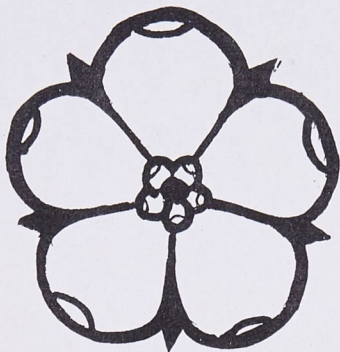


# Conamur — 1897 - 1936

## *A Brief History*



*“Conamur Tenues Grandia”*

370  
Folk

### Translation

We, though little, strive to do great things

Folkestone Heritage Room  
12cc.

As I said, Bobbie, it became the Riviera Hotel.

## Conamur. 1897 - 1920. Part 1

### Chapter 1

The name of the School came from the motto which was taken over from the former owners of the house, "Though small we strive for great things" by the first Headmistresses, Miss F. S. Jarvis & Miss Berry in 1897. Norma Faith tells us that they had been given the chance to run Bedales School but preferred the independence of starting on their own. The School started with one pupil, Norma Crundwell, but it soon grew to 20 boarders and some day girls in 1903. The houses they started in were 'The Nook and 'Conamur' joined together, with a third, 'Audley' which they built on, containing a large hall which was used for everything. They were situated on the Undercliffe at Sandgate near Folkestone with only a garden large enough for a tennis court between them and the English Channel. The garden fringed with billowing tamarisks abutted onto the beach. The interior of the buildings was large and airy with high windows and parquet floors, polished some time later by Mr. Christmas, reflected the morning glare of sunlight, and the rooms echoed perpetually with the thud and hiss of waves on the shingle. There were tiled fire places with jars of beaten copper filled with flowers. All the doors were of heavy oak with enormous wooden latches with latticed patterns of green glass. The entrance hall with its glass roof joining the second house to the third was known as the the Crystal Hall.

The School was blessed with very gifted and highly qualified Headmistresses with advanced ideas and high educational ideals. They tried to instill in the girls their high ideals and a sense of purpose in life without the exclusion of fun and games. The aim of education at Conamur was learning for it's own sake and therefore competition and prize-giving had no place. In theory and in practice the regime differed greatly from that which prevailed at that time in most girl's schools, including the great girl's public schools. Conamur was not co-educational though for a short time there were two boys of nine to ten years old as boarders, with some day boys in the Kindergarten from Sandgate and Folkestone. One little boy is said to have been brought to school in his pram! We are told by Iris Butler that Miss Jarvis was very keen on female emancipation, urging the girls to be learned and independent and not be 'Early Victorian'.

We hear from Enid Melsford that when she came to school in 1903 Miss Berry was teaching, but becoming more and more paralysed until she had to take to a wheelchair. So Miss Jarvis was the more active one of the partnership and the moving spirit behind the School's many activities. They shared the same ideals and educational aims, working in harmony in a steadfast friendship. Enid recalls Miss Berry as a quiet, dignified, courageous person commanding the respect and affection of her pupils. The beginnings of Conamur owed much to her initiative, foresight and intelligent planning. The red-haired Miss Jarvis, on the other hand, was a much more formidable figure who put the fear of God into everyone. She had the more potent personality and immense energy with a wide-ranging mind that was open to new ideas and prepared to experiment. She took an active delight in literature and the arts. Politically and temperamentally she was a Liberal and although unorthodox she was genuinely religious. She combined a generous and broad-minded outlook with strongly held ethical principles, which her pupils sometimes found too exacting for their comfort. She inspired affection not unmingled with awe.

And knew  
There was nothing I could do,  
Now that the water  
Cold, deep, diligent  
Had done.

At a match one year against St. Margaret's it was reported that a Conamur girl swore, an unheard of event in those days. The result was that Conamur was not asked to play them again for quite a few years. At a Netball match against another school a window was broken and the money was offered to pay for it, but it was rudely refused.

Early morning practices in the cold and draughty passage room before breakfast was one way of missing the obligatory cold bath, it being reckoned to be the lesser of two evils. Toasting bread on the Hall fire for supper was illegal but much enjoyed.

One of the memories from a day girl, Pam Phillimore, is that the day girls were allowed to miss prayers in the morning if they were late, but expected to be present for untidy marks and the register. They were un-supervised during rest and would play in the cloak room 'going round the world', not touching the water after the floor had been flooded by rain from the door on the sea side. They swung from coat hangers on the way. She remembers interesting History and News of the World lessons with Miss Dora; Scripture with the Vicar, Mr. Blackburn, when he would teach with his eyes closed enabling the girls to get on with prep they had not completed. Puddings she remembers were Spotted Dick, Suet Roly-Poly with golden syrup and peculiar to Conamur 'Porridge Pudding' a yellow sago mixture relieved with golden syrup. Bread and scrape at tea-time was improved by dipping it into a sugar bowl until the culprits were found out by Miss Dora. From then on no sugar appeared on the table. The ennis court and the parallel bars in view of Miss Dora and Miss Lucy's room were much enjoyed.

In 1935 Fenny retired after eighteen years teaching music in the school, years which she had found were some of the happiest of her life. Fenny, when teaching the girls to sing would exhort them to 'open their mouths a bit wider and the sound was bound to come out', all in a wonderful Cockney accent! In the summer term Rhona and Georgia Thorndike came to the school. Their father, Russell Thorndike, wrote stories of the smugglers round Dymchurch and Hythe, one entitled 'Dr. Sn'.

The Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary this year gave the school an extra week's holiday. Soon after returning to the school they all went to the Cinema to see the celebrations on the screen. At half-term they went to Canterbury to see 'Murder in the Cathedral' by T.S. Eliot beautifully acted in the Chapter House; after which they listened to a serenade in the Cloisters. 'Toad of Toad Hall' was produced by Miss Burford and beautifully acted by the Juniors, the dresses being designed by Miss Muriel. The Dramatic Society acted 'Northanger Abbey' which they did very well. A whole holiday was granted to celebrate the wedding of the Duke of Gloucester to Lady Alice Scott, with a play delightfully acted by the Staff, and a few of the Old Girls in the evening called 'The Chinese Lantern'.

The Easter term of 1936 began very sadly with the death of King George V. The proclamation of King Edward VIII was heard on the wireless, and instead of the usual Sunday service they listened to the Archbishop of Canterbury's speech on the late King. The school listened to the funeral service of King George V. which was broad-

cast in Sandgate Church. Mr. Beach gave two lectures this term and Dr. Stuart, an Old Girl, gave an interesting lecture on Parish Churches.

## Chapter 8

It was with great sadness that a letter was received from the Misses Pennycuik in May, 1936. After long and careful consideration they had decided that the time had come for them to close Conamur as a school. The decision had been forced upon them by the circumstances of the last few years. The loss of the ground on the Leas, the drift at an earlier age to the public schools, and the demand for specialised buildings had made them feel that it was impossible to maintain Conamur at a worthy standard.

They had been too kind and generous in the last few years during the recession in the 1930's, but the spirit of the school was to linger on in the Old Girl's Association right up to the present day. With the closure of the school presentations to the Misses Pennycuik were in the form of a cheque, a carpet which was purchased at their request and a silver standard lamp suitably engraved. After discussions with Miss Jarvis it was decided to give the Scott Coward Memorial Library to the Burlington Girl's School, Shepherds Bush. The school was a very old establishment and had recently moved from Piccadilly to magnificent modern premises at Shepherds Bush. It was largely maintained by the L.C.C. as a Secondary School. Margaret Pyke, one of the Trustees, said she had been down to see the Headmistress and had spoken to the middle school who would be using the books. She told them about Conamur and its early days and about Miss Scott Coward. They were willing to put up a tablet on the shelves commemorating both Miss Scott Coward and Conamur. Margaret found the girls extremely nice and very grateful for the books.

The school in Sandgate was turned into the Riviera Hotel and Barbara Johnson remembers returning there for a wonderful week-ends re-union, seeing old friends again. They could not believe how the rooms had shrunk! Later the Hotel was knocked down and there is now a block of flats in place of Conamur.

The Old Conamurite Club started in 1911, the first President being Nora Crundwell, the first boarder. The last president was Betty Edwards in 1936. The first Honorary Secretary and Treasurer was Enid Welsford. A General meeting of the Club used to be held in January each year, and a Sherry Party or Tea for members annually, usually in June, always in London at the home of an Old Girl. There were three Trustees of the Club who looked after the money and an Executive Committee. A Benevolent Fund was administered for the benefit, advancement or assistance of any past, present or future member of Conamur, whether pupil, member of staff or otherwise. Their transactions were kept secret so we do not know how many people they were able to assist.

**Post Script.** The Old Conamur Magazine of 1938-1939 was published with news from the following Old Girls and Staff.