

Account of the foundation of the present Junior School in 1992 by Lynda Sharpe – first Head of Friends’ Junior School. Taken from ‘A History of Friends’ Junior School’ edited by Tony Watson in 2012.



Above photo of Lynda Sharpe with her first class in 1992

1992–1996

Lynda Sharpe was appointed in June 1992 to set up a junior school in Gibson House, a large white-washed building in its own grounds, in the premises built originally as the school sanatorium in 1911. It was expanded in 1995 to include a nursery.

It was a very exciting project, as it meant considering every aspect of a new school – furniture, books, curriculum, uniform, staff and, of course, the recruitment of the first pupils, who were to be aged 7 to 11 years. The target set by the governors was that it was to open in the autumn with ten pupils. As Lynda had an eight-year-old son, Daniel, who would become pupil number one, there were only nine to be recruited!

Lynda recalls:

In the first week of June (as I had a two-week half term from my current post at a Yorkshire prep school) my family and I stayed in the school’s medical centre, opposite Gibson House, and my work began. Whilst my husband and son explored the surrounding area, I held an open day, interviewed prospective parents and ordered furniture and books.

It was an exhausting summer ... everywhere needed decorating, display boards and blackboards needed erecting, furniture and books arrived and we finally made our move from Yorkshire and into the Gibson House flat which occupied the first floor of the building. Part of the flat which was downstairs was needed for the new school, so one of the upstairs bedrooms was turned into a kitchen during our first few weeks in residence.

Gibson House opened its doors in September 1992 to 15 pupils. The only full-time member of staff other than Lynda Sharpe was Elspeth (Ellie) Parry, the Gibson boarding house matron, who was to be teaching assistant, playground supervisor, receptionist and anything else which was needed. Nina Gatward taught French for one afternoon a week to release Lynda to show around prospective parents and some of the senior school teaching staff took such lessons as PE, ICT, Design Technology, Art and Music, so that the children could be split into lower and upper juniors for their main academic lessons. The juniors had full use of the sports hall, swimming pool, music school, main hall, the art and technology areas and the dining hall.

An early highlight was the lovely mural painted by Jim Anderson, the artist in residence, for the Gibson entrance hall. Lynda, Ellie and all fifteen pupils featured in the painting, with the children making suggestions and watching enraptured as it took shape. A new pupil joined before Christmas, in time to take part in the carol service and shadow play, a further two joined in January; by the end of the first year there were 26 pupils and Gibson was becoming a thriving and happy little community.

In the spring of 1993 Lynda Sharpe met with the governors' education committee and persuaded them to lower the age group to take five- to seven-year-olds from the start of the second year. This was a successful move, and September 1993 saw the roll rise to 52 pupils and the appointment of new members of staff – Nikki Prestwich to teach the infants, assisted by Vivienne Menhinnick, and Sally Knight to teach with Lynda in the juniors. When Sally took maternity leave Linda Ridsdill-Smith joined the staff, and when numbers increased again for January 1994, Helen Lane became the second teacher in the infants.

Lynda writes,

I have such happy memories of those first two years. Pupils could arrive from 8 a.m. and many of them stayed until 6 p.m., playing in the day room or outside in the garden. Ellie would make drinks and sandwiches and we all sat chatting and laughing, like one big family.

Our first residential trip for the older pupils was to Scarborough, followed by trips to Wales and the Isle of Wight, which the children loved.

The first major drama production was 'The Wizard of Oz' – Nikki Prestwich directed, assisted by Edward Dodge, the director of music, and Ellie's daughter Clare, who painted an absolutely wonderful set. This was to be the first of a series of fabulous shows performed in the main school hall. My son, Daniel, who was almost ten, played the Tin Man and discovered a talent for singing and acting which led to his career becoming that of a professional musical theatre performer, touring in shows such as 'Evita' and 'Chitty, Chitty Bang Bang'.

By the end of the second year the juniors were outgrowing the space available in Gibson House. The day room had become a library, and the smallest classroom had become a music room with a Clavinova piano, to be used by the new music teacher, Martin Wilson. The original, tiny head's office now housed Gibson's own secretary, Christine Noakes

(previously, the senior head's secretary had also served Gibson). Lynda Sharpe moved into the old matron's room where she finally had space for a couple of armchairs for visitors.

By September 1994 the Junior School had taken over half of the medical centre, there were seven classes and more staff, including Melanie (Mim) Clark, who became Gibson's first deputy head.

The number on roll finally hit the magic 100 in spring 1995, and it was now a very good feeder into the senior school.

At this time a nursery school, "The Avenues", held sessions in the scout hut behind Gibson House. Following discussions with the nursery staff and the governors, it was decided to make this nursery part of the junior school, so that Friends' School would finally encompass the whole age range from rising three years up to eighteen years. In order to do this the whole of the medical centre building would be needed as well as the garden area for the youngest pupils to play.

Work started in early 1995 to alter existing rooms in the main school to re-house the medical centre. In the summer term the necessary alterations were made for the new nursery – tiny toilets, a gated entrance, a garden fence, a wet play area, a quiet room and a main activity room.

In September 1995 Gibson House Nursery opened, and the old medical centre building now housed all the infant classes and an art/technology room. The original Gibson building had four junior classrooms, a library, music room, office, staffroom, kitchen and head's study. The scout hut became the assembly hall and offered space for peripatetic teachers giving instrumental lessons.

In September 1995 the first male teachers, Phil Soutar and John Dodsworth, began and a new playground area was made on the tennis courts. Gibson was a thriving Junior School of 130 pupils, fully embracing the Quaker ethos and a successful addition to the longstanding senior school.

Lynda Sharpe left Gibson House in July 1996 to return to her native Yorkshire, and Mark Anderson was appointed to take over as head from September 1996.

Lynda recalls,

My years at Gibson House were very special ones. It was a challenge to set up a new school but one which I thoroughly enjoyed. I will never forget my time there and the wonderful friends I met, many of whom are still close friends today. Gibson will continue to be very dear to my heart for the rest of my life.