WILSON HOUSE
A BRIEF HISTORY
EXPECTA CUNCTA SUPERNA
EPSOM COLLEGE
Although the grounds of Epsom College are indeed beautiful, as alumni that is not what draws us back to our old school. It is the people; teachers, tutors, former classmates, coaches... Meeting old and new friends with a shared educational experience often gives us tremendous insight into just how far we have travelled since our school days.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this Wilson Reunion. It is a celebration of the House, many generations of Wilsonians and the extraordinary continuity of Housemasters, Housemistresses and tutors. I am especially pleased to welcome our most senior Wilsonian, Dr Geoffrey Grogono who arrived at the College in 1936, as the third generation on his mother’s side and second on his father’s to come to the College.

I hope you enjoy this book, which is a brief history of Wilson, largely from the perspective of previous Housemasters and Housemistresses. It may serve as a reminder of how important your educational opportunities have been and the importance of preserving them for future generations.

To commemorate this special occasion, the Trust has commissioned a painting by Andrew Roberts (W 1987-92) of the interior of Wilson, which will hang permanently in Wilson. Please consider purchasing a limited edition print of the painting. All proceeds will go directly to the General Bursary Fund. I hope you enjoy the day.
British students of anatomy. Wilson’s practical skills and brilliant anatomical drawings (his mother had been a successful amateur artist) enabled him to become a member of the Royal College of Surgeons on his twenty-second birthday, a remarkable achievement.

He was head-hunted by Jones Quain, one of the most famous anatomists of the day, to become his chief assistant at University College, where he had charge of nearly four hundred students by 1835. In those days anaesthetics were unknown (Liston’s first use of chloroform was not until 1846); Wilson’s “steady hand and calm nerve” were certainly valued. His career flourished and he took on an incredible work-load; lecturer in anatomy and physiology at the Middlesex Hospital, consultant at the Marylebone Infirmary, extensive research for and publication of articles in the new field of dermatology, as well as being sub-editor of The Lancet.

Despite modern teenage obsessions with hygiene, generations of Wilsonians, boys and girls, are probably unaware that Erasmus Wilson’s most successful publication (1845) was: “Healthy Skin: A popular treatise on the Skin and Hair, their preservation and management.” Seven editions were published by 1866 and it helped to promote the building of many Municipal Baths and to popularise sea-bathing.

An extensive private practice and shrewd investments, particularly in new gas and railway companies, brought Wilson considerable wealth. Always generous in treating the poor free of charge, he became a major philanthropist: he paid for the restoration of the 10th century church in Swanscombe, Kent, where he was to be buried in 1884, endowed a hospital in Margate for the treatment of skin diseases, and set up

Houses in many schools are named after benefactors, national heroes or role models; Sir Erasmus Wilson was all three. Although he was born in 1809, the same year as Charles Darwin, he is relatively unknown; it is time to set the record straight.

Erasmus Wilson acquired his unusual first name from a Norwegian grandfather and showed precocious scholarship, briefly at Dartford Grammar School and then with a series of private tutors. Determined to follow his father, a naval surgeon, into medicine, he was still only sixteen when he took up residence in a small London school of anatomy (few hospital schools of medicine existed then). He also studied in Paris, where more liberal laws allowed a cheap and plentiful supply of cadavers for dissection; the notorious activities of Burke and Hare highlighted the difficulties faced by

BIOGRAPHY OF SIR ERASMUS WILSON

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professional chairs in London and Aberdeen Universities. He also gave generously to The Royal Medical Benevolent College, as Epsom College was then known, laying the foundation stone for Wilson House on 11th October 1872. Completed at a cost of £5,058 it was where all our Headmasters lived until the 1960s, and early Wilsonians were charged higher fees in recognition of the special care they (allegedly) received. A similar sum was left to Epsom College in his will, and a massive £209,617 to the Royal College of Surgeons, by reversion after his wife’s death; they had no children.

Erasmus Wilson also achieved fame in other ways. Firstly, he showed great moral courage in risking his career at a sensational inquest into the death of a soldier after a brutal flogging. When the army doctors closed ranks, arguing that death had resulted from illness contracted prior to the 150 lashes with the cat-o’-nine tails, Wilson emphatically disagreed, standing alone against the establishment. He convinced the jury, which recorded a verdict that “by means of the said flogging … the death was caused”. Widely publicised, this trial ended the punishment of flogging in the British army.

Secondly, Wilson became an enthusiastic Egyptologist after travelling to the Ottoman Empire to research the therapeutic benefits for skin diseases of Turkish baths. He campaigned for the shipping to London of an ancient obelisk, a pair to the one in the Place de la Concorde. In 1877, a unique casket was designed, in which this would be towed from Alexandria, but the cable snapped and six of the crew were drowned. Wilson refused to accept that the obelisk was lost and paid £10,000 from his own pocket for it to be retrieved. That was how Cleopatra’s Needle came to the north bank of the Thames.

Now better known to the general public, Wilson was showered with honours in his last years, becoming President of the Royal College of Surgeons and of the Royal Medical Society of London. He was knighted in 1881 for his “munificent gifts for the support of hospitals and the encouragement of medical study”. So much for worldly honours: the Wilson House motto, his own, suggests that Erasmus Wilson, like other great Victorian Christian philanthropists, had things well in perspective. “Expecta Cuncta Superna” may be loosely translated as: “Look to all that is coming from above”.

BY ROGER LANE

MICK WALKER
HOUSEMASTER TO 1949

Recollections of his former pupils

DARRELL WILKINSON 1933-1937

My Housemaster, J P Walker, knew Dom Bernard Clements, a wonderful monk from Burnham Abbey, I think as it was then. He came from time to time to give profound and stimulating sermons at Evensong and would come back later to ‘Mickey’ Walker’s room at Wilson, where he overflowed
into a chair, monks robes around him. Some of us would be invited to ‘sit at his feet’ while eating some of Mickey’s hoard of Cox’s. A delightful few minutes.

At other times a few of us might be invited to Mickey’s room just to listen to music from his gramophone with its huge horn like speaker and fibre needles which he would particularly sharpen to give the best sound. It was there that I first heard some great music such as the second pair of Bach’s B Minor Mass and was overwhelmed by it. An introduction to so much more.

**I B MACKINTOSH 1938-1944**

I started at Epsom College as a boarder in September 1938 aged 12 and was there for six years. My Aunt Cathy reminded me in later years that she came with Mum to bring me to the school where they met Mr ‘Conny’ Berridge the Housemaster of Hart-Smith. She told me that I then said “you can go now” showing I was not too overwhelmed by being away from home for the first time. I was a Foundationer for whom uniform was provided free by the school. However, Mum had her pride and had provided me with one suit of uniform to start school with, although I was very soon taken to the ‘Wardrobe’ where a lady measured me up and found me the right size clothes from her large store, some of which was second hand from others who had outgrown a uniform not yet worn out. We had one ‘best’ suit for Sundays and another for every day. We had a striped blazer, rugby and cricket kit.

School uniform at Epsom consisted of a grey flannel suit, black lace-up shoes, a white shirt with a separate stiff starched linen collar and black tie. House Prefects were allowed a striped tie with house colours, school prefects one with the school colours and there was a tie for boys awarded Ist XV rugger or 1st XI cricket colours. Below the Sixth Form the stiff collars were of the rounded style at the front, secured by a front and back stud — sixth formers could wear pointed collars. It was hard for a new boy to do up his tie properly, and if your front stud showed you were told you had a ‘new boy’s privilege’. We had a clean shirt twice a week and socks and underwear appropriately but a clean collar three or four times a week. All clothing was marked with one’s school number and also with Cash’s Names, and clean linen was laid out on our beds by one of the ‘skivvies’. Some boys would communicate with them through notes under their pillow. When a prefect, I remember a note being found left by a boy called Swindell – I remember him only for that. We used last names between ourselves – I was never called Ian, often Mac, but some boys had nicknames.

I do not remember having a cap, because we normally never went out of the grounds except for a cross country run as all the sports fields were in the College. Perhaps at certain times in the afternoon when you were not on compulsory sports I do remember going to the shops in Fir Tree Road. I had a trunk which went ‘luggage in advance’ by rail for the holidays three times a year. But I don’t remember having a tuck-box, which was a small wooden box 1’9” x 1’2” x 1’0” for books and hobby items, but not tuck as such. Mine may have gone in my trunk. Some boys brought some tinned food which they could cook for themselves on a gas ring on afternoons.
when ‘brewing’ was allowed – I never brewed.

The first autumn, 1938, we helped to dig trenches for air-raid shelters because war was expected with Nazi Germany. That threat soon abated and war was not to come until the following August, 1939. Those shelters were never used though we did get air raids. We carried gas masks everywhere for the first few weeks of war and then that stopped. I was now out of Hart-Smith into Wilson House under ‘Mick’ Walker who was to become a great friend. Mick was a Latin and Greek master and he took me for Greek and I did Ovid with him. It was in his classroom that I had carved my initials IBM on about nine desks for which I was caned by Finnegan the head prefect of the house.

At the beginning of the war the dormitories of Wilson House were relocated in the basement, very crowded together; and extra timber props were installed to support the floor above. This may have lasted 18 months or so before we moved, but not upstairs again. Forest House was then closed for the rest of the war and so Wilson moved into the Forest dayroom with its ‘ptoyces’ and their dormitories above the Forest dining room. We remained there until I left.

Wilson was attached to the Headmaster’s house. The new Headmaster H W Franklin had a young daughter, whom I woke up one evening when singing in the bath and Mick had a complaint the following day; I was only rebuked for it. We had a hot bath in the evening twice a week, but a quick cold bath every morning in the summer. After games we had only a splash at a row of wash basins, there were no showers. There was fagging which included making toast for prefects and last-minute waking up of senior boys in the morning. Each house prefect had a fag to run errands for him.

During my first year the Epsom Derby was a very exciting time. Thousands of coaches, motor and horse, converged on the roads outside, visible from where we changed classrooms for lessons. I remember small aeroplanes drawing adverts for Bile Beans in the sky. A school roll-call was held outside the chapel every two hours to prevent any boy slipping out to the races. That was the last Derby run at Epsom until after the War.
to excuse both a failing memory and the use of such expressions as ‘take over’. That was how I saw it after seven years in the army, though the reality was perhaps not quite as simple. Happily, I have been able to keep in contact with the College and also with the House up to the present day. Mark Salusbury and Roger Lane were colleagues while I was still at Epsom, and it has been good to get to know Rob Worrall, Debbie Parsons and Kirsty Adams. This has helped to keep some of the memories alive, as have some most enjoyable occasions from time to time in the company of Wilsonians of the 50s and 60s.

I am thus aware of the major developments that have taken place in Wilson since my appointment in January 1949. A flavour of life in the House as it still was in my early years is given in the recollections of two Old Wilsonians in this booklet. Neither refers, however, to the lack of privacy, which applied in all areas of life for every member of the House, all day and every day in term time apart from three Sunday exeats. It was accepted then, along with the cold dormitories, primitive ablutions and terrifying fire practices down the Davey escape, but it was the issue to which all subsequent improvements were principally directed.

There was one exception. Just inside the front door was the study of the Head of Wilson. Its possession was a unique privilege, and much envied – not least because of its gas fire. In ‘free’ hours it often became a common room for the House Prefects and selected friends from other Houses, but at other times he alone had some privacy.

For others there were no studies. House Prefects made do with curtained alcoves in the corners of the two dayrooms; all others, from the Upper Sixth downwards, had one locker (no lock) for books and personal possessions. During prep they worked six to a table, where also they could read or write at other times. The Senior Day Room on the ground floor had window benches, for which in due course the luxury of padded seats were provided.

Everyone slept in one of five dormitories, more than in most other Houses at the time. The largest was the junior dormitory of twelve, on the first floor. Each was in the charge of a prefect, except for the smallest occupied by the four senior members of the Upper School. Ablutions were hand basins on a bench down the middle of the room; hot water was carried from a large sink on the landing, or from the bathroom. A rota allowed one bath per week just before bedtime, supplementing the showers in the Box Room.
With beds as close together as regulations allowed, the maximum strength of the House at this time was 42. Wilson was thus the smallest of the boarding houses, by some 6 to 10 boys – sometimes a challenge for the selectors of house teams in the major sports. This limitation on numbers resulted from Wilson’s original foundation as the Headmaster’s House. Although J W Wilson was appointed as Housemaster just before the first World War, successive Headmasters continued to live in the southern half of the building until 1962.

In August 1949, two terms after my arrival in Wilson, Jill and I were married. Before the war, any housemaster of a boarding house who wished to marry was obliged to give up his house. (The first exception to this was Maxwell Phair – appointed to Fayrer in 1940 but away on war service from 1941 to 1945 – who married Venetia shortly after his return.) The principle had been accepted by the Council but at the time no house had suitable accommodation or could be adapted. So ‘No. 7’, the College dwelling in Longdown Lane beyond the old Armoury, became the family home. My House Tutor, Bob Fallows, occupied my former study and bedroom, and for the next fourteen years I commuted during term time between my home and a study in the House.

Hugh (R 65-70), Alison and Graham (P 72-77) were born in No.7. After some years, when the mild disturbances of their early childhood were in the past, we found enough space to take ‘lodgers’ in a spare bedroom. The Bursar provided a washbasin and college beds for three selected members of the Lower Sixth, who arrived when prep was over and left in time for ‘first roll’. This may or may not have been accounted a privilege, but it increased the strength of the House to 45.

In 1962 came the first big change. Henry Franklin, Headmaster for 23 years, retired, and Duncan McCallum became the first occupant of the present Headmaster’s House. Wilson acquired a Library, formerly the Headmaster’s house study, and conversion of the second floor bedrooms into three further dormitories began. During the school holidays of 1962-63 studies were built in the rooms on the first floor (I planned the original layout of these on graph paper) and hand basins with running water were installed in all dormitories. During the same year extensive alterations were made on the ‘private side’ in preparation for a resident married Housemaster.

In September 1963, Wilson House took possession of its new quarters. The much enlarged changing room and showers were now in the basement, and the old Box Room had become a games room. The Library had more comfortable chairs and a quieter environment, and all members of the Sixth Form had at least a share in a study. These were cramped by present day standards, and everyone was still in dormitory accommodation, but the improvements were nevertheless substantial.

At the same time my wife and I and our three
children moved into our quarters at the far end, to enjoy the spaciousness of the Victorian house designed for earlier Headmasters. Whether our move was everywhere counted among the improvements I cannot say, but it undoubtedly made the running of the House much easier and pleasanter for me – despite my becoming more accessible for the occasional emergency during the night.

Many of you will have read in the OE Magazine for 2007 Jonathan Maitland’s entertaining recollections of Wilson in the 70s, where he described his House as a “grey, loveless, macho boot camp”, with images of “deeply sinister showers” comparable to a morgue, toilets inferior to “khazis in a Victorian prison”, and “a suburban Guantanamo Bay” regime. All tongue in cheek, naturally, but one wonders what further expressions he might have found had he been a Wilsonian in the 50s.

So back to 1963. Following the expansion of the boarding accommodation, the capacity of the House rose to 56, a figure which was achieved gradually over the next two years. Any effect on achievements in the major sports was not immediate, but signs appeared, such as the very successful junior rugger and cricket sides of the mid 60s. In every year, Wilson had distinguished individual athletes, cricketers and rugger players. Minor sports always provided successes somewhere.

To mention just two: in both senses the House dominated the Fives courts below the Wilson Steps until the courts fell into decay, and incidentally rifle shooting which produced trophies in most years, and not a few members of the VIII. Academic success was taken for granted, and Wilsonians of these years have gone on to distinguished and fulfilling careers in the professions, the services, commerce and elsewhere; as of course have those of later generations and of both sexes who inherited the same traditions in vastly different surroundings.

Mark Salusbury
Housemaster 1969–1974

Remembered by former Wilson Tutor

Doc Young

My arrival at Epsom in 1969 to teach Biology coincided with Mark Salusbury taking over as Housemaster of Wilson and a year later I became his House Tutor. After six years at University as an undergraduate and PhD student, I wondered what I would find. This was the time when the anarchic film ‘If’ had just been released; would the students be rioting and shooting their housemaster and others? I need not have worried. Whilst the physical conditions were spartan to say the least, the atmosphere of the house was most civilised and welcoming.

More recent Wilsonians would be surprised at the difference in living conditions. My ‘flat’ – well actually two rooms off a corridor – had no kitchen and the bathroom facilities were shared with the boys! On making gentle enquiries of the then
Bursar I was told in no uncertain manner that I had the pick of the tutor flats and that “he had never had a problem sharing bathrooms when he was in Africa”!

The height of luxury for the junior dayroom was the building of ‘poyces’ to give each boy a little personal space. But then up to the chill of the unheated dormitories. On really cold days the breath froze on the blankets. But the joy of being able to slide all the way down the banisters from top to ground floor. Sadly this fun was ruined when bolts were screwed into the rail at strategic intervals.

The glory of the house was the library – a fine room liberally furnished with books and much valued. Perhaps this was a reflection of Mark Salusbury’s love of all things literary. I suspect some members of the house could be puzzled by his classical quotes and allusions, but none could miss his quiet concern for all and his desire that the talents of each member should be nurtured. Music and drama flourished and the Epsomian magazines for the period record the success of many individuals in squash, gymnastics and athletics. The Oxbridge roll of honour over this period is liberally sprinkled with Wilsonians.

L P Hartley wrote in ‘The Go-Between’ that “The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there”. Certainly looking back thirty-five years, it is easy to see how very changed the physical environment has become; but I am sure that the warm, friendly and generally very civilised house society of the time will always flourish.

Penelope (Penny to Wilsonians) and I moved into the House with two young daughters in 1974; we soon got used to enjoying the extra space – and the quiet. All that was to change on the first day of term!

We had wondered how sound-proof the former maids’ quarters were, then still all dormitories; we soon found out when the morning ‘fire’ bell rang – not very. And when the first boys returned from breakfast (morning routine dictated that sheets and blue blankets, so uniform and institutional, were stripped back before and beds smartly remade afterwards), it was like a herd of elephants above our bedroom. The lino on the floor didn’t help to keep noise levels down either and there were no curtains to alleviate the Tom Brown’s Schooldays appearance of ‘the dorms’. Present pampered girls, snug in their colourful, personalised duvets would surely mutiny at the thought of living in such spartan conditions with no form of heating provided. One of Penny’s first tasks was to make curtains in order to make this area warmer, in every sense. Radiators took longer; water freezing in tooth mugs overnight was not unknown.

Roger Lane
Housemaster 1974-1989
However, all schools were looking to improve facilities in Boarding Houses and Epsom swiftly realised that parents now expected less austerity. Parents were also aware of the academic benefits that would come with study bedrooms and Wilson was earmarked for up-grading in 1978. The then HM, Owen Rowe, came to assess the situation during afternoon school on the day of our House dinner/soirée. To my embarrassment, we heard drunken burbling as we approached one study. I opened the door quietly to find the occupant with his back to us, wine bottle in hand. Oblivious of our presence, he raised a glass (thank heavens, it was empty!), sipped, spat and proclaimed: “Chateau (he named a senior colleague)...no, this hasn’t aged well...too bitter...an unpleasant after taste”. We retreated quickly before he pretended to sample Chateaux Rowe or Rocky and found fault with them, while I persuaded a sceptical HM that this was a rehearsal for the revue. Later, Jonathan Maitland, now a TV presenter, then an enthusiastic performer, successfully repeated his inventive sketch with witty character assassination masquerading as fantasy wine-tasting.

Such evenings were always fun and gave a chance for very varied talents to express themselves. Penny, who had initiated these biennial soirees, also encouraged those with artistic talent to display their paintings in a ‘mini-Tate’ gallery down the long corridor to the study passage. We are delighted that Andrew Roberts, whose early works were displayed there, has been commissioned to paint a picture of the House. We held play-readings on a semi-regular basis and they were surprisingly well-attended even after the generosity of parents had enabled the House to acquire a state-of-the-art TV. We knew that some “were only there for the cakes”, but many were encouraged through these evenings to audition for parts in school productions. Wilson combined with John Potter’s Granville for several outstanding House plays and we knew we had much to live up to when we went solo with ‘Oh What A Lovely War’. It was a fitting climax when our final production of the challenging ‘The Strong Are Lonely’ was extensively rewritten and directed by a member of the Upper VI; I’m sure all those who were involved in all these plays still remember them vividly.

Others will have equally vivid memories, perhaps of sporting triumphs, although, as a small House compared to Propert and Fayrer, they were fewer than we would have liked. Many will remember John Odell’s excellent part-songs, often to his own distinctive and original settings, or the

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time when we bought our own printing press and began to turn out Christmas and invitation cards. As that petered out with the growing popularity of computers and desk-top printing, the House became entrepreneurial in other ways by participating in the Young Enterprise Scheme, forming a new company each September and going into voluntary liquidation each June. Although voluntary, this attracted 100% participation from U4s and Lower VI and provided an invaluable introduction to business methods; at various times the companies organised Barn Dances, Dancing Classes and Self-Defence Lessons, as well as selling tuck from the Day Room windows every Saturday break once the College Shop stopped providing this service. Share-holders doubled their money year by year and, with the profits cut up into third shares (charity, House Funds and a share-out to participants) there were no scandals of excessive bonuses going to fat-cats.

For fifteen years Wilson House was very central to our lives and to those of Helen and Catherine. They are both married to teachers and we have four grand-children. I look forward to re-meeting many Wilsonians of vintage 1974-90 and, of course, to meeting others older or younger even if your priorities on this unique and brilliantly organised occasion will be in renewing friendships formed in our shared House. Penny sends her apologies – sadly, she had agreed to run a Barn Dance to raise funds for our village church roof on this very day and couldn’t change it. We would love to hear your news, so please write to: The Stable Cottage, Stafford Court, West Stafford, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 8AA. Sorry, we technophobes would prefer to restrict our e-mail address.

ROB WORRALL
HOUSEMASTER 1989-1999

Rather like the current period, 1989/90 saw the beginning of a recession. Whilst various families experienced difficulties, the House number remained, throughout, at its maximum of 58 and there was ample evidence of Wilsonians developing, discovering and deploying a range of skills that proved to be of benefit both to the House and to the College. The Honours Boards (which remain on display) were added to liberally and the sense of purpose, nurtured for 15 years by Roger and Penelope (Penny) Lane, showed no sense of flagging. Erasmus Enterprises continued, plying its Tuck Shop trade through the Day Room window on a Saturday morning and producing mugs to commemorate the Queen’s visit in the November of ’89. (My sitting room was elected as the ’pre-reception foregathering area’ for the ‘B List’ guests, such as the Mayor and the local M.P. The latter disappeared to my study to phone Downing Street, re-appearing some thirty minutes later to tell me he had just had a tour of the House, shown around by “a chap in a towel, who seemed quite
“unfazed” – the Head of House, who had just emerged from a shower in the Box Room!

The Box Room: ‘spartan’ would have been an appropriate adjective in the late 1960s, let alone the late 1980s! Thus began the first campaign to continue the process of modernisation. A process that, towards the end of my time, produced the New Wing set over and beyond the Games’ Room. This enabled us to reduce both Dormitory dwelling and multiple room sharing.

Then came the bombshell! The decision to embrace co-education demanded that a suitable building to house 13-18 year old girls was needed. Wilson was the obvious choice. We were to stop taking M4 boys and, thus, to wind down over a period of four years. Inevitably, this was an unsettling moment. However, once the dust had settled, there were only two families who decided to transfer to alternative Houses and “the Wilson Spirit” came to the fore. When it came to our last year, the recruitment of several new Lower Sixth Formers and of an Eastern European Scholar in the Upper Sixth brought our year group number to 16 and we moved into The Terrace, as ‘Wilson Boys’. It is a matter of considerable pride that several trophies were won and that even better than anticipated A Level results were achieved, ensuring that all 16 secured University places without difficulty.

Thus, one era of College history came to a close, leaving behind it a rich legacy to help Debbie Parsons pioneer the co-education that has become a firm cornerstone of the College’s current success.

DEBBIE PARSONS
HOUSEMISTRESS 1996-2007

In September 1996, co-education at 13+ began when twelve girls were admitted into The Terrace House, next to White House, in rooms which had been converted from bursarial staff accommodation. Initial fears about whether the girls would be robust enough to cope in a predominantly male environment were, in some measure, quelled by a reassuring note from Admissions Staff which read, “This little girl is 5 ft 8!” Miss Dawson (as Doc Young called her) towered above the boys in her year and kept them in order.

During the summer of 1997 a further expansion of The Terrace took place and additional rooms were incorporated to cater for growing numbers. With thirty-four girls, a move into Wilson became imminent the following year.

I moved into Wilson House with my husband David in August, 1998, a newly-wed, with four stepchildren (plus a cat called Duncan and a rabbit...
called Fudge). My colleagues said I was brave taking on four step-children. To the contrary, my husband was far braver taking on sixty-three thirteen-to-eighteen year old girls, fifty-seven of whom were under sixteen.

One of his first tasks was to install a new doorbell to my study with a light system: Green = enter; amber = she won't be long; red = someone's in the study, come back later... anything to save his frequent trips to answer the doorbell.

The girls quickly discovered how helpful it was to have a man in the house for shoe repairs, emergency brace repairs, fixing fuses and even extracting a butter knife that a girl had accidentally dropped down her plaster cast! David's banoffee pies and birthday cakes became legendary at the 18th birthday parties and House social events, as did the cornflake packet game.

The importance of the girls setting the right tone in all areas of school life was emphasised. A school uniform was introduced for 13+ and 16+ girls to bring them in line with the boys (gone were the long skirts of White House days). The mantra “Smart not tart” became a well-worn phrase.

“Thought for the day” became a regular feature, as did the End of Year assemblies on “The good fruit salad” and the girls enjoyed supporting the work of the School Charity, once raising money for Task Brazil by cooking pancakes in the Housemistresses’s kitchen for anyone in the school to buy! Even visitors to the school were queueing to buy freshly made pancakes. It was before the days of Health and Safety and Risk Assessments!

By September 1999, the day girls from Wilson moved to the Terrace under Miss Eve Jardine-Young and later established Raven House. The Terrace was renamed Crawfurd House and Helen Paulett was appointed as Housemistress.

The refurbishment and modernisation of Wilson continued. The day room was converted into a common room and the large dormitories into smaller ones, with the creation of more single studies and a computer room. The infamous ‘box room’ was converted into an additional common room and showers were added to the first and second floors. A decking area was also made to ensure that the House had a small ‘garden’ area.

Wilson girls built on the successes of Wilson boys, adding three Heads of School to the Honours Boards, trophies for the choral competition, all the major sports and CCF, (including Sergeant Major) in addition to gaining several Oxbridge places and putting on a very memorable House play.

However, the one trophy that continued to elude the House was the chess trophy, in spite of Tessa Brisbane and Lizzy Day's attempts!

The popularity of “Harry Potter” did much to
encourage boarding and the numbers of weekly boarders reached an all time high. As I left Wilson, Epsom College was preparing to open its fifth girls’ house and the number of House Tutors had risen from one to four:

I handed over the reins to Mrs Kirsty Adams, who, as Resident Tutor of Wilson, was admirably equipped to lead the next generation of Wilsonians.

KIRSTY TOD
HOUSEMISTRESS 2007 TO PRESENT

In my brief tenure so far, another ‘face-lift’ has occurred within Wilson. The old basement showers were replaced by a 6th Form ‘Snug’, Mrs ‘K’ and her team moved to the old PC room (which in turn relocated to the old games room). Cries of “we want pink!” were met with the arrival of new duvets upstairs, whilst the beautiful red and black tiled floor downstairs provided inspiration for the redecoration of the Common Room and Library. Undoubtedly though, one of the most popular additions must be the new ‘Penthouse Suite’ bestowed to the Head of House. With en-suite shower (and bath!) coupled with a beautiful view of the Headmaster’s garden, it is lovely to be able to reward those who work so hard in running the House. Ironically its first occupant was immediately promoted to Head of School but in gracious Wilson spirit ‘surrendered’ it to the new Head of House after only one term!

Wilson girls continue to come from near and far, with recent full boarders arriving from the Far East, Russia and Zimbabwe. Keen to socialise and display their many talents, the tradition of Wilson Soirees was renewed in 2008 to a packed audience of nearly 200. Sporting success remains strong, especially in Cross-Country and Netball and the girls also delight in house-based activities and competitions, utilising the library for events such as Pumpkin-Carving, Quiz Nights and Dinner Parties.

However, whilst the House may have undergone a makeover both in looks and usage of space, we remain keen to preserve many features of its historic past. The beautiful wooden carpentry remains in the library, the old bell remains heartily rung by each new M4, and the First World War memorial to former Wilsonians hangs proudly on the first floor corridor.

The colours and cries of voices may have changed over the years, but the House remains proudly Wilson through and through.