

Alumnae Reunion Lunch 2020

The Headmistress's Address



Welcome to you all on this very special day as we join with women around the world to celebrate **World Women's day**. At the centre of your tables are bunches of Mimosa – not only is this symbolic as the official flower of 'Women's day' but it is also a wonderful symbol for this event.

The yellow colour is of course, very South Hampstead. I am told that yellow has stood for wisdom and intellect throughout the ages. It represents personal power and fulfilment, abundance, courage and self-confidence and it is supposedly full of creative and intellectual energy – qualities in no short supply when in a room full of South Hampstead women.

A quick google told me that Mimosa represents "sensitivity" and is often connected to philosophers or problem solvers – that definitely sounds like a typical South Hampstead Girl. Mimosa is also the flower of reunification and means to "expand" your life whether referring to family, career or adventure. This reunion event is all about expanding our school life and welcoming you here as part of our extended family.

So today is for celebration and we have much to celebrate this year.

Earlier in January we opened this wonderful new Hall. I realise it must be barely recognizable from the shiny new sports hall that Averil created in the 1980's for many of you and even less recognizable from Waterlow House and Martin's Garage that some of you from the 1950's, 60's and 70's will remember.

If you have a moment, do take a look at the archive timeline in the atrium as it may stir some memories for you all of the previous incarnations on this site. I do want to let you into a little secret – under this beautiful floor, the old sports hall markings for netball and badminton remain, and inspired by the graffiti that was once on the petrol pumps at Martin's Garage, our current pupils have 'left their' mark by writing messages to the old Waterlow Hall on the walls. The graffiti includes a Gillian Ayres inspired mural which covers the wall to my left.

So yes, the school does move on and change from what you remember but your history continues to create the foundations on which we build and we are determined that it should do so.

This hall represents much about South Hampstead today. It has been created with the help of you all. We raised £3 million for this project and I am delighted to welcome those of you who took part in our campaign as my guests today. More than 800 people joined the campaign and supported us at wonderful events, like Music in the Garden and the Waterlow Hall Gala Dinner. These events created such a strong feeling of community that we have determined to do more of this sort of thing in the future and I hope you will join us.

Our alumnae 'stood up' as Ambassadors for the project and we opened the hall to gasps of delight from the girls when former SHHS pupil, Helena Bonham Carter and Olivia Colman (the GDST Alumna of the Year), the Queen and Princess Margaret in the Crown no less, joined us as two of our 15 Ribbon Cutters. I was so proud to welcome many of you here today to our gala concert, masterminded by our Director of Music Steve Collisson, and with Alumna Gemma Rosefield performing the Elgar Cello Concerto accompanied by our school orchestra.

I have called the hall 'The jewel at the heart of South Hampstead' and our alumnae community has been very much at the heart of this jewel! Thank you so much for your help.

But, buildings are just buildings, it is what happens in them that is important. Last year, we announced at this event that plans are already afoot for our 150th Anniversary in 2026 and as part of the strategic plan for the school, we intend to double our current bursary provision by that date.

Many of you here today will have attended South Hampstead in the era of the Direct Grant and Assisted Places schemes. You will know just how important these schemes were to creating opportunities and making sure that South Hampstead was a diverse and inclusive community.

We are determined that more students from all backgrounds can have a transformative, life changing education by studying at this school and we are working closely with the GDST to ensure that we can create the funding to ensure this happens.

On this note, I am delighted to announce that the governors and GDST have agreed that any future income that is generated by this wonderful new hall can be invested directly back into our bursary funds.

I want to thank all of you here today who have supported our bursary initiatives in the past, who have donated to our funds, and who have shared your stories for our future campaigns. Can I encourage you to sign up for our bursary consultancy groups next month so that we can be guided and informed by you as we develop our plans for the future in this area and for our 150th Celebrations?

It is good to look to the future but I would be remiss not to include a celebration of the present and the achievements of the school this year.

Last week, in the place of these tables there were exam desks. Scholarship does of course remain at the heart of the school. We were placed among the top ten independent schools in the examinations league tables again this year and I am delighted that 20% of our cohort were offered places at Oxbridge, including one of our new sixth form entry bursary pupils.

This says much about what we aspire to do. At the heart of our curriculum is the idea that school has a critical part to play in opening hearts, minds **and doors** and expanding future opportunities for everyone. New week, we will be holding our Aspirational Futures fair in this hall – and thank you to those of you who have offered your help at this - The fair is just one part of our Futures Programme, as we strive to provide an educational arena that empowers girls to prepare for life and work in this rapidly changing world. Your help in this area over the past year has been invaluable and I thank all of you who have come back to speak to the girls, offered work experience, shared your stories and joined our Rungway Mentoring scheme.

Confidence is a key thing we have to give our girls if they are to thrive in life after school and my personal ambition is to ensure that all our girls will 'stand up and speak out' for what they believe in. This hall is already a hub for performing arts, debate and discussion, academic lectures and events to bring our community together and I have been particularly proud to see it used this year for

- The outstanding performance of Emilia – trailblazing play celebrating female empowerment
- Prof. Alice Roberts from the BBC's coast and Digging for Britain joining our Speaker Series
- Public speaking competitions and success in national competitions
- Welcoming pupils from local state schools to attend our events
- And reunion and celebration events like this one today

You may have been aware from the national press that our girls have been 'standing up and speaking out' about climate change this year. They have inspired me to launch my own initiative - The '365 club' – I've committed to buying no new clothes for 365 days and the girls have made a

variety of their own eco-pledges. The girls are working with staff on 'Project Zero' to ensure that the school is environmentally responsible.

South Hampstead alumna and England cricketer Netta Rheinberg MBE would be delighted to learn that cricket is back at South Hampstead, with a number of our girls selected to represent Camden at the Indoor Cricket Championships this term. Football is also gathering pace as one of key sports, with our Year 7 pupils kicking off the season comprehensive victories against their rivals. The U14 ski squad recently medalled the British Schoolgirls Races in the French Alps while traditional sports like netball go from strength to strength - one of our players has been selected to play for the national GDST squad. And I look forward to this month's Gym & Dance Show, involving 175 girls – one of my annual sporting highlights and a wonderful spectacle of teamwork, agility and enthusiasm.

It is not just our pupils who have been making headlines this year and I wanted to take this opportunity to celebrate the achievements of so many of our alumnae in all areas of life – (Lilah and Sascha Fear are ranked as the UK No1s in senior and junior Ice Dance, Katya Adler was named journalist of the year, Katherine Newton was appointed Queen's Counsel)

I am delighted that one our brilliant former pupils has been nominated for the GDST Alumnae of the Year award this year. Jess Wade (Class of 2007) has been an outstanding spokes-person and advocate for Women in Science. You can read more about her in your programme and can I encourage you all to vote for her – I can think of no better or deserving winner and it would be lovely for a South Hampstead Alumnae to be recognised in this way. (Our sixth form monitors are available to help you place your vote today if you would like to).

And finally I want to celebrate our Staff – it is wonderful to have so many of you here today, including three former headmistresses, Averil Burgess, Jean Scott and Jenny Stephen. Everything that happens at South Hampstead is thanks to the brilliant, hardworking and dedicated staff that have devoted so much time and energy to the school over the years. I am so pleased to welcome you all as my guests today.

I must also at this point thank the staff who have been involved organising this event today – Alex our chef and our catering staff who have given up their Sunday to provide such a wonderful lunch; Jo Coates who has scoured the archive to find materials to prompt your memories and Dr Steve Collisson who has injected his energy and patience into our 'Come and Sing' this morning and produced the concert that will follow.

BUT, today we want to pay particular tribute to a former member of Staff who passed away earlier this year at the age of 95.

Jean Middlemiss was the head of music here at South Hampstead from 1957-72. I worked out that in those 15 years, she would have touched the lives of more than 1,500 girls and that does not include those she taught as a visiting member of the music staff after 1972.

And touch their lives she certainly did, for she was an inspirational teacher and one of those whose influence extends far beyond the classroom. I was lucky enough to meet Jean on several occasions and what struck me was how connected she remained to the school and to all of you. I know there are many of you here today who remember her with such joy and affection. I am particularly delighted to welcome her cousin - Hilary Salter as my guest.

We shared our plans for the Waterlow Hall with Jean at a very early stage. She was such an enthusiast and supporter. Her attitude was never 'why on earth do you need something like that – we always managed before' but was very much 'just think what you could with those talented girls in a hall like that'. Even at the age of 95, she was open to possibilities and opportunities.

Jean is one of the teachers who has her own star in our Galaxy of stars as you enter the building and she would have loved to have seen the finished product. Up until late last year, she was hoping to join our Come and Sing today. We can't think of a more appropriate way to remember and celebrate her contribution to South Hampstead than by dedicating the concert today, performed in our new Waterlow Hall to her memory.

There is one final association that I failed to mention for the Mimosa flower – it represents the celebration of the triumphant life. Before you leave today, please do take a sprig of Mimosa from the centre of your table to remind you of Jean's 'triumphant life', to unite you with women around the world and to celebrate our reunion today.