

HILLSIDE SCHOOL
Hillside Avenue, Borehamwood, WD6 1HN
1939-2014

Hillside School, Borehamwood

*Chapter 23 of Keith Newson's memoirs
("Searching Back") reproduced for the
Elstree & Borehamwood Museum Exhibition,
to mark the 75th anniversary of the
opening of the School in September, 1939.*



Hillsiders, 1983

A copy of this and other Exhibition documents can be found on-line, at:
www.robertnewson.co.uk/hillside

Welcome back to Hillside School!



*This document was prepared in October, 2014 by
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(7 Lings Coppice, SE21 8SY; kip.newson@gmail.com)
from material presented, given or lent to him
by ex-colleagues and former pupils,
for the 75th Anniversary of the opening of the School
(in September, 1939).*

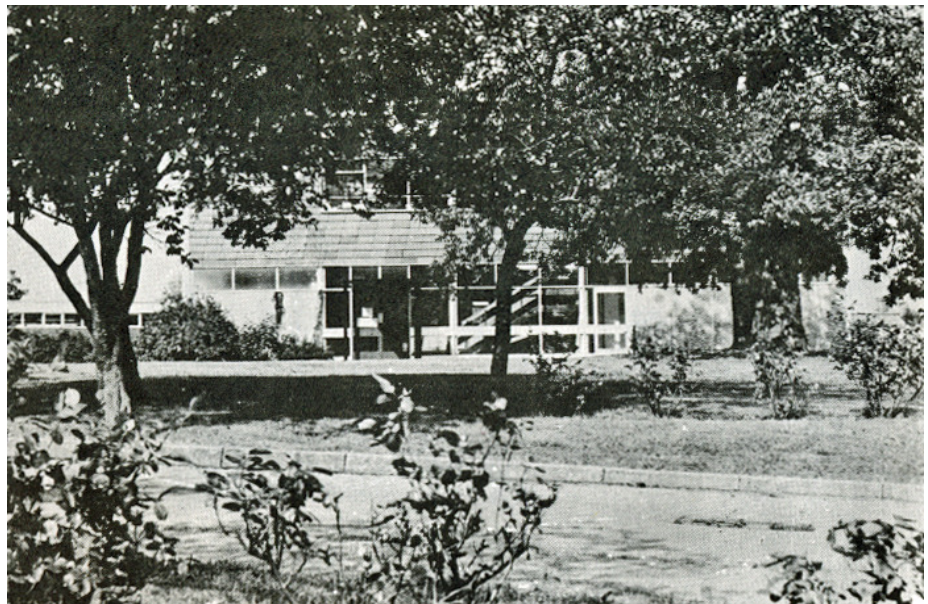
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CHAPTER 23: Hillside School, Boreham Wood
(by Keith Newson)

In Summer Term, 1969 I came over from Morden, to visit two schools in south Hertfordshire that were seeking to appoint Head Teachers, hoping that I might have a chance of securing a headship in one of them. Both seemed to have pleasant and generous campuses, with on-site playing fields; as I remember, both were already co-educational. Secondary education in Hertfordshire was being reorganised, and these schools were both destined to become comprehensive, taking pupils of all abilities, and would be either expanding or starting sixth forms. The first and strongest recommendation of the national ‘Newsom Report’ (1963) had been to raise the compulsory school leaving to 16, ensuring that every child could leave school with a Certificate of his or her achievement. That Report’s title, “Half Our Future”, indicated those 50% of secondary school pupils who (having already failed their 11-plus) had had little hope of gaining academic or even engineering & technical qualifications, before seeking a job. The committee’s chairman, Mr (later *Sir*) John Newsom CBE, had by 1969 already retired from his post as Herts County Education Officer (and was a Managing Director of the publishers, Longmans Green). He died in 1971. His legacy was obvious in the County’s fine school building programme. But all over England & Wales, secondary schools were already preparing for expanding numbers up to fifth form level (nowadays called ‘Year 10’), and places for those who would choose to stay on in 6th forms (now years 11 & 12). In this County, “all-ability” secondary schools would soon be the norm.

On a preliminary reconnoitre of my own, I chatted to the Hillside School caretaker, Mr Nash, a tough ex-N.C.O. who pointed to the problems of security. The pre-war buildings were set in extensive, but partly unfenced, playing fields, almost surrounded by an estate of small semi-detached houses. These had small gardens, few had garages, and almost all of them were occupied (but not then owned) by families moved out from central London, or from areas with much unemployment, such as South Wales. The solid, pre-war purpose-built secondary school building was standing on what was an exceptionally beautiful, rising site; and moreover, on the broad

front lawns beyond some trees, there was already a brand new block of classrooms, built with the raising of the school-leaving age to 16 in mind. This was just crying out to become a new block for an enlarged sixth form! Hillside was on an incomparably more attractive site than Wandsworth School; and it was clearly a better prospect than the other school, within equally easy reach of my Winchmore Hill home, which at that time also had a vacancy for a Head. That one was down in the Lea Valley, in Cheshunt. No real contest!



This photo (from a 1983 ‘School Prospectus’) was taken from the lawn looking eastwards, across the rose bushes that flanked the drive. This splendid new accommodation, built (1968) with funds for raising the leaving age to 16, was not on the post-war aerial photo (on p.3, below).

So, armed with my c.v., my references and copies of the “Art of English”, I went for it – and to my surprise and delight, I was offered the job! It was already too late for me to resign from my Wandsworth post; and Smith, the out-going Head, was committed to taking up his new post as Head of a school in Potters Bar, already comprehensive; and so, for that Autumn Term, 1969, Miss

Bythe and Mr O’Keef had to keep the school together: which, as Deputy Headmistress and Senior Master, they were quite capable of doing: they had been there since the school had first opened in the early years of the 1939-45 war. Mr O’Keefe was there when the full opening of this first purpose-built secondary school in the town was postponed until November, because war ‘broke out’ on 3rd Sept.1939. (See more details of the school in 1939-69, in *Appendix J*). We moved house to Winchmore Hill in July 1969; so I commuted to Wandsworth for one last term.

I cannot remember whether anyone raised doubts at that interview about my almost total lack of any experience of teaching girls, or of managing a mixed staff. If they did, I am sure I pointed out that there were *some* female staff at Wandsworth, and that I was happily married with a daughter as well as two sons, who were all in coeducational schools. But I had indeed come from in a male-dominated background. I had more boy than girl cousins, more uncles than aunts, had attended an all-boys’ school until I was over 18, done my alternative National Service alongside other young men, gone to an overwhelmingly male ancient university where female students were still segregated in a few separate Colleges (and not even permitted to join in the Union debates) - and had then taught English to boys only for 13 years! However, as most of the women I had met were already re-thinking their female roles in the middle of the 20th century, I started at Hillside with a healthy respect for the women and girl pupils I found myself working with (at all levels) – and I very soon recognized that many of them outshone their male colleagues.

In terms of pupils on roll, complexity of timetabling, staff numbers, and management of buildings and equipment, Hillside seemed to me a not much greater a challenge than the English Department at Wandsworth. But I had learned the importance of assessing the strengths and the potential of what one has already – the pupils, staff, buildings, equipment, money and human resources - before deciding how best to use these, or what changes to make. As a Head, I always felt that I had remarkably little real control over those factors: it was always a case of taking what resources the County allocated to you, and then finding the right way to make full use of them. Day to day, it was a matter of facing as calmly and confidently as possible whatever might be thrown at you. Of course as many jewels were thrown as stones: one of many pearls cast our way was Alison Baker, who would become the first Hillsider to win an Oxbridge place (and soon after to be awarded a Scholarship) at Clare College, Cambridge, in 1979. A scientist, a girl, the kind of outstanding pace-setter that every mixed comprehensive school needs to find. She is now a Professor of Biology at Leeds University, leading a team of distinguished researchers. Her brother, Chris, also won a place at Girton College, Cambridge, went on to do research at Birmingham for a PhD, and is still having a successful career as a free-lance consultant.

But measuring any school’s success, let alone ‘being accountable’ for any failure, is certainly not a matter of adding up the exam passes or setting out league tables. Testing is not teaching, and teaching and learning is not about cramming information into pupils’ memories. Good schools are all about personal development, and building up a community that shares common values as well as respecting each individual for what they are and can be. Success builds confidence, and everybody’s achievements need to be recognised and rewarded; but repeated failure breeds disruption and destructive bad behaviour. Good school communities foster learning by cooperation, and are about learning by doing, by imaginative thinking, and sensitive feeling. A good secondary school is always like a large family, sharing common aims, and integrated with the wider community around it. It strives to prepare pupils well for the world in which they have to live the rest of their lives. These were principles I had learnt at Wandsworth, and they were the essence of my approach in 1970. Hillside already had the motto “Forth to Adventure”, and I tried to cherish that spirit.

Britain was then at the beginning of a prolonged period of rapid technological development, of much migration, and social, economic and political change. It was a particularly challenging period for all schools. The Head’s voice in a school assembly and many teachers’ words in the classroom, the lab, the workshop or the sports hall were in danger of being drowned out by the stream of information and loud music that was already pouring out of radios and television sets. We found ourselves at Hillside straining our tight budget (and/or getting the Parents Association to

augment it) to buy musical instruments, tape-recorders, cine- and other cameras, extra lighting for the school stage, and additional sports equipment and a Minibus for taking pupils to games fixtures, or field-work; we knew that our teenage pupils needed to make and do things, and individuals would thrive on the combined success of the class, the cast, the team, the group, choir, orchestra – and in 1970-73 for the Brass & Wind Band (*see Appendix J, pp.15-16 & 20-21*).

Mrs Frances Murray, J P, a local Labour town councillor, was Chair of the Hillside Governors, at my interview, and remained on the Governing Body for most of my time as Head. It was lucky for me that Borehamwood, with its ‘London overspill’ estates, was such a progressive enclave in a predominantly conservative, middle-class ‘home county’. I suspect that Frances wanted to appoint someone quite different from my predecessor, to press for equality of opportunity in the town’s new comprehensive schools, and that she rather liked the fact that I had refused to do military service, and had then done my teaching apprenticeship in one of the first London comprehensives to make a name for itself (even if it was an all-boys’ school). For 8 years my predecessor at Hillside, Bert Smith, had been head of the secondary modern school in competition (from 11+) with a newer grammar school in the town, Nicholas Hawksmoor. Smith’s important achievement had been to build up an ‘examination’ 5th form’ for those boys and girls who did not leave at 15, and create a small 6th form, aiming at GCE Advanced Levels, and/or secretarial qualifications. He had also managed to be one of the first heads to persuade the County to build a “Raising of the School Age Unit” some two or three years before staying on until 16 was to become compulsory. That Unit was already in use by 1968, and was still looking good, 14 years later (*photo above, p.1*), but it was not there in this post-war photo, *below*. In January 1970 when I moved into my study on one side of the formal front entrance, the room opposite (which I soon changed into the School Office and Reception) was occupied by a small number of (mainly male) 6th formers, who were ‘prefects’. One was James Walsh who would

soon be the first Hillsider to gain a First Class Honours degree (having failed to qualify for a grammar school place at 11-plus!): by 1973 I was able to report to the Governors that James had a B.Sc. in combined studies at Leicester University. He must have left the U6th at Hillside at the end of my second term as Head.

Miss Blythe (and it was a long time before any of us called her Thora) had been Deputy Headmistress under Bert Smith and under Dennis Gernat, (first Head of Hillside from 1939) for 28 years. After the War, Gernat had had been allocated three temporary classrooms, called *HoRSA* huts (‘**H**uts for the **R**aising of the **S**chool Leaving Age’ – i.e. from 14 to 15). These prefabricated ‘Nissen huts’ were still in use when I arrived; we

took our daily school dinners in one of them - and I was relieved that the Head was not held personally accountable for the hygiene of the school kitchen there! That was the last hut to survive: until 1982, when it caught fire, and (as recorded in the log-book) the insurance money paid for: “two minibus garages, a dustbin base, and a brick wall to protect the rural studies area”. While they were there (and even after additional new laboratories & workshops, library block, and sports hall & music suite were built in the 1970s) we were able to augment school funds by renting these huts out in the holidays to the local film and television studios for filming period military scenes, etc. The main buildings later became well-known locally as the film-sets for the 1978-2008 BBC series, “Grange Hill”. There is more about Mr Gernat, the legendary first Hillside Head, and about



When I arrived, a large 1964 aerial photo was hanging on the wall of the Head’s study. This is part of that photo. The HoRSA huts are clearly visible; also a then new art & craft suite (seen here beyond the 1939 class-room, science labs, & workshop block, & the gymnasium). But the new ‘RoSLA Unit’ had not then been built, on the front lawn.

the history of other Borehamwood schools, from the 1930s to the early 1960s, in a historical account by Janet Clark, former head of Champions School, reprinted in *SECTION XII*, of these Memoirs, in *Appendix J*, on *pp.1-3*, together with excerpts from Mr Gernatt’s ‘School Log Book’.

The situation in Borehamwood in the 1970s was in many ways similar to that in Wandsworth in 1956: the whole structure of education in this division of the County was about to be transformed. But in important respects, certainly in its school provision, Borehamwood was not at all typical of the rest of Hertfordshire. It was in fact the local head teachers who persuaded the County to re-organise their schools into a three-tier pattern of all-ability co-educational institutions: first schools (5-9 years), four middle schools for years 9-12, and two upper (13-18) schools. For the cohort of school-age pupils at the time, this plan made sense of the way the buildings were distributed, though Hillside needed more additional new accommodation than the other schools. In her article, Janet Clarke explains the situation (nationally and locally) regarding the fluctuating post-war birth-rates, and also the changes in curriculum structure and attitudes to public examinations, and how both of these influenced education authorities’ policy and planning. In the 1960s the cohorts entering schools were smaller, but there were pressures from both employers and parents for more pupils to spend longer at school, gaining meaningful examination results and leaving certificates - for all at 16, and at 18 particularly for all of those going on to higher training or further education. Teachers in Borehamwood, indeed across the whole country, were getting together in groups and subject committees to devise their own class-room-based assessments, which would be codified, and validated as the new *Certificate of Secondary Education*, by regional GCSE Exam. Boards. But central to all this new thinking was the public’s and the employers’ trust in the professionalism and integrity of teachers when assessing the progress of their own pupils throughout the courses - as opposed to relying on independent examination boards to devise both syllabuses and tests that should produce fair results. At that time universities, employers and parents were in the main prepared to trust schools’ and teachers’ assessments as being fair and meaningful. For most of us, the only practical way to maintain that trust was to create well-staffed all-ability schools, offering a variety of courses up to the age of 18-plus, and to run those courses efficiently and fairly.

In Borehamwood, it did now seem appropriate to pass all pupils, between the ages of 5 and 18, through three “tiers” of school, irrespective of their ability. There would be more 5-9 first schools, with smaller rolls, then four 9-13 middle schools with larger numbers in each, and then just two 13+ all-ability Upper Schools each with approximately half of the town’s cohort of pupils. But making this very new and untried pattern of all-ability coeducational schools *work*, for every pupil of every age and ability, whilst abolishing the 11-plus transfer from primary to secondary, was the real challenge. In terms of curriculum and staffing, these problems were inevitably greatest in the Middle Schools. They needed to attract specialist teachers, e.g. for Modern Languages, Sciences, Mathematics, Design Technology and Physical Education, but would find this difficult when the age-range was neither primary nor secondary, and when teachers with mainly Middle School experience were not going to find it easy to get promotion elsewhere. There would be no external exam results for pupils between 5 and 13 in Borehamwood state schools, and Hertfordshire believed in allowing parents the maximum possible freedom of choice of school. A number of staff teaching in schools that were becoming middle schools applied for promotion in the new Upper Schools: Geoff Farmer came in 1971 from Lyndhurst; Terry Darby from Champions. Geoff very soon started taking groups sailing each year on the Norfolk Broads (*see p.10*); he studied part-time for a degree, and was later a Housemaster, and responsible for our English Department and its sixth form courses. On the other hand, my arrival in January 1970, with a mission to turn Hillside into a 13-18 all-ability Upper School, immediately prompted several promising and well-qualified young teachers to apply elsewhere for posts - no doubt hoping to find older and wiser (or more conventional) Heads! Then there was the real challenge of smoothing the transition of pupils at 13+. In the upper schools, we had to develop a pattern of ‘talking through’, with teachers from four Middle Schools, all the pupils who had chosen to transfer to our respective schools; and of course heads of departments in each upper school had to devise courses and teaching groups, to prepare most of those pupils - in just three years - for at least some public examination papers: this clearly meant we all had to work closely with our opposite numbers, in all four middle schools. Finally,

this 3-tier system (with the rolls in the area soon due to fall) inevitably meant some intense competition between the two Upper Schools, one of them an ex-11 to 18 Grammar School (1956-1972), the other an expanded Secondary Modern school that had only recently developed a small 6th Form. Hillside was competing with Nicholas Hawksmoor both in recruitment of staff and in attracting enough of the brighter pupils at the 'last point of choice' (when they were 12/13). Some of the pupils with obvious academic potential had already been 'lost' (from the Herts LEA schools) by transfer at 13 to independent schools like Haberdashers. Because I was a member of the Secondary Heads Association, I made some kind of personal contact with the Head of Haberdashers (whose school buses and coaches swept daily through the town, picking up privileged boys from all the prosperous areas from Enfield to Elstree), and we did arrange a few fixtures and exchanges. But for a majority of the school-age population in Borehamwood, we just had to persuade parents, particularly those who were hoping or expecting that their children would qualify for University entrance, that our teaching and courses at Hillside would give them just as good a chance as Nicholas Hawksmoor. Tommy Thomas, well known and respected as the head of the Grammar School, had been head of science, deputy-head, then head, over many years before I became head of Hillside; his school already had most of the necessary accommodation and staffing; and families with older children already at this now ex-grammar school would of course choose a place there for their younger siblings. Tommy was also an established 'teacher member' of a local Rotary Club, which seemed to offer many of his school-leavers the pick of the local jobs.

At Hillside, I had to start at once where Bert Smith had left off: building up 5th and 6th forms, in a school where a majority of pupils had for years been leaving at 15 (or 14). In 1970, the raising of the leaving age to 16 was only 2 years away. In the main, it was the younger brothers and sisters of pupils already at the secondary modern school who would be choosing Hillside as their Upper School, and the County Education Authority was firm in defending the right of parental choice of a school, as against allocating pupils of differing abilities to try to get a 'balanced intake' for each secondary or upper school. I was indeed fortunate to have parents like Mr and Mrs Baker, who chose to send Alison to us in 1972. That was the year when Tommy Thomas and I agreed to take our shares of *two* year-groups (13+ & 14+, at once!) from the three former secondary moderns (Champions, Lyndhurst and Holmshill) all of which were becoming middle schools. Hillside's new buildings were not yet ready for use: and these were all pupils who would be the first not to be allowed to leave until they were 16! Whether it was teaching accommodation, staffing, or the intake of pupils each September, one had to look carefully at the resources available, and seek to make the best of whatever one had at any given time. But for me it was essential to set the highest possible aims for everyone, pupils or teaching colleagues, and build up the morale of the whole school and its reputation in the neighbourhood. As Head, one needed to get to know (and if at all possible to like) everyone, including ancillary and caretaking and kitchen staff, rapidly - and to exude confidence, without ever sounding complacent. I remembered a quotation from the Wandsworth School magazine, about me at the time of my departure: "We shall all miss the kindness and the smile." So I told the staff at Hillside that my door would always be open, and my name was "Keith". I took my reel-to-reel tape-recorder into the Hall for my first assembly and played the popular song, "*Turn, turn*", with its theme from Ecclesiastes: "*To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.*" I knew how to ad lib a public prayer, from my days as a fundamentalist Christian; I had composed parable-like stories with a modern moral message, for upper school assemblies at Wandsworth, where we had experimented with using contemporary folk-songs and other music, instead of routinely mumbling hymns. But I knew that it was too soon to upset the established staff in a school that had clearly had a unique place in the village and now in the town, for thirty years. There were already quite a few second generation Hillside pupils in that assembly hall, in January 1970. Before I retired I would celebrate with them the school's 40th anniversary, and a few years later welcome the first grandchild of an old Hillsider as an upper school pupil. In 1987, "*Turn turn*", sung by Mary Hopkins, still seemed appropriate.

It was important now for me to respect the core of existing staff, particularly Mr O'Keefe, who had joined Mr Gernat's staff (2 or more years before Miss Blythe) before September, 1939; both had then come with the 11+ pupils (and a number of staff) from Furzehill elementary school, into their

new ‘Senior Elementary School’ building on Hillside Avenue. By the time when the school became a “Secondary Modern”, in 1948, there were several other teachers who had come from active service in the war, and then taken short courses of teacher training, and became well-respected and experienced teachers of the many children from the families moving into the Borehamwood estates from inner London. Colleagues like Fred Brotherhood, Don Angood, Freda Pellowe, Kate Irving, Beryl Radbourne, Joan Ramsden, Rob Wilton, understood the pupils, knew many of their parents, and exercised a firm discipline that gave a reassuring stability to the school community. The school already had its own traditions and rituals, such as an annual “Harvest Sale” where pupils raised money for the “Save the Children Fund”; such foundations, like the main school building itself, needed to be built on and extended, not demolished. The toilets did need a makeover, but the wide well-lit corridors were resistant to graffiti; there was then no demand for ‘disabled access’. The school had a very strong brass band, directed by Barry Smallwood, although music had to be taught in one of the ‘Horsa Huts’, because there were then no sound-proofed music practice rooms. The two oldest school laboratories were just like those I had known during the war at Bancrofts, but less well equipped; my predecessor Bert Smith had already managed to put together a room full of typewriters for classes in shorthand and typing (strictly for the older *girls*, of course!). I was determined to build on the existing strengths, and to plan carefully and appoint new, younger staff to fill the gaps, whilst pressing the County for the kind of capital investment in new buildings, and for extra funds and resources, to help us catch up with the level of provision the ex-Grammar School already had. The school’s Log Book confirms that there was already a Parents Association that could easily be transformed into a lively group, prepared to support school funds by running Car Boot sales in the playgrounds; also to continue the disco dances on Saturday nights, popular with the growing number of teenage pupils - whilst supervising the toilets, to stop pupils smoking there! I sometimes wonder now whether I should attribute my

later loss of hearing, and tinnitus, to too much loud pop music in the 1970s. I was very often last man out, and was locking up after evening and weekend activities; and it did help to find a new caretaker, when Fred Nash retired, and vacated the School-keeper’s house, and when Ken Martindale, who had children in the school himself, took over as both Caretaker and as Chairman of the by then very active Parents Association. But it had taken too long - summer term and the 1982 August holiday - to find the right man for the job. An increase in vandalism (outside of school hours) had begun with the fire that destroyed one of the Horsa huts (as mentioned above, on *p.3*). This photo (*right*) dates from that year: the boot-sellers’ cars were parked on the edge of the playground, by the playing field, where this picture was taken. This photo was in an album presented to me at my retirement, with the following caption: “*The life of a busy headmaster – well beyond the call of duty. Keith at a car boot sale (1982).*” (Well, someone had to be responsible for opening up and locking up, ‘outside hours’, and I didn’t like to ask my colleagues to volunteer their Saturday mornings, for events not organised by teachers).



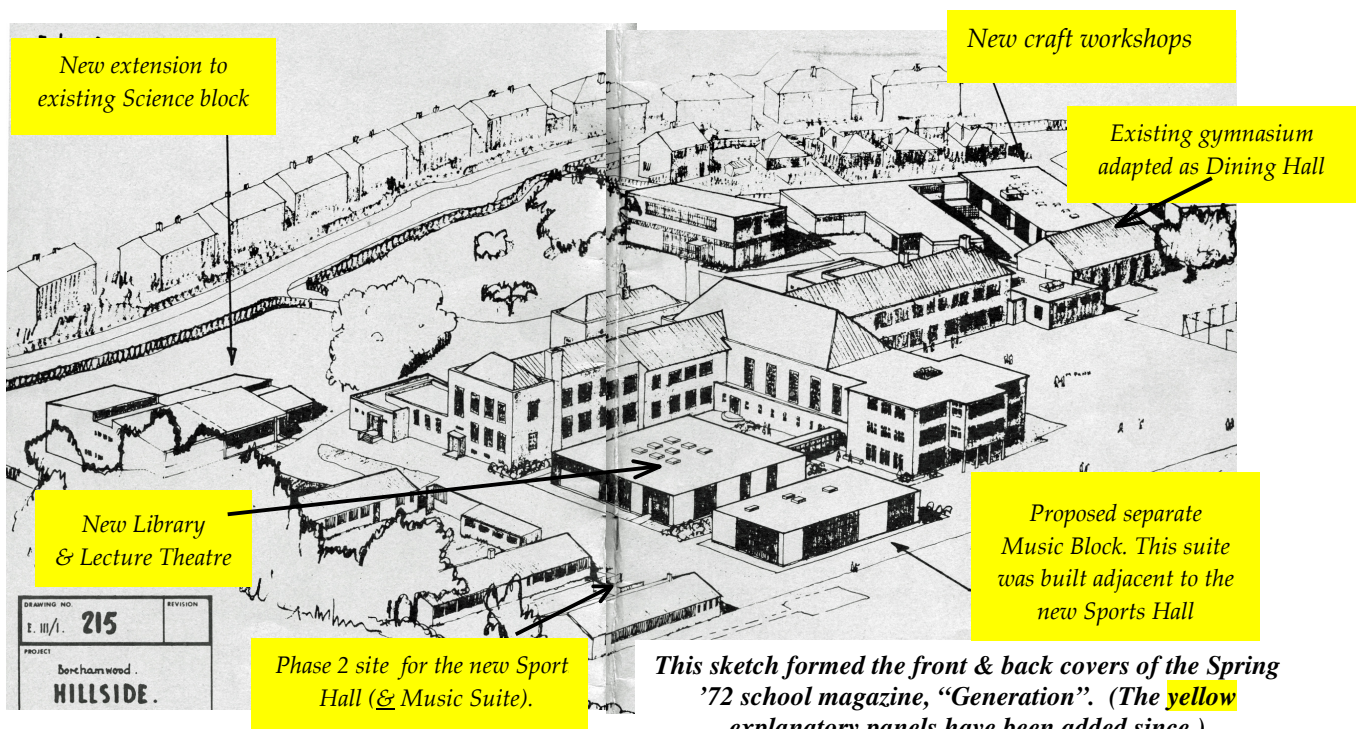
Unfortunately, I cannot now remember this particular car boot sale in 1982, whom I was chatting to, nor whether I was discussing, with her, those important-looking papers that I was carrying.

“Accountability”, whether we talk about teachers, or M.P.s, bankers, civil servants, NHS administrators, and all manner of other so-called public servants, is a much-used buzzword now; but it was perhaps too easily taken for granted back in the 1970s. I did feel accountable, first and foremost to myself and my family, but thereafter to almost everyone I had day-to-day dealings with. But my chief fear was that I might fail the pupils and their parents - rather than let down my employers, the Hertfordshire Education Authority, with their education Advisors (there was one

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such advisor for nearly every secondary school subject), and their courteous Divisional Officers. There were also county auditors, school psychologists and social workers, attendance officers, surveyors and architects, a school meals service, etc, all of whom had their own definite but different expectations of me and my school. But at no time did I feel that our School Governors were actually *responsible* for me or even for the school; I regarded them more as useful and important allies, linking us with prominent members of the local community; so I reported to them, each term, all the good news I could muster about Hillside. Somewhere in Whitehall, there were Her Majesty's Inspectors who might occasionally visit a school, but we never had even one *full* inspection by them in the whole of my time (neither at Wandsworth nor at Hillside!). In those days, certainly in Hertfordshire as in London, the county level organisers/advisers/inspectors were the reliable support to the Head; they gave specialist subject advice, helped with the selection of new teachers, and with recommendations about books, equipment and teaching aids, and passed on 'best practice' from other schools. How different the world of primary and secondary schools has become, where later generations of teachers are put under absurd (and fruitless) strain by OFSTED (no longer *H.M.I.s*), scrutinising test and examination results, and specialist teachers' lesson plans, to rate each teacher (and the institution) as more, or less, satisfactory than its neighbour! I was soon on friendly and good professional terms with the Herts education advisers. I was also fortunate to have a budget (for educating pupils, not for maintaining buildings, nor for paying teachers and ancillary staff) fully under my and the school's control, to be spent where and as we thought best for the education of whatever pupils the local families chose to send us. I knew that, if we did let *our pupils* down, the size and quality of our intake would suffer - then the school budget, together with later years' allocation of staff and money for responsibility posts, would suffer too!

I was also fortunate in taking up this headship when capital funding had already been allocated for extending and adapting the existing buildings, but when no detailed plans had yet been drawn up. Herts County had a good architects department experienced in design and getting the best value for the ratepayers' money. It seemed obvious that Hillside as a 13-18 all-ability upper school would need new, state-of-the-art workshops, a Library (and lecture theatre), suitable accommodation for Music teaching and practice, and for catering for school meals, and extended and improved science laboratories, and a sports hall instead of an old-fashioned gymnasium (lined with wall-bars). I was quite excited to sit down and sketch a ground-plan for our generous site, which the architect who was assigned to us, turned into the plan represented in this preliminary sketch:



By the end of the planning (and costing) stage, and because we needed a new Sports Hall (on the site of two of the 3 post-war HoRSA huts), the architect later decided to incorporate the music

suite (shown here) into the far end of that additional new Sports Hall (*not* yet shown in the sketch); and thus we could release the old gymnasium and changing rooms as space for new dining and kitchen facilities. Probably because funds were running out when it was finally built, this combined Sports Hall and Music Block proved to be an ongoing liability in maintenance/repair bills (costs which, happily, the headmaster was *not* having to budget for). By the 1990s, some years after my retirement, it had to be pulled down and the school was given a better sports hall. It was this, together with all the rest of the buildings, new and old, on the site, that was eventually sold, to become, in 2006, a 'Jewish Free School'. 'Yavneh College' is a 'voluntary aided' Academy school, which is now making good use of the whole of the campus. At least this site was not sold off to property developers, who would by now have built houses all over the playing field.

If there were courses, in the 1960s, for would-be heads and deputies I was unaware of them; like most of my contemporaries, I assumed that the best training for headship was to learn as I had, by doing the job of teaching, and by climbing the 3 'ladders of responsibility': for administration, for the curriculum and for the pastoral care of pupils. But I was acutely aware of my own limitations. I was certainly not a scientist: but three of my four male deputies were science teachers. Admittedly 'J.J.' O'Keefe was originally a P.E. instructor - but when I arrived he was teaching in what (back in 1939!) had been an up-to-date school science laboratory: and the head of that science department was a younger graduate based in one of the post-war laboratories - and *he* was one of three department heads who left for promotion six months after my arrival! However, John O'Keefe's successor (whom I chose, as Deputy Head) was John Earnshaw, a scientist; and by then we had also found a man qualified to teach Chemistry to 6th Form level; he was a retired army officer with a brass band background, and later had his own jazz band. 'The Colonel' and I respected each other's rank and experience, but the Borehamwood youngsters were not in awe of him (and our brightest sixth formers did wish he had a more up-to-date grasp of modern science than they had!) John Earnshaw, and both his successors, Julian Marcus (who was a classicist, with an eclectic grasp of almost everything, including most of the world's religions), and Tim Westrip (a biologist), in time moved on (or in Tim's case *up*) from posts as my deputy, to become secondary Heads themselves. As in most schools, it was physics and maths teachers qualified to teach to 6th form level, that we struggled to find. Tim taught alongside an excellent Head of Biology, Kate Irving, who had been well established at Hillside before my arrival. Together they went on with the challenge of building a balanced Science Department that could keep up with the rapid discoveries and dramatic scientific breakthroughs, which were by then being reflected in 5th and 6th form examination syllabuses. As she looks back, Dr Alison Baker (now a Professor of Biology at Leeds University, at the 'cutting edge' of scientific research) has written this (in a generous recent email): "*I have always been grateful to Hillside for the opportunities it gave me (and the lessons in life) and particularly to yourself, Mrs Millsom and Mrs Irving, Mrs Prior and Col Wheal (even though he neglected to teach me any electrochemistry, which would have been handy in the exam!)*". At the time, I knew I had to call on all the expertise, within the school and from the L.E.A., that was available, in a whole range of specialist subject areas most of which I really knew little about. We were not just building a few extra classrooms; we were a working team transforming the whole campus, and equipping and staffing the institution to teach a complete cross-section of teenage pupils for life in the last quarter of the 20th century.

In this 1970 photo (*left*), Thora Blythe & I were on the Hall stage, where she had her own stall at the annual Harvest Sale for Save the Children Fund, at the beginning of her last year as Deputy Headmistress: she was nearing the end of 32 years at Hillside. She was talking to me about the pupils she knew so well, who were all busy raising money for kids less fortunate than themselves. Miss Blythe was an old-fashioned disciplinarian; but she genuinely cared about all those 11 to 15-year-old boys and girls, and about the school and the wider community in which they should have their rightful place. I knew we would have to move on after Miss Blythe (and John O'Keefe) retired, but this cooperative fund-raising was definitely the sort of thing I wanted to continue. In summer 1971, we appointed Jane Mancus as 'Senior Mistress' (not 'Deputy Headmistress') as well as a teacher of geog-



11.

raphy, and this relieved me of direct responsibility for any, except the very worst, of the girls' personal problems; at the same time it ensured that there was someone who would stand up for absolute equality between the sexes! John O'Keefe had retired at the same time as Miss Blythe, and John Earnshaw was appointed Deputy Head. So he (not Jane, whom we appointed at the same time) took over Miss Blythe's office on the 'admin corridor'. (Not much equality there, then!). Jane was an experienced Geography teacher, and she too had confidence in the Head of her Department (John Negus), so another part of the curriculum was 'in safe hands', as they say.

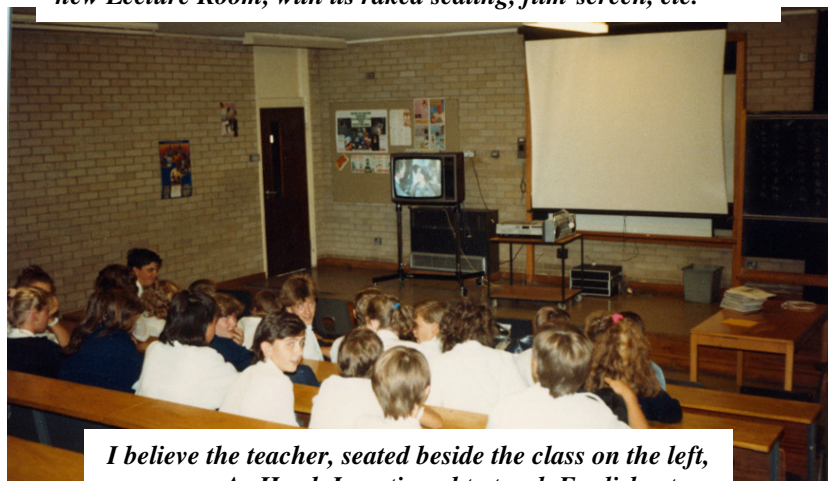
I suppose I did indulge myself when it came to designing the new Library and Lecture Theatre block. It was going to have a glazed corridor link to the Assembly Hall and we turned what was left of the former (segregated) girls playground, from tarmac into a sort of courtyard garden, with seats. Obviously an upper school Library had to be a 'multidisciplinary resource centre', serving all departments of the school; but we were planning this suite before the arrival of computers, the internet, and Google. So we designed a companion lecture-room mainly for the educational use of film, and television. After my experience of how English teaching was developing at Wandsworth, I insisted on including a separate and sound-proof projection & dark-room, and indeed I got Harry (our joinery man in our 'Newsons of Enfield' family shop) to make a bespoke frame for the specially glazed panel between the noisy 16mm projector and the cinema audience. The linking corridor's external doors, some years later, became the public's entrance to our main school hall, when that was being transformed into the Community Theatre. From an early stage, I had fought against any plans to double up the use of the school's splendid 1939 Hall, with its raked upstairs gallery, as a space for serving school dinners! The sketch (*on p.7*) shows the change of the former cloakrooms and gymnasium into kitchen and dining hall (though it did still double up as an extra space for dance and indoor games). Thus the Hall/Theatre, as well as its use for assemblies, remained as yet another space for drama, dance and music, and for a host of other school events, educational and social.

It takes time to make big changes in education; but (as I mentioned on *p.5*), we had agreed to hurry up the process by taking our half share of two year-groups from the former secondary modern schools, at 'one go', in September 1972. That was a big gamble, a real challenge: to absorb so many 13+ and 14+ year-olds, none of whom had qualified for grammar school courses and all of whom would have to stay on at school until 16! Our Phase 1 of the building programme had only just begun, adding to the chaos! In a bid to lift morale, I wrote about my 'vision' for the new Hillside in the school magazine, 'Generation' (*see p.23, in Appendix J*). We now had an '8-form entry', in what would have previously been our 3rd and our 4th years (neither upper school was receiving any more 11-plus pupils). At least we had more funds to spend, and were entitled to more staff, more responsibility allowances. This was an opportunity to make both staff and timetable changes; but I decided not to start experimenting with totally



Above: Group-work and reference to source-books - in the new, light, spacious, and comfortable Library.

Below: A class watching an educational tv programme in the new Lecture Room, with its raked seating, film-screen, etc.



I believe the teacher, seated beside the class on the left, was me. As Head. I continued to teach English. etc.

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mixed ability classes (as some London comprehensive schools were doing in the 1970s), but to keep some ‘streaming’, and ‘setting’ of pupils for subjects like maths and modern languages, by levels of achievement. So we sorted the newcomers into differing ‘levels of ability’, as best we could, with the advice and information we had from their previous schools. Heads of departments were aiming pupils at the new CSEs, as well as at O.level examinations, in their 5th year. But I felt it was very important to bring pupils with widely differing academic potential together in other contexts, including practical and creative projects, sports and games, music and drama, and all sorts of activities and clubs outside the classroom or laboratory, such as school journeys at home or abroad. With this in mind, we adopted the pattern of “houses” and “vertical tutor-groups” that was developed at Wandsworth School. For what we liked to call the “pastoral care” of pupils of mixed age, sex and academic ability, we had “tutor-sets” of 20 to 30 pupils who would be registered every morning, and have some ‘assembly time’ together during the week. Virtually all the staff had a tutorial role, quite distinct from their subject teaching, and the tutors were to be the first point of contact for parents. On parents’ evening the tutor acted as a ‘class-teacher’, having summarised each pupil’s progress on a report that term. This kind of pastoral care depends on each tutor making some kind of a relationship with each pupil in the group; the tutor would have at least 3 years to get to know each pupil, even if he or she never actually got to teach any, or even all of them in a class. This kind of mentoring also works best when the tutors and heads of ‘Houses’ are organizing sporting, social or creative activities, in friendly competitions between the Houses. Drama, music, competitive sports, public speaking, and charity fund-raising were already established at Hillside, and we strongly encouraged these activities within this tutor-group and House system, as an extra-curricular means of building a teenager’s confidence, providing a sense of achievement and success, and fostering teamwork and integration of individuals into social groups. It was easier to do this in Borehamwood upper schools than it had been at Wandsworth. The school was smaller and the age-range of pupils (13 to 18) was narrower; and many of our students and pupils already knew others who had been with them previously in local schools; our catchment area was compact, and only a small number of Hillsideers (mainly from Shenley) had to come and go by school buses. Keeping rebellious teenagers in order, and creating group, house and school spirit amongst 600 girls and boys in a suburb like Borehamwood, was somewhat easier than it was with a school roll of 2,000, all boys, in Southfields. This pastoral approach to individual disciplinary and attendance problems meant that we could, finally, throw away canes that had been kept in the Head’s and/or Deputy’s rooms since 1939.

Although I had very little relevant experience (as a teacher) on the playing field or the track, or in the gymnasium, sports hall, or swimming pool, my experience at Wandsworth (and before) had taught me about organising plays, concerts, and debates, and I quite understood that a pupil’s education and personal development did not stop as he or she left the class-room or laboratory door. It was going to be particularly important in this 13 to 18 age-range to encourage large and small extracurricular activities – indeed to get away from the restrictions of a curriculum, set then by examining boards

(and later by the Department of Education), for at least some of the time for all of the pupils. By the summer of 1973, Geoff Farmer was already organizing his second sailing holiday for Hillside pupils (and staff) on the Norfolk Broads. Geoff is in the centre of this picture, with (in front of him) Barbara Jarrett – an energetic laboratory technician who was integrating herself into almost every thing else that went on. Brian Cluett (who was transforming himself from Rural Studies teacher to an Environmental Scientist), is on the the cruiser, in the left of the shot.



The 4 sail training boats, the life-jackets, the informal mix of adults and students at lunch, all go to suggest much that was educational about our school journeys.

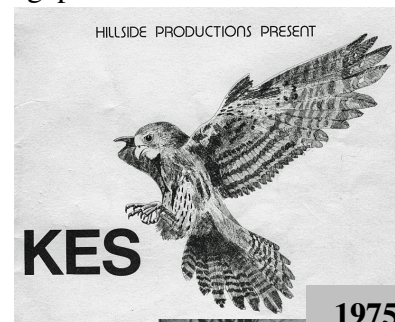
This picture (*right*), cropped from a 1985 staff photo (*see p.35, in Appendix J*), was taken 12 years later to mark the retirement of both Fred Brotherhood and Freda Pellowe (seated between me and Jane Mancus), both of whom were established specialist teachers in 1970. I relied heavily on the experience, dedication and advice of such colleagues. Freda had established the new Business Studies department, Fred taught technical & engineering drawing and established our school careers department; they both became heads of houses, as well as pioneering links with local businesses and a comprehensive programme of work experience.



Mary Hurlstone (top left here, and in both the 1985 and the 1986-7 staff photos - *see Appendix J, p.35*) taught Office Practice, and then took over the careers work. Mary later left teaching for a responsible post organising careers advice at County level, chosen because she was outstanding in developing the links with local business and further education that were so important in our upper school. Quite rightly, there are non-teaching staff who are in the row behind us in the photo: Mrs Richards next to Mary, and Mrs Jarratt (already in the photo on *p.10, opposite*), and Irene Roff the School Secretary, are standing right behind me (as indeed they also did metaphorically!). Jane, Fred, Freda and Irene are sadly no longer with us. Such colleagues were quite indispensable to the smooth running of such a busy school. Games fixtures, many educational day-trips to museums, galleries, etc., holidays abroad and foreign language exchanges, theatre visits, sports days and swimming galas, field work, music concerts, dance productions, and perhaps above all the plays produced - all of these made additional, extracurricular demands on *all* the staff: teachers, ancillaries and administrators - they seemed glad to volunteer to do this work, because (I am sure) they felt they were sharing in the school's successes. Harry Hilton (not in any photos in his chapter) had come from Champions Secondary Modern to teach French (and get a language laboratory set up), and he was already (when I arrived) taking pupils on rock-climbing expeditions! Hillside did indeed become an 'outward bound' sort of school.

Buoyed up by the extraordinary success of the choir and the school plays at Wandsworth, I was very keen to appoint a new member of the English department with some experience of school play production. I was lucky enough to receive an application from Allan Stronach, who had just adapted Bary Hines's short novel "A Kestrel for a Knave" (1968): the Ken Loach film had premiered in 1970, and Allan had adapted it as a play script. Very soon after his appointment, he staged it as '*KES*' in our Hall, in 1975 (followed by a striking production of '*A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*' later that year). In a review, I wrote:

"KES is not a story that easily translates to the stage, yet Billy Casper's school career, bedevilled by failure and misunderstanding, and his escape into the natural world and his admiration for the proud independence of the kestrel hawk he cherishes, are clearly suitable subjects for a school production. The casting of Kieran Ruane as Billy was perfect - in personality, mood and mannerism he simply was Billy." Perhaps I should have written "became Billy"? Allan welded the cast of 47 (45 of them pupils) and a strong supporting off-stage group of pupils and staff, into a working team who presented on stage perfectly lit scenes, film sequences, slides, and sound-track. Pupils played adults, as well as themselves, with conviction, and one of the two teachers with parts was Mr John Timson (playing Billy's head-teacher). Himself an 'old boy' of Hillside, with 2 children at the school, John had been (and was until his retirement) the school's full-time groundsman and gardener (and he also always sang in the school choir). In finding Allan, I felt I had struck gold! This, like the succeeding productions on our stage, felt just as good



Kieran Ruane, on location, with Billy Casper's kestrel, 1975.



as, if not better than, anything we had achieved at Wandsworth in the 1960s. Before Allan, Daphne Vane and John Stone had begun to break new ground, with big productions like "THE MASSACRE AT PETERLOO"; but Allan, with his rapport with the young actors, and his quiet confidence, was going to transform school drama into something quite professional. "GODSPELL" (a musical adapted from St Matthew's gospel) was perhaps the highpoint of Allan's "HILLSIDE PRO-



1975 & 1983



1979-80

DUCTIONS". He had secured the right to do the first amateur premiere; his programme note said that "the first aim was....enjoyment and satisfaction based on a lot of time and team-work between pupils and staff of the School. The second aim is that this enjoyment is shared with the audience." With "GODSPELL", as with "Sgt.PEPPER" (based on Beatles songs), "EGO" (based on songs of Elton John), and "BUGSY MALONE", all of which led to television broadcasts (excerpts, on BBC & Thames), "THE BLITZ SHOW", and then "TALES" (dramatising extracts from Chaucer), Allan's aims were always clearly educational. He did not stop with these "Hillside Productions"; but took them out into the local community, and he



1976 & on Blue Peter Jan 1977



1980



1978

brought actors, of all ages, back into the school. By 1984 Allan was Artistic Director of the new Elstree Youth Theatre he founded, and produced "STREETWISE" (on our stage). This emerged from 5 months of discussion and improvisation, based on real-life experiences of young people, which were "entertaining and enlightening....and not too far removed from the prospect of being young in 1984 and unemployed". That same year, Allan produced a stage version of "GREGORY'S GIRL" which was another entertaining 'team effort' by school pupils and staff. Allan used the Programme for that play to launch the Hillside Community Theatre project. This would transform the gloomy 'foyer' behind the rear doors to the hall, into this welcoming theatre foyer (right), and our 1939 school assembly hall into this fully equipped space for drama (below) - which had an upstairs gallery, with tip-up seats, given to us by a local



cinema that was refurbishing.

Allan's HILLSIDE COMMUNITY THEATRE COMPANY's first production, on this newly refurbished stage, had a cast of over 40 (many taking dual roles), and a back stage (and front-of-house) team of over 20. As I look down the listed names on the Programme, I can no longer distinguish the pupils, from the school staff, and other members of



the community, all of whom played some part in the performance of scenes from these mediaeval "MYSTERIES". These were short biblical plays from the streets of York and other English towns or cities, now being re-enacted to entertain 'packed houses' - in our modern suburban theatre.

'Mysteries' Programme logo, March, 1986

(There is some more material about drama, supplementary to this chapter, in: **Appendix J**)

I never had any doubts about the important part that school dramatic societies would play in the personal development of young people, or about their gain in self-confidence after taking part in a successful production. But I soon realised that Allan had a broader educational brief: and I saw how he engaged a wide range of pupils - in age, background, personality, ability; also, he was using not only their talents, but their own experience and challenges that they faced in their own lives, to develop a spirit of cooperation and empathy, and a consciousness of their own place in a wider community. These pupils were not being taken out of their regular lessons; instead they were taking back into the school curriculum, much of what they had learnt, in their own time, on the stage. As a director, Allan was not teaching them how to act, he was educating them: making them more aware of themselves, of the emotions of other people, and more able to communicate.

What Allan and those young people did and communicated so well was not allowed to eclipse all the rest of the bright and busy life of the school. Although I set out from home each day at 8.0 a.m., determined to keep in control and in charge, only rarely did I end the day satisfied that we had simply followed the timetable routine and that I had dealt with all the day’s diary of engagements, by 5.30 or 6.0 p.m. (when I at least aimed to leave the premises). The things that went well and the things that went wrong were equally unpredictable, and quite often I heard about them when it was too late to change them (but not too late to learn from the experience!). At any time staff or pupils might be sick, have accidents, not be where they should be when they should be; and there might be minor or major confrontations, angry or distraught parents on the phone or on the door-step; or the heating might break down, the weather might disrupt the timetable, so might a tanker drivers’ strike (with not enough notice!), or a teachers’ strike (with notice). Things became particularly difficult in schools from 1979 onwards, as we entered the “Thatcher decade”. The so-called “winter of discontent” that had preceded her election as P.M., with its “3-day week” and electricity cuts, had given us some short-term headaches; but the policy shifts that followed were to have lasting adverse consequences for educational funding and organisation: just at the time when secondary schools were struggling to keep up with a world-wide revolution in information technology. Mrs Thatcher became Prime Minister following her election in May

1979; but I had already introduced the idea of holding a school **Mock Election** (borrowing old black ballot boxes and a polling booth from the local authority, about a week before the national polling day) at general election time in 1974; and we did that again in 1979, 1983 & 1987. In our case, the Labour candidate invariably won. But Mrs Thatcher went to the country again in 1987, to increase her majority, while a French tv company covered our mock election, and broadcast all over France that, at Hillside, the Labour candidate had again won easily. *These photos, showing how we organised these mock elections as a practical exercise in citizenship, were probably taken at our 1983*

Some U5th boys are queuing to have their names checked on the register of voters, and a girl is voting in a polling booth nearby.



Hillside’s Mock Election in Summer 1987 was filmed and broadcast all over France (for French TV, ‘Antenne Deux’)

mock election, in the ground-floor room in our “Unit”: the same space that was set aside as a Polling Station for adult voters, a week later. (I’m sorry that I cannot now identify the 6 pupils).

To mark my retirement (summer, 1987) the staff prepared an elaborate “*This Is Your Life*” presentation on the stage, and a commemorative volume of photographs, etc. On the last 8 pages, someone listed salient points selected from my 1970-87 full Reports to Governors each term (at first some of these were pasted into the school’s Log Book, but the remainder were in a ring file

that did not survive the closure of the School in 2000). There is more about the original school Log Book in **Appendix J.** This also has lists of “salient points” selected and paraphrased from my Head’s Reports to Governors, for the period 1970 to 1982. From 1939 to 1969 the Log was hand-written by the first 2 Heads. These records all illustrate some of the many challenges, burdens and difficulties the school had to face over those years. I was also able to report to the School Governors: that our pupils were gaining places and awards at Cambridge and other universities, that many of our U5th formers were taking and gaining 7 to 9 O.Level exam passes, that drama at Hillside was gaining nationwide recognition, that our pupils were raising record sums for charity; and that that we celebrated our school’s 40th anniversary with a warm vote of confidence in the school from the next Archbishop of Canterbury. However, I am also having to report: record youth unemployment in Borehamwood, reductions in staff and in County funding, the imminent closure of the invaluable local Teachers’ Resource Centre, all at a time when we were struggling to provide a colour tape-recorder and our first school computer, and a replacement minibus, and when the PTA (whilst changing its name to the ‘Hillside School Association’) is having to subsidise the purchase of text books! Across the country at that lean time, there was industrial strife, significant racial tension and riots, and threats from the I.R.A. We too had telephoned bomb threats (thankfully they were always hoaxes), and on at least one occasion had cleared the whole school building and called the police. By 1985 (the year we completed the Community Theatre project), 43 of our older pupils were going on strike – not to protest about our school, but to demonstrate anger over the “Youth Training Scheme” and the government’s refusal to pay unemployment benefit to school leavers! We knew we really had to record their absence as truancy: but should we punish them, or commend them - for their action?

As individual teachers and as an institution we were beginning to feel that, instead of being fully supported by the adult voters, by the education authority, and by colleagues in social services, and outside specialists like educational psychologists, education welfare officers, (and even the probation officers, the police and local business organisations), we were now having to compete harder for resources, and being forced to win (or at least retain) the respect of parents and the wider community. Hillside had always had to cope with the social problems of the estate around us. From the late 1940s, the LCC expected the Hertfordshire and Hertsmere local authorities to take full responsibility for the education and welfare of the children on their estate, but they maintained a number of foster homes on this estate for children from inner London who were all ‘in care’; and most of the older ones were enrolled at Hillside (at least until they were moved on!). At first we had a lot of outside support in dealing with these ‘damaged’ children. But in time the excellent and separate ‘Children’s Departments’ in Hertfordshire were all merged with other professionals into the main Social Services Departments; and then, delays in getting children psychological help and/or finding them places in special schools or units, grew longer. The support networks were all short of resources, staff and funds. It was a good thing we had already built up our own school pastoral care systems, and that Daphne Simmons, already an experienced P.E. teacher, had re-trained herself to do remedial teaching of mainly English and maths. Lesley de Meza, who joined our English Department in 1973, took County courses in counselling adolescents; and in her last two years at Hillside she became tutor for those pupils/students who were excluded from other tutor groups because of their behavioural issues. She left us (in 1979) to become first a counsellor with Capital Radio, and later to set up as a consultant (to Herts Education Dept, amongst other LEAs) in what later became PSH&E (Personal, Social, Health & Economic) education in schools. But I could rely on almost *all* of my colleagues to act *in loco parentis* to boys and girls, and particularly those who had lacked the love and the structure of a stable family - as an increasing number did. The intractable cases were always those whose attendance was very poor, since neither we nor the attendance officer had time to follow up quickly and thoroughly all instances of prolonged truancy, or cases where parents deliberately kept their children away from school. One case where we did fail, was an adolescent boy who managed to attach himself to a successful male pop star, and ended his schooling at least a year early: he was never ‘in care’. But at least one of the difficult girls who *were* in care, finished her last school year by pushing her baby in a pram on her last visit to Hillside, to show the child off. I still wonder how that story ended, and whether she reared that

child successfully - perhaps as a single mum? Is it even possible that the experience of motherhood was exactly the therapy she needed? We did have Child Care classes (as the *photo below* shows); and Kate Irving was a pioneer of sex education in schools. I'm not sure we ever included future dads (though 6th form boys did have a cookery course). The girls' serious problems were handled by tutors and heads of House, and in the end by Jane Mancus. She held her senior post, from 1971 to 1994, with firmness and with much understanding and sympathy. Jane died in May 2014, much loved, and always respected.

Back in 1970, I had felt all too aware of my limitations, very much reacting to each new challenge as it arose; but by the 1980s, I was much more prepared to delegate, and above all to trust to the professionalism and expertise of my colleagues. I was no sportsman, but attached great importance to physical education, knowing the value of fair competition in individual sports and team-games. I was no



*The caption in that photo album was: **Child Care: Hillside pupils demonstrate their mature attitude to this subject!***

craftsman or artist, and had had too little musical education, but I understood the importance of these creative subjects. My first head of Art, Joan Ramsden, who had a flair for creative art and design, made sure of that! The same applied to all the sciences, to mathematics, and to all the practical skills training, including typing and computing and domestic sciences. I also lacked management or business training, but I had learned these by practising them, on the job. Above all I knew my colleagues were professionals who could (and would) make Hillside successful in all these fields: I worked to create the conditions for that success – and it did indeed happen!

The second deputy head I appointed (early in 1976), Julian Marcus, is mentioned in the 1979 log book extracts, in the *Appendix J*, when he took over as acting Head for the Autumn Term that year, whilst I was taking a "sabbatical break" to "re-charge myself". Julian was of Jewish origin, but was a Church of England theologian, and a polymath, very knowledgeable about world religions. I was not aware of any Muslims or Hindus on our roll at the time, though I did rather like and respect one extremely bright young Iranian lad whose family, I think, were taking asylum in the U.K. after the fall of the Shah (1979). He didn't stay long enough with us to work for a university place; and his parents did not withdraw him from our assemblies: which (at least when I took them) were safely humanist and rationalist. In fact I don't think *anyone* was withdrawn from our assemblies, though we certainly had a number of Jewish members of staff, and of course pupils. Julian, however, wanted me to join a new team taking assemblies on multi-cultural topics; reluctantly (on the principle that if you delegate powers, you must accept others'

decisions) I agreed - which meant I was for the first time introduced to the 'Upanishads', and to many mythical tales that did not seem to me to stand much comparison with the parables attributed to Jesus of Nazareth. I have to



confess that I couldn't follow Julian's trail of philosophical study very far. But I obviously did think he would make an excellent head, and certainly he was an organiser and a disciplinarian, and that he would therefore be a good

This photo was in our 1983 'brochure for parents', with this caption:

At our Jubilee Exhibition, the present Archbishop of Canterbury discussed the school's history with Peter Martin (now studying Physics at Birmingham University), Paul Law (who went to read English at Hatfield), Alison Baker (who was then studying Natural Sciences at Cambridge) and the Headmaster. Alison became a Scholar of Clare College, and is now a research student at Edinburgh University.

acting head for my sabbatical term. As it happened, September 1979 was the school’s 40th Anniversary; and Julian, who was himself active in the diocese of St Albans, knew personally Bishop Robert Runcie, and knew that he was then the Archbishop of Canterbury-elect! So it was Julian who arranged for him to present the prizes and give the address at our anniversary Prizegiving that September. I insisted, of course, that while the school’s administrative arrangements would by then be in Julian’s capable hands, I must myself be there, as the ‘real’ Headmaster! In terms of his address, Bishop Runcie was well-briefed and excellent; and in terms of the upbeat publicity for Hillside and indeed for the ‘image’ locally of comprehensive education, this occasion gave us maximum good coverage – almost as good, I had to admit, as that of the television appearances of the cast of “Sgt PEPPER” on “Blue Peter” in 1976 (a long ‘clip’ of that has now turned up on U-tube!), or of “EGO” on BBC “Nationwide” in 1978!

It was soon time to get my feet back on the firm ground of Borehamwood. For that ‘sabbatical term’ I had attached myself as a “mature student observer”, to Harold Rosen’s English Department at the London Institute of Education. I wanted to understand how they, and inner London schools were meeting the multicultural and multilingual challenges resulting from continuing immigration. Enoch Powell had made his “Rivers of Blood” speech 11 years previously, but when I had left Wandsworth, at the end of 1969, there were still no significant racial tensions in the playground there; and indeed 10 years later there were still very few signs of such tension in Borehamwood. But I did know that dramatic change was afoot, and I was pondering what effect this might have on English text books (like my “Art of English”, then in its revised, reprinted 1977 edition). Did I need to revise the reading lists and introduce new poems? What would be the impact on English (as spoken, sung, and written by generations of British citizens in the U.K.), of the influx of people speaking other ‘heritage languages’ (now not called their ‘mother tongues’)? We had always (already in my Wandsworth English department and now at Hillside) confronted prejudice and racism and sexism head-on; but I suspected that the challenge of integrating many diverse groups with so many differing languages and cultural backgrounds meant more than just teaching tolerance and respect to girls and boys born and bred here. I admired the skill and the practice of teachers who were meeting that challenge with children from so many backgrounds in London; but I fear that I did come out of that term, spent listening to the Institute’s “learned arguments” about linguistics, by “that same door wherein I went”!

In retrospect, I sometimes wonder now if the proximity of the big BBC and commercial film studios to our school and to the estate around it, had already made a difference to the ambience in which we taught our adolescents. I have already referred to our supplementing school funds by hiring out some of buildings as locations for filming; and in *Appendix J*, p.22, I have copied the full aerial photograph, showing how close the nearest working studios were to our school campus, and have added some comments on such links as we did have with the film and television studios. Allan was always good at exploiting links with people and organisations in the wider stage, film and tv world: somehow he persuaded Mel Smith to be a patron of the Elstree Youth Theatre. I think it was on one EYT dress rehearsal evening that I found Mel Smith and Griff Rhys-Jones sitting (rather larger than life!) in our staff room, before they went into the Community Theatre to encourage the cast and boost their morale. There is a note in the Programme for “*GODSPELL*” (1981) about the successful progress of Michael Packer (who had had leading roles in “*MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM*” and “*THE BLITZ SHOW*”) from the Arts Educational Drama School, through the RSC at the Aldwych, to parts on BBC TV. Michael left in 1976, before the start of the EYT and a Community Theatre - and I now think he was an exception, certainly not the rule, in becoming a successful professional actor.

As I have said, Allan was not running a drama school, and most of those who gained new confidence on our stage put that to many other uses in their later lives. However, good reviews and brief appearances on the tv screen were never as important to our pupils as their public examination results - and those results went on improving, despite the cuts and the youth unemployment in those Thatcher years. Another milestone was in 1986 when for the first time the number of first choices for admission to Hillside exceeded those for Nicholas Hawksmoor. So, what were we doing wrong in the late 1980s and the 90s? The answer must surely be, *nothing* – the ultimate dismantling of the three-tier system of schools in Borehamwood was *not* of *our* making! Early warning signs had come in the early 1980s, when, as recorded in Reports

to Governors (see extracts quoted in *Appendix J*, pp.25-34), the County Education Officer was demanding a “Review of the Hillside curriculum”; and soon the County’s own Review was suggesting to us “the possibility of a consortium at 6th Form level with the College and Nicholas Hawksmoor”. We faced a cut of 2 staff the following summer, and we had already had cuts in funding. In June, 1983, P.M. Margaret Thatcher was given another term at a general election (as I said, not by the Hillside pupils in our Mock Election). In 1984 we had to lose another three teachers (by ‘natural wastage’, which of course restricted any plans to replace specialist staff).

But in fact, underlying problems in Boreham Wood had as much to do with demographics as with politics or economics. There was a steep decline in numbers of school-age pupils, combined with an uneven distribution of school sites around the town. Where school rolls fall, loss of staff and funding follows - which made it very difficult to keep the full range of specialist staff and facilities in each middle and upper school. The structure that had been adopted in Borehamwood from 1972 required two upper schools, each with a viable 6th form, and 4 quality middle schools, and some pupils crossing Elstree Way daily. In the end, it was Nicholas Hawksmoor that fell into decline, whilst Hillside’s results were better than ever. Tommy Thomas was older than I was, and after his retirement (in 1988 or ‘89) there was a difficult period when no replacement head was in post at that other Upper School; as a result, Hillside remained as the first choice of the discerning or ambitious parents. Our 1982-3 Governors Reports (quoted in *Appendix J*), say that Hillside ‘compensated’ for declining intakes of pupils by attracting more students to stay on in the 6th form; both Upper Schools were also offsetting staffing problems by cooperating with the local F.E.College, and coordinating their 6th form timetables. One of the first real casualties of cut-backs was our local teachers’ centre; this had brought teachers of children of all age-levels closer together, as well as providing practical resources (like printing equipment) that the smaller schools could not provide on their own premises. From my first days in Borehamwood, I had been impressed by the close and apparently very friendly relations between all the head teachers; and by the sense that this was a defined local area where most staff (and indeed most children) seemed to know and like, or at least tolerate, each other. (I don’t remember any aggressive teenage gangs on the local estates). There was a strong head teachers’ group, meeting regularly, which I was in turn asked to chair. We met in the Teachers Centre, which could also cater for refreshments or meals. We regularly met the local magistrates and police, the social services, and the GPs. There were also other standing committees that liaised between the two upper schools, the F.E.College and representatives of local businesses and employers; one of these was the B.W.Education & Industry Forum. The local Rotary Club awarded prizes and funded courses for outstanding pupils (from both upper schools). My own desk diaries, and my Reports to Governors, are full of new national initiatives, known only by their initials (I have now to searched on Google to discover what all or some of the letters stood for!): TVEI, CPVE, BEC, YTS, and by 1987, GCSE. These were all attempts to regularise the transition from schools to the workplace. In the face of a decline in traditional apprenticeship schemes, a sharp rise in youth unemployment, and a steady demand for IT qualifications (another new pair of initials!), and at a time of declining school population and Government cuts in education budgets, we were still trying to adapt and equip our comprehensive schools for the 1990s - and for the new millennium. It was an uphill task! I worried about the underlying trend in those Thatcher years, though I welcomed the new concept of a ‘GCSE’ (General Certificate of Secondary Education), which combined CSE and O Level in one examination. I feared we would not have the necessary support to offer pupils at the CSE end of the scale a wide range of courses in which to achieve well, and that those qualifications would not get them the job opportunities they deserved. Moreover, this proposal set off a campaign to ‘reform’ the whole curriculum. The shadow of the controversial “Black Papers” (*Prof.C.B.Cox, 1969*) had hung over us all throughout the 1970s, and I feared that now, in the ‘80s, we would be forced back to selection and segregation of pupils. When central government laid down a national curriculum (from teaching reading up to preparing pupils for university), and devised nation-wide attainment tests for pupils (SATS), this was undoing the work teachers had done, since the War, to rebuild the professional (rather than trade union) status of teachers and of heads of schools.

It is true that by the 1980s many of us were having doubts as to the ‘fitness for purpose’ of the 3-tier structure of education in the town, and wondered whether the County would maintain the

staffing and funds, and sufficiently support us with their social services and careers service. The County, of course, was stuck with existing buildings and campuses, and in no position to close old schools in order to build new ones in different places. But I still believed that, even if County was going to do a u-turn, and restore Borehamwood to the pattern of transferring 11+ pupils to one (now comprehensive) secondary school, they would not be so stupid as to close Hillside, when it was manifestly succeeding, whilst Nicholas Hawksmoor was failing. It might be unlikely that two secondary schools would still be required, but surely one 11+ school could use the Hillside campus for all the older students, and younger pupils could be accommodated on other existing school sites? There would obviously be an overall surplus of school places, and empty buildings, in the town. By 1986, I had personal family and health reasons for considering early retirement to Lechlade, but I was also concerned to choose a moment when I felt sure that Hillside would continue to thrive. I assumed that just meant making sure I had deputies who could and would carry on, and a reasonably stable staff most of whom felt that they had a real stake in the school's success. With people like Jane Mancus and Tim Westrip, and Allan (and the new Community Theatre!), and Tim Van Kroonenburg, Geoff Farmer, Terry Darby, Brian Mee (promoted to Head of Science when Kate Irving left in 1986), Mary Hurlstone, John Negus, Mike Newman, Rob Wilton, Daphne Simmons, Martin Sireling, Moira Coup, Angela Reid, Elam Singam, Adelheid Smith, Jane Inglis, and a strong team of ancillary staff, surely Hillside was a 'tight ship', that only needed a smooth 'change of watch' at the helm?



A thoughtful Tim Westrip, at our May '87 Garden Party

Back in 1980, Julian Marcus had earned his own headship, of a successful Church of England school; then, as I have already mentioned, I had selected Tim Westrip from quite a strong field of candidates, largely because he was male and an experienced Head of Science. I didn't then realise that he was a heavy cigarette smoker, nor did I then realise that his wife (also a heavy smoker) was suffering from multiple sclerosis. (Tim has since successfully given up smoking). He was younger than Julian and John Earnshaw had been, when they took up the deputy-head post at Hillside, and the existing staff had warmed to Tim. He was a loyal and utterly reliable colleague to me (and to Jane), and was soon on good terms with all the staff, senior and junior. By 1987 Tim seemed, as indeed he was, ready and able to run the school – to take the helm. But the vacant post had of course to be advertised. When County took their time about making a permanent appointment (as also would happen at Nicholas Hawksmoor, in 1989), I recommended that Tim should be appointed as acting Head.

In the end Tim did get the permanent job. I was confident that my retirement would not be a setback for the school (as Tommy's departure from his Upper School was to be); and indeed Hillside continued to flourish for some 12 years - until County dealt their mortal blow: closure!

Tim Westrip, Allan Stronach, and many other long-standing members of staff like John Negus, put up a good fight then; many people signed petitions. Ex-staff, such as Geoff Farmer and I, did what we could, from a distance. But it was all to no avail! The Hillside site was going to be sold.

In 1987. Gill and I had been excited by the prospect of adapting a Grade II listed house, with two beautiful old agricultural barns to be restored, and by the idea of building up Gill's new business - another 'Dolls House Gallery' – in the Cotswolds. But we were also excited, and indeed overwhelmed, by the 'Farewell to Keith' that colleagues put on in the Community Theatre on 18th July, 1987. We knew and felt we were among



Tim Van Kroonenburg, reintroducing Howard Thomas, to Gill & Keith, at the "This Is Your Hillside Life" party.



true friends, as well as genuinely appreciative colleagues from the whole of the previous 17½ years. I think I had already written (at the risk of sounding complacent) an article for the 23rd July issue of the local paper, which I headlined "A fruitful past, and an exciting challenge ahead." I think the extracts copied below do indeed reflect what I genuinely felt then: that the school had indeed 'arrived', and that pupils and staff had numerous achievements that they had every right to be proud of. I still stand by what I wrote then about the previous 17 years. But as for the 'challenge', I had no idea then that the school's 60th anniversary (1999) would coincide with a losing battle for Hillside's survival! Sadly, Hillside's closure means that the school's 'legacy' is now vested only in our former-pupils and ex-staff.

*Extracts from
K.N.'s article in
the local newspaper
on July 23rd, 1987*

Miss Blythe and Mr O'Keefe endured too, to be deputy headmistress and senior master respectively when I took up the headship in January, 1970.

By then, the school had a fine reputation for its work with the less able, but particularly for helping those who had failed their 11-plus selection, but were still determined to go on to higher education.

Andrew Gibbs (who gained a 2nd class BSc in 1972) and Gerald Wilson were the first Hillside sixth formers to win university degree places.

They have been followed by such successful personalities as those local entrepreneurs Gristwood and Toms; James Walsh and Paul Macarthy, the first ex-

Hillsiders to gain first class honours degrees, Paul Socket, Alexander Byars and many others like Paul Welsh (now a governor and our Town Council's entertainments officer), who have created remarkable careers for themselves.

It was my brief to develop that successful secondary modern school into an upper school to cater for pupils of all abilities from the age of 13 upwards.

Gradually, we have proved that we can keep faith with the academically most able. Alison Baker and Christopher Baker have both gone on to higher degrees from Cambridge, where Alison was elected a scholar of Clare College. Others like Alison Theobald and Dawn Edwards are at Cambridge and Nottingham now; and there have been Hillsiders at universities and colleges in every corner of the country.

But there is much more to a good all-ability upper school than successful coaching for university entrance.

Hillside has been a consistently caring community, concerned for all those with difficulties to overcome and problems to resolve. As a 13 to 18 school, we have been in the front line of feedback from broken families,

acutely aware of the impact of cuts in welfare and support services, and of all the debris left by a fast-moving, fast-changing society around the school.

What a comprehensive school has to do for adolescents under these pressures is to keep open every opportunity, build personal confidence and character, and help pupils to find some experience of success, some sense of their own value.

This has meant trying to build the school as a true community, sending pupils out with confidence into the community around us.

"Forth to Adventure" was always our motto, and staff and pupils have always ventured out. I remember a long succession of pupils who were "outward bound" from Martin Creese who became an Outward Bound instructor, to the latest, Sasha

Gurrey and Natasha Delliston, who go on full courses in Scotland this summer.

I think of outstanding athletes and sportsmen and women like soccer-player Ian Richardson, Tony Butcher, and now Emma Balsler, national U16 Girls Basketball captain.

I recall visiting pupils on work-experience, more and more of them after year until every fifth former was included.

Parties go skiing and exploring the Continent as far away as Moscow. There's been fundraising every year to sponsor four young people through Save the

Children Fund, as well as to keep our own minibus on the road to fieldwork in Wales or sailing in Norfolk.

Plays and musicals like Bugsy Malone, Sergeant Pepper and Godspell, which put Hillside on the TV screen, Kes and The Mysteries have led us on to become the local Community Theatre.

There has been music for Christmas and Easter, including Spanish Holiday, specially composed by Barry Smallwood for the celebrated Hillside Brass Band. There has been a spectrum of dance performances and countless discos. Add to this mixture all kinds of competitions and exhibitions and memorable prize-givings like those of Mike Brace and Robert Runcie. These are the things that help make a good school a fine school.

I addressed this article to the parents of Borehamwood, in the belief that we had achieved full parity with the other upper school, and that Hillside had the facilities, and above all the staff, to face the future with confidence.

Such experiences make confident adults out of children, including both the cocksure and the shy. Such activities depend upon the dedication and diligence of many teachers, backed up by the loyal service of the rest of the adult staff.

We have fought for and won new accommodation and modern equipment and facilities as good as any in the county. But the tools and the hardware are not the educators.

It is people that matter, it is men and women that turn children into responsible young adults. It is the

community of my colleagues with our common ideals and common purpose that I shall miss most after August.

Just one year after my retirement, a radical 'Education Reform Act' for England, Wales and Northern Ireland introduced 'LMS' (local management of schools), the National Curriculum, and Key Stage testing, all of which weakened the powers of LEAs, and the Act gave increased powers to central government through 'OFSTED' (then formed to replace Her Majesty's Inspectors). This 1988 Act was not repealed by the Labour governments that followed the Thatcher and Major period. Quite apart from enabling schools to become 'Academies', and so be independent of local authorities, it had the effect of increasing the burden of responsibilities of *all* Heads and Governing bodies, and yet withdrawing the support services for the classroom teachers in all schools. If I had

gritted my teeth and postponed my retirement for another 10 years or more, I do not think I could have stayed that course; Hillside needed someone younger and fitter to see the school through the difficult period of the 1990s. Maybe, by then, the school really did need the kind of professional ‘*manager*’ that is to be found at the head of most schools today, rather than a *teacher*, whose prime concerns were the individual progress and development of the pupils, and leadership of the staff?

What I fondly remember now, above all, is the people (though not always their names!) - not so much the places, certainly not all the events. I have found a random selection of photos to remind me of pupils and colleagues, most of them taken in the later years of my time at Hillside. I shall end this chapter of my Memoirs, with 16 ‘portraits’ (in pictures and a few words) of some of those colleagues, and shall postpone the rest of this ‘picture gallery’ to the end pages of *Appendix J*.



1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

(Left to right) 1. John Earnshaw (who got his own headship at Bushey Meads in 1976); he was succeeded as my Deputy by 2. Julian Marcus, (who became head of Kelsey Park School in 1981); whilst 3. Jane Mancus was my Deputy Headmistress from 1971 to 1987, & remained in that vitally important post until 1994. 4. Howard Thomas was my first appointment of a Head of English, and he too became a Headmaster. 5. Fred Brotherhood was an established senior teacher in 1970; he taught Technical Drawing and also became Head of House and organised careers and work experience. He and Freda Pellowe (pictured on p.35) both retired in 1985, and have since died.

6. 7. 8. 9. 10. and 11.



6. Allan Stronach became a key senior member of the teaching staff, as well as our outstanding stage director; but 7. Joan Ramsden was already running a dynamic art dept. when I arrived, and continued to keep me on my toes. 8. Tim Van Kroonenburg was a key, senior colleague when he did a “This Is Your Life” on me, and he also went on soon after to a Headship. (There is more about Tim meeting his wife, Fiona Jotham, head of Modern Languages, in Appendix J, p.37). 9. Geoff Farmer (Hd. of English, etc) is pictured here (when he was in the “Mysteries” cast). 10. Elam Singam (Maths & wizard timetabler), and 11. Joan Elmer, School Secretary (at the 1987 garden party).

12. 13. 14. 15. and 16.



12. Julie Crane was a lively, soon to be much-travelled, colleague of Tim’s in the History Department. 13. Chris Weaver, was Head of a very successful Music Department (after Barry Smallwood & Kathy Goad, & before Margaret Coolen), who founded Borehamwood Youth Orchestra & directed Music for school productions; 14. is Morwen Millsom (Science), at the farewell (& with a tiny glimpse of Kate Irving, Hd.of Science, behind her). 15. Lesley de Meza (English), who had by then gone into counselling, here with others at my farewell; I’m not sure who was with no.16. Terry Darby, Hd.of Design Technology, at that moment (at our last Staff garden party, in 1987).