

Lincoln High School Commemoration Services

Item of Interest No 85

From the Garton Archive

Compiled by Peter Harrod

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LHS Commemoration Service at Lincoln Cathedral in July 1956

Commemoration Days, sometimes known as Founder's Days, are a common feature of the calendar at public and other independent schools in the UK. They normally take the form of a religious service to celebrate the foundation of the school. A speaker is often invited to give the address. Grammar schools often imitated the public schools in many ways and also celebrated their foundation with a similar service. As girls' high schools began to be opened in the late nineteenth century, they also followed suit and Lincoln Christ's Hospital Girls' High School (LHS) was no exception.

This photograph, probably taken by the Lincolnshire Echo, shows LHS pupils emerging from their annual commemoration service at Lincoln Cathedral in July 1956. Centre stage, fourth from the left, is Head Girl Joey Lyon, flanked by prefects and other senior pupils including Jacqueline Lord, Angela Houlty, Marie Smith, Margaret Wark, Athalie Wales, and Jean Perkins. Joey has very sketchy memories of the occasion

and another Head Girl, Ruth Montgomery (m. Miller) told me that no-one apparently knew what it was they were commemorating, and she could only recall having to wear white shirts with ties, and the school hymns that they sang on the occasion, 'Through the night of dark and sorrow' and 'Fight the good fight.' She remembered thinking at the time what a strange choice they were, and several alumnae have since expressed a similar feeling!

The first ever commemoration service took place in Lincoln Cathedral in June 1898, six years after LHS opened on Lindum Road. The school magazine reported that an annual Special Flower Service was to be included in the calendar to celebrate and commemorate the opening of the school. The official school flower was the lily of the valley, and the service was planned for early June when the lilies were in full bloom. Every child wore a lily, and a vase of beautiful 'Madonna' lilies was on view in the School Hall. The Dean read prayers and gave an address.

On a somewhat lighter but equally informative note, Mr Evetts gave a most interesting talk on hedgehogs and badgers. His main theme was how useful those animals are to the gardener and the farmer, pointing out that the hedgehog's natural food consisted of slugs, leatherjackets, beetles and other garden pests. With respect to badgers, he informed his audience how useful those 'quiet clumsy-looking animals' were in keeping rabbits under control.

The annual commemoration continued until 1909 when it appeared to stop. There may have been a further service in 1910 but there is a gap in the LHS magazines from Easter 1910 to Easter 1911 and there is no evidence to suggest why the service ceased to exist. The 1909 birthday of the School was commemorated on 3rd June when Sub-Dean Canon Leake read prayers at 10am followed by an address to the assembled School as was the custom. A large number of parents, friends and Old Girls attended the prayers and visited the form-rooms which had been decorated by the pupils for the occasion. During the evening the Games Club organized a dance which ended at 10pm with hearty cheers for Headmistress Ashburner and the Club. Perhaps we might infer from the large number who attended the service that the reason why it was stopped was the lack of space in the small School Hall. It also coincided with the appointment of Miss Lucie Savill in 1911 as headmistress following the sad and untimely death of Miss Ashburner in February 1910. Miss Savill was a deeply religious person with a profound Christian faith, and she may have felt that the annual communion service was a more appropriate celebration.

Some thirty-five years were to elapse before the Commemoration Service was to be resurrected, but under curious circumstances. The December 1945 edition of the LHS magazine contained an entry from the recently appointed Headmistress Cleave under the title. 'Commemoration Service'. This is an extract from the entry, which begins by referring to the annual communion services held at St Benedict's Church for staff, governors and benefactors:

"We value these services very much and hope that they may long continue, but for obvious reasons the School as a whole cannot take part in them. It has been suggested, therefore, that we should hold an annual commemoration service in the Cathedral, inviting not only present girls to attend, but also Old Girls, staff, parents and

friends of the School as well. The Dean and Chapter have received the suggestion most kindly and have reserved for us the first Saturday in July."

Miss Cleave felt that such services would bear witness to the Christian traditions and values of the School and also strengthen its sense of solidarity as a community. She also had in mind doing everything she and the staff could to make the School conscious of its founding traditions by informing the pupils of former personalities and achievements during the early days through talks by Old Girls and former staff. First thoughts were of Miss Lucie Savill who, after thirty-three years as headmistress, would be able to share a host of memories. She was pleased to announce that Miss Savill had already accepted the invitation for July 1946. The reason why the entry aroused my curiosity was because Miss Cleave was clearly unaware that there had been an annual commemoration service from 1898 to 1909! The address in 1946 was given by the Provost of Southwell, the Very Rev H C L Heywood MA, who took up the theme of Commemoration stating that it was a time of thanksgiving, resolution and petition. Loyalty to the school was also one of his main themes and the school's emblem, the *fleur-de-lys*, is clearly visible on some of the blazers.

Further scrutiny of the Summer 1946 magazine revealed what a vibrant school LHS was during the 1940s. There were many musical events organised by Miss Broadbent including visits to hear the London Philharmonic Orchestra in Grimsby and the St Matthew Passion in Lincoln Cathedral. A school party also went to Stratford to see a performance of *Hamlet* and the legendary Miss Ryder accompanied a party of seniors to see Richard III at the Ritz Cinema which later became the Odeon and is now Wetherspoon's Restaurant.

Several pupils went on to higher education that year including Pamela Lawrence who won a place at St Hilda's College, Oxford to read English and Jean Perkins who studied English at Durham University. Others left school to train as teachers including Head Girl Joey who secured a place at Avery College in London. Her deputy, Margaret Wark, attended the Secretarial College of the Lycée Français in London and perhaps enjoyed a more exotic career.

The annual commemoration day continued almost to the time when the School closed in 1974, although the final years are not recorded in detail as the magazines became less frequent and less detailed. In July 1960 Miss Elizabeth Peat, an Old Girl, gave a talk to School after prayers and in the afternoon a trumpet recital was given by Mr Bernard Brown. The address at the Service was given by a well-known and respected local Anglican priest, Revd. Canon A 'Ossie' Jones. In July 1968 Mr Nigel Denver, a folk singer, entertained the School during the afternoon and the address at the cathedral service was given by the Rural Dean of Nottingham, Canon D R Feaver. The last recorded service was in May 1969 when a Queen's Messenger, Group Captain Coulson, spoke to the School about his work, and the preacher at the evening service was a former colleague of mine, Rev Keith Hudson, Chaplain of Bishop Grosseteste College. Clearly, the second 'phase' of the commemoration days at LHS were somewhat more ambitious than those during the early days of the School and they also became more culturally diverse, especially during the 'Swinging Sixties'! During the 1960s the commemoration days occupied a couple of pages in the LHS magazines

and both the afternoon entertainment and the evening services were fully described. Unlike the early days, the School was determined to make a day of it!

Thanks to a kind donation by former LHS pupil Diane Sutton (m. Davis) during the fiftieth anniversary of Lincoln Christ's Hospital School, we now have the programme of the final Commemoration Service. The Service began at 6.30pm on the 5th July with the prayer, 'O Lord open thou our lips' followed by the School hymn, 'Through the night of dark and sorrow'. This was followed by Psalm 23, 'The Lord is my shepherd' and the first lesson, *Isiah* Chapter 61. The choir then sang 'As torrents in summer' by Edward Elgar, after which the whole congregation sang the hymn, 'Through all the changing scenes of life'. The second lesson was from *The Ephesians* VI, verses 10-18 and the choir then sang Thiman's adaptation of the much-loved anthem, 'How lovely are thy dwellings'. The congregation then stood for 'The Bidding Prayer' which was followed by the address given by The Venerable R W Dudman, Archdeacon of Lindsey. The third hymn was, 'All people that on earth do dwell' followed by 'The School Prayer', which I'm sure will be embedded in the minds of alumnae as securely as The Lord's Prayer. A fourth hymn, 'The day thou gavest Lord is ended', perhaps a few hours prematurely, and the Service ended with The Blessing and the Song of Simeon, 'Nunc Dimittis'.

The final Commemoration Service heralded the closure of Lincoln Christ's Hospital School, but its spirit lingers on in the form of the Old Christ's Hospital Lincolnians society (whose committee met earlier this month), the regular formal and informal reunions, and in its rich heritage preserved in the Garton Archive at Lincoln Christ's Hospital School.

Notes

This article is an extended version of one published in the *Lincoln Independent* magazine in September 2024.

A second LHS Annual Service was held in Lincoln Cathedral.

Acknowledgement

I am most grateful to Diane Sutton (m. Davis) for sending me the programme for the final Commemoration Service in July 1974.