

## Chapter Four

### 1. *The post-war years, 1946-65*

THE war finally over, schools could really look to the future. For grammar schools in areas that had known little disruption, school life continued much as before, though there was an acute shortage of teachers. In some areas, however, much lee-way had to be made up; it is estimated that, in 1941, fourteen per cent of children of secondary-school age had been receiving no education at all. Each school, nevertheless, had some problems of adjustment to the post-war world, and the changing patterns of life in the community were reflected in the schools.

Food, clothing and petrol rationing continued for several years and conditions returned only slowly to normality. The idea of the working mother became more generally accepted, and the number of girls taking school dinner rose accordingly. The last evacuees had gone home, but a number of children from Weeton Camp and from the service families billeted temporarily in Blackpool, had to be accommodated. Some of these girls had been to as many as twelve schools in two years and it was not unusual for them to be issued with all their books one week and have them collected in again the next as their fathers were once more posted away.

Before schools had managed to settle down in their post-war reconstruction, further change came, this time affecting the grammar schools more than the others. This change was, in fact, to have a profound effect later on secondary education in general. In 1950, the School Certificate and Higher School Certificates were replaced by the General Certificate of Education at Ordinary and Advanced level. The significance of this change was the substitution of a subject examination for a group examination. A certificate could now be achieved for as many subjects as reached the pass grade, however few, even one. No specific subjects were now required. For some years the universities stuck to their old

matriculation requirements, success in English Language, a foreign language, Mathematics or a science and two other subjects, but gradually this became diluted to English Language and Mathematics. Later it was modified still further. The Collegiate girls continued to take a spread of subjects wherever possible. The new Advanced level was virtually the old Principal, but no minimum number of subjects was required for a certificate. The Universities mostly asked for three, and no-one could take a degree course with fewer than two.

The personal freedom of the Heads was progressively curbed after the 1944 Act. Miss Dunn had been able to appoint her staff herself, taking rooms in hotels in various parts of the country in order to interview candidates. Now, appointments were usually made by the Governors, in consultation with the Head, with a representative of the Authority present at the interview. Regulations proliferated, and the steady flow of paper which was soon to become a deluge, began. The headmistress, however, still directed the policy of the establishment and Mrs Robinson was, throughout these years, a public figure in the town and a stimulating leader in the school.

The young teachers who joined the schools towards the end of the war and immediately afterwards were as much influenced by the war as their older colleagues had been by the previous one, but in a different way. Many had been at college in wartime conditions, with shortened courses and curtailed activity. Only if they were going to teach had they been allowed to finish their Arts courses instead of being called up.

They realised their privilege in being able to complete their education, while some of their contemporaries had not, but some of them had glimpsed wider horizons by the time they entered the schools and came to the profession with a certain reluctance, craving what appeared to be more exciting outlets for their talents. Some did not stay long, seeking change and new opportunities. Some seized the chance of exchange with America or other distant countries. Few considered staying in teaching if they married and few thought they would still be teaching when they were sixty. They saw the profession in a different light from the one in which those after the First World War had seen it. Their education had been affected by international events rather than by the struggle for feminine recognition. Furthermore, in sharp contrast to the 1918 situation, teachers were in short supply. A post could be turned down. Not for them the 100 plus applications of their older

colleagues (or of their pupils in later years). They were not as settled as the older women had been, but they taught with enthusiasm and there was a spirit of camaraderie in the staffroom very different from the more frigid formality of pre-war years, affecting old and young alike.

By the pupils the teachers were now taken, in general, rather more for granted. Some were considered perhaps a little odd, some were still a little feared, but on the whole they were no longer considered as superior beings. Some understandably, as ever, won greater respect than others and some, as ever, found the livelier forms more difficult to manage. But the greater informality in staff-pupil relationships, brought about by the war, at its best led to a new kind of bond between teachers and taught. The form mistress, for example, could gain the confidence of her form, forging a bond to the form's advantage and the mistress's satisfaction. Barriers were still there and neither side wished them away but the barriers were built on mutual respect and were lower than they had been before the war. Such a relationship had been common earlier only with the small sixth forms which were then the norm. Neither side made the mistake, so common today, of pretending they were "all girls together". The teacher was still a person in authority, and the pupils were still in her charge. In a successful relationship no-one overstepped the mark because no-one wished to do so. Each side knew how far to go, but the more relaxed relationship in which each side respected the other's shared humanity, was the basis for successful teaching. It is so still, but perhaps more difficult to attain in today's circumstances.

As time went on young entrants to the profession were joined by older women who had been "emergency trained" to meet the staff shortage. Later still, young teachers stayed on when they married, leaving only when they had their first child. During these years practically no-one returned to teaching until their children were at least of school age. The composition of the staffroom changed again, as some younger members both ran their homes and embarked upon their careers. This trend has continued until, today, the married teacher is the norm and many leave their very young children to minders or relatives. Maternity leave was unknown in the immediate post-war years. In addition, men teachers started to enter girls' schools, bringing their contribution to staffroom discussions, often with experience of industry or commerce. The staff became much more heterogeneous than the small bands of women, mostly from the same kind of background and life-style, of

the past had been. Today's even greater variety was still some time away, but the direction was indicated.

In the recollections of those who attended the school in these years, some staff, usually the older ones, are still remembered for their teaching, Miss Humphries, Miss Taylor and Miss Mason among them. But more frequently recalled are the vagaries, the pranks played on certain teachers, or the passing "bons mots" of the staff. Miss Bradley's Latin version of *Daisy, Daisy*; Miss J. F. Taylor's insistence on the windows being open; snowballs melting from the blackboard top during a master's lessons; Miss Berryman's remark that no answers were correct but that the wrong answers were beautifully written; Miss Ewing's reply to the query of a pupil if she could open a window that, as she was capable of performing the act the question was whether she might, not whether she could.

Punishments come to mind: detention for illicit table tennis in the library; standing on a chair at dinner time for flinging water at a member of staff and "dodging games lessons more than once". A certain teacher could be distracted by getting him to talk about his favourite subject. Once, a group managed to tiptoe out one by one from a room conveniently provided with two doors until only a handful was left. The school Christmas party, revived after the war, had lost something of its mystique, and not just because there were no boys. The whole school rehearsed *The Lancers* "with great hilarity" and on the evening performed it "with gusto", so much so that Miss Wright ended up on the floor. One remembers bringing down the curtains, rods and fittings in the music room "while swinging on same"; another the effective rebuke for a particularly noisy outburst by Mrs Robinson's reading from a book written by a blind person, entitled *My Eyes have a Cold Nose*, telling of the impressions of people gained from the modulation of their voices. One remembers learning the meaning of the word "casuist" when she told Mrs Robinson that she was playing, not table tennis, but ping pong. Another was duly embarrassed having to wear her hat, standing in assembly, when the rest of the form were seated. The gauntlet was run to the Tuck Shop and Beech Bakery where sticky buns were regularly purchased, and even parched peas on rare occasions.

Yet among all these high spirits, there is still remembered pride in belonging ("How proud I was when I first wore my school hat"), and particularly clear impressions of the expectations as one walked up the imposing front steps on the first day, a privilege

otherwise reserved for staff and sixth form. The Golden Book is remembered as the incentive it was meant to be. Speech Day, with the School hymn and Miss Burns' music programme, made an impression on many who might not have admitted as much at the time. The School hymn "which still sends shivers down my spine" makes an impact on most old girls and is now regularly sung before the annual Old Girls' Dinner. Also "bringing a lump to the throat" is the hymn sung at the last assembly of the year, *Lord dismiss us with Thy blessing*; many an eye became misted at the lines, "May Thy father hand be shielding All who here shall meet no more".

Uniform was still demanded, but the beehive hairstyle is remembered as an obstacle to wearing the school hat, "so we pinned it on the nape of our necks" (surely not on to the skin!). The first two years wore the Windsor woollie skirt with braces, and indoor shoes for all were obligatory. The expectation that gloves should be worn is recalled.

Now, a variety of girls accompanied the hymn in assembly each week and a different form provided weekly flowers for the Hall platform and a reader for the lesson. Only sixth formers had read previously. Now, there were garden plots to be cultivated (some-times, for the favoured, with the help of the school gardener) and an inter-form gym competition and an end-of-session drama festival became regular features. All these activities have left their mark, alike on the unsuccessful as on the successful.

In spite of the few male members of staff, the school's confines were essentially cloistral and some remember hogging the window seats when St. Joseph's or Grammar School boys passed by to games. Some also recall the experimental dancing classes with the Grammar School, the joint dramatic and operatic productions and some shared Classical Society excursions, ("which did little to improve the mind"). Some remember all the activities outside the school in which they participated - music, Guides, swimming, horse riding, choir, skating - all these from one person's recollections! This was a far cry from the one evening a week at a drama class guiltily indulged in by one pre-war pupil. Sex education was introduced in Physiology and Hygiene, and the older girls had talks from the Headmistress. The world encroached upon the school just as the school encroached upon the world. The school was certainly no longer "entire unto itself."

In retrospect, it is obvious that the year 1961 was a watershed. After thirty-one years in school, eighteen as Deputy Headmistress, Miss E. M. Taylor retired. Mrs Robinson said of her;

If she was a staunch upholder of Feminine Rights she was an even stauncher advocate of Feminine Responsibilities . . . we are conscious of the richness of her contribution to the life of the school.

In 1961, too, Mrs Nickson died. She had been elected as the first Old Girls' representative on the governing body and was herself a former member of staff and an old girl of the Dual Secondary School. Chairman of the Governors for many years, she had presided with charm and dignity at public functions until ill-health forced her to retire in 1956. Her interest in school had been both deep and generous and the school owed much to her wisdom and sound judgement. She was succeeded by her daughter, Mrs Woosnam (later Dawson), also an old girl and former member of the Collegiate staff. At Christmas of the same year, after a very short illness, Mr Robinson died after nearly twenty years of untiring interest in school affairs. He had been a regular attender at all school functions and school missed his warm and friendly presence.

With these three tried and trusted friends removed from the scene, the school was bound to appear different. But it was in this same 1961 that the first real flurry of the wind of change began to blow our way when the result of the re-organisation of Palatine school led to our absorption of 120 pupils and three members of Staff.

The four Palatine forms were coming to a building already overcrowded. So as the long-awaited new Grammar School at Highfurlong had at last been built, we took over the old Grammar School building and sent the second and third forms to work there while the staff shuttled back and forth between the two buildings. A new regime was worked out for "the Annexe". Monitresses from the thirds took over the daily duties that made for the smooth running. The desks were very old and dilapidated, and some fathers declared that their daughters occupied the same desks as they had done in their school days. Once a week the girls returned to Beech Avenue for practical subjects, and as they hurried down Leamington Road laden with cookery equipment, games equipment, yesterday's homework and today's textbooks, they must, in Mrs Robinson's words, "have sympathised with every beast of burden." Mrs Small, later Thornton, was in charge of the Annexe, and it operated for two years.

It is not surprising that the generation of the Annexe remember

their trekking to and fro with exceptional vividness, "going to the Annexe and carrying all our belongings to the main school." One girl, at least, felt peeved "that what the boys had left was considered good enough for us", but this initial resentment was followed by "the adventure of the move and a very happy, if somewhat disorganised, period which followed."

Several dogs played their part in the life of the school. The distant Myra was eventually followed by Jock, a canine of independence, imported by Mrs Robinson. Jock had passed on, but the Annexe produced Vicki, Mrs Small's corgi. The girls exercised her in the dinner hour and several remember that she had to be carried or dragged on the outward journey, only condescending to walk under her own steam when homeward bound.

The provision of three prefabricated classrooms, on most of what was left of the garden, made possible the return of the Annexe girls in September 1963. The school was again on one site but there was already an air of uncertainty hanging over us. The surface of the tennis courts began to show signs of serious deterioration, but "because of the doubt about the future", repair was not allowed. Tennis became virtually impossible in the next few years. Nothing definite was said, but it was beginning to be suspected that the days of the school were numbered. Another pillar was removed when Miss Humphries retired in July 1964 after thirty-three years of yeoman service.

The session of September 1964 to July 1965 was very much Mrs Robinson's year. Her illness overshadowed the opening, her marriage to Mr J. B. Forgan enlivened the middle and her retirement dominated the end. (Indeed, during this dramatic year, we nearly lost the school by fire, fortunately spotted in time, which occasioned a fire drill which was not a practice, though few suspected it at the time.) After twenty-four years as headmistress, she left for Norfolk and another kind of busy life. The appreciation in the magazine is an appropriate ending for this section.

The word "service" has been the one most frequently used by Mrs Forgan when she addressed the school. Her ideal has never been an ivory tower sheltering a cloistered virtue. Rather she has offered to her girls the challenge of the hurly-burly of everyday life, and to her that challenge has meant the ability to discriminate (another of her favourite words) choosing what is worthwhile, while disregarding the less worthy among the pressures and influences which are the content of life in a modern community. Mrs Forgan hands over to her successor a school which she has made vigorous, alert, well-informed and in touch with the world.

## 2. *School life*

THE internal story of these years is of steady growth and development, with an empirical fluidity that allowed procedures to be adapted to circumstances. The pattern of the years changed, like a kaleidoscope, with no harsh line of demarkation as one pattern merged into the next.

Apart from the regular school concert, all the other annual ceremonies which had marked the Collegiate year were revived. The House Singing Competition, House Parties, and Speech Day, (which had never been allowed to lapse completely) were restored almost at once, and the School Party was held again at Christmas 1949. House Parties lived only until 1948, but the Singing Competition, first reduced from two choirs to one choir for each House, persisted until 1958. The School Party was abandoned in 1957 as more modern forms of entertainment were at first substituted for it and then in their turn abandoned because of changing teenage customs. Speech Day returned to the Palace Theatre, but without the white dresses, and then to the Winter Gardens.

The School societies were also revived but the full and regular programmes of the old Literary and Scientific Societies were never again equalled. Demands had changed. The Discussion Group, a product of the war, flourished and eventually became a Senior Debating Society with a middle school off-shoot. S.C.M., later to be called C.E.M., drew a constant audience and in 1958, '59 and '60, gave a Passion Play, proceeds of which contributed to the Chapel of Unity in Coventry Cathedral. Junior Hobby Groups were introduced for those left out of the senior activities. Other societies, like the Chess Club, grew and declined according to the presence of interested senior girls in school to run them. In 1958, the Literary and Scientific Societies were amalgamated into the Friday Club, but as school syllabuses grew wider and television provided specialist programmes, support weakened and eventually lapsed.

There were so many channels for every opening to canalise the energies of the willing.

In the early years of this post-war period there were three major ceremonies which the school celebrated.

In 1946 the school came of age. To mark this, a hospital cot was endowed in the school's name and the £500 for the endowment was raised by pupils, old girls, staff, parents and friends. The Staff Play, *Ladies in Waiting* raised £170 and a School music concert brought in £35. Mrs Forgan recalls that the last £16 was acquired by a working weekend when each girl earned a shilling and each member of staff 2s. 6d. The school enjoyed this so much that the method was repeated on other occasions. On July 12th, the school walked in crocodile to St. John's Church, under police escort. At the service of thanksgiving and rededication, Canon C. H. Lambert preached. The next day, a garden party was held, with considerable panache. Miss Dunn attended both the service and the garden party and she cut the large birthday cake, made by Joyce Greenwood. A cricket match between fathers and the school concluded the afternoon's activities.

Four years later the school celebrated its quarter century. On July 21st, the school, headed as before by the staff in academic dress, proceeded to St. John's where, on this occasion, the Bishop of Blackburn gave the address. The garden party, held on July 15th, had been attended by Miss Dunn and her sister and on July 24th there was an open afternoon, at which the usual displays of work were augmented by a play by the Junior Drama Group and a production by the Senior Choir of the Papageno story from *The Magic Flute*. During these end-of-term celebrations a grand piano for the music room, purchased as a result of many efforts, was duly presented to the Governors.

The last ceremony was a national one. In 1953, the year of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, the school presented *Merrie England* with Barbara Robotham, later of international fame, as Raleigh. This spectacular production won universal praise. In the town's procession of historical tableaux, our float represented a scene in the Pump Room at Bath in the eighteenth century. The school was decorated with gay roundabouts and heraldic lions and portrait sketches of famous women. On June 4th a head-dress competition, which gave scope for much ingenuity, was judged and school drank the Loyal Toast from the newly presented Coronation Mugs and ate little cakes with crowns on them. The Staff and guests from the P.T.A., Old Girls, and Governors had slices of ceremonial



The School First Seven, 1945-46



Miss Dunn cuts the twenty-first birthday cake, watched by Mrs Robinson and Joyce Greenwood.




Ladies in Waiting, 1946. Standing: Miss Ewing, Miss Humphries, Mrs Sharp, Miss Dobson and Mrs Storey. Seated: Mrs Rich, Mrs Duxbury, Miss Astle and Miss Clarke.



Murder in the Cathedral, 1949

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLACKPOOL.  
 BLACKPOOL COLLEGIATE SCHOOL FOR GIRLS  
 BEECH AVENUE, BLACKPOOL.




TWENTY-FIFTH BIRTHDAY  
 SERVICE OF  
 THANKSGIVING  
 - AND -  
 RE-DEDICATION

ST. JOHN'S PARISH CHURCH, BLACKPOOL  
(BY KIND INVITATION OF THE REV. GANSON YATES.)  
 3 P.M., FRIDAY, 21ST JULY, 1950.

Collegiate School and Grammar School, Blackpool  
 The Head Mistress, the Head Master, Staffs  
 and Pupils have pleasure in inviting  
 to attend the Annual Swimming Gala to be  
 held at the Derby Baths, at 7.0 p.m.  
 on Tuesday, 14th October, 1958  
 Please present this card at the entrance.  
 R.S.V.P.

**RESERVED**

County Borough of Blackpool  
 Blackpool Collegiate School for Girls  
 Beech Avenue



The Governors and Head Mistress request the pleasure of  
 the company of

at Speech Day, on Friday, 10th October, 1958  
 at 2.30 p.m., in the Winter Gardens Pavilion,  
 when the Chief Guest will be

The Lady DOROTHY MACMILLAN

Please present this card at the entrance to the Winter Gardens Pavilion

R.S.V.P. by 6th October, 1958

**BLACKPOOL COLLEGIATE SCHOOL FOR GIRLS**

I can attend Speech Day on Friday, 10th October  
 I cannot (Please delete whichever does not apply)  
 Please reserve me. Name.....seats  
 Name.....  
 Address.....



*Toys for the Hospital.*



*Reminiscence Evening, 1955. Standing: Miss E. M. Taylor, Miss Wright, Mary Rawes, Miss Edwards and Miss Humphries. Seated: Joan Wilkinson, Miss Weatherup, Mrs Robinson, Sheila Hollingworth and Nora Jarvis.*



*The Brontës, 1957: Elizabeth Walker, Ann Cross, Helen Whittaker, Ann Whitehead, Ann Wakley, Angela Shearer, Lorna Rigby, Gaile Galloway, Audrey Hill and Janet Henderson.*



*Old girls on the staff, February 1960: Susannah Doughty, Maureen Fozard, Carol Parkinson, Joan Wilkinson, Enid Lonsdale, Mrs Robinson, Sheila Hollingworth, Marion Dewhurst, Gladys Wright, Josephine Parton and Alice Edwards.*



*The First Eleven, 1960-1961.*



*Annexe Mistresses and Monitresses, 1962. Staff, back row: Mrs Evans, Mrs Kirby, Mr Payne, Miss Pilling, Mrs Atkinson, Mrs Cochrane, Miss Gray and Mrs Thornton. Front row: Mlle Chapelaine, Mrs Clayton, Mrs Honey, Mrs Brown, Miss Berryman, Mrs Small, Mrs Robinson, Miss Burns, Miss Edwards and Miss Gibson.*



*School journey to France, 1962, with Miss M. L. Taylor.*

iced cake, made by Miss Lewis (Mrs Hoggett) and Shirley Fry.

The major building addition of this period was the provision of a dining-room-kitchen in the grounds. By 1950 the number of girls taking school dinner had become so great that the existing arrangements could in no way cope with them. The obvious site for the new building was the smooth turf of the tournament court, court three, which stood in splendid isolation, flanked by a border of flowers around the surrounding netting. To the chagrin of many this was where the "purpose-built" walls arose, replacing the grace and aesthetic delight of the cherished grass court by its utilitarian unwieldiness. Dinner became no longer a nightmare but it could never again be a social occasion.

The old basement dining room was turned into a library and the kitchen into a craft room. The magazine recorded;

Important to the intellectual life of the school is the conversion of the old dining room into a Library where, in the quiet bays between the bookshelves, the Senior School is discovering something of the peace and concentration which learning, in



its widest sense, must have. Perhaps some great scholar of the future will have her first introduction to the pleasures of the life of the mind in this studious atmosphere.

Two new hard tennis courts were provided to compensate for the loss of court three and, at long last, hot water was laid on to two of the cloakrooms.

Although the pattern of these years is fluid, certain fixed ceremonies do emerge. Speech Day, now with the interpolation of spoken observations by girls, remained the climax of the Autumn Term. At Christmas, a school performance of either drama or music or a combination of both, was regularly given. Sports Day and the Garden Party came to mark the ending of the session.

Drama and music were not confined to Christmas and many plays and concerts were performed during these years. 1948 saw *Alcestis*, 1949 *Murder in the Cathedral*, and also three one-act plays by the staff. The proceeds from these went to provide, at last, stage lighting and back curtains. *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* started the fund for the Coronation piano. The choir was still the hub of the school's music and in 1948 it first broadcast, in *Children Singing*, as it was to do later on more than one occasion.

In 1953 girls were included for the first time in the Grammar School play, on this occasion *Our Town*, and a long co-operation began. In December, 1952 staff and girls gave one-act plays, *Everyman* was produced in 1955 and *The Brontës* in 1957, a memorable tour de force. The opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors* was given at Christmas 1958 and 1959, with universal acclaim.

The musical life of the school was enriched in 1956 by the foundation of the orchestra. Instrumental classes for girls seeking admission to the orchestra began and Mrs Leslie and Mrs Kershaw started their magnificent string tuition. Later, tuition in wind instruments was included. The orchestra appeared for the first time in public at a carol concert in 1957 under the baton of Miss Burns, to whose musicianship much was due.

The school was always rich in musical talent. Many gifted musicians were willing to share their love of music by contributing generously to the musical activities of the school. We heard first in school the names of many who were to distinguish themselves nationally and internationally. Phyllis Boar became the accompanist for opera at the Royal Academy. In 1960 Barbara Robotham won the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society's competition for contralto singing and became one of the youngest-

ever Fellows of the Royal Manchester College of Music. Felicity Leslie is one of the finest recorder players in the country and her oboe playing is winning her distinction. Joan Atherton was the Gold Medallist of the Royal College of Music and is enjoying a brilliant career. Ann Pickup is the accompanist at local festivals and a gifted concert pianist, and there have been many more.

In 1945 the parents met to elect their representative which, following the changes of 1944, they were entitled to have on the school's governing body. Mr J. K. Starkie was elected and the meeting decided to form a Parent-Teachers' Association. So the P.T.A. was born. The founder members were extremely active and social activities included a musical concert given entirely by talented parents. The Year Meetings were established when, each year, all parents had a chance to discuss their children's progress with members of staff and each year at least one evening was devoted to Careers. Occasional meetings were arranged as demand arose.

An unusual venture in 1964 was the financing of an Arab refugee teacher-trainee from the camps of the Middle East. On a visit to Palestine, Miss Humphries, who herself did so much in extra-curricular activities to foster service to others, met one of the adopted trainees and visited her college. Kathleen Grey, as editor of the school magazine, commented on the adoption scheme that "with so much to do, both in work and play, it is often easy for us to forget that we are fortunate to have an education which allows us so many chances of using our talents."

School was always encouraged to save in the National Savings Scheme as a useful habit and a public spirited one. During the first two years of the war school had saved £8,889 and the total for 1947-8 was £2,395. Miss Fletcher, Miss Drew and Miss Edwards urged the school to become one hundred per cent savers, though this goal was never reached.

An interesting link with wider horizons was the adoption of a ship in 1946, the first of a succession of such adoptions. In 1948 Captain and Mrs Harrison came to school to present a model of the then current ship, H.M.S. Wheatfield.

Visitors from abroad came frequently. Two American teachers exchanged with members of staff, Miss Helen Ansley with Miss Astle in 1951 and Miss Janetta Wright with Miss Drew in 1954. In 1965 Mr Van Zant joined the staff for a year. As early as 1949 Fraülein Fielitz had spent some time in school studying British education and several German girls from time to time spent a term