

## CHAPTER V

### APPROACH OF WAR

As far as day to day events in school were concerned, the usual routine was interrupted by several events of interest to anyone concerned with the history of the school; for example, on the 25<sup>th</sup> October, 1937, holes were bored in rooms ten to fifteen inclusive for the radio cable; by this time, of course, the telephone had been installed in the building. In March 1938 the school was visited by a man from the Ordnance Survey to sketch the school for map-making purposes. Obviously Dr. Barry regarded the existence of the school on future O.S. maps of the area as important, in that he mentions this cartographer's visit. In April, 1938, fifteen pupils were selected by ballot to attend the Empire Exhibition in Bellahouston Park; in all, sixty nine pupils from all the schools in the area went to Bellahouston in a double decked bus. May 1938 saw the first organised visit of pupils of this school to Carfin; the parish priest of Carfin in the heart of industrial Lanarkshire between Motherwell and Newhouse, had organised the construction of gardens and a grotto dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, and this centre soon became an attraction for 'pilgrimages' from all over Central Scotland, particularly in the month of May of each year. The building of the grotto and laying out of the grounds had provided, on a more mundane if materially valuable level, employment for the masses of unemployed in the area in the 1930's when Lanarkshire, like any other industrial area, felt the worst effects of economic depression.

The liner Queen Elizabeth, and the Croy pupils hit the headlines of the school records in August and September, to be joined by Adolf Hitler later in September. The Croy school strike has been dealt with in a previous chapter. On September 27<sup>th</sup>, Dr. Barry records the launching of the above liner from John Brown's yard at Clydebank by the Queen; he mentions the absence of the King 'owing to the European war crisis' – the grisly spectre of Prussian militarism was becoming a grim reality. Like 'the parishes of Fermanagh and Tyrone' in July, 1914, those of Townhead and Croy temporarily 'faded into the mists and squalls ... and a strange light began immediately, but by perceptible graduations, to fall and grow on the map of Europe'. On September, 30<sup>th</sup>, 1938, Dr. Barry records as follows in his log: 'Peace pact was signed this morning at Munich averting war. Children have been very unsettled for the past few days'. It is interesting to record this awareness on the part of the people generally of the dangers of their situation in 1938; few were blind to the fate of Europe as so many had been in 1914, but the experience of one world war was enough to enlighten all as to the horrors of modern warfare and to dispel any mistaken ideas of a war which would bring picturesque glory and 'be over by Christmas'. Newspaper and radio communications were more effective in 1938 in bringing home to people in Britain and elsewhere the danger in which they stood, and the experience of 1914 to 1918 did the rest. It is rather pathetic to record Dr. Barry's evident but premature relief in September, 1938; like most other people, he obviously considered there to be good grounds for hoping that the appeasement policy of Chamberlain and others at Munich has in fact appeased Hitler's ambitions. The leader of the Reich had already incorporated Austria in his dominions and at Munich was given what he wanted regarding Czechoslovakia. However, unknown to many, the way was now paved for the invasion of the Polish Corridor in 1939 and for the outbreak of general war. Yet even in September 1938, the authorities were taking no chances. Dr. Barry records the continued digging of trenches in the Peel Park for shelter from air raid

attacks, a strategy perfected by Germany's Luftwaffe in Spain between 1936 and 1939, and the distribution of gas masks to pupils in case of poison gas attacks. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1938, the local police inevitably visited the school to warn the pupils to keep away from the above trenches, and to instruct the pupils in the use of gas masks. Despite Munich and Chamberlain's 'scrap of paper' or 'peace with honour', precautions were still regarded as being necessary; events were to justify these precautions within a year.

The end of Europe's breathing space was nearing; in the next holocaust, no school or other public institution would be able to ignore the existence of war. In World War I, the only involvement of our school had consisted in the knitting of socks for soldiers at the front; in 1939 to 1945, new tactics, in particular the bombing of factories, shipyards and installations generally was inevitably to lead to widespread damage to housing and death and injury to non-combatants; apart from during the Spanish Civil War, this particular strategy, which was designed not only to destroy strategic targets but also to undermine national morale, had never been attempted on a large scale and the effects brought a new and terrible dimension to war. Our own school was not to be able to virtually ignore the Second World War as it had the First. As the next chapter will recount in more detail, the civilian population and children in particular were evacuated from the danger areas of Clydebank and many were sent to Kirkintilloch where St. Ninian's like other schools in the burgh, played its part in making conditions tolerable for the victims of war on our own doorstep.