

# Seventy years of school memories

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## **SEVENTY years ago school life was very different.**

In September 1939, these ladies all started at Western Senior School for Girls in Ipswich - the very same month the Second World War was declared.

And this weekend 20 of the girls who started the school in 1939 and graduated in 1943 met up to celebrate 70 years of the school.

Former student Jean Nichols, now 80, said: "At school it was all about the war effort.

"Everything was geared up to helping us win the war, all the lessons."

The life-long friends spent Sunday afternoon reminiscing about their school days, where many lessons were taught in the air raid shelters in the playing fields and cookery lessons was muddled through with rationed ingredients.

Another former pupil, Sylvia Clarke, 79, one of the organisers and host of the party in Tranmere Grove, said: "It was lovely to see everyone.



*L-R: Betty Taylor, Pat Richardson and Sylvia Clarke*

"I think this will be our last reunion. We're all getting a bit older and it's hard for us to venture out. We all had a lovely catch-up."

The women have been having regular reunions for the last ten years.

The school in Marlow Road is now Westbourne High School. It also had a separate boys' school, where many of the group met their husbands.

n. What are your memories of the school? Write to Your Letters, Evening Star, 30 Lower Brook Street, Ipswich, IP4 1AN or email [eveningstarletters@eveningstar.co.uk](mailto:eveningstarletters@eveningstar.co.uk)

Betty Taylor, 80, of Foxhall Road, Ipswich said: "We were very happy-go-lucky girls.

"When the sirens went off in school we all had to march quickly to the air-raid shelters. Arriving in the shelters we either had a lesson, quiz, spelling or I-spy. Then we would have a sing-along, we always sang Ten Green Bottles.

"Then in 1941/42 there was a bomb dropped on the school - and we ran round each others houses saying that it would be great because we wouldn't have to go to school and we would have a long holiday - but we were disappointed because the bomb dropped on the art class, so we didn't have a long holiday at all.

"To us it was a fun time because everyone was the same. We all had the same amount of food. There was no difference and everyone used to laugh a lot."

Jean Nichols, 80, of Ipswich said: "We did a lot of our lessons in the shelters. It was all about the war effort at school. We used to have to cook with rationed ingredients.

“When school was first opened we had a long summer holiday so they could finish building the air raid shelters. I can't remember much about them, just that they were really long. One of the memorable teachers was the art teacher Miss Dunckley. We thought she was really old, I don't suppose she was really. She used to wear crocheted stockings. My favourite lessons were geography and history, I still love those subjects today.

“Once a week I remember we used to have to knit for servicemen. I used to knit socks. Once I made a balaclava but I was told they couldn't find a serviceman with a head big enough.”

Sylvia Clarke, 79, of Tranmere Grove, Ipswich said: “I don't have many memories of school because we spent most of the time down in shelters. We all got a good education, some better than others, but it was quite disjointed. The sirens would sound most days, and wherever we were we would find the nearest shelter. One day at school we had an art lesson, but the art rooms had been bombed. It was a bit difficult at times, but we managed. There wasn't another choice.

“I remember I used to admire my husband across the playground from being about 11-years-old. But he never looked at me because I was big. I never met him at school. We met when I was 21 and we got married at 24.”

Heather Moore, 79, who was born and grew up in Kensington Road, Ipswich, and now lives in Claydon, said: “Our lives were very different from the lives of youngsters today.



*Pupils at the reunion*

“We couldn't just go out in the evenings to Scouts or Girl Guides because of the blackouts. Also our mothers, many of whom had never worked before, had to go out and work to support the war.

“I suppose we just got on with it. There was no moaning and we weren't scared. I suppose if your parents didn't make a fuss, you learned to get on with things. I remember we used to have to sleep under the dining room table in the early evening, until our father would come home and we would all go to the dug out to sleep. Ipswich was bombed quite heavily, especially where we lived because they wanted to take out the bridge on Norwich Road.

“The school was never short of teachers, they must have been older and not called up.”