



St Mary's College
Durham University

125 Faces of St Mary's



Celebrating
125 years

Welcome

The beginning of the 125 Faces of St Mary's

Over the academic year 2024/25, we have celebrated 125 years of Mary's.

Founded in 1899, 33 Claypath in Durham, known as the women's hostel, became home to the first six female students of what is now St Mary's College. Over the past 125 years, thousands of students have entered St Mary's College and called it home.



Kellie Horrocks.
St Mary's College Alumni Officer

During a quiet period in the summer of 2024, a colleague and I decided to venture into the basement of St Mary's Fergusson Building, on the site which has been the College's home since 1952. The plan was to clear out "the strong room", which was filled to the brim with memorabilia from years gone by.

Before the digital age, students had to supply passport images of themselves to be used for their student records, interviews during the application process and campus cards. While in the strong room, I came across folders and albums containing passport photos of former St Mary's students. Some images I found go back to the 1960's. There was no rhyme or reason to how they were stored; they weren't in date or alphabetical order. I suspect that many passport photos were stored away when disposing of student records. And as Mary's was an all-female college until 2005, I came across very few passport photos of men.

This gave me an idea. As most of the photos had names on the back, can I reunite former St Mary's ladies with their younger selves, and would they be happy to share their memories of Mary's with me? Thus, the 125 Faces of Mary's collage was created to celebrate this historic anniversary.

I hope you enjoy reading stories from our alumni who feature in the collage. Do you see anyone you recognise?

Sarah Rigby nee Walker English 1983-1986

I'd describe Mary's as fun, free and friendly. Every term had its character and features.

I have many fond memories of my time at Mary's. I was JCR Treasurer of the Social Committee, organising and setting up the balls. I enjoyed playing pool in the basement, piano duets in the practice room, college balls and I sang in the Christmas carol service.

Midsummer ball was my favourite event. We had brilliant comedians of the day as well as music. Rory Bremner and Ronnie Scott stand out.

The porters were fab. I remember one rescuing a necklace for me which had I had dropped down the sink. We had "moral tutors" in those days. I remember being invited to dinner at Mrs Rogister's house, who was mine.

Catering was always interesting – there was a very unpopular meal served at formals called pork casserole. We voted to ban it I think but we were convinced the kitchen turned it green and re-branded it as goulash.

After Mary's I became an accountant, and eventually a Finance Director. I got married and had two children. My daughter also studied at Durham, so I've been back to visit and I still love it. I have now returned to my first love, words, drawing on my degree once more in doing a Masters in Creative Writing and writing a novel.



Sarah at a Mary's ball in 1986 and the St Mary's Midsummer Ball invitation in 1985

Hannah Bedding

Geography

2011-2014

My time at St Mary's was hilarious, unique and unforgettable. I have so many fond memories of my time at Mary's. From the formals to the socials to the balls and just the hilarious day-to-day going on in and around College. I think my favourite memory was during summer ball in my first year when a group of us took the silent disco outside and were singing our hearts out next to one of the lion statues at the entrance of Mary's as the sun came up.

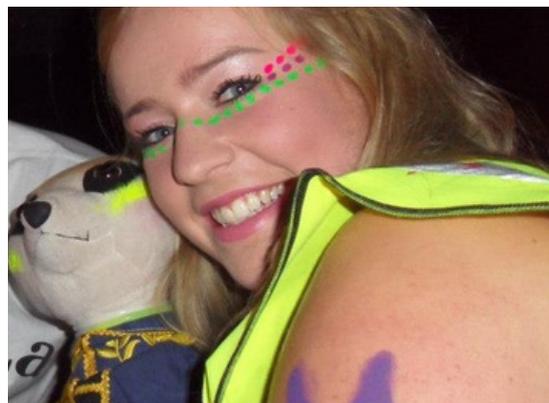


Summer was always my favourite. Once exams were over, I spent lots of time chilling and relaxing in Mary's grounds, which were always beautiful, especially when the sun was shining. I was a Fresher's Rep and an Open Day Rep. I was part of the team that created Maurice the Mascot! I also took part in the We Will Rock You show and played Scaramouche!

All the staff were amazing. Mustafa ran the bar and dining hall, and he was always up for a laugh!

My closest friends are from Mary's. I met them in the first week of Freshers' and we haven't looked back since! Since graduating, many of my friends are dotted around the country, and even abroad, so we don't get to see each other as often as we would like. So enjoy having your friends close!

After Mary's, I worked in Town Planning for a couple of years in London before retraining as a Geography teacher.



Hannah the Open Day rep, and right with Maurice

Julie Fitton nee Worthington English Language and Literature 1979-1982

I have many fond memories of Mary's, but the one that has left the greatest impression on me is of walking down the steps from the main building after Thursday Formal to the sound of the Cathedral bells. During the summer the view was wonderful: on dark nights the illuminated cathedral was magical. I often think of all those who have walked down those steps to that view since I left Mary's over 40 years ago.



I have memories of the people at Mary's, too. In my first year I was hospitalised with an inner ear infection and Miss Kenworthy accompanied my father to visit me in the hospital. He never forgot her kindness. There was the College porter, Laurie, who assisted me and my friend Tracey when we were running the college bar. A real Geordie who called us both "Pet", he spent his Wednesday afternoons helping us change the barrels and clean the pipes. In my second year at Mary's, 1981, I became JCR Vice President, and if the JCR President wasn't in Formal, it fell to me to say Grace at the start and end of the meal. During the Easter Term of 1981, Adam and the Ants topped the charts with "Stand and Deliver". Before the internet or catch-up, the only way to see them perform was on Thursday's "Top of the Pops", on the TV in the common room - and Mary's girls wanted to make a quick exit to see Adam Ant. I remember sitting at the far end of the dining hall, near the SCR table, seeing girls leaning forward and fixing me in their gaze, willing me to say the Blessing without which no one could leave the hall. I waited until our tables had been served the main course, then stood to say Grace. I'll never forget the scraping of chairs, the look of surprise on Miss Kenworthy's face, then the rush and flurry of gowns as girls dashed down the side of the dining room!

Since leaving Mary's, I have been back a few times. My husband went to Grey College, although we met after university. The first thing we asked each other when realising we'd both studied at Durham was, "Which college?"



Julie with her father, the steps leading to the Fergusson and Julie with her friend Tracey, left

Clare Hubbard nee Bull
Sociology and Social Policy
1982-1985

I met many people while at university, who I remain close friends with to this day. I also met my husband when I was a Mary's student. I have a lot of friends who moved to Durham, so I'm often in the city and have been back to Mary's since graduating. My daughter also studied at Durham.

I loved the old building and the grounds at St Mary's. My favourite event was the garden party. After graduation, I became a family lawyer, then a project manager, a magistrate and now a psychotherapist. I've divorced a few famous people in my time, but I can't tell you about that!



Jo Aidroos nee Birks
Engineering
1990-1993

I made some lifelong friends at Mary's, some of whom I'm still in touch with today. While here, I played university netball and I particularly enjoyed the annual summer ball. Summertime was wonderful at Mary's, especially after exams.

After graduating, I started work as a management consultant, and continue in this career today - now as an EY Partner.

Nicola Brown
Law
1993-1996

I loved my time at Mary's. I'll always remember the beautiful view of the cathedral and the daily fight to get warm toast. I made lots of friends while I was here, and we would all crowd into the JCR to watch TV. I'm still in touch with friends from Mary's today. After graduating, I've worked predominantly in IT within the public sector. I try to come back to Durham every year.



Jo Freer
History
2001-2004

I have lots of fond memories of my time at Mary's. I was bar manager in my second year. A huge achievement for us was refreshing and repainting the whole bar. And another memorable moment was the bar committee's contribution to Durham's DUCK naked calendar! I was also part of a wider cohort of Mary's Girls, whose fundraising efforts for DUCK Week involved donning bright yellow duck ponchos and wearing these to all lectures, seminars and social events! I can't remember how much we raised, but I do remember it being a hilarious experience.

My housemate was the netball captain, and I was made an honorary member of the college team. I didn't play one game, but I was a great cheerleader! Christmas was fun. I always enjoyed the Christmas formal, with everyone chorusing Durham's version of the 12 Days of Christmas. I wonder if they still sing this, and if the lyrics are still the same?

After I graduated, I spent six months working at the Royal Blind School in Edinburgh, then moved to Oxford to complete a Masters degree. I settled in Oxford and now live here with my partner and son. I now work for National Geographic Learning, and I have the opportunity to collaborate with some truly inspirational people.



Helen Andrews
Economic and Modern History
1984-1987

St Mary's is a wonderful college and is transformative, fun and stimulating! Summertime at Mary's was my favourite time of year. I remember sunbathing to T-Rex on the lawn when I should have been revising. My favourite event was Michaelmas dinner. I enjoyed many a night out with my fantastic friends, who I'm still in touch with after all these years.

I have been a solicitor for over 30 years, which I consider a success in itself!



Left to right - Ayesha Garrett, Samera Said and Rashmi Misra.

Rashmi Misra nee Pandya
Computer Science
1989-1992

My time at St Mary's was just a blur! I met many amazing young ladies and have kept in touch with some dear friends, although I have lost touch with many whom I'd love to reconnect with. Bill the porter was amazing. More than a porter, he was a counsellor and a friend. Miss Kenworthy always managed a smile when she saw me. The catering staff always saved me a little bag of nuts and some cottage cheese to go with my more meagre vegetarian meal! Not forgetting that I also met my husband while studying.



Sarah Ellis and Rashmi Misra pictured at their graduation below.



I remember the garden party after exams were over in my final year. No exam stress or running to something. Just friendly banter, hopes and conversations on what we intended to do over the summer. Spring, when the cherry blossoms bloomed and looking at the snow-covered Durham Cathedral from the college library window in the winter.

After Mary's I continued to study at Heriot-Watt University and then my PhD in AI at Exeter University. In 2013 I moved to the US. I am currently Chief AI Officer for a silicon and sensor company, before that I led all strategic AI partnerships for Microsoft, including the OpenAI partnership from 2019.

I have been back to Durham and Mary's many times. When my children were younger, they were instantly inspired by the "Harry Potter"-esque dining room! My daughter graduated from Durham University with a Law degree in 2023.



Bill the porter was amazing. More than a porter, he was a counsellor and a friend.





Emma Steiger nee Finch
Geology and Geophysics
1991-1994

I applied with an open college choice to the university, as a single sex college, not many people applied directly to Mary's. I was happy to be offered a place and was glad as soon as I turned up, it had a relaxed atmosphere and the best food across campus, according to my husband from Hilde Bede.

My strongest memories are queuing with 50p coins for the three phones and the view of the Cathedral when heading to lectures in the morning.

I made a lot of great friends, was part of the JCR committee, and always helped decorate college for the balls. I played university first team netball all three years, represented the northern universities, and was club captain in my second year, getting full university colours.

Sarah Bowen nee Waith
Politics
1993-1996

I have so many amazing memories from the very first day that I arrived and met my roommate to Mary's Bops to doing laundry in the wee hours. I was JCR Social Secretary, played football for the St Mary's team, coxed Mary's crews and I was also the Chapel Clerk.



My favourite event was the auction and everything that came after—it was quite the experience! Getting someone to follow another person around, ringing a bell and hollering "unclean" all day long was honestly worth its weight in gold. I mean, can you imagine the spectacle? It was absolutely priceless! We also hosted a Blind Date in the college bar, which was so fun!

My group of friends from our corridor have met a few times, and we visited for the reunion a few years ago. I feel so lucky to have met them.





Liz Bradshaw nee Brougham

Education

1988-1992

I have many fond memories. I came to all the JCR events. I remember one Summer Ball when Jo Brand and Jack Dee performed. Their names were the smallest on the poster, clearly pre-dating their fame! I loved the formal dinners with friends, some I'm still in touch with today, we even came back once for a reunion. I remember Bill, the porter. He always went over and above. He looked after us all as if we were his family. He took a telephone call from my family who asked to be put through to me on my corridor as they had sad news that my Grandpa had just died. Instead of transferring the call, he came all the way to my room and insisted I take the call in the office. I've never forgotten how thoughtful and kind Bill was.



Liz with her friends Helen Owen nee Monk and Kathryn Powell nee Phillips at a St Mary's reunion in the late 90s

And not forgetting that it was while at Mary's that I met my husband while bellringing. He was at Hild Bede. All I can say is that I had the best time ever at Mary's. I loved it all!

Zarqaa Chohan

Law

1990-1993

I made some good friends while I was here. I remember eating peaches and cream on the lawn and the chocolate fudge cake from the local tea shop.

I was active in the JCR in my first year and was involved with Durham Theatre, the debating society and the Palatinate Law magazine. I enjoyed the college dinners and always found the catering staff to be friendly.

After graduating, I finished training as a solicitor and practised with an international law firm. I then completed a Masters in Human Rights and practised international law and institutional law with missions of the United Nations, OSCE and European Union in East Timor, Kosovo, Cambodia and the United States.



Sophie Johnson nee Yale
History
1990-1993

I have so many memories of my time at Mary's! I loved the Thursday night and Sunday lunch formal meals and the end-of-year bops! I loved to watch TV in the East JCR, mostly reruns of US TV shows, eating rolos from the vending machine. I was one of the only Americans at St Mary's, plus I was a vegetarian, and I was always hungry. The dining ladies would sometimes take pity on me and give me extra roast potatoes, which were delicious!

I met my best friend Liz while at Mary's. We met in the mews in September 1995. Since that time, 30 years ago, we talk on the phone about once a week, and we have gone on dozens of trips together around Europe and the US. We have walked literally hundreds of miles together. Liz is close to my family and is one of the people who make my life so wonderful.

After Mary's, I went to Stanford for graduate school, but left before finishing my PhD, had a very successful career in the Silicon Valley and now have been a Career Coach in Washington DC for the last decade.



Sophie left, with her best friend Liz



Lucy Bewley
French and Music
2002-2006

I made many lifelong friends at Mary's. I have many fond memories of the staff - Eileen on reception, Steve & David in maintenance, Mary the cleaning lady, and Sharon the dinner lady. In 2005, we had an Egyptian-themed Mary's Day, which was my favourite event. In the summer, I would sit on the lawn with a pile of books beside me.

After Mary's, I worked as a television subtitler at ITV, a marketing executive at British Engines, a PA, and now I work for Vattenfall, a green energy producer. I don't live far away from Mary's and even had the chance to attend a SCR dinner as a guest.

In memory

Sarah Packwood
Biological Sciences
1988-1991

Sarah died in 2024. Her friends, including Juliet England, who met her at St Mary's, have shared some memories of her.

Sarah was always creative, and whenever you were with her, the sound of music was never far away. She was in an a cappella singing group called Seventh Heaven with six friends, and they performed at college balls, including at Grey and Hild & Bede as well as a garden party at Mary's. There are also great memories of her dancing to UB40 when we saw them perform at Whitley Bay ice rink.



We would often congregate in her room, where there would always be a warm welcome. Sarah was also a homebody who loved her parents and her home village of Long Itchington, Warwickshire, where she grew up, and where she invited some of us to visit during the vacations.

Sarah was someone who had big feelings and could get upset easily. So, aid work was an interesting choice of career. Yet she never became "hardened" to life and always remained sensitive to others and the world's many injustices. After her death, colleagues said it was part of what made her so good at what she did.

It was during her time at Durham when she started to grow and spread her wings and, afterwards, she never stopped!



Images of Sarah Packwood while a student at St Mary's. Images provided by her friends.

Advice from St Mary's Alumni

"Embrace Durham and all the opportunities. Durham is an exceptionally beautiful city, and I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to study there".

Jo Freer

"A degree from Durham will open many doors, so relax, drink everything in and have a ball".

Emma Finch

"Make the most of your time at Durham, it will stay with you".

Sarah Rigby nee Walker

"Take risks, do things that scare you, invest in your friendships, they remind you of who you are when life overwhelms with expectations and obligations".

Sophie Johnson nee Yale

"Dream big! It's easy to get involved in University life, and it's easy to forget how short and fundamental the time is. Try to slow down to enjoy the moments".

Zarqa Chohan

"Savour your time at Durham. It's both incredibly special and ephemeral".

Rashmi Misra nee Pandya

There are hundreds of unclaimed photos, mainly because we don't have up to date records for our alumni. As part of the process, I have kept a record of all unclaimed photos in the hope that I can reunite alumni with their student self. I'll keep hold of the photos until January 2026, after which time I'll sadly have to destroy them.

If you were a Mary's student and remember giving us a passport photo, please get in touch to see if I came across your photo in the strong room. I can also update your alumni record. stmarys.alumni@durham.ac.uk

Best wishes,



