

Royal High School biography interview

Lee Ann Cockburn

1. **Which primary School did you attend?** I attended Davidson's Mains primary school for the full seven years. I loved my time there, and that is when I began my love of swimming, winning a wee prize or two in primary seven.
2. **Which years did you attend the Royal High?** I went to Royal High from 1980 to 1986 – these were fantastic years, although our class was a bit naughty (not me), and 1A1 barmy army was left out of a few things back then. I made many new friends, and even befriended a few of the teachers – Anthea Gage, Kate McNaught, Liz Harrison and Carolina Ianetta (now Maxwell). I loved my time there, especially 6th year: senior vice captain for the girls, school colours for swimming, being a prefect, and enjoying the spoils of being semi decent at sport. I believe I was the first female to win the big shield for the 100 metres freestyle - it was nearly as big as I was.
3. **What were your first impressions of the Royal High?** My first impressions were good – I liked working to a timetable, time flew by compared to primary. There were so many people, and we were certainly little fish in a big pond, and there were a few people that needed put in their place. Of course as time went by, I managed to assist with that.
4. **What were your favourite subjects?** I loved the subjects with the nicest teachers - PE, Art and History in my early years, although I liked most of them.
5. **Who were your favourite teachers?** Ms Gage, Miss Ianetta, Miss McNaught, and Mrs Harrison were the ones that there was a really close bond with, and the ones I kept in touch long after school finished.
6. **What are your best memories?** Friendships made, fun, sport, singing in the choir at the Usher Hall with my dad, swimming, trips with school ... and the 6th year party was amazing.
7. **What was your greatest achievement?** Becoming senior vice captain (probably the equivalent of being head girl) gaining my school colours for representing Edinburgh at the youth Olympics in Denmark in 1985 in swimming, winning the 100-metre freestyle shield, winning the swimming trophies, sport trophy for field events at athletics. I might have even won an academic book thingy for something, might have been home economics. I was also the 1st XI hockey goal keeper, as girls were not allowed to play rugby back then... I just loved being there.
8. **What was your impression of school as you left?** I loved my time there, and I was devastated to leave and there was a lot of adjusting to be done, to feel okay in adult life - as they say, school is the best time of your life. I was proud to have gone to Royal High, loved the uniform, although I wore skin tight black jeans, Tucka books, squint tie and thought I was cool.
9. **What did you do immediately after School?** I went straight to work in an insurance company, I didn't go to university. It was never something I wanted, and was never pushed to strive for. I left with 8 O grades, and 4 highers, and 2 CSEs for English and Drama – and at that time I was swimming nearly 5 hours a day – no time to study! I was told by my English teacher that I wouldn't get my O grade for English, so I had to do CSE and O grade, and managed a higher too.
10. **What has your career been?** Straight after school I went to work for Scottish Provident, for a year and a half, then a lifeguard at the Commonwealth pool, where I carried out 45 rescues, carried out CPR on 3 occasions, and saved a few sorry souls. I became Duty manager at 23, carried out all of the lifeguard training, completed my Recreation Management Certificate only for the unqualified Mason to get the job I studied to get. I thereafter joined the police in 2000, working in response frontline policing, public order, CBRN, search, medic, then sergeant in 2009. I worked in community, custody, and was promoted to Acting police Inspector in 2019 – I have saved another few sorry souls there too. I've been punched and kicked, spat at and sworn at on many occasions, dealt with violence, death, IED's/bombs, mass disorder, worked at the G8, and have got two commendations – but I wouldn't change it for the world. What I have learned is, that there is still a fair way to go for fairness and equality to get with the times.

11. **What message do you have for today's pupils?** My message to all the pupils is be kind, treat people like you would like to be treated. Don't let anyone tell you, you can't do it, or you need to change. Fight for your dreams, and go out there and live them.
12. **Have you kept in contact with your contemporaries?** I have kept in close contact with my friend Kim Duke, Leanne Scott, my cousin Pauline Cockburn, and more recently many, many more on Facebook.
13. **Do you want to tell us about your family?** I am gay, I have a civil partner Emily Noble, and two 10-year-old sons, Jamie and Harry, and live happily not too far away from where it all began – again to all those pupils out there that don't fit neatly in the box, who cares, be yourself and those that are important to you will love you for who you are so don't change or hide your true self, own it and go and live your life.
14. **What's next for you in work, social and family?** I write crime thrillers, so I am working on number four, that must make the English department very surprised, I retire in 5 years, and not sure what to do after that, hmmm, relax maybe and never work again.
15. **Have you any other comments?** Royal High gave me the start in life I needed, good morals, and a platform to step up from.
16. **Other information?** After school I went on to play women's rugby in 1990 for the first non-university rugby club, Liberation Ladies – ground breaking really, challenging stereotypes - then Boroughmuir, but we had to be called Edinburgh women as they didn't want us wearing their colours, then Edinburgh Accies, and finally Royal High, where I was the only FP. We won the league and cup on many occasions. I was lucky enough to be in the first ever women's international rugby game in 1993 against Ireland, winning that. I won 77 caps for my country over 13 years in the number 4 shirt. We won the first ever 5 nations cup, a grand slam beating England at Stewarts Melville rugby ground in 1998, and went on to win the European championships in 2001 and won two thirds of our games. I played in 3 World Cups, 4 Europeans, retiring in 2006 just before the World Cup (I wasn't happy at that). I also played for the Classic Lionesses and have four caps for them, 3 nomads caps and played for the Lothian and Borders police force.

I am now a crime writer, having written a book series, although it is an adult series, very violent and graphic - all because I read a dull book, and thought I'd give it a shot ... and seem to be doing okay. Due to my writing, there have been a few articles in the local papers, and I am lovingly known as the Trunchbull by the locals in Pilton. This is due to my large stature, and formidable appearance - a tad unfair, as I really am a big softy at heart.

Photographs

