



Royal Star & Garter

Care with courage

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Back to the classroom: Centenarian revisits school she left at start of WWII

A 100-year-old has returned to her old school – for the first time since the outbreak of WWII.

Maureen Smith visited Tolworth Girls' School & Sixth Form 86 years after her education was abruptly halted in September 1939. She was 14 at the time and went on to play an important role in the war effort.

The centenarian shared her memories of school life and WWII with staff and Year 12 students during the visit on 11 March. She was also given a tour of the school during her trip down memory lane, and looked at vintage photos, where she spotted her headteacher.



Maureen chatting with students at Tolworth Girls' School

The visit was arranged by staff at Royal Star & Garter in Surbiton, where Maureen now lives. She was accompanied by her niece Jacqui, also an ex-Tolworth Girls' School pupil who attended in the 1960s.

Royal Star & Garter is a charity which provides loving, compassionate care to veterans and their families living with disability or dementia, from Homes in Solihull, Surbiton, High Wycombe and Worthing. It has also launched new services reaching out into the community including Day Care, Lunch Club and a national Telephone Friendship Service.

Maureen said: "I remember feeling quite relieved when I discovered I didn't have to return to school in 1939. It's great to be back all these years later. Returning brought back so many happy memories, and I thoroughly enjoyed chatting with the current pupils and teachers. Thank you to staff at Royal Star & Garter and Tolworth Girls' School for making this wonderful visit happen."



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In 1941 Maureen, aged 15, started work at the Hawker factory in Kingston, which helped design and build the iconic Hurricane aircraft that played a crucial role in the Battle of Britain. She worked there until 1953, before starting a family with husband Colin, an Army veteran. Maureen continued to live and work in the Kingston area and moved to Royal Star & Garter in April 2025.



Maureen and her niece Jacqui, who also attended Tolworth Girls' School, outside the school

Niece Jacqui added: "You could see how much my aunt enjoyed her time back at Tolworth Girls' School, and so did I! I'm grateful to Royal Star & Garter and Tolworth Girls' School for working together and making it a very special day for both of us."

Sam Dixon is Subject Lead for History at the school. He said: "It has been a privilege to welcome Maureen back to Tolworth Girls' School for the first time since 1939. To return more than eight decades after the outbreak of war is truly extraordinary. Our pupils and staff were captivated as she shared vivid memories of her school days and her experiences during wartime Britain. Her visit has brought history to life in the most powerful way, and we would very much love to welcome her back again soon."



Maureen and her niece Jacqui inspect the pottery during their tour of Tolworth Girls' School

Yasmin Rogers, Deputy Home Manager at Royal Star & Garter in Surbiton, said: "Being able to reconnect Maureen to such an important place from her past is truly special and a privilege for everyone involved. It is heartwarming to help create such a meaningful experience, reflecting our commitment to person-centred care and to going above and beyond for our residents."

Royal Star & Garter in Surbiton is welcoming new residents. For more information on this, the other services it offers to the veterans' community, or to work at the Home, go to www.starandgarter.org/surbiton

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About Royal Star & Garter

Founded in 1916, Royal Star & Garter provides care, support and friendship for veterans and their families so that they can live well. The charity delivers nursing and dementia care through Homes in Solihull, Surbiton, High Wycombe, and now in Worthing, having recently merged with the military charity Care for Veterans. It also offers a range of services reaching into the community, including Lunch Clubs, Day Care and a national Telephone Friendship Service.

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Royal Star & Garter
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