

Memories of the School in WW1
by Miss Ellenor Herbert, on her retirement in 1961

In September 1916, during the First World War – my excuse for being in Gordon's College at all – I started my teaching career in Room One, now occupied by Dr Forrest. Room One being definitely not a room "with a view", there was nothing to distract the attention of a teacher. In those days, the teacher's long table, not desk, faced the door; the pupils sat on long benches, not at individual desks; and the room was heated by a hideous black stove, surrounded by a black fender, and supplied with a bucket of coal with which the teacher could keep the home fires burning.

It may surprise boys of the present day to learn that in those days, there was no P.T. or "drill" as it would have been called then, the nearest approach being an occasional route march under one of the masters. Music was not a school subject in 1916 and, as there was not a playing field, the boys found their own "pitches" and a lad who possessed a football was a very popular member of the class.

School was from nine till one in the forenoon (three double periods), and one double period from two-fifteen to ten minutes to four in the afternoon. As there were no facilities for school meals, the boys went home for dinner – as the midday meal was known then – while the country boys had their "piece" or went to relatives or friends. In spite of what educationalists of the present day would consider handicaps, the College produced many outstanding pupils who were to make a name for themselves and the College in academic and other fields.

School did not start with morning Assembly as Gordon's did not have a hall of its own until 1931. There was a time in the "twenties" when we had prayers in the Hall at the back of the Training Centre opposite the historic back gate – on dry days only out of respect for the floor of the hall!

On both sides of the drive were the "tin palaces", rather ghastly places with a peculiar earthy smell. Those on the side where the MacRobert Hall now stands were classrooms; on the other side, some training in war services was given.

Although there was no formal assembly, the Headmaster still knew all the boys. Every day the burly frock-coated figure of Principal Stewart, carrying his top hat and bearing the bi register under his arm, came into each classroom to take the attendance for the day and sometimes he would question the boys on their work.

I find that I have taught eleven members of the present staff, four of whom are Heads of Department, two Governors of the College and once, the inspector who came to one of my classes had once been a pupil in the first class I ever taught. "So the whirligig of time brings its revenges".