

AUN APPRENDO

It was war time; not the 'phoney' war of 1939-40, but the dark foreboding period of 1941. The Battle of Britain had been won, the battle of Europe was yet to come.

Apart from the constant reminder in the form of gas masks, sand-bagged buildings, black-outs and the frequent rejoinder "Don't you know there's a war on?", a young school boy's life went much as it had before. True, you could no longer buy bananas, and other delectable fruit; and we had had a strange and relaxing period when the Council schools were closed and teachers visited various homes to give lessons to assembled groups of children. But no realization had yet dawned of a new life which lay ahead.

In common with my contemporaries I had 'taken the Scholarship', (which was what later became called 'the Eleven-plus'), and which was, incidentally one of the first selection examinations to use the I.Q. technique. And to my surprise, I had passed!

Thus I found myself one September morning of 1941 in Nether Edge Grammar School yard, in an unusual brown uniform amongst unknown boys. When in due course a bell sounded and all except we newcomers were admitted I began to fear the worst; they had no room for us; there'd been a mistake. My fears were allayed, however, when we were ushered into a hall, small but probably adequate, and were faced by the Headmaster, whom we learned was Mr. Smith. We were doubtless given certain instructions, cautions, and exhortations; I remember not one! I was over-awed by the presence of several black-robed dignified gentlemen who were to be our form masters for that first year.

I think I was first impressed by the to-ings and fro-ings of masters, each bent on instructing us in their own specialist subjects; and frequently we did a sort of dance between form rooms, physics laboratory, chemistry laboratory and music room. The time table for all this must have been a work of art; the art room certainly was a work of art. Since it was an old stable block of doubtful age with an uncertain wood floor, we were constantly adjured by Mr. Parsons, "Hey, take your boots off!".

I expect we gradually soaked up some learning; Mr. Chambers assisted our assimilation of scripture with a few raps from an old

chair spell; Mr. Biltcliffe could mark out a good musical rhythm with a blackboard rubber — which might suddenly take-off in the direction of an inattentive pupil; and Mr. Potts proclaimed before each chemistry lesson, "Silence, loudspeakers!".

I remember that not a small part of our break times in that first year was spent in the school yard supervising workmen who were constructing an air raid shelter; we obviously did a good job — I see it's still there.

The end of our first year confirmed our establishment as grammar school boys; we were no longer referred to as 'fags'! But our survival was beset by many hazards; Mr. Whaley scattered a crowd of boys on those mornings when he arrived in the school yard, at high speed, in a small Morris Eight motor car. Drowning at the swimming baths was only avoided by obeying Mr. Buchan's instructions to 'become water-rats'. And following an air raid shelter practice, it was quite possible to 'lose' a boy in the labyrinth of cellars for half an hour or so! A sports afternoon at the field was no straightforward matter either, for it would be preceded by a long hike through Needhams Fields and a muddy trek across Knab Farm yard (yes, literally!). Strong lads were they who could kick a ball around for 90 minutes after that marathon.

I well remember one cross country run. The whole School assembled at Springfield Road on Saturday morning for a four-and-a-half mile trot through Ecclesall woods. It appears that one boy lost his way, being quite unfamiliar with that part of Sheffield, and eventually found himself at Beauchief tram terminus. Attired in running shorts and vest he boarded a tram for town, gave the conductor his name and address, since he had no money, and watched for land marks he knew. He recognised his whereabouts at the Moor foot, boarded a Nether Edge bus (the same credit arrangement!) and arriving at School set off on the familiar walk to the field. I believe he was disqualified for using mechanical transport!

You might be forgiven for thinking we did little in the way of learning, but School Certificate time came round and the majority acquitted themselves successfully.

School Certificate marked the end of my days at Nether Edge. I had tried to conform to the School motto, the title of this article, 'One learneth', now I wanted to move out into the world.

R. S. Haywood, 1941-46.