

HARRIET MAY SKIDMORE ROBINSON

David Skidmore

24 September 2015



Introduction & Acknowledgments

I grew up with the feeling that my father had virtually no family. However I have a vague memory of my mother telling me that he had a cousin in South Africa. But I knew nothing about this cousin and certainly had no name. At least sixty years later and ten years after I had started researching my family's history I came across the name of Harriet May Skidmore Robinson on a Cape Town¹ to Liverpool Passenger List. I had known of Harriet – the daughter of my grandfather's half-sister Polly Skidmore – but never knew that she had used 'Skidmore' as her third forename or that she had lived in South Africa. Such is the power of the internet that this simple discovery led me within a few weeks to a considerable amount of information about Harriet. Starting with an entry in *The Biographical Dictionary of Women in Science* I was led to an obituary in the *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of London* which gave me a list of the schools and other institutions in which Harriet had studied and taught.

I have been extremely fortunate in receiving generous and efficient help from many archivists, librarians and other interested individuals both in England and in South Africa. The more I learnt about Harriet the more attractive and impressive a figure she appeared to be and I wanted to write an account of her life in case it was of interest to people outside my own family. She was, of course, 'of her time', but her determination to give the best education she could to 'her girls' and her desire to foster in them a love of learning and a commitment to humane values strikes me as being still of great relevance in the world of today.

Among those who have helped me to write this paper I should like to thank in particular: Elaine Charwat at the Linnean Society, Anne Budworth of the Kidderminster High School Old Girls' Association, Jennifer Lees at Wolverhampton Girls' School, Lucy Tranah at the Cambridge Assessment Group Archives, Jean Hasson and her colleagues at Aston University, Katie Bennett at the University of Birmingham, Kathryn Adamson at the Royal Academy of Music, Erin Buchanan and Lynne Neilson at Durban Girls' College, Madeleen Welman and her colleagues at Herschel Girls School, and Penny Harrison, Susan Carnochon, Heather Johnson and several members of the St Mary's Hall Association who shared their memories of Harriet with me and helped in many other ways.

The paper is much longer than I had expected largely because I have received so much information about Harriet and I have quoted extensively from her letters so that she can 'speak for herself'. I have included a Contents page to assist those who only wish to look at a particular period of her life.

This paper should be regarded as a first draft as it may well contain errors and omissions. I would welcome any comments and corrections from anyone who has additional information or can correct errors of fact or judgment. Please send them to me at d.skidmore007@btinternet.com

¹ The city's name is sometimes spelt as one word and sometimes two. I have used the Cape Town form except when quoting directly from sources which use the Capetown form.

CONTENTS

	Page
Chronology	4
The Early Years	5 - 9
Wolverhampton	9 - 12
Durban	12 - 27
Cape Town	27 - 32
Brighton	32 - 41
Return to South Africa	42 - 51
The Final Years	52 - 53
Annex 1: Miss Willis	54 - 57
Annex 2: Margaret Howard and her Family	58 - 59

A Note on the Author

David Skidmore was born in Surrey 1943. He was educated in Yorkshire and obtained a BA from the University of Nottingham and an MA from the University of Pennsylvania. He also studied at the London School of Economics before becoming a Lecturer in Politics at the University of York in 1971. In 1985 he was appointed Social Responsibility Advisor for the Anglican Diocese of St Albans. From 1989 to 2003 he was General Secretary of the Church of England's Board for Social Responsibility. He was appointed OBE on his retirement in 2003 since when he has continued to live in St Albans and has developed his interest in family history and grandchildren.

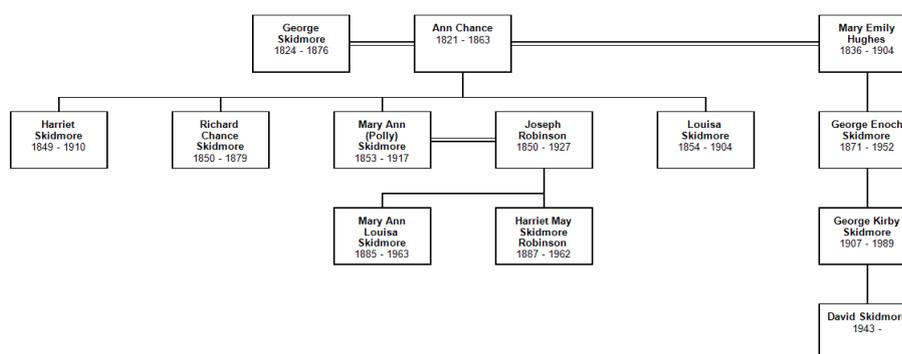
CHRONOLOGY

- 1887 Born 20 May in Amblecote, Staffordshire
Baptised 23 June at St Mark's Parish Church, Stambermill,
Worcestershire
- 1898 - 1909 Pupil at Kidderminster High School for Girls
- 1909 - 1910 Student at Municipal Technical School, Birmingham
- 1910 - 1913 Student at Birmingham University, graduated with B.A.
- 1913 - 1914 Secondary Teacher's Diploma, Birmingham
- 1914 –1918 Taught at the Central Secondary School for Girls, Hull
- 1915 Elected Fellow of the Linnean Society, London
- 1919 - 1924 Taught at Wolverhampton Girls' High School
- 1924 - 1932 Headmistress, Durban Ladies' College (later named Durban Girls'
College)
- 1933 –1944 Headmistress, Herschel Girls' School, Cape Town
- c 1945 Taught at St James' School, West Malvern
- 1946 – 1950 Headmistress, St Mary's Hall, Brighton
- 1951 – 1958 Lived in Pietermaritzburg, Natal. Occasionally served as relieving
Headmistress or taught Biology and Botany in various schools
- c 1959 Returned to UK and lived with her sister in Bewdley, Worcestershire
- 1962 14 April, died aged 74, in hospital in Kidderminster
17 April, buried in All Saints, Wribbenhall near Bewdley

The Early Years

Harriet Robinson was born in Staffordshire at Amblecote Bank near Stourbridge on 20 May 1887. Her father, Joseph Robinson (1851-1927) was an Inland Revenue Officer who had married Mary Ann Skidmore (who was known as Polly) on 16 September 1884.² Three years before, at the time of the 1881 Census, Polly and her sister Louisa Skidmore (1854-1904) were running the Pear Tree pub in Amblecote.³ Harriet was baptised in St Mark's Parish Church, Stambermill, on 23 June 1887 at the same time as her sister who had been born in 1885 and was named, presumably after her mother and her aunt, Mary Ann Louisa Robinson.

Chart 1: The Skidmore and Robinson Families



The family perhaps remained close as the 1891 Census shows Louisa as Head of the Household working as a Licensed Victualler in Amblecote Bank with Joseph, still an Inland Revenue Officer, enumerated as a Lodger, together with Mary Ann and their two daughters. There is reason to think that the Robinsons prospered⁴ – the 1901 Census shows that Joseph was now a Supervisor of Inland Revenue and the family was living on Bewdley Road, Kidderminster; the girls were 15 and 13, so presumably still at school, and Polly's sister Louisa, now 45, was living with the family. The family must have moved after this as Louisa was living with the Robinsons at The Lea, Bewdley Hill, when she died of pneumonia on 12 July 1904. By the time of the 1911 Census the family was living in Birmingham, at 407, Hagley Road, Edgbaston; Joseph was still described as a Supervisor of Customs & Excise and Harriet was described as a Student.⁵ We know that she was a pupil at Kidderminster High School for Girls

2 Polly's father, George Skidmore (1824-1876) was my great grandfather so I am Harriet's first cousin once removed. It is quite likely that Harriet was named after her Aunt Harriet Skidmore (1849-1910) who became an artist – Christopher Wood refers to six of her works in his *Dictionary of Victorian Painters* including 'Local Deposits', 'Traces of Decay' and 'A Sketch at Alnmouth'. Her work sometimes appears at auction and sells for modest prices; in 1997 Christies sold 'Holbrook Hall from the Garden' for £92 – it had been exhibited at the Old Dudley Gallery in London in 1879 – and in 2009 Bonhams sold for £720 a portrait in pastel inscribed on the back 'Copied by Harriet Skidmore July 1881', the original being by George Romney. The best source of information on the Skidmore family is Linda Moffatt cf. skidmorefamilyhistory.webplus.net

3 The pub had been run by George's father in law, Dudley Chance (1799-1875). On his death George's son, Richard Chance Skidmore (1850-1879), took over The Pear Tree; his death at the age of 27 led to his sisters, Polly and Louisa, acquiring the pub.

4 Joseph's father, Zechariah, had been a coal miner who later became a mine agent.

5 The 1911 Census was the first occasion on which the Head of Household, rather than the Enumerator, was required to complete the form; Joseph had written 'Student' as the occupation of both his daughters but then crossed it out on the line referring to Mary Ann. The house was rented from a Mrs Baker who may have been Emmeline Baker the widow of the

and it is likely that she was there from about 1898 to 1909 initially when Miss Catherine Bennett was Headmistress (1868-1903) and then under Miss Constance Jordan (1904-1911). The latter's philosophy can be gleaned from a letter she wrote for the KHS School Magazine just after she left:

*Train yourselves to do your work first. Train yourselves to be punctual, not merely by the clock, but punctual also in carrying out plans. Train yourselves to be absolutely honest. Train yourselves to say a good, round 'No', when you are face to face with wrong-doing.*⁶

Harriet was clearly a conscientious student; in 1905, when she was 18, she sat the Senior Cambridge exams and appears (as the only girl from KHS) in the list headed 'Students under 19 years of age who have satisfied the Examiners'.⁷ In the same year Harriet obtained an Advanced Grade with the Associated Royal Music Colleges Board. She then took the Cambridge Higher Local Examinations and her name appears in the pass list for Group B (Ancient & Modern Languages) in December 1906 and Group R (Religious Knowledge) in June 1907.⁸ This means that Harriet did not gain the full Higher Certificate. Lucy Tranah helpfully explained the regulations governing the Higher Local Examinations at the time:

*The regulations for the Higher Local Examinations in 1906 state that the exam was divided into nine groups – (R) Religious Knowledge, (A) English Language and Literature, (B) Ancient and Modern Languages, (C) Mathematics, (D) Moral Science, (E) Natural Science, (F) Music, (G) Geography, and (H) History.. . . In order to obtain a certificate a student must have passed in arithmetic, and in three of the groups A, B, C, D, E or H, **or** in arithmetic and in two of the groups A, B, C, D, E or H **together with** one of the groups R, F or G. Furthermore in either case one of the groups taken must be B or C. Students were able to spread their exams over two or more years, and the groups could have been taken in any order.*⁹

Harriet left KHS in 1909 and attended the Municipal Technical School – the forerunner of today's Aston University – in Birmingham. The following year she began studying at the University of Birmingham and graduated in 1913 with a B.A., although records held by Aston show that she studied there from 1909 to 1913, doing Botany in the first year and then Maths.¹⁰ Harriet remained at the

distinguished Birmingham surgeon (and uncle of Archbishop Benson), Alfred Baker (1815-93). Emmeline lived less than a mile away.

6 See 'Memories of a School' edited by Margaret Phelan and Beryl Bedford and scanned by Rosemary Gibbs available on the KHS Old Girls website. This history also notes that Miss Jordan 'was set the difficult task of welding into one a Pupil Teachers' Centre from the School of Science and the existing High School'. The 1911 Census enumerates Miss Constance Ellen Jordan, aged 47, living at the School with two Assistant Mistresses, Miss Coombs and Miss Warner, and three servants.

7 This and the information which follows about Cambridge examinations is reproduced by kind permission of the Cambridge Assessment Group Archives.

8 After the First World War the government introduced national examinations and the Cambridge Senior became the School Certificate. From 1869 Higher Local Examinations were introduced, initially for women who wished to become teachers, but which were also open to men after 1875. Both the Senior and the Higher Local Examinations were 'group' exams which required candidates to achieve passes in certain subjects from specific groups unlike the single-subject exams we have today. I am grateful to Lucy Tranah for this information.

9 e-mail 16 June 2015.

10 e-mail from Jean Hasson, 12 June 2015

University in 1913-1914 when she obtained her Secondary Teacher's Diploma with training at King Edward's High School under Miss Major.¹¹ Around May 1914 Harriet must have applied for her first teaching post at the Central Secondary School for Girls in Hull.¹² She was given a glowing reference by Dr Jesse Bayliss Elliott of the Botanical Department at the University of Birmingham:

I have known Miss H M Robinson for four years and as a student in this department I thought very highly of her abilities.

She did excellent work in Botany and showed an interest in this subject especially the field work, far beyond the average student.

She has a good presence, a pleasing manner, is very conscientious and hard-working, and is likely to be successful in any work she undertakes.

I am pleased to recommend her as very suitable for a teaching post and feel she will be especially valuable as a teacher of Nature Study.

Dr Bayliss Elliott's confidence in Harriet was well-founded. Within a year of starting her teaching career as a Botanist Harriet became a Fellow of the Linnean Society – the Minutes from 1915 show that the process had three stages: she was proposed on May 6, elected on June 17, and admitted on December 16.¹³ Her address is given as Rodenhurst, Bewdley (where her parents still lived) and her main interest, unsurprisingly, is given as Botany. What is remarkable, apart from her relative youth (she was 28 at the time) was that she was recommended for election by such distinguished existing Fellows as H.Wager, G.S.West and B.D.Jackson. We know quite a lot about them:

Harold William Taylor Wager FRS (1862-1929) was President of the British Mycological Society in 1910 and 1919 – an indication of his interests may be glimpsed from the title of his Presidential Address published in the *Transactions of the British Mycological Society* in 1920: 'The significance of sex and nuclear fusion in the fungi'. He lectured in Botany at the Yorkshire College of Science and then at Victoria University (both of which later formed part of the University of Leeds) and then he became a Schools Inspector – the 1901 Census shows

11 Edith Helen Major (1867-1951) read for a History Tripos at Girton and had a distinguished teaching career – Assistant Mistress Blackheath High School, Head Mistress of Putney High School for Girls, King Edward VI School for Girls, Birmingham, then Mistress of Girton (a surprise appointment in some eyes as she had been a school teacher rather than an academic lecturer). She was President of the Headmistresses' Association from 1919-21. Her obituarist wrote that she was 'Wise, gay, courageous, (and)... was the best of company at all times. She had the rare gift of being always witty and never unkind'. cf. Brendan Walsh (ed), *Knowing Their Place: The Intellectual Life of Women in the 19th Century*, Dublin, 2013.

12 The Central Secondary School opened at the beginning of the twentieth century as a mixed school and pupil and teacher centre. It became a girls' school in 1907 with Miss G H Rowland as Head Mistress. In 1911 there were 480 girls. In 1914 a new building in Cottingham Road was completed but, because of the War, was not occupied until 1920, when the school became Newland High School. (Information from *British History Online* - originally the Victoria County History of Yorkshire). It is now the Newland School for Girls.

13 'The Linnean Society of London is the world's oldest active biological society. Founded in 1788, the Society takes its name from the Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) whose botanical, zoological and library collections have been in its keeping since 1829'. (Description from the Society's website). I am grateful to Elaine Charwat for additional information about Harriet.

him living in Stroud, Gloucestershire, employed as an 'Inspector of Education, Secondary Branch'. It is possible – but I have no evidence for this – that he had spotted Harriet's talent when she was still at school. Harold's own career showed the effects of education on social mobility in this period – the Marriage Register in Ilkley Parish Church shows that on 7 August 1894 Harold, a gardener's son, married Winifred Miall, the daughter of a Professor of Biology at the Yorkshire College.

George Stephen West (1876–1919), Harriet's second supporter, would certainly have known her work as an undergraduate. He was a prominent British botanist specialising in freshwater algae.¹⁴ In 1906 he became a Lecturer in Botany at the University of Birmingham and was later appointed the Mason Professor of Botany. The publisher's blurb for the first volume of his book *Algae* (still available on Amazon) tells us:

*This volume was first published in 1916 as the first of the Cambridge Botanical Handbooks series and provides a description of both marine and freshwater algae in the Myxophyceae, Peridinieae, Bacillarieae and Chlorophyceae classes. West describes the habitat, biological conditions, distribution, internal and external structures and life history of these algae in great detail, with a bibliography concluding each chapter. The book provided the first detailed description of the Myxophyceae (or blue-green) class of algae, and provides an insight into knowledge and classification of algae at the time of publication. A second volume containing a full taxonomic account of freshwater algae was planned, but not published owing to the author's death in 1919.*¹⁵

Dr Benjamin Daydon Jackson (1846-1927), Harriet's third supporter, became a Fellow of the Linnean Society at the age of 22 and served as its Secretary from 1880-1902 when he became its General Secretary. His obituary in *The Times* of October 15 summarised the scale of his achievement:

A man of great erudition and industry, he had few equals in his knowledge of botanical literature. Indeed, it was the possession of these qualities which marked him out as the best possible person to undertake the execution of the "Index Kewensis," which will always be a monument of his painstaking industry. He was engaged for nearly 14 years on the preparation of this great work, which is indispensable to systematic botanists all over the world. The idea of the index originated with Darwin, as Sir Joseph Hooker relates in the preface to the first volume, published in 1893 at the Clarendon Press:— "Shortly before his death [writes Sir Joseph] Mr. Darwin informed me of his intention to devote a considerable sum in aid or furtherance of some work of utility to biological science; and to provide for its completion should this not be accomplished during his lifetime. He further informed me that the difficulties he had experienced in accurately designating the many plants which he had studied, and ascertaining their native countries, had suggested to him the compilation of an index to the names and authorities of all known flowering plants and their countries, as a work of supreme importance to students of systematic and

¹⁴ An article in *The Botanical Gazette*, March 1909, refers to Professor West as 'the well-known phycologist'.

¹⁵ West died at the early age of 43. His obituary in the *Journal of Botany* vol 57 (1919) mentions two of his postgraduate students, Dr Muriel Bristol and Dr Nellie Carter, 'whose respective researches have thrown much light on the algae of the soil and in the forms of chloroplasts of Desmids'. It seems possible that Botany was a field in which able women of the time could excel.

geographical botany, and to horticulturists, and as a fitting object of the fulfilment of his intention. I have only to add that at his request I undertook to direct and supervise such a work; and that it is being carried out at the herbarium of the Royal Gardens, Kew, with the aid of the staff of that establishment."

The magnitude of the undertaking may be estimated from some particulars given by Dr. Jackson himself in the Journal of Botany in 1887, when the work had been five years in progress. He states that 30,000 covers were required for genera. These were stored in 178 boxes, the whole manuscript weighing more than a ton.¹⁶

For Harriet to have received the support of three such eminent scientists suggests that she was seen as a Botanist of some considerable potential. But at this stage she was still in Hull in her first job as a teacher. Her mother, Mary Ann, died in 1917.

When Harriet came to leave Hull Miss Rowland wrote a very positive reference in November 1918:

Miss H Robinson, B.A., has been a member of this staff for over four years.

She has been responsible for the Senior Botany of the School and has prepared pupils for the Senior Oxford and London Matriculation Examinations. At the present time she has a small advanced class working for University Scholarships.

She has thrown herself most whole heartedly into the work and her enthusiasm for the subject has been communicated to her students. Her interest has not been confined to the lessons in the laboratory, but she has arranged many field excursions, being herself a keen field botanist.

She is an excellent draughtswoman and most orderly and methodical in her management of a laboratory.¹⁷

She has proved herself a very pleasant colleague and I most deeply regret that we have been unable to retain her services here.

Wolverhampton

So in 1919 Harriet started work at Wolverhampton Girls' High School. She was appointed on probation on 30 April 1919 and the appointment was confirmed in January 1920. Her special subject was Botany and she was probably also Form Mistress for the Upper V2. Her starting salary was £200 with a £30 increment

¹⁶ The obituarist felt that Sir Joseph Hooker had failed to make clear that the Kew Index was largely the work of Dr Jackson. This provoked a Letter to the Editor from Leonard Huxley (the son of 'Darwin's Bulldog' T H Huxley) written on the same day which argued that both Sir Joseph Hooker and Sir Francis Darwin (Charles's son) had a high appreciation of 'Dr Jackson's immense work in the "elaboration in detail" of the scheme already considered, and his unsparing devotion to his task, already so "colossal", within five years of Darwin's death'.

¹⁷ Miss Rowland had a Science degree herself so presumably knew the importance of these qualities.

being paid 'for additional course work' and in the Spring of 1921 she was receiving £335.¹⁸

Harriet's first Head Mistress at Wolverhampton was Miss H.D.Heatley. Helen Donaldson Heatley had a London degree and had taught for six years at the Sheffield High School for Girls as Senior Classical Mistress. She was then appointed the first Head Mistress of Pate's Girls' Grammar School in Cheltenham when it opened in 1905 and remained until 1911 when she moved to Wolverhampton. Miss Mildred Couldrey, a colleague from Cheltenham, recalled that at the first Speech Day Miss Heatley had explained the motto she had chosen for the school and 'said that it embodied the spirit of work for its own sake, and of doing a thing because it was right to do it rather than for reward. That, she said, was why she had chosen the motto *Honour before honours*. She did not want them to be learned blue-stockings so much as self-disciplined gentle-women'.¹⁹

I think it is likely that Harriet expected high standards of her pupils. The School archive includes an exercise book from 1919 on which is written 'Nellie Bethune. Upper V2, Botany Drawing Book'. One of the pages inside is headed 'Leaves' and Nellie has drawn an Oak Leaf, a Lime Leaf, and a Poplar Leaf. Red ticks appear next to the Lime and Poplar but the Oak receives a 'Not Good'. She earns 3 out of 5 marks. We cannot be certain that the red ink was Harriet's but it seems very probable and the handwriting is certainly similar to that of a letter written by Harriet in 1951. Another page is headed 'Fleshy Fruits' and sub-headed 'Pomes.'²⁰ Nellie has drawn a 'Median Longitudinal Section of Pear and a Transverse Section through Pear'. There are several corrections in red ink with the comment 'Rather indistinct toward the centre.' A mark of 2 out of 5 is given. By today's standards I think Nellie's work appears to be neat and careful. If Nellie Bethune is the Helen Bethune who appears in the 1911 Census (born in 1904 which feels about right for a Vth Former in 1919) she came from quite a humble background – a fact which is of some interest in terms of more recent debates about education and social mobility.²¹

Some four years later Harriet received another glowing reference from a Head Mistress. Miss D E de Zouche wrote on December 23, 1923:²²

18 I am grateful to Jenny Lees of WGHS for these details and much additional information.

19 *Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucestershire Graphic*, September 29, 1928, p.6. Miss Heatley also earns a mention in the useful study by Khim Harris, *Evangelicals and Education: Evangelical Anglicans and Middle-Class Education in Nineteenth-Century England*, 2007.

20 Unlike Nellie I have access to Wikipedia so could pretend that I knew that a pome 'is a type of fruit produced by flowering plants in the subtribe Malinae of the family Rosaceae. It is an accessory fruit composed of one or more carpels surrounded by accessory tissue'.

21 Her father James worked as a General Labourer in the Railway Axle Box Works in the town. He was born in Edinburgh, as were Helen and her two older siblings, while her mother Eliza and Helen's two younger siblings were born in the Heath Town area of Wolverhampton where the family was still living in 1911.

22 Dorothy Eva de Zouche is a good example of the calibre of some of the Head Mistresses of her day. She had been born in New Zealand in 1886 and went to school there before reading Greats at Somerville College, Oxford. She was Senior Assistant Classics Mistress at Roedean (1909-17) and then taught at the King Edward VI High School for Girls, Birmingham (1918-21) before moving to Wolverhampton as Head Mistress (1921-1948) in succession to Miss Heatley. She had obtained her registration with the Teacher's Registration Council on 1 August 1920. She served as President of the Headmistresses' Association (1939-42) and in 1955 published the school memoir *Roedean School, 1885-1955*. She died in Wolverhampton in 1969. (Information from 'Women of History' accessed via www.abitofhistory.net)

I have known Miss H.M.S.Robinson as one of the staff of this school since September 1921, and I have pleasure in stating that her work has appeared to me to be very good indeed.²³

This is a school of 400-500 girls. Miss Robinson has had charge of all the Botany teaching, including the examination work for School and Higher School certificates (of the level of Matriculation and Intermediate examinations respectively) in which her pupils have been notably successful. Their work in the recognised Advanced Course in Science and Mathematics reflects her wide and scholarly knowledge of her subject, on which H.M. Inspectors recently made favourable comment. She shares the teaching of the middle school General Science, and has given an excellent course in Biology to the class of Student-teachers who attend part-time after completing their regular school course. She has also taken occasional lessons in arithmetic and mathematics at different stages.

Miss Robinson is thus familiar with the work and capabilities of girls of all ages. Her own teaching is clear and effective, and her class management excellent; and both as form-mistress and as teacher she has shown that she appreciates the individual powers and requirements of her pupils.

Miss Robinson has recently had entire charge of the arrangements made for the medical inspection of the girls and the keeping of their physical records, an important piece of the administrative side of school organisation which has also given her numerous opportunities of contact with parents. She has been responsible, with equal success, for the conduct of the School Certificate examinations (which called for considerable organisation, since the school was the centre for over 70 candidates.)

Miss Robinson takes her full share in the school's social activities also. She has always shown herself readily adaptable to emergencies and is both broad-minded and independent in judgment; possessing also a sense of humour which will find an easy solution for many problems. I think that she is admirably qualified for the Headship for which she is making application.

*D.E. DE ZOUCHE, M.A., Oxon.,
Headmistress
Wolverhampton High School for Girls.*

The reference to Harriet's sense of humour in the last paragraph is one of a number that I have found (another we will find, much later, in Miss Ghey's comments after Harriet had announced that she was leaving St Mary's Hall). In the nature of the case it is a difficult quality to establish posthumously. However I am struck by the fact that some of the photographs which I have been shown of Harriet when she was at Wolverhampton show someone who did not always take life too seriously.²⁴ Joyce Wrinch-Schultz tells us of an incident when the family of

23 This is the first occasion on which I have found Harriet's initials being given as H.M.S. rather than just H.M.

24 Jenny Lees sent me some photographs from albums in the school archives. Some show Harriet in serious, almost contemplative, mood (in one of which she is sitting alone on a low wall), another shows her sitting on a step with five colleagues with a slight smile and holding some cut lupins, and others, taken on Sports Day in 1921, show her entering into the spirit of things (see overleaf). Miss Bailey, who may well have been in charge on the day, was Frances Wallis Bailey (1892-1981) who trained at the Oesterberg Physical

George Rutherford, one of the Founders of Durban Girls' College, discovered that when Harriet had introduced the new names for the Houses the name of Rutherford had been omitted. Two Great-Aunts, Annie and Emily (sisters of the great man) were persuaded to part with a large photograph of him and this was presented to Miss Robinson. 'Aunt Emily was a very forthright old lady and her tales of the early days in Durban reduced Miss Robinson to school-girl giggles'.²⁵



Miss Robinson (centre left) and Miss Bailey (centre right) WGHS Sports Day 1920

There is also a letter written on December 12, 1951, in which she thanks one of her successors at Durban for a wonderful visit. 'What fun it all was too, even poor old Mr Glover seemed to cheer up!'. I have no knowledge of Mr Glover but it is hard to imagine the line being written by someone lacking a sense of humour.²⁶ But we must return now to the beginning of Harriet's time in Durban.

Durban

On 20 June 1924 Harriet sailed from Southampton to Natal on the *SS Edinburgh Castle*. South Africa was still a relatively new country; after the Second Anglo-Boer War ended in 1902 the British Government worked to unite its colonies of the Cape and Natal with the Afrikaner republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free

Training College. (In 1881 Martina Bergman-Österberg, a Swedish feminist, had been appointed, by the London School Board, Lady Superintendent of Physical Exercises in Girls' and Infants' Schools. She appears to have been a Social Darwinist and is quoted as saying 'I try to train my girls to help raise their own sex, and so to accelerate the progress of the race; for unless the women are strong, healthy, pure and true, how can the race progress?'. One of her students, Mary Tait, is credited with the introduction of the gymslip). Later photographs, including the one which hangs in a corridor at Herschel School (see p. 32), are formal portraits which rightly show a very serious and almost severe Head Mistress.

²⁵ *The Happy Ship*, p. 172. (Details of the book follow in the next section).

²⁶ I am grateful to Erin Buchanan for showing me the letter and other material from the Archives of the Durban Girls' School.

State in a self-governing Dominion. The Union of South Africa came into being in 1910. Harriet had been offered the post of Head Mistress, Ladies' College, Durban. It seems likely that Lilian Willis,²⁷ who had taught at the school before joining the staff at Wolverhampton Girls' High School, had told Harriet about the school.

Joyce Wrinch-Schulz's *The Happy Ship: A History of Durban Girls' College 1877-1977* provides a great deal of valuable information about this stage of Harriet's career.²⁸ In 1875 a group of Durban businessmen and Protestant clergy resolved to found the Durban Young Ladies' Collegiate Evangelical Institution. They were influenced, perhaps, by changing views in Britain – Queen's College in London²⁹ had begun training women teachers in 1848, the North London Collegiate School (the first high school for girls) opened in 1850, followed, in 1853, by the Cheltenham College for the education of young ladies – and the fact that in 1869 American missionaries had established the Inlanda Seminary for Zulu girls north of Durban, and in 1875 the Roman Catholic Sisters of the Holy Family came from Bordeaux in response to Bishop Jolivet's request that they establish a 'school for young ladies'. As hard-headed businessmen they raised the capital required to buy land and build the school (estimated at £3000) by issuing debenture bonds, as had been done at Cheltenham, valued at £10 each, carrying an interest of 6 per cent a year and redeemable over a period of 25 years.

Wrinch-Schulz says that Harriet was the first woman since Miss Cheetham, 47 years before, 'who had come from England to South Africa especially to take up the position of Lady Principal of the College'.³⁰ She continues:

Her arrival marked a change in the school. Its period of infancy and childhood was over. With her vigorous and decisive handling, it settled down to a useful maturity. In eight short years she was to make an indelible impression on the character of the school and steer it into the full stream of the modern world.

She was an intellectual and a distinguished botanist, who set for the school a goal of scholarly excellence based on a strenuous discipline of mind, body and spirit. In appearance, Harriet Robinson was tall, slim and athletically built. Her hair was thick, wavy and corn in colour and she drew it back severely from a centre parting to a bun in the nape of her neck. Her face, with its grey-green eyes, long prominent nose and wide mouth, reflected her forceful character.

Twelve teachers had applied for the post which had been widely advertised in the South African Press. An approach had also been made to the Society for the

27 For more details of Miss Willis see Annex 1.

28 I am indebted to Lynne Neilson, Director of Marketing at the school (and an Old Girl of the College) for giving me a copy of the book. I have paraphrased and quoted extensively from the book throughout my treatment of the Durban years. The title comes from Dr Edington, the College Medical Officer who used to say after his rounds 'It's a happy ship!'

29 Among Queen's founders was the Christian Socialist theologian F D Maurice. Initially all the tutors were men so the students were chaperoned by aristocratic ladies. See the entry in historyofwomen.org

30 *op.cit.* p. 95. This and subsequent quotations come from Chapter XIX of *The Happy Ship*.

Oversea Settlement of British Women which recommended Harriet.³¹ She was the unanimous choice of Miss Moore Smith (Headmistress from 1896 to 1924) and the Committee. 'A cable was despatched to her without delay asking her to leave as soon as she could for Natal. She would be paid £60 travel allowance from England'.

Harriet arrived in Durban on Saturday, July 12, 1924. Long afterwards she recalled her first sight of the town:

I remember so well the College being pointed out to me after we had rounded the Bluff in the very early morning. A rather dismal building, isn't it, with its grey roof when seen from the sea? Miss Willis was first on board to greet me.....That same morning I paid my first visit to the school and I was impressed – as I still am every time I enter it – with the excellence of the building. I was thrilled, too, when I saw the beautiful tree in the quadrangle – just like the one in my home garden in Worcestershire, the tulip tree, which I was amused to know had been called a plane!

Harriet's starting salary was £400 a year with annual increments of £20. She also had, we are told, 'a free house, free servants and a White housekeeper'. Her stipulated responsibilities under the Committee were for the entire management and supervision of the day school, which now had 250 pupils, the kindergarten of about 30 children and the boarding establishment of between thirty and forty girls. She was also expected to undertake some of the class teaching and give Scripture lessons. With her arrival, 'ladies' became 'girls' and a uniform dress was introduced at the school. The latter had been recommended by Harriet in a letter to all parents suggesting a school dress 'in line with all the best English public schools'. A majority of parents favoured the change and a further letter explained the rationale and the specifics of the new regime:

We feel that a uniform dress will improve the tone and appearance of the school, that it will prevent the tendency which is often present among schoolgirls to attach too much importance to dress and that it will be altogether beneficial to their education.

The dress decided on is as follows: for drill – the plain green gymnasium tunic with green braid girdle and white shirt blouse with College tie. This costume may be worn always. The knickers worn with the tunic should be of the same colour. If preferred on the days when there is no drill, a plain green skirt with a white shirt, jumper and college tie may be worn.

The green tunic and skirt must be of the regulation cotton or serge material. No other coat may be worn in school except the College blazer (plain green with the College badge on the pocket).

31 SOSBW (1919-1962) was established as a response to the economic and social position of women after 'the men returned' from the War in 1919. Emigration to parts of the Empire was regarded as a solution. The Society brought together the Colonial Intelligence League, the British Women's Emigration Association, and the South African Colonisation Society. (Information from archiveshub.ac.uk which incorrectly uses 'Overseas' rather than 'Oversea' in the Committee's title but usefully indicates that the papers are held at London Metropolitan University: TUC Library Collection). See too footnote 114 below. When I worked for the Church of England my Board still had responsibility for the successor body to the Church of England Council of Empire Settlement which had been established in 1925 with comparable objectives.

Further evidence of Harriet's interest in detail comes when she thanks parents for their co-operation in the matter of the girls' indoor shoes. If girls could not wear shoes without heels, then shoes with crêpe soles or low-heeled slippers with rubber heels could be used.

Harriet's greatest interest, obviously, was in botany. 'But she showed equal concern at College with science, literature and the arts and she introduced the first school debating society, of which she was president'. Her enthusiasm for music and dramatic art was immediately reflected in a series of entertainments and concerts which benefited not only school funds, but outside charities as well. For example, £30 was raised for the general school library from the Fifth Form's *Richard III*:

Her idea of a library was that it was a place to attract children. She felt that it should not merely contain 'ponderous reference books and classical tomes' but fiction too. In fact, she said of the reference library: 'Of course there are some people who do not like the idea of schoolgirls reading anything but classical books during term time. Happily, our school does not side with them and on every Tuesday and Friday morning at recreation, the fiction library is open'.

In March 1926 Miss Robinson decided that the Sixth Form should be divided into two sections: matriculation and (for less academically-minded girls) domestic science. The latter was to include needlework, cookery, housewifery and laundry work as well as lessons throughout the year on physiology, hygiene, civics, chemistry and English. In the third year there would be instruction in child care. According to a report in *The Natal Mercury* 'Throughout the school, particular stress is laid on the formation of character by moral and religious training and on fitting girls for the practical business and duties of life'.

Although Harriet was clearly very academic herself, there is no doubt that she attached importance to both sections. She felt that only those girls who were likely to succeed in the matriculation examinations should be promoted to the Sixth Form but she also insisted that the Committee address the problem of under-resourcing in the domestic science section. The class 'was far too cramped and was having to spill out into the corridor and into her own kitchen'.

Harriet must sometimes have returned to England – presumably to visit her family – and her name can be found on the Passenger List of the Union Castle Line's *Carnarvon Castle* when it sailed in 1926 from Cape Town to Southampton, arriving on September 6. Her address in the UK is given as Rosenhurst, Bewdley, Worcestershire which, as we have seen, was the house her parents lived in and where her sister continued to live after their deaths.³² Sometime after July 1926 'Miss Robinson received news that her father was critically ill and she applied to the Committee for compassionate leave as she said he was "likely to linger for three months"'. She wanted to leave Durban on August 4 and she suggested that Miss Eastwood act as Headmistress and Miss Duffield take over her science

32 Charles Purcell of the Bewdley Historical Research Group sent me his interesting account of Rosenhurst. It was a substantial property (the 1911 Census shows it had nine major rooms) but was demolished, after the Robinson sisters had sold it, following a landslip which caused serious damage.

teaching'.³³ Harriet returned to South Africa (leaving Southampton on the SS *Windsor Castle*) on 1 October 1926. Joseph died on 21 January 1927.

When Harriet returned to Durban she decided that now was the time to take a good look at the staff, to examine their terms of service, their attitudes and methods of work. Four members of staff were replaced (though one of these was leaving to get married). The College historian provides some tantalising detail: 'Miss Bruce (French) replaced Miss Poland, who, the girls said, used to wear the same dress to classes throughout the term'.

Harriet felt that the staff salary system should be placed on a more business-like basis and she drew up six staff rules:

1. Annual increments are subject to a satisfactory report on the conduct and work of the teacher concerned and can in no case be claimed as a matter of right.
2. Promotions to a higher grade are contingent on the possession of the necessary certificates and governed by professional ability as well as length of service.
3. No assistant can be promoted to a higher grade without a special report from the Headmistress.
4. In case of doubt regarding qualifications held, the decision of the Headmistress and Committee shall be final.
5. In case of inexperienced teachers, no increments may be claimed until the end of two years' continuous service from the date of the first appointment.
6. The decision of the Committee in regard to the interpretation of the above shall be final.

Harriet also graded the staff from A to F, with those in the F category receiving the highest salaries of between £260 and £300 a year. They also had to possess an honours or second degree as well as a certificate of training from a recognised institution - matriculation and five years. Teachers in the A category were professional unqualified assistants and received between £150 and £220 a year.

Evidence of the need for flexibility – as well as the challenges Harriet would not have encountered in England – came around this time when an epidemic of dengue fever hit the school.³⁴ At one point fourteen women were down with it at the same time. But Harriet's energy was not diminished as she soon turned her attention to streamlining the school house system – 'to make it more effective and efficient'.

After serving for three years Harriet's own salary was reviewed. Her contract was renewed for a further three years and she was to receive annual increments of £20 until her salary reached £500. And now, at last, comments the school historian, the school finances were in a healthy state. The Committee's annual meeting on July 27, 1929 heard that a profit of nearly £1000 had been made in the tuition and boarding departments and, against this, £435.4s.7d had been spent during the year. All the expenditure seems to have been justified: the outside of the buildings

³³ *The Happy Ship*, p. 100.

³⁴ Dengue (sometimes known as breakbone fever) is a debilitating viral disease of the tropics, transmitted by mosquitoes, and causing sudden fever and acute pains in the joints.

had been repainted, a casement and two windows added, the tennis courts and pianos repaired and a brick wall built. Electric lighting was installed in the ground floor rooms as well as in the cloakrooms and upstairs corridor at a cost of £55. (The upstairs classrooms had to wait about half a century for electricity).

On 4 November 1927 a Dinner was held at the Country Club as part of the school's Golden Jubilee celebrations. 'Miss Robinson wore a graceful black marquisette dress deeply fringed and trimmed with jet'. The following morning a service of thanksgiving was held and among the speakers was Miss Robinson who said that the school had changed greatly during the past fifty years and the celebration marked the close of an epoch in its history. The school historian reports her remarks at some length:

Great though the changes in its outward form had been, Miss Robinson believed that the spirit had been the same all through. It was this spirit, this indefinable something, which today was binding the generations together – the members of fifty years ago with the present – in a common bond of fellowship. It was this spirit which had brought them all together that day with feelings of loyalty and devotion to the place to which they owed so much.

It was a great thing in this comparatively new land to have traditions, to have schools like College, which had within their walls mothers and daughters receiving the special impress of the school's individuality and ready, because of the love they bore her, to uphold the traditions during school life and afterwards.

She was sure that it was thrilling for a child, when she came into the buildings to know that her mother had been there before her.

After some further remarks in a similar vein Miss Robinson said that the school was proud of its Old Girls and hoped they would remain faithful to it and think of it with affection. She then touched on the question of what alumnae had done after school:

Girls had gone from College to universities or to other places of higher instruction and had taken degrees in art or science. Some of them were now doing useful work in the teaching profession. Some were doing secretarial or office work. Others were nurses. One was a landscape gardener.

However:

Last but not least, there were those whose vocation in life was second to none – one for which the very best training was not too good – that of home-making.

Miss Robinson then reflected on the nature of the changes seen in the last half century and its implications, as she saw it, for education. As will be seen in later reflections she strikes the reader as being a thoughtful and interesting teacher who might have struggled in today's world of electronic communication and social media:

Miss Robinson said that during the past fifty years, the increase in population had brought with it a terrible keenness to compete. There had been a great speeding up in the affairs of mankind; life was less simple, less quiet than in 1877. They all

must feel the rush of these racing, over-full days. There seemed too much of everything except peace and simplicity. Life nowadays was full of interest, but very complex. There was too much to do. There was too much to learn. There was too much to interest them so that there was a danger of attempting to do too many things, to be a superficial jack-of-all trades and master of none.

In all that College taught the girls Miss Robinson wished that first and foremost they learn to want to go on learning for themselves afterwards. She wanted the girls to be hungry to know more and eager to do better, so that they could live as fully and usefully as possible, finding happiness in contributing to the good of the community.

Miss Robinson recognised that 'while there was an ever-increasing need for girls to earn their own living, they must not look on education simply as a means to a successful career'. She then quoted Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch:

The man we are proud to send forth from our schools will be remarkable less for something which he can take out of his wallet and exhibit for knowledge, than for being something and that something recognisable for a man of intellectual breeding whose trained judgment we can trust to choose the better and reject the worse.

With these ideals before us we look forward, full of trust into the future and earnestly hope that in the years that lie ahead, 'whatsoever is true, pure, lovely and of good report may here forever flourish and abound'.³⁵

The proceedings concluded with a Latin oration by the senior prefect and the singing of the school song, *Forty Years On*. It is claimed that it was Harrow's song and that Miss Robinson asked for permission to use it as well.³⁶ However once outside the School Hall the guests sat under the trees while the girls served refreshments and the Durban Municipal Orchestra, conducted by Mr Huddle, played relaxing, background music. Meanwhile:

Miss Robinson moved from table to table to greet parents and friends. She was wearing a figured voile dress hemmed with silver-green taffeta and a large picture hat trimmed with green and gold.

The jubilee celebrations ended with a fancy-dress dance. Among those commended were Joyce Hosking (the most comical), dressed as a cat, and Isabelle Balance (the most original), dressed as a cabbage. Miss Willis, the music mistress, received a special prize for playing the part of a clown. Miss Robinson was given a present to mark the event too – a beautiful Alsatian puppy which, appropriately, was named Jubilee and soon became a favourite in the school.

³⁵ I think the quotation – from the school prayer used in many Anglican schools – forms part of the quotation from Sir Arthur rather than Miss Robinson's remarks. The notion of discrimination as a desirable outcome of education (distinguishing good from bad etc.) is reflected in the Memorial to Quiller-Couch (1863-1944) in Truro Cathedral; it notes that as 'Author, Critic and Anthologist' he 'Kindled in Others a Lively and Discriminating Love of English Literature'.

³⁶ The Harrow Archivist confirmed (e-mail 7 September 2015) that *Forty Years On* is a Harrow song (written by Edward Bowen and composed by John Farmer who were both Masters there) and that over the years various schools had been given permission to use the song. So although there is no documentary proof of the validity of the story it does seem 'entirely likely'.

With the celebrations completed school life returned to normal. The school historian notes the excellent results obtained in swimming and that some of Miss Robinson's students 'believed she made almost a fetish of swimming'.³⁷ But this can hardly have been at the expense of the College's academic performance because:

all the girls entered in the matriculation examinations in 1927 passed, to Miss Robinson's considerable satisfaction. There were now 332 pupils in the school, of whom four were non-paying, two on Government bursaries and two on Committee scholarships. Four girls were doing domestic science. There were also five part-time pupils – four learning only music and one learning only swimming.

The constraints were clear. The school could not expand without more staff and in order to recruit 'the finest possible teachers and to experiment with the very latest teaching methods, it was decided to raise tuition fees again, with secondary girls paying £6 a term from February 1929, and preparatory fees going up from £4 to £5 a term'.

There is evidence to suggest that Miss Robinson's achievements were beginning to be appreciated outside the College. An enthusiastic appreciation came from Dr C T Loram. In a memo headed *Durban Girls' College* and dated August 21st 1928 he writes:

Visited the school for the first time since the present Head Mistress (Miss Robinson) has taken charge.

The atmosphere of the school is delightful. The easy discipline, the cheerfulness of the children and the zeal of the staff are noteworthy.

With increased accommodation, which the school sorely needs, the Girls' College would take its place with the other great girls' school of South Africa.

C.T. Loram
*Acting Superintendent of Education*³⁸

In the same year Miss Robinson told the Committee that she wanted to buy a motor car and asked if a garage could be built for her near the quadrangle. Around this time, too, it seemed that there were problems in the Afrikaans department.

37 The following quotations and information are taken from Chapter XXI of *The Happy Ship*. Among the swimming team's outstanding coaches was Rachel Finlayson, known as Ma Fin, who was South Africa's 1928 Olympic coach. See www.swimhistory.org

38 *The Happy Ship* refers to the memo (p. 109) but gives it a slightly later date (September 13). Charles Templeman Loram (1879-1940) was born in Pietermaritzburg and was educated at the Universities of Cape Town, Cambridge and Yale, and at Teachers' College, Columbia where he obtained his Ph.D. After working as a teacher in Natal, he became Inspector of Schools (1906-17) and Chief Inspector of Native Education (1917-20) of Natal. He was a member of the Native Affairs Commission (1920-29) and Superintendent of Education (1930) in Natal. In 1931 he became Sterling Professor of Education at Yale. (Details from L R Harlam and R W Smock (eds), *The Booker T Washington Papers: 1914-15*, vol 13, 1984, Illinois, p. 136, which includes a letter Loram wrote in 1914 to Booker T Washington requesting an interview. Washington had a remarkable career – born into slavery and then an advisor to Presidents and a guest in the White House. Loram is seen as an educational segregationist and his ideas for the curriculum appropriate for Black Africans may well have been based on Washington's ideas. Loram's papers are deposited in the Sterling Memorial Library at Yale).

Miss Erasmus who had asked for two weeks' leave before Christmas 'had still not returned six months later. Miss Jones stood in for her until June, when it was found necessary to appoint Miss van der Merwe in Miss Erasmus' place at a salary of £220 – non-resident. She was a graduate of the Huguenot University College, at Wellington in the Cape'.³⁹

In discussing events at the end of the year the College historian offers an intriguing portrait of Miss Willis:

Thanks to the high standard of singing achieved at the school through Miss Willis, the College choir was chosen to broadcast carols on Christmas Eve. Her pupils regarded Miss Willis as a highly-strung, hopeless disciplinarian, who, at the slightest pretext would burst into tears and rush to the headmistress for support, but she was nevertheless an outstanding authority on music.

Less importantly, perhaps, the Secretary reported in March 1930 that the ice-chest at college was worn out and the housemistress asked if she could have another – or perhaps even a refrigerator.

Dr Loram inspected the school again in mid-1930. He was again impressed but felt strongly that the school should be enlarged and that the accommodation should be increased to permit this. However:

The organisation of the school was so satisfactory that the Principal was able to devote the major part of each day to classroom teaching. This gave her an opportunity of getting to know the pupils well and was having the happiest results on their progress.

Dr Loram thought the quality of the school staff was above average, but there should be a more comprehensive course in domestic science, the introduction of physical science and greater facilities for art and music. He had one especially strong criticism:

A fault which should be remedied immediately, was the alternation of Afrikaans with French as a modern language. 'It cannot be too strongly impressed upon the people of Natal that every child should learn the second language of the country, so that Afrikaans becomes as constant a study throughout the school as English or arithmetic'.

The school history suggests that everything was going well. In the classroom and on the playing fields – and perhaps particularly in the swimming pool – the girls were receiving an excellent all-round education. All this, the author continues:

Reflected the school Principal's own standards of excellence and her concern with an all-round education. She herself was an enthusiastic and capable all-rounder. She possessed a first class, disciplined mind. She gave her utmost to the school and, in turn, she expected a strenuous response from her pupils.

But this character sketch of Miss Robinson continues with a hint of trouble ahead:

³⁹ The College was associated with the Dutch Reformed Church.

Some people said she was intolerant. Certainly she did not suffer fools gladly.

The trouble erupted over the handling of the case of a girl with a hearing disability. Two years before, the class teacher had reported that the girl's progress was being hindered by her deafness – she was eighteen months older than the class average. Miss Robinson wrote to the girl's mother several times explaining all the difficulties and telephoned the father, who admitted that the child was slightly deaf. Eventually, Miss Robinson said it would be better if the girl was taken out of the school and given private tuition. This infuriated the parents who not only complained to the Committee (the school's governing body) but threatened legal action.

The Committee members felt that they had been placed in an awkward position when a barrister's letter reached them. Mr James felt the parents should have discussed the matter with Miss Robinson, but 'he regarded the Principal's letter to them as being too severe'. Mr Wilfred Payne, the Vice-Chairman, felt that 'more tact and discretion could have been shown. He said the child's dismissal was not in question, but the way in which it had been done'.

The Committee agreed a 'compromise' whereby the girl would be allowed to stay on at the school until the end of the June term. Miss Robinson felt let down and that the Committee was undermining her authority. 'If she could not get their full support then her position as headmistress was untenable. She might as well resign. And she did'.

Her letter of resignation read:

Dear Mr. Greenacre,

For some time past the feeling has been growing on me that I ought to return to England in order to be near my sister. I am beginning to realise too, that after seven years in South Africa, I am getting out of touch with the educational world.

Since it would be necessary for me to find work in England, I think I should return before I am too old to obtain good work there.

I am obliged, therefore, to ask you to accept my resignation and I shall be glad if the College Committee will release me from my position of Headmistress at the end of December this year.

I shall leave the College with many regrets; for although there has been much hard work and many worries, I have had great joy in my work here and I shall be very sad to leave it. I am sure, however, from every point of view, it is the right thing for me to return to England'.

Walter Greenacre, who chaired the Committee of Management, replied to her on 20 July 1931.⁴⁰

40 Walter was the son of Benjamin Wesley Greenacre (one of the Founders who gave the school land in 1904 so it could move to a new site). Walter was also a staunch friend of the College and served as Mayor of Durban 1909-10. (cf. *South African Who's Who* 1912).

It was with very genuine regret that I learnt you had decided to relinquish the post of Head Mistress of the Durban Girls' College.

For seven and a half years you have filled this onerous position with great credit to yourself, and to the entire satisfaction of the Committee of Management.

During your regime the College has maintained and improved its high standard of efficiency, and the many scholastic successes during your period of control are splendid testimony that your methods have been sound and progressive.

The moral and spiritual needs of the scholars have always been your first care. The tone of the College has never stood higher than it does to-day, due largely to your influence and example. Your attainments have been a great source of strength, and your personality has always attracted a most efficient and able staff, who have loyally supported you in all that has been for the benefit of the Institution, which holds so high a position in the esteem of Durban and Natal.

After recording more of Harriet's achievements he concludes:

It is therefore with singular reluctance that the Committee has accepted your resignation, and tenders to you its warm thanks for all you have done for the College.

May I hope that the future holds a great store of happiness for you, and that you will soon succeed in obtaining a post in which your ability and attainments will find ample scope.

Despite having accepted Harriet's resignation a special meeting of the Committee was convened for July 31 and 'it was unanimously decided to do everything possible to persuade Miss Robinson to stay on. Mr Greenacre wrote to her at once'. But Miss Robinson was unwilling to change her mind and her reply seems to me to suggest that there was more to her unhappiness than the disagreement over the handling of the case of the deaf girl:

I appreciate the fact that it is the unanimous wish of the Committee that I should withdraw my resignation. It is evident, however, that there is still a wide divergence of opinion between the Committee and myself as to the right methods of conducting a large modern girls' school and also to the respect and appreciation due to a Headmistress and her staff. It is therefore impossible for me to withdraw my resignation.

Perhaps because Harriet had spoken of returning to England the final paragraph of Mr Greenacre's 1931 letter suggests that when she first decided to leave Durban she did not have a specific job to go to. This is a phenomenon which would be repeated on later occasions. Perhaps she shared Archbishop Cosmo Gordon Lang's view that 'A man' (and presumably, he might have conceded, a woman)

'ought to resign when people ask, "Why does he go?", instead of waiting till they ask, "Why doesn't he go?"⁴¹

The Committee had one final weapon to deploy in the shape of the kindly Archdeacon Heywood Harris who called on Miss Robinson and pleaded with her to stay.⁴² This was followed up by a letter from the Committee 'begging her to reconsider and pointing out that they all shared a common interest and one universal aim and ambition, which was the welfare, prestige and success of the school and they urged that the harmonious relations which had existed between them for so long, be restored'. (Does this suggest, after all, that it was only the case of the deaf girl which had caused the rift?). This appeal was successful and Miss Robinson withdrew her resignation and school life continued into the second half of 1931. Presumably as a condition of her agreeing to stay on she was now employed on terms of six months' notice on either side (instead of a three year contract) and would, from March 1932, receive her £500 annual salary in monthly instalments. She was still doing all the science teaching as well as giving most of the Scripture lessons and she applied for a full-time science mistress to help her.

The school historian tells us that in June 1932 Harriet had completed eight years as Headmistress and, despite her earlier change of heart, she was now determined to leave. She wrote to thank the Committee for the very happy years she had spent at the school and for the help and consideration they had always (sic!) shown her. Although she would have very happy memories of College and of her life in Durban, she asked to be relieved of her post by the end of the year.

But it is clear that many people were sorry to see her leave. The Committee secretary said, 'Personally, I cannot speak too highly of Miss Robinson. Her energy and enthusiasm for the College has reflected on all the mistresses and on the school itself. Her abilities are most marked and the college will feel her loss very much indeed'.

As her last term ended the effects of the global Depression were felt in South Africa as elsewhere. As the school historian notes 'This critical financial period was reflected by the fact that no fewer than 51 girls were withdrawn from the school in that term'. In a further blow, Walter Greenacre who had done so much, with Harriet, to put the College's finances on a sound footing, died suddenly at the age of 65. As a mark of respect it was decided that there should only be a Founder's Day Service without the usual afternoon function and prizegiving.

Harriet had always been interested in the Girl Guide movement⁴³ and in 1931 had founded the first Girls' College Ranger Company. As a final gift to the school she gave a Guide standard. She asked that it be kept in the College Hall to serve as a

41 George Bell wrote this in his Journal (24 July 1941) and added 'The Archbishop spoke to me several times on this strain'. See R.C.D. Jasper, *George Bell: Bishop of Chichester*, 1967, p. 377. When Harriet left St Mary's Hall in 1950 she was reported as saying that she was not worn out, but did not feel she should wait for this to happen.

42 Heywood Harris was born in Liverpool in 1877 and was ordained in 1902; after a curacy in Staffordshire he moved to South Africa in 1906. He served as a Chaplain in the First World War, was awarded an MC and was mentioned in despatches. He was Archdeacon of Durban 1926-1942. He died in Durban in 1956.

43 It is not clear from the school history whether this interest predated her time in South Africa. Many of Baden-Powell's ideas came from his time in South Africa.

perpetual reminder of the loyalty and devotion which 'we all owe to our school, our country and our God'.⁴⁴

Miss Willis – described in *The Happy Ship* as 'Miss Robinson's close friend and colleague' – resigned not long after she did and the Old Girls' Guild gave the two women a farewell reception. Miss Willis was presented with a handbag and Miss Robinson with a copy of Marloth's *Flora of South Africa*. Harriet was deeply touched by so thoughtful a gift and in her letter of thanks she wrote:

*My heart was so full on that Saturday night, November 5, that I failed to express to you what I feel about you all, about the Guild and about those magnificent books you have given me. Your message to me in Kathleen Osborn's beautiful printing inside each book overwhelms me with my own unworthiness each time I see it – yet I love it.*⁴⁵

On that Saturday night after you had all gone, Miss Willis and I carried the books and the bag across to my room and there we sat talking of you all, drinking more tea and looking at the pictures till after 1 a.m. To my great joy I found a plant whose name I had been searching for for years.

Norma Eastwood, who had been Harriet's Secretary ever since her retirement as Second Mistress, says that Harriet gave Marloth's wonderful book back to the College when she left Natal for the last time⁴⁶ and adds that it is 'now, in mint condition, one of the school's most treasured possessions'. If the school has kept her gift it might now be very valuable – a First Edition was recently on sale at £1000. The bookseller's description says 'A very good copy of the monumental botanical survey of South Africa, which is rarely found complete, as here, including plate 59 in volume 4 which is usually missing'.⁴⁷

Another tribute to Harriet said 'She has given us of her best and our greatest recognition will be to maintain the standard she has set: an ideal of fine dignity, wide vision and good scholarship'.⁴⁸

Joyce Wrinch-Schultz says that at the same time Harriet gave the College her family Bible. Apparently it was used in Assemblies up until the 1980s.⁴⁹

44 The history goes on to note that 'Some years later the standard was taken down for safe-keeping and no one knew what became of it'.

45 Kathleen Osborn (later Tod) had been Dux (or top academic student) in 1918.

46 Harriet sailed for England on February 9, 1961.

47 See www.maggs.com - Rudolf Marloth (1855-1931). His famous work 'appeared in six superbly illustrated volumes between 1913 and 1932'. An article in *Veld and Flora* (September 1876) says 'The production of this costly and magnificent work was made possible only by the bountiful generosity of Sir Lionel and Lady Phillips, who together bore the entire cost of printing and publication. After the First World War, the valuable colour plates were sent from Germany to Lionel Phillips' agents in England for safekeeping. By a cruel stroke of fate the warehouse in which they were stored was destroyed by fire in 1926. Copies of volumes I and IV yet to be bound were also destroyed, which resulted in the production of subsequent copies of these volumes without the colour plates'. See 'The Flora of South Africa – Auction #20' at www.antiquarianauctions.com (Accessed 13/6/2015). Miss Eastwood provided much of the information for M.A. Pocock's obituary of Harriet in the *Annals of the Linnean Society*, 1964.

48 Wrinch-Schultz, *op.cit.*, p. 119 quotes this without giving the source. The website of DGC today suggests that Harriet's high standards have continued to inspire staff and students.

49 Information from Erin Buchanan, e-mail 17 August 2015, who told me that Harriet had put an inscription in the Bible.

Harriet concluded her 1932 letter of thanks by turning to a theme which we shall find repeated when she addressed alumnae of later schools too:

You Old Girls are of extreme importance to the school. You are in fact the school. It lives in you. It belongs to you and you in it. Your devoted work for it and your remembrance of it through all the changes and chances⁵⁰ which may lie ahead can help it in ways undreamt of.

In addition to the Guide standard I am aware of two other gifts which Harriet left the College. The first was one of her treasured possessions - a photograph of the Winged Victory of Samothrace which had hung above the House notice board for several years.⁵¹ She explained to the girls the reason for her gift:

My eight and a half years with you have been exceedingly happy ones. Because I have enjoyed working with you all so much I am leaving you this picture. Some day when you go to the Louvre in Paris you will see the original in marble.

I am leaving the photograph of this masterpiece for you hoping that by its strength, its freshness, its vigour and its beauty, it will inspire you to put your best effort into something – into your work and your play. Your school is worthy of the best you can give her.

You will remember, won't you, that I shall always be delighted to have news of you and of the school because I, as you, having once belonged to College, belong to it for all time.

The school historian reproduces a note given to Miss Robinson by one of her smaller girls:

*Dear Miss Robinson,
I am sorry you are going away but I think you will like Ingrand better than Durban and you will be free of mosquitoes from biting you. But when you get to England, Jack Frost will get you.
Love
Joan⁵²*

When Harriet's time in Durban was recalled at her Memorial Service on 11 May 1962, nearly thirty years later, the address was given by Professor Elizabeth Sneddon, who had been Harriet's first Head Girl and Dux in 1925, and was the first pupil of the school to be awarded a professorship.⁵³ She said of her former Head Mistress:

⁵⁰ It is impossible to know whether such echoes of the Prayer Book were conscious or unconscious for an Anglican of Harriet's generation.

⁵¹ After her death a replica of the sculpture replaced the photograph which by the 1960s was badly foxed. The statue was placed in the library, which had been Harriet's drawing room.

⁵² Spelling may not have been Joan Thomas's strong point but remembering the outbreak of dengue fever Harriet might have been pleased to get away from the mosquitoes. However, as we shall see, the return to England was to be postponed.

⁵³ Elizabeth Sneddon (1907-2005) was a playwright and Professor and founding Head of the Department of Speech and Drama in what is now the University of KwaZulu-Natal – the first in Africa. Her influence on generations of students and actors was immense. The report giving news of her death in *IOLNews* 25 November 2005 noted that 'for 20 years Sneddon taught drama over weekends to non-white students who were not accepted at white institutions'.

With her coming, there was an end in the school of debate about what constituted a suitable education for girls as distinct from a suitable education for boys. Harriet Robinson knew education motivated by the pursuit of truth is the only road to human freedom.

Her goal of education was to create citizens who were worthy inheritors of their civilisation, able to conserve what was good in it, perceptive and strong enough to make a contribution to the realisation of its richer and fuller possibilities.

She was extraordinarily well fitted for the task she had undertaken. Greatly endowed physically, mentally and spiritually, she had been equipped by a liberal education to implement her vision of the development of a civilized human being as the true educational goal of this School. Her academic training had given her not only a disciplined, well ordered grasp of Languages and Literature, more especially French and English, but also a sensitive awareness of the significance of the creative arts in the spiritual life of the individual and the community. She had the power to quicken this awareness of the visual arts, especially painting and sculpture, in everyone with whom she came in contact. In addition, we all know that she was herself profoundly musical, and with the aid of her life-long friend, Miss Willis, she made music an integral part of the life of this School. Another aspect of her academic training had been a sound grounding in modern scientific thought. She was already, before she came to us, renowned as a teacher of Botany....Because Harriet Robinson had not only the power to dream and to hope, but imagination, the skill and knowledge of how to implement her great rich vision of life's possibilities, she made of living 'her work of Art' whose influence and inspiration is known and felt not only within the precincts of this school, not only in the lives of those she influenced personally, but in the lives of succeeding generations. She never spared herself in stimulating the good pupil and helping the backward and she served the College with a passionate love and devotion to its best interests.

Norma Eastwood, who called her 'Our much loved Head Mistress', also admired her greatly.⁵⁴ She wrote:

Unfortunately Miss Robinson had little time to indulge in research work; she was a great educationalist and there were many demands on her time. She taught throughout the school but her specialized work in Botany and Zoology was devoted to the Senior pupils, giving up much free time as well for this purpose. Many of her pupils took science degrees at various universities, several achieving considerable distinction in Botany: she was a truly inspired teacher.

The Memorial Service appears to have captured the essence of Harriet's character very well.⁵⁵ The hymns were *He who valiant be*, *Blest are the pure in heart*, and *For all the saints*; the Anthem was Psalm 23, *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*; and the Prayers were led by the Rev. Victor Shaw. (The website of St Martin's Church, Durban, intriguingly tells us 'The Reverend Victor Shaw was our

⁵⁴ After a few months helping the new Headmistress to settle in Miss Eastwood followed Harriet to her next post.

⁵⁵ The Order of Service contains a minor error; it says Miss Robinson 'died at Bewdley, Worcestershire, on 13 April, 1962'. In fact her death is certified as having occurred the following day in Blakebrook Hospital, Kidderminster, although her address was still 42, Stourport Road, Bewdley.

first parish priest and his actress wife, Yvonne, caused quite a stir with her big hats and theatrical entrances!').

Although this is not the place to discuss Harriet's successor it is worth quoting the contrast drawn by the author of *The Happy Ship*: 'She was very different from Miss Robinson. Where Harriet Robinson was tall, slim and athletic with a commanding manner, Miss Calway was short, plump, rounded and indecisive'.

Cape Town

In 1932 Harriet was offered the post of Principal of Herschel Girls' School. She returned to England, presumably for a vacation, before taking up her new job – she and Miss Willis are found on the Passenger List of the *Winchester Castle* which sailed from Cape Town and arrived in Southampton on 9 January 1933. Harriet's address in England is given as Rosenhurst although it is clear that South Africa would remain her country of permanent residence. Her occupation is given, rather curiously, as 'Scholastic'. On the return journey to Cape Town, leaving Southampton on the *SS Windsor Castle* on 21 April 1933, her occupation is given as 'Nil' (perhaps she felt she could not call herself a teacher until she took up her new post). Miss Willis's occupation is given as 'Teacher'.

Herschel Girls' School at the time was only a decade old (although Wrinch-Schultz calls it 'this old-established girls' public school').⁵⁶

The property on which the School stands belonged to V.A. Schonberg, who, when he sold the main estate in 1834 to Sir John Herschel, the astronomer, retained this portion and named it after his illustrious neighbour. In July 1921, the estate was bought by The English Church Schools Association, with the aid of a generous loan from John William Jagger, to provide for the needs of the many girls living in the Southern Suburbs who wished to attend a private school. The first Headmistress was Miss Morley Armitage Ralph, and the school opened on Wednesday, 1 February 1922, when the first seven boarders arrived. On the following day, Thursday, the roll call was taken and the first school day began with prayers led by Archbishop Carter.⁵⁷ There were twenty-nine girls on the roll and seven staff members.⁵⁸

An article in *The Focus* shows that Harriet's acceptance came with conditions. She would accept 'only if the Council would agree to spend capital on improvement of buildings and equipment. Despite the financial problems brought on by the Great Depression, many new buildings, such as a School Library (the current Chapel), had

⁵⁶ *op.cit.*, p. 119.

⁵⁷ William Marlborough Carter (1850-1941) was Archbishop of Cape Town from 1909 to 1930 having previously been Bishop of Zululand (1891-1902) and Pretoria (1902-1909).

⁵⁸ Information from the School website www.herschel.org.za Sir John Herschel (1792-1871), son of the astronomer William Herschel was a man of astonishingly wide ability; his entry in Wikipedia usefully describes him as 'an English polymath, mathematician, astronomer, chemist, inventor, and experimental photographer, who in some years also did valuable botanical work'. Herschel and his wife Margaret lived in South Africa from 1833 to 1838 and did important botanical work. When *HMS Beagle* called at Cape Town the young Charles Darwin visited Herschel on 3 June 1836. In the opening lines of the Preface to *On the Origin of Species* Darwin writes that his intent was 'to throw some light on the origin of species – that mystery of mysteries, as it has been called by one of our greatest philosophers' referring to Herschel's letter to Charles Lyell. Herschel was given a national funeral and is buried beside Darwin in Westminster Abbey.

been added to the school campus by 1944 when she retired. The school choir was established in 1933'.⁵⁹ Madeleen Welman told me that Harriet 'was also President of the Music Club and under her wing Music at Herschel has grown into one of its strongest subjects, with many of our students pursuing it as a career after school. Our oldest living Old Girl, Diana Davis, told me that "the start of a choir by Miss Willis (under Headmistress Robinson) made the school a much happier place" and in the Music Club Notes a trip to City Hall to listen to Yehudi Menuhin is mentioned'. Madeleen Welman adds that Miss Robinson's editorials during the War urged the girls to fundraise more fervently for 'The War Effort'.⁶⁰ In short:

*She was a strong and purposeful woman, who badgered the girls to participate in a wide range of activities (even playing cricket), cajoled parents to donate money towards the new swimming pool and had tea with the Archbishop of Cape Town and Countess of Clarendon as a matter of course.*⁶¹

A letter from Harriet written for the school Magazine in November 1933 suggests that her style of leadership should not have come as a surprise:

My Dear Girls,

As this is the first issue of the Magazine since I came amongst you, I have been asked to write you a letter.

First I want to thank you and the Staff for the very kind welcome which you gave to me and Miss Willis. I want to thank you also for your willingness to respond to the many changes which we thought necessary. Your responsiveness has helped us very much in the difficult task of taking over a new piece of work.

Then I want you all, from the youngest to the oldest, to realise that each of you has your contribution to make to the life of the School which you love so much. Every school has its own individuality – one might almost say its own personality, and this School has characteristics which make it just Herschel. What is your contribution to be? See to it that it is worthy of you and of the School to which you belong.

The more you strive for the School, in your work and in your play, the more it will mean to you and the more you will get out of it. What the School will do for you depends on what you do for it. Make up your mind each one of you that you are going to give of your very best to the School, because only the best is good enough.

Having been at Herschel just six months, I feel already that I belong to it, and I want us all, present girls and past, to work together to make the School worthy of

59 See Sue Grové, 'Tradition v Progression' in the Herschel school magazine *Focus* vol 5:2, June 2012. This issue includes some gems which, strictly speaking, lie outside the scope of this paper. Miss McLean, another Head Mistress (1947-1962) apparently had firm ideas on how to deal with girls at public functions. Her directives to staff included: 'In the event of a child fainting, remove her SILENTLY' and 'Should she show any inclination to be sick, pull her hat down'.

60 Harriet also believed that actions were as important as words. In the 1941 magazine she is reported as saying that because new accommodation had been built 'we had been able to welcome into our midst children from war-stricken areas overseas'.

61 e-mail 29 May 2015. George Villiers, 6th Earl of Clarendon (1877-1955) was Governor-General of the Union of South Africa from 1931-37. His wife, Adeline (1886-1963) was given the title of Countess of Clarendon in 1914.

the great astronomer whose name it bears, and that the School may fulfil the intention of its Founder and make its own special contribution to education in this country which he hoped that it would one day make.

With very sincere good wishes,

Believe me,

Always yours affectionately,

HARRIET ROBINSON

We have seen that Christian faith was an important part of Herschel's foundation. Harriet herself seems to have been a serious if unostentatious believer. A report in the 1941 issue of *The Herschelian* says:

Miss Robinson particularly stressed the importance of literature to us all, and appealed to parents to encourage reading at home, and to attend more to the reading matter of their children. Another point made was that many people were under the false impression that Scripture was meant to be learnt only at school as a curriculum subject; this however was entirely wrong as its real place was in the home.

A few years later, at the Service of Thanksgiving for the re-opening of St Mary's Hall under Harriet's direction, Bishop George Bell preached the sermon:

...The Hall was founded over 100 years ago for the education of girls, based upon the teaching of the Church of England. The moving spirit was H.V. Elliott, a well-known Evangelical clergyman. He and his friends were pioneers at that time in the schooling of girls, convinced that it was vital to the girls, vital to the homes which they might afterwards build, and vital to the nation that their schooling should be both of a sound academic standard and also inspired right through by the Christian religion. The founders knew that though instruction in the Bible and the Prayer Book was absolutely necessary to the girls' religious education, it was the general influence and atmosphere of the school, the attitude of the teachers to all their subjects, the disposition of the girls, and the mutual confidence of all members of the society, that really made the education received in the true sense religious.

Later in his sermon he said:

A new Headmistress possessed of wide experience, with the help of an able and loyal staff, is calling the Hall back, step by step, into life and activity as a centre of knowledge and religion.

Then reminding the congregation that, important though the Hall's traditions were, they would have 'to shape and make it for to-morrow' he said:

The teachers have an immense part to play by their faith, and skill, and humour and patience. And the girls have theirs, by doing their bit in work and in play, by their friendship to one another, by their good spirit and good temper, by their zest, and their joy.

*....You have a duty to the future of Britain. Britain needs the very best ability and the very best character that the young can give it. And if with happiness and friendship, and each working to the best of her ability, you receive here what St Mary's Hall has to give, in religion and in learning, you will be doing a service of the greatest value for the well being of Britain, and you will be helping your country to fill the role which it is called to fill in the moral leadership of Europe.*⁶²

The context of this sermon – the challenge of beginning again after the War makes this is a convenient point to ask about the impact of war on Harriet. She is part of that generation whose view of life, and death, must have been profoundly affected by living through two World Wars even though I have found no direct evidence of her views on the matter.⁶³ We have seen that she was just starting her first job as a teacher in Hull when the First World War broke out. When G.S. West, one of those who supported her nomination as a Fellow of the Linnean Society, wrote the Preface to his famous book *Algæ* in June 1916 he said:

There has been considerable delay in the publication of this volume owing to a prolonged illness of the author in 1913-14 and partly owing to conditions which have arisen as a result of the present calamitous European upheaval.

Such a view might well have reflected Harriet's view rather than the initial enthusiasm which led, we are told, to 20,000 Hull men enlisting within the first six months of the War.

But, to return to South Africa and Herschel, in November 1944 Harriet wrote her valedictory letter:

Dear Herschelians, Past and Present,

Just over twelve years ago, on a cold, grey, late-winter afternoon I was brought by Lady Beattie to pay my first visit to Herschel.⁶⁴ The School was on holiday, and the place was almost deserted, empty, and chilly and grey as the weather outside. The following afternoon I came alone to have another look at it, this time from the lane at the lower end of the playing-fields, - the sun was shining, and I liked the look of the old white house almost hidden among the trees. I took a fancy to it, and felt it had great, and interesting possibilities. During the past twelve years some of those possibilities have been accomplished and I want to take this, my last opportunity as Headmistress, of telling you all how very happy I have been amongst you, and to thank you and your parents for your loyalty and for all that you and they have done to help us in the development of the School. Twelve very interesting years have passed, and I have loved them all; new buildings in 1934

⁶² Chichester Diocese had an unusually large number of public and preparatory schools (350) and Bell tried to co-operate with them as well as with the County Education authorities. See R.C.D. Jasper, *George Bell: Bishop of Chichester*, 1967, p.73. Bell's call for Britain to provide the moral leadership of Europe seems extraordinary in today's political climate. Bell is a fascinating figure whom I came to admire after I became a Trustee of the George Bell Institute. A friend of the martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer and a key figure in the Ecumenical Movement Bell was heavily involved in the Sword of the Spirit (see Jasper, *op.cit.*, Ch. 13) of which my grandfather, Paul Kelly, was the first Treasurer.

⁶³ Harriet's successor at Durban, Miss Mary Calway, was engaged to be married during the First World War but her fiancé was killed

⁶⁴ I am unclear why it was Lady Beattie who brought Harriet to the school; she was probably Lady Elizabeth Beattie (née Paton) the wife of Sir John Carruthers Beattie, the distinguished scientist who became the first Principal and Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town (1918-1937). Their daughter Joan was a pupil at Herschel.

(the Domestic Science, the Laboratory, Kindergarten, Classrooms, the rooms behind the Hall); in 1938 the Swimming Bath; more buildings in 1939 (the Library wing, the new Cloakrooms and Entrance Vestibule, the Art and Music block). Then came War, and all chance of immediate development ended.

But with all this we are still only at the beginning of things, Herschel is still only in its infancy. I regard it as a great privilege to have had a share in the shaping of its early years, though I have done little but help to lay a foundation on which it is for others to build.

The future of Herschel depends to a large extent upon your love for the School during your school-days, and after you have left. May you feel towards Herschel and all its undertakings as the students of ancient Rome who, defending their studies said, 'If there be any worth in us, my friends, we must refer it to these our studies. You will perhaps ask of us how it is that we find such great happiness in studies of this kind; and we would answer you: because they open to us a retreat where the mind may find refreshment after the noise and bustle of the street; and where our ears, weary with the clamour of the struggling crowd, may find new peace'.⁶⁵

I am leaving Herschel now to return to my home in England, in the happy confidence that the School will hold its own, and will go on from strength to strength, 'ad majorem Dei gloriam'.⁶⁶

You will remember, won't you, that I shall always be delighted to have news of you and of the School, because I, as you, once having belonged to Herschel, belong to it for all time.

With love and sincere good wishes,

Believe me,

Yours always affectionately,

HARRIET ROBINSON

Of Harriet's time at Herschel Norma Eastwood says 'she would spend much of her leisure time in Kirstenbosch (National Botanical) gardens or up on Table Mountain....She gave herself entirely to her work and encouraged all arts and has left a lasting memorial of all that is best in life'.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ I have been unable to trace the origin of this quotation.

⁶⁶ Someone of Harriet's erudition must have known that she was quoting the motto of the Jesuits – I presume that she simply approved of its sentiments and we should not read into her use of it any proto-ecumenical commitment. It is not clear why Harriet decided to resign in 1944. Sue Grové, in the article already cited, says that during the tenure of her predecessor (and founding Principal), Miss Morley Armitage Ralph, the School Council had introduced a pension scheme and agreed that the retirement age would be 50. Harriet had reached that age in 1937. M.A. Pocock's Linnean Society obituary is clearly mistaken in saying that Harriet remained at Herschel until, 'on reaching the retirement age in 1948, she resigned and returned to England'.

⁶⁷ In 2015 viewers of BBC's *Gardener's World* were given a glimpse of South Africa's botanical splendours: on 27 March they saw agapanthus in its native habitat and on 29 May the streptocarpus in the Drakensberg Mountains.

There is no evidence to suggest that Harriet knew what she would do when she returned to England. The 'Foreword' to the December 1944 issue of *The Herschelian* pays tribute to Miss Robinson and concludes: 'We all join in wishing her Godspeed on her journey, and every happiness in whatever she undertakes on her return to England'. The same issue of the magazine described the double blow that the school had received:

*...we are going to lose Miss Willis as well, to our heartfelt regret. The high reputation in which the music of the School rejoices is due to her hard work as head of the Music Department for many years; and the wide knowledge of this subject which each student takes away with her can be attributed to Miss Willis' careful training. Her peculiar gifts of organisation and foresight can be seen in the smooth running of every School function, and we shall sorely miss her guidance. To her as well we wish Godspeed on her journey, and all happiness in her future work.*⁶⁸



Miss Robinson at Herschel School

Harriet returned to England a few months before VE Day; she sailed from Cape Town on the *RMS Andes* which docked in Liverpool on the 25 March 1945. She gave her occupation as Head Mistress and her address as Rosenhurst. The Passenger List confirms that South Africa had been her country of permanent residence and that England was her country of intended future permanent residence. Miss Willis returned five months later sailing from Cape Town on the Union Castle Line's *Athlone Castle* which docked in Southampton on 27 August.

Brighton

M.A. Pocock says that, on her return to England, Harriet 'resumed work, first at St James, Malvern. Offered the principalship of that school, however, she refused it in favour of that of St Mary's Hall, Brighton, where she was appointed to re-open and re-establish the school, closed during the war when the buildings had been taken over by the military'. The only confirmation I have found that Harriet taught at Malvern comes in a note in *The Herschelian* in 1945: 'Miss Robinson has taken

⁶⁸ An Editorial in the December 1939 issue of *The Herschelian* gave an indication of Miss Willis's importance: 'During the Second and Third Terms of this year Miss Willis was enjoying a much-needed holiday overseas. We missed her very much, especially at our Morning Prayers' and adds 'We should like to congratulate the Choir who carried on manfully during Miss Willis's absence'.

up teaching again in the Science Department at St James', Malvern'. The same issue noted that 'Miss Willis is teaching Music at the Abbey School, Malvern'.⁶⁹ Miss Robinson and Miss Willis cannot have remained in Malvern for long as they were at St Mary's Hall by 1946 – Harriet was appointed Headmistress of St Mary's Hall in July and took up her appointment on 1 September.⁷⁰ St Mary's Hall was one of the country's oldest schools for girls and was founded in 1836 by the Revd. Henry Venn Elliot for the 'daughters of poor clergy'. By 1920 the daughters of laypeople were also admitted.

T.J. Elliott's, *A Personal History of St Mary's Hall*, pays fulsome tribute to Harriet's achievement and stresses the scale of the challenge she faced:

Nothing, in the Hall's history, is as shocking as the barbaric destruction of the interior of the Main School and of the buildings in Sussex Square by our own troops. We would have been better off, if the evidence in France is anything to go by, if the buildings had been requisitioned by the Gestapo.

Once again we can turn to one of Harriet's own letters for a vivid description of what was achieved:⁷¹

Time has passed so quickly since I wrote my first letter to you that it is difficult to realise that it was twelve months ago, one whole year, the first year of the School's new life. In this year the school has grown from 20 pupils to over 170. Last November we had only day-girls. We now have 60 boarders, and Babington is full. In January we moved from Babington to the Elliott Wing of the Hall. This term we are in the Hall itself. I am writing this letter in the Headmistress's Study over the front door, the room you all know so well, the room of which the Founder wrote in 1836, 'The pretty little mullion-windowed room over the entrance'. The top floor of the Hall is still under repair and no place is really completely finished. To make the Hall fit for occupation, to get the workmen out, the furniture in, the classrooms arranged for lessons, the dining-rooms and kitchen equipped to provide meals for boarders, and a mid-day meal for over 170, was all there was time for. Such things as floor-staining and picture-hanging have had to be left till the holidays.

On Friday, September 19th, we came into residence at the Hall, from Babington; myself, Miss Willis (Secretary),⁷² Mrs Cameron (Cook-caterer) and Ethel Philipps (maid). Our first night here was a memorable one. The escape of gas was so bad in our bedrooms that we had to sleep in my study! Then, very tired and dirty, we thought how comforting a hot bath would be. To our dismay, though there was

69 Malvern was unusual in having four independent girls' schools: The Abbey School, Lawnside, Malvern Girls' College, and St James's School, West Malvern. The Abbey merged with St James' on the West Malvern site in 1979, and was joined by Lawnside in 1994. (Information from Malvern St James's website).

70 Charles Purcell (e-mail 13 June 2015) wrote to say 'I knew the Miss Robinsons, although I don't really remember them, as I went up to the house (Rosenhurst) during the war to collect their salvage for the war effort'. This may suggest that Harriet spent time with Mary Ann in Bewdley after returning from South Africa in 1944 and before she went to Malvern – or perhaps simply that Mary Ann was there during the war and that Charles knew that both sisters had lived there at some stage.

71 The letter appears in the SMH *News Letter* of December 1947 and is reprinted in M. Martin's invaluable *History of St Mary's Hall*. I am also grateful to Penny Harrison, Sue Carnochon and many members of the SMH Association for additional information.

72 When I first read that the Secretary was Miss Willis I assumed it was someone other than the Music Mistress described by Professor Sneddon as Harriet's 'life-long friend'. However, later research made it clear that Lilian Willis acted as School Secretary – perhaps an indication of the scale of the challenge involved in re-opening St Mary's Hall.

plenty of hot water, there was not a single bath-plug in the building. I had to go down to Babington to find one. In spite of difficulties, however, it was really thrilling to be at last living at the Hall, and to be occupying rooms vibrating and pulsing with memories of by-gone days.

After two further paragraphs in which she thanks the people who have worked so hard and asks if members of the Association would care 'to furnish a dormitory, or a staff bed-sitting room, to be called after herself, or perhaps in memory of someone' she continues:

The hour is past late, and is getting early. My predecessors in this lovely little room whisper to me, that it is time to end this letter and go to bed.

She ends by quoting from a letter sent by an Old Girl:

'It is almost unbelievable that you can have accomplished all this since the School re-opened, and what I was so struck by in particular is that you have kept the atmosphere of the old while building anew. I felt I wanted to paint again in the Studio and eat in the Dining Hall, and even suffer a Latin lesson in one of the sunny classrooms. The garden too looked so happy and cared for – you must have a devoted staff already'.

Then she signs off in her familiar style:

Hoping that you will all feel like this when you visit the Hall, and with my sincere thanks to you all for your inspiring devotion to the Hall,

I remain,

Yours very sincerely,

HARRIET ROBINSON

Miss Willis provided an interesting account of the same period for *The Herscheliana* in 1948 in the section headed 'News of Old Herschelians'. It reported that

Miss Willis tells of the school in Brighton in which she assisted Miss Robinson in the task of re-opening after it had been closed down during the war. She says that the O.G.A. of St Mary's Hall is perfectly wonderful – it was due entirely to the Old Girls that the school was re-started, and the feeling among them and the Staff had been an inspiration, and they have given great material help too. She writes: 'Rebuilding the school has been, and is being, a colossal task. It has grown from 30 to 230 in two years – too quickly. The three houses and the big main Hall had all been occupied by the Forces. One house, where furniture had been stored, had a direct hit. The damage done by one section of the Forces who had inhabited the buildings was worse than the enemy's. We started at Babington House, and by degrees the other buildings have been repaired and we moved into them bit by bit. Can you imagine the work of re-equipping in these times, and of re-staffing, academic and domestic? Our holidays consisted of getting ready new premises – never quite sure if we could be ready in time, or have beds, desks and chairs enough – or sufficient Staff – for the coming term. Holidays were a nightmare, the term was bearable'.

St Mary's Hall clearly evoked a very strong sense of loyalty among alumnae. The report of the 1947 AGM included the following:

Miss Robinson then spoke of her gratitude for the welcome and help given her, and said it was encouraging to feel that she had the good wishes of the Association and many kind friends of the Hall. She had been very touched by £1 offertory money sent by an Old Girl of 91.....Miss Robinson looked forward to welcoming visitors and would try to show them the school if she had time, but it was impossible at that moment to answer all letters. She mentioned the keenness shown by a daughter who came to see the school where her mother had been in 1844.

Another item in *The Herschelion* suggests that Harriet was occasionally able to get away from her responsibilities. Under the heading 'RE-UNION' it reported:

A meeting was held in a room in St Stephen's Tavern, Westminster, at 7p.m. on Wednesday, June 16th, 1948. We were delighted that both Miss Robinson and Miss Willis were able momentarily to leave their heavy labours at St Mary's Hall, the school which they have refounded in Brighton, to be with us.....The proceedings were very informal, everyone sitting about at tables and exchanging news and ideas, while beer, cider and soft drinks were served. There was much laughter, and all agreed that nobody had changed in the least, in spite of slightly more sophisticated attire. We seemed all very smartly dressed and the New Look was well represented...⁷³

The Editor of the 1948 *News Letter* (the 50th Jubilee Number) noted that 'St Mary's Hall is in vigorous life once more, and increasing steadily in numbers and enthusiasm under the leadership of Miss Robinson'. The same number included a letter from Miss Robinson – the first she wrote as President of the Association. She pays fulsome tribute to Miss Ghey, though she calls her, inaccurately, her immediate predecessor ('...to follow in her footsteps is indeed a difficult task').⁷⁴ The affection and respect expressed is clearly reciprocated for, later in the same issue, Miss Ghey speaks of the many letters she has received from old girls expressing thankfulness for all that they received at St Mary's Hall and then says:

So memory looks back in thankfulness; and hope looks forward in thankfulness, now that the School has come so happily and truly to life again, and has found in Miss Robinson a new friend, whose sensitiveness to tradition equals her devotion to the tasks of the present and the future. I cannot find a more fitting end to this letter than an attempt to describe what I felt when Miss Robinson asked me last term to share the School's evening prayers in the Elliott Hall. The grave perfection of bearing in the very youngest as in the eldest, the reverence and the sweet

73 Wikipedia claims ('1945-60 in fashion') that on February 12, 1947, the first collection of the House of Dior was launched and that the new collection went down in fashion history as the 'New Look'. So it seems that the Old Herschelians were very avant- garde.

74 Miss Ghey was Headmistress from 1911-1936 and Miss E E Stopford from 1936-1940. The Hall was then closed and re-opened under Miss Robinson in 1946. M D Martin's History gives Miss Stopford's first name as Evelyn but in fact she was Eveleen Emily Stopford (1897-1971). She had been Head Mistress of the Deaconess Home School in Jamaica from 1926-31 and changed its name to St Hugh's High School for Girls in honour of her Oxford alma mater. After St Mary's Hall she became Head Mistress of St Elphin's from 1941-58. In a letter she wrote for the 1947 SMHA *News Letter* she says she had visited Brighton in the summer 'and was delighted to be shown round the Hall by Miss Robinson'.

singing, were a testimony to the unbroken life of the spirit that has breathed in the Hall since the Founder read his favourite Psalm on the first evening.

Harriet also expresses her gratitude to Miss Galton who had worked tirelessly to prepare the new House, St Hilary, at 22 Sussex Square; in addition to her own work she had spent days and days 'buying furniture, materials for curtains, and bedspreads, etc., and not only that, but she supervised the making of them also, so that everything came to us ready for use. It was a colossal task, and I do not think that anyone else could have done it but Miss Galton'. Later in the year after an event in July, when the Hall welcomed back so many old staff and pupils, Harriet says 'I went for two delightful weeks to Montreux. Miss Daisy Short and her sister were there at the same time and we never met! Yet I did meet accidentally two of my former Capetown pupils. Is the world great or small?' Later she says that many old pupils have visited the school and that they all like the drawing room very much. 'Several have recalled the tears they frequently shed at piano lessons in that room!' She ends her letter:

...I close with the thought that when summer comes, and the gardens are lovely again, we hope that we shall have you all here for another Summer Meeting.

With all my heart I thank you for your quite inspiring devotion to your old school.

Yours very sincerely,

HARRIET ROBINSON

It is clear, however, that the weight of responsibility was beginning to take its toll. In her letter to the SMH Association on 16 November 1949 Harriet begins, as usual, by noting the progress that had been made:

How quickly the year has passed since my last letter, a year in which much has been accomplished, a year of growth and progress, and much hard work.

She then describes the high point of the year – the first Founder's Day since the school's re-opening:

It was a truly wonderful day. Amongst the present school the excitement was intense...The climax of their joy was the moment when they marched on to the netball court for the Display, with the eyes of the visitors focussed upon them. They had never experienced anything like this before. They marched as a school and felt a school. It had a wonderfully unifying effect.

She reports steady progress but knows that much more is to be done:

The year 1950 therefore promises to be a very busy one. I had hoped, after all the very strenuous, exhausting work of re-construction and re-establishment, to have been able at last, to devote my chief attention to the school itself, to have been able to give more individual attention to the children than has been possible hitherto. This is my real work, and the work I like best of all.

While I was on holiday in Italy, I gave much thought to my work at the Hall. It has been all-absorbing, and all-demanding. I have put into it all I had to give, and have

loved the work. But one cannot continue to do that indefinitely, and I am beginning to feel the strain. After very serious thought, I decided that the time had come for me to hand over the work of guiding the Hall through the next stage of its development to another enthusiast.

Therefore, one Sunday morning from the calm of a hill-side above Stresa,⁷⁵ overlooking beautiful Lake Maggiore, I wrote my letter of resignation to the Chairman.

I find this all very difficult to tell you, and I do hope that you will understand. I know that the next three or four years will require more vigour, more energy, more strength, than I have to give. My successor will come fresh to that task. I know that she can rely on your whole-hearted support. I shall never be able to thank you sufficiently for all your wonderful kindness and friendship which have made all my efforts at the Hall a labour of love. I feel that I belong to the place, my roots have gone down deeply. In spite of all the difficulties, and frequent discomfort, especially in the early days, the words have kept ringing in my ears, 'the lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground; yea, I have a goodly heritage'.⁷⁶

With your thoughts and your prayers to help them, whoever works for St Mary's Hall will feel the same.

Yours always affectionately

HARRIET ROBINSON

I think Harriet's decision came as a surprise – her own account suggests that she only came to it after the end of the summer term – and it certainly came as a great shock. The same issue of the *News Letter* carried a letter to the SMH Association from Miss Ghey dated October 25, 1949.⁷⁷

You will partly realise how great a blow has fallen on us all with Miss Robinson's resignation. Feeling it as a personal grief as well as a calamity to the school, I will not try to find many words, but will only say how deeply thankful I shall always be that Miss Robinson was the first Head Mistress of the re-established school, and that her strength and dignity and delightful humour blessed its recovering years. I wish she could know how much we admire and thank her for taking the past to her heart and using it to build a better future. Though her so generous self-giving has cost her too dearly, we will all hope and pray that it may not too unfairly have taxed her strength, and that our love and praise may be cordial to her heart when the parting comes.

⁷⁵ Stresa has 'spectacular views as well as areas of historical and architectural interest' and developed as a popular tourist destination during the twentieth century – having been fashionable with aristocrats for much longer. It seems unlikely that many British holiday makers would have been there in 1949 though Ernest Hemingway had visited Stresa the previous year.

⁷⁶ The quotation is from Psalm 16:6

⁷⁷ Miss Fanny Louise Ghey had been Headmistress of SMA from 1911 to 1936 though, M D Martin adds, 'she had not finished with St Mary's Hall by any means!', *op.cit.* p 31. In her letter describing the frantic activity before the school re-opened after the War Harriet had particularly thanked Miss Ghey and Miss Galton. The two ladies lived at Blunt House, Oxted, and in addition to organising two Garden Fetes there (perhaps as fund-raisers) they had donated many personal gifts to the School including ten cream enamelled bedsteads and twenty-four desks and chairs. 'Do you wonder', asks Harriet, 'that words fail me to express my gratitude?'

'It is sad to think', wrote E.G.Street in the same issue in 'A Tribute to Miss Robinson':

that her health has suffered so through all she has given of herself to the Hall. I cannot help thinking at the same time, however, of the glory of her work, and what an example she is of disinterested and loving labour, and the wonderful foundation she has relaid, so truly in keeping with the spirit of our Founder himself. If she will remember that she has the gratitude, not only of her own girls, but of those of us who have some idea what it has cost her to revive our old School, it will, we trust, do much towards the renewal of her strength.

It is clear that Harriet's love of Nature, which had perhaps been intensified by her time in South Africa, remained strong. On 9 April 1949 she opened her Head Mistress's Report to the SMHA Annual General Meeting in London with what the Newsletter described as 'a very moving description of the Hall at dawn':

She spoke of the early thrush singing just before daylight, and the walls and treetops golden as the sun rose and turned the sea to opal. The almond and the forsythia were more lovely than ever, having lived through so much, and it was a miracle that the Hall had withstood the bombing. 'The Hall sends to you, from the beauty of the morning, its best love, and it thanks you for your support through the years'.

Miss Robinson ended her report, we are told, by saying 'when you wake in the early morning, think of the old thrush, will you?'⁷⁸

It is clear that the affection felt for her by Harriet's colleagues was also felt by many of the girls. After my interest in Harriet became known I received some marvellous memories.⁷⁹

I had her for a short time. She was a very kind and lovely lady.

Miss Robinson was Head when I joined SMH in 1945. She was everything you could wish for in a Head. Gracious, kind and always had time to listen.

Heather Johnson vividly recalls a particular episode:

"Heather, Miss Robinson wants to see you". Miss Foster, our form mistress, was telling me that the Head Mistress wanted to see me. What had I done wrong, I wondered. Although Miss Robinson was a kindly lady, nearing her retirement, I was still terrified at the thought of being called to her study. Although I was only nine years old and wasn't aware of any misdemeanour I may have committed, I could not think I was called to her study for anything other than some wrongdoing.

78 Miss Galton brought the proceedings back to basics by giving thanks for the kind words said about her but taking the opportunity with four Governors present 'to tell of the appalling condition of the stored furniture'. She had been summoned to a meeting of the Executive to talk about furniture 'but was only given ten minutes out of nearly five hours in which to speak'.

79 I am grateful to Penny Harrison for these examples. Several correspondents point to the great contrast between Miss Robinson and her successor. The latter 'really scared me' says one, 'I used to dread going back to school'. Another says 'she made my life a misery'.

So it was that I climbed the wide wooden staircase to the carpeted corridor above with some trepidation and stood outside the door saying 'Headmistress'. I knocked and was greeted with a kindly "Come in Heather, sit down".

"You may remember," she said "that recently you returned a box in which you had collected money for the Church of England Children's Society".

I did remember, I had had the little blue box at home by the telephone and when friends visited they were asked to put a coin in the box. I had collected the princely sum of 8/-, nothing to write home about, or so I thought.

"I am pleased to tell you" she continued "that you collected the highest amount in the school"

(I wonder if that was true. If it was, it wasn't very impressive, even in 1950)

"You have been chosen to represent the school at Central Hall in Westminster, where you will present a purse to Princess Elizabeth".⁸⁰

The 1950 *Letter from Miss Robinson* in the *St Mary's Hall Association News Letter* shows that Harriet was now in London though the letter is written 'As from Meadowbank, Bewdley':

November 19th, 1950

Dear SMHA Members,

First, just a message to thank you all for your thoughts, and for your kindness to me from the very first moment that I became part of your much-loved old school. I lived my life there to the full, and was completely absorbed in it. The infectious happiness which pervades the place gripped me and made my life a very happy one.

Time has passed quickly since we met at the Annual General Meeting last April, when I was given that wonderful present that took my breath away for the moment. I then had still to get through the painful process of packing, and uprooting myself from the Hall. And what a business it was! Why must we go on surrounding ourselves with possessions when, in reality, 'man wants but little here below'?⁸¹ I was thankful to reach the stage when Pickford's men could take over. In spite of my most careful instructions (on the whole they were very good), I found when I unpacked that I had the Hall Visitors' Book and that most precious, beautifully-illuminated, Centenary Celebration book!

The actual moment of my departure from the Hall at about 9.30 a.m., on Friday, April 14th, will ever remain in my memory. Weller, the caretaker, packed me into the car, then with him at the gate, I said good-bye to the Hall. It was a beautiful morning, and the Hall was looking lovely, in the soft sunlight of an April morning, against a background of pale blue sky.

80 Heather's account of her meeting with the future Queen has been wonderfully written up in 'A Purse for a Princess' in which she describes travelling with her mother to Westminster Central Hall and feeling let down by the fact that the Princess was not wearing a crown or a pretty long dress. However the children were given orange juice and spam sandwiches and the next day, when Heather told her class all about her meeting with a Princess, she gradually realised what an honour it had been to represent her school.

81 I presume the reference is to Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Chapter 8, 'The Hermit' or 'The Ballad of Edwin and Angelina'. It must have been a favourite quotation as it is also found in John Quincy Adams and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., 'Contentment'.

It was a rather chilly drive home, but through some of the most beautiful country in England. I was very tired after many strenuous days, and felt rather lost and absent from my bodily self. Between Reading and Oxford I became dangerously drowsy and had to pull up for a ten minutes' nap! The Vale of Evesham was white with cherry blossom.⁸²

I was glad to reach home, where my sister was anxiously awaiting my arrival. For many days after, we were very busy in the house. Our furniture, which you got to know so well at the Hall, just fitted into place, and looks as if it had been there always. When the weather became warmer, I began my work in the garden, which was a jungle of weeds, and over-grown everywhere. I was again perfectly happy, and worked from morn to eve, getting the garden in order, and fit for you all to see when you pass my way. As Autumn came on with its chilly, shorter days, I began to feel the need for a change of occupation, and after my sister had had her holiday in Scotland, I was free to come away. So here I am in London, learning shorthand and typing. I have a very good teacher and am enjoying shorthand very much. My instructress works me very hard, and gives me a great deal of homework! I have very little time left for seeing the sights of the city.⁸³

Now that we have our home again and my sister is happily settled there, I hope to be able to go South next year. I am much looking forward to seeing all my old pupils and friends in South Africa. Perhaps next year I shall write from Cape Town. Already I have had a message of welcome from my old pupils of Herschel, through Miss Wisdom's great-niece, who is now a pupil there.

My love and best wishes to you all, and thanks again for the present.

Yours always affectionately,

HARRIET ROBINSON

A fortnight before, on 1 April 1950, Harriet had presided at the St Mary's Hall Association AGM in London attended by 65 members. The *News Letter* reported her speech:

This was the last time she would speak as President. She had really loved and been interested in her work at the Hall, and while there had been the difficulties of infancy, she had had, as a mother with her baby, some of the best years, and was now giving way to her successor for the next growing stages.

Miss Robinson ended by saying she was not at the time worn out, but did not feel she should wait for this to happen. 'Once one belongs to the Hall it is for all time. I am handing over, but I still belong'.

The report then noted several tributes paid to the retiring Head Mistress:

⁸² We do not know Harriet's precise route but the journey would have been quite arduous. The RAC Route Planner today estimates the distance between Brighton and Bewdley, avoiding motorways (which did not exist in 1950), at 186 miles and the journey time at about four and a half hours. Although there were far fewer cars even the 'A' roads were poor and most journeys involved going through towns rather than around them.

⁸³ It seems likely that she was in London by October because she attended a meeting in Ealing of the Home Counties Branch of the SMHA on 7 October.

Miss Ghey rose to give an appreciation of Miss Robinson. She said that it was not easy to say what was in everyone's mind. Miss Robinson had soon inspired loyalty by her charm and courage. The school had then no sails or mast, only the rudder of her faith. Miss Robinson could never be thanked enough for her inspiration, strength and dignity. She had renewed the spirit of the past, and carried it on in an even better form. All would be glad that she was not worn out, but she had minimised the strain and cost to herself.⁸⁴ She had the gift of listening to the past, and then using it to plan a better future. She had built new walls for old music which had echoed for a hundred years, and would continue to do so.

The Secretary, Elizabeth Moore, said she had received many letters full of gratitude, affection and admiration for Miss Robinson. They spoke of her charm and welcome, how sadly she would be missed, and concern for her health. 'These writers wish her good luck and Godspeed, and to these wishes may we add yours and mine'. Then, as a token of their regard, the Secretary presented Miss Robinson with a cheque on behalf of the Association, which it was hoped would be used for a holiday abroad. With this also went a posy of blue grape hyacinths, bordered by daffodils, and tied with the School colours of blue and gold.⁸⁵

Miss Robinson was obviously overcome with surprise and gratitude. She said she did not know what to say, but thanked the association warmly for their marvellous gift.

Later in the meeting Mrs Broadley, one of the School's Governors, said that Miss Robinson's resignation was a great blow from which the Governors had not then recovered. She hoped, however, that they had found a very good Head in Miss Conrady, though it was not easy to find a successor to the former Headmistresses (sic). She ended by saying 'Thank you, enormously, Miss Robinson, for a great Headship'.

Miss Robinson's approach to life may be glimpsed in the report of a later discussion, which will be familiar to veterans of AGMs. It was suggested that a revision of the Constitution of the Association might encourage younger people to join. Miss Robinson 'felt that the Association had managed not too badly without an up-to-date Constitution, but as the present day was one of rules and regulations, a new Constitution should be considered if it would be to the advantage of the Association. She suggested that a Sub-Committee should be formed to go into the matter. She said that she herself was most impressed by the Association, and had not found its equal in other schools with which she had been connected'.

⁸⁴ The word 'minimised' used by the writer of the Report is ambiguous. Given that the previous year's *News Letter* quotes Miss Ghey and E.G. Street clearly saying that Miss Robinson's health had been affected by the strains of the job I think it likely that Miss Ghey was wanting to say that Harriet had downplayed the effect on her health rather than that she had been able to keep the stress level low.

⁸⁵ A Note from the Treasurer in the same *News Letter* suggests that the cheque was for £60 and it came 'from friends and members of the St Mary's Hall Association as a token of our love and appreciation of the vast amount of work that (Miss Robinson) did to bring the Hall into being again. We hope that she is using the money as a help towards the rest she so much needed'. It is hard to say what £60 in 1950 would be 'worth' today but the cheque was certainly a generous one. The National Archives currency converter would suggest that in terms of 'buying power' it would be between £1,000 and £1,500 today. The same AGM heard that the Secretary had postponed a proposed lunch because the very many places she had tried all averaged at last 10/6 per head, plus 10% service charge and Committee members she had consulted thought that too expensive without authorisation from an AGM.

Return to South Africa

The wish Harriet had expressed to return to South Africa was fulfilled the following year and it is clear that she was not simply going for a visit. On 2 October 1951 she sailed from London to Durban on the Union Castle Line's *Llangibby Castle*⁸⁶ - the Passenger List gives Harriet's last address in the UK as Meadow Bank, Bewdley, and indicates that South Africa is the country of her intended future permanent residence. The space for 'occupation' is blank. The 1951 SMH Newsletter also tells us that 'Miss Wisdom has since heard that she has been to meet a number of her old pupils who are still at Herschel'.

Later in the same Newsletter there is further news headed 'STOP PRESS!':

Letter from Miss Robinson

*Pietermaritzburg,
Natal,
S. Africa*

Nov 22, 1951

.....I hoped to have arrived here in time to get a letter written. We left London on October 2nd....calling at Las Palmas, Ascension and St Helena. We encountered strong S.E. trade winds all down the African coast, and arrived at Cape Town after our scheduled time. We were nearly a week at the Cape, instead of 2 days; and had a most exciting and exhausting time there, seeing all our old friends. A reception had been planned for us at Herschel, and we met governors, parents and school, past and present. We were very glad when we reached Durban and saw our friends waiting to welcome us. I don't want to do another voyage just yet! Since we arrived here I have been very busy, trying to find a house, and seeing many old friends. Yesterday afternoon we went to a party of some of our Durban Girls' College O.G.'s, mostly married now and with families. Houses are in great demand as Maritzburg is a very popular place for retired British people. Not only are they flocking here from Gt. Britain, but also from the East. There is a Men's Club, called the 'East of Suez' Club. My sister is anxious to come out to join me, so I shall have to come home in the Spring to help her with business affairs, and bring her out.

Please remember me to all my old friends. I should like to be home for the Annual General Meeting.

With best wishes for Christmas and the New Year,

Yours very sincerely,

HARRIET ROBINSON

86 A ship which may be seen as quite typical of the era: built by Harland & Wolff in Govan, launched in 1929, damaged in an air raid on Liverpool Docks in 1940, torpedoed and damaged by a German U-boat in 1942, scrapped in 1954. The liner would probably have sailed from the East India Dock.

But it would have been unlike Harriet to be idle for long. The 1954 SMH Newsletter (which shows that the Vice-Presidents still included Harriet as well as Miss Ghey and Miss Galton) includes an item headed 'A Letter from Miss Robinson' who wrote from Pietermaritzburg in November:

My Dear Friends,

All this year I have been leading a very busy scholastic life. Nevertheless you have often been in my thoughts and I have longed to see you all and the school.

The schools in South Africa have four terms, with a short holiday of about ten days at Easter, and at Michaelmas, and a long holiday at the half-year, and at Christmas, when school-year ends. During the first term of this year I was teaching at two schools, at St Anne's Diocesan College, and at the Girls' Collegiate School in Pietermaritzburg. This was hard work. During the second term I was Acting Principal at the Girls' Collegiate while Miss Williams, the Principal, was on holiday in England. I was resident at the school and thoroughly enjoyed the life; it was very interesting to be right in the middle of school-life again.

Just as the second term was ending my sister became very seriously ill with heart trouble, and she was in bed for two months. I am thankful that she is much better, but she has now to take life very easily. She has a little dog, a young dachshund called Barnabas, the loveliest, and the liveliest and most mischievous little dog you ever saw. He is fully determined that my sister shall have no rest at all!!

At the end of the month, for my sister's sake, we⁸⁷ are moving to another house where the garden and the surroundings are perfectly flat. Our present garden is terraced and we are on a hill. We are very sorry to leave this pretty little place. We have worked very hard in the garden, and put in many plants.

Miss Willis's arthritis has been very bad lately, and she is now in hospital for intensive physiotherapy treatment. She is looking much better, and seems to be responding very well to the treatment. I visited her yesterday and she was so pleased that she could walk almost without a limp.

I am at present teaching three Senior Classes at the Collegiate. The girls are working very hard with the prospect of the Matriculation Examination looming ahead.

Last Friday I gave away the prizes at the Durban Girls' College where I was Headmistress from 1924 to 1932. It was Founder's Day. I was present also at the Thanksgiving Service in the morning. It was delightful to be back in my old haunts, to meet many of my old girls, and to have the pleasure of handing prizes to some of their children.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ A reference in a later letter shows that the household consisted of Harriet, her sister Mary Ann and Miss Willis. Mary Ann in fact lived for another nine years. I note the details from her Death Certificate at the end of this paper - the cause of death is consistent with her having suffered from heart problems for some time.

⁸⁸ Wrinch-Schultz, *op.cit.*, p. 119 confirms this: 'Twenty years after she left College she came back to the school – this time as official speaker and guest of honour at Founders' Day'.

We are moving to our new home on December 7th (See addresses).⁸⁹ Please come and visit me soon.

With very best wishes to you all.

Yours always affectionately

HARRIET ROBINSON

The 1955 SMH Newsletter includes an update; 'News from Miss Robinson':

My Dear Friends,

How quickly time goes!....I have been hard at work all the year teaching Zoology and Botany to Senior Classes at the Girls' Collegiate School, here in Maritzburg. I enjoy the work very much.

We have been in our new home now for nearly a year.We have a large garden, mostly lawns and beautiful trees. I wish you could see the Australian Flame trees in full flower as they are just now, a mass of scarlet. After a chilly Winter, Spring is with us at last, and wherever you look you see the beautiful purplish-blue of the Jacarandas. I miss the spring-time songs of the birds in England. The birds here are brighter in plumage but much less musical in song. We get many lovely white egrets on the lawns. They are very tame, and are fascinating to watch as they search for insects in the grass. Having spotted one, they are still as if carved in marble. Then, with a peculiar gyrating movement of their long, thin, necks they seem to mesmerise the prey. Swift as lightning down goes the beak, and one can see the insect passing down the slender neck. They go home in the evening to the Bird Sanctuary, where there are thousands of them, making the trees look as if covered in snow.

Owing to the cold winter, Miss Willis has had rather a bad time with arthritis, but with the arrival of the warmer weather she is considerably better.

A pile of examination papers is lying on my table, so I must get to work.

My very best wishes to you all,

Yours always affectionately,

HARRIET ROBINSON

The December 1956 issue of the SMH News Letter and School Magazine includes the regular letter:

⁸⁹ The Newsletter has a list of SMHA members. The page on which Harriet appears is difficult to read but the address is probably 97, Ridge Road, Pietermaritzburg, Natal, South Africa.

NEWS FROM MISS ROBINSON

Pietermaritzburg
October 21st, 1956

My Dear Friends

The jacaranda trees are coming into bloom, a beautiful reminder that it is time to write to you. The year has been a very busy one, but working hard as I have, much has been left undone which I had hoped to do.

Ever since I came back to Natal I have been looking forward to meeting Miss Ghey's sister, Mrs Maunsell,⁹⁰ who is living in Durban. Imagine my joy when a telephone call from Durban put me in touch with Mrs Maunsell herself. She and Major Maunsell were coming to Pietermaritzburg and would like to call to see us. We had a most interesting hour with them and time was all too short. They are both delightful. I could see traces of Miss Ghey in Mrs Maunsell. After they left, their visit was more like a dream than an actuality. I hope to see them again before very long.

I had another interesting contact with St Mary's Hall some months ago. I met a Mrs Flook and her two children, a girl and a boy. They live in Bahrein in the Persian Gulf. They had been on leave in England, and were spending a few weeks in Maritzburg with Mrs Flook's mother, whom I happen to know very well. They were then contemplating sending their children to school in England, and told me how very kind Miss Conrady had been, and how pleased they were with all they saw at St Mary's Hall. The difficulty of holidays has, I fear, made them decide to send the children to school in Natal where they have relations.

Miss Smith very kindly sent me the 'Brief History of St Mary's Hall', which I have read and re-read many times. I also read the 'News Letter and School Magazine' with great interest, remembering more names now in the Old Girls' Section than among the present girls. I was so pleased to see how well M.A. Coates has done in the G.C. Examination. I remember her and her sister.

Of myself I have little new to tell you. I still teach, I garden, and I try to play my 'cello. My sister and I have been planting roses. She has bush roses, and mine are all of the polyantha variety.

There is a beautiful Botanical Garden in Maritzburg with many tropical trees. The lotus flowers in the pools were magnificent last summer. I wish you could see them. Maritzburg is known as the 'City of Flowers'. Azaleas are being planted along all the main roads leading to the city.

Our kind editor, Miss Baron, will be glad to receive my letter both earlier and shorter, so I will stop before I transgress.

90 The copy of the magazine I have seen appears to say 'Mannsell' but Dorothy Gladys Ghey (sister of SMH's Head Mistress Fanny Louise Ghey) was married to Frederick Henry Robert Maunsell (1888-1957). He fought in the First World War and was mentioned in despatches. They married in 1917. He retired with the rank of Major in 1933 and died in what was then Southern Rhodesia in 1957.

My love and best wishes,

Yours always affectionately,

HARRIET ROBINSON

Harriet, who mentions the beauty of the jacaranda trees in her 1955 and 1956 letters, was not the only English woman to love them. In her old age the redoubtable Mabel Palmer wrote:

... pawpaw with orange or lemon juice is one of the reasons I am glad I came to Natal. The other is the sight of jacaranda trees in bloom in October. I have one tree in the garden which is a great joy every spring.

That remark is quoted by Sylvia Vietzen in her article *Beyond School: Some developments in higher education in Durban in the 1920s and the influence of Mabel Palmer*.⁹¹ She brought with her, writes Vietzen, 'the forces of liberal humanism, Fabian socialism, W.E.A. idealism and feminist militancy' and was 'a little too energetic for main-line liberals like C.T. Loram'. Mabel Palmer, born in England in 1876, was not typical of her age and sex but when she writes 'of her longing to ride a bicycle, march in a procession and enter Parliament' one is reminded of how constricted the life chances of women were in the period just before Harriet's. 'Yet (Mabel) entered Glasgow University in 1893, one year after it was opened to women, and graduated with her M.A. in 1900, winning the University silver medal for the best essay in philosophy, the medal and prize for the most distinguished arts graduate of the year and a fellowship to the London School of Economics'. But Vietzen reminds us that sisterhood has always had its limits:

It was at a meeting addressed by Mabel early in 1915 that no less a personage than Virginia Woolf saw fit to join the Fabian Society. Not that she was impressed by Mabel who, she wrote, "drivelled at length about Peace - I could understand, always, and confute generally, all that she said; so that I think it must have been very bad."⁹²

There is no evidence that Harriet was remotely like Mabel Palmer but they would surely have agreed on the importance of promoting the education of women. It is also clear from the things that I have quoted from her letters and speeches that she believed strongly that a good education could enable young women to make their mark in the modern world. We have seen, too, that her Christian faith was strong and that she believed that faith had ethical implications. On 17 June 1949, in her last Headmistress's Report for Founder's Day at St Mary Hall she said several things which help us to get a sense of her beliefs:

It is a great thing to be enthusiastic about something. One meets so many young people now-a-days, keen on nothing at all, just drifting, having no idea what they want to do with their existence.

Later, speaking of progress made in the Physical Training side of school life she says:

⁹¹ Natalia 14 (1984), Natal Society Foundation 2010.

⁹² Vietzen, *op.cit.* p. 51. The quotation is found in *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, 1977, vol 1, p.26.

Miss Lindley has no time for slipshod, careless, half-hearted work either in the gymnasium or on the playing field. She is working hard, together with the rest of the Staff, to instil into the children the belief that if a thing is worth doing at all it is worth doing well. The going is hard for us all, but the goal is worth achieving, and we shall win through in the end.

Her Report ends with some thoughts about the future:

To be responsible for a big school is one of the most absorbing and exhilarating things a woman can do – at least so it has always seemed to me – for it demands the utmost one can give all the time, and then leaves one with an acute sense of one's own inadequacy. The joy of it is that one can continually start afresh, hoping to avoid the mistakes of yesterday, and one can never quite lose one's own enthusiasm when working with high-spirited, vigorous, youth.

The boys and girls in our schools to-day are the heirs of the ages, and they must also be the builders of the future. In our plans for the coming day we shall remember that, with the School, the Church and the home have, or should have, their part. And we should ask more from the homes, and should cease to assume one by one, the functions which the thoughtless, or the ignorant, or the indifferent parent lets drop.

We want the next generation to be wiser, broader in outlook and in sympathy, stronger in faith than our own. The schools must produce women, citizens, with a highly developed sense of social responsibility, with intelligence, with conscience and will, deliberately trained to meet new conditions, with a standard of values, and a balanced outlook, far greater than that demanded of women in the past.

She concludes by quoting someone who would not be everyone's first choice of educational guru in Britain today:

'If I were a dictator', he said, 'I would lay down as a programme of principles for the new education; the building up of individual personality, the encouragement of imagination, not of memory; the feeding of the young mind with interest, ideals, and the joy of life, avoiding repressions; the cultivating of a love of Truth, a broad outlook, and objectiveness; a thorough grounding in fundamentals, leaving details to reference books; and the principles of Holism, namely that in this universe we are all members one of another, and that selfishness is the grand refusal and denial of life'.

The reference to Holism perhaps provides the clue that the quotation was from Field Marshal Jan Smuts (1870-1950). An assessment of Smuts lies outside the scope of this paper⁹³ but Harriet's evident approval of his educational philosophy raises a

93 The child of Afrikaaner farmers Smuts was intellectually brilliant (Double First from Cambridge), a military leader fighting against the British in the Boer War and for the British in the First and Second World Wars, a statesman and a politician. It has been claimed that, had Churchill been killed during the Second World War, Smuts might have been proposed as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Although his statue stands in Parliament Square I suspect that little is known about him by most people in Britain. I also think that there is remarkably little knowledge of the South African wars – unlike the First World War. Lucy Ellis, a distant relative of mine, has told me the extraordinary story of her great grandfather's family. *The Graphic* of 7 April 1900 carried the story of six of his brothers who enlisted in the 3rd Middlesex Imperial Yeomanry. The parents received letters from Buckingham Palace ('The Queen trusts that the six brothers, who have shown such excellent spirit in all joining the same regiment for service in South Africa, may all be spared to return in safety at the end of the war') and Cardinal Vaughan ('To give six soldiers is [the] next best thing to giving six priests to God's service'). Lucy told me that her great great grandmother bore nine sons and four daughters between 1869 and 1883. The

more fundamental question. Given that South Africa was so important to her, what did Harriet think about the politics of that country? We have noted that Professor Sneddon, who was chosen to give the address at the Memorial Service for Harriet, thought it important to teach non-white students who were not allowed to attend all-white institutions. Whilst not providing direct evidence of Harriet's views I like to think that the humane values which she sought to inculcate in her girls enabled some of them to play a part in the movement towards a multiracial South Africa.⁹⁴ Professor Sneddon's address was given in May 1962 – just two years after the Sharpeville Massacre. The 1954 *SMH Magazine* contains an item headed 'News from South Africa' in which Winnie Banks says:

*This really lovely country, so richly endowed with climate and mineral wealth, is in a very sad state just now, with racial bitterness between the white races, and worse still, the unjust and un-Christian colour bar. But we just have to go on doing the best we can, and there are bright spots to cheer us up, particularly the good stand being made by the Anglican Church, and in particular, the most devoted work of the Community of the Resurrection.*⁹⁵

The following year the Community recalled Trevor Huddleston to England and in 1956 he published *Naught for your Comfort*, which introduced many people to the realities of South Africa. Nelson Mandela believed that 'No white person has done more for South Africa than Trevor Huddleston'. Desmond Tutu and David Sheppard, with whom I worked closely in the 1990s, were also much influenced by Trevor.⁹⁶ When Desmond Tutu contracted TB as a child:

*Trevor drove him to hospital and visited him mostly once a week over the twenty months he was in hospital. Desmond wrote: 'What this said to me, a Township urchin, about caring, about gentleness, about being made to feel you really counted, is more than I can put into words. Maybe I hoped to emulate him one day. His affection helped me to exorcise a likely bitterness against and hatred of whites and made my future ministry more possible.'*⁹⁷

David's role, as a well-known cricketer, in opposing apartheid – after Sharpeville and then, in 1968, at the time of the D'Oliveira Affair - was important though it cost him some friendships (including that of P.B.H. May who had been a close friend at

eldest girl volunteered to work for the Red Cross in South Africa. All but one of the six soldiers returned home – Gerald died, aged 23, a year after *The Graphic* article was published.

94 Smuts himself believed in racial segregation and it is a matter of debate whether he would have approved of full-fledged apartheid.

95 I presume Winnie Banks was the 13 year old Winifred Banks enumerated at St Mary's Hall in the 1911 Census so was at the school long before Harriet's time. However the views Winnie expressed in 1954 and her firm Anglican convictions may suggest that Harriet's values were a firm part of the tradition of SMH.

96 See David Sheppard, *Steps along Hope Street*, 2002. I treasure the copy he gave me which is inscribed '... with great thankfulness for the steps along Hope Street that we've shared'. He chaired the Church of England's Board for Social Responsibility (1991-1996) when I was its General Secretary. Trevor also made a deep impression on Fr Ken Leech who worked for Board on racial justice issues in the 1980s. In 1956, as a teenager from a non-religious family, he heard Trevor denouncing apartheid and this convinced him, he later said, that 'if this faith could drive this man to oppose racism with such passion, perhaps it could drive me too'. Ken died just as I was completing this paper.

97 David Sheppard, *ibid.*, p. 143. The Tutu quotation is from his Foreword to Eric James' 1999 Huddleston Lecture. The text of the lecture is reprinted as 'Trevor Huddleston from a biographer's chair' in Eric James, *The House of My Friends*, 2003. Eric was the last Director of Christian Action and an important influence on my life. He started to write Trevor's biography but the task was later given to Piers McGrandle; see his *Trevor Huddleston: Turbulent Priest*, 2004.

Cambridge) and required great courage.⁹⁸ The last time I saw Trevor was on 7 December 1996 – he seemed very frail as he got out of a taxi to attend a Service of Thanksgiving for 50 years of Christian Action at which Diana (the widow of Canon John) Collins spoke. An extract from *Naught for your Comfort* was printed in the Order of Service of Thanksgiving for the life and work of Archbishop Huddleston which I attended at Westminster Abbey on 29 July 1998.

In the 1956 *SMH News Letter* Winnie Banks shows that things had not improved although she now acknowledged the scale of the challenge which would have faced any government:

About our difficulties here in South Africa; the Nationalist Government's policies of racial discrimination not only towards the non-Europeans but to the English-speaking section, makes us all ashamed, and the Anglican Church is a focal point of their hatred. Maude (Hudson) and I are both members of the Fraternity of the Resurrection attached to Father Huddleston's Community and know him well. All that he says in his book is true; but it is also true that for any Government there is a terrific problem – ten million natives needing education and housing, etc., and only two and a half million whites, but it is the attitude of the Afrikaner Nationalists that is wrong.

It is likely that Harriet held similar views – not radical but liberal and convinced that education was the key to social and economic progress for all communities. Evidence for this can be found in her letter in the 1953 issue of *The St Mary's Hall News Letter* which reads, in part, rather like an article from the *National Geographic* magazine of the period:

*Pietermaritzburg,
November 1953*

My Dear Friends,

A whole year has passed: how can I tell you in half a page of all the interesting things I have done since last I wrote? I have been very busy. As a member of the National Council of Women, I was asked to be Convenor of the Education Sub-Committee. This has brought me into touch with many interesting people, especially as Headquarters requested us to spend three months on Bantu education. As part of this work, I arranged for our members to visit the native township of Edendale, about 4 miles out of Maritzburg. We spent the morning in two of the Nursery Schools, watching the 2 to 5-year-old native children, boys and girls, at their daily occupations. They change into school uniform as soon as they get to school – cotton shorts and little loose shirts. Boys and girls wear the same uniform, and since the hair of them all is short and curly I could not distinguish the boys from the girls! They all looked very happy, sitting on the floor and so good. Their percussion band, led by their own conductors, was one of the highlights of our visit. These little children have quite prodigious memories, and have a repertoire of about 50 songs. The Bantu people

⁹⁸ David told me that when he later invited May to meet him Peter replied: 'I don't think we have anything to talk about'. I grew up in Surrey and May was one of my cricket heroes - he was part of the extraordinary Surrey side which won the County Championship seven years in a row under Stuart Surridge (1952-56) and May (1957-58). I still have the Surrey team autographs I obtained on 11 September 1956 (the only time I saw Peter May play) when Surrey played 'The Rest' at the Oval. South Africa had toured England the previous year but would not tour again until 1994 when the international ban was rescinded.

have a natural sense of rhythm, which was very noticeable, even in these little children in their singing and dancing. One notices it, too, in the streets of Pietermaritzburg when the house-boys are off duty. With a guitar slung across their shoulders, they play as they walk along. Another day my sister and I went out to the model village of Sobantu to see the school of weaving.⁹⁹ It is a beautiful little village financed by the Pietermaritzburg Municipality, and occupied entirely by natives, who are housed in pretty little red brick houses, each with its little garden. In the weaving school there were about 30 native women, with an English instructress trained at the London School of Weaving.¹⁰⁰ The native women do everything, from washing the raw wool to the finished article. They spin, dye and weave the wool. They make beautiful, bright travelling rugs, scarves, shawls, table mats, floor rugs, in the most lovely colours. Some of the mats have fascinating designs of South African wild animals. All the work is for sale, rather expensive, but good.

I have been teaching since July, three mornings a week, at St Anne's Diocesan College, where, as in most schools in South Africa, there is a shortage of staff.¹⁰¹ St Anne's is entirely a boarding school, beautifully situated, high up amongst the Natal Hills, about six miles out of Pietermaritzburg. I am enjoying the work very much and I expect I shall continue until a resident staff arrives from England.

After giving other bits of news she concludes in a familiar style:

I am practising my 'cello whenever I get the chance, and one evening a week I join a small orchestra at the home of one of my old Durban Girls' College pupils, who is a very successful teacher of the violin.

Maritzburg is blue with the hare-bell blue flowers of the jacaranda trees, now in full bloom. There are avenue of them in many of the streets. Some of the old full-grown trees meet overhead, forming a perfectly lovely blue archway, and everywhere one walks on a carpet of heavenly blue.

99 Presumably the Marjorie Pope Ellis School of Weaving. Work with this label sometimes appears on e-Bay and in May 2014 the entire contents of the Schreiner Estate in Parktown, Johannesburg, were auctioned – the Catalogue included Lot 370c 'African Wall Hanging, Marjorie Pope Ellis School of Weaving'. The Schreiner family included William, Prime Minister of the Cape, and Olive the author of *Story of an African Farm* and an influential feminist and socialist.

100 I have been unable to discover much information about the London School of Weaving other than that it was established by Miss Katherine Grasett in 1898 and seems to have closed in 1970. At one time its premises were at 13 Old Cavendish Street. *The British Journal of Nursing* reported in 1922 that a nurse who had trained at the School had received 'a very good appointment' under a Government scheme as a teacher of handicrafts in one of the Colonies.

101 I have already quoted from Harriet's 1954 Letter in which she refers to the College. St Anne's was founded in 1877 by Bishop William Macrorie and Miss Cresswell. Macrorie was installed as first Bishop of Maritzburg by Bishop Robert Gray of Cape Town after the latter had failed to remove Bishop Colenso from his office of Bishop of Natal. Gray had sacked him in 1863 but Colenso appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council which ruled that the Bishop of Cape Town had no coercive jurisdiction and no authority to interfere with the Bishop of Natal. Since the charge of heresy remained unproven the first Lambeth Conference was convened in 1867 to address (or fail to address) the questions left unanswered by the Privy Council. Colenso had created panic in the ranks because of his views on Biblical Criticism, his friendship with members of the Zulu Royal Family and his advocacy of native African rights. The present Archbishop of Canterbury, who also struggles with the questions left unanswered by the first Lambeth Conference, is distantly related to Colenso. Justin Welby's great grandfather, Sir Montagu Butler, was the great nephew of Bishop Colenso. (Sir Montagu was also the father of 'Rab' Butler, later Lord Butler of Saffron Walden). Since 1867 Lambeth Conferences have normally been held every ten years (except when the two World Wars led to their postponement). When media reports suggested the 2018 Conference had been cancelled Archbishop Welby said, rather crisply, 'As it hasn't been called, it can't have been cancelled'. (Interview on BBC *Sunday Programme*, 5 October 2014).

My love to you all,

Yours always affectionately,

HARRIET ROBINSON

Harriet's response to what she saw in Sobantu can be seen as symptomatic of the complexity of South African history and the difficulty – for an outsider – of fully understanding it. Writing in 2006 Sue Derwent's guide book¹⁰² notes that many of the original cottages in the village are still standing. They were built in 1924 after the Pietermaritzburg City Council, which had been unsure as to how to provide accommodation for black urban workers, decided to create a 'model village'. The settlement was named Sobantu, which was the Zulu name of William Colenso, first Bishop of Natal, who had established his home and mission station nearby. The name, she tells us, means 'father of the people' and is a mark of the respect and affection in which Bishop Colenso was held by the Zulu people. In 1956 the government decided to relocate Sobantu, but the move never took place. Despite increasing tensions, Sobantu was considered a model village and it came as a shock to Pietermaritzburg's white residents when riots broke out there in August 1959 – six years after Harriet's visit.

I have not found a precise date for Harriet's return to England. In the 1958 St Mary's Hall Association *News Letter* the editor says that Harriet had written in October to say that she felt it was time to cease sending a special letter.¹⁰³ The editor reports that:

She says she has retired from her school work and has been doing all sorts of things at home, in the house and in the garden, and enjoying the freedom of no more examination papers to correct. Her sister, who is not very strong, is glad to have her at home, and so is Miss Willis. She does a great deal of 'chauffeur' for them both, shopping, and so on.....She hoped that the SMH Founder's Day was a happy one, and would have loved to have been there.

102 *KwaZulu-Natal Heritage Sites: A Guide to some Great Places*. My description of Sobantu is taken from the book. Derwent says that the village 'is now a sprawling township'. Some writers have taken a highly critical view, see for example Clive J Napier and Phil Mtinkulu, *Pietermaritzburg's Sobantu Village: a case study of control and violence in a Natal township*, 1989.

103 The 1958 issue also contains news that two Founder's Memorial Scholarships worth £150 p.a. have been established – one of them given by the Trustees of the late W. J. Yapp – and it is explained that 'Margaret Howard helped to interest Canon Hudson, one of the Trustees of the Yapp Trust'. I have written a separate paper about Cyril Edward Hudson (1888-1960) who was a Canon of St Alban's Cathedral. He married Mary Yapp, the daughter of William Johnston Yapp, in 1916. W J Yapp was originally in the boot-making business but in 1894 bought the Carreras cigarette company and became immensely wealthy. Margaret Howard might well have known Canon Hudson through the Cathedral although when she died her funeral was conducted by the Rev Richard Gill, the Vicar of St Paul's in St Albans. See Annex 2 for a further note about Miss Howard's family. It is also possible that Canon Hudson knew of St Mary's Hall through Bishop Bell who, as Acting Chairman after Lt Col A C Elliott became ill, did a great deal to assist the re-opening of the school after the War. A Chichester Diocesan School was planned for 17-21 July and it was reported that Canon Hudson, the Secretary of the Teaching Church Group, had organised a course of five lectures and that Bishop Bell would speak on 'The Conflict in the German Evangelical Church'. See *Sussex Express*, 22 June 1934.

The Final Years

I am not sure if 'at home' meant Bewdley or Durban but think it more likely that Mary Ann had already returned to England and that Harriet and Miss Willis had joined her there. This seems to be confirmed by the Linnean Society obituary which says: 'Some two or three years ago', (so about 1959), 'her health continuing to deteriorate, she left South Africa for the last time and joined her sister in Bewdley, where she died last year'. At the time of her death on 14 April 1962 she was in Blakebrook Hospital, Kidderminster, with her address being given as 42, Stourport Road, Bewdley. The cause of death is given as:

- 1a Myocardial degeneration and
- 1b Senility.

Her death was registered by G. S. Lawrence which may suggest that Mary Ann was not well enough to carry out this task.¹⁰⁴ Surprisingly, I think, for someone as efficient and organised as Harriet, she died intestate. On 14 June Letters of Administration were granted to Mary Ann 'the lawful sister of the whole blood of the said intestate, the only person entitled to her estate'. The gross value of the estate was £10,033.17s.8d.

Over the years many people had tried to sum up Harriet's philosophy of life. Joyce Wrinch-Schultz suggests that it may be found in *A Knight's Prayer* which, in her own handwriting, was the last Christmas card she sent to Margaret Christison (Headmistress of DGC 1957-77) a few months before she died:

My Lord, I am ready on the threshold of this new day, to go forth armed with thy power, seeking adventure on the high road, to right wrong, to overcome evil, to suffer wounds and endure pain if need be, but in all things to serve thee bravely, faithfully, joyfully, that at the end of the day's labour when I am kneeling for Thy blessing, Thou mayest find no blot upon my shield.

Mary Ann, who had suffered from ill-health for many years, died on 21 March 1963. Her death certificate shows that, like Harriet, she had been a school teacher although to find out where or when would require another paper! Her address was still Chaseley, 42 Stourport Road, Bewdley but she died in The Nursing Home, Marlpool Lane, Kidderminster.¹⁰⁵ The causes of death, once again certified by Dr Lawrence, were given as:

- 1a Cardiosclerosis and
- 1b Thyrotoxicosis.

As I understand it the former is a hardening of the heart caused by the development of fibrous tissue in the heart muscle. The latter, sometimes called hyperthyroidism, occurs because the thyroid gland is over-productive. It is much more common in

¹⁰⁴ George Smith Lawrence (medical practitioner) and Robert Mark Thursfield (solicitor) were granted Probate to Mary Ann's Will after she died the following year. On Harriet's death certificate Dr Lawrence's name is followed by the words 'causing body to be buried'. I had not come across this formulation before but it simply means 'the person who made the funeral arrangements' and the wording stems from the legislation governing the Registration of Deaths. His address is given as Abbotsford, Bewdley.

¹⁰⁵ This may be the same building as today's Bryden House Care Home.

women and its many unpleasant symptoms can include rapid heart rate which may also be irregular.¹⁰⁶

Harriet is buried in the churchyard of St Mary's Wribbenall with her parents and her sister. The gravestone is inscribed with their dates of birth and death:

Joseph Robinson of Rosenhurst, Bewdley, born Dec 28 1850, died Jan 21 1927
Mary Ann, wife of Joseph Robinson, born May 11 1853, called to rest Aug 10, 1917
Harriet M S Robinson died April 13 1962
*Mary A L Robinson died March 21 1963*¹⁰⁷

With Mary Ann's death the line of Skidmores descended from George and his first wife Ann Chance also ended; George's second marriage to Mary Emily Hughes, my great grandmother, produced two children of whom only my grandfather, George Enoch, survived infancy. We cannot know what Harriet Robinson would have made of her mother's half-brother and his descendants. Her primary legacy must be seen in the hundreds of girls whose lives she influenced and inspired as a teacher and Head Mistress both in England and South Africa. But when my son decided to work in Africa and succeeded in establishing a new school in Sierra Leone despite the ravages of the Ebola epidemic I like to think that he brought to the task some of the qualities which I have seen in the life of Harriet Robinson in the course of writing this paper.¹⁰⁸ Joyce Wrinch-Schultz suggests that Harriet summed up her own philosophy in four lines from Browning which she quoted in a farewell message to Durban Girls' College:

*All we have dreamed or willed or hoped of good shall exist;
Not its semblance but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.*¹⁰⁹

106 Students of Skidmore medical history will note that after Enoch Holt Skidmore (my first cousin twice removed) died in Brazil in 1920 it was said 'Heart weakness seemed to run in the Skidmore family'. I had discounted the claim, not least because its source was a manifestly unreliable document written by Mormon missionaries as Enoch's widow neared death in 1955. Elder Leland O Sheets confirmed (letter to me of 21 January 2009) that his colleague at the time, Elder Peterson, had the document which detailed the testimony of Sister Skidmore's servant. Shortly afterwards I succumbed to severe myocarditis and atrial fibrillation. As I was writing the present paper, and noting that Mary and Harriet Robinson suffered from heart disease, my sister told me that she had been diagnosed with a serious heart condition. Perhaps more research is called for!

107 I am grateful to Charles Purcell for this information, e-mail 14 June 2015. Curiously the church's burial registers give Mary Ann's age as 78 although her death certificate gives it correctly as 80. The burial registers show Harriet was buried on 17 April 1962 and Mary Ann on 25 March 1963.

108 For details see *Rising Academy Network* on Facebook.

109 From *Abt Vogler* (1864) quoted in *The Happy Ship*, p. 120. Arthur Symons thought the poem 'the richest, deepest, fullest poem on music in the language'. The verse is also quoted in a sermon on Providence by Dr Andrew McLellan with whom I worked in the 1990s; see Andrew McLellan, *Preaching for These People*, 1997, p. 17. Andrew was Convenor of the Church of Scotland's Church & Nation Committee 1992-96, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 2000, and H M Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland 2002-09.

Annex 1

Miss Willis

When I first read Professor Sneddon's tribute to Harriet Robinson I wondered who Miss Willis was – described as 'her life-long friend'. As I worked through the material I had acquired about Harriet the name of Miss Willis came up quite frequently but I knew next to nothing about her – not even her Christian name. This note sets out what I have since been able to discover about her – some of the material appears in the text of my paper but is reproduced here for ease of reference.

Lilian Willis was born on 9 April 1886. She was the second of the eight children of Willie James Willis and Evangeline Saward who survived to adulthood – three other children had died by 1911. The family lived in Theydon Garnon in the Epping Forest district of Essex. Willie was a farmer and presumably a successful one because Probate records show that when he died in 1938 his Effects were valued at over £20,000.

Lilian studied at West Ham High School for Girls from 1896 to 1904 – now the Sarah Bonnell School – which has a fascinating history. Every year, the website notes, Sarah Bonnell's birthday is celebrated (with birthday cake for the students) and flowers are taken to her memorial. 'We do this to remember a far-sighted woman who thought it important to educate girls in a time when the idea of equal rights for women was seen as revolutionary'.¹¹⁰ Lilian taught privately in Epping and she studied as an External Student of the Royal Academy of Music in London obtaining her Licentiate in Piano (Teaching) in 1909.¹¹¹ The 1911 Census shows the family at Home Farm, Epping, with Lilian, aged 24, working as a Governess. Three years later, on 21 March 1914, we find her sailing on the *Durham Castle* from Southampton to Cape Town. She was taking up the post of Music Mistress at Durban Ladies' College. She gives South Africa as her country of intended future permanent residence but, as we shall see, she returned to England six years later. She taught at DLC from April 1914 to October 1917. She then moved to the Girls' High School in Queenstown in the Eastern Cape and taught there from October 1917 to April 1919.¹¹² On 29 May 1919 she arrived in Southampton, having sailed on the Union Castle Line's *Llanstephan Castle* from Cape Town, and now gives England as her country of intended future permanent residence. She worked for her Music Teacher's Training Certificate at Streatham Hill High School from September 1919

110 The school's website (sarahbonnell.co.uk) tells us of '237 years of amazing girls'. Founded as a charity school in 1777, after Sarah Bonnell left £3500 in her Will for the setting up of a school for poor girls in West Ham, it was known as Mrs Bonnell's School and had one classroom, one teacher and forty girls. All the uniforms were paid for by the school. The Vicar of West Ham chose which girls would be allowed to attend the school and also the woman teacher who had to be 'of good character'. By 1834 there were 140 pupils. In 1873 the name was changed to West Ham High School for Girls. Over the years the school changed – at one time it was an independent fee-paying school which also admitted boys up to the age of ten. In the 1920s it ceased to be fee-paying and during the Second World War it was evacuated to Brentwood and then Truro. With the 1944 Education Act it became the Sarah Bonnell Grammar School and in 1972 the Sarah Bonnell Comprehensive School.

111 I am grateful to Kathryn Adamson of the Royal Academy of Music and Jenny Lees of WGHS for this information.

112 The school website says that two girls, Gwendoline Berry and her friend Wilhelmina Browne, were admitted to the previously all-boys school in 1875 so this date is celebrated as the Foundation date. 'In 1898 the girls and boys were separated. Miss Agnes Burt was appointed headmistress. She gave the school its motto: Veritas et Virtus. Zealous and strict, she won the admiration and affection of her girls....Her staff regarded her with awe as she appeared very stern'. In 1991 former 'Whites Only' schools were allowed to enrol pupils from other racial groups and the school became, it says, 'one of the pioneers of multiracial schooling'.

until July 1920. It is possible that her time there influenced her later decision to return to South Africa (and Harriet's to join her). Miss Reta Oldham was Headmistress from 1898 to 1923. In her book, *A River Full of Stars*, one of her pupils, Elizabeth Hamilton, described Miss Oldham as small and square. 'Her large head, set low on wide shoulders, gave her a bull-like appearance which was accentuated by the curls resting on her broad forehead, and by a habit when displeased of thrusting her head forward as though about to charge'. She was a truly great teacher, 'a big-hearted woman with interests that extended far beyond the School'. She had a taste for music and the theatre, for women's suffrage and social reform. 'She sat on committees, addressed societies and took a busy part in all that had to do with citizenship'.¹¹³ Among those committees was the Education Committee (which she chaired before the First World War) of the Colonial Intelligence League for Educated Women. As we saw, when discussing the process by which Harriet was appointed Head of Durban Ladies' College, the League became – in 1919 (the same year as Lilian's arrival in Streatham) - the Society for the Oversea Settlement of British Women.¹¹⁴ Joyce Goodman and Zoe Milsom¹¹⁵ show that Miss Oldham was also instrumental in the decision of the Association of Head Mistresses to establish a sub-committee 'to enquire into the openings for educated girls and women in the colonies', for which she framed the Constitution. This sub-committee established a formal relationship with the Committee of Colonial Intelligence, established by members of the British Women's Emigration Association and the South African Colonisation Society.

Having obtained her Music Teacher's Training Certificate Lilian joined the staff of Wolverhampton Girls' High School. She began work on 15 September 1920 and this may have been when she first met Harriet Robinson, who had started teaching there in April 1919. Lilian's Staff Record gives as her 'Subjects for which specially qualified': Pianoforte, Musical Appreciation and Class Singing. Her starting salary was £250 with an annual increment of £15 and rising to a maximum salary of £400. Lilian's date of leaving was technically 31 August 1922 but on 28 July 1922 her name is found on the Passenger List of *SS Edinburgh Castle* sailing from Southampton to Natal; her occupation is given as Music Mistress and England was her country of last permanent residence and South Africa her country of intended future residence. She was returning to teach at the Durban Ladies' College. Two years later Harriet arrived there as Headmistress.

On 13 November 1925, the College historian tells us, there was a musical afternoon 'at which Miss Willis (in charge of music), Miss Willoughby and Miss Elms were soloists. It was Miss Willis who had arranged the first carol service at the school the year before, in aid of the Durban Crèche'.¹¹⁶ The same source tells us that Miss Willis was regarded as 'a highly-strung, hopeless disciplinarian' who was liable, on the slightest pretext, to burst into tears and rush to Miss Robinson for support. But she was clearly a very able musician. She also worked hard to encourage musical

113 Quoted in Josephine Kamm, *Indicative Past: A Hundred Years of the Girls' Public Day School Trust*, 1971.

114 Brian L Blakeley, 'The Society for the Oversea Settlement of British Women and the Problems of Empire Settlement, 1917-1936', *Albion*, vol 20, no 3 (Autumn, 1988), pp 421- 444 offers a valuable account. See too Rosemary Wall, 'Surplus Women' a legacy of World War One?, which also has suggestions for further reading on the subject. See <http://ww1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/?p=2345>

115 The information which follows is taken from their essay 'Performing Reforming and the Category of Age: Empire, Internationalism and Transnationalism in the Career of Reta Oldham, Headmistress', in Tanya Fitzgerald and Elizabeth M Smyth, (eds), *Women Educators, Leaders and Activists: Educational Lives and Networks 1900-1960*, 2014, pp 96-120.

116 Joyce Wrinch-Schultz, *The Happy Ship*, p. 97.

appreciation in her pupils. On March 31, 1931, she took a party of 65 College girls to hear a recital by Madame Galli-Curci in Durban Town Hall.¹¹⁷ Eight days later the girls attended another recital – in the school hall. The singer was Perla Siedle, one of their Old Girls.¹¹⁸

Miss Willis sometimes visited England whilst keeping South Africa as her country of intended future permanent residence (she gives Theydon Garnon as her address in England). For example we find her on the *Llanstephan Castle* sailing from Durban and arriving in London on 24 October 1928, and returning to Durban on the *Balmoral Castle* which left Southampton on 4 January 1929. Her father died in 1938 and the following year – perhaps wanting to visit her siblings - she sailed from Cape Town on the *Dunnottar Castle* which reached London on 24 April 1939 (though she disembarked at Southampton).¹¹⁹

In 1933, when Harriet was appointed Headmistress of Herschel, she arrived at the same time as Lilian – Harriet's first Letter in the school magazine thanks the girls and the Staff 'for the very kind welcome which you gave to me and Miss Willis'. At the start of that year Harriet and Lilian were on the *Winchester Castle* which sailed from Cape Town to Southampton, arriving on 9 January. They returned together on the *Windsor Castle* which left Southampton for Cape Town on 22 April.

The current Herschel website notes that the first Herschel choir was established in 1933 by Miss Willis 'who was an avid supporter of music, and also founded the first music ensemble called "The Bamboo Pipe Players", with pipes made by the girls themselves'. In 1941 Lilian was elected President of The South African Society of Music Teachers. In August 1945 she left Cape Town on the Union Castle Line's *Athlone Castle* giving South Africa as her country of last permanent residence and England as her country of intended future permanent residence.

At some stage after this Lilian took up a post as Music Mistress at the Abbey School in Malvern while Harriet was at St James's School, West Malvern. But by September 1946 when Harriet took up her post as Head Mistress of St Mary Hall, Miss Willis was at her side.¹²⁰ After Harriet's decision to leave St Mary's Lilian sailed with her back to Durban on the *SS Llangibby Castle*, leaving London on 2 October 1951; her address in England was given as 33, The Drive, Loughton in Essex and she planned to remain in South Africa. This clearly represented a change of plan as, three years

117 The Italian Amelita Galli-Curci (1882-1963) was an opera singer whose gramophone records were very popular.

118 Perla Siedle (later Gibson) (1888-1971) became a well-known singer and painter. During the Second World War, when Durban was an important port for Allied shipping sailing to North Africa or the Far East, she became known as the Lady in White. As sailors lined the rail of their ships they saw her singing through a megaphone such numbers as 'There'll always be an England', and 'Land of Hope and Glory'.

119 This had not been the first occasion on which she had received news of a death in the family while she was in South Africa. Two months after she first arrived in the country, in 1914, she had received some particularly tragic news. The *Chelmsford Chronicle* of 19 June reported, under the headline 'Harlow Farmer's Sad Death', that Lilian's Uncle Henry, a widower, had drowned. Six days earlier his son Walter, who suffered from defective eyesight, had been found drowned. Lilian's father gave evidence at the inquest; he had visited his brother the previous day and almost every day the previous week 'owing to his depressed condition'. The jury returned a verdict of 'Suicide during temporary insanity'. Cousin Walter was about three years younger than Lilian.

120 Harriet's Letter to the Girls refers to Miss Willis as 'Secretary' which led me, initially, to think this must refer to a different Miss Willis (see footnote 72), but her report in *The Herschelian* makes clear that it is the same person. Harriet's Head Mistress's Report in 1949 paid tribute to Staff who had helped to re-open the school: 'Miss Willis's organising ability as secretary, Mrs. Cameron's skill in the early days as cook-caterer, Ham the gardener, who single-handed, has made a beautiful garden out of a chaotic wilderness...'

before, in 1948, *The Herschelian* had reported that Miss Willis 'has now retired and is living permanently at her home at 33, the Drive, Loughton, Essex, where Old Herschelians will be always welcome'. This house probably belonged to her sister Catherine as it is the address given when Probate was granted to another sister, Evelyn, in 1953. The article adds that Lilian wrote in May: 'My heart is still at Herschel, and quite the happiest times I have known since I returned to England have been at gatherings of Old Herschelians.' In the *St Mary's Hall News Letter* in December 1949 Harriet reports that 'the School Choir begun by Miss Willis early in 1947 has made great progress, thanks to Miss Wyn's hard work'.

By September 1954 Miss Willis was with Harriet in Pietermaritzburg and her arthritis was very bad – she was in hospital receiving intensive treatment. A year later the warmer weather had led to an improvement but she had suffered greatly over the winter.

Lilian Willis died in Pietermaritzburg in April 1962 – within a week of her dear friend Harriet Robinson.

ANNEX 2

Margaret Howard and Her Family

I noted earlier in the paper that St Mary's Hall had initially been established as a school for the daughters of Church of England clergymen. When I came across the name of Margaret Howard (see footnote 103 on pp. 51 of the paper) I soon discovered the extent to which clergymen dominated her family. Although I do not claim to have identified all her clerical relatives I think the following list is quite remarkable.

Margaret was the daughter of the **Rev Alfred Howard** (1837-1945). He married Edith Bryan (1866-1951) who was the daughter of the **Rev Reginald Guy Bryan** (1819-1912) the formidable Principal of Monkton Combe School, who was the son of **Rev Guy Bryan** (1782-1870). The latter also had a son, the **Rev Guy Bryan (1816-1893)** who was therefore Margaret's great-uncle.

Margaret's paternal grandfather was the **Rev Thomas Henry Howard** (1804-1885).

Alfred had four clerical brothers so Margaret had among her uncles the **Rev Thomas Henry Howard** (1843-1870), the **Rev Stanley Howard** (1850-1883), the **Rev Richard Nelson Howard** (1852-1932) and the **Rev Charles Howard** (1853-1928).

Margaret also had a clerical brother, the **Rev Stanley Reginald Kekewich Howard** (1910-2007) who had a son, the **Rev William Alfred Howard** (born 1947) who is listed in the current *Crockford*.

Perhaps the most distinguished of Margaret's clerical relations was the **Right Reverend William George Peel** (1855-1916) who was the husband of Margaret's Aunt Agneta Jane Bryan.¹²¹ He was born in north India and, after ordination and a curacy in England, did Mission work in India until his appointment as first Bishop of Mombasa in 1899. He died at the age of 61 with the cause of death being given as Enteric (perhaps typhoid) Fever and cardiac failure. He was most famous for having been accused, with the Bishop of Uganda, of heresy. The charge was brought by the Bishop of Zanzibar. The outcome was summarised in the *New York Times's* obituary¹²² of Bishop Peel in a curious foreshadowing of more recent controversies in the Anglican Communion: 'The case came up for consideration before fourteen Bishops of the Anglican Church, at which the Archbishop of Canterbury presided. At that time he said: "Questions have been raised of real and far-reaching importance, and, although such a trial for heresy and schism as has been suggested would in the circumstances be wholly out of place, it is right that these questions should receive deliberate consideration at the hands of those on whom special and central responsibility rests".' The obituarist correctly summarised the controversy as being 'largely one of church discipline' (Bishop Peel had celebrated a Service of Holy Communion in a Presbyterian Church and the sacrament had been given 'to many members of Protestant Bodies whose very existence is hostile to Christ's Holy Church') and involved also the question of high and low church(manship)'. The fullest

121 *The Bath Chronicle* of 5 August 1880 carried a headline 'Double Wedding at Monkton Combe' from which we learn that, two days before, the Rev Reginald Guy Bryan managed to marry off two of his daughters – Agneta to William Peel and Helen to Charles Howard – in a double wedding celebrated in St Michael's Parish Church, Monkton Combe.

122 'Rt. Rev. Wm. G. Peel Dies: Bishop of Mombasa Figured in Famous Kikuyu Heresy Case', *New York Times*, April 16, 1916.

account is found in Bishop Bell's biography of Randall Davidson¹²³ but Christopher Byaruhanga's summary also reads as though it could be applied to modern controversies: 'In April 1915 the Archbishop issued a seventy-page statement named "Kikuyu" in which he showed he was more interested in the preservation of a working unity in the Anglican Communion than in the theological or pastoral issues raised by the Kikuyu controversy.....The Archbishop's judgment satisfied neither Bishop Willis and Bishop Peel nor Bishop Weston'.¹²⁴

Another relation – Margaret's first cousin - who became well known was the **Very Revd Richard Thomas Howard** (1884-1981) who worked in India before returning to England and from 1933 to 1958 was Provost of Coventry Cathedral and was there at the time of the destruction of the old St Michael's in 1940 and the opening of Basil Spence's new Cathedral – the foundation stone was laid by the Queen in 1956 and the Cathedral was consecrated in 1962. Richard was the son of Margaret's uncle Charles.

Margaret Howard is listed as a Life Member of the St Mary's Hall Association in the 1958 *News Letter* and gives her address as Layston, 28 Hamilton Road, St Albans. Her father was Vicar of Layston near Buntingford from 1896 to 1933 so presumably the family moved to St Albans when he retired and named the house (which today simply calls itself '28') after a place of which they had happy memories. There must then have been a sad decline for when Pevsner published his volume on Hertfordshire in 1953 he wrote of Layston: 'St Bartholomew. Derelict at the time of writing'.

Margaret died, aged 81, in Sevenoaks Hospital on 15 June 1976. She was buried on 22 June in the Hatfield Road Cemetery, St Albans, a short distance from where I live. Several other members of her family are also buried there.

123 G.K.A. Bell, *Randall Davidson: Archbishop of Canterbury*, 3rd ed 1952, Chapter XL11 'Kikuyu, 1913-14'. Bell was appointed Chaplain to the Archbishop in 1914 and provides a well-informed and documented account of the controversy. Bell, who devoted so much of his life to international and ecumenical affairs also points out that the Consultative Body met at Lambeth from July 27 to July 31, 1914. On August 4, War was declared.

124 C. Byaruhanga, 2006 entry on Bishop Frank Weston in *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* accessed online, dacb.org