

THE HOUSE NAMES

Written by Sue James of Sutton High School for publication in the Sutton High School Newsletter

All four House names were chosen by the senior management and the head girls after the head girls petitioned for a house system.

The four chosen women have all had something to do with our school; 3 were pupils, 1 helped set up the Girls' Day School Company.

Starting with the oldest:

Lady Henrietta Stanley, Lady Alderley. Born in 1807 in the reign of George III, she was a formidable woman with rather 'modern' forthright views. 'Plain speaking' was how she was described! Brought up in Florence, she supported nationalism in the form of Italian Unification and the Risorgimento led by Garibaldi but she also had a deep interest in women's education. After the death of her husband she felt able to pursue her interest in this. Her title and the vast funds at her disposal enabled her to be a 'mover and shaker'; i.e. to effect change. She was one of the founders of Girton College Cambridge, the Girls' Day School Company and a Medical College for Women in London. She even wrote an article in support of women's education and presented the prizes for the GDSC students in the Albert Hall in 1894, one year before she died.

Henrietta Stanley thrived on political argument and loved having her large family of ten children, plus grandchildren, around her table, all debating about religious, political and moral issues of the day. The Prime Minister in the middle of the nineteenth century, Lord Palmerston, commented that Henrietta's husband held the government post of chief whip but he held it jointly with Mrs Stanley. I think we know who wore the trousers there! Her descendants were also famous in British history, Henrietta was both the grandmother of both Winston Churchill and Bertrand Russell as well as the great grandmother of the Mitford sisters.

Frances West; born in Worcester Road, Sutton in 1875, during Queen Victoria's reign. She was the first Sutton High student we can find who went to university. Frances was obviously extremely intelligent; she was a Council scholar in 1891 and got an award of £10 a year to help pay the school fees. She left school in 1893 probably meeting Henrietta Stanley at the 1894 prize giving. She began teaching in Swansea before going up to Somerville College in 1897 where she won a Clothmakers' scholarship of £60 a year. Frances achieved a first in Modern History as well as winning an award for writing the best English essay whilst she was there. As she was a woman, she was unable to collect a full degree until 1920; apparently, she was one of the first to apply for her M. A.



Frances West, April 1893

Frances never married but devoted herself to girls' education. It seems that teaching was in her genes. The school registers show that a Mrs West taught pupils in Worcester Road and it is highly likely that this Mrs West was Frances' mother. Her sister, Grace, was a primary teacher who taught and lived with her sister, in Eastbourne. By 1912 Frances was a headmistress in a boarding school in Eastbourne, advertising for pupils in our school magazine. Fees were 100 guineas a year. Her two schools, St Winifred's and, in 1921, Raven's Croft, became recommended schools for girls of fathers who worked in the Raj in India and therefore needed boarding facilities.

One rather interesting story surrounds Frances. For three years she was the tutor of the Maharini of Baroda in India. The daughter of the Maharini then attended St Winifred's School in Eastbourne. Whilst at this school she became friends with two other Indian princesses. Through them she met their brother and fell in love with him. Unfortunately, she was already engaged to another, more high-ranking, prince. The princess insisted on breaking her engagement and she was allowed to marry her love but she had to come to London to do it. One wonders how much Frances was involved in this, especially as at least one of the daughters of this marriage became a pupil at Raven's Croft in the 1930s.

I have spoken to some of Frances' former pupils who remember her as great fun although a stickler for manners and good grammar...very SHS. She was an enthusiast for sport as well as drama, attending school sports days long after she had retired. I found a photo of a young Frances in a school play...very Renaissance woman! Frances served on education

committees in Eastbourne after she retired. She lived until 1969, well into her 90s.

Dora Black was born in 1894, she lived at the Belmont end of the Brighton Road and was one of 3 high achieving sisters who attended our school at the start of the twentieth century. All three appear on the merit boards in the old hall, now the Study. All 3 went to University; the eldest sister Mary was also the head girl but Dora was the brightest. She appears over and over again in the school magazines because she wrote articles most years and also for her academic prowess. Like Frances she won a Council scholarship; she also won a certificate in the Concours French exam in 1910 and the Duirs Prize for French. Not only was she intelligent but she was also a great gymnast. In the 1907 magazine her arm and leg circling was described as excellent! In 1908 she revealed a dramatic streak and had a leading role in Sheridan's 'The Rivals' at school.

The school greatly admired Dora, especially when she learned Latin to Cambridge standard within a term so that she could be admitted to Girton College. Little did the headmistress know what would happen when Dora went up to Girton and met the famous mathematician and philosopher, Bertrand Russell; the grandson of Henrietta Stanley. Dora was an amazing woman but not in the way the school would have known or expected. She did get an MBE for her work helping her father in Washington in the Great War but then she rather went off at a progressive tangent. She visited the Soviet Union just after the Russian Revolution; having to reach the USSR through Sweden as Britain had cut off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Premier, Lenin. She travelled alone and unprotected and ran the risk of being ostracised by British society just for visiting a Communist country. For the rest of her life she remained an admirer of Communism and altered her appearance to emulate Soviet women by shying away from make up and stylish clothes. She was one of the first women to wear shorts in this country! This trait for rebellion against western dress had started at school. In her autobiography, Dora complained about having to wear gloves to school and resolved never to wear white gloves again!

Dora's relationship with Bertrand Russell became legitimised when Dora became pregnant and Bertrand insisted on marrying her despite Dora's aversion to the married state. The marriage foundered when Dora became pregnant with another man's child and Bertrand Russell, despite having a mistress himself, divorced Dora. Despite Dora's antipathy towards marriage she actually married three times, though it would

appear to be true that Bertrand Russell was the love of her life and she never really understood why he divorced her. During their marriage Dora opened Beacon Hill School, a rather avant-garde institution because it had no rules or discipline.

Late in life Dora kept up her radical ideas by becoming a founding member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. She died in 1986 in Cornwall. She wrote many books. Her autobiography, the Tamarisk Tree, includes an account of her time at Sutton.

Phyllis Mudford; the youngest of the four. She was born in 1905 in Egmont Road, Sutton. Her father's profession was described in the school register as 'gentleman'; in other words, he had no need to work. She started school in 1917 at the time of the Russian Revolution that Dora Black was so interested in and, when she left in 1923, she did what any gentleman's daughter would have done, stayed at home and concentrated on her tennis. Phyllis became a great tennis player and her prowess at this game is recorded many times in the school magazines. She was Tennis Captain for the school between 1922 to 23. It was traditional in the school magazine to write a critique of the first team players and Phyllis Mudford is praised because: "she can always be relied upon to play a thoroughly good game". She was also criticised as she "found it difficult to get in her first service through having to curtail her preliminary foot movements". Little did the tennis teacher know she was referring to a champion of the future.

Phyllis won the Ladies Doubles at Wimbledon in 1931, playing with Dorothy Shepherd-Barron. Her achievement was all the more remarkable because she was unseeded. The Daily Telegraph gave much of the credit to Phyllis for winning the deciding third set, comparing her to a "Gibraltar in the siege" a reference to Gibraltar's success in withstanding a year long attack from the Spanish and Americans. Presumably, Phyllis was 'rock-like'! This victory was considered one of the greatest upsets of the inter war years.

A month before her famous victory, Phyllis played an exhibition match at Sutton High to raise money for the new tennis courts, in front of what is now the Hall. She brought with her other tennis names, such as Kitty Godfree who won Wimbledon as a singles champion in 1924 and 1926. The match attracted a large crowd and they raised £592 needed to finish the courts.

Phyllis attracted great publicity when she reached her 100th birthday as she was the oldest surviving Wimbledon champion. She was still living in the house she bought with her husband, Maurice King, and reporters noted how sprightly and well informed she was. Her comment on the difference between the game today and in the 1930s was that: “We used to walk off court with our opponents in a friendly way which doesn’t seem to happen anymore.” This is borne out by a photograph in our archive of Phyllis walking arm in arm with an American opponent after the Wightman cup.