

Head Girl at Kendal High School

Dr. Sheila Cochrane was born in 1923 and interviewed in 1992

When I was five in 1929 I was taken along to Thorny Hills to the Kindergarten at Kendal High School. My mother would take me there and I walked home with the big girls and my mother usually met me at Stramongate Bridge. One day she was early and had come right along to Thorny Hills and I was so annoyed when I was going with these big girls that I gave her a kick outside Kentdale Nursing Home. Mother never came beyond Stramongate Bridge after that. In those days you stayed in the same building all the way through school life. I stayed in the Kindergarten until I was seven. Then I moved up to lower third, then Upper third; then lower fourth and so on to Upper Fifth. I took the School Certificate when I was fourteen. I was considered to be a bit young to do that. I hadn't leap frogged I just think it was being at school all the time. The 11+ wasn't even thought of in those days and you just continued upwards to the top.

There were very few students left in the Sixth Form after the School Certificate. On the whole most people left after the Upper Fifth. A lot of my High School generation would probably get jobs in Kendal.

It was an extremely friendly school and the teachers were helpful. Two of us were doing maths for higher, it was called "higher" in those days, with Miss Blacker. I liked the sun and the other girl liked the shade so we sat in the quadrangle in the summer, half sun half shade and we had to move our desks according to where the sun was and this mistress did this for us.

There were about 270, maybe 350 there when I left. I really enjoyed Kendal High because you got people of all strata there, and when I did go to university, you felt that you had come from something a bit more special than the high powered city schools. I enjoyed it and I was Head Girl there for two and a half years and then helped in the office for a term once I got into Cambridge. It would be called "Work Experience" now but it was just voluntary.

The boarding house at Kendal High became more difficult in the latter years I think than in my time because the house was quite a difficult one with lots of entrances. In later years when I was a governor you used to hear about girls wanting to climb out or boys wanting to climb in.

One memory I have was when the boarders were trying out the fire escape system. You had to go down on a rope from the upper classrooms with the aid of a rope and a pulley and you had to keep yourself away from the wall. Miss Trood, our headmistress at the time, had some lovely little black Charles Spaniels when they came to be big black Charles, one male one female and they had three little grey Charles puppies. It was wartime and Miss Trood and her friend Miss Blacker were vegetarians, but they both got the meat ration, and you saw steaming bowls of meat being carried in to these dogs.

We actually lived on the corner of Maude Street. Dad built the surgery when I was four and my uncle moved down as well. His consulting rooms had been the back of his house opposite the General Post Office. He had two rooms in which he saw his patients, a violet ray room, a dispensary and a little private waiting room.

There was none of the one-way traffic. Oh it was a much slower existence and a memory I have is of the road sweepers sweeping the road with his handcart. Well imagine a road-sweeper in Stricklandgate now! Then in Sandes Avenue you had the gaslights and the little gas lighter going down with his rod over his shoulder lighting the lights.

We had a playroom at the top of the house. My brother and I had that but I never really used it when I was bigger and studying. I always did that in the sitting room because I liked to know what was going on.

The war was about to begin. We had just come back from holiday in Scotland and had bought reams of blackouting in Glasgow to cover all the surgery premises and found my uncle had evacuees arriving, all with labels on. He lived in the house known as Dr Noble's House that became Dodd's the Electricians and later a curtain shop. Noble's Rest, the park at the bottom of Maude Street is in memory of him.

Mrs Noble his widow when she was leaving that house and moving into Stricklandgate House she went to the top window she went to the top window and made my uncle build a wall so high that he would not be able to see over it into her garden. She lived in Stricklandgate House, just her and her maid. She used to come out of the house with her maid, Ada go into Noble's Rest to chase the children if they were not sticking to one side of the park. Noble's Rest, previously, had been a rugby ground and we used to clamber up on our wall in Maude Street and watch all the crowds coming in.

Then the park was built and there was meant to be a children's shelter and a sand pit but the children weren't allowed to be on that side of the park, officially, so really it was almost a white elephant, and yet she had the alms-houses built there. She was a benefactress but I think she was a recluse really.

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