

Ferncourt High School 1938 – 2018:

*A Story of
Enterprise, Access and Opportunity*



Vivienne Roberts

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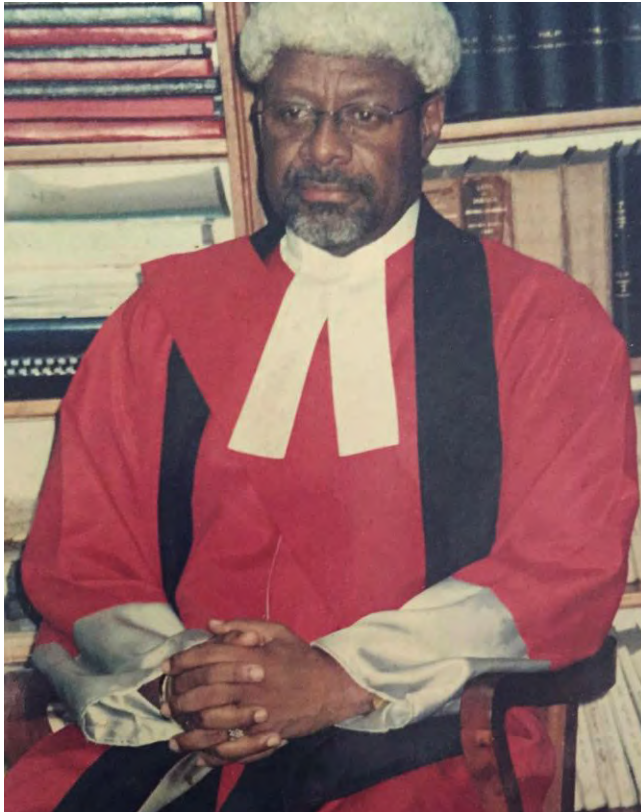
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of the church in others. It described the re-organisation of these schools to create a secondary education system under the Jamaica Schools Commission.

Citing some of the reviews and recommendations made by various Commissions, the Chapter points to an evolving secondary school system with an agreed and accepted structure, functions and guidelines. Up until the nineteen twenties, this system was inadequate to meet the economic aspirations and the social needs and demands of the society and was driven by political initiatives and responses which catered more to the middle classes than to the poor. Not surprisingly, in the nineteen thirties which is the focus of the next chapter, secondary education continued to develop, against the national backdrop of significant social unrest and this provided the context in which Ferncourt High School was established.





Horace Marsh – 1956 – 1962

Retired – The Honourable Mr Justice Horace Marsh

Memories

The early morning car rides from St Ann's Bay with the Reynolds workers;

Mrs Simpson's dogs – Bonzo and Custos

Never chew gum in the presence of Mrs Simpson
– Horace Marsh

Mrs Simpson's inculcation of honesty;

The bible and key episodes, for which students were punished.

– Marjorie Davies–Dale

The cold, timed showers,
the pit latrines

– Marjorie Brown

I have only recently got back in touch with Bill Harrison, who was on the staff at the same time as I was. We have been reflecting on our time at the school and the very happy memories we have of it.

–Wyllie Longmore



CHAPTER 4

Ferncourt in the Nineteen Sixties

The Context

Through the eyes of a Claremont child, the single most important national event of the nineteen sixties was the coming of independence with the country having its own national flag, anthem, dish, bird, flower, tree and heroes, as well as Claremont's local celebration of the event by hundreds of persons—clad in colourful, home or locally made, nationally advertised costumes: all gathering at Prosper Hall to celebrate in grand style. There were speeches, music, singing, rides including merry go rounds, food and people of all ages and classes—mingling together, unified by a shared mood, celebrating the achievement of something important.

The single most important school event was the arrival at secondary school in nineteen sixty. Energised by the pride of being the only child living in Harmony Vale (temporarily) and attending Bensonton Elementary school to have passed the common entrance examinations that year, experiencing the feeling of advancement to another level from primary school, and being present at daily assembly in the open air was

an awesome experience. Its commencement was signaled by the ringing of a bell which seemed as though it could be heard from miles away. Choreographed, like diligent ants, we processed, meticulously lining up, with our teachers or prefects standing at the end of each neat row; the completed lines ordered by classes and levels—all looking up expectantly at the gallery above us.

Teachers of the nineteen sixties report that they enjoyed and grew from the experience, making such comments as:

Ferencourt was a nice school – the children were fine, fairly bright and very focused (Arthur Geddes).

I liked it. I met some of the nicest children of my career. Many were poor but decent and I began to understand how to be magnanimous (Ena Daniels).

It was a very gentle school, the children were children, very well-mannered and very loving. Without a degree, I was given tremendous responsibility and this built my confidence (Jean Bramwell, nee Nelson).

In 1968, after a fulfilling stint at Ferencourt, about seven young teachers tendered their resignation, one after the other on the same day and it had nothing to do with the headmaster, Oswald Fisher (Arthur Geddes). – May 2019

For two past teachers who completed the survey, their stint at the school in the nineteen sixties reinforced their commitment to teaching and inspired further study. The challenges were motivating students and mastering subject matter.

They had Higher School qualifications at the time that they taught, were each employed for two years under Mrs Simpson and Mr Weller – one teaching Arts and the other Science. In addition to their teaching, they contributed to the school by coaching and leading extra-curricular activities. Their time at Ferencourt confirmed their commitment to teaching and inspired further study. One explained that it gave him space and support to develop his skills as a teacher.

Not surprisingly as new untrained teachers, their greatest challenges were motivating students and managing the subject matter. Some of the strengths of the school were seen as discipline, values education, all round development of students, the close, caring community and the ability of the headteacher to be firm while at the same time, giving the students the feeling of being valued and the inspiration to do their best. The only weakness identified was the physical plant. The enduring feeling about the school was given an average of 3, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. On a similar scale, the two past teachers gave the school a mean rating of 1 as an enterprise, 3.5 as an agent promoting access and 3 as a provider of opportunity for its students.

The decade ended with some frustration and agitation by the PTA. In 1969, the association



*Novlene Williams–Mills – 1996 – 2000
Eight Times National 400m Champion,
Commonwealth Games and Olympic Medalist*

Cliff Riley lived in Golden Grove, St Ann, and was therefore offered a place at nearby Ferncourt High School, as a result of his performance in the Common Entrance Examination. He attended Ferncourt from 1991 to 1996. His favorite subjects were Chemistry and Agricultural Science and not surprisingly, his favourite teachers taught those subjects. His Chemistry teacher, Mrs Venice Cooper–Chung, was outstanding and the subject was fascinating as he watched chemical reactions – the interactions of chemicals, the visible changes which they underwent and magical products which emerged. Mr Earl Lugg, his Agricultural Science teacher, was nothing short of inspiring. Both of these teachers were always facilitating, gave good guidance, moulded and directed him, fostering in him a sense of security and offering him the opportunity to explore.

Cliff always appreciated the more practical subjects and deplored English Literature which was too “fictitious”. He got in trouble with that subject in Ninth Grade, even though he was scoring eighties and nineties. Mrs Kelly was the first Principal that he encountered but she was seen more as an administrator who had much less direct impact on him than his teachers did. He played football and was an active member of several clubs and societies including the Environmental Club and the 4H Club. He became Head Boy of the school.

About the Author



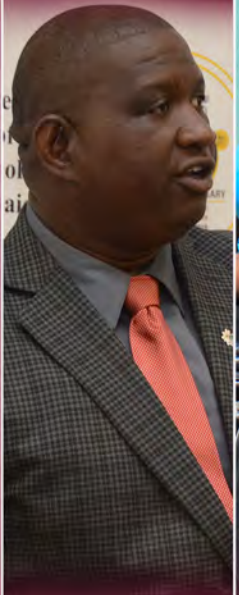
Vivienne Roberts (nee Green) was born in Alderton, St Ann in 1949. She lived in Claremont from 1955 to 1966, with a two year break in Harmony Vale from 1958, attending both the Claremont and Bensonton Primary Schools. She

attended Ferncourt High School from 1960 to 1966. Beginning her Higher Education at the University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona Campus, she graduated with First Class Honours in Chemistry and Upper Second Class Honours in Zoology. Her performance in the UWI Scholarship Examinations during her first year earned her a Jamaica Government Exhibition and her performance in her second year earned her the Zoology Book Prize. Vivienne later pursued a Diploma in Education at the Cave Hill Campus in Barbados and a Master's in Educational Leadership at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, USA. It was at the University of the West Indies (UWI) Cave Hill Campus that she completed her Ph. D in Educational Administration and one of her supervisors was Professor Errol Miller.

Teaching was her lifelong interest. Inspired, perhaps, by role models such as Mr Oswald Fisher, she began this journey by teaching at Kingsway High School in Kingston, Jamaica for two years. After graduating from UWI in 1972, she taught at Immaculate Conception High School for two years. She married a Barbadian and migrated to Barbados where she taught for a few months at West St Joseph Secondary School. First, as a teacher and later, as an educational administrator, she spent several years at the Barbados Community College where she became Head of the Division of Health Sciences.



Ferencourt High School 1938 – 2018:



▲
Cliff Riley
1991 – 1996



▲
Yanique Mendez
2009/10 – 2013



▲
Horace Marsh
1956 - 1962



▲
Novlene Williams-Mills
1996 – 2000



▲
Omar Robinson
1983 – 1988



▲
Fayval (Johnston) Williams
1971 – 1975



▲
Hardley Lewin
1966 -1971