

Jean Lister visits Clarendon School, Abergele.

ONE expects a sort of stridency to be inseparable from the young these days, so it was the complete absence of it which impressed me first of all when I visited Clarendon School at St. George, which is just off the North Wales coast road between St. Asaph and Abergele.

The two hundred or so girls there do pretty much what girls do in schools everywhere, but they seem to do it more quietly and with just a little more grace than usual.

Why is this? Certainly not because they are restricted by rules and regulations or are kept down by teachers. There seemed to be a minimum of school rules, and the relations between pupils and teachers were cordial, though not lacking in mutual respect.

It may be that mutual respect is the key to it all. When the headmistress, Miss Sheila Haughton, refers in conversation to her younger pupils as "small people", as she often does, she is being neither whimsical nor patronising. The accent is not on the word "small", but on the word "people" – human beings whose smallness calls for guidance and control but whose rights and personality are inviolable.

Miss Haughton has only been at the school for six years, having come as deputy headmistress to Miss E. G. R. Swain, who retired recently after being at Clarendon for forty-eight years, thirty-five of them as head. She is keeping alive a spirit in the

school which obviously comes as naturally to her as it did to her predecessor – something quietly based on true Christian belief which, though non-sectarian, is positive and enriches every part of school life.

Clarendon started in Malvern in 1898, a tiny school in a converted house. Like Topsy, it grew and grew, and one house after another was taken over to cope with the growing numbers of pupils till they were occupying eleven different houses, with all the inconvenience that such an arrangement inevitably brought in its train.

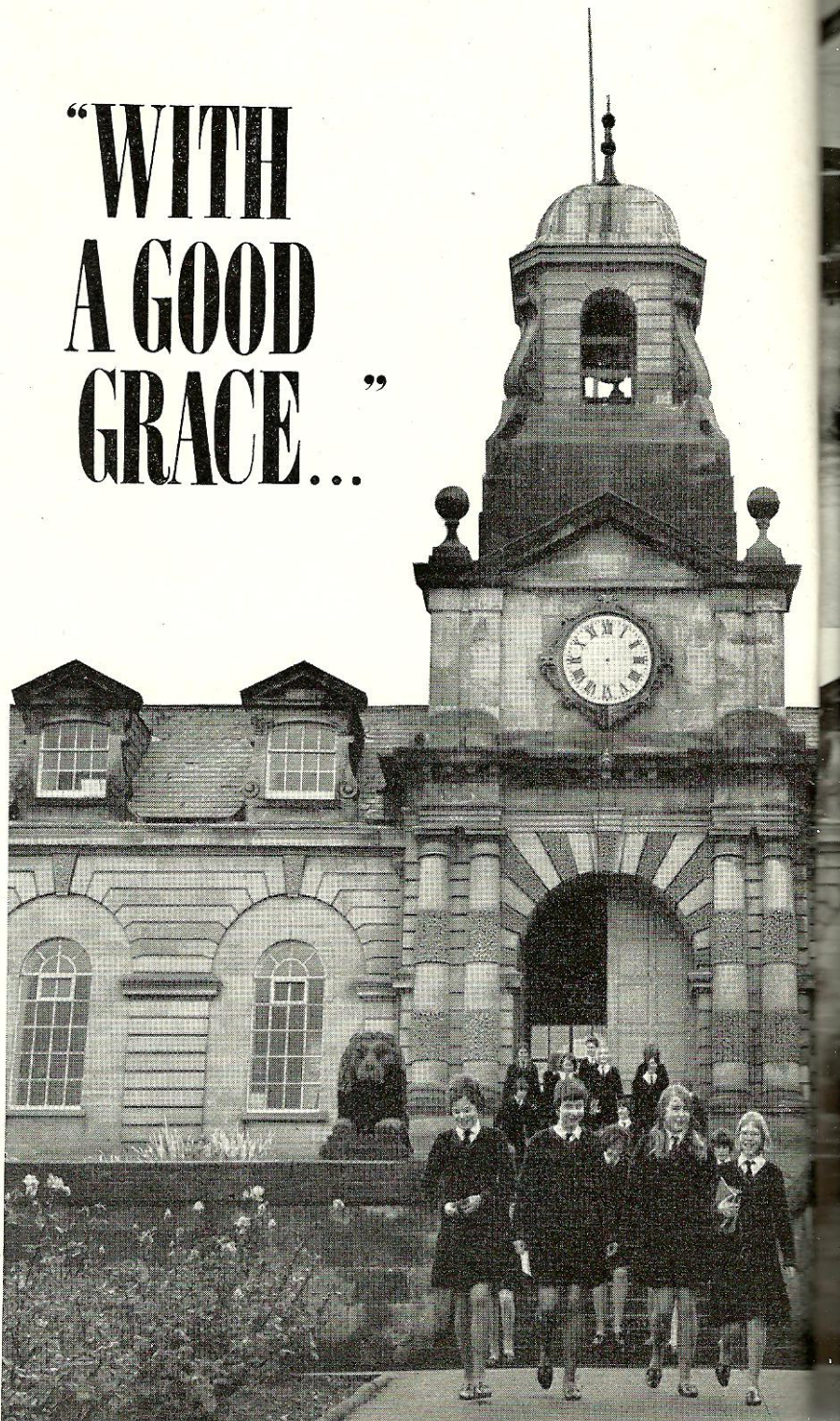
In 1948 it was moved to North Wales, just fifty years after its opening, to the house which was formerly Kimmel Hall, the home of the Dinorben family, in a neighbourhood which, because of its accessibility and good climate (it has a very high sunshine record and a low rainfall), has attracted many independent schools.

It is built on the site of two previous houses (the first was Elizabethan, and its ruins are still in the grounds: while the second, a Georgian house, was burned down more than a hundred years ago, leaving only the handsome stable block which is now converted into classrooms). It is spacious

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"WITH A GOOD GRACE..."

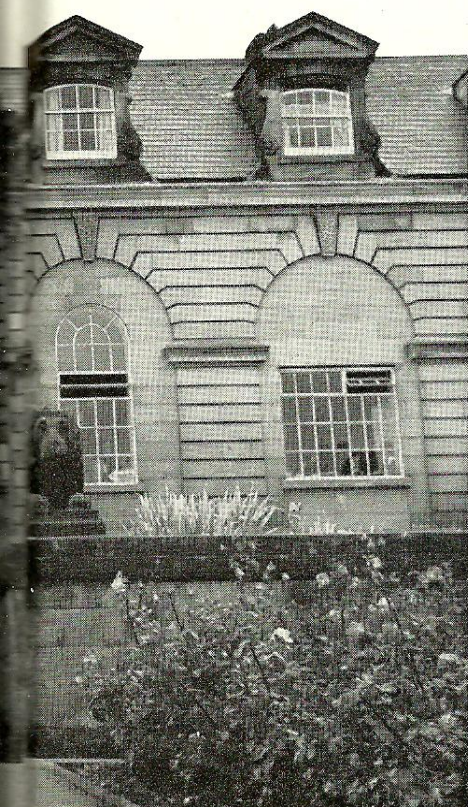
below Children are allowed to have their own small pets at school – partly, says Miss Haughton, because so many of the girls (57 this year) have parents abroad, whom they seldom see. The pets provide the girls with some compensation and an outlet for their affection. In the centre of this group is sixteen-years-old Anne Jarvis, who was the first girl to bring an animal to school.





left Members of the staff and prefects foregather in the drawing room to listen to a piano recital by one of the music mistresses, Miss Olwen Williams.

below In the biology lab. Miss Pat Gill dissects a dogfish and discusses it with a group of senior girls, Margaret Blair, Lim Bee Hong, Christine Ringer and Kathleen Johnston.



In the art room at the top of the stable block, junior girls at work under the tutelage of Miss Margaret Readdy.

left The stable block, now used as classrooms.

WITH A GOOD GRACE *continued*

and beautiful, being regarded as one of the finest buildings in Wales.

It stands in a beautiful park of 300 acres, part of which has now been made into playing fields, commanding views on one side of the coastline and the sea and on the other of rolling Welsh hills, and presenting an incomparable landscape at all times of the year.

It is a pithy reflection of the change in social conditions that when the house was built a hundred years ago, for a family of five, it had forty indoor servants and sixteen gardeners, while now, for two hundred girls and a large staff it has a housekeeper, deputy housekeeper and chef, about half a dozen continental girls who come over to combine study with domestic help, some daily women and only four gardeners and three maintenance men.

Even so it must be one of the best-kept schools in the country, with a beautifully groomed Venetian garden and a drawing room, recently redecorated by Miss Haughton, of quite outstanding beauty.

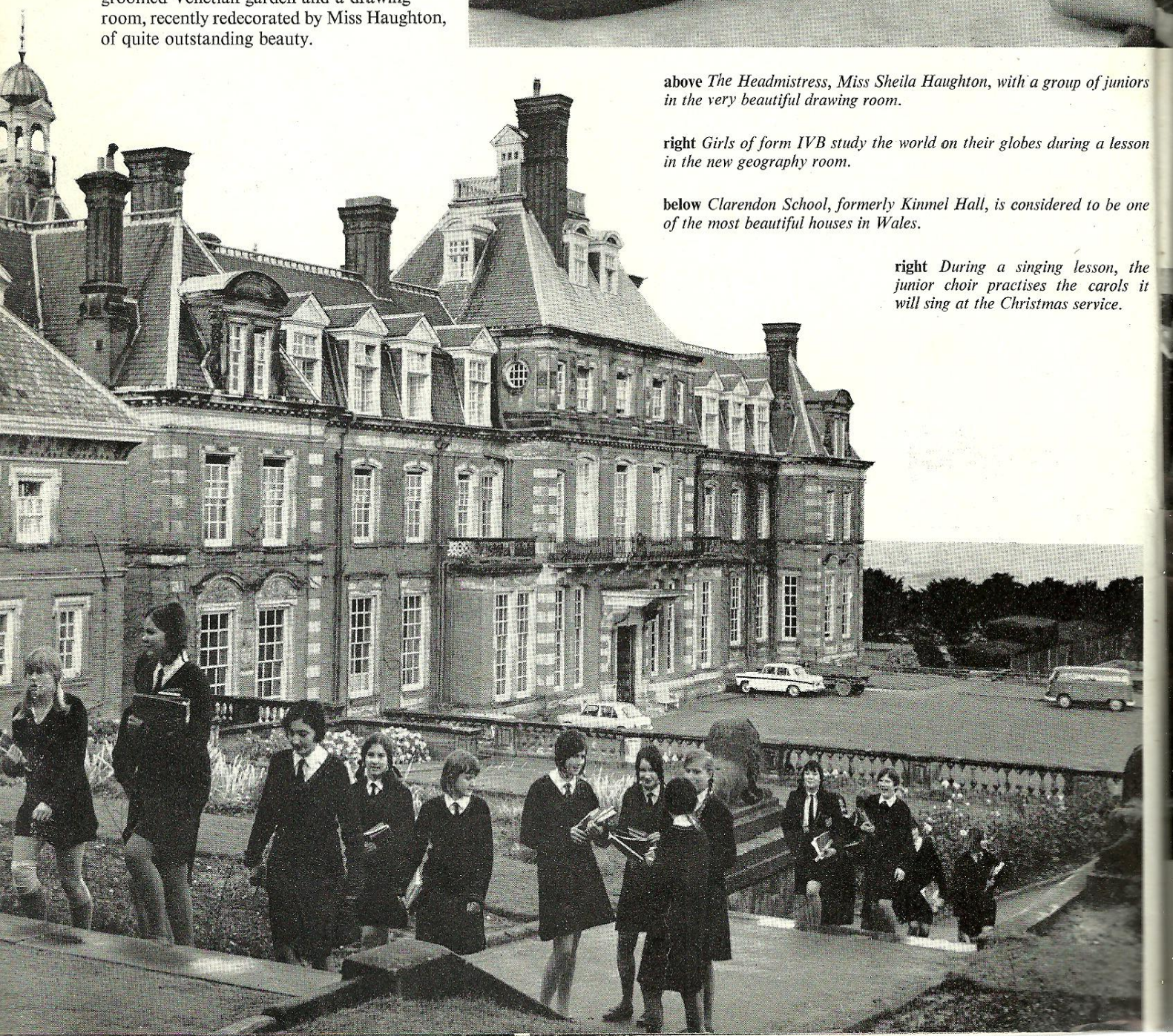


above The Headmistress, Miss Sheila Haughton, with a group of juniors in the very beautiful drawing room.

right Girls of form IVB study the world on their globes during a lesson in the new geography room.

below Clarendon School, formerly Kimmel Hall, is considered to be one of the most beautiful houses in Wales.

right During a singing lesson, the junior choir practises the carols it will sing at the Christmas service.





The orchestra rehearses with Mr. Fred Brough, former leader of the B.B.C. Northern Orchestra and ex-deputy leader of the Hallé.



Girls of the Remove at netball practice.



Apart from the excellence of the house and grounds, which might be said to be largely an accidental bonus from the past, though its maintenance in such good order is very much an achievement of the present, the modernity of the school, in view of its size and independent status, is impressive.

New physics-cum-biology lab, a fine geography room, an open-air swimming pool, and two language booths in the modern language department, all testify to the up-to-dateness of a school where girls can study up to University level with confidence, whether they specialise in arts or science. Incidentally, for several years they have won the senior German and French verse speaking competition sponsored by the North Wales branch of the Modern Languages Association in the area.

Apart from academics, the school has a tremendously high musical tradition, fostering solo and choral singing and instrumental skill with equal enthusiasm. The twenty-five strong orchestra is fortunate in having as its coach and conductor Mr. Fred Brough, former leader

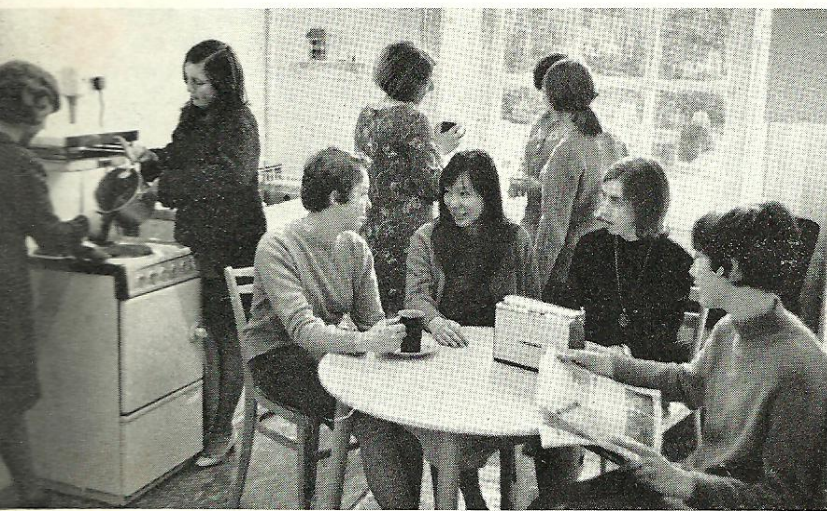
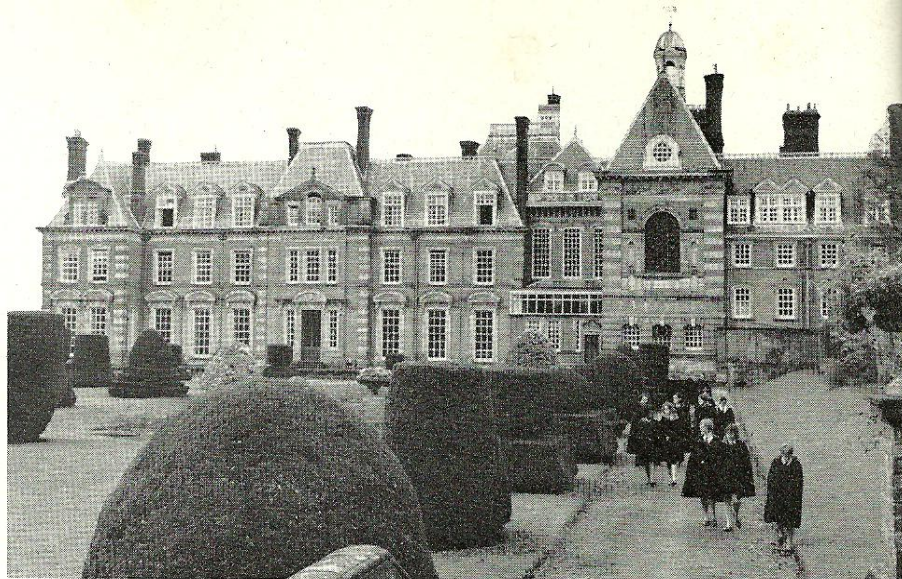
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WITH A GOOD GRACE

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right A view of the west side of the house, showing the Venetian garden.

below Sixth form girls relax in the kitchen in the Sixth form wing. The kitchen was equipped as a leaving gift to the girls by the former headmistress, Miss Swain.



of the B.B.C. Northern Orchestra and ex-deputy leader of the Hallé.

Singing is taken all through the school, and though it is a voluntary subject for the upper sixth form, most of the girls would hate to give it up, even when examinations are pressing hard upon them. This term they are providing some of the soloists and choral singers for Rhyl Music Club's production of the "Christmas Oratorio".

There is a cosmopolitan quality in the school which derives not only from the continental girls who come to study and help, but from the fact that a number of children whose parents are overseas (many of them working as missionaries) attend the school, as well as Americans, Chinese, Malaysians, Persians and Ethiopians (the granddaughters of the Ethiopian royal family have all been pupils).

The girls are given a great deal of freedom to run their own affairs in school, with a School Society for senior girls, split into housecraft, science, geography, astronomy, music, literary and other clubs, a six-form wing which has its own kitchen where the girls can make snacks and drinks independently of the school kitchen, and a lively "Areophagus", where they can debate freely on subjects which they choose for themselves.

They play games well – hockey, netball, badminton, squash and tennis – and swimming is popular in a magnificent open-air heated swimming bath in the summer.

But as I said at the beginning, they seem to work and play alike with a quietness and grace which is all the more attractive because it is so rarely found these days.

left Girls gather in groups in the main corridor to discuss School Society matters during break.

Sixth form girls – Lim Bee Hong, Elizabeth Hughes, Hazel St. John, Janet Capper and Elizabeth Patching – watch their instructor carrying out an experiment in the physics lab.

