



Old Palace of John Whitgift School

Independent Girls' School



Summer 2026

Old Palace Alumnae News

Dear alumnae,

It is now over a year since Old Palace closed its doors as a school as we all knew and loved. It has been a time of adjustment, and I am sure we all miss the chance to return and visit as we have done in the past.

That said, your committee has continued to meet regularly on Zoom and has grown during the year. It now consists of Veronica Barnes, Sophie Filon (treasurer), Liz Forrest (secretary), Hannah Guerin, Joanna Jayarajan, Tracy Lee, Jean Loh (chairperson), Karen Sayers and Karina Thorne. **Our purpose is clear: to keep the Old Palace community connected and to establish legacy projects that preserve the school's history, heritage and spirit for the future.**

Our new website is now fully functional and managed by us, and the alumnae have also taken over maintaining the new database.

We are, however, still unable to contact many of our 'old girls', so you will find an invitation to join the database in the following pages.

In September 2025, we held our first Founders Day service without current pupils. It was very well attended and included many old favourites, not forgetting the school song. Our scratch choir was conducted by Veronica Barnes and accompanied by Marian Holmes on the school piano, now permanently housed in the Minster. We were also fortunate to display a copy of the school song, loaned to us by The Whitgift Foundation, and to use the beautifully refurbished school banner held by the Minster. Refreshments afterwards gave everyone plenty of opportunity to chat and catch up.

In terms of current projects, we are working on creating an oral history archive about our times at Old Palace – please ask for more information after this year's Founder's Day service.

We are also exploring ways of working with Trinity School to support the education and opportunities of girls. We would love to hear your ideas for legacy projects too, so please do get in touch and share your thoughts with us.

At the same time, the committee is establishing links with the new occupiers of the school site and developing links with the Friends of Old Palace, who previously ran tours of the building. We hope to have more to share about this in our next newsletter.

Keep up to date with our latest news through our website and social media, and let us know if you have suggestions for venues where we could hold future events.

Finally, we look forward to seeing many of you at this year's **Founder's Day and AGM on Saturday 26th September.**

Jean Loh, Chair OPA

Follow us on social media:



Choir Appeal

A message from Veronica Barnes, Founders' Day OPA Conductor

Calling all OPA singers, whether Soprano or Alto – or “I don’t know what I am!”

Now is your chance to join the Choir for the next Alumnae Founders' Day Service in September.

Just three pieces – nothing complicated (honest!):

1. **Introit:** *Lift Thine Eyes* – Mendelssohn
2. **Anthem:** *The Lord Bless You and Keep You* – Rutter (two-part version for upper voices)
3. **Seven-fold Amen** – Trad.

All music will be provided – no folders required.

On the day:

Meet at the Minster: **11.50am**

Rehearsal: **12–1.15pm** (bring a packed lunch)

Service: **2–2.50pm**

Dress: **smart, but not black** – it’s too sombre for our happy day!

Please email oldpalacealumnae@gmail.com to receive a link to the music so you can rehearse beforehand if you wish.

We had a wonderful choir last September – let’s keep the tradition of excellent singing by former Old Palace pupils going!

Pro Ecclesia Dei!



Readers Appeal

We would like to involve more alumnae in this year’s Founder’s Day service, and are **looking for volunteers who would be happy to read a prayer.**

Perhaps you remember reading prayers or taking part in services during your own school days?

If you would like to take part, or have a brief memory to share, we would love to hear from you via email:
oldpalacealumnae@gmail.com



Oldest & Youngest

Can you spot the **oldest and youngest Old Girls** at the service? Look out for more information in a future newsletter!

Obituary

Joan's daughter sent us the following news by email:

It is with great sadness that I inform you of my mother's death on 26 October 2025.

She was 95 and lived a very happy and healthy life. She looked back on her time at the Old Palace with great fondness and pride and especially loved the historical building.

Sister Fenella (then Miss Saintsbury) and Sister Mary Ursula were both teachers at that time. Joan particularly enjoyed her English lessons with Miss Chandler who gave her a life long passion for poetry and reading.

When she left school she trained as an SRN and went on to become a District Nurse and Midwife, a vocation she loved.

She married Keith in 1955 and they had two daughters; Claire (me) and Nicola. She gave up nursing to raise her children.

I followed in my mother's footsteps, attending Old Palace (1970–75), when Sister Fenella was headmistress and Sister Mary Ursula school secretary. Both remembered Joan, with her two long plaits!

Joan and I went to the Old Palace Centenary Founders Day Service and Celebrations in 1989 and there were plenty of Joan's classmates present.

In 1983, on Keith's retirement, Keith and Joan moved to Wenhaston, Suffolk where she immersed herself in village life; volunteering and joining local activities.

Her passion for bell ringing lasted nearly thirty years ringing regularly at three local churches and participating in bell ringing tours of the county.

She died peacefully in her sleep at the care home where she'd been living for a couple of years. Keith predeceased her at 92, six years ago. She will be greatly missed by all who knew and loved her.



Joan Johnceline
(née Hoar)
1930-2025

Attended OPS
1941 - 1946

Obituary: Remembering Joan

School Pageant, Old Palace courtyard, 1946



Joan would have been 16 years old here.



She is third from the right in the tableau.



Old Palace
Alumnae

Founders Day Service
Saturday 26 September 2026
2pm at Croydon Minster

Join us after the service to:

Attend the AGM

Meet & mingle with Alumnae

Hear & share school stories

Get involved in OP legacy projects

Please RSVP oldpalacealumnae@gmail.com

Old Palace Senior School Site

This past year has seen the John Whitgift Foundation pass on both the senior school site at Old Palace and the Jubilee Building.

The Jubilee Building and the swimming pool were sold to a new educational charity called **RISE School of Excellence**.

The senior school site was sold to the **Curwen Group** in August last year.

The Group leased it to **Serenity Education Group** who have been running a special educational needs school at Old Palace since September 2025.



Oral History Project

Remembering Old Palace is an oral history project created to capture and preserve the memories of former pupils and staff across the generations.

With the school now closed, it is more important than ever **to record the stories and traditions that made Old Palace such a unique place** – from everyday school life and friendships to special occasions, favourite teachers and memories of the historic buildings. Together, these recollections will help preserve the story of Old Palace for future generations.

We would love to hear from alumnae and former staff of all ages. Memories can be shared in writing or through a recorded interview, with selected reminiscences eventually featuring as audio clips or in online and print publications as part of a lasting ***Old Palace Alumnae Oral History Archive***.

If you have a story to share, please complete [this online form](#).



Memories of the School Bell

The sound of the **Old Palace school bell** will bring back memories for many former pupils.

We would love to compile some of your recollections of the bell – perhaps of hearing it during the school day, ringing it yourself, or a particular occasion when it played a part.

If the school bell holds a special memory for you, please **get in touch** and share your story.

Mentorship Programme

Hannah and Joanna from the alumae Team have been working on a **mentorship programme** to enable former OPS students to be able to advise and mentor other Old Palace girls who are interested in working in the same field.

They have been talking to the heads of Trinity and the Whitgift Foundation in regards to setting up this programme.

We very much want to give girls the opportunity to hear from everyone's successes across so many sectors so that former OPS girls as well as girls and boys at Trinity can **be inspired and achieve their full potential**.





“Buddy” System

Not all Old Palace alumnae use email, social media or the internet, so **please help us make sure nobody misses out.**

This newsletter can be printed and passed on to former classmates and friends who may not receive our news online.

Perhaps you could **become a ‘buddy’ to an Old Girl you know**, keeping her up to date with OPA news and events and helping us stay connected across the generations.

Join the Database

The **Old Palace Alumnae database** is now managed directly by the OPA Committee, and we would love to reconnect with as many of our ‘old girls’ as possible. By **joining the database [here](#)**, you can keep up to date with OPA news and events, reconnect with friends and former classmates, and become part of our growing alumnae network.

We would also love to draw on your memories, ideas and experience as we develop projects to preserve and celebrate the legacy of Old Palace for the future.

Help us grow our network and stay connected by scanning the QR code.



Treasurer's Report

As the Treasurer of the OPA since 1st July 2025, I have been delighted to serve on the committee with my fellow members. We have all felt sadness following the closure of our old school, of course, but **we are working together to keep the OPA going for the benefit of our Alumnae and to preserve our precious heritage and memories.**

Our main event last year was Founder's Day on 27th September 2025. This was well attended and was a joyful, if poignant, occasion. Afterwards, many alumnae gathered to have tea, coffee and biscuits, as well as a catch up with the others attending.

Of course, **Founder's Day is happening again in September**, and we are busy preparing for the big day! After the service and AGM, refreshments will be served again. Last year, many people were kind enough to make donations to our funds in cash or via our new card machine! This year, **we are asking people to make a voluntary donation of at least £5 a head to help us cover our costs**, not only of the refreshments, but also of hiring the Minster and an organist for the service.

We no longer receive any income apart from donations, so these are much appreciated. We hope to put on some **fundraising events during the coming year** and any ideas or offers of help are most welcome.

I will be presenting my report at the AGM and look forward to seeing lots of you on the day. **Don't forget to RSVP!**

Sophie Filon, OPA Treasurer

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Contact us:

oldpalacealumnae@gmail.com

<https://oldpalacealumnae.co.uk>

