

## ***Students' Recollections: 1916 - 1920***

*Students from these early days vividly recalled their stay at the Halls. There were prayers before breakfast. The dining room tables had bowls of fresh flowers on them. The 'high tables' were reserved for the Wardens and their guests. The Hall dances, held once a term, were a particular highlight for the students. Sunday afternoons were formal affairs held in the common rooms, to which friends could be invited.*

*"...remembering the coarse grass which waved high where now is trim turf, the unmade roads, the unnamed hostels, the chaos of trenches, dug-outs, sandbags and barbed-wire entanglements, which in the far-off days of war littered our grounds. So harsh were the hearts of Food Controllers, with whose piles of returns and ration-cards Miss McKnight's early days and nights were made wearisome, that potatoes and beetroot, artichokes and cabbages had to claim all too large a share of our cultivated space.*

*Inside, Buchanan was a little bare though we did not think it so then; we had Miss Melvin's carpet and the Common Room chairs, and all else was serviceable and beautiful in a way we took for granted at first, but which we soon realised as having come from the care and forethought of Miss McKnight. And if bookshelves were more evident than books in our Library, there was a quiet room, with white, black bordered carpet, brave purple curtains, a sketch of gay daffodils in Bedford College garden over the mantelpiece, an oak stool, an armchair, a bureau, and, within black bookcases, a rare wealth of refreshment and learning so gladly extended to the true enquirers. Here were Pater and Ruskin, Henry and William James, Fortescue with his " Little Red Deer," Dorothy Wordsworth's journal, and so many others. Sometimes on Saturday evenings we picked sphagnum moss and sometimes then, and on Sundays, Miss McKnight read us a few of her favourites - Browning, we remember, and Brooke and R. L. S. and (rarest) Mrs Meynell."*

*[M.E.B.]*

*"I think I must have gone up in 1916, only one year after the Hostels (only three) were built ...In 1916 life was very tough and discipline still very strict. In Balfour we had single rooms, each with a coal fire, which was so difficult to light because it was very modern - flat on the hearth - and many a tear was shed by the new girls.*

*Coal was rationed. You put your black, round coal bucket outside your door every other morning, and only by sharing another's rooms and fire could you possibly manage to keep warm. In consequence, we had the dreadful habit of saving, or rather hoarding any pieces of coal, which we might happen to have over, in a cardboard box in our wardrobe. When it was time to go home for the holidays, we all had large saratogas (trunks), which we could leave locked in a box room set aside for this till the next term, and into these went the precious hoard of coal.*

*The stock of coal was stacked at the back of Balfour, and, to prevent anyone stealing a lump, the whole stack was whitewashed over so that any gap would show up. But, if you went to the bottom of the grounds (where Carlyle now stands) and waved to an engine driver, he might throw you out a lump of coal!*

*Social life was very restricted. There was a war on, and we went to the "gods" of the theatre in a sort of crocodile. You couldn't go outside the gates after dinner in the evening without having queued up outside the office in the morning and asked our dear, motherly warden, Mrs Mackenzie's permission.*

*There was great tension round the letter-board especially if a telegram or field postcard appeared, for brothers and sweethearts were "at the front", and a telegram might be exciting news that someone was coming home on leave and would be passing through Edinburgh - or the tragic news that yet another loved one had fallen. Telephones had not come into daily use.*

*If you did get permission to go out with a boy friend, he had to call for you, and be received in a small sitting room opposite the front door, and if it was to a dance, then you were given a key to the front door, which you had to put on the table beside Mrs Mac's bed when you returned. Many an escapade was risked, and the French door into the sitting room could be left just a tiny bit not quite locked to help a late returner creep in."*

[Florence Lumsden, Association Newsletter 1981 – 1982]