

## ANNUAL REUNION

This took place on March 9th 2002 at the Charing Cross Hotel. It was well attended: there were over 70 Old Girls and a number of relatives and friends. There was no one from the Community but Rosette Sermeus (Mme Haesaerts) told us the news. The main item was the dreadful volcanic eruption which destroyed so much of Goma, including the convent, the school, the noviciate and the cathedral. Fortunately, there was no loss of life among the nuns or the pupils. You will see from the photographs how extensive the damage was. More details are given in the General News. A collection for Goma was made at the Reunion; it raised about £250, a splendid amount. Rosette very kindly took this back to Tildonk for us and as there happened to be nuns from Goma in Belgium at the time, the money was changed into dollars and was taken back to the Congo a few days later. The nuns at Tildonk and at Goma were very touched and grateful.

The next Reunion will be held at the Charing Cross Hotel on March 8th 2003 from 2.30pm to 4.30pm. Do come if you possibly can and encourage any Old Tildonkers who might feel shy or think they won't know anybody to come all the same. They will be welcomed with open arms.

## GENERAL NEWS

For once, there is no news of building new bits on to the convent or the school or of altering the old. The ramp at the front door has not materialised yet, so the piggy bank must still be fairly empty. The marble steps leading to the front door are in need of repair and that will probably be done first when funds are available.

There is however a "change of use" to report. Because the Community is now smaller, there are five spare rooms on the first floor; they overlook the Louvain-Haacht road. These now house the financial records of the whole Institute, which I think means that the financial records of all the other Provinces are there as well as those of the Belgian Province. There is also a lot of very up-to-date equipment.

The main changes during the year have been in the Community; there are now only 15 nuns. Sœur Margriet van der Abele, whom most of you will probably not know because she worked mainly in Louvain, went to Melsbroek quite a while ago. The latest news is that her condition has deteriorated and that she is in hospital in Louvain. Sadly, there are two deaths to report: Mère Emilie, who had been at Melsbroek for about three years and Josette, who retired in 2000 and went to live with her family in Tubize, both died in March. Their obituaries follow this section.

There are still three Tildonk nuns at Melsbroek: Sœur Stanislas, Sœur Paule and Sœur Rita. They were joined fairly recently by Sœur Monique who went to Tildonk when her convent at Grimbergen closed about a year ago. But in August she moved to Melsbroek because she needs more nursing care than Tildonk can give her. Sœur Stanislas particularly has her good and bad days but, as you know, Melsbroek is the place to be if you need "Tender Loving Care".

During their "Echo stint" at Tildonk, Joan Ewin and Nell Turner, like a great many nuns from all the convents in the Ursuline Province, went to a Vlaamse Kermis at the Home Merici in Melsbroek; it was organised by the lay members of staff to raise funds for extras like materials for the Occupational Therapy groups. The nurses' families were there as well, in force, including young children. In fact, the side-shows, e.g. skittles, a kind of Aunt Sally, piles of tins to knock over with balls and even plastic ducks, bobbing about on running water to catch with sticks that had a hook screwed into the end, were all supervised by children of primary or secondary school age. They were charming, helpful, patient, cheated happily on behalf of old, elderly or infirm players, let them stand almost on top of the "goals" and gave them extra chances: "You missed that time. Have another go!" The competitors were awarded points for their performance at each side-show and these were added up. It was a visiting nun from Ternat who won with 69 points. Her prize was a huge basket of delicious fruit. Incidentally, the tins we had to knock down had been painted and decorated by the nuns in the Occupational Therapy groups.

The organisers had asked a group of professionals, I think, to entertain us. The two men and their woman partner were excellent: their repertoire was varied, they kept everything moving, they had good voices and everything was clear. They sang, recited poetry, acted sketches, - some in the Brussels dialect, a hilarious mixture of French and Flemish. The audience was delighted, joined enthusiastically in the songs, some old, some fairly new, some from films or shows, some traditional Flemish songs.

The funniest sketch was performed by one of the men. The woman, acting as compère, announced that a world-famous musician had been engaged at enormous cost to entertain us. We were asked to wait patiently for him to appear: he had only just arrived. Presently, he came on to the stage, dressed formally in tails but with a fawn-coloured waistcoat and an orange-brown wig, tousled à la Beethoven. Silently, without a smile, he bowed slightly, put his violin case on the floor, moved the chair a fraction of an inch, sat down and stared unblinkingly at the audience. Then, very slowly, he bent down and, still pausing every few seconds to stare at us, he opened the case, took out a thick pair of leather gloves which he put on, and a sheet of music which he studied before laying it on the music-stand, pulled a folded handkerchief out of the case, studied the music again, beating time gently to the passage he was looking at, unfolded the handkerchief and tucked it under his chin, bent down slowly to pick up his bow - a little bamboo cane with a piece of string dangling from one end - studied the music, beat time again and finally "rummaged" in the case and brought out - a banana. Unhurriedly, solemnly, still staring at the audience, he peeled it, took one bite, folded the skin back over the rest, put the banana in the case. Then, still in slow motion and stopping to stare at us all, he returned the bow, the handkerchief, the music and the gloves to the case, stood up solemnly, waited for the applause, gave a little bow of appreciation, picked up his violin case and, slowly, with great dignity, stepped down from the stage and walked away. The audience was delighted and convulsed with laughter and there was thunderous applause.

I believe the group gave their services free but I am not sure. They were so good that they were almost certainly professionals. If they were and waived their usual fee to help the Home Merici, it really was very generous of them.

After that, there were dances, performed by some of the children and the lay nursing staff. There too the standard was high. Then came the various "thank you's" and, to end the afternoon, one of the nuns, who was in a wheelchair, sang a song about the Home Merici where she and the other old and sick nuns really felt "thuis" - at home.

Most of the visiting nuns stayed for an evening meal, which they had ordered in advance. It was apparently very good. The Tildonk contingent did not get home till about 8 o'clock.

Everyone was delighted with the Vlaamse Kermis and is waiting eagerly to hear how much money was raised. The organisers and their families must have been dead-beat! I saw one little lad, about eight years old, drooping in the open boot of the family car, obviously making the best of the not very comfortable seat until Mum and Dad arrived with equipment to take home.

After that long digression, here is the rest of the news. Most of the nuns have their "charges" and are on the rotas for duty "à la porte" and for serving and clearing up after meals. But as some of the Community can no longer help actively, their off-duty periods are shorter. Luckily, various people come in to do various jobs, like the nurses who come in twice a day to help those who can not get up or get ready for bed on their own, and the young women who come in to do the cleaning. And, of course, there is Annemie, who arrives about 8am five days a week to cook the main meal. She was off sick for a while - she had an operation for varicose veins and she is delighted with the result. The midday meal at weekends is brought in by a caterer. Sœur Bernadette takes charge of it on delivery and she also looks after the commissariat for all the other meals. She has retired from her administrative job in the school and in September went on a five-day pilgrimage to Lourdes - her leaving present from the school. She and Sœur Mechtilde are the official drivers for the Community but only Sœur Bernadette drives the minibus.

The wonderful Madame Janine spends a good deal of time at the door and, as you know, she will take over in the kitchen if need be. To celebrate her birthday in September, she made waffles for all the Community which, in this case, included Joan and Nell. She understands English very well but still finds it hard to speak it.

You will be sorry to hear that Irene, who used to work in the kitchen and was a dab hand at making delicious frites, is very much worse. She can no longer even knit and has to spend most of her time in bed or in a special armchair. In fact she needs total nursing care. I don't know whether she still has a lot of pain or whether the arthritis has done its worst, but she is well looked after and is very happy in the home she now lives in.

This year a General Council of the Tildonk Ursulines was held at Hoogstraten. Nuns came from all the Provinces: Belgium, India, North America and the Congo. A new "gouvernement" was elected. Sister Judith, an American, was re-elected to serve a second term as Superior General. She has three Assistants, two Indian and one Belgian: Sœur Clara and Sœur Bimela are from India and Sœur Ghislaine is Belgian; she was the Superior at Grimbergen, which closed about a year ago. In the past each Assistant had responsibility for one particular area; for instance, it was an Indian who saw to anything connected to India. Now any of the three will deal with whatever crops up. It cannot always be easy, but it does mean a fairer distribution of work and would avoid a major crisis if one of the Assistants were suddenly taken ill.

As usual, there was the Annual Interursulinendag in September. This year it was in Belgium, at Heusden-Zolder. The convent there was host to Ursulines including

members of the Roman Union, from Belgium, Holland and Northern France. Nuns from Tildonk and other Belgian convents went over a few days before the meeting to rehearse what was to be sung on the day of the meeting.

Most of you will remember reading about the annual General Post which goes back several years. For anyone who does not know what it is all about, here is a brief explanation. As the numbers of nuns are decreasing, and more convents are closing, the Superiors decided some years ago that the nuns who were still there should get to know one another. So every year, each Community would play host to another and be the guest of the third. This year the Huize-Lambertz, i.e. M. le Directeur's house, next to the parish church, which was the Provinciale and is now the Secretariat for the Province, is to play host to the Tildonk Community. Sœur Ann, the Superior, Sœur Benigna and Sœur Josepha say they expect the whole Community, even Sœur Dorothee and Sœur Dionyse who are in wheelchairs, to come over to visit them. Everyone is tickled pink: they all know one another very well, because the Huize-Lambertz Community comes over for Mass and the midday meal almost every day. The Huize-Lambertz is quite big and has a garden but I think there might be problems if the visit takes place on a wet, cold or very windy day! Tildonk was to be host to Londerzeel sometime in the near future.

By now, I suppose, all the Tildonk Ursuline Communities have met and got to know one another, so perhaps the custom will be abandoned, at least for a few years.

In the past, most of the convents had a boarding-school but they have all been closed except one, - at Ternat, I think. In September there was a meeting of Superiors at Tildonk and the Superior from Ternat took back several plastic bags of apples from the orchard which might otherwise have gone to waste. She was very pleased to have them.

The annual excursion planned by the Provinciale took place on June 18th. It was a round tour, taking in the Jacobinahof at Hoeleden, Zoutleeuw and Montaigu. The Jacobinahof is an 18th century walled farmhouse now made by Jacobina Ulrix into a museum of traditional Flemish arts and crafts, including statues of Our Lady, bouquets of flowers and all kinds of fruit, made of wax and displayed under dome or bell-shaped glass covers. Jacobina, herself no mean craftswoman, has made similar articles which are also on display. Besides these, there are 17th century tapestries and furniture to be admired. Visitors may go into what I think must be a stillroom with all kinds of herbs on display. There is another room where rows of colourful bottles containing various drinks are "a joy to behold". The garden is laid out as it would have been in the 18th century. Visitors can eat there and enjoy the smell of the flowers while having their meal.

The nuns had their lunch there and then went to Zoutleeuw, to the St-Leonardus-kerk where there are statues, paintings and reredoses dating from the 16th century and a yellow copper Paschal candlestick which is even older. There is also a remarkable collection of altar vessels. The 16th century Town Hall and the 14th century Cloth Hall, which served as a Council Chamber for the Guild of Archers, were well worth a visit.

In mid-afternoon, the nuns left for Montaigu. On arrival, they had refreshments and were then free to potter about till Mass in the Basilica at 6 o'clock. After that, everyone went home. But in August, the Tildonk nuns were back in Montaigu on pilgrimage. The Saint Curé often made the same pilgrimage, on foot and fasting. He would leave Tildonk in the early hours, reach Montaigu in time for the first Mass, after which he spent a long time in prayer. He would not go home until the afternoon, still fasting and having had no sleep for the best part of 48 hours.

There is a shortage of priests in Belgium and Tildonk still has no parish priest of its own. There is Mass on three Sundays a month and Sœur Ann takes Liturgy of the Word services at other times. Some people come to Mass at the convent on Sundays and on weekdays. Fortunately, Sœur Ann, who is in charge of catechesis, has a number of dedicated helpers.

The Ursulines in India are flourishing: there are more of them than in all the other Provinces put together. But life is far from easy: the Hindu and Muslim extremists, normally at loggerheads, are united in their opposition to Christianity and do all they can to make things difficult and even dangerous for Christians. Those of you who see the Catholic papers in this country may have seen a report about a Tildonk Ursuline, Sister Briddi Ekka, who is in serious trouble for having made converts without reporting the facts to the Government authorities. She might be sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. I think it makes one wonder whether there is not a touch of this anti-Christian feeling in the Government's refusal to renew the permits of the Indian nuns working in Melsbroek. Moreover, these nuns will never be allowed to work in Belgium again. Nurses are needed in India and understandably the authorities do not want to lose those they have but, if that is the only reason for not letting the nuns stay at Melsbroek, why is life made so difficult for them at home?

And what about the Congo? You know from the Reunion that the Convent, the noviciate and the school were destroyed but that there was no loss of life. It seemed at first that the lava flow was not coming their way but threatened the Salesian Orphanage. The Salesians had to leave their premises with the 150 boys and they all arrived at the convent. They were given a meal before going on their way to safety. The nuns, as they had been doing every half-hour, rang up to get the latest news, expecting to be told that they were safe. To their horror, they learned that the lava flow had changed direction and was coming their way; they had half an hour to get out. The Salesian buildings were now safe, so the Salesians and the boys went home. The nuns fled in small groups to Ruanda; they all arrived there safely and to their great relief, found one another. They returned home to Goma fairly soon, unhurt but homeless. Other religious communities gave them hospitality and they are still living in separate groups.

Soon after their return Sœur Espérance went to see what remained of the convent. The shell of the building still stood, though within the walls there was a very deep layer of semi-solid lava. There were people on top of it, looking for loot. "If they can get up there, so can I," she thought. So she went to consult the police. Later, with a police escort for protection, she and another sister scrambled to the top of the lava. To their surprise, they saw that the lava flow in the chapel had stopped short of the altar. Sœur Espérance was able to remove the Blessed Sacrament from the tabernacle and also to rescue other things from the sacristy.

I suppose one could see this as a near-miracle, particularly if one remembers the statue of "Notre Dame auréolée de Balles" in the little first floor room in the Belvedere tower. On September 12th 1914, the convent was shelled by the German army on one side of the canal and the Belgian army on the other. The statue was not even chipped though the wall behind it was quite badly pitted. This is so unusual that the wall has never been repaired though it has of course been repainted several times.

The Secondary School is flourishing: early in September there were 590 pupils. The Nursery School and the Junior School are doing very well. Sœur Dorothee, whose room overlooks the Nursery School playground, has a front row seat and watching the times at play is one of her great delights.

The Belgian Old Pupils' Association has been taken over by other members of the staff and they have not sent in any news. As you know, Rosette Sermeus, who was in charge, took early retirement last year. She and Vic, her husband, are still very busy working with other groups to organise cultural tours and to collect cultural material which can be put on computers and then on discs. Much of this is supplied by museums. The discs could be used in museums or sold to visitors. Vic is at present experimenting with putting material on mobile phones. At least I think that is what he is doing. To a computer-illiterate like me, it is all wonderful but as incomprehensible as the Quantum Theory to an infant.

I said there was no building going on in the convent or the school - the Buanderie, which was to be demolished to make way for a new Junior school, is still standing, owing to lack of funds. But it is a different matter in the village. The Bisschopshof, the field on the other side of the road, was sold some time ago but, even in the last couple of years, there have been animals on it: sheep, geese or hens. But now there are 24 houses on the site, some already complete. This development has created a problem. The road bends fairly sharply as it comes down from the canal but, in the past, motorists had a clear view of approaching traffic; now they can see nothing but houses. So there is a mini one-way system: traffic can turn into the Lambertzdreef, the road that goes past the parish church, from either direction but to get out, it has to go up to the Gemeentehuis, turn left and then left again to get on to the main road.

At one time there was a café, very popular with Anciennes anglaises who came to the International Reunions. Unfortunately, it was all but destroyed by fire and never rebuilt. The owners, relatives of Nelly, who ran the Mini-Discount, sold it. It was demolished and there is now a small block of "des studios" on the site. The stairs leading to the first floor are on the outside at the front and the wall of black bricks will certainly stop anyone from tumbling into the road but most people think it is absolutely hideous.

There is likely to be more building nearby. As you know, Mini-Discount closed about four years ago and Nelly has sold the premises. The new owners intend to turn them into four flats.

Nelly is just about as busy as she was when she was running the shop. During the school term and most of the holidays she looks after her four-year-old granddaughter five days a week and her two-year-old grandson two or three days a week - he spends the others with his paternal grandmother. Christel, Nelly's daughter, is a doctor and, though she is not a GP, she works very long hours, as does her husband. They take the children to their grandmother's on the way to work and pick them up on the way home. The little girl goes to school at Rotselaar, so Nelly ferries her to and fro. It is not easy to look after two such lively youngsters but Nelly enjoys it and the children

love being with her.

That is all the general news. I cannot say much about the garden because there is no change. The front, that is what can be seen from the road, still looks impressive, thanks to the layout and the magnificent trees but one misses the colourful flowerbeds. Most of the ground at the back, the old kitchen garden, is lying fallow. It would be lovely if it could be cultivated again - but who could or would be prepared to take it on? Perhaps someone will turn up with a practical suggestion. Espérons-le!

## DEATHS

Mère Emilie, on March 29<sup>th</sup> 2002, aged 92.

Josette Vanbellinthen, on March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2002, aged 61.

## MÈRE EMILIE

Those of us who were at the International Reunions in the middle 1970s and 1980s will remember Mère Emilie as the Superior (at that time renamed the "Responsible") who succeeded Mère Emilienne in 1974.

Before that she was Head of the Section Flamande. Indeed she founded it. She thought that Flemish should rank as equal with French and, because during the War there were no foreign girls whose main reason for coming to Tildonk was to learn French, it was a good time to give equal importance to both languages. There was another innovation: Mère Emilie felt that the school should concentrate less on the academic subjects and more on vocational courses, on what might be called the domestic arts, especially those with a more rural bias. Her Superiors asked her to plan such a course, partly because it would attract Government funding and finances were a problem during the War. The change was a fundamental one and required official approval, from both the Belgian Ministry of Education and the German Occupying Authorities. So Mère Emilie, "avec sa petite valise", made frequent trips to Brussels.

The Section Flamande opened in the autumn of 1942, with about a dozen pupils. Numbers increased very satisfactorily. Fairly soon the syllabus was widened to include the more academic subjects. This meant that there were in fact four streams in each year: an academic and a vocational stream in each of the two languages of the school. The inevitably high ratio of teachers to pupils was ideal but very expensive. At first there were enough nuns to cover most of the teaching but, as they grew older and there were very few new vocations, lay teachers had to be appointed and had to be paid. The nuns did not: if they were paid by the State, their salaries belonged to the Community, not to them personally. So, gradually, staffing problems arose.

These were partly solved when the law about the official language to be used in schools came into force. Tildonk, being in the Flemish-speaking part of the country, had to phase out the Section Française. The International Section, which really took off in about 1950, received no State subsidy and was totally independent, so it was able to keep French as one of its official languages. Although the two sections were separate for nearly all the teaching, there was a good deal of common activity and many of the friendships made then have lasted until now.

The school was Mère Emilie's life. She worked tremendously hard and she won her colleagues' real affection and deep loyalty. For all her small stature and quiet ways, Mère Emilie had a stubborn streak and usually got her way and, because her pupils respected her, there was generally no need for a battle of wills. The fact that several of her pupils came back as teachers - Rosette was one of them - is a proof of the happy relationship between them and their Headmistress.

Even after retirement, Mère Emilie's advice was often sought about school matters and in 1998, the Board of Governors showed its great appreciation by awarding her the title of "Honorary Headmistress". It was a public acknowledgement of the school's indebtedness to her and she was delighted and touched to receive it.

It was during Mère Emilie's years as Responsable that Ursulines all over the world celebrated the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the "Constitutions", that is, the official establishment of the Order. The anniversary was in 1985, which happened to be an International Reunion year. So the Anciennes élèves were able to wander around the marvellous exhibition planned and organised by Mère Emilie. The Salle d'Etude was full of records, registers, exercise books, needlework, photographs, letters, not just about life at Tildonk but in other convents and in other countries where there were convents founded by Tildonk or by its daughter or granddaughter convents. Mère Emilie planned a "family tree" which showed all of these. Mère Marguerite Marie painted the original which is now in the Community Room. A very small copy of it hangs on the wall "à la porte".

Mère Emilie celebrated her Golden Jubilee 150 years to the day after the first nuns made their vows. You may remember the account of that event from a past issue of the "Echo". It was a spectacular occasion, partly because these were the first nuns to make their vows and partly because it was a celebration of freedom after twelve years (1818-1830) of tyrannical Dutch rule.

After many years as the Responsable, Mère Emilie was able to concentrate on other things. She became a walking history of Tildonk and could usually answer any questions about it on the spot: on the very rare occasions when she could not, she knew exactly where to find the information and would usually be back with it in a few minutes. She had a formidable intellect and a wonderful memory but never, in any way, looked down on or intimidated less able people.

You will no doubt recall from past issues of the "Echo" that Mère Emilie had her own particularly vicious strain of flu which plagued her every year bar one - and then she had a particularly vicious kind of pneumonia. Her health deteriorated greatly over the last few years and eventually she went to Melsbroek. She must have found it hard to leave Tildonk where she had spent about seventy years - she entered in 1929. But she accepted the change cheerfully and was always immensely grateful for anything people did for her. She became even more frail in the last two or three years of her life; she had a number of falls which resulted in bad fractures, so she had several stays in hospital and even had to undergo surgery. She died on Good Friday this year, a few hours before the Queen Mother.

Those of us who knew Mère Emilie will remember her for her gentleness, her modesty, her great mental gifts and her kindness. We will always be grateful that we had the privilege of knowing her, as members of the same Community, as colleagues, as pupils or as friends.

The TOGS has asked for a Mass to be said for the repose of her soul.

## JOSETTE

Probably only a couple of English Old Girls even knew Josette's surname - Vanbellinthen - and even they never thought of her or spoke of her otherwise than as "Josette".

Those of us who were at the International Reunions will have seen her working with Sœur Jeanne to make sure that all was sparkling clean and tidy. She was a very conscientious worker and was a wizard at cleaning windows and, as you know, the windows at Tildonk are large and numerous. They always looked good.

Later, when Sœur Jeanne grew too old and frail to carry on, Josette continued to do a lot of cleaning and helped Sœur Gabrielle de la Cave au Pain who looked after the nuns' Infirmary. She also gave a hand with the washing-up. But what she liked most of all was helping the teachers with the tins at dinner and during their playtime. She had a wonderful way with little children: she loved them dearly but was also firm and never sentimental and they really loved her. Several parents told her how much she meant to their children.

Josette, the youngest of four children, was born less than a fortnight before the Germans invaded Belgium in May 1940. Like thousands of others, her family set off to find refuge in some other part of the country. Her parents had managed to get hold of some kind of little covered cart; they put in what they could, including a sack of potatoes, on top of which they put the baby because they were anxious to hide this precious food from the Germans. When they were stopped and asked what was inside the cart, they replied: "The baby" and showed them Josette, fast asleep. "Aaah!" said the soldiers who were probably missing their own children very badly and there was no more trouble. Like many others, Josette's family went back home fairly soon after leaving because, in spite of the Occupation, life was more peaceful there than in many other places.

Josette went to Tildonk when she was in her late teens or very early twenties and she remained there until she retired at the age of 60 - the best part of 40 years. She really became part of the establishment. In the evening, when her work was done, she would join whichever nun was on duty "à la porte" and watch TV. She was a native French speaker but spoke Flemish fluently, thanks to her contacts with the sisters and the children, so she could enjoy whatever was on. Being bilingual she could, if

necessary, deal with visitors and answer the phone and it was Josette who rushed up to the Allée Blanche if there was a call for one of the anciennes anglaises.

She always went home for the holidays and sometimes spent part of them abroad with members of the family. She really enjoyed herself and came back bursting to tell everyone about it all. She certainly seemed tough but was perhaps less so than she appeared because, when she did fall ill, recovery was slow. She also had a number of nasty accidents and it took her quite a while to get over them physically. But she was always rather stoical about such things.

When she retired about two and a half years ago, she was in good form and looking forward to being with her family for good. And she certainly enjoyed her new-found leisure. One of her great pleasures was walking - she never had much time for that when she was working. She enjoyed coming back to Tildonk as a visitor. In fact, in both 2000 and 2001, she brought several members of her family to the fund-raising lunch organised by the school.

But early this year she became listless, had no energy and felt generally out of sorts; eventually, she went to the doctor. Nothing could be done for her because she was riddled with cancer. She died on March 22nd. Her illness and death must have come as a terrible shock to her family and friends, including the Community at Tildonk but everyone will be glad for her sake that she did not linger.

Those of us who were at the International Reunions or visited the convent independently do owe Josette a debt of gratitude for she contributed enormously in so many practical ways to our comfort and pleasure.

As she was part of Tildonk and did so much for us, the TOGS has asked for a Mass to be said for her. Her family will be told about this: it is only right that they should know that we, les Anglaises, really appreciate all she did to make our visits to Tildonk so enjoyable.

#### NEWS OF OLD GIRLS

There have been several visits from Old Girls in the last twelve months and one from a lady who is not an Old Girl herself but whose grandmother-in-law was at Tildonk in the 1880s or very early 1890s and may, therefore, have been a contemporary of Mère Georgine's.

The first Ancienne élève to arrive was Olive Donnelland (Mrs Glaser, 1026-1927). She called in September 2001, not long after Joan and Nell had left. She has happy memories of her schooldays at Tildonk and ends her entry in The Book with the words: "God is good!"

Diane Silcock (1964-1974) followed about a month later. She found that much had changed but that her memories were still vivid.

After that there was a long gap till the spring of this year, in fact. Lynette Tanner (Mrs Marsden, 1967-1969) turned up in April. She and her husband have three children, Joanna (10), Tom (9) and Matty (7). Joanna is a Wells Cathedral chorister and was due to sing at Mol that very evening. Lynette asked for details about the Reunion.

Not quite three weeks later, Judith Letwin (Mrs Kraynick, 1936-1940) called. She was delighted to be back. She and her husband Michael have a son and a daughter, both in their 40s.

The next Ancienne to appear is one of the three Barrett sisters, Christina (Mrs Bromley 1961-1964). She and her husband Stephen have two children, Peter and Cheryl. Christina would be happy to be contacted by any of her contemporaries.

There was another gap of several months before Hanne Friedrich (Frau Haetzel, 1957-1958) arrived. She would like to get in touch with Deirdre McRobbie, Pamela Rothon and Midori Suzuki. She gives no address but what looks like an e-mail address.

At the end of August, Ann Burden (Mrs Fearn 1960-1968) arrived. She is married to a farmer. She came "on spec" to see the place where she had spent eight of her school years. She was celebrating her 50th birthday with a trip down Memory Lane. She greatly enjoyed the now traditional Tour de la Maison and found many changes but also much that was the same.

The Book must have gone AWOL sometime during the year and when it was back again a slip of paper bearing Sarah James-ap-John's name was inserted. So all we know is that Sarah called at Tildonk sometime between September 2001 and September 2002.

If The Book is AWOL when you call, please write the date of your visit and news and comments on the same piece of paper as your name, address and the date of your visit. And don't forget to give the years you were at Tildonk.

The visitor who was not an Old Girl herself is Mrs Ann Powell. She and her daughter wanted to see where Mrs Powell's grandmother-in-law, Evelyne Moseley, had been at school. So while they were staying with Mrs Powell's nephew in Brussels, he drove them over to Tildonk. He had previously reconnoitred the village but was not sure the Sint-Angela-Instituut was the right place. They really appreciated the warm welcome they were given and thoroughly enjoyed the Tour de la Maison with Sœur Bernadette. When she wrote in The Book, Mrs Powell added: "It was lovely to see another sampler!" So Evelyne must have made a sampler like Mère Georgine's which hangs by the door into the Allée Blanche. Everyone sees it during the Tour de la Maison, but as far as I can remember, Mrs Powell is the only one to mention it.

Here are some details about the sampler for those of you who do not know about it. It was re-discovered in the Grand Clear-up after the International Section closed in 1977. The TOGS took charge of it and had it framed so that it could be put on view and enjoyed by everyone. It is mounted on green sateen and consists of 19 "sections", which show all kinds of stitches and techniques, such as hemming and patching, embroidery of various kinds on different sorts of materials and several kinds of lace. There is another smaller and less elaborate sampler at the Huize-Lambertz and Mercia Walsh found a third in a museum in Sydney. It was almost certainly taken to Australia round about 1900 because there were Australian girls at Tildonk in the 1890s. A few years ago, an American lady, Mrs Reaveley, who belongs to both the British and the American Guild of Embroiderers, bought two or three "sections" of a similar sampler at an Antique Dealers' Fair in London. One showed the girl's name and another had the words "Pensionnat des Ursulines, Thildonck" on it. Once she was home, Mrs Reaveley wrote to the Ursulines in the States. They referred her to The Ursuline Generalate in Brussels, her letter was sent to Tildonk and Mère Emilie was able to tell her that the girl came from Scotland and had been at school in the 1880s. This confirmed the dealer's estimate of the date of the work.

I shall write to Mrs Powell when I am home again and ask her if she can give us any more details about Evelyne Moseley's sampler and if so, I shall try to add a PS about it.

To return to the News of the Old Girls and, of course, of former members of staff. Mme Rose went off to Greece a few days after Joan and Nell arrived so there was not a great deal of time to collect news. She is still as energetic and busy as ever and is enjoying her classes in Italian and Painting. She did not mention helping out at the American School in Brussels when a member of staff is away but I cannot believe she has not been doing so in the last 12 months. Her two nephews are still studying in Europe, one in England, the other in Holland. They usually spend their holidays with her.

What with e-mails and the Internet, many of you, if not most of you, are likely to be better informed about your old school friends than you could be just through the "Echo". But a number of us, particularly the Oldies, belong to the letter-writing era, so please go on sending in news of yourselves, your families and friends. And remember Tildonk itself: the nuns, all of them Oldies, are not IT buffs and they do love to have news of les Anciennes. Even if they do not know us personally, we are still "enfants de Tildonk", so news of us and our doings is always welcome. Any letter or card sent to the Community is put on a table near the Refectory door for all to read and any nun who has a personal letter from an Old Girl passes on any news of interest to the others. So please keep on writing to the school and to the "Echo".

Linda Bloomfield (Mrs Rees 1966-1973) sent us a fascinating newsletter from Macedonia, where her husband Michael is our defence attaché. They arrived there in early

January, to be greeted by plenty of snow and temperatures of -20 at night and sometimes -11 during the day, but this chilly reception has been more than compensated by two Christmases a year (ours and the Orthodox one on 7th January), summer temperatures in the low 30s most of the time and a thriving cultural and social life," all in the line of duty of course". The people are very friendly and there has been serious work to do, helping return the country to peace, monitoring the elections, providing support and training to the military, even advising some farmers on how to improve their business -"all from listening to the Archers!" Their children visit when they can but are all busy with their own lives: Victoria is studying Spanish in Madrid and being well cared for by her cousins Emma and Sasha, Edward is living in Halls in Lewes where he is studying leisure and tourism and Richard (Sub Lieutenant Rees) has just returned from the Persian Gulf where he was doing his initial Sea Training. Linda adds:"Just for the record we entertained 275 people in December and consumed 230 mince pies!"

Gay Sudbury (Mrs Harris 1958-62) and her husband Nigel are still enjoying the good life in Oman, where they have lived for many years, but they escape the hot summers by moving to their house in south-west France, in the picturesque hamlet of St.Cirac, near Foix. Here they hold 'open house' for a constant stream of visitors, including Jocelyn and family, who were pampered and cosseted in August, with Michelin-star meals, great company and views on to stunning scenery. Our window looked over to Montsegur, the Cathar stronghold, which we managed to climb (before one of those meals) and we spent many happy hours catching up, while my daughters (10 and 13) listened in wide-eyed amazement to our memories of 'Proclamations' and all the pranks that led to our occasional 'deuxième et troisième degrés de conduite'. We both nevertheless felt the discipline had been a good preparation for life and that the art of curtsying was due for a revival".

By the way, there is a Tildonk website on the Internet. It is not likely to have been set up by an Old Tildonker because the information given is about trade and industry. But I think an American Old Girl has also put in something about the convent and the school. *Note from the TOGS webmaster: I've not been able to find the site Nell is referring to; the official TOGS site is [www.Tildonk.co.uk](http://www.Tildonk.co.uk)*

If you want to call at Tildonk it is wise to ring up beforehand, just to make sure there is nothing special going on. The number is 16 (the Louvain code) 60-11-85 and the best time to ring is 11.30 our time, 12.30 in Belgium. The nuns will have finished lunch about then but will still be in or near their Refectory and there is a phone a couple of yards away. So you are not likely to be kept waiting while someone is fetched from her office or her room. Or, of course, you could always write and allow time for an answer to reach you!

In the past, when there were more of us and there were pages and pages of News of Old Girls, it would have been impossible to give the addresses of those who called at Tildonk. Now there are fewer of us, fewer are calling at the school and there is less news to report; moreover, the History of Tildonk has been completed. So there is less pressure on space and there is room to give the addresses of the Old Girls who paid a visit in the last 12 months.

Here they are:

Olive Donnelland - Mrs Glaser, Laan v.Meerdevoort, 110-112 (Kamer 61), Den Haag, NL.

Diane Silcock, Dewsmoor Cottage, Crediton, Devon EX17 2ER

Lynette Tanner - Mrs Marsden, Breach House, Breach, Clutton, Bristol BR39 5EQ

Judith Letwin - Mrs Kraynick, 3442 Lanark Road, Coopersburg, PA 18104 USA

Christina Barrett - Mrs Bromley, 98 Stein Road, Southbourne, nr Emsworth, Hants PO10 5LU

Hanne Friedrich - Frau Haetzel@aol.com

Ann Burden - Mrs Fearn, Radford Farm, Garrock, Laurencekirk, Scotland AB30 1HS

#### **P.S.**

I did get in touch with Mrs Powell when I came back and she and her husband very kindly invited me to their home near Nottingham so that I could see Evelyne Moseley's work myself. I went on November 5<sup>th</sup>.

Mr and Mrs Powell gave me a wonderful welcome. Evelyne's sampler had been brought out ready to show me. It is a beautiful one, rather shorter, I think, than Mère Georgine's and less elaborate and colourful. But the work is breath-takingly beautiful. All kinds of stitches and techniques are shown. The stitches are tiny and perfectly regular, so I think Evelyne must have counted threads on the very fine material used. I was greatly impressed, particularly by the workmanship of two loops, the kind one sews on to tea-towels; one end is attached to the "piece" while the other is left loose, to show how neatly the little hem should be made. It is absolutely perfect: a very narrow "hem", stitches that are almost invisible and not a trace of a loose end of cotton. There is also a square "piece" knitted in very fine white yarn. Darning stitches in very fine red cotton have been worked on it. One "piece" showed a technique I am unfamiliar with: ribbon folded ingeniously and kept in position by a stitch or two in the right places. The general effect is of padded quilting but with the sides not fully stitched down. It occurred to me that this kind of sampler may have been the first step towards a more elaborate one like Mère Georgine's, that it was intended to make sure that a pupil really had mastered the basic skills and techniques on which more ambitious work could be based.

Evelyne was born in 1872 so was probably at Tildonk in the middle or late 1880s. Unfortunately, her name is not in the Registers which Sœur Bernadette brought out for Mrs Powell to see. I think that, if for some reason, a girl came to the school in the middle of a term, no-one got round to entering her details in the Register. After all, there was no School Secretary as such in those days and there were no Government forms to return!

Among Evelyne's things is a card labelled 7<sup>ème</sup> Cours. So it seems probable that Evelyne was in that class. The pre-World War II Oldies will remember the three Cours Préparatoires in the Grandes, taught by Mère Victorine, Mère Germaine and, I think, Mère Marie-Blanche. They were for foreign girls who needed extra tuition in French and were too old to go into the Section des Moyennes. The top class there was 6<sup>ème</sup> Primaire, so it seems logical that the next one up in the standard of French should be called the 7<sup>ème</sup> Cours. Perhaps in those days the word "Primaire" was not used at all and that the word "Cours" was the usual term.

Mrs Powell has several photographs of Tildonk as it was in the 1880s. One shows the convent seen from the farmland where the Eikeblok now stands. It gives an unrestricted view across the Cour des Grandes, of the building which houses the Salle Ste Marie and the dormitories: St Joseph, St Ignace and Ste Marie. One of the dormitory photographs shows the cubicle curtains drawn back so that the petites armoires and the washbasin and jugs can be seen. There are photographs of the garden as well: two of the Allée du Calvaire - one from each end - and one of the pond. The gloriette built on what someone ironically called "la montagne" had not yet been put up. Mrs Powell took photographs of the same places, except the dormitories because they have all been dismantled. She took some of the Salle des Fêtes and the Galerie de Passage as well.

I am very grateful to Mr and Mrs Powell for their kindness to me and I would like to thank them on my own behalf and on that of the Tildonk Old Girls' Society for all the information they have passed on about Evelyne Moseley and the "Tildonck" of her day. Merci de tout cœur!

**PPS** from Jocelyn....Un très grand merci once again to Nell for all the news from Tildonk. You really do bring it to life for us. Your affectionate tributes to Mère Emilie and Josette painted a vivid picture of two strong and generous women who each in their different ways exemplified the Tildonk tradition of commitment and dedicated service to their community. Together with the updates on the nuns and their daily lives it was like reading a long letter from a favourite aunt all about ones relatives and

reminded me once again that, wherever in the world we may be, we are still part of a wider family, in that lovely phrase "enfants de Tildonk".

The Mystery of the Missing Samplers is a fascinating story and a touching link with the past. I remember well our embroidery classes in "les Moyennes" in the mid-fifties, rows of little girls seated round the salle, our heads bent over our work, our brows furrowed in absorbed concentration.....I know it's a lifetime ago, but in many ways it could be several centuries past - very Jane Austen really. Embroidery skills were one of the essential accomplishments of "les jeunes filles bien rangées" which Tildonk aimed to produce and, while modern life may no longer provide much need for 'petit point', it does present me with plenty of opportunities for darning and hemming and I'm grateful for what I learnt. And the baby dress I smocked in 1957 is still being worn by our Head Teddy!

Another of those feminine accomplishments was music and this brings me to Senorita (Remei), one of the great influences in many of our lives. I was lucky enough to carry on having lessons with her in Brussels for many years and she taught my eldest daughter, with the same enthusiasm and vivacity we all enjoyed at school. So I was delighted when our annual family holiday to Catalonia coincided with the concert Remei and her sister Dolors gave in the beautiful 11<sup>th</sup> century church of Sant Joan de Sanata, near Barcelona, where she and David were married. The concert was in aid of the restoration fund and Remei played a Beethoven sonata, a Brahms rhapsody and three dances by the Catalan composer, Mompou, who was a close friend and whose whole œuvre she has now recorded. Remei accompanied Dolors, who is Professor of Singing at the Conservatoire in Barcelona, in songs by Toldra and Mompou, including a very moving tribute to their sister Miriona, who sadly died last year. Miriona was the Director of the first internationally-recognised dance school in Spain, also in Barcelona, and had launched many students into successful careers. To complete the talent of this amazing family, their sister Maria Lluisa, who organised the concert and is the nun responsible for much pastoral work in the parish of Sanata, has just recorded a CD of Byzantine liturgical music, which is truly heavenly to hear.

The concert was of course a great success, the chapel was packed with family and friends and as we sat there, enveloped in the glorious harmonies, I blessed my good fortune in having met such an inspirational teacher all those years ago. Moltes gracies, Remei!

Finally, our usual "cri de cœur". When you write, please give your Christian name, your maiden name, your married name, where appropriate, in capitals, and say when you were at Tildonk.

Please also remember to give an address through which you can be reached, especially if you are going abroad. It is disheartening as well as expensive to have letters returned "Not known at this address".

Apologies again for the delay in producing the "Echo", which Nell had valiantly written up in good time, even though last year's was going to be her last! You are a star, Nell, and we are all very grateful to you! We all look forward to seeing you at the Reunion, where possible, and in any case hope you will all keep in touch and give us your news for the next edition. Bonne continuation et à bientôt!

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