

As, in a world currently being made fit for heroes to live in, it seemed inappropriate that choirboys should be paid halfpenny a service, a friend and I organised a two Sunday strike for a penny minimum wage. A just settlement was achieved.

Meanwhile the War continued, H.M.S. Bulwark, H.M.S. Princess Irene, and Faversham Gunpowder Works, all blew up, shattering windows in the village, while artillery barrages in France could be heard when the wind was easterly. Air-raids occurred, dangerous chiefly because of the A.A. gun on Barksore Hill.

In 1917, seven of us from the Sittingbourne and Sheppey areas won scholarships tenable at Borden Grammar School. Primed with a literary acquaintance with Greyfriars, I knew the sort of life which awaited me there: Gentlemanly fellow-scholars, noble buildings, and magnificent playing fields. Of course, there might be bullying and caning, but I had resolved not to tolerate either, and, in the event, I never did, for Borden turned out to be a place of friendship among the boys and kindness from the Staff. Of course, material conditions were bad. While at the primary school one towel lasted all the pupils a term, at Borden Grammar School this breach of hygiene was obviated by turning off the water in the cloak-room (for six years), and so dispensing with the necessity for a towel. Apropos of this, when in 1929, the current Lord Harris formally opened the new school, he said: 'I hear you've got baths here. Never had 'em at Eton in my time!' Obviously, even then, they were too good for us.

The sports field existed, but partly as a campus for the Headmaster's flock of pedigree white Wyandottes, partly also as a parade ground for two alluring daughters. The ex-school kitchen was used for concocting a Macbethian brew known as 'Fowl or foul food', but school meals, except for a brief interlude of hot cocoa and baked potatoes, were non-existent. We marked the football fields ourselves, weeded the cricket pitches, and from time to time clubbed together to entertain visiting teams at a cafe in the town.

The Borden Grammar School I have taught in is essentially a school-master's school, a Panopticon where the pupils may be kept under close surveillance, where as the old school was set in a then rural area, surrounded by thick growing trees and shrubs, a veritable maquis, honey-combed with wigwags and tree-dwellings, headquarters of rival gangs, engaged in tribal warfare of a fairly harmless kind, except for an occasional act of mayhem or arson.

In retrospect, such 'delinquency' to which our mentors of 1917/20 turned a blind or tolerant eye, would appear as a necessary stage in adolescent development.

It would be extremely unwise for me, although a teacher of 42 years' experience, to pass judgement on the personality, methods and efficiency of the Borden Grammar School staff I knew as a pupil. They were all interesting, and except for the 'casualties' of the war, one shell-shocked 'Old Salopian', and one dipsomaniac, all certainly helped me, and some of my more intelligent contemporaries to reach the University, a goal somewhat rarely attained by children of the working classes 47 years ago.

My years at the Borden of 1917/23 were among the happiest I remember, and two or three of the friends I made then, were at the University with me, and have remained friends throughout my life.

In 1923 I went up to King's College, London, where I should have felt very much outclassed if, contrary to my own private decision not to waste

time on games, I had not immediately found myself playing in the first "Soccer" eleven in 1923/24 and captain in 1924/25. I subsequently represented the College at Rowing and Cross-Country Running. Realising how little I knew, and how good the University teaching was, it was a pleasant necessity to work hard. It was pleasant too, to live in a most comfortable college hostel at Dulwich, where, because of the low wages then prevalent, service, staffing and food were all of a very high order.

A fashion note of 1925: Girls in mini-skirts and knee-length boots practising the Charleston (not the twist) on suburban railway stations. Plus ça change

A period touch: My first professor of French, aged 60, cycling daily up from his South Kensington home to the Strand, wearing a hard hat, black frock coat, grey striped trousers and cravat.

In 1926 came the General Strike, during which students, oddly enough, supported the Government.

I worked on the British Gazette, where one of my friends, on guard duty stopped Churchill, Lord Birkenhead, and Arthur Balfour from entering because they didn't carry passes. He said he didn't know who they were.

Shortly after this, the Army was considered as a career, but the £180 p.a. subaltern's pay made it unlikely that my net income would equate with my gross appetites. An interview for the post of secretary to Wanda Landowska, the harpsichord player, seemed a possible mésalliance after I had given her delicate hand a too vigorous handshake.

In contrast to these youthful memories the years 1929/69 seem paradoxically short and uneventful.

Aware, before I entered the profession, of the salary I was to receive as a teacher, it seemed somewhat pointless to complain immediately of inadequate rewards, and indeed, 3 million unemployed provided a salutary background to my early professional years. With simple tastes and good health, I have, curiously enough, found the salary sufficient, and the work congenial and easy. In fact, for the past fifteen years I have done two jobs without undue fatigue.

The only theory I hold about education is that, if the pupil is not learning it is usually the teacher's fault. It is also a valuable antidote to self-satisfaction to realise that half of any A form are more intelligent than oneself, and that the noisy youth in 4B is an alter ego 50 years back.

The things I remember and treasure about teaching at Borden Grammar School are: the tolerance and friendliness of my colleagues, especially my contemporaries, Eric Snelling, Stan Ashby, Reg Goff and Roy Hill. The splendid fellows in the Sixth Form, their hard work, good scholarship, and unfeeling courtesy.

The School Journeys (first 1932, last 1969), although on some of them I have murmured a remark, attributed to Wellington when reviewing his troops: 'I hope they frighten the French, by God they frighten me!' And I was always relieved to get them back home alive.

Finally, and perhaps oddly, the French 'assistants', among whom I have found one lasting friendship, with Paul Mayoult 1946/47, and some picturesque characters including a friend of Darlan's assassin.

What now? Retirement at the moment means that I am doing the equivalent of one full-time job, which, in fact, suits old age extremely well, for then what else is there to do, but work?