

CHAPTER VII

POST-WAR YEARS

The history of St. Ninian's immediately after the Second World War tends to be one of steady progress and development rather than dramatic change; there are of course exceptions to this generalisation. In the latter part of 1945 the contribution of the school to war charities was examined more closely. Such causes had benefited to the extent of more than eighteen hundred pounds, much of this going to the ship's company of the King George V, the R.N. ship 'adopted' by the school. Public recognition was given to St. Ninian's for these efforts by the Provost of Kirkintilloch. Further appreciation of the pupils' generosity was signified by the visit to the school in March 1946 of Captain Schofield, C.B.E., R.N. of the King George V; as a token of thanks he presented the school with a wooden plaque carved by himself; a letter from the Chaplain of the ship also thanked the school, not only for its financial help to the ship's company, but also for the prayers of the pupils, to which the chaplain attributed the fact that in eighteen months' action in the Pacific against the Japanese, the ship had sustained no casualties.

The internal life of the school, however, had reverted to normal, and in October 1945 Dr. Barry notes that the Primary roll stood at 603 pupils, secondary at 330; these departments had 14 and 21 teachers respectively, and the roll included forty three evacuees. The usual routine of school life was indeed restored to its mundane pattern, with visits to pupils recorded to Lennoxton Nail Work and Kirkintilloch Gas Works, and with the gathering by the pupils of two hundredweight of rosehips in September 1946. Accommodation was beginning to become a problem, and the primary classes ranged in numbers from forty eight to fifty six pupils. In June 1946, the principal teacher of Science, Mr. Monaghan was appointed Rector of St. Patrick's High School, Dumbarton. Amidst the everyday events of school life stands out the log entry of October, 1946 regarding Harry McLernon, a secondary pupil. At lunch time one day, McLernon saw a two year old girl falling into the canal at Luggiebank Place, and he at once jumped in fully clothed and saved the child from a premature end. He subsequently changed his clothes and kept quiet about the incident, but a member of the staff was informed by passers-by, and he in turn told Dr. Barry, the rector of the school, who checked on the facts of the incident and found the account given above to be accurate. The staff presented young McLernon with six pounds, and the rescuer, his anonymity gone, was soon tracked down and photographed by the press.

On the subject of less fortunate heroes, it is recorded that twenty three former pupils had been killed in World War II and on November 29th, 1946 a plaque designed by the late Mr. Coleman, head of the school's art department, was unveiled in memory of these casualties. Public tribute was also paid to several former pupils who gained military medals.

Throughout February and March 1947, the staff and pupils of St. Ninian's, like most other people in the British Isles, found life disrupted by the extremity of the winter weather conditions; unprecedented falls of heavy snow were frequent, and frost was prolonged; electric power was scarce nationally partly because of the increased demand for fuel because of the weather, so the school suffered power cuts and the schools' broadcasts were suspended. No school milk could be delivered, and no pupils were transported from Croy, Twechar and Condorrat because the Carmichael's buses were snowed in at Greenfoot Garage. The snowfall on the 27th February, 1947

was recorded as being the heaviest in the area since 1865, and only 444 pupils turned up at school, out of a roll 1020. Although the cold continued, road conditions improved enough by March 3rd to permit the arrival at St. Ninian's of the first bus from Croy since February 25th. By March 10th, weather had deteriorated and by the 13th no buses were running because of severe snowfalls, and the attendance again dropped to below 50% of the total roll. Presumably eventually school life returned to normal, and milk again flowed, buses again ran, and pupils again got to school, although even in April, Dr. Barry records cold, wet weather which was still having an adverse effect on attendance.

The months of March and April, 1947 brought two significant events unconnected with the weather. In April, the school leaving age was raised to fifteen years and this, in the case of St. Ninian's further aggravated the accommodation shortage in the school; in March, the headmaster, William Barry, was elected president of the Educational Institute of Scotland for the year 1947-48, the first president from a Catholic school, and 101st President of the E.I.S. The magnitude of this tribute to Dr. Barry's scholarship and enthusiasm for all aspects of his profession is obvious. On June 13th, he was installed in office as President, and the Director of Education appointed Mr. McKinnon of the Classics Department as 'second master' to fulfil the headmaster's duties during the inevitable and frequent absences which his new office would entail. Nor was this the end of public recognition of Mr. Barry's qualities; on July 2nd, 1948, he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from the National University of Ireland in Dublin; the degree was conferred by the Chancellor of the University, Eammon de Valera.

In September, 1948, the part played by the school in helping the King George V was again acknowledged by a visit from Vice Admiral Sir Wilfred Rupert Patterson, C.B., C.V.O., Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty, and first captain of the King George V. He and his secretary called at the school to thank all concerned for the adoption of the ship by St. Ninian's during the war.

Within the school, problems of accommodation were becoming acute, as a result of several factors; the raising of the leaving age was bound to increase the toll, and after April, 1948 the inclusion of Auchinairn in the school's catchment area aggravated the situation; the school meals system required a considerable number of sittings to serve all 560 pupils who were taking meals by this time, and the classroom situation was grave enough to require the education authority to lease four rooms in the Church Hall in Union Street. As time went on various scattered huts were erected, but obviously these expedients would only present a short-term solution, and overcrowding was to become an unwelcome feature of St. Ninian's for a number of years. A general increase in population and the inclusion of Bearsden and Milngavie at a later date would make things still more difficult.

The year beginning January 1949, the seventy fifth anniversary of the school was one of a variety of happenings. The levelling of the playing fields, a large undertaking, was begun; the roll was 1173, the highest ever. Pupils and staff were shocked by the sudden death of Miss Elizabeth Hughes, the Senior Woman Assistant and a member of the staff for forty five years; although ill, Miss Hughes had continued to work, without seeking much-needed medical attention, right up to her death (12th September, 1949). In October, 1949 Dr. Barry indignantly records the partial failure of the school heating system owing to the delivery of several hundred tons of useless coal which looked more like ordinary stone and provided a corresponding amount of heat. A more serious event of November, 1949, was an official enquiry from the Scottish Education Department, asking Dr. Barry to explain

why the attendance had been so bad in the previous session (1947-1948). His reply throws an interesting light on his own rather authoritarian figure, in that it demonstrates that Dr. Barry was only too well aware of the social and economic difficulties with which so many of his pupils had to be content; such pupils he strongly defends from any implication of failure to attend school without good reason.

Dr. Barry's answer to this enquiry takes the form of methodically numbered and clearly explained points in which he admits such shortcomings as there may be while at the same time producing concrete reasons for these. The school catchment area, he states, now includes some rather outlying housing schemes such as Townhead and Westergreens, and the even farther distant villages, Auchinloch, Waterside and Bishopbriggs. (He is here dealing with the primary school only). The reply goes on to intimate that Hillhead and Westergreens are one and a half miles from the school, that the bus services are infrequent, that the pupils have to pay their own fares, and that the nearest bus stop is a quarter of a mile from the school. All these factors inevitably mean that in wet weather the children get wet, and some, as a result, are ill; however, a more frequent and significant result is that since so many children possess only a limited amount of clothing, at least one day's absence and often two day's absence is unavoidable while such clothing as these children have is being dried after the journey to and from school on a wet day. The headmaster concludes his reply regarding the primary school with a reference to the prevalence of mumps, scarlet fever, chicken pox and similar ailments, in addition to the common cold. Under such circumstances the absence rate is bound to be high.

Regarding the secondary school, he reminds the department that of the total absences, 5,120 were attendances lost by 159 pupils who were permitted to leave school temporarily to work on the potato harvest and many of whom failed to return after their period of exemption. In addition, attendance was irregular amongst pupils as they neared the official leaving date; finally the poor attendance record of the Cumbernauld pupils is explained by the fact that they must rely on special buses, and have no alternative transport if they miss the school buses or if the latter fail to put in an appearance.

It is difficult to find a clear pattern of events in 1950; this again was a year of a great many relatively unimportant incidents; a few examples should be adequate. In January, three boys from what Dr. Barry refers as the 'N-Q classes' end up in the Sheriff Court in Dumbarton, and one is sent to an approved school; events of this kind were unusual in St. Ninian's, and the Rt. Hon. Thomas Johnston, writing in 1947, had been justified in paying tribute to the school's one per cent delinquency rate. In February, 1950, the fire equipment and fire drill were inspected by the local fire service; on May 2nd, of more interest to the pupils, thirty cases of apples were gifted to the pupils by a benefactor in British Columbia. The month of October brought several significant happenings; on October 16th, the Headship of the school was advertised in the 'Glasgow Herald', on the 25th, an oaken board with the names of outstanding former pupil's inscribed thereon, was unveiled, and on the 26th, Dr. Barry opened 'The St. Ninian's High School Fund' with a donation of two hundred pounds. Obviously an era in the history of St. Ninian's was about to end, and a new one to begin. On January 12th, 1951, the headmaster made the following entry in the school log: 'I William Barry, finished here as Rector to-day under the statutory age limit'. From January 15th to January 22nd, John Doolan, B.Sc. 'second master', took charge.

Thus ended the regime of the first headmaster of St. Ninian's, a regime of more than thirty years, during which William Barry had worked endlessly to bring his pupils up to own obviously high standards, and to give his school a significance on

the Scottish educational scene. Strangers who had heard of the school and of Dr. Barry and who encountered pupils and former pupils admit to having somehow got the impression that this was a highly exclusive private establishment and not, in fact as it turned out to be, a school in the state system; this example is eloquent testimony of a headmaster who aimed at educational success and high social standards rather than any easy-won and transient popularity. Under his direction, the old primary school had developed into a thriving secondary school with fair claim to good repute in terms of academic excellence; it had grown in size, taken in new areas, and moved into a new building. It had played its part in the dark years of 1939-45 in looking after its evacuee pupils, and had been an example to all in its generosity towards the ship's company of H.M.S. 'King George V'.

Dr. Barry's enthusiasm, not only in the narrow educational field, but also in such spheres as the work of approved school management, in which he took an active interest, raised him above his contemporaries; his achievements did not go unnoticed, as the award of Honorary Doctorate of Laws from Dublin University and his election as President of the E.I.S. for the year 1947-48 prove; nor did his services for Catholic education; as opposed to education generally, pass unrewarded, and in March, 1951 he was decorated with the award of the Papal Cross 'Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice'.