

The theme for this meeting was “Educational memories”

Ann recalled how she began her life as Matron at Heathfield Boarding School, just outside Kidderminster. Looking back she wonders how she got the job, since her background had been in recruiting but did have experience in psychology if not any nursing qualifications. The headmaster at the time was a rather eccentric gentleman who seemed to take on staff that he thought would just fit in and adapt to the variety of duties to be undertaken.

Heathfield at that time was a small independent school catering for pupils from 3 to 16 years. She was responsible for their overall care, plus dealing with bumps, bruises and any type of sickness. Later on the duties became more of a pastoral role, dealing with teenage problems, family traumas and absentee parents. At times this included serious illnesses and real tragedies when children had to deal with losing a parent. Ann was always busy, as well as being “Mother” to 200 children she took on other roles such as marketing, producing the school prospectus, social media and taking photographs all to help promote the school. It was a large part of her life for 17 years. From reports in old school magazines we heard how much staff, pupils and parents held the past Matrons in such high esteem and were respected by all. We think Ann only decided to retire when pupils started telling her that “you remind me of my Gran” what a lovely compliment!

Anna had attended Holy Trinity Convent School, from the age of 5 years, which is still housed in the same buildings on Birmingham road, Kidderminster.

We heard a brief history of how the nuns came to open a convent school in our town. At the time of Anna starting school, there were many foreign children, orphans and boys up to 7 yrs. It was a fee paying school and much to the relief of Anna’s parents she passed the 11+ exam and was awarded a bursary.

The iconic uniform of the school has changed little over the years, although now it is minus the gloves, summer straw boaters and winter velour hats, but has kept the traditional design of the blazer. Students had to buy their own books, PE kit and pay for extras such as ballet, election and piano lessons. Latin was a compulsory subject. The nun’s characters were very varied, some with a kindly disposition but some who ruled and operated with a fearsome attitude.

Sisters were addressed as Madame, but secretly the pupils seemed to think that they were “penguins on castors” as their feet could not be seen due to the full length black habits worn with the white headress. A practised curtsy was always performed on seeing the Holy Mother.

Some of the nuns acted as teachers whilst others took on domestic duties, but all had one aim in their lives and that was to raise as much money for their African Mission.

The Sisters eventually left the school in 1986 to return to a convent in Bromley.

Of course religious instruction took up a lot of time, but pupils learnt manners, discipline as well as educational subjects, which no doubt benefitted them all in later life.

As if going to school was and is an ordeal for many young people now and in the past, Moira told us about her life for 4 years, when she went to Bristol, West of England University at the age of 50 years old!

At the time she had 2 daughters both at university and a friend had encouraged her to find out what it would be like to give up her full time job as a dental nurse and become a full time student.

On receiving an unconditional offer, that was it, Moira gave up her job, moved from Bath to Bristol and became a “mature” student. The availability of an annual grant and allowance made this possible. Apprehension soon disappeared when she experienced the attitude of the younger 18yr old students. Discussions, a good rapport both in lectures and in the bar was quickly established between those students, the mature ones and the lecturers. The students worked together sharing ideas, thoughts and borrowing others work as a norm. Tutors would spend time with the mature students socially as they were able to benefit from the experiences they were able to bring to university life.

Moira enjoyed the freedom of university life which allowed her to organise her days as she wished, thus putting her in charge of her day and liberating her from a humdrum timed working life. She did not find life difficult and was interested in all the knowledge she collected whilst there. Importantly for her course she learnt how to write an academic essay and the discipline of writing correctly and how to use technology. Moira says it was a lot of fun and she enjoyed it especially as she was not looking to use the experience to further her career. The sense of freedom and working with the younger students was a great experience.

Her course in Humanities majoring in Literacy resulted in a 2 : 1 degree

Another great afternoon all provided by our members' own knowledge and ability!