

Kaleidoscope

We had to catch the 7.34 train from Kirkham after walking almost a mile to the station, arriving at Blackpool Central at 8.15 a.m. We were known as "the Kirkham and Wesham Girls" throughout school life, a title which made us stand apart from the rest, no doubt because of our broad accents. (1924-1930.)

Every so often the school doctor visited us. She was a formidable figure who filled us all with dread. Her tall, proud figure reminded me of the late Queen Mary as she wore a toque. On one occasion we all received notes that our teeth needed numerous fillings with the exception of Ruth Worthington who had filled her teeth with bread left over from lunch. Another time all our form were suffering from murmuring hearts! Marjorie Pye had a more elaborate complaint - "dissipation of the veins of the heart". Our family doctor dispelled all my mother's worst fears and wanted to know, "Who is this woman?" (1924-1930.)

I was often late for school and had to face the teacher who was on duty in the downstairs cloakrooms (hopefully one of the milder members of staff and at worst MISS CLARK, of blessed memory - more appreciated later than when one was 11). (1927-1934.)

Memories of Maths. lessons with Miss Clark - every girl standing up straight at her desk, with not a whisper in the classroom as Miss Clark's footsteps were heard along the corridor. Woe betide anyone who had forgotten to get all the appropriate books and implements out of her desk. Miss Clark's eagle eyes would spot any attempt to get them out surreptitiously from the desk with the lid slightly raised. (1927-1934.)

I feel I owe everything to my school and I shall be eternally grateful to the dedicated women who taught me. Miss Weatherup took me to Germany in 1934, against the advice of many people, including the staff. I was 15. The two of us travelled by train throughout Germany, stopping in any city that seemed interesting. She fostered in me a spirit of adventure and complete confidence in my ability to travel alone without the help of any agency. This experience coloured my life and enabled me to spend ten weeks alone in France at the age of seventeen, visiting Nice, Cannes and Paris. Because of my experience in Europe I was able to get a fascinating job with Thomas Cook, building up the travel business immediately after the war, when I spent a year in France and Switzerland. (1927-1935.)

Chapter Two

1. Pre-War Development

THE development of women's education continued from the 1902 Act to the outbreak of the Second World War, with no marked change in direction. By and large, grammar-school teachers born around the turn of the century came to retirement in the same kind of school in which they were themselves educated, mostly in single-sex schools, either built as a result of the Act or given a new lease of life by being taken over by the local authorities. Their childhoods were not dominated by the same precepts that had dominated the childhoods of those some ten or more years their senior. Secondary education was an accepted goal for the able girl, though it had to be worked for and could not be taken for granted. It also presented the possibility of university education for those who qualified and whose families were willing and could afford, with the help of loans, grants and scholarships, to let them leave home. For many women graduates teaching offered the obvious destination when the university course was over.

For these women, the initial battle for secondary education had been won by their precursors of the two previous generations. The municipal universities had joined London in accepting women as full members. Although university women were still a small minority, and felt privileged to be so, they were more confident for they were now accepted in their own right. They no longer felt obliged to be apologetic about their academic attainments, or fearful lest they should be thought betrayers of womanhood. A career was expected of them if they did not marry.

Members of staff in their 30s and 40s in the 1930s had been in their teens and early twenties during the 1914-1918 war. Less conditioned by pre-war standards and attitudes than their older colleagues when war broke out, they came into the post-war world with greater maturity and a new perspective. They had different

expectations for the future and different regrets about the past. The greatest proportion of casualties had come from their contemporaries, a large part of their generation had been wiped out. They were aware of the million "surplus women" who would never marry, but, in spite of this, and in spite of the differentials in salaries of men and women, they were also aware that their profession gave them opportunities denied earlier genteel spinsters. Women in general had proved their worth during the war and the position of women was never to be the same again. True, the vote was denied them at twenty-one until 1930 (they were obviously considered still politically inferior) but their horizons had been widened and their perceptions of possibilities sharpened.

They had valued their own educational opportunities and they believed in the contributions they were making in introducing others to those opportunities. So, too, of course, did their older colleagues. But, somehow, there was a difference. The older women had been educated either privately or in secondary schools of various foundations, usually in large towns or cities like Salford or Oldham, intended for boys but taking some girls. Their younger colleagues had been the product of post-Act development. Burnley High School, Ulverston Grammar School, Clitheroe, Aigburth Vale, Crewe, Blackpool Secondary itself, were typical of their schools.

These younger women were still "ladies", chosen because of that by Miss Dunn, but they were also independent women in a way some of the older women were not. The older women tended to live with their families; the younger lived in lodgings, where meals were cooked for them but in which they had freedom of movement. Miss Dobson had her own house. They were assured by their academic training of a place in society.

They made a professional rather than a social statement and the standards they demanded and demonstrated were to do with professional integrity and responsibility, coupled with commitment. (Miss Taylor, on teaching practice, had surprised the practice school staff by her query, after sampling the delights of teaching, "And do you get *paid* for doing this?")

To them academic effort for able girls was not over-taxing when properly regulated. Effort, presentation and attention to detail were important. Courtesy and acceptable behaviour were, of course, expected. But they had a more rounded view of what they were about. Education was no longer a lady-like accomplishment; it was an integral part of a girl's life, broadening her opinions, quickening

her sensibilities and training her mind. It was to equip her to play an independent part in a wider world in which she would be able to hold her own. The boundary between teachers and taught was still there but it was less high. Equally respected as their older colleagues, they were more approachable and had a more relaxed relationship, particularly with the sixth form.

There were, of course, exceptions to these generalisations. But Miss Walton, Miss Fletcher, Miss Farrow and Miss Parkin were in a different mould from Miss Taylor, Miss Humphries, Miss Dobson and Miss Hudson. Miss Weatherup was, as always, a law unto herself.

It is not surprising, therefore, that many recollections of those who attended in the 1930s are more specifically centred on individual members of staff and isolated events connected with them. Incidents of no special significance have left snap-shot-like vignettes in the memory

Miss Dunn still appears as the presiding genius, still the advocate of lady-like behaviour, but by the '30s she had become the accepted Head, no longer needing to make the overt impact which every new head has to make if she is to succeed, making clear the standards expected and the direction desired. Other members of staff, women of individuality and personality, now made their impact on the pupils. No doubt they, too, had become accustomed to what was expected of them and were better able to spread their wings.

Many of the remembered impressions are of the staff with their hair somewhat let down. Miss Hughes rushing round the hockey pitch in Staff matches "more like school than staff", Miss Dobson, a former county player, tackling with only one hand on the stick, Miss Taylor, suitably accoutred, more placidly keeping goal. Miss Ward is remembered for losing her shoe heel on the summit of Ingleborough, Miss Humphries for leading the country dancing on school journey evenings. Dinner girls, then a rare breed, recall the discomfort of new staff when confronted with the roast for carving and Miss Taylor's vegetarian distaste for the job. They remember, too, the polite but relaxed conversation with the duty staff. Miss Cottam and Miss Humphries are remembered for their bearing, in their elegant evening gowns, at school parties "like two very dignified queens". Miss Read is remembered for the Choir Trip to Chapel Stile and Miss Hudson and Miss Taylor for their acting of Tony Lumpkin and Marlowe in *She Stoops to Conquer*. Even Miss Dunn is remembered in a less than formal guise,

enlisting the help of two girls playing tennis on the front courts to arrange her room and not only inviting them up the forbidden front steps but rewarding them with tea and cream cakes.

In class, Miss Jones' recreational cookery for the sixth form is recalled, with special reference to the nougatine. Miss Weatherup is seen marching round the room leading French songs like some latter day Pied Piper, or climbing onto the desk to illustrate "Grimper" or bringing a French salad shaker to demonstrate how to make a salad. (Her teaching by the direct method was in advance of her time.)

Miss Cottam is remembered for her lucid lessons and her "military bearing", Miss Hudson for conducting the chanting of "qui quae quod" and Miss Clark for her "wonderful teaching of Maths." Miss Walton's lip reading and Miss Farrow's "Vapex" which accompanied her, like an aura, wherever she went, are reminders of the frailty of the flesh, even in such stalwarts.

The satisfaction of personal achievement is, of course, also recalled. The winning of a French Oral prize reminds us of the emphasis on the spoken word, and the awarding of a deportment badge, mentioned with modest pride, acknowledges notice for non-academic achievement. The girls selected to present a bunch of white heather to Captain Slack as he left Stanley Park for his flight to India, or a button hole for Councillor Duckworth on Speech Day, remembered their honoured tasks, even if the latter did fall up the steps to the Opera House stage.

Two specific snippets of advice are brought to mind: from Miss Dunn, presumably looking ahead (unless the much-filled teeth mentioned above had gone already beyond repair) - "Always brush your dentures over a bowl of water": from Miss Weatherup - "Remember to wear warm bloomers under your Speech Day dresses".

The sixth form enjoyed a status of pre-eminence. There are many memories of the deference accorded to the Prefects, who exercised a real authority on corridor and cloakroom duty, and also in the classroom when supervising for absent staff. (This continued until the school closed in 1971). There were miscreants, of course, who were summoned from lessons to Prefects' Meetings which sat in weekly judgement.

Although Miss Dunn was available at a set time each week to see parents, interviews were the exception rather than the rule. Most pupils preferred to soldier on alone and fight their own battles. Perhaps they suffered for their independence. Some anomalies

remained undetected which today would be rectified, but their self-reliance is to be commended.

The public examinations of this period were the School Certificate, taken at fifth form level, and the Higher School Certificate two years later. This system was introduced in 1917, during the war, to regularise the "dense jungle" of unco-ordinated examinations and examining bodies. Administered by a small number of examining boards, based on the universities, the School Certificate was a group examination. That is, a certificate was awarded only to those candidates who achieved a pass mark in English Language, a foreign language, Mathematics or a science, and two other subjects, which excluded Art, Music and Housecraft, subjects available for examination but not counting towards a certificate. For university matriculation the five subjects had to reach credit standard. The sixth-form course offered subjects at Principal and Subsidiary level, three Principal at Good grade or two Principal and two at Subsidiary level being required for university entrance. Girls also took Civil Service Examinations, which were separate from the School Certificate.

Miss Dunn's notions of propriety affected all aspects of school life. *Jane Eyre* was not suitable for fourth form pupils because of Mr Rochester's natural daughter. No Sports Day was held because competitive sport was not suitable for young ladies (although girls had competed in the Dual School Sports Day). A school photograph was allowed only in Coronation Year, 1937. Quite why a group photograph was unladylike is not clear. Could it have been because of the disruption to lessons and the difficulties of organisation?

Miss E. M. Taylor would often relate how she once said to a sixth form that the eccentrics she remembered among the teachers of her youth no longer existed, only to be met with a hail of laughter: the sixth assured her that eccentrics were as numerous as ever. I suppose that, of all people, teachers would be surprised to see themselves as others, particularly their pupils, saw them. But, in the end, these pre-war years were in many ways the years of the staff, of dedicated women of character for whom their careers were of prime concern, not for personal advancement, for no promotion ladder existed, not for prospects of increased monetary gain, for scale posts also did not exist and the yearly increments on the salary leading to the maximum after fourteen years were fixed, but for personal satisfaction in a job done as well as they could do it. The final impression, eccentricity or no, must be in the words of one recollection, "the respect and admiration given to the staff".

2. The pattern of the years 1928-39

THE yearly routine of the school, when at last adequately housed, soon settled into a pattern. In the Autumn Term, Speech Day and the Christmas party were the high water marks. In the Spring Term the Singing Competition and the School Concert were held, and the climax of the year came in July with the public, and school, examinations. The year came to an impressive end with the final assembly on the last day of term when Miss Dunn read the Prize List.

Speech Day was a Great Occasion. Held first in the Opera House and later in the Palace Theatre its ceremonial character was marked by the fact that every girl in the school was attired in a white dress. The

teachers wore academic dress and the chief guest was always a person of eminence. In days when ceremonial was not so familiar as it is now an atmosphere of circumstance was created. Perhaps the most distinguished speaker of these years was Margaret Bondfield, the first woman cabinet minister. The Duchess of Atholl was another chief speaker and because of her interest in music a special musical performance was arranged. The custom of the Choir's singing on Speech Day was established from the beginning.

The School Party was held at the very end of the Christmas Term in the Spanish Hall. This was an opportunity for new party frocks and for seeing the

Order of Proceedings.

2-30 p.m. prompt.

IN HER MAJESTY'S
OPERA HOUSE,
WINTER GARDENS.

PRESENTATION OF PRIZES

BY

THE DUCHESS OF ATHOLL.

Alderman T. G. LUMB, J.P., in the Chair.

school, including staff and old girls, in an unfamiliar light. Everyone had a printed programme of the dances, with tassel and pencil, and partners were booked in advance as in Edwardian society. The favourite dance of the evening was the Lancers, learnt in gym lessons and danced with gusto and relish, if not with grace. It was more popular than the modern Waltzes and foxtrots, no doubt because more energetic. During the interval allowed for the band's refreshment, piano accompaniment was substituted. Miss Humphries and Miss Edwards were particularly noteworthy as duettists. No boys were present; this was a school event and was enjoyed as such. That it really was enjoyed, any suitably aged old girl will testify.

The Singing Competition was a House contest. Two test songs (earlier three) one in parts, one in unison, were given to the choirs of each House. The House singing captains took rehearsals and the Competition took place on a spring evening with an outside adjudicator. In 1930 Mrs Hood (Patuffa Kennedy Fraser), who was famous for her arrangements of Hebridean folk songs, was the adjudicator. House loyalty always ran high and as many old girls as possible returned to hear their House choirs.

In the earlier years, a school concert was given in addition to the competition songs. In 1932, for example, the programme opened with a French play and the "audience enjoyed the play immensely, because, even though they did not understand all the French, the acting was so good that they were able to follow the story." The same writer sums up the evening as "very exciting".

Eventually the School Concert became separate from the Singing Competition, though the winning choirs (junior and senior) contributed the competition songs to the concert. In 1936, scenes from *Twelfth Night* were followed by a short French play, songs by the School and House choirs, dances from members of the dancing class and an "orchestra" playing upon pokers and culinary instruments.

Certain years saw an Open Day to show to parents aspects of the school's work. Sometimes this was held on the day of the concert, sometimes during the Summer Term. Tea was served in the dining room.

Around these fixed feasts the other activities of the school were arranged. House activities, meetings of the Literary, Debating and Musical Society, and of the Scientific Society, and school journeys and visits had all to be fitted in.

The four Houses were formed with the new school and the

