

**Oral Testimony of Mrs Pauline Winifred Allen (née Payn), aged 96 years, given at the Abode Hotel, Canterbury. 26/7/2025.**



*Pauline Payn returns to Canterbury (1<sup>st</sup> time in 75 years!) and meets Aphra Behn*

Pauline Payn was born in November 1928 in a maternity unit next to the Dane John Gardens; Pauline's parents were not living there at the time. They were initially living in the Longport area, then they moved to 74 Martyrs' Field Road and then to 'Windermere' at Rough Common (renting properties on each occasion). They moved to Rochester at about the time Pauline left school.

Pauline's father, Edward Thomas Payn, became secretary of The National Deposit Friendly Society, and his place of work was 8, Vernon Place. Pauline's uncle, George Payn was an expert cabinet maker, and he carved linenfold panelling on the spot in the Cathedral. He also carved panelling for many shops in Canterbury, (in the 1920's and 30's it was expected that the internal customer facing areas of shops would be very smart and fashionable).

One of Pauline's grandfathers, William, was a builder/roofer and died at a fairly young age of lead poisoning, leaving a four-yr old Edward and a seven-yr old George. Pauline's grandmother, Charlotte, needed a source of income and became a very successful tea merchant. She invested the money she acquired in several properties in Canterbury.

Uncle George and his wife Mabel and their only son Maurice lived on 24 Cherry Garden Road on St Thomas Hill. Pauline remembers Maurice, herself and her younger brother Brian, as cousins playing in the garden and often looking at the most beautiful wooden screens that her uncle was working on at the time.

Both Pauline and Brian (who won a scholarship) went to Simon Langton (four guineas a term) and her cousin Maurice won a state scholarship to Kent College and then later another scholarship to Oxford, he was an outstanding student. He became a County Education Officer.

Pauline remembers going to Sunday School (aged about 5) somewhere in the Cathedral Precincts, and Miss Babington telling her off for being on the grass. Miss Babington was a slim petite woman, always immaculately dressed, but had a very forceful personality. Pauline remembers Miss Babington showing around a group of young American service men, one exclaiming how beautiful the lawns looked and Miss Babington remarking that to get the lawns looking this good, it's been five hundred years in the growing! She felt it was important that the young men knew some of the history they were protecting. She was a very capable woman, exceptionally dedicated to the running and restoration of the cathedral.

Young Pauline at 6-8yrs , often took tea with Mary Tourtel at her home in Harbledown, (Pauline could walk to Harbledown from her own home in Rough Common). The friendship seems to have come about because Pauline's mother, Winnie (Winnifred) who was very community-minded and an active church member, knew Mary locally. Pauline was a voracious reader, and they talked a lot about books and writing. Pauline remembers her as a kind and popular lady, but much shyer and more retiring compared to Miss Babington; they just sort of clicked. Mary Tourtel became a warm Aunt-like figure to Pauline and also was a Simon Langton alumnus, so they also talked about Pauline's new school experiences, (having moved to Simon Langton Girls school after being at the Methodist school). Mary gave Pauline some of her Rupert Bear books (which Pauline might still have).



*Pauline with brother (Brian) at about the age she met Mary Tourtel*

At the age of 7, Pauline's father decided she should attend the Simon Langton Grammar School for girls. Pauline really liked the headmistress, Miss Campling, who was strict but very fair. The teachers would often take notice of the girls arriving for school and woe betide any girl who wasn't neatly and properly attired (gloves, Panama hats in Summer and velour hats in winter). Pauline remembers another teacher, Miss Platt, who taught maths in a really engaging manner, made the subject very interesting and was a very popular teacher and well-liked by many students. Miss Green, the deputy head, was an excellent French teacher and was annoyed that both Pauline and her friend (also called Pauline) used to sit together and used to answer at the same time deliberately! She and Miss Campling made a very effective senior management team. The school uniform was bought from Lefevre's, one of the biggest department stores in Canterbury at the time. Every child was proud to be part of the school in those days, and Pauline remembers it as a very happy time, a wonderful school.

When Pauline was about 10, Pauline's father took her to lectures given by the Red Dean (Hewlett Johnson) in the Chapter House in 1938. Pauline thought the Red Dean was a very good speaker and, although still a young girl, Pauline enjoyed these lectures, the Dean made quite an impression on her and her father.

Her father Edward respected him greatly as an expert speaker on the Cathedral. She remembered the dean describing in detail the removal of the medieval stained glass, (because of the impending war).

At the start of WW2 Canterbury, was considered safe and two boys from Erith Grammar School came to live with Pauline and her family. Pauline recalls that the two boys said that their favourite food was pheasant and port, and her father saying that it would be unlikely they would be dining on that very often!

Many Canterbury children were evacuated during WW2. Pauline recalls that over half her classmates were evacuated. However, as she and some of her classmates lived outside Canterbury, they were not eligible for evacuation. She was disappointed at missing out on an adventure and having to stay in school but her best friend Pauline Hunnisett, (whose family had a family drapery store in Whitstable) also wasn't evacuated and they remained friends for the rest of their lives.

During exams, Pauline remembers many of her schoolmates were silently sobbing because they had lost brothers in the Battle of Britain. The average life expectancy of a pilot was less than 6 months in the RAF, and it is generally not known that many of these pilots came from Canterbury, and many of their sorties were over Kent and the Channel in particular.

Funnily enough after the war, Pauline's brother Brian, did his national service in the RAF and his son Andrew, Pauline's nephew. also had a career in the RAF, some 20 years later, following on this tradition

On the day of the blitz, it had been particularly wet, and the incendiary bombs that the Germans used to guide them on bombing raid patterns didn't light, later it seemed the bombers took an 'horizontal approach' rather than a 'longitudinal one' which much to the relief of everyone meant they missed the cathedral. Pauline and her family, had to spend the night of the blitz in the Anderson shelter in the garden. At Rough Common where Pauline lived, she could hear all the bombs going off and see flashes of light, whilst watching with her parents. Her mother tried to get both children into the shelter as quickly as possible as everyone knew the risks of shrapnel flying.

The next day parts of Canterbury were unrecognisable, Rose Lane had gone and a lot of the shopping centres, there were mountains of rubble, Lefevre's had got hit and was a real mess. Everyone was terribly shocked and saddened at the destruction of their beloved Canterbury, however the Cathedral still stood, seen as a miracle by many, given the bombardment throughout the night.

The school, which was severely damaged in the blitz, was temporarily relocated to St Martin's Psychiatric Hospital (then called a lunatic asylum). Pauline remembers cycling

up a steep hill to get to her temporary classrooms. Somebody saw the girls in their striped summer uniform entering the hospital and thought it a shame that so many girls had to be admitted to a lunatic asylum.

Miss Campling arranged for two former inmates of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp (exclusively for women and girls) to come to the school. These were French girls aged about 19, and the year was probably 1945. The girls told of the horror of the camp and how every morning members of The German High Command would choose women and girls at random to go to the gas chambers. The camp was apparently close to The German High Command and Himmler visited frequently. He was the most hated German, and Pauline remembers the burning anger of these young women when they talked about him.

These girls were farmers' daughters from Normandy; whenever British pilots crashed on farmland, the French farmers would try to contact the Resistance to get them back to Britain. Many of the farmers were reported, shot and their surviving female members of the family were sent to concentration camps. The people that reported on them were rewarded by receiving a cheap radio.

After her schooling ended Pauline moved to Hockerill Women's Teaching College (Hertfordshire). In those days most choices for women centred around teaching or nursing. Her parents moved to Rochester and Pauline managed to get her first teaching job at Iwade school near Sittingbourne. As far as she can recall this is Pauline's first return visit back to Canterbury since the 1940's.



*Pauline at about the age she started teaching at Iwade*