

LIFE AFTER TANFIELD



NAME ELIZABETH HAWKINS (NEE THIRLAWAY)

PUPIL AT TANFIELD FROM 1958 -1965

STAFF MEMBER FROM 1970 – 80 AND 1985-2005



MY LIFE AFTER LEAVING TANFIELD

I passed the 11+ and went to Tanfield in 1958. 'Going to Tanfield' was a real feather in your cap. It was Stanley Grammar School in those days but everybody called it Tanfield anyway. I spent seven happy years there, making good friends – Audrey Atkinson, Joan Clarke, Jenny Carr, Cynthia Tooke, who I'm still in touch with after almost 60 years since leaving school.

In a way, I can say that I've never left Tanfield, because after taking a BA Hons degree in English and French at Lancaster University, followed by a PGCE at St Martin's College, Lancaster, I returned to the school to teach French. I taught French for 12 years, enjoying every minute, especially running the French Club after school and organising trips to France in the Summer holidays.

I married in 1979 and left Tanfield in 1980 to have our first child. Two years later I had twins, so I was pretty busy looking after three young sons.

In 1985 I was asked to go back temporarily to look after Music classes when the Music teacher left and could not be immediately replaced. I certainly couldn't teach Music but luckily other staff members could help out. I employed a nanny to look after the boys and this worked so well that I came back into teaching full time in 1985.

When French was no longer taught to everyone and was put on the 'Options' list instead, I moved across to the English Department and taught English for the next 18 years – at the top of the Tower Block – a real drag when I was carrying bags of exercise books up 72 stairs – then on the top floor of the 1912 Block, next to the Library. I became Teacher-Librarian in the late '80s and very much enjoyed developing the Library, especially when Lorraine Hall was appointed as full-time graduate librarian. We started TASC (Tanfield After-School Club) to help pupils with homework, which was very successful.

I became Head of Year in 1998 but still had a full timetable teaching English. When my husband retired in 2004, I decided to take early retirement, so I left in Summer 2005. That wasn't the end of my life at Tanfield, however, as I joined the Tanfield Association Working Executive and am now the Secretary. I still enjoy 'working' for the school and going back to visit. Ted Brabban once said he thinks I have Tanfield engraved on my heart. He's probably right! I made so many good friends there, as a pupil and as a teacher.

One of my favourite memories – and I have plenty of them! – is of an occasion when I was an English teacher but had been timetabled to supervise a French class when the teacher was off sick. I said to the class, "Well, I teach English but let's see if I can have a go at French today." We then launched into the lesson and did some good work. Much as I enjoyed teaching English, it was great to be back! As the kids were leaving, one little boy said to me, "Miss, for an English teacher, you're not too bad at French!" I hid my amusement and said "Why, thank you!", giving him a big smile. Happy days!