

## Lifting the lid on hidden 'Tale'



When Derek bought a Victorian vintage school desk for £10, similar to one he used while a pupil at the Simon Langton Grammar School in Whitefriars, Canterbury, in the 1940s, he acquired more than he bargained for.

Under the lid he found a 24 February 1944 copy of *Picture Post*, with a picture of Sheila Sim on the front cover and a feature on '*A Canterbury Tale*' inside.

It was published during post-production, soon after Derek's classmates at Sturry Primary School - juvenile

leads Len Smith ('Leslie'), Jimmy Tamsitt ('Terry') and David Todd ('David') - were excused lessons to join Eric Porter, Sheila Sim and John Sweet at Denham Studios for their final scenes together.

The desk was among many scrounged from local schools to replace those lost when the school's girls' department was completely destroyed in the Canterbury Blitz in June 1942 and had relocated two miles away to Stone House, part of a vacant mental hospital on St Martin's Hill.

Perhaps, one day in February 1944, a star-struck pupil smuggled the copy of *Picture Post* into her classroom, hid it under the exercise books in her desk, and surreptitiously read it during boring lessons?

The desk has a sloping lid, an inkwell for Waterman blue-black ink (replenished daily by the class's ink monitor) and a groove to hold pens, pencils and crayons.

In September 1950 the Langton girls' school moved to a new 'state of the art' concrete and glass building in Old Dover Road, Canterbury, equipped with new furniture. A new Langton boys' school opened in November 1959 in Nackington, enabling its Whitefriars site to be redeveloped.

By then, redevelopment of Whitefriars and its neighbouring area, St George's, was well under way on the

bomb sites seen in the closing episodes of *A Canterbury Tale*.

*Above: The St George's and Whitefriars area of Canterbury in 1955. Centre: Simon Langton Boys' School. St George's Street runs diagonally across the picture, past the clock tower of St George's Church.*

