

## Kaleidoscope

*I remember a company of strolling players who came to "do" Macbeth. The actor doubling for Banquo and the Messenger sprained his ankle and the driver was pressed into service to read the part. We had no overhead lights in front of the flame-coloured curtains and he had to stoop and peer to see his lines. I shall never forget him, bent almost double, head down, waving a vague hand while telling us that Birnam Wood was coming to Dunsinane. (1929-1935).*

*I remember the watering can being used to lay the dust on the floor during Matriculation exams. - when we were permitted to come "out of uniform". (1929-1935).*

*I still have my report book which I show to my grandchildren. (1933-1938).*

*How in awe I was of Marjorie Gregson, Peggy Mason and Edna Turner! (1934-1938).*

*Speech Day - Assembly of little girls dressed like angels all in white, to quote Alderman Newman, when Mayor. (1934-1938).*

*How impressed I was by the vast learning of the Sixth Form when Edna Furness, supervising us in 2a in a staff absence, bade us be quiet as she was studying "the Geography of the world in detail". (1934-1942).*

*Court Three was the holiest of holies, kept for the school matches and the Tennis competition. Much more evocative than the school kitchen which supplanted it! (1934-1942).*

*The long walk up Collingwood Avenue from the Layton bus stop - hoping the Garstang bus had arrived first with the Great Eccleston contingent and that Miss Walton would pick us up. (1934-1938).*

*The lovely dinner Mrs Cusworth made for the dozen or so of us who stayed to dinner. (1934-1938).*

*The House Championship was closely contested, in my time by Parlick and Bowland. (1936-1940).*

*I remember my surprise when Miss Clark commended me on my initiative instead of giving me detention, when, having found the cloakroom door locked upon my late return to school in the afternoon, I entered the school by the open door of the gymnasium, and was taken to my Maths. lesson by Miss Glen, the gym mistress. (1935-1942).*

*Memories of sweeping the netball courts of puddles before matches. The courts were always going to be resurfaced, but in my seven years this was never accomplished. (1936-1943).*

## Chapter Three

### 1. The War Years

**I**N September 1939 the declaration of war brought education, elementary and secondary, into a crisis which the 1914 war had never occasioned. From the beginning it was expected that the cities and industrial towns would be bombed from the air. Air raids had been a feature of the Spanish Civil War and of the Italian campaign against Abyssinia. The Luftwaffe was not much flying time away. In an effort to spare the children of the vulnerable centres of population, mass evacuation of those of school age was ordered. In the first month of the war, 750,000 children and their teachers were moved from London and other areas to safer places in what has been called "the most remarkable movement of civil population ever recorded in history".

These children were not refugees seeking protection from civil upheaval, but evacuees (a word coined for the occasion) seeking refuge, in the homes of their fellow countrymen, from enemy action. Their arrival in the reception centres posed serious problems and there is no doubt that some children found it impossible to acclimatise themselves to the lifestyle of their hosts. It is equally true that many were successfully assimilated and, indeed, a post-war laboratory assistant at the Collegiate was the formally adopted evacuee of her Blackpool hostess.

The burden of accommodating the children fell on the schools. The constraints of curtailed educational provision necessitated by the sharing of school buildings fell heavily on the teachers. Miss Dunn had intended to retire before she was sixty, but she stayed on to see the school through the initial disruption caused by having to accommodate the evacuated schools allocated to the Collegiate. She retired in 1941, in the middle of the war, and with her went the assumptions and expectations she had been able to carry, more or less intact, from her nineteenth-century roots well into the

twentieth century. The school had been spared the more dramatic revelations of social contrasts which the experience of evacuation had forced upon some schools and, in 1941, there was no overt indication of the changes which were to come to the educational scene in 1944.

Already, however, change had begun. Inevitably the war had forged closer links between schools and the outside world. Not only children were evacuated. Government departments and service personnel were also moved to provincial centres, and, in Blackpool, boarding houses and hotels were commandeered and many private houses had evacuees or servicemen billeted on them.

Blackpool's capacity to absorb vast numbers was used for another cause in 1940. After the fall of France, all the Polish Air Force which could make its way here, was brought to Blackpool, where the airmen stayed for varying lengths of time, until they could be posted to other areas, and re-formed as a fighting unit. The officers and men were given a course of English as part of their training, and some of the Collegiate staff volunteered to give lessons to their wives and families, using French, which many of them spoke, as a common tongue until they were sufficiently fluent in English. Some of them had fled the length and breadth of Europe to find means of reaching England; most of them were gnawed by anxiety for relatives still in Poland; all of them were homesick for their own country and eager to talk about it. Some of the younger men, billeted in the town, found good friends and new homes; some married local girls, and by the 1950s, their children were beginning to enter the Collegiate School.

People generally learned to accommodate themselves to ways of life quite different from those to which they were accustomed, and a greater informality between teachers and pupils grew up as they shared in the adjustments and privations war conditions made necessary.

The staff itself was changing, as those who had known the school before 1925 came to retiring age. They were often replaced by part-time, temporary or married teachers. The new Headmistress, Miss Allan, married a year or two after taking up the appointment. This unorthodox step caused her continuance as Headmistress to be seriously in doubt. (It was not so very long afterwards that the authorities were urging married women to return to the schools to alleviate the acute shortage of qualified teachers.)

Miss Allan, like Miss Dunn, was a Scot, but she had spent part of her childhood in England before her family settled in Elgin where

she attended Elgin Academy and subsequently Aberdeen University where she read English. Later she took her M.A. in Education from Liverpool University. She taught in Scotland, Wallasey, and Manchester before her Collegiate years.

Miss Allan's arrival speeded up the development of contacts between school and the outside world already initiated by wartime conditions. She was outgoing and energetic, soon herself playing in the life of the town an active part which would have been quite foreign to Miss Dunn. The educated woman was by now not only professional but also orientated to work in the local community not connected with her professional life. Mrs Robinson became a J.P., founded the Blackpool Ladies' Luncheon Club and was instrumental in inaugurating the Blackpool branch of the Business and Professional Women.

From the first, her aim was that the school should make as many contacts as possible with a wider world. Scope was restricted until the war was over, but she always wished the school to be looking outwards and to be linked in many ways with the society outside its doors. She was later to write:

We are fortunate that there are so many ways to explore in tracing the pattern of contemporary life, thought and culture.

She established the Charities Fund in 1945 and it was to develop into one of the school's finest contributions to the material service of others. Special appeals never failed to inspire a generous response and the regular weekly contributions kept the fund healthy.

Development of another kind of contact, beginning in the war years and becoming the norm rather than the exception in the post-war world, was the taking of weekend and holiday jobs. Potato and fruit picking camps for schoolchildren were introduced as part of the war, and immediate post-war, effort, but many began to seek paid employment in their free time. Blackpool provided then, as now, good scope for this kind of work and by 1989 for some pupils the part-time jobs have come to take precedence over schoolwork. At first the part-time work supplemented the family income, but as the practice steadily grew and as young people expected to have more and more possessions, the money was seen as their prerogative.

It was, however, the Education Act of 1944 which was the official instrument of change. This Act, passed in a bold gesture of defiant confidence by the wartime coalition government, restructured state

education and had a profound effect on secondary educational thinking. Whereas the 1902 Act had aimed at educating the academically able to a level commensurate with their ability, irrespective of financial status, the 1944 Act aimed at providing secondary education for all according to the gift and potential of each child. Married women were allowed to teach as a matter of policy, not expediency, so girls ceased to feel that teaching and matrimony were mutually exclusive. The spectrum of careers open to women widened as educational opportunities were extended and Careers Conventions became established practice in schools, in co-operation with the Ministry of Labour. Parent-Teacher Associations fostered closer co-operation between school and home and the rift which was often wide in pre-war days between parent and teacher began to close. A parent was appointed to the Governing Body.

In the Grammar Schools, fee paying was abolished, thus removing the places taken by those pupils who had not been awarded minor scholarships, "special places", on the Authority's examination. In the Collegiate School the fee payers had always been a comparatively small minority, comprising county girls, not eligible for Blackpool awards, pupils educated in local private schools and therefore outside the Authority's responsibility, and those aged ten rather than eleven, too young to take the special place examination. These children had been admitted after an examination set by the school. Once they reached the sixth form they no longer paid fees. After the Act, selection was solely by an examination taken at 11+. The pupils showing academic promise were directed to the Grammar Schools, those rather less academic but capable of vocational qualifications were sent to the Secondary Technical Schools, developed from the Central Schools, and the rest to Secondary Modern Schools, developed from the Senior Schools. This tripartite system was intended to establish three streams of equal parity but differing emphasis.

The 1944 Act widened the provision of secondary education but the school leaving age was not raised to fifteen until 1947. (It had reached fourteen by 1918). Grammar school courses and some Technical courses continued to the age of sixteen and there was a penalty of £10 to be paid by parents who withdrew their children before this age was reached and the course completed. Modern schools were not intended to prepare their pupils for public examinations. Their pupils were therefore to go earlier into employment suited to their potential and ability. The Modern

schools were thought of as very fortunate to be freed from the constraints of public examinations and were to be the home of experiment in art, music, drama and other enjoyable, though often neglected, areas of the curriculum.

Such was the vision of 1944. There is no bias in the Act in favour of Grammar Schools. They are assigned a role merely different not superior. But, as so often, the implementation of the Act coincided with a period of financial stringency. In addition, when the war ended, one fifth of all the schools in the country had been destroyed in air raids, and another fifth had been commandeered. As the Grammar schools had to do nothing more than continue to provide the education they were used to providing, the lot of the Technical and Modern schools was somewhat harder. They had also to establish themselves in public esteem. Some aped the Grammar Schools, already valued by the public, but most, wisely, at first, did not, preferring to experiment and develop in their own way, according to their pupils' needs. Students training for teaching in the University Training Departments were encouraged to seek Modern school posts as offering the most scope for creative teaching.

The Collegiate had not suffered from enemy action, and the evacuated schools had not stayed long. The Act did not have any direct overt influence upon the day to day life of the school. The fee payers were not missed and there was already a married headmistress, and some married members of staff. But there was, nevertheless, a subtle change in the attitude of the town to the school. It was seen, in common with other Grammar schools, to have come off best in the new arrangements, having to meet no new educational demands. The 1944 Act sowed the seeds of Circular 10/65 twenty-one years later, but there were no crystal balls available when Rab Butler introduced Secondary Education For All as the catchword of 1944.

That the education of the Collegiate pupils was not seriously disrupted by the war is reflected in the fact that no reminiscences covering that period make specific reference to educational disturbance. The arrangements necessitated by the accommodation of the evacuated school were accepted as another wartime inevitability and the Collegiate came off quite well in the provision allocated to it. Even for those pupils present in September 1939 and during the following year there is no critical recollection of the temporary accommodation. "A school from Manchester was also housed in the school. We all led separate lives, passing one another

on the corridor, with two different Headmistresses and different school curriculums". Air raid drill, testing gas masks and the camaraderie of the potato-picking camp "for the war effort" are recalled, but the actuality of the cricket pavilion and the Co-operative rooms have left little lasting impression on those who spent half a day there for several months. The illusion of normality must have been preserved in school life and the years of the war, overshadowed as they inevitably were by the vicissitudes of the conflict, blend easily with memories of what happened before and after. No doubt school provided a focal point of familiarity in a world by no means familiar or friendly. However bad the news the school day proceeded along the allotted path. With invasion a daily possibility, with personal losses mounting daily, with Manchester and Liverpool in flames, the daily round and common task furnished reassurance. Bells were rung, games were played, homework set and detention given. This is both a tribute to those who ran the school and taught in it and a reminder that Blackpool pupils fared far better than many whose secondary education coincided with the war years.

Those of us who entered the Sixth Form in September 1939 still debated and discussed and prepared for our examinations. Current events were of pressing relevance and our perspectives were understandably different from what they would have been had there been no war. Yet the running of the school had to go on, and, in our youthful optimism, before Hiroshima changed our concept of permanence, we could still feel that goodness, truth and beauty would somehow prevail. We could still write:

As war planes thunder overhead  
I sit and read  
Books which will still be read  
When I and those above are dead

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## 2. *Wartime School*

MISS Taylor wrote:

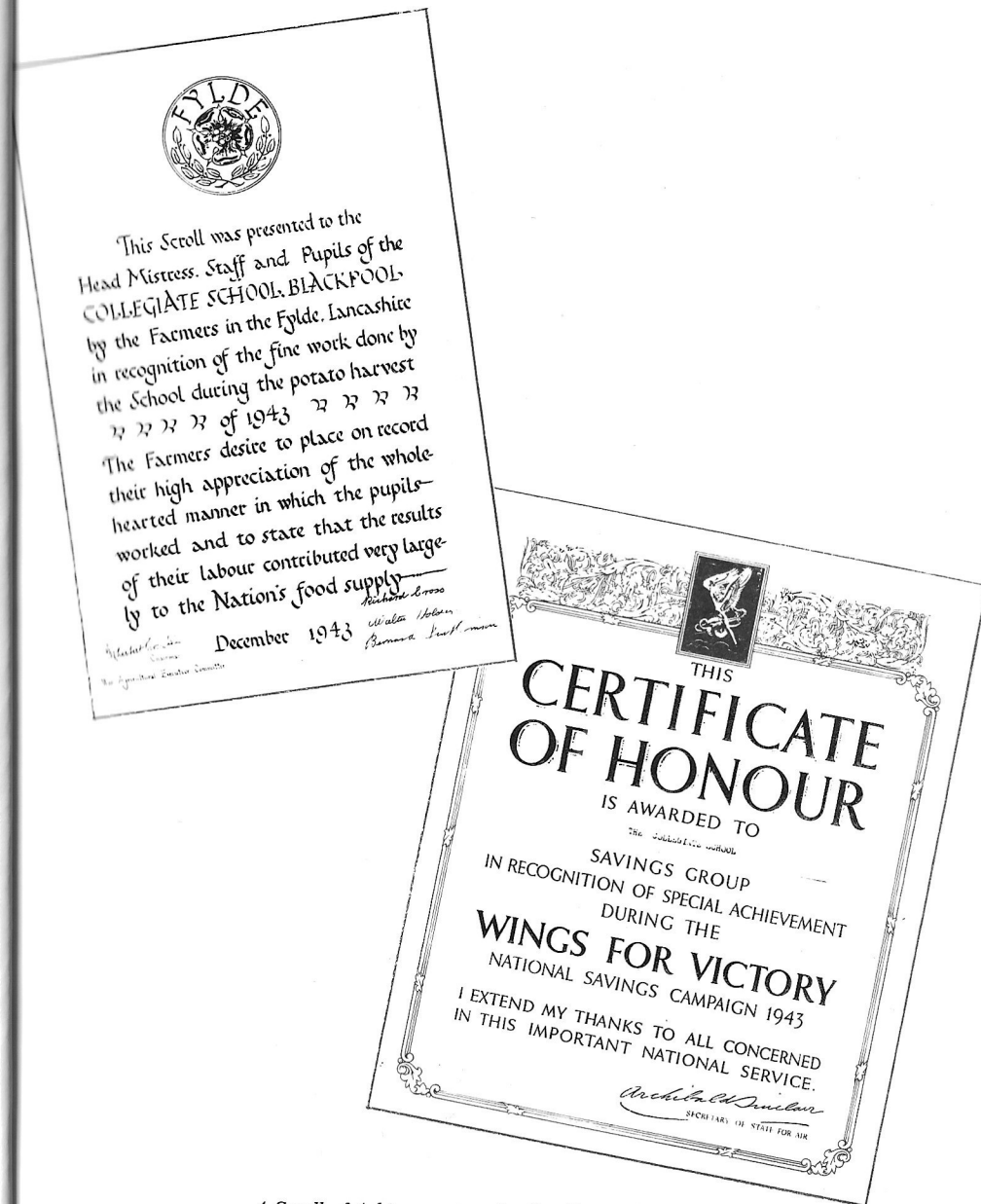
"At the beginning of September 1939, the Staff were recalled from holidays, as the Government's plans for evacuation were put into operation. Blackpool was a reception area, and into it poured thousands of evacuee children. Teachers became billeting officers, first of all collecting information about available accommodation in the streets assigned to each of us, and then leading strings of children to occupy it. My 'beat' was Adelaide Street, and I still remember the warmth of sympathy from many of the householders there, though there were understandable tears from one of them when twenty little boys of seven and eight years old filed into the house she was running single-handed.

"Once billeting was complete - though the return home began as a trickle almost overnight - we returned to our own scholastic problems. The Central High School for Girls, from Manchester, had been allocated to the Collegiate School, and it took many staff meetings to work out the details. On one basic principle Miss Dunn was adamant - that the incoming school must have an exact half of all we had to offer. So, each school spent hours daily in the school building, 8.45 to 12.45 or 1.00 to 5.00, morning or afternoon in alternate weeks. We spent the out-of-school time in a variety of accommodation, including the cricket pavilion in the park, and rooms provided by the Co-operative Society near their central premises. Here we did what we could - lessons as far as possible for the Senior School, and some for the Juniors, with various other ploys like darning socks for a nearby anti-aircraft battery, knitting, speech-training and mime. However, this two-into-one scheme had a limited life, for many Manchester girls, with their attendant staff, drifted back home as the threat of air-raids appeared to recede, until we were able to incorporate such as remained into our own classes. In 1943, when severe bombing attacks on Manchester became reality, we housed a part of Stretford High School, but this

time with little disruption of our own regular activities.

"Blackout regulations made other changes necessary, as it was not possible to black out the whole building. The Hall was done, and most of the main floor. The staffroom became the headquarters of the staff fire-watchers, for, like other citizens, the able-bodied among us had to undertake fire-watching duties. After instruction at the Fire Station in such alien branches of knowledge as the use of stirrup pumps and how to deal with incendiary bombs, we arranged a rota of three fire-watchers per night, to spend the blacked-out hours in school. Duties began by a routine inspection of the top corridor with dimmed torches, and a hazardous ascent of two ladders, one at each end, to make sure that no incendiary bomb had somehow got unnoticed into this loft. Then three camp beds were put in the staffroom, though we were not allowed to undress, and the watchers lay uneasily listening to the sounds of darkness - swing doors creaking without cause, pipes muttering, the occasional foot-step outside the windows, which we always hoped belonged to a warden or policeman. As the months went by without incident, sleep came more easily, until the night when a patrolling policeman, loudly pealing the front-door bell, failed to wake the 'watchers'. After that, one of the three spent the night in isolation in room 24, theoretically more likely to respond to any future summons. There was no hot water in school taps then, so after a chilly wash in the morning, we greeted the new day bleary-eyed and sticky, grateful if it was the weekend, when we could go home to a bath and sleep, instead of staying to teach.

"Black-out affected, too, the hours of teaching. We could not begin school until it was light, nor continue after it was dark, so in winter we were often having Morning Assembly in the light of dawn, and seeing girls out of the cloakrooms in a deepening dusk, where they moved quietly like dwellers in some mythical land of shades. It was difficult to run the school societies, but some new activities came into being, as some girls and staff were prepared to come back in the evenings to make camouflage nets, or, like the Knit-Wits, to combine knitting for the Forces with discussion. The Savings Group, too, made gigantic efforts, and raised thousands of pounds in the special Savings Weeks organised by the Government. As the need for labour in the Fylde became more acute, girls from the middle school were sent out in the Autumn terms to help lift the potato crop on local farms. They would return to school at the end of the day, muddied, tired, but usually happy, eager to compare notes on their employers and rural amenities. Some girls



A Scroll of Achievement and a Certificate of Honour

also helped on local farms in the Summer holidays, one going on to qualify as a veterinary surgeon from this start.

"To the fire drill was now added air-raid practice, mostly in the humped shelters excavated at the ends of the hockey pitches, a feature of the school landscape for six years – almost a school generation. Into them filed the school, packed tight on slatted wooden benches in semi-darkness, though fortunately actual siren-warnings in school hours were few.

"The Government's wise policy of ensuring that sufficient food was available for school children led to a rapid extension of the School Meals Service – too rapid for the very limited accommodation available. The select little group of County and other girls from a distance suddenly exploded into two crowded sittings in the small dining room (later the Library), where space was so restricted that plates of food in one direction and piles of 'empties' in the other were passed over the heads of the diners by a chain gang wedged tightly between the tables. Dinners were no longer cooked on the premises, but imported from a central kitchen in the town, and the erection of the kitchen-dining-room unit after the war was a most welcome relief from conditions which had become almost intolerable – even if part of the cost was the loss of the best tennis court!

"We tried to keep up as normal a programme as possible. We went on a school journey to the Lakes and stayed at Elterwater Youth Hostel. Most travelled by bicycle, and from the third years up to the sixth, only twelve faced the outing. Food coupons and food for packed lunches had to be taken with us. We were used to surmounting the difficulties these years constantly presented."

### *Kaleidoscope*

*My air-raid shelter was the bicycle shed. Once or twice an "alert", as distinct from a practice, drove us there and we sat in silence, wondering and listening. (1934-1942.)*

*The morning after unwelcome news of war setbacks we would come to school solemn and thoughtful but we left more cheerful and relaxed. (1934-1942.)*

*There were only two cars in the drive, one belonging to Miss E. M.*

*Taylor the other driven by a sixth former who lived in the country. No one else could get petrol allowance. (1934-1942.)*

*Walking to the Cricket Pavilion for lessons when sharing school with Manchester Central High. Returning in the evenings to make camouflage netting in the hall. (1937-1943.)*

*I remember having lessons in the Blackpool Cricket Pavilion, wearing gasmasks for twenty minutes every Monday morning, darning soldiers' socks and raising money for war weapons. (1938-1943.)*

*Away matches for hockey and tennis were continued, but we travelled by local buses and trains instead of our own coaches. (1938-1943.)*

*I remember having lessons in the Co-operative rooms and the school hats with frayed sides which my mother thought looked ragged. (1936-1941.)*

*I eventually won a bronze and then silver medal for ballroom dancing, having practised in the library. (1935-1941.)*

*I remember my blouse being in an exhibition for the button holing. (1938-1941.)*

*I recall dancing on a Saturday morning as a wave in a sea-shore ballet, and queueing for sweets in short supply at the tuck shop. (1936-1942.)*

*I remember an evacuee called Iris who had a beautiful green pinafore tunic as uniform, much nicer than our three-box-pleat navy gymslips. (1938-1944.)*

*I remember Miss Clark, whose appearance always caused a deathly hush; we lived in fear and dread of her, and I remember Miss Farrow who said that we should never blow our noses violently, but just dab as she did. (1938-1942.)*

*Clothing coupons meant that school uniform was no longer possible in every particular, but we were expected all to wear suitable navy skirts and white blouses. A friend wore a navy suit passed on by an aunt. (1940-1945.)*

*I remember having "round the world" in the gymnasium at the end of term. We had all the equipment out and we had to go "round the world" without our feet touching the ground. (1940-1945.)*

*Listening to Miss Humphries making History live. (1940-1945.)*

*I loved the dissection of frogs in the Biology lab. (1940-1945.)*

*School dinners: jacket potatoes and soup – and barley kernel pudding. Wholesome fare. (1941-1948.)*

*Miss Dobson riding her sit-up-and-beg bicycle. (1941-1948.)*

### *Mrs Forgan Recollects*

I readily accepted Dr. Wilkinson's invitation to write an introduction to the chapter recording my happy years at the Collegiate School.

Changes in work and play were evident. After the war, to conform to the accepted standards in order to be a lady was almost like accepting Jane Austen in modern dress – unreal and unrelated to the world's changes. We enjoyed wider choices. Latin and French were joined by Spanish, German and Russian. One girl justified her choice of German by the explanation that she hoped to be able to translate the Peace Treaty between us and the defeated Germans. Parents who had slept in air-raid shelters and faced demanding work for the war effort and who still stood in endless queues waiting for, perhaps, some fruit, faced realities! Their children were not to face such ordeals! The new form of Speech Day forsook the pattern of an eminent citizen giving advice to the younger generation. Girls were asked to write their opinion of what the five or seven school years would add to their quality, as citizens and individuals, rather than wage-earners. I took six VIth formers from the Grammar and Collegiate schools to Manchester to take part in the programme *Youth wants to know*, and heard the producer urge them to “forget diffidence”, “to be more positive” and to “forget they had been taught to be polite” if they hoped to represent, faithfully, the youth of the post war years! (At the Odeon that week, Cliff Richards was presenting a picture of “Successful Youth”, by Youth, for Youth, as a recognised setter of standards for his generation.)

I was amused to receive a request from a national newspaper, for a copy of my Speech Day programme and report before it was shared with Governors, Staff, Parents, Pupils. They were disappointed. Did I not know education was news?

Peace made travel possible, since Europe was no longer a battlefield but a potential playground. Parents now enjoying adequate petrol, took their families to the Lakes, as a weekend jaunt, and

went abroad on holiday. Miss Parton and Miss Walmsley, as seasoned travellers, were much in demand for information re Spanish Life, or how to get an audience with the Pope!

I remember, too, our close co-operation with the seven Fylde Grammar Schools for one day conferences on Current Events, Religions of the World, Languages, Drama and Music. The playing field was no longer our only common ground, and we were happy to host such gatherings. The barren years of restrictions had gone, and now, for the trained, and the ambitious, opportunities abounded. I am sure that we did not let them escape our eager minds and ready hands. Contact with so many old girls, faithfully supporting their old school by sending their daughters where they once sat, and grew up, confirms me in that belief.

*J.R.F. Forgan*

### *Post-War Pupil*

MY year arrived at the Collegiate School in September 1946. Our early childhood had coincided with wartime and its restrictions. The discipline and order of grammar school life, therefore, although rigidly applied, was not out of keeping with what had been going on around us. The corned-beef hash and swede-atoe that seemed the major feature of school dinners was accepted un-demurringly because the country was not yet “sorted out”. The careful wrapping of every text book in brown paper and the teachers' appraisal of how we filled every line of every page in our exercise books was all a reminder of the shortage and more shortage of those post-war years. We were not only privileged to be at grammar school, we were privileged in every belonging we possessed.

I turned up at school on the first day not only feeling the peculiarity of a uniform but with the added peculiarity of being labelled from head to foot. We named individual items in case of loss but we soon found that school uniform was itself a label. If we

lost our manners or behaved indifferently in public we could be picked out as "Collegiate girls". As members of the school we had a corporate identity and our reputation could depend on how other members of the community behaved as well as ourselves. We were taught very strongly to have a sense of being part of a larger whole. This whole had certain standards in behaviour and in ways of thinking that gave it a moral cohesion. The school set us a regular pattern of behaviour that sought to establish certain principles and social niceties. It formalised in various ways respect for elders, courtesy towards others, and pleasantness of surroundings (we contributed flowers for the classroom each week and changed between outdoor and indoor shoes before leaving the cloakroom).

At the same time we were constantly reminded that there was a world outside whose standards had to be judged, not just followed. During my time at the Collegiate we were presented with an alternative model which perhaps complicated the feelings if not the existence of many girls whose experience of Blackpool was mainly one of "getting and spending". The school had to stand as a principal bulwark in a primarily materialistic society. Moreover, a town relying on business and boarding-house interests and the sort of distraction that Blackpool offered, would hardly seem to be served by having its womenfolk learn that;

"Gallia in tres partes divisa est."

The Collegiate made accessible to many first-generation grammar-school girls a cultural tradition which in past ages had been the province of the gentleman and the scholar. Not all pupils carried through with this, but the important thing was that opportunity had been given. Even so we were aware that since we were a girls' school staff had not been made available to teach some of the things on offer at the boys' Grammar School. Russian and Greek were not then included in our diversions, though Russian was later introduced.

At junior school a great deal of cohesion had been given to life by one teacher being in charge of all areas of work in a class. Now at grammar school we had "specialist" teachers, which provided us with quite a round of teaching personalities. We were very aware that we were being taught by a generation of women (still without equal pay) who conveyed not only pride in their "subject" but the possibility of new vistas ahead for the female student.

I look back on my generation at the Collegiate as a fairly innocent one, sandwiched as we were between the end of the war and the arrival of the television. We were generally book-

orientated. Trousers and unisex were not yet "in". We attended all-female school dances and it was still possible for a young woman of eighteen or nineteen to be found at school in white ankle socks in the summer and grey knee-lengths in winter.

Even so, no generation is without its problems. We were going into uniform just as the rest of the world was coming out of it. Sophistication was being preached to us by the cinema. The return of fathers at the end of the war did not necessarily mean easy adjustment for families. And some fathers did not return at all. The Collegiate with its ordered society and promise of future prospects, as well as the kudos that attached to being there, was a stabilising influence.

*Mildred Davidson 1946-1952*

*(Lecturer in English - North London Polytechnic)*