

A brief history of The Hall School

With the support of The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), The Hall School was founded in Weybridge, Surrey in 1898 by Eva Margaret Gilpin, an innovative educationalist, together with the instigation and vision of Sir Michael Sadler, a renowned educationalist famous above all for pioneering primary education in India.

In the very early days, the school was known as the Village Hall School and it was here that Miss Gilpin (who was later to become Lady Michael Sadler) set out her vision to convey her inspiring and comprehensive conception of the meaning of education.

The school was co-educational at Weybridge; with the onset of the Second World War, the Weybridge buildings were requisitioned by the Ministry of Defence so in 1939, the school moved from Weybridge to a rural hilltop mansion house in Bratton Seymour, Wincanton, Somerset.

It was at this extraordinary location in Somerset that the school then established itself as a small independent girls' boarding school with (during its peak years) approximately 120 pupils enrolled per year as either full boarders, weekly boarders or day girls and a staff body averaging 20 full and part time teachers.

Girls could start at The Hall School from the age of 9 and from the 1960s, it was then possible for girls to continue their education to A' Level in the Sixth Form by joining their male counterparts for daily lessons at its brother school, King's School in Bruton, Somerset.

After 85 years of existence, The Hall School closed down in July 1983 - factors such as two larger girls' public schools in the vicinity, coupled with the school's isolation from any major centres of population and poor transport links, impacted negatively on The Hall School's prospects.

The withdrawal of funding by local authorities for pupils in independent schools together with the recession of the early eighties put pressure on all schools – the larger independent schools in the West Country area managed to maintain their numbers by admitting more applicants whilst smaller independent schools saw their enrolment numbers dwindle.

In June 1983, the governors of The Hall School came to the agonizing but wise and courageous conclusion that since the school could no longer be economically or educationally viable with the prospective roll for September 1983, the only honourable

course of action was to close the school while its reputation was high and it had absolutely no financial difficulties.

In the mid-to-late 1980s, most of the buildings of The Hall School were sold for redevelopment and conversion into several extensive private residences.

Today, the site of the old school is a residential community in itself and from its commanding hilltop position, residents can still enjoy panoramic views of the surrounding countryside.

While 85 years of Hall School history came to an abrupt end, the spirit of the school still lives on today through The Hall School Old Scholars' Association (www.thehallschool.org) and The Hall School Trust – a bursary fund set up from the proceeds of the sale of the school buildings, grounds and equipment.

Today, this trust fund allocates grants to help former pupils, their children and grandchildren fulfil their educational needs.

Some notable former pupils* of The Hall School:

Alise Ashby – Published Composer and Songwriter (Boston and New York)

Christine Bierdrager – PhD Clinical Psychology (Los Angeles and Bangkok)

Claudia Cole – Animal Portraiture (Wiltshire)

Sarah Finch – Marketing Manager, Merrill Lynch (Hong Kong)

Jo Girdlestone - Actress (UK)

Katherine Kingsbury - Viola Player, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (UK)

Clare Latimer - Caterer, Clare's Kitchen (UK)

Emma Lumley-Frank – Property Manager (French Alps)

Claire Morpurgo MBE - Farms for City Children (UK) & wife of Michael Morpurgo (author)

Juliette Newth – Area Sales Manager, Brakes Foodservice Solutions (UK)

Lucy Schofield – Certified Accountant and Legal Executive (Surrey)

Penny Schofield – Solicitor and Assistant Deputy Coroner (Hampshire)

Sara Schofield – Solicitor (Hampshire)

Musonda Shikopa – Morgan Stanley (New York)

Mutamba Shikopa – Marketing Manager (Wiltshire)

Astrid Tesson – Divisional Managing Director, Deutsche Bank (London)

Anna Thompson – General Manager, South East Asia, Cathay Pacific Airways (Singapore)

Sarah Thompson – Financial Services Director, Your Move (UK)

Antoinette van Belle – Actress (Costa Rica); Dru Yoga and Iokai Shiatsu specialist

Ming Veevers-Carter – Owner, Veevers-Carter Flowers (London)

Sarah Wheeler – Interior Designer and Contemporary Artist (Wiltshire)

Deceased:

Jean Henderson - Suffragette

Jean McGibbon – Writer

Jemma de Vere Cole – Fine Artist (Wiltshire)

Ferelyth Wills – Sculptress

*Please forward entries to: contact@thehallschool.org