

2. The New School, 1925-28

THE first term of the Blackpool Girls' Secondary School began in September 1925. A building of sorts was there in Beech Avenue to receive the school, the ceremony for the laying of the foundation stone having taken place in May 1924. Miss Cottam recalled a photograph of a company of girls, staff and friends such as Mrs Dunn, assembled for the occasion on the front netball courts, with a smiling Miss Dunn on a platform with Alderman Heap, Chairman of the Education Committee, on her left and the Tuck Shop advertisements providing a back cloth.

From the old Secondary school fourteen members of staff came with the girls. They were the Misses Bertram, Clark, Cottam, Elliot, Jones, Leach, Farrow, Fletcher, Parkin, Rawsthorne, Thornton, Walton, Weatherup and Woodward. Miss Dobson and Miss Kenyon were two of the new staff joining the school in its first term. Miss Farrow was the first Senior Mistress until, in 1930, a system of two years' service in this office was started and Miss Cottam was appointed for the first two-year period.

The building was unfinished and so the lower forms still used the Raikes Parade Sunday School as they had been doing for some years. Each form mistress took as many subjects as possible so that a complete half day could be spent there. Miss Cottam recalled a second form of forty-two girls to whom she taught History, English, Latin and Scripture.

The new school still lacked an assembly hall, a cookery room, a biology laboratory and a staff room. The end of the corridor was shut off to form a staff cloakroom containing nothing but pegs. There was no window and no mirror until Miss Elliot supplied one from Woolworth's. Before this corridor was available, the staff had used one of the book cupboards upstairs. Prayers were held in what was then the Music Room (rooms 19 and 20) and there was no

room for the staff.

The furnishing was inadequate. Miss Dunn gradually acquired rush seated chairs and tables for the classrooms. There were no shelves anywhere and it took years to get the book cupboards shelved. No door had, at first, any knob, let alone lock, and therefore no door could, for some time, be closed.

Such were the growing pains of a school built in the 1920's when financial economies in education were much more stringent than any we have known in the post war years despite recurring economic crises. In the first issue of the school magazine, in July 1928, the editors recorded;

On looking back, we smile as we remember our quaint experiences. Doors without handles, mistresses locked into classrooms, dinners in the bicycle shed, lessons in the kitchen, balance-room or dark-room; workmen at the windows, workmen at the electric light; cupboards used as cloakrooms; a Headmistress's room, staff-room, office and sixth form room, all in one; - these are some of the things we recall as we look back over these three years. And even now we have our trials. Still the building continues, and a whole class has to leave its classroom to seek a quieter retreat when at times the hammering is truly deafening. But the reward is now in sight, and we all look forward to a completed building some time next Autumn.

The school was built on a mere, filled in to receive the building. Very soon cracks developed as the building settled. The dining room, which eventually became the library, flooded after rain and a major drainage scheme was necessitated. Neither structural fault was ever completely rectified; new cracks appeared annually and parts of the basement still flooded. There were some who thought that the mere would claim its own when the Collegiate School was forced from the building, and that the *Fall of the House of Usher* would be appropriately paralleled.

All through our tenure of the building we wanted improved changing facilities for physical education. It took over twenty years for hot water to be provided in the cloakrooms. We were told repeatedly that showers were out of the question, and enlarged changing rooms too. We watched in ironic amusement, in 1971, as the builders moved in even before we were moved out, to effect these very improvements for the school which was to follow us.

The girls who moved from the old to the new school look back



The First Eleven, 1926-27: P. Ellison, W. Rogerson, S. Kenney, H. Spencer, E. Rowe, B. Walmsley, R. Ellison, J. Bolton, M. Howarth, H. Gillett and K. Marsh.



The Netball First Seven, 1926-27: M. Jump, G. Furnass, I. Street, D. Cunliffe, M. Ratcliffe, P. Ellison and E. Fowler.

with the happiest of memories to these spartan and pioneering days. Miss Wright recalled the excitement and the novelty and the general movement and improvisation as a time of purposeful co-operation which the girls thoroughly enjoyed.

On the fine, crisp morning of October 23rd 1928, the school was officially opened by Lady Stanley and a short ceremony was held in the new hall at which the Mayor, as Chairman, presided. From this beginning the two themes which were reiterated to successive generations of Collegiate girls were sounded. In the opening ceremony, Lady Stanley said she was pleased to see the practical side of a girl's education so adequately provided for in the new wing, and she hoped this would lead to success in what she considered the greatest profession for women - marriage. On the other hand, at the Speech Day which followed at the Opera House in the afternoon, the speakers who gave the votes of thanks, all civic dignitaries, stressed the advantages modern school children enjoyed "in their expensively and scientifically equipped schools" and they all hoped that "full use would be made of these many advantages."

In spite of the upheavals of these early years Zelda Caplan won an open scholarship in English to Cambridge, Gladys Wright and Margery Stretton won Blackpool University Scholarships and Hilda Unsworth a County University Scholarship and a place in History at Cambridge. The first State Scholarships were won in 1930 by Eleanor Best and Marion Hodson.

In June 1987 the stones commemorating the foundation and the opening were salvaged from the building while under demolition and re-sited by the entrance of the 11-16 part of the Collegiate High School at Highfurlong. Thanks to the efforts of the old students who effected this, some tangible symbol of the old Collegiate School persists.