

The 'Prep' at Lincoln High School: a Personal Tale

From the Garton Archive: Item of Interest No 9

A delightful letter has arrived at the Garton Archive from a former pupil of the Preparatory Department at Lincoln Christ's Hospital Girls' High School, Mr Frank Romney Haggis. Readers may be surprised to hear that there were boys at a girls' school, but in fact the 'Prep' was open to boys as well as girls. Frank was a pupil at the School from 1944 until 1946.

At his home in San Remo, Italy, Frank was trying to clear out unwanted paperwork and came across the Lincoln High School (LHS) Magazine, Christmas 1944, which had travelled the world with him. It brought back a flood of memories which are worthwhile broadcasting to a wider audience. He was quite reluctant to attend the School but his mother told him that she would be sent to prison if he didn't, and therefore he 'did the decent thing'! His parents later told him that his education at LHS was 'priceless'.

Frank was born in Formby near Liverpool, but his parents later moved to Lincolnshire when his father was commandeered to take charge of RAF maintenance as part of the War effort. They lived on Bunker's Hill, Wragby Road, but later moved to The Old Manor House in Nettleham, which doubled as a vicarage.

Frank recalled his first teacher, Miss Moore, with great affection, and reminded us what an important part teachers played in our lives, and the influence they had in shaping our destiny. The letter offers a rare and colourful insight into life at the Prep Department at LHS, which first opened in May 1903. One of his first memories is of Miss Moore playing 'Dance of the Flowers' (possibly Tchaikovsky's 'Waltz of the Flowers'?) on the gramophone, and asking the children to think of a flower and make up a dance about it. When asked what his flower was, Frank told her that it was a tulip. 'A tulip,' she exclaimed, 'What were you doing with your hands all over the floor at the start?' Frank explained that they were his roots going into the earth so that he could grow. Later, when the dance was performed on Parents' Evening, Frank was placed in the

centre of the group. He was unsure whether it was to emphasise his position as a boy in a girls' school, or that she was just trying to hide him!

Frank was one of the youngest in his class, and a more senior girl was charged with the responsibility of accompanying him to the bus stop at the bottom of Lindum Hill. The young lady who was selected for that awesome task insisted that they didn't tread on any cracks or joints in the paving stones because if they did, a big monster would be waiting for them around the corner! Frank got his own back by deliberately treading on several cracks and then, as he rounded the corner, emitting a blood-curdling scream which caused the girl to run away up the hill in a state of extreme fright!

A further interesting episode in the school life of Frank Haggis was when Miss Moore announced that she was going to tell the class the facts of life (with hindsight he assumed that the parents had consented to this). I am reluctant to go into the vivid details, but one little girl apparently later told him in the playground that she wasn't having any of those tadpole things swimming in her! (At this stage I was wondering whether these stories were based on a reliable memory or a creative and vivid imagination!)

On the bus on the way home, Frank politely enquired of the man sitting next to him if he knew where babies came from! Sensing a bit of fun the man drew the attention of everyone in the bus to this question and invited Frank to reveal all! Frank was pleased to have an audience and relished the opportunity to enlighten the passengers. As he left the bus in Nettleham the driver told him that it was a pity he didn't travel on his bus every day as it would always be packed! This is a story worthy of Gervaise Finn!

One further tale also involves Miss Moore, who must have been way ahead of her time as a teacher. In attempting to bring to life the structure of the human body, she introduced a skeleton into the classroom, having warned the children about her intention. Frank asked his parents if he could be excused from meeting the skeleton, not because he was frightened, but because he thought that the person it had belonged to wouldn't like children staring at it and poking it about. Some of the boys,

however, heard about this and started teasing and jeering Frank and calling him 'scaredy-pant'! Following an initial period of shame, Frank suddenly had an inspiration and admitted that he was scared because he had an uncle who travelled all over the world and once entered a pyramid in Egypt where he encountered a skeleton. He bent over to inspect it when suddenly the skeleton's hands shot up and grabbed his uncle's throat until he was dead. After that imaginative story Miss Moore had great difficulty in getting the children to go anywhere near the classroom-based skeleton! As Frank wrote, 'I wish I could thank her and apologise right now'!

The photograph below, included with Frank's letter, shows Miss Moore with her charges on a newly installed climbing frame, which reminds me of the one I used to play on at Bracebridge Infant School at about the same time. Frank is on the second row from the front standing next to, and holding hands with Lorna Waterhouse and Annie Steele. At the far end of the line, sporting a white shirt and tie, is his best friend John Adams whose father survived a very difficult war only to die of pneumonia twelve months after being demobbed. Frank wrote that Miss Moore looks as though she can't wait to climb the frame herself!



Along with his amusing and highly readable letter, Frank also enclosed a copy of the Christmas 1944 edition of the LHS magazine. In it is a transcript of Headmistress Miss Cleave's report on the Lower School Speech Day. Of the work of the Preparatory Department, Miss Cleave had little to say. However she did report that Miss Moore was planning to invite parents to a Conference to take the opportunity to explain briefly the Department's aims and methods. Perhaps to show her tacit support, she also anticipated Miss Moore's words by saying that the Department tried, in the early stages, to show the children how to learn rather than to make them memorise rules or facts. (How often has that debate been re-enacted over the decades as the philosophy of education pendulum lurches from one side to the other?) Miss Cleave did admit, however, that some children thrived on 'a little judicious rough handling'. She also confessed that, although she believed that she and her staff knew the children better than their parents, she was willing to admit that there might be times when they were wrong! In cases such as that, she was prepared to act on their advice and 'metaphorically apply the whip'!

In an earlier edition of the LHS magazine (Christmas 1943) Miss Cleave, who had recently succeeded Miss Savill as Headmistress, included the Preparatory Department in her report. She informed the parents that Miss Moore had a Dublin degree, Froebel training and 'good experience', and would take over the Headship of the Department from Mrs Pollard. Miss Sharp remained in charge of the 4-5 year-olds, about half of whom were boys, who usually left at the age of 7 or 8 mainly to attend the Lincoln School Preparatory Department.

Miss Cleave went on to describe the Preparatory Department as a very friendly place, where the adults took an active and personal interest in each child, and where a 'very purposeful atmosphere' was created. She reassured parents that they should not worry if the children had not learned to read or write in the first few weeks, because they were learning a very valuable lesson in how to live peaceably and happily in a community! Of course much more was demanded of them in 'Transition' and Form One, where 'serious work begins'.

Following the 1944 Education Act, it was clear that the Prep Department at LCHS was under threat, and Miss Cleave reported in 1947 that its closure was 'not too far distant'.



MISS I. V. CLEAVE

The Kindergarten and Preparatory Department at LHS opened in May 1903 and was housed in the St Catherine's area of Lincoln, as recorded in the December 2012 Picture of the Month. It later moved to the main building, and ended its life at Greestone House, the L-shaped building looking south onto the back of Greestone terrace and west onto the Tithe Barn. It finally closed down in the late 1940s following a change of the School's status imposed by the 1944 Education Act (LHS Magazine Summer 1945).

I would be very grateful to receive any other information about, and/or memories of the Kindergarten and 'Prep' from former pupils.

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