

CHAPTER VIII

MODERN DEVELOPMENTS

On January 22nd, 1951, a new chapter in the school's history began with the installation as Rector of Mr. John Griffin, M.A., former rector of St. Columba's High School, Cowdenbeath. At 8.45 a.m. on that day the parish priest of St. Ninian's Rev. Dr. Tennant, formally introduced the new rector, after which an installation ceremony was held in the school hall.

The school was not long in returning to its normal routine; educational visits were made to such varied centres of interest as the Scottish Wire Rope Company and the Festival Ship 'Campania' which visited Glasgow in September, 1951. Events at a national level are reflected in disruptions of school life as, for example, in the case of the death of King George VI on February 6th, 1952 and holidays in general, if rather 'organised' rejoicing in June, 1953 for the Coronation of the King's successor. As usual, however, in any school, internal events take precedence over national ones, and the exemption of pupils for the potato harvest and the visit to the school of the Secretary of the Scottish Education Department are of at least as much importance as the passing of Kings. The Secretary, Sir William Murrie, records his pleasure at having been entertained with a 'delightful concert of choral singing' by the school choirs. Of more concrete significance is the inspectorate's report for 1951-52 which draws attention to the extreme shortage of accommodation, and mentions the probability of a new school in one of the housing schemes to relieve pressure on the primary department; lack of dining-room facilities is also commented on. The inclusion of Milngavie in the school's catchment area in August, 1953 exacerbated the problem. The last outstanding event of 1954 came in October of that year when Mr. John Griffin, Rector of St. Ninian's, attended a graduation ceremony at St. Andrew's University to receive the Doctorate of Philosophy of that University.

For a year, nothing of note occurred; the records show a series of staff changes and staff absences and little else until November 1954, when, on the second of that month, the Director of Education let it be known that the committee, in its wisdom and enlightenment had decided it time to end the apparent barbarity of corporal punishment in Dunbartonshire schools; corporal punishment was outlawed entirely in primary schools and its use was restricted to the headmaster in secondary where a written record was to be kept of any occasion on which a pupil was thus punished. Dr. Griffin further records on November 26th, 1954 that the above rules were suspended by the same committee which had made them; no reasons are given for this volte face; it is merely a matter for conjecture whether this sudden 'leap forward for mankind' had been too much for the pupils of 1954, and that their habits and behaviour had failed to advance along with the thought behind this piece of humane legislation. Perhaps no-one had thought to find an alternative solution; no-one has done so since, and the belt still lurks in the sleeve of many an academic gown, and will no doubt do so until mankind devises an acceptable alternative (other than the sword), or rises above the whole squalid question of crime and punishment.

In January, 1955 the roll had reached 1301, and, by August, 1349, yet still no large scale extension to the school was planned, and as yet no new primary had opened in the area. In September, 1955, the school lost a friend when the parish priest, Canon Tennant, died; on November 28th, the new incumbent, Father W. McGhee was introduced to the pupils of St. Ninian's. September 1956 also saw the opening of the new school library with some 350 volumes.

The log dealing with the years 1945 to 1956 ends with the proverbial bang, recording the fact that a number of pupils were injured, none seriously, when the bus from Auchinairn was in a crash on November 22nd, 1956, near Auchinloch.

The new session 1957-58 marked a significant stage in the development of St. Ninian's in that it was the first session in which all the post-primary pupils from Milngavie and surrounding area attended St. Ninian's; the secondary roll was now 615 and the primary 782, the highest ever in the school's history, and accommodation was to loom larger than ever as a problem. It is true, however, that while the accommodation crisis came in the 1956 to 1970 period, this was also the period by the end of which the accommodation problem was to be solved; the opening of various other schools in the area eventually the opening of Holy Family Primary which ended St. Ninian's dual role as secondary and primary, and finally the opening of the new extension, Strathclyde House, were all to be factors as a result of which shortage of accommodation no longer existed to any serious extent in the early 1970's. 1957 was significant in yet another aspect of education; in that year the first television schools' broadcast began. The year 1958 can be summed up briefly as the year in which work commenced on the new dining hall, and the year in which the roll rose to 1504 pupils, a new record. This included a few pupils from the embryo Cumbernauld new town. The theme of lack of space for a given number of bodies, pupils and staff runs on through 1959, although in that year the first major breakthrough came in the shape of the opening of St. Flannan's primary on January 7th. 324 pupils and 9 teachers transferred to the new school leaving St. Ninian's with a roll of 1171, and the chance of a brief breathing space; by June the roll had somehow shot up again to 1307. On the credit side, however, new dining halls and kitchens were in use in August, 1959, obviating the need for a large number of separate sittings. At the same time, the school was not only overcrowded but scattered, with four classes in Westermains and four in the Union Street hall.

In August, 1960, eighty-four primary pupils were sent to St. Matthew's, Bishopbriggs, and the roll remained under 1200 for the next year. Once again the opening of a primary school had eased pressure on St. Ninian's, although the general increase in population was still to present difficulties. Further building, this time of the technical hutment in 1961 helped prevent further overcrowding and provided much-needed facilities for practical subjects.

By the 1964-65 session, the frequency and variety of educational outings and visits was proliferating; the new emphasis on the more practical aspects of education for living, especially with regard to non-certificate pupils, brought with it a new awareness of the relevance of the world outside the classroom. Visits to plays and films were becoming more frequent, as were outdoor courses, with increasing emphasis on climbing and hill-walking, geographical excursions and participation in orienteering competitions; Kirkintilloch Water Works, indeed shared with Kirkintilloch Sewage Works the honour of a visit from some pupils and staff in 1964-65. December, 1965 brought a one-day strike by teachers throughout Scotland; in St. Ninian's, 230 pupils were instructed to stay at home; suggestions that the educational prospects of pupils were harmed by this merely token stoppage can be met not only by reiterating the justice of the teachers' cause, for which this history is not the place, but also by contrasting the minimal difficulties caused by the teachers' action with the widespread and long-lasting chaos, poor attendances and loss of education resulting from the bus strikes of the late 1960's.

Only one, but one very important event, marks 1966 as a significant date in the annals of St. Ninian's. In that the summer of that year, a new primary school, Holy

Family, was opened specially to serve the area served by the primary department of St. Ninian's. Thus in August, 1966, all the primary pupils and all primary staff but one were transferred to the new establishment. In August, 1966 for the first time in its long history, St. Ninian's had no primary department and was a secondary school only. In some ways, a link with the past, with a long and distinguished tradition had been broken; St. Ninian's had, after all, never aspired to anything beyond primary level from 1874 to 1920. Yet as population increased and the secondary catchment area did likewise, the break had to come eventually; new methods and attitudes in the primary school no doubt required more accommodation, and anyway, the senior staff of the school were at last free to concentrate on the specialised business of organising and operating a large modern comprehensive school with all its virtues and some at least of its failings. It is worth noting at this point that St. Ninian's had always been a comprehensive school long before the term 'comprehensive school' was invented; probably its obvious success to-day as a comprehensive school is due in some measure to the fact that it never had to self-consciously turn itself into such a school. Here the comprehensive system has grown smoothly and naturally since the school became a secondary, with pupils of all levels and ability sharing the same staff and the same facilities, the same traditions and school identity.

In common with other secondary schools during the mid-1960's, St. Ninian's acquired in January, 1967 a new kind of member of staff, an administrative assistant. The existence of such a post has contributed greatly, in an increasingly bureaucratic age, to the smooth running of the school; St. Ninian's has been particularly fortunate in that the administrative assistant appointed in 1966, Mr. Archibald Crawford, has and still does prove himself a most helpful and valuable member of the school establishment; everybody's administrative problems, especially insoluble ones, are solved courteously and efficiently by Mr. Crawford.

By 1967, further problems of accommodation had to be met by alterations to the school building; new art rooms were provided on the ground floor of the school, the old art rooms were turned into a science room, and a new commercial subjects hutment was opened. While after August, 1968, not only senior secondary but also junior secondary pupils from Lennoxton were to attend St. Ninian's, shortage of space seemed unlikely to remain as a problem with the opening of the new Our Lady's High School in Cumbernauld; from August, 1968, first, second and third year pupils from Cumbernauld, Condorrat and Croy were to attend the new school, while only those in the upper school at St. Ninian's were to continue there. Again the school's accommodation was relieved of a considerable strain. The outlook in this respect was further lightened by the fact that plans were well under way for a new extension, and building had begun by August, 1969. At the beginning of the 1970-71 session, the new extension, Strathclyde building, was opened, with twenty classrooms, twenty practical rooms and staff accommodation.

Thus by the end of 1970, there seemed little likelihood that St. Ninian's would again prove too small for the numbers of pupils using it, although the roll in the 1973-74 session stands at 1447 and the possibility of lack of accommodation cannot be ruled out in the future. The 1960's period was significant in that the development of Catholic primary education in the area reduced and finally ended the primary department of St. Ninian's, and the various building and extension projects had given more classroom space at the cost of scattering pupils and staff over a wide area in a collection of different buildings. As indicated above, the day to day life of the school had followed, an almost unvarying pattern of outside visits being one of the few distinctive features of the period.

The problem of shortage of accommodation was at least temporarily alleviated in 1970 with the opening of the new extension; the latter contains a number of general purpose classrooms and accommodation for practical subjects, technical and home management. In addition there is a lecture room and new accommodation for staff. On the other hand, the lack of accommodation has not entirely disappeared as a problem, and the new building, Strathclyde House, has further scattered the school over an even wider area, and led to a danger of lack of contact amongst the staff. Obviously a completely new school designed for the purpose would be a more satisfactory answer.

School life over the past three years has continued to follow a routine interrupted only by more frequent education visits and excursions. The raising of the school leaving age to sixteen years of age has meant the need for more imaginative planning of non-certificate courses, and these, in turn have to some extent emphasised the importance of expeditions, industrial, historical and of general interest, outside the classroom during school time. Certificate pupils too have been increasingly involved in outside visits; in October, 1970, parties went to Stirling Castle, a nursing exhibition, the Modern Homes Exhibition, the Garelochhead Outdoor Centre and even a County Council education committee meeting. In the same month, three senior girls won the Crime Prevention Public Speaking contest at Dumbarton. St. Ninian's was itself in turn host to the Commonwealth Conference for Modern Studies pupils in November. Altogether sixty-five pupils attended from schools all over Dunbartonshire. Internal activities included a Christmas Fair, which raised £350 towards a new mini-bus, a Christmas sequence in music and tableau in the school hall, and January 22nd, 1971 a highly successful Burns Supper. The above-mentioned £350 was in fact used, and on March 30th, the school took possession of the new mini-bus, WSN 887J, a vessel regarded as unique in many ways by all of us who sail in her. In March and April 1970, pupils again visited a variety of localities ranging from Austria to ski to the Glasgow Transport Museum no doubt to stare. In June, the mountaineering club went to Wester Ross (and came back).

Of more significance on the wider education front were plans being set under way in summer 1971 to appoint a guidance staff to this and all other secondary schools in the county. The structure was to be one of guidance throughout the school being in the overall charge of an Assistant Rector (Guidance) with several principal teachers (guidance), and a number of assistant principals. The Scottish Education Department and the local authorities throughout Scotland established these additional promoted posts to bring pupils, especially in the very large schools of the future, into contact with at least one member of staff whose specific function should be to help and advise with all kinds of problems, personal, domestic, curricular and with regard to careers; advice on entrance to central institutions of learning, for example, would present a problem of advice for the subject teacher, since most have different entry requirements, through the maze of which the future student must be piloted. This then is a very brief and inadequate indication of what guidance staff in this and every school were to be appointed to do. Again, a change in the educational sphere reflects changes in society at large. Greater awareness of the complexities of contemporary life as these affect pupils at school is probably part of a greater general social awareness of the problems of others and of the need to attempt some provision for these.

In the course of the 1971-72 session the new guidance posts were filled, and life continued in the usual school routine. In January 1972 a weeks retreat by the Redemptorist Fathers was given to the upper school pupils during school time, again

an example of awareness on the part of the Rector of the pupils' spiritual needs. As usual, outside events were not without influence on the internal life of the school, and, in February school was disrupted by the electricity cuts resulting from the strike by which the miners brought to public attention the fact that their rates of pay had lagged far behind those of other workers. In March, 1972, the upper school demonstrated its own form of social awareness and concern for the problems of the less fortunate by organising activities themselves for the benefit of 'Shelter' organisation to help the homeless; later in the same month the boys' choir brought honour of a slightly different kind to our school by gaining second place in the national music festival in Perth.

Again the omnipresent educational outings constitute a conspicuous feature of the records for the rest of 1971-72 session and of the 1972-73 session; a number of examples should be enough to illustrate the wide-ranging scope of these expeditions; they included trips to Glenshee to ski, Killin to climb, geographical outings to Arrochar and Loch Sloy, Modern Studies visits to Ravenscraig Steel Works, a religious 'pilgrimage' to Nunraw Abbey in East Lothian, more climbing expeditions on Sundays and week-ends, not to mention the week-end in March, 1973 when the 'wee, red leaky tents' of the mountaineering club gave scant protection to the few who braved the worst weather of the winter in Glen Nevis. Incidentally the activities of the climbing club were climaxed by the epic journey by mini-bus, of Mr. Connelly and eight pupils in June, 1973 to the Pyrenees.

In school itself, routine was slightly interrupted in several ways; the janitors' strike of April, 1972 resulted in two day's unexpected holiday for the lower school, and on the afternoon of November, 1972 an electrical fire destroyed the main fuse box, filled the building with less than pleasant smoke, and brought two fire engines; on the following day school dismissed at ten since there was no electricity supply. On the more profitable side, in September, 1972 the first Police Community Involvement Course was commenced and in October the first meeting of the school centenary steering committee of staff involved in the events to celebrate the centenary was held with a view to discussing and deciding how best to celebrate the fact that the school will be one hundred years old on 11th January, 1974.

In January, 1973, yet another highly successful Burns Supper was held, the Immortal Memory being proposed most ably and in a highly entertaining and instructive manner by Mr. Arthur Wilson, retired headmaster of Townhead Secondary. In March, again the time-table was suspended for four days in the upper school to allow Frs. Michael and Justinian C.P. to hold a retreat. The ninth annual swimming gala provided a pleasant afternoon for pupils and staff at the local swimming baths, and on 6th April the annual staff dinner dance took place in the Black Bull Hotel, Milngavie. The latter part of the 1972-73 session was darkened by the death after a period of illness of the former Principal Teacher of Mathematics, Mr. Ernest McEwan, a universally popular and respected figure; pupils and staff attended a Requiem Mass on the same day.

School amenities were further extended by the opening on April, 20th of the new Games Hall built at a cost of £60,000; the hall was put into immediate use for the Scottish Certificate of Education Examinations. The 1973 session concluded with such events as an Open Day on Saturday, 23rd June and an evening of music and drama in the Town Hall on the 27th June. The open day, a new departure in the school's history, owed its existence to the inspiration of Mr. S.V. Murray, one of the school's assistant heads; the primary object was to let parents and the public at large see for themselves what the school was doing in all fields, curricular and extra-

curricular, and, if possible, to make some money for school funds in the process. The main building was used to house displays of pupils' written and illustrative work in all subjects, including posters, models, maps and more such visual material; in addition some departments mounted colourful and instructive book displays. Outside in the playing fields was a wider variety of financially successful side-shows of every possible kind; these are too numerous to mention individually, but it is certain that our youngest visitors were most impressed by the horse and pony rides, and by the journeyings to and fro on Mr. Kingham's model steam train. The outdoor proceedings were greatly enhanced by the warm sunny weather, while those involved in the indoor displays of work were surprised and encouraged by the numbers of parents, pupils, and public who were interested enough to spend so much time indoors at the displays on such a fine afternoon. The music and drama evening was a further success which received excellent publicity in the local press.