

The daily life of

the 19th century pupil at the
Royal Masonic School for Girls



Image drawn by Sheila Donaldson Walters, former pupil, from an original in the *Illustrated London News*

Girls rise in Summer at 6am
Girls rise in Winter at 7am

But for the girls to rise at these times, the staff had to be up before them!

RETURN of all the PERSONS who SLEPT or ABODE in this INE

No Person ABSENT on the Night of Sunday, April 3rd, to be entered here; EXCEPT those TRAVELLING during that night and who ARRIVE on the MORNING OF MONDAY, APRIL 4th.

Write after the Name of the Head of the Institution the names of his Wife, Children and other Relatives; Officers, Visitors, Servants, &c.; and finally the special INMATES.

State whether Wife, Son, Daughter, or other Relative; Visitor, Officer, Servant, &c.; and give the Designation of Inmates.

CONDITION as to MARRIAGE

Write either "Married," "Widower," "Widow," or "Unmarried," opposite the Names of all Persons except Young Children.

AGE

Last Birthday

For Infants under One Year, state the Age in Months, writing "Under 1 Month," "1 Month," "2 Months," &c.

NAME and SURNAME	(1) RELATION to Head of Family--or (2) Position in the Institution	CONDITION as to MARRIAGE	AGE	
			MALES	FEMALES
1. Eliza To J. Wood	Matron	Unmarried		70
2. Sarah Louisa Davis	Head Governess	Unmarried		39
3. Mary Ann Howell	Sub-Matron	Unmarried		44
4. Alice Caroline Finch	Governess	Unmarried		26
5. Emily Redgrave	Asst. Governess	Unmarried		27
6. Ada Ann Wood	Asst. Governess	Unmarried		27
7. Jane Ann Wood	Asst. Governess	Unmarried		28
8. Elizabeth Hutchinson	Asst. Governess	Unmarried		23
9. Maria Louisa Threlkirk	Asst. Matron	Unmarried		22
10. Selina Sheppard	Wk. Mistress	Unmarried		30
11. Sarah Barron	Teacher	Unmarried		31
12. Agnes Ingham	Teacher	Unmarried		19
13. Melora Ingham	Teacher	Unmarried		18
14. Frances Elizabeth Gannon	Pupil Teacher	Unmarried		17
15. Laura Sophia Gannon	Pupil Teacher	Unmarried		16
16. Helena Meacock	Pupil Teacher	Unmarried		16
17. Florence Bruskina	Pupil Teacher	Unmarried		38
18. Sophia Elizabeth	Cook	Unmarried		27
19. Frances Wood	Housemaid	Unmarried		21
20. Annie Wood	Housemaid	Unmarried		20
Total of Males and Females.....				

From the 1881 census, showing some of the staff at the School



The pupils would rise and dress themselves. By 1845, the uniform had changed little from the 1788 original: the blue serge dress - the same: the white apron, with the bib and wide 'collar' - the same.

By 1852, the apron had shortened but remained in proportion to the amount of dress covered as the dress itself had also shortened. Its hem had risen to mid-calf length where it remained for considerable time, regardless of what the skirt lengths did in the external world of fashion. The cape worn for outside walks and the straw bonnet looks remarkably like the one first sported by the 1788 pupils.



No concession was made for even the youngest pupils (8 years old) who were faced with the daily task of donning all the uniform.

Underneath the dress were the black woollen stockings worn throughout the year, regardless of the external temperatures.

And then there were the dreaded 'combinations', which were long-sleeved, long-legged and buttoned up to the throat. In summer, they were cotton, but in winter they were made of wool "which had the consistency of steel wool. They itched, prickled and tingled." Attempting to listen to the sermon in church was difficult because these undergarments itched so much. Ultimately, the chaplain visited the Matron. Quite what was discussed behind closed doors was never revealed, but in future, it was announced, the clean set of combinations would be issued on a Monday, not on a Sunday, in the hope that they would have become more comfortable in time for the sermon.

Morning Prayers in Summer at 7.30am
Morning Prayers in Winter at 8.45am

Breakfast at 8am

in 1877 breakfast comprised bread and butter, washed down by milk and water.

By 1895, tea, coffee or cocoa were added



Background image of sunrise over Wandsworth Common
http://fancyowdecor.blogspot.co.uk/2011_09_01_archive.html



Morning School commenced at 9.30am
Morning school closed at 12.30pm

This was six days a week, with half-holidays on Wednesdays and Saturdays

By the middle of the nineteenth century, in accordance with the pattern at other schools of similar nature, the subjects undertaken were reading, writing, arithmetic, needlework and domestic duties

In 1848, the first moves were made to improve the curriculum. It was suggested that French and Drawing should be introduced but this was rejected.



However, in 1858, a sub-committee met to consider the curriculum, with the result that it was recommended that French and Drawing *should* be taught and that two further pianos were to be bought so that children could be taught music.



In 1888, prizes were awarded in the following subjects: Needlework, Religious Knowledge, Music, Drawing, French, German, Elocution* , Arithmetic & Cookery.



*The rise in the nineteenth century of a middle class led to great interest in the teaching of elocution, and it became a staple of the school curriculum.

Background image of the dining room,
taken by a pupil in the C19th

Dinner was
at 1pm

In 1877 this was:

Monday: Roast mutton, vegetables, bread, rice pudding with treacle

Tuesday: Roast or boiled mutton, vegetables and bread

Wednesday: Beef steak pie, vegetables and bread

Thursday: Roast beef, vegetables, plain pudding

Friday: Roast or boiled mutton, vegetables and bread

In 1895, the weekday menu was:

Monday: Hot roast sirloin beef, fish, vegetables, bread & jam, or stewed prunes, pippins or pears

Tuesday: Hot roast mutton, vegetables, bread, milk puddings

Wednesday: Cold beef and mutton, potatoes, bread, baked apples or stewed fruits

Thursday: Hot roast beef, potatoes, bread, jam or treacle tarts

Friday: Hot roast mutton, vegetables, bread, milk puddings



In 1877, the weekend meals were:

Saturday: Stewed meat, vegetables, bread and baked rice pudding

Sunday: (summer) Roast beef, vegetables, bread and fruit tarts

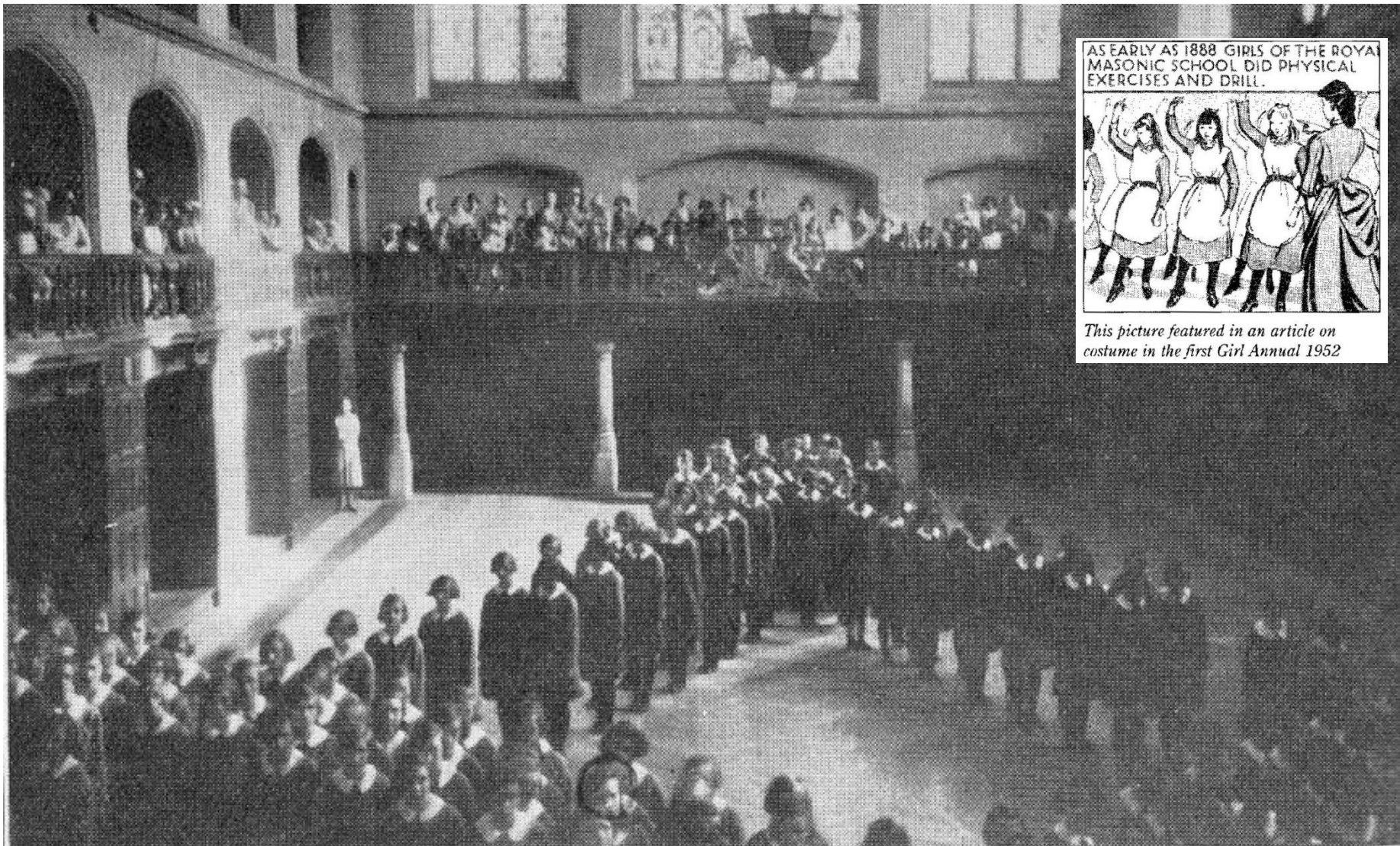
Sunday:(winter) Stewed beef, dumplings, vegetables and bread

Occasionally when in season - pork, fish, peas, beans, plum pudding, fruit pies and salads.

And in 1895: -

Saturday: Cold beef and mutton, fish, potatoes, bread and butter with golden syrup

Sunday: Cold boiled beef, vegetables, bread, plum pudding or fruit pies



AS EARLY AS 1888 GIRLS OF THE ROYAL MASONIC SCHOOL DID PHYSICAL EXERCISES AND DRILL.



This picture featured in an article on costume in the first Girl Annual 1952

Many of the pupils' lunch breaks were occupied with practising Drill, this being a form of calisthenics to music and a tradition that the School still practises with pride today, as was demonstrated on BBC 1's *The One Show* in September 2012.

In addition to Drill, the girls were “to walk out once a week, and take exercise in the Garden every day, weather permitting”.

There was also a swimming pool which, in winter, was drained and boarded over to become a gym.



Afternoon School commenced at 2pm and ended at 5pm

Background image taken by
Alice Kent, a C19th pupil

In 1868, the first pupils of the school sat public examinations the papers of which were demanding. The week was clearly an intensive period of examination:

Monday - two Scripture papers running back to back;

Tuesday - an English paper, followed by two French papers;

Wednesday - Latin;

Thursday - Introductory Lessons on Christian Evidences
and a German paper which finished at 8pm;

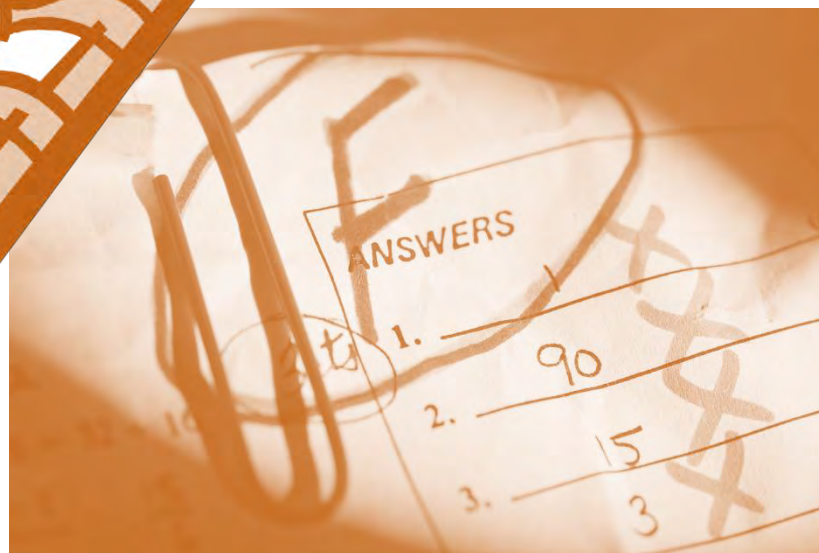
Friday - Catechism.

There were also papers in Linear Perspective and Model Drawing and a two hour music paper.

These questions are taken from an examination paper of the time.
How will you fare?

“Who were Ahithophel, Zeruah, Rizpah, ‘the Cherethites and the Pelethites’?”

“Draw a map, marking only the boundaries of the dominions of Solomon and the positions of the following places: - Damascus, Ezion-geber, Nob, Engedi, Mount Gilboa”



The answers!

Ahithophel was an adviser to King David

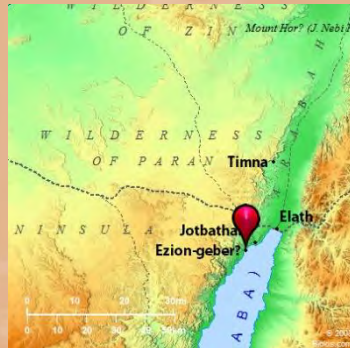
Zeruiah: was an older sister of King David

Rizpah ("coal", "hot stone") was one of Saul's concubines.

Cherethites: A people in South Palestine whose territory bordered upon that of Judah

Pelethites. These people were mentioned always along with the Cherethites. The

Cherethites and Pelethites were foreign mercenaries who formed David's bodyguard.



Ezion-Geber was a city of Idumea, a biblical seaport on the northern extremity of the Gulf of Aqaba

Nob a place in the vicinity of Jerusalem

Mount Gilboa is a mountain range overlooking the Jezreel Valley in northern Israel.

Did you pass?



or



Afternoon school closed at 5pm
Tea was at 6pm

Tea - daily bread and butter, tea or coffee, later added to by cocoa and milk.



Occasionally: cake,
and watercress,
radishes, mustard
and cress when in
season



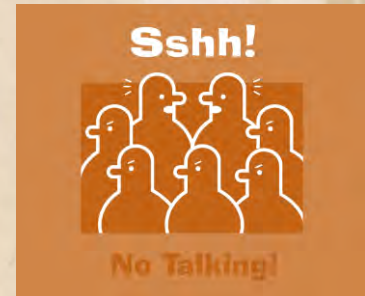
Background image: dining
room at Clapham

Later on in the C19th, supper was added, consisting of milk and bread and butter, cake or biscuits 'to those children who require it and to all the older children who study late'.

For nutritionists this no doubt made a welcome change from what had formerly been supplied to drink – beer.



Of course, one should temper this knowledge with the fact that, at the time, the water was undrinkable!



All meals were consumed in silence.

Background image: photograph of the Committee dining room windows taken by Alice Kent, pupil at the School in the late C19th



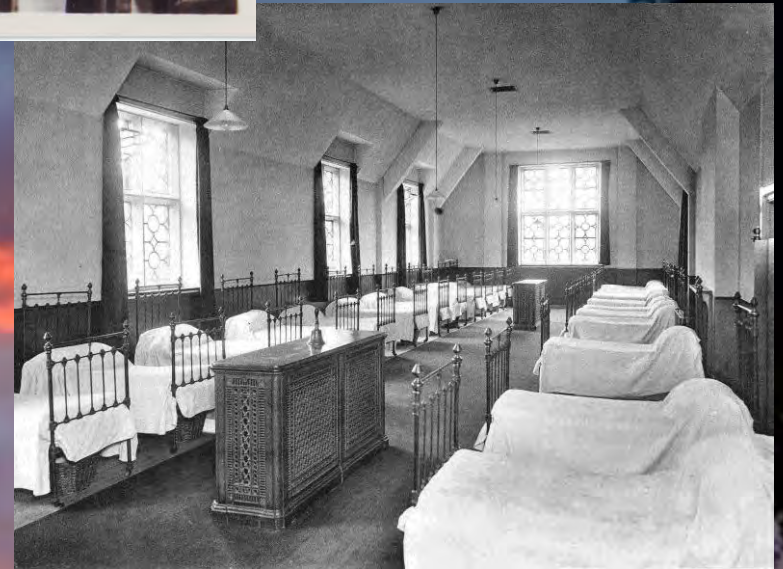
Grace was sung not spoken and both before and after every meal.

Anyone who had not finished her meal before the second grace had to face the ignominy of sitting down again afterwards and finishing her meal, under the gaze of the pupils filing out of the dining room.

After tea and before supper, pupils did the school work set for completion for the following day. There might also be chores to do as one of the lessons the girls took away with them from their days at school was the virtue of industry.



And then it was bedtime with uniform carefully folded and stored in a basket underneath the bed, ready for the next morning.



FB 319/13
FB 319/29

Goodnight!

