

## **Dr Sue Hornibrook's Experiences of Growing up and Working in Canterbury**

*(oral history recorded and summarised by Isabelle Keogh, April 2026)*

Dr Sue Hornibrook was born in October 1953 and has always lived in Canterbury. She went to Blean Primary School, which was just a short distance from where she lived in Hillside Avenue. After passing the Kent Test, which enabled entry into grammar schools, she got into Canterbury Technical High School for Girls, which is now known as Barton Court.

### **School life**

For Dr Hornibrook, school was not an entirely joyful experience, as *'looking back now'*, she did not enjoy having to *'learn by rote'*. This meant that students could not question, debate, or research what they were being taught; they just had to learn what they would be tested on in their exams. It was also strict, with students having to stand up whenever a teacher entered the room. Sue recalls that she rebelled, but also that there was a lot of social change around the 1960's. It was the beginning of *'a different free time'* for women in particular. However, Sue also states how this new era caused parents to struggle to adjust with the changing times from being brought up during the war.

Sue encountered a number of negative experiences at school. *'I distinctly remember a biology teacher saying I would never amount to anything and I would end being up a single, pregnant woman at sixteen, and that was my future mapped out for me apparently.'* Another experience she encountered was in the sixth form, where prefects had the power to discipline younger students for minor things such as being rude or messing around at dinner time. Sue and her friends did this, and the sixth form committee decided that their punishment would be to clean the floors of the sixth form common room on their hands and knees with brushes and soap!

Despite not loving school, Sue really enjoyed English. She had a favourite teacher, Mrs Lyle, who played a prominent role in the formation of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust. *'She was such a good teacher and made everything come alive.'* She was *'such a refreshing change from the other teachers we had'*.

In the technical school, there were three streams teachers put students in according to how they thought the student would get on in life. These streams were separated into students who would be going to university, students who were going into nursing and Sue recalls how everyone else was put into the stream of secretarial work, which included her. *'We didn't really have a choice; the ones who were seen as University*

*material were mainly from upper class families with money.'* As a result of this separation from other streams, it meant students could not take certain subjects. For example, although Sue's history teacher was her favourite teacher, because she was in the secretarial stream, she was not allowed to take history after having her for only one year. They were only allowed to be taught what they would need for becoming a secretary. In the secretarial stream, the girls were taught shorthand, typing and commerce, which prepared them to become secretaries after leaving school.

### **Expectations of women**

In the early 1970's, there was a significant amount of social change around women's equality because women were unable to earn enough to live on their own nor buy or rent property. As a result of this, *'Their only way out, really, was to get married. When I look back on myself and my other friends in the same time period, that's really what happened: the only way out of your house if you weren't going to university was to get married so you could afford to live, as you didn't earn enough.'*

Sue married at age 24, which at the time, was considered to be marrying later in life, as most of her friends had got married around the ages of 19 and 20.

### **Work and University**

After leaving school, there was an economic crisis in 1974, which caused there to be a three day week as a result of the miners' strike. This meant that heating and lighting could only be used three days a week and people could only work during daylight hours. Her first job, which was with the council, was during this period of time. Sue recalls that there were paraffin stoves to heat the rooms. One day she was standing next to one of these stoves to keep warm and her skirt caught fire. Thankfully, no harm was done. *'It just showed you how bad it was. It was dreadful. It's so sad as well because people were suffering.'*

Sue worked as a secretary in a number of places until she had children. During this time, the economic crisis resulted in Sue having three part time jobs. As a result of this making her feel used, she felt that she could offer so much more, so went back to college.

Sue enrolled in Wye College, which was part of Imperial College London, as a mature student at age 40. She got a first-class degree in Business and went on to do a PhD where she received her Doctorate. She found university much more enjoyable than school because it gave her the freedom and opportunity to research and find things out for herself, which school had not enabled her to do. After university, at age 50, Dr Sue Hornibrook became a senior lecturer at the University of Kent Business School. Thinking

back to how she was treated at school: *'I think my motivation was to prove everybody wrong.'*

Dr Hornibrook also worked in [Pedigree Dolls and Toys](#), on Market Way, which made [Sindy dolls](#). Sue considers this to be her best job, where she worked in marketing and new product development, where they would make prototype dolls. Part of her role was for her to go to schools and playgroups and see how the children responded to the toys.

### **Fun and spare time in Canterbury**

For fun in Canterbury, Dr Hornibrook used to play a pub garden game that originated in Canterbury, called Bat and Trap. She would play it in the Dolphin pub in the summer, where there was a pitch laid out. Sue and her friends also enjoyed going to discos, her local one was called Bridge, which is now a restaurant and hotel known as The Pig at Bridge Place. She also recalls *'going out on scooters with young fellas who were mad - never wore helmets!'*

Sue also used to enjoy going to boutiques. One popular boutique was on the top floor of a shop called Martins, which had 70's clothes.

### **Most Memorable Moment in Canterbury**

One of Sue's most memorable moments in Canterbury was when a man from the World Wildlife Fund, who also worked on the popular game show *Crackerjack*, came to give a talk at her school. He wanted people to take part in the show and Sue managed to get onto it, so she was on TV in 1968! Unfortunately, it was on television before it was recorded, and Sue didn't have a TV to watch it. She did really well in the game show and won a Sketch-O-Matic, which was a device where you could draw pictures with buttons.

Dr Sue Hornibrook went to the same school and is friends with Carol Gibbs, who is another one of our oral histories!