

## Discover Hidden Treasures at St. Swithun's School

**Intro:** Welcome to Hampshire HistBites. Join us as we delve into the past and go on a journey to discover some of the county's best and occasionally unknown history. We'll be speaking to experts as well as enthusiasts, asking them to reveal some of our hidden heritage, as well as share with you a few fascinating untold stories.

**Julie:** Welcome back to Hampshire HistBites. This week, we are joined by Elly Crookes, the school archivist at St. Swithun's, and we will learn more about their archive project, the school's historical collection, and discover some hidden treasures. So welcome to Hampshire HistBites. Can you start with introducing yourself and how you ended up at St. Swithun's?

**Elly:** Hello. My name is Elly Crookes and I am the school archivist for St. Swithun's. Thank you very much for having me on; I'm really excited to share our story.

So, essentially, I've been an archivist for five years now and I used to work at a charity and the St. Swithun's archivist job came up relatively at the same time that the other project was ending. I was really excited to get the job. I think we're at nine months into the project at the moment.

**Julie:** Can you tell me about the archivist project and give us some background information to that?

**Elly:** This archive project has come about from a generous donation from an old girl and it was specifically to spend on the school's heritage. Without that donation, we wouldn't have been able to find out any of the information that we have done so far. It really allowed us to delve into our history and find out details that we don't know about and then we can really publicise it and revel in the fact that we have a great collection. The school decided to employ a professional archivist to delve into their archive and catalogue it so that the school know what they have and that they can use it in the future as a resource, either to aid with teaching or just a general historical resource to consult. A lot of people don't know that our collection actually dates back to 1712; our earliest record is a copy of *The Spectator*. This particular record is part of a collection of records from the 18th century.

Really our collection is a story of two halves. The majority of our records relate to the school and include things like our photographs and mission records, things to do with our Old Girls, boarding house records. Then, on the other side, we have a really small collection of 18th century material that was donated to the school in 1934.

And we don't know anything else about this donation other than it's called the Southey & Scobie collection. Within it are some really fascinating items. I had to take a five minute break when I realized some of the stuff that we had. It includes signatures from historical figures: King George IV and King George III, the signature of the Duke of Wellington and Lord Palmerston. We have two letters: one from Christina Rossetti and another one from William Wilberforce. We have a pardon, which is signed by Queen Victoria in her own hand, which is preventing someone from transportation to Australia at the time. We also have a really tiny calendar of dates. It fits into the palm of your hand, it's that small, but it's really

beautiful and intricately embroidered. That is probably from about 1802, I think it's dated. We also have a scrapbook which contains everything about 18th century popular culture, really: newspaper articles and engravings and pieces of music and some really beautiful water-coloured drawings of ladies' fashionable dress at the time. It's a really great collection of material.

We just don't know anything about why we have it. The only reason I can think of is that somebody wanted to add more value to our collection and so gave us those pieces. In terms of our school collection, I think our most important records are our school chronicles and they date from 1895 to 2011.

**Julie:** So can you tell us a bit about St. Swithun's school? It wasn't always named St. Swithun's, was it?

**Elly:** No, so St. Swithun's used to be called Winchester High School for Girls. It started in 1884 and we weren't actually located in the place that we are now. We were actually in the city centre. The first premises was 3 Southgate Terrace, which I think is now 17 Southgate Street. It moved when it grew in numbers, to St. Peter Street, and then it grew so big we moved to Alresford Road, the site that we're on now.

**Julie:** Could you take us through a bit of the history of the school?

**Elly:** We started in 1884 on the 5th of September, I believe, with 17 pupils.<sup>1</sup> The school was the brainchild of Anna Bramston, who is our founder, and her lifelong friend, Amelie Le Roy and although Anna is sort of considered our official founder, I think of them both as our founders, because Amy and Anna were both so integral in setting up the school and they had a common goal: that they wanted women to be educated. It said in our school chronicle that Anna was inspired to start a girls' school after hearing a speech from the writer, Elizabeth Sewell. She was talking about the benefits of having good church boarding schools in the town diocese. It said that Anna got inspiration from that, but I think that inspiration was probably a bit deeper. Her dad was the Dean of Winchester from 1877 to about 1883. And her stepbrother, the Reverend John Trant Bramston, was Housemaster at Winchester college. I believe he founded Bramston's House, which I think is unofficially known as Trant's. So Anna's connection to education and religion would have been really ingrained from when she was growing up.

They lived at Witham Close, which I think is still around today. She lived there after her dad died and then with her friend, Amy Le Roy, until they both passed away. But Anna Bramston was also in a big circle of big society people like George Moberly, who was Headmaster of Winchester College, and the Coleridge family, who were descendants of Samuel Coleridge the poet, and they were big believers in education and also religious education.

One of her greatest friends was Charlotte Yonge, who was quite a famous novelist. She's probably best known for her book, *The Heir of Radcliffe*, but she also created a magazine called *The Monthly Packet*, which was a religious publication, really, for young people. Charlotte Yonge also created *The Gosling Society*, an essay society for young Victorian women to give them intellectual stimulation. I believe this is where Anna and Amy met and

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<sup>1</sup> The school actually opened on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1884, not 5<sup>th</sup> September 1884.

became friends and I think that's probably where Anna's inspiration to found a school for women came about really.

I think one of our biggest legacy is that we were big pioneers of female education. In our collection, we have the school prospectuses and our very first one talks about the school curriculum. And this is where you really find out how progressive the school was in terms of educating women. According to our prospectus, the school aim was to 'provide an education that will develop to the full the capacity of every girl and help her to become a useful and gracious woman in whatever position she may have to fill. School life is planned to give a wide outlook, to awaken varied interests and to stimulate thought. The girls are expected to exercise judgment and self-reliance, and to act as responsible members of the community.' So they were really forward thinking. They felt female education was a real benefit to women. They would also have lectures on economics, so they knew how to manage money and there is a particular passage in our school chronicle that said in the absence of the husband, who isn't able to manage his own accounts, it's important for you to know how to do it. And it's something that I think we're really proud of is they introduced STEM subjects really early on into the curriculum, as early as 1897. So science, technology, engineering, and maths.

What it did was spark off a legacy of female scientists who went to St Swithun's and they really encouraged the girls to take it on to further education and to do the subject at university. The very first girl, I think, to win a science scholarship to Girton College at Cambridge was called Mabel Clark. So we're really proud of our legacy of female scientists.

Our second Headmistress, who was Margaret Mowbray, she was the real pioneer and was really the lady that introduced the STEM subjects onto the curriculum. She really bought in a well-rounded education, which included sports and games. I mean, we've been playing lacrosse at our school since 1905. We have a really strong legacy of lacrosse here and Margaret Mowbray recognized very early on that having a well-rounded curriculum was going to be important.

Anna Bramston and Amelie Le Roy also felt the same and they established a university scholarship for St. Swithun's girls, named in honour of Charlotte Yonge because they were big supporters of her work. Charlotte was also a big supporter of female education. Queen Alexandra, who was Princess of Wales at the time, put her name behind the fund and it grew from there and what it did was allow girls from St Swithun's to go to university. That's really significant because that started in 1899. So we're still talking the Victorian period when education was still restrictive for most women.

**Julie:** Definitely, it's so important, and you can just see the links to all these extraordinary women from the school and how important it is for an all-round education.

**Elly:** Just on the topic of the STEM subjects, I just wanted to mention... We have something called Green Power that the girls get involved in. It's a UK based charity that gets young people enthusiastic about science and engineering. What they do is they challenge young people to design, build, and race an electric car. So we've been involved in that for quite a long time now. The charity provides you with a kit car and that can be built in school and then you race at Motorsport venues across the country. St Swithun's girls have been involved in that for a while, and it just adds to our legacy of STEM subjects being really significant at

school. We've always been quite science-y, so I think that is a direct result of the fact that we've been doing it since 1897.

**Julie:** I find it quite impressive that the school focused so much on science and maths that early for women. It's amazing.

**Elly:** Yeah, I thought it was interesting as well and actually their domestic course, so which included how to sew and mend things, that was actually an optional subject. I think a lot of people would've thought that would have been a really big part of the curriculum.

They benefited from a lot of lectures about economy and knowing how to run a household. But I think the school felt that these things were just as important as having a well-rounded education that meant you could hold your own in society.

I know they did encourage women to get employment and a lot of them did go on to have jobs. But for the Victorian women in particular, I was really surprised that they brought science, including physics, onto the curriculum really early.

**Julie:** Yeah, most definitely. So can you tell us a bit about St. Swithun's school during World War II, as I understand it the school turned into a hospital?

**Elly:** Yeah. So for Remembrance Day this time round, both the First and Second World War, I was really surprised by how involved we were from a home front perspective. I think as most people know, in the First World War, Winchester became a place of assembly for troops that were to be dispatched to the British Expeditionary Force in Belgium.

There was a camp on Morn Hill, absolutely massive camp, and in the winter of 1914, the weather conditions got so bad that the soldiers had to be temporarily billeted in the city centre. That meant that the 19th men of the Royal Fusiliers and the East Surrey Regiment requisitioned the school as a temporary camp. But the school continued to operate, and we used our boarding houses so that's where most of their classes took place. I think the caretaker had about one hour to prepare for the reception of 400 soldiers. And I can imagine they were absolutely covered in mud and dripping wet, so it would have been a bit of a shock for the school. We do have some great photographs in our collection of the soldiers and all the carts, and the horses out picketed on the lawn. There's a really great quote in our school chronicle that talks about what the school looked like. I think the barbers used the staircase as the regimental barbers, and I think everybody was sleeping next to radiators because it was so cold.

Possibly my favourite piece of history of our school is that the girls challenged Canadian officers from the Princess Patricia's Light Infantry Regiment to a game of lacrosse because the playing fields were still in use by the school, and they were adjacent to the massive camp that was on Morn Hill.

So I think the Canadian officers had seen the girls playing it and it's written in our history book that they wanted to defend their native sports. So they challenge the girls to a game of lacrosse. There's a really funny passage in our Earlsdown boarding house diary about the fact the Canadian officers lost horribly. I think they lost eight goals to two.

But they all went to tea afterwards and it said that the officers were a bit stunned by how small the girls were. There was a bit of a height difference and it was a bit difficult for them, I think.

**Julie:** Oh, I love that story.

**Elly:** Yeah. It's one of my favourite ones. But they got involved in lots of other things. They really supported British prisoners of war. Each boarding house were assigned a prisoner of war and they would send them correspondence, they would send them food, they would send them textiles like socks and hats. And I think it was just basically to keep up the morale and in our Earlsdown boarding house diary, one particular soldier, Major Read, sent us a lot of correspondence back. He was in the prisoner of war camp in Germany, and he would send the school magazines from the camp and just general information about what it was like out there. They're a really good source of information and hopefully something we can build in to using in our curriculum, because it's a great reflection of prisoners of war in the First World War.

So in the Second World War, which is when the school had moved to its new site on Alresford Road, we were once again occupied by the armed forces. From 1942 until the end of the war we were taken over by the army medical corps and the school buildings, including High House and Hyde Abbey, which are two of our boarding houses, they were turned into a military hospital and the pupils and the staff, again, decamped to the boarding houses on St. Giles Hill.

One girl was in our boarding house, Hillcroft, and said that 'the conditions were Spartan, by today's standards quite ghastly,' but she said, 'We all survived and I'm quite sure it did me no harm whatever and probably much good, as I am very immune to common ailments.' To be honest, for most of the girls, the school life was more diversified and less restrictive in the Second World War. The school contributions to the war effort occupied a lot of their time. Almost everyone in the school joined the War Savings Group and they knitted scarves, socks, and balaclava helmets for the soldiers. Senior girls helped at nursery, other girls grew vegetables, and went to farming camps over the school holidays. The staff were drafted into fire watching duties on St Giles Hill, and the girls would have to walk around the boarding houses at night to check for chinks of light during the blackout.

A lot of girls remember coming to the playing fields, which again were still in use, and they would go in a strict crocodile line under military escort past sunbathing, convalescent troops. They were told under no circumstances to look at them or peer in at any windows according to our history book. Some of the girls taught the GIs how to play cricket and I think they were amazed how hard it was to catch a ball; that was so hard. And they couldn't believe that girls at... probably at the age of 15 were doing that. So I think that we've got some great recollections of the Second World War. When it ended the Army Medical Corps presented the school with a plaque as a token of gratitude for allowing them to use the school as a military hospital.

I think coming back into the school after the Second World War would have been a real shock to the system. I think it had been completely gutted out and then it was putting everything back in again and turning it back into a school. So I'm really proud of the school's contributions to both World Wars, because I think in the absence of a role of honour,

sometimes it's difficult, for girls' schools in particular, to say what contribution they had, but they obviously had such a massive contribution on the home front. I really recommend anybody who's interested about our connection with the World Wars to go into our school website because there's a page on there that I wrote for our Remembrance Day about our involvement.

**Julie:** Yeah, definitely. The girls and the staff really contributed to society. So it's important that we actually know that.

**Elly:** That actually feeds into something bigger was that our mission society, which is actually now called Assist, is probably our oldest society. It started at some time between 1890 to 1896. It oversaw all the fundraising activities for the school. It initially worked in unison with the Women's University Settlement at Southwark, which is now the Blackfriars Settlement, and the girls and their families would subscribe to a fund that would pay for sick or convalescing children to recuperate in the country or by the sea. It was this society that kicked off the plans for the cathedral restoration fund in 1906. And that included a sale of work with tea and entertainment, which was held at the school, and the school raised about £181, which is quite a lot of money, I think, in 1906. More than 400 people came to the school and they were treated to a performance that was written by the French mistress.

But apparently the main spectacle according to the Hampshire Chronicle and our school chronicle was the living statues. The girls would depict some famous statues such as Chapu's<sup>2</sup> *Joan of Arc* and Barrias's... Barrias' *Mozart*<sup>3</sup>, apologies if I've pronounced that wrong. So I can imagine that was a pretty interesting spectacle to see, and we have a picture of the girls doing the performance that was created by the French mistress, but we don't have any pictures of the living statues, which I'm gutted about 'cause that would have been fantastic. I think it's something they carried on in various other fundraising activities. There is another account of them doing another living statue spectacle at a later date and we've been raising money for charitable causes ever since. The Assist Society are a great extracurricular activity for the girls. So we're really proud of that.

**Julie:** I can see throughout the school's history that fundraising and just helping society in general is an important part of the school's motto.

**Elly:** Anna Bramston really believed in principles of religious teaching. A lot of our charitable activity is as a result of that connection with the Church of England. And our official school motto is 'caritas, humilitas, sinceritas', so yeah, it's important.

**Julie:** And I do love that the girls fundraised to help out with the cathedral restoration in 1906, because we did an episode on William Walker earlier in Season One. So it actually links to that. So another little part of hidden history. You've posted a lot of interesting finds on the Twitter account, which we will link to in the blog post, but can you tell me about maybe some of your favourite or more interesting finds in the archives?

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<sup>2</sup> Henri Chapu (1833-1891) *Jeanne d'Arc à Domrémy*

<sup>3</sup> Louis-Ernest Barrias (1841-1905) *Young Mozart*

**Elly:** I think when I was talking about the Southey & Scobie collections, all the 18th century material was massive for me because I'm a big Regency fan, so I was really excited when I saw that.

Recently the biggest surprise has been what our alumni have done. We had some quite pioneering women like Sheila Scotter, who was the editor-in-chief of Vogue Australia and she founded Vogue Living. There's Elizabeth Clark, she was a 20th century children's novelist, Rosina Harris was the first woman to be chosen as a senior partner in any leading London firm of solicitors and the preeminent copyright solicitor of her generation. We had a lady called Noël Robb, who was a South African activist and a founding member of the Black Sash organisation, Captain Rosanna Barker was a member of the first all-female team to cross the Antarctic only using muscle power and Emma Chambers who played Alice on 'The Vicar of Dibley'; she obviously became quite a fantastic actress. We also have Baroness Celia Thomas of Winchester, who is a member of the House of Lords. So we have some quite pioneering women who went to St. Swithun's.

We've had so many generous donations from Old Girls, telling us about their life and that's really helped to contextualise what our school was like in the past. Another big favourite is probably my photographs, especially our early photographs. They've told us a lot that we didn't know. A big one was that we've actually been teaching juniors since we started. I think lots of people probably thought our junior school started in 1952 but actually we've been teaching children as young as three since 1884. We've got some fantastic pictures in our collection of tutors with their pupils and they're really sweet and they've got some beautiful petticoats on and some sailor outfits and flat caps so they look lovely.

**Julie:** I absolutely love that and I think photographs, they tell a different story as well. So where do you find the items in your collections? Do you find them in storage at the school or is it mostly donations?

**Elly:** Well, a lot of it has been scouring the school to find stuff. The meat of our collection was really stored in a cupboard and it just needed going through and actually the Hampshire Record Office a couple of years ago came to have a look at the collection and listed what was in the boxes. So they had a general idea of what we've got. But as we found out more information from the records, we've been able to figure out that there's actually a lot more around the school. I put out an appeal to our house mistresses and house masters if they had any material, because a lot of our boarding houses that used to be on St. Giles Hill, obviously we don't have the original buildings anymore, but we still retain the boarding house names and when they all moved to the site that we're currently at now, they did take a lot of material from the original boarding houses and so we've managed to gain a lot of records from there.

And it's just a case, really, of going around the school and determining what is historically significant. And that is the benefit of having a professional archivist, is that they can evaluate what really is significant to the school and what isn't. So that's how our collection has really come about. It's currently stored on site at the moment, but we do have a collection of some early material, probably from when we first started, at the Hampshire Record Office, which we deposited there in 1997, I think.

**Julie:** I do love the thought of just going through bits and just seeing all these amazing finds.

**Elly:** There's actually a really funny story about a crazy burglary that happened in I think it was about 1906. And a man called Richard Allen broke through the boarding house window and specifically stole 29 silver spoons, two candlesticks, and a silver box containing some stamps in it. He then hid the items in a haystack up on Morn Hill. I think the police questioned his wife and his wife told him to take the stuff back and he said that he was too cunning for the police. But they arrested him within a matter of 24 hours. It sounds like a story out of *Jeeves and Wooster* because the boarding house invited the policemen for a cup of tea and they proceeded to have a fabulous afternoon tea and they all rejoiced in the return of the items and the capture of the criminal.

So that's a great story in the diaries and a real great way of contextualising what the school was like at the time. And the Earlsdown boarding house diaries, I think they're still being written today. So they're a great source of information.

**Julie:** The fact that they're still being written down just makes me think about maybe fifty or a hundred years from now, someone's going to look at that and see the continuous development of a place or a person or a family.

**Elly:** Yes, I think so. As an archivist, I probably haven't recorded much of my own life, but I really encourage others to do so because in a hundred years' time, people like me and researchers and family researchers will be really interested in your stories. I definitely recommend doing it and saving your pictures and writing down who the people are in the photographs, 'cause that really helps everyone.

**Outro:** We hope you enjoyed listening to today's episode. If you would like to find out a little bit more about what we've been talking about, then please visit the website, [www.winchesterheritageopendays.org](http://www.winchesterheritageopendays.org), click on Hampshire HistBites, and there you'll find today's show notes as well as some links to more information.