



# The Handoo Bursary

Queenswood

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In 2010, Mrs Ramma Shankardass made a very generous financial gift to Queenswood for the establishment of two awards in perpetuity to commemorate her time at Queenswood between 1943 and 1948. One of these awards is the Handoo Bursary.

The recipient of this Bursary is selected by the Trustees, assisted by the recommendations of appropriate members of the Academic and Pastoral staff of Queenswood.

She will personify the Queenswood Qualities of courage and resilience, creativity and resourcefulness, curiosity and reflectiveness. In addition, she will uphold the Queenswood code of conduct at all times:

- We respect the privacy, property, culture and religious beliefs of everyone in the community.
- We value and respect each other as individuals, regardless of race, gender, age or disability.
- We accept responsibility for our environment, in order to enjoy and maintain it for the future.
- We uphold the rules of the community in promoting the safety, happiness and well-being of us all.

The Handoo Trustees will receive a report annually on the recipient's progress at Queenswood.

## Mrs Ramma Shankardass (née Handoo) 1929-2011

Ramma was born in Calcutta, an only child. Her father Hari Krishna Handoo was a doctor in the army, posted to the turbulent N.W.Frontier but spent most of his working life as a medical practitioner in London where he went to further his studies. Ramma, aged 6, and her mother Jai Kishori Kitchlu joined him and they lived in Highgate Village. Ramma went to school at nearby Byron House.

The war came in 1939 and some Byron House staff and children were evacuated to The Orchard on Huntingdon Road in Cambridge, one of the beautiful Darwin homes which have since become part of New Hall, now known as Murray Edwards College.

London was bombed and her father put in charge of a mobile unit which went to aid the injured for which he was awarded the Defence Medal. Meanwhile Ramma's mother went to a nearby hospital to learn how to fire watch and how to dress the wounded.

What follows are Ramma's own words:

“When I left Byron house for Queenswood, my headmistress, Miss E.M.Terry, gave me a cherished copy of *The Myths of Greece and Rome* inscribed ‘in remembrance of happy days’ and in many ways they were.

“At Queenswood, I started in the third form and stayed to take entrance exams in the Upper Sixth.

“There were some learning adjustments as we had already started Latin at Byron House but read it a couple of years later at Queenswood. One of my most evocative memories, a sensation really, is of early morning snow on my window sill in Senior overlooking the bare woods while I prepared the next two chapters of my Latin text.

“In post-war years, both my parents were active in association with prominent British leaders in the campaign for the independence of India which came in a peaceful and orderly way that has served as a foundation for excellent Indo-British relations ever since.

“However, sadly, India's independence came amid horrific internal violence following the division of the country into India and Pakistan. My mother returned to India and

set up a home for displaced families. She was immensely grateful to Lady Mountbatten, as were many others, for her help and support.

“My mother had always missed living in India and returned to the mountains she loved. She made a home for herself in the Garhwal Himalayas and endeared herself to the local village people by visiting them regularly, teaching their children and assisting the development of their agriculture aided by the India Relief Committee in London.

“I sat my university entrances and would have been happy to go back to Cambridge but found myself in London reading International Affairs with Professor Keeton, Dr Swarzenberger and Lesley Green encountered recently and unexpectedly by my husband Kumar in Toronto.

“I spent my working life in Delhi as a journalist, first as Producer for the News Division of All-India Radio and later as a regular contributor to the print media.”

Ramma married Kumar Shankardass, who graduated in Economics from Trinity College, Cambridge and became a barrister from Lincoln’s Inn. He subsequently became President of the International Bar Association and was awarded an honorary OBE for legal services to the British High Commission in India.

Ramma and Kumar made regular visits to London and she kept in touch with some of her old school friends by letter and visiting when she could. Jennifer Schofield (née Plowman) recalls getting to know “Rabbit” (it was an era for nicknames at Q) in the Sixth Form. She was a popular, intelligent girl and “I can still see her laughing with her friends outside Trew House where groups gathered after supper”. Jenny also recalls lively parties later in her London flat. Jenny later taught in Calcutta for six months and saw a lot of Ramma and her family. They remained life-long friends: “I first stayed with Ramma in Delhi on my sabbatical in 1988 and we became firm friends. It has been a privilege to get to know her over the intervening years and spend more time with her here and in India.”

