

MEMORIES OF Esher - Esher Place 1930 - 1936

by Mrs Ripley



There were two Shaftesbury Girls' homes - one in Ealing and the other in Sudbury in Middlesex.

Sudbury Hall was very old, so we girls were at first going to Claremont, but it was found to be too small, so Ealing and Sudbury were amalgamated and both went to Esher Place after the Summer holidays in 1930.

As far as I can remember, there were no houses down the long drive leading from Esher Green to the house, or down the path to Wolsey's Tower.

We had a big playing field behind the right side of the building and there was a field on the other side of the path leading to Wolsey's Tower, where sheep were kept. We used to watch the sheep being sheared.

There were four round rooms - the Head's private sitting room off the main hall, the junior dining room and two bedrooms above. Leading off the hall from the right was a long room with gold tapestry on all the walls which was called the picture gallery. This room faced the terrace at the back, and next to it was the theatre with a stage which you could enter from the picture gallery. The room to the right of the entrance was the staff dining room and sitting room.

Up the main entrance to the right were dormitories for middle school girls, and three staff bedrooms. At one time I slept in the room where Edward VII slept, above the staff dining room. At the end of the corridor were two bathrooms with sunken baths.

To the left of the front entrance downstairs were the girls' dining rooms and the juniors' dining room and kitchen, and the cook and laundry mistress's quarters. The senior girls' bedrooms and bathrooms were above the kitchen end.

On the terrace at the back was a mark where you could stand on a clear day and see Windsor Castle. I remember seeing the airship dipping over the castle in salute.

From the theatre's other door there was a long glass passage which led to a big hall which we called the assembly hall, where we had prize giving, Christmas shows and any other big do's. It was also used as a common room for middle school girls. I believe it had been an indoor tennis court. Above the end of the passage there was another dormitory and two staff bedrooms.

We were never allowed on the lawns at the back - only on rare state occasions. We played on the front driveway. There was a lovely outdoor theatre where we used to do dancing on state visits and prize giving days. There was a lovely rose garden to the left of the tulip tree.

The gardener's cottage was separate off the kitchen end, and there was also a laundry where we used to do all the washing, except sheets. We ironed with flat irons heated on the stove.

We all had jobs to do, from about 12 years of age. In the morning we had to tidy the dormitories and sweep the landings and stairs.

We schooled at Esher Village School, but as there was not enough room for all of us, we had a classroom near the laundry and one down the passage from the kitchen: but no children from the village came to Esher Place to school.

When we left school at 14 years of age, we had two years working in the home - either in the kitchen, laundry, housework, parlour work or waiting on the staff. We had our routine changed every six weeks, and we used to do sewing and mending in the afternoons. I cannot remember our fee - something like 6d a week in the first year and a shilling in the second year.

Before I left in 1936 a lot of houses were built in the drive and some in the field leading to Wolsey's Tower. Some of the playing field was built on too.

Inscription on the main entrance:

Inveni Portum

A haven I have found.



School Song

Written by Judge Dodson

Music by Mr. Montague Phillips - Organist of Esher Church

*1. When Pelham built the mansion great,
That gathers us within,
He saw the stones were truly laid,
He watched the work begin.
So we with daily efforts make
Our small foundations rise,
And may the arches as they grow,
Point upwards to the skys.*

Refrain

*There shall we be in heart and mind
Through all the coming days,
With those who taught us how to love,
And taught our lips to praise.
Oh happy day that led our feet
Where joy and love abound
INVENI PORTUM runs the words,
A haven I have found.*

*2. If Wolsey strode with harassed mind
The paths we race along,
And murmured thoughts of anxious care,
We raise a happy song.
If Howard, Lord of Effingham
Accords his chants to fame,
By faithfulness in little things,
May we not do the same.*

Refrain

*How slow to rise on winters morn
When six o'clock doth sound.
But lazy legs move fast enough
When dinner time comes round.
The glorious games on gravel sweep,
So hard on hands and knees,
Who can be poor who are so rich,
In memories like these.*