

MISS HILDA SHEFFIELD, 1905 - 1997.



The death of former Swanage Grammar School Senior Mistress and Deputy Head Miss Hilda C. Sheffield in January 1997 marked not only the end of an educational era but also the passing of perhaps the most devoted and dedicated servant that short-lived seat of learning had known. Hilda Sheffield spent her entire teaching career at the school, retiring in 1965 after 35 years of exemplary service. Known throughout her school career as Sheff or Sheffie, she will long remain in our collective memories as a fair, conscientious and devoted teacher.

Hilda Charlotte Sheffield was born in North London on October 11, 1905. She was educated locally in Islington at Owen's School. This prestigious school, now located at Potters Bar, Herts, was founded in 1613 by Dame Alice Owen. After leaving school in 1925 Miss Sheffield went on to University College. In 1929 she graduated with a 3rd Class Hons Degree in History and applied for a post with the newly-opened Swanage Grammar School. Her application was turned down but she re-applied the following year, by which time Miss W.F.Howe, who had taught history, games and PT, had left to teach in Siam.

Hilda Sheffield duly started at Swanage on March 1, 1930 and not only was she teaching English, History, Games and Physical Training, she assisted with domestic subjects and helped out by playing the piano in the mornings. Shortly after her arrival the first issue of the school magazine (Cygnet) noted, "In Miss Sheffield we have found real ability and keenness and her love for her work will produce lasting results in her pupils" Hilda Sheffield's real forte, however, was drama. She formed the school Dramatic Society and in December 1930 its first production, Act II of A.A.Milne's "Make Believe" was staged. Later productions were put on at the old Mowlem Institute notably in 1933, when the players performed "The Importance of Being Ernest". Later, in retirement, Sheffie was moved to comment, "I should like to thank all those players, past and present, who by their skill, zeal and friendliness have made my hours spent in their company the happiest of my school life in Swanage"

When Hilda Sheffield retired from the grammar school in 1965 former headmaster Mr. Turner wrote the following:- "It is hard to imagine Swanage Grammar School without Miss Sheffield. She was there when I arrived, and there when I left. Except for the first two terms the whole history of the school was part of her experience."

After her retirement Hilda Sheffield moved to Brighton, spending the rest of her long life in a residential block off the London Road on the northern approach to the town. Though she lived alone she received and entertained an endless succession of friends and former colleagues, many of them former pupils of SGS. Even in retirement she was never idle; she liked to travel and she took up art and enjoyed painting landscapes, mostly of Sussex. She retained her independence and continued to run a car until the last few years of her life.



Hilda Sheffield and Hilda Rawlings pictured after a tennis match in 1952. Right: During the war Hilda Sheffield ran the Girls Training corps.