not happy or celebratory and I hope readers do not find it too negative. It was my experience and I write the story as I remember it. I would be happy for comments and corrections. My memory for names is appalling so any gaps you can fill would be welcomed."*

I had to get up at seven o'clock to arrive at school for ten to nine, so I couldn't fit with my family's usual routine. My dad got me up early at first, but after a few weeks I didn't bother him and got off to school on my own. Later, when my brothers and sisters started secondary school, I took over making breakfast for them, so mum and dad could sleep in. A regular saucepan of porridge got us started and was followed up with egg and beans, or bacon sandwiches, or a boiled egg and bread fingers. I liked ringing the changes.

Luckily, Susan Burns, my best friend from Pyebank junior school in Pitsmoor, had passed the 11 plus and got into High Storrs, so every morning I would walk up to her house on Catherine Street to call on her. I got worried if she wasn't ready and would have been mortified if we'd been late for school. We'd hurry down the hill, onto Burngreave Road and get a 75 bus into town, with our over-sized satchels difficult to handle as we invariably had to stand up. At least we got a free school bus pass, though it was a palaver when you lost it, which you always did, at least once in the year. You had to brave the frowns of the clerks at the Barkers Pool municipal offices to replace it.

I liked Sheffield buses with their cream and navy livery and I thought they were an improvement on the old trams which stopped running in 1960, the year before I started at secondary school. I liked the 'new' and the 'modern'. A short walk from the 75 to the 82 bus-stop took us through the new bit of the city centre, reconstructed after the heavy bombing in 1940 and 1942 around Fitzalan Square. The raised municipal flower beds on the wide pavements, the new glass and concrete shops, (C&A, Walsh's, Peter Robinson's, the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative store), were in sharp contrast to the rather grand, but blackened Gas Company building further down Commercial Street and the even grander GPO round the corner in the Square. The new buildings always lifted my spirits.

If the 75 bus brought me from the grimy nineteenth-century industrial landscape of my neighbourhood in Pitsmoor, to the new 60s city centre, the 82 bus took me from one world (the poor east side of Sheffield adjacent to all the steel works in the Don Valley) to the much more affluent west of Sheffield. From the start of the nineteenth century, large stone mansions were built there: the first Crescent was laid out in 1824 in Endcliffe Park; Kenwood Park Road was much more ambitious with its laid-out estates, and houses in the Tudor, classical or gothic styles, with their libraries,

conservatories, and ten foot walls round the acres of gardens to maintain their privacy; the stone houses of Broomhall, followed with Collegiate Crescent at its heart, with their four lodges manning the gates to control who got in and out of this 'rural' idyll, an early example of a gated community for the rich.

But none of this up-market development was known to me, as the 82 bus took us up Ecclesall Road where newer, twentieth-century housing had been built. Even though, these modern houses were a revelation to Susan and I, with their gardens and trees and long paths leading to the front door. We never used our front doors, approaching the house through a passage at the side, leading to the yard and to the back kitchen. So we were being taken into a foreign country. The terminus was at the top of Carterknowle Road, with the Derbyshire hills visible in the distance, but we still had a long walk up the hill to the school gates, over an hour's journey in all. It was a long way to travel when you were eleven and not just geographically - the psychological adjustment was even trickier.

High Storrs Grammar School, built in 1933, was a replacement and enlargement of the senior Central School in Leopold Street, in Sheffield's town centre. There was a great tradition of public education in Sheffield: initial drawings for the Central Schools development were immediately produced following the Education Act of 1870. The new replacement school sixty years later was a suitably modern building in the long, pared-down style of the thirties. On the left, looking from the road, was the boys' school, to the right the girls': two uniforms, two head-teachers, two timetables and two leaving times. The girls' entrance led straight down a long dark corridor with the cloakrooms behind wood and glass to the left, in which there were rows of long benches with shoe cages below and hooks above. In the first term, I felt safe in two places in the school – in those lovely, dark cloakrooms with all the coats hanging close together so you couldn't be seen, and in the toilets where there was complete escape. Everywhere else I felt frightened and exposed.

The first terrible shock was on the first day: I was split up from Susan, my only friend from primary school. Names were called out in the hall for each class – S, T, P, and (F?). We lined up accordingly, me in 1S and Susan in 1P. In a selective grammar school, which had already scooped up the brightest 25% of the age group, we apparently needed banding into four ability levels according to our 11 plus results. Apparently, Grammar schools were expected to sort their pupils into the top set (destined for university if you were a boy, and teacher training college if you were a girl), the middle set to provide recruits for middle management and the civil service, and the bottom set for those expected to leave school at sixteen and become white collar workers. It was very difficult to move from band to band once you were allocated, so your future life was pretty much sealed, for the second time, at eleven. True to form, Susan left school at sixteen and got a job as a bank clerk in Sheffield and I stayed on and went on to university.

The corridors with class-rooms off to one side were arranged around a garden with French windows which you couldn't enter. It introduced an airiness to the architecture and of course brought light into the centre of the building, something completely lost on me at the time. The rural feel of the school extended to the

beautiful views from the classrooms at the back, with large sports fields stretching out to the woods in one direction, and to the Derbyshire hills in the other. On the first day, we were led to a form room, where each girl was given a single desk (a wooden and iron all-in-one with a seat and desk with a lid) and a high pile of text-books all neatly presented and tied with string to keep everything in place. We were told that these were precious and that we were individually responsible for covering all our books, keeping them in good order and then stringing them together, and passing them on to the next girl when it came to the end of the school year. Of course, finding such a lot of book covering material was not easy in our house, and after a great deal of anxiety ended up with books covered in a variety of wallpapers. But I was proud to have so many books for myself: I was used to borrowing books from the local library but no-one in the family could afford to buy books and there were none in the home.

Once I'd got used to the idea that I didn't know anyone in my new class, I started wondering who was going to be my friend? I'm not sure how the few working-class girls in the class found each other, but I stuck to one all the way through school, even doing the same A levels as her. Jacqueline Turner's dad was a crane driver and she lived on the Manor Estate, where my auntie Lily, Uncle Sam, and cousins Susan and Christopher also lived. Eleven thousand people were housed in these modest, semi-detached council houses to the north-east, which re-housed the first generation of working-class people in the twenties and thirties from the worst housing in the city. The semis had two big rooms downstairs, a bathroom and two or three bedrooms. Gardens front and back. They were built for the respectable working class, only changing their status in the 1980s when the Thatcher closures of the subsidised steel works brought mass unemployment.

The first year at grammar school was marked by very confusing and contradictory feelings. I was relieved at surviving the completely new education regime of separate subjects and teachers, but was constantly alert to the chance of being humiliated and socially excluded. Jacky and I found out that we were both 'clever' by the school's standards; she had won one of the few scholarships to the private High School for Girls but had turned it down as too posh and expensive. So the two of us never had any problems with academic work or homework. We liked all the different subjects and the specialised rooms which catered for the different disciplines: we had an art room, a dressmaking area with sewing machines, a well-equipped domestic science room and music rooms with musical instruments at the back. Then, best of all, were science labs (all dark mahogany wood, with sinks and Bunsen burners) and little cupboards where dangerous chemicals could be handled. The sports department had a gymnasium and ample playing fields so we rotated our daily games lessons which included hockey, netball, gym and dance in winter, and tennis, cricket, rounders and gym in summer. I was proud to have such wonderful facilities.

But there was also the humiliation about my working-class origins which dogged me through that first year. My form mistress, a French teacher with a pronounced limp,

(Miss Russell??) had clear ideas about the kind of young lady who belonged in a grammar school, and I wasn't it. She was on dinner duty one day and spotted the way I was holding my cutlery. Before I knew what was happening, she'd grabbed my wrists and starting pressing food on the back of my fork, instructing me not to use my fork as a shovel. I was mortified and didn't understand what I was doing wrong. The whole dinner hall saw her do it, but remarkably, I experienced no bullying, and so whatever other pupils were thinking, nothing hurtful was ever said. I appreciate that now when I hear of the level of bullying that is suffered by children nowadays, but it has meant that whenever I sit at a formal dinner table I slightly panic, hoping that none of my meal ends up on the table-cloth. Naturally, I enjoyed my form mistress's look of utter confusion when I got the 'honours report' at the end of the first year. Could anyone be top of the school and be rubbish at cutlery? It seemed impossible in her cosy, snobbish world, which had been suddenly, deliciously, turned upside-down.

Next, the first Christmas party had to be endured. As some sort of training in being a hostess, we had to invite a teacher to the party with a formally written invitation. Then, on the evening of the party, we each had to accompany our 'guest' from the staff room, and 'entertain' her. At least I think that is what happened, but I was mystified throughout the whole evening and most of it passed in a haze of anxiety. Our family would have had no idea what 'entertaining' was. No-one was ever invited for a meal to our house, not even a relative. Grandma or Auntie Lil might get a cup of tea and a biscuit but that was as far as it went. There weren't enough chairs for a start. I had no idea that the school was inducting us, as 'young ladies', into the secrets of middle-class, socialising rituals. However, I did as I was told, picked Miss Watson as my 'guest', who was a kindly history teacher who I thought looked like Hattie Jacques. I also liked her because she gave entertaining stories in her lessons about her travels to historical sites abroad and encouraged my interest in decorating my history book with drawings I copied from books. She also smelled sweetly of scented soap like my Auntie Vi. As our evening progressed, she was nice enough to prompt me about what I should be doing as I think she must have recognised my confusion. But by then I was experiencing an extra level of misery when I realised I wasn't properly dressed for a party. Most of the girls had specially-bought party dresses, velvet bows in their coiffed hair, and shiny black patent shoes and white socks. I didn't have any of those things. The cost of the school uniform (an average working-man's wage) meant I didn't get any other clothes that year. When Grandma took us to Littlehampton in the following summer to see her sister-in-law, I had to wear my school uniform. All I had for the party was some awful cheap summer dress from the year before and my school shoes.

The next anxiety was about parents' evening. My mother never went up to school as she was so ashamed of her shabby appearance and bad teeth. My dad had no such worries and was more interested in hearing me praised, as that way, he got recognition too. He always wore his flat cap, partly to control his contrary, Welsh,

crinkly hair, so of course that would give away his class origins immediately. His face was like any other window-cleaner's, who spent his entire working-life outdoors, permanently ruddy and sun dried. His hands were much worse. He had to put them into water every few minutes to clean out his mop and scrim. It wasn't so bad in summer, but in winter not everyone he asked would give him hot water and, anyway, it would quickly cool. The water would first chap his hands. Vaseline helped, but then, as the season wore on, deep sores would form in cracks which the frost would break open. He had to bind up his damaged hands every night. Window-cleaning was not a job for sissies before the invention of rubber gloves. I wonder what Mrs Collier, the chic French teacher, made of him? She was a very elegant woman, with her long dark hair fixed in a loose pleat at the back of her head and a fine wool cardigan hanging from her shoulders. The social chasm between her and my father couldn't have been wider. My dad didn't own a suit, so he might have been wearing his best jacket - a second-hand velvet number which was his idea of 'best' clothes. But he always came back from parents' evening in good spirits, so at least one of us was happy.

When I wasn't being shown how to eat properly, or to entertain, but taught Latin, Maths or Art, I felt more at ease. Lessons generally passed without any problems, academic prowess became my claim to fame after all. The exception was Mrs Collier's French lessons. Fortunately, we learned most of the language from a book and I could learn vocabulary as well as the next person, but speaking *oral* French in her lessons was heart-thumpingly awful. Once she decided, it would be a good idea for each of us to describe our families, starting with our father's occupation. I remember, as she started with the row furthest from me, getting into a complete panic. There was no way that I was going to admit my dad was a window-cleaner, and I was madly trying to think of the French for plumber. I was so flustered by the time she got to me that I just fluffed the words and she passed on. I hadn't been concentrating well enough for me to work out what most of the other girls had been saying, but one mentioned the name of the shop her dad owned. I think it was Sheenagh Watt-Smith. Having a businessman as a father was impossibly grand to me, so that made my embarrassment even worse. I decided nobody must ever find out who I was, or what my dad did for a living or where I was from. I never said I was from Pitsmoor, which just sounded dire, but Firth Park, the district further north where there was a boys' grammar school. It sounded better to me but probably wasn't as far as the middle-class girls' understanding of Sheffield geography was concerned. It was on the 'other' side of town so that was that. I should say that this fever of embarrassment was all in my head. No teacher or pupil ever made an actual comment about my origins in the whole seven years I was in the school.

I knew, however, that my Sheffield accent was another stumbling block. I didn't even know I had an accent until I got to grammar school. Everyone I had known up until then spoke like me (except grandma who was from London). In fact, I thought I was a cut above in some ways as I didn't swear, or speak the local dialect, which could only be learned if your parents had been born and bred in Sheffield. My dad was Welsh and my mother had been born in Derby, but I inevitably dropped my aitches like all the other children round our way, spoke with a northern short 'a' for bath, and, much more stigmatising, a strong 'uh' as in 'uhz', not 'aus'. Tony Harrison would

immortalise his bitterness and defiance about being corrected on this usage by his English teacher at Leeds Grammar School in his poem, 'Them and [uz]'. Alan Bennett has also spoken of the treacherous Yorkshire 'uh' sound which can trip you up when you least expect it. If you try to 'put it on', you will always be found out when you mispronounce words that everyone pronounces as an 'uh' sound, as in 'put' or 'push' and 'pull'. I could perhaps have explained to my teachers about the niceties of local speech, especially when you wanted to be emphatic: 'an't got nowt' (three syllables) was short for 'I haven't got anything' (seven syllables); 'shrupp' was short for 'shut up', and 'gi' o'er' meant literally 'give over', but meant 'stop what you're doing now!' 'Sithee' literally meant 'see thee', but meant 'listen to me carefully', which sounds like a throw-back to old English. But it wouldn't have mattered whatever I thought about the richness and expressiveness of local speech, in grammar school, 'slang' was totally unacceptable and I began to watch my speech carefully until, after a few years I was speaking in two distinct ways, one for school and one for home and neighbourhood.

The point about the acceptability or otherwise of speech modes was made even more explicit when I was chosen to read on of the nine lessons from the Bible at my first Christmas carol concert, and was required to have elocution lessons. The concert was a huge annual event with enormous significance to the school's sense of its own importance, but even more so to the municipality and the great and the good who were invited. Why did the school choose me to read the lesson if they didn't like the way I spoke? Perhaps they were trying to be helpful and show me how to adopt a more educated way of speaking. But nobody explained what was happening, so I just saw it as another criticism. I felt self-conscious speaking 'their' way and I certainly didn't want to mimic those voices on the BBC, in received pronunciation which mystified me. Not even the few professional people I came across, such as the local doctor (who was Irish) or the teachers at my primary school, spoke remotely like that. But I had to practice my Bible piece, Luke 2, 8-16 over and over, in received pronunciation, starting with:

*And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. And all went to be taxed, everyone to his own city. And Joseph went up from Galilee, out of the city to Nazareth into the City of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David.*

I liked the grand sound of the words, but I hit a sticking point towards the end of the piece. I couldn't say 'the young child, lying in a manger'. That 'uh' sound caught me out again, so the 'young child' came out as the 'yuhng child' - straight Sheffield. That 'uh' haunted me, so when the time came and I had to mount the steps to the stage in City Hall with an audience of two thousand people (all the teachers, the pupils, and parents), my head swum and I had to do the whole thing from memory. I've no idea if I said it 'right'. I never asked and nobody said.

The result was that from that moment, my voice has never been quite my own. I've unconsciously developed many ways of speaking, depending on my audience. With a degree of shame, I notice that I do concentrate very hard on 'correcting' my speech when I'm speaking to anyone eminent, say a well-known academic. But if I go to

Sheffield for a few days and stay with relatives, I can eventually relax and speak as I originally used to, only to come back to London, with this inappropriate and striking accent, and start the whole laborious process of adjustment again. I try to keep some Sheffield in my speech whoever I'm talking to, unlike people of an earlier generation like Joan Bakewell who was born in Stockport but who now speaks like the Queen. I still like to hang onto what I see as an important 'other' identity, even though I haven't lived in Sheffield for forty-five years.

I don't think my relative poverty compared to most of the girls in my class was that apparent, thanks to the standard expensive school uniform which was slow to show its age. At one point, I regularly took some of the free bottles of milk home in my satchel: an inordinate amount was wasted every day and it seemed sensible to me to take some of it home and get it drunk. No-one noticed or least no-one said anything. Perhaps it appeared odd that at the first Christmas fair, I bought up practically the whole of the toy stall's home-made items as presents for my brothers and sisters, using money I made from babysitting next-door's children.

Once, I was asked why I was struggling with an extra-large bag by a girl I met on the bus. As I couldn't think of a quick lie, Jacky jumped in with the truth: 'She's going to the slipper baths'. I hoped no-one understood what she'd said, but no such luck. Jacky plugged on and explained all the horrible details. It was the worst act of betrayal I had ever experienced; she showed me up as a poor, working-class girl, whose family had no modern amenities. She seemed to revel in poking fun at me, presumably because she could look down on me because we didn't have a bathroom or indoor toilet. The shock on the other girl's face said it all, but once again she didn't gossip and I never heard anything else about it. I went to the Sutherland Road Baths once or twice a week after school to use their bathroom facilities. This was the large municipal amenity about a mile from home that had been built in enlightened, nineteenth-century times for the local workers, and included bathrooms, a wash-house and a swimming pool. The large steamy bathing room was divided into cubicles and the first job was to find an empty cubicle. I liked the one in the corner best, because it was bigger than the rest and there was plenty of room to hang up your clothes and get down to cleaning the bath with some bright pink disinfectant in a bucket and a long-handled brush. Then you filled the bath up with scalding water and had a good soak. I enjoyed it very much, but it wasn't anything I wanted to be known for. You even averted your eyes if another woman was coming out of a cubicle at the same time as you. We all knew there was a stigma attached to going.

But everything about my double life was potentially stigmatising by then. I vividly recall being in the centre of town on my way home from school and seeing my mother on the other side of the High Street. I can see her now in the distance. Though only forty or so, she looked terrible - very overweight, wearing an old shapeless mac, with her dusty pull-on hat, old shoes and numerous shopping bags weighing her down. Her face was puffy, red and sweaty because of her exertion and high blood pressure, her early death already being presaged. I didn't want to

acknowledge her and desperate with embarrassment, I ran away in the opposite direction. She hadn't seen me. My mother had nothing to do with my school existence as she would never go to school performances or parents' evening to see the teachers. How could she? It would have reminded her how far she had come down in the world – from the beautiful young secretary who worked in the Town Hall, read the New Statesman and went out with the Sheffield Clarion ramblers club, to the exhausted skivvy at home looking after seven children on next to no money. My horror at seeing her in public confirmed what she herself must have known – that she wasn't fit to be seen in the company I was now keeping. I now keep two photographs of her on show at home, one in her lovely youth and one in her distressing middle-age. I watched the tragedy unfold over the years and I'm still guilty about her awful decline and early death at 71.

I began to grow my hair after a while, to water down my utilitarian short cut and to try and look a bit more feminine perhaps. But my efforts were pointless as I was sporty and later played netball and tennis for the school, so I was never going to be one of the popular, pretty ones. That elite group were all middle-class and had that clean, fresh, healthy look I recognise in my sons a generation later. I also wasn't bothered about looking attractive or pretty and was genuinely confused when girls started complaining about their stomachs or thighs being too fat. I never took the slightest interest in what I looked like and was totally uninterested in boys. I had already decided unconsciously that I was more 'head' than 'body'. At odd times during our teenage years Jacky would remind me I could enjoy myself and ask me to go out with her in the evening to 'socialise'. I didn't want to go, but I tried out one or two things she suggested: roller skating in Attercliffe was alright, if pointless, going round and round monotonously with the noise of the skates on the wooden floor practically deafening me. I associate that particular venture with two things. It must have been a Friday when I was coming up to fourteen because when I was on my way there, I noticed an electrical shop full of TVs in the window suddenly fill with repeated J.F.Kennedy images. It was November 1963 and it was the day he was shot dead. The other thing was that I could hardly walk. My difficulty was the result of a disastrous purchase of 'fashionable' shoes from Auntie Vi's catalogue – scotch, winkle-pickers with a black patent heel - not only bad taste, but also the wrong size. I don't remember ever having my feet measured for shoes as a child and I guessed I was probably a size 5 like my mother. Wearing the shoes for twenty minutes showed me I was wrong. My toes were so crushed together they started to bleed. I was not Cinderella, but one of the ugly sisters; I later found out I was size six and a half.

Another half-hearted venture was a trip to Jacky's local youth club, held in brand-new Waltheof Secondary Modern School (named after the Viking Earl of Northumberland and Hallamshire) on the Manor estate. We were collected together in a small hall, with a table-tennis table, a record player and a few young people who didn't have the confidence to talk to one another. Although working-class girls were supposed to be a bit forward when it came to flirting with the opposite sex, I had no



interest in it. I sometimes liked the look of a boy in a shy kind of way, but it never went any further. I adopted a strange, voluntary celibacy and had only kissed a couple of boys by the time I was eighteen. For bright girls there seemed an unwritten rule that if you were to be academically successful, there was to be no sex.

So what with all the shame (the accent, my dad's job, where I lived) did I value anything about my grammar school? I was grateful for the dinners, always two courses and all home-made. The sixties was the great decade for school meals, subsidised and nutritious and I loved them. It also meant that my mother could forget about getting us a cooked meal when we got home, as we could make do with a sandwich and perhaps a Weetabix before we sent to bed. Working-class meals in the North were then based on what a manual worker would need to eat: a cooked breakfast, elevenses, dinner (a proper cooked meal), tea (sandwiches and cake), and supper (a snack before going to bed.) I have kept to this regime all my life, even if the portions have been getting smaller as the decades have passed. I am always struck by the eating habits of well-heeled Londoners who get by either constantly grazing on next to nothing, or waiting until 'supper', what they call their evening meal, which they don't eat until eight or nine at the earliest. But those school meals in the sixties set me up and I'm sure our big family would have suffered without them, as we did when the summer holidays came around. It sent my mother into an anxious frenzy, trying to fill us up, three times a day, and she even took to hiding food shopping under her bed so we wouldn't eat it all at once.

So the meals were good at school and I always looked forward to them. The lessons on the whole were not so memorable. Was it because we were in an all-girls grammar school, that the institution seemed so unambitious? Did the boys next door get better teaching or a more ambitious curriculum? I do remember one really exceptional teacher – Miss M.T. Freeman, the classics teacher who took us for Latin. Miss Freeman was an archetypal 'spinster' teacher, trained in the inter-war years, wedded to the job and brilliant at it. She was thin and rather petite and had a very old-fashioned forties hairstyle, her long salt and pepper hair tucked into a small roll around the back of her head and held in place with hair pins. She made Latin the most interesting subject I did, contextualising the language within the history of Roman society and always treating us with intellectual respect. She was wonderful at explaining complex topics and I remember she once helped one of the English teachers, who could not explain what a gerund was. We just didn't get it, but Miss Freeman got to the bottom of it in Latin in no time. I shared her love of grammar and found the whole subject absorbing. Who else could have sold Virgil's Aeneid to us, with its military values, never-ending battles and dripping severed heads? I was so inspired I got a copy of Dryden's translation in poetry from the library and studied it on my own. She also ran the library and when I took sciences at A level she gave me a copy of Robert Oppenheimer's book about his central involvement in the making of the atomic bomb and got me to do a review for the newsletter. She was the only teacher who ever put books my way.

The odd English teacher tried more discussion-based methods of teaching, but the novels that were chosen for us were so awful that I could never get really engaged. Even as a pupil I thought the set-texts were a strange choice for an all-female school. In the first year it was Walter Scott's medievalist *Ivanhoe* set in post-Crusade, twelfth-century Britain; later, we were given George Elliot's story of greed and redemption, *Silas Marner*. Another year, it was Charles Reade's bizarre *The Cloister on the Hearth*, about the early life of Erasmus in the fourteenth-century which nearly killed my love of books stone dead. Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*, came a little later, but was small-minded and silly as far as I was concerned. This list of the unsuitable pursuing the ghastly, only improved with Dickens' *David Copperfield* in the O level year, though the length of it, at around eight hundred pages, was daunting. I remember dividing the number of pages by the weeks we had to finish it and making sure I read exactly that number, day by day, and week by week, sometimes finishing mid-page, mid- chapter. I did finish it and it has stayed with me ever since as one of my favourite books.

I enjoyed how one teacher got us to bring in props and act out scenes from the set Shakespeare play, *Julius Caesar*, (stabbing Caesar dressed in a white sheet was entertaining) and another teacher got us to do creative writing. It was interesting to make our own version of a poem, a ballad, a fable and finally a 'novel', and, as I've remembered her intervention from fifty years ago, it must have made an impression as a more engaging approach. I liked one history teacher, because she told us stories from her travels and encouraged me to fill my notebook with my own drawings. History to me was visual – the Tudor houses, the castles, the endlessly changing clothes, the streets, the kings and queens, the battles. When I got to O level, in 1966, all we did with a particularly uninspiring teacher (??) was take notes from her dictation and sit endless tests. Are there thirteen causes of the First World War? Perhaps there are. She put me off the subject for good. Maths and science I mastered easily. It was abstract and logical and I took to it. I liked the fact you could get things right, and as I did, it appealed to me. But no teacher stands out except perhaps Miss Beech and her bloomers, on view under her desk.

I could 'do' most subjects, but I was made to drop the creative subjects for the more academic after the first year. I liked the way we could work by ourselves in art, dress-making and domestic science. The freedom to pursue a project through to its end was a lovely change from other lessons. Luckily, I was good at sport and played for the school, so I got some excellent coaching from the sports mistresses, one of whom (??) was in the English Ladies cricket team. I was fortunate to get her input and I'm still an accurate bowler to this day.

At the end of the fourth year (now called year 10), I got another honours report, but it was downhill from then on. I was getting sick and tired of school and year 11, the 'O' level year, killed off any love of learning. There was too much note taking and testing that I was almost persuaded by Susan Burns to leave school and get a job in a bank, as she eventually did. I was so bored by it all and I couldn't think what subjects to do

at A level. No help was forthcoming from the teachers, so I did what Jacky did, the three sciences. As soon as I made my choice the maths teacher told me I'd made a mistake, as I was an 'arts girl'. I wasn't sure what that was, but I'd been put off English and History by the O level curriculum and Latin was the only language I'd enjoyed, and what could you do with that? I was 'good' at maths and science, if not inspired, and had enjoyed programmes on TV like Armand and Michaela Denis On Safari, David Attenborough's Zoo Quest, his first natural history series, and Your Life in their Hands. The latter featured televised surgery procedures and I was toying with the idea of medicine. Later on there was Tomorrow's World and I would watch any documentary about astronomy with my dad's encouragement. (Early television has been routinely underestimated in discussions of the effects of TV in the on working-class children of my generation. For me it was exciting and interesting, opening up worlds I could never have known about otherwise. )

I also made a link between science and my family's politics, as my mum and dad were solid Labour, and socialists. I remember delivering Labour Party pamphlets throughout my childhood and we were overjoyed when Harold Wilson won the General Election in 1964. I went into Marshall's on Andover Street, the local newsagents where I worked and did a sort of victory war-dance in front of the proprietor's son, who I knew was a Conservative. I thought it was going to be a great change for the better and I took to heart from Wilson's gripping vision of the 'white heat of technology' which would make all our lives better and provide us with a modern socialist future. Wilson made this speech at the 1963 party conference reflecting on the pace of technological change and its implications for industry. Wilson warned his audience that if the country was to prosper, a "new Britain" would need to be forged in the "white heat" of this "scientific revolution". He cleverly placed the Labour Party in the future, the Conservatives he cast as Luddites, way past their best, doddering and out of step with the times. It was an optimistic time for young left-wing young women like me, but I could not share my hopes or politics with anyone except my dad. All this went on in my head and I didn't think to look for like-minded people at school with whom I could discuss politics.

The Biology A level class was large being the science subject that girls were told they could do; the Physics class was much smaller and Chemistry only attracted three of us and had to be taught in a cupboard by a nervous peripatetic, male teacher. I liked the practical elements of science in the lab, but I was bored almost immediately in the lessons, and wondered what I could do to keep motivated. Then, in my last year, I was elected as Head Girl. I don't know why or how it happened. I wasn't particularly popular. I didn't have lots of friends and I immediately wished I hadn't been given the position. I had been brought up by my dad to be anti-authority and anti-establishment and although I was not a rebel, I needed to be persuaded that arbitrary rules and norms were legitimate. I didn't want to be at the top of a ridiculous hierarchy I didn't believe in and wished I'd had the nerve to turn down the offer of being Head Girl. One of my responsibilities was to call on the Headmistress, Miss Furtado, every morning and accompany her to the hall for the daily Christian assembly (I'd been an atheist all my life). I was obliged to carry her hymn book and place it on the desk on the stage and retire gracefully to the side. I hated bowing and scraping like this. Another job was organising the prefects into rotas for their various 'duties', all nonsense of course. There was beret duty: we had to take turns standing at the exit door at the end of the school day to make sure everyone had their beret

on properly. In the nineteen-sixties, older girls started wearing their hair in back-combed, bee-hives and they had to fix their hats to the back of their head with multiple grips. So there had to be a new school rule that the beret had to be visible from the front: unenforceable of course.

Another duty was taking a turn reading the daily lesson from the Bible, which became the source of my undoing: one of the prefects (??) got pregnant and I was summoned to the Head's room, to find a deeply embarrassed woman totally out of her depth trying to explain the situation to me. Whether there had been a discussion with the staff I don't know, but the pregnant prefect was not to be expelled, against the Head's better judgment I thought. I was then instructed to relieve the pregnant woman of her prefectural duties because of her 'condition'. I took no notice of the instruction mainly because I didn't want to act as the Head's lackey. Why didn't the Head tell her he was 'sacked' if she felt so inclined? But I naively let the girl keep her place on the Bible rota without any notion of what a storm would ensue. When she walked up to the lectern and started reading, the Head became apoplectic – a person who had had sex before marriage reading the Holy Book! Miss Furtado was visibly shaking as she told me I had brazenly disobeyed her and that I was to go round every class in the school and apologise to all the girls in the school for allowing such a travesty. I couldn't see what the fuss was about, so I took no notice of that order either. No-one in the lower school knew the girl was pregnant at that stage, so it was obvious that I was being told to do something ridiculously counter-productive. We were at an impasse. The prefects came out in support of the girl and the Head backed down. Surprisingly I was kept on as Head Girl, but my pariah status lingered. After that, I just wanted to get out of the place.

The only way out for me was university but not a single teacher in the school thought it necessary to give any help to those of us who had no idea what a university was. I realised at some point that it had been decided that the place for girls like us was a teacher-training college, but I had no intention of following that path. When both Jacky and I turned college down, I think we were left to fend for ourselves. Jacky went for straight science, but I was so turned off sciences by then that I applied for the most arbitrary courses I could find: 'Philosophy of Science' at Manchester – no idea what that was, but it sounded a challenge and I was offered a place; metallurgy at Sheffield, ditto; cybernetics and ergonomics Loughborough and some social science courses. I got offers from all six universities I applied for, and I'm ashamed to say I accepted the place which offered me the lowest grades – University of Wales, Swansea. There was a slight nostalgia in my choice having spent holidays in Wales over many years, but Swansea was in the industrial South, not the picturesque north that I'd known through my childhood. The main reason for going was that such a choice would take away the pressure I'd endured for seven years. For once, I wouldn't have to try my hardest to get top grades at A level and it wouldn't matter. Grammar school had got me to where I wanted to go and that was all that mattered: Politics and Sociology at university beckoned.