

Madam's Legacy

In a sense every Headmistress leaves the same legacy – her influence for good or ill on a succession of generations of pupils. In Madam's case this was overwhelmingly beneficial. She always thought of the School as a family, and included siblings, parents and teachers as well.

The Old Girls were equally regarded as family, and many of those surviving, not only Madam's death but also that of the School, feel part of that family to this day. Fay (Thompson) Wildey ('48) recalls: "It was a small friendly school, and Madam ensured there was no snobbish competitiveness. We weren't allowed to wear jewellery or have any excess amount of our own clothes to wear in the evenings... At mealtimes we changed tables every week and all ages were mixed up – the table lists were pinned up every week. It was a happy, fairly homely school where one could develop without being pressurised. A school with solid values and a 'live and let live' atmosphere."

These sentiments are echoed by Maggie (Roper) Cousins ('51) who writes: "We learnt how to live with others – to care for each other and avoid small irritations – people have many different skills – not only academic." She writes too about a very special prize; "Once a year we and the staff voted for the person we felt had been the most helpful and good example that year – they were presented with the Arkwright Cup. In many ways it summed up the philosophy of Winceby – an all round education." An important part of Madam's legacy, there were only ever 34 holders of the Arkwright Cup, and 14 of them have contributed to this book.

Gillian (Highwood) Betts ('53) sees herself as a beneficiary of Madam's values and teaching. "I joined the Vth form at 15. They had all been together for three years. They were so nice and so easy and gave me all the help needed in such a very difficult exercise. Worse still for all of us, I was put in a lower form to start with and moved up about half term. This could have been a nightmare but it wasn't at all, a credit to the school and dear Madam I think."

Every pupil will have her own special memories of Madam, and many were summed up in the address at Madam's Memorial Service on 16th May, 1979. It was given by Jennifer (Copeman) Hewitson ('46), Chairman of the School Council at its close, and is reproduced here:

St Paul, Philippians, i 3: *'I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.'*

We have come here today to remember and give thanks for the life of a truly remarkable woman, Winifred Moore Wilson. Some of you, like me, probably find that name 'Winifred Moore' rather unfamiliar, because to us she was, and will always be, 'Madam'. I don't want this afternoon to give you a potted history of the school she founded, or even a brief biography of Madam herself; these facts are well known to many of you already. Rather I would like to share with you some of my memories of a wonderful person who had a great influence on my life, and, I believe on the lives of all her pupils.

I arrived at Winceby at the beginning of the war when it had just moved to Shobdon, and journeyed with it to Knill and Yattendon, and so back to Bexhill. I grew up for nine years under Madam's influence, from the trembling child to whom Madam's voice was far more awe-inspiring than the voice of God, to a situation of comradeship in the Upper Sixth, where if we did not choose to tell her things she didn't need to know, she, for her part, knew very well when to turn a blind eye and assume ignorance of things she probably knew a great deal about. She was essentially a wise woman! Looking back this week at what Madam meant to me, I think two of her greatest qualities were courage and faith, the one inseparable from the other. Founding a school, moving it from Cambridge to Bexhill, building an entire complex from scratch and with very little ready money taking it on its wartime journeys, seeing it destroyed by fire, and returning home after the war with the school doubled in size, was no task for the fainthearted or pessimistic. But whatever the demands of the situation Madam maintained an unflappable exterior, the staff followed suit, and each crisis was to us another happy adventure.

Shobdon: I remember her Scottie dogs, Jock and the uncertain-tempered Mac, the craze for walking on stilts outside the cloisters, an enormous tree we used to climb. I wonder if Madam had any fears about some of the climbs made by the more adventurous spirits. I remember being read to on hot Sunday afternoons under the cedar tree. At Winceby there was always time. Madam had a knack for creating oases of calm in a war stricken country.

Knill: I remember dragging logs off the hills blazing with autumn colours to keep the fires burning (Don't waste opportunities, dears). Trying to tickle trout, getting into trouble after a ducking when some of us tried to float down the river on a door. Howling with laughter at the staff plays, amazed at Madam resplendent as a Bishop, or as an old lady with her teeth blacked out. Madam was a participator. She did

things, and encouraged us to do things too. Knill burned down, but we still started the next term on time, and what organisation that must have taken. But Madam made such friends that everyone hearing our plight wanted to help.

Yattendon: writing in pencil so that no ink blots would go on the floors, a drill display for the village, Joan of Arc with the choir sounding ethereal in the gallery, and Madam's only partially successful attempt to check the customary riot by the rest of the school on Lit. Soc. night, the termly meeting of the Literary Society. I remember lying in a dark corner of the staircase for what seemed like an eternity while Madam patrolled the corridor above. And there is another thing: I don't think Madam ever bore a grudge.

And so back to Bexhill. It was inevitable that the portraits on the dormitory walls left by the army should have been obliterated and we settled down quickly. The major change in routine seemed to be that at Yattendon one got nearer the front of the church as one gained seniority, while here at St Augustine's one moved back. Is this the sort of tradition that leaves the front pews empty for the rest of one's life? What are the pictures of Madam in Bexhill? I see her standing on the beach with a large bell in her hand while the school went swimming; on the saluting base as the Guides marched past on various parades; leading the traditional UV visit to Canterbury and making sure the coach stopped so that we could buy cherries; above all Madam with boundless creative energy producing the annual Shakespeare play at the De La Warr Pavilion. Nothing overawed her. *Twelfth Night* to *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet* to *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice* to *The Tempest*. No-one could ever say that Shakespeare at Winceby was boring.

The school magazine for 1927 had a song commemorating the move to South Cliff when the school was fifteen years old.

Miss Wilson and Madam they built a school, hurrah, hurrah,
Miss Wilson and Madam they built a school
On the edge of a cliff for to keep it cool,
And they all went into the school because the term had begun.

In 1962 Miss Wilson and Madam celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the school – and what a party that was! The following year they retired and three years later economic events and the change in patterns of education forced the school to close. It would have been time, perhaps, for Madam to sit back and rest on her laurels. No way. As President of the Local Association of the Girl Guides, as a moving spirit in interdenominational talks between the local churches, as the driving

force behind the OWA she continued to be interested and interesting. OWs were always made welcome, her memory for family details was fantastic. When I saw her not long before she died she was busy recommending a book I should read and recalling an evening we had had with Professor Dover Wilson in the 1940s.

The school has gone, but the influence Madam had on her pupils remains. An early editorial in the Wincebian said 'It is not, we hope, the school for the woman of one idea; we do not want narrow-minded people here; we want girls to be tolerant, broad-minded, and ready to help where it is needed, cheerfully and with a good grace. Therein lies her memorial, in the people she infected with her ideals, in the service she gave her school, her Church, and her beloved Guides. Truly we can say with St Paul 'I thank my God upon every remembrance.' ”



Madam with 'Mac' at Yattendon Court