

OSWALD ROAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The Early War Years:

The declaration of war in 1939 brought great changes in Chorlton-cum-Hardy, as elsewhere, too. But the standard of living and the lack of so many amenities, taken for granted today, make those far-off times seem bleak indeed! But it is comparative, of course.

An air-raid warning siren was mounted on the roof of the Library. When warning of the approach of enemy bombers the siren fluctuated in its wailing. When the danger was passed the siren sounded the 'All Clear'- a steady blast. Mostly the air raids were at night and, when the sirens sounded, we left our beds to sit in a cold, damp Anderson Shelter in a neighbour's garden. The Air Raid Warden for each road had to be informed if you were going away or be absent for any reason so that he knew whose door to knock on to make sure they were aware of the danger..

Gas Filled Barrage Balloons were sent aloft as a hazard for the enemy aircraft and moved around, as were the trailer-mounted anti-aircraft guns. The local Swimming Baths on Manchester Road were turned into a First Aid Station.

The School Life:

The children gathered in the playground before 9.00am and waited there until the Teachers came out. Each class lined up and, when the Teacher was satisfied, led her class indoors. Coats were hung up and places taken in the Hall for Morning Prayers and then at the double desks in the Classrooms, taking care not to spill the ink in the inkwells! A mid-morning interlude was for the purpose of each child being given a small glass milk bottle containing one-third of a pint of milk. We all went home for lunch - no school lunches!

We now attended school only in the mornings and were given homework for the afternoons. An important part of this daily homework was practicing hand-writing. In our writing books on each page there were two lines of copper-plate script to be copied on to the following blank lines until two pages daily were completed. My writing still bears the marks of this discipline. Left-handedness was firmly discouraged. There were no recreational facilities apart from the School playground, neither were there any outings and no school holidays!

We were given a Gas Mask packed into a strong cardboard box with a cord to facilitate carrying everywhere. In school we had to practice putting them on correctly. My older sister was evacuated to Bacup in Lancashire, but health issues kept me at home.

In your school I gained the best marks ever in my whole education for a piece of work! We were asked to collect as many different leaves (it was autumn) and mount them on sheets of paper with their names. I got 12 out of 12 (Imperial then) without declaring my father's help!

Daily Living:

The standard of living was very different in those days. Three times a week a horse-drawn cart brought fruit, vegetables and rabbits to the door whilst another one fresh meat and bacon. A similar two-wheeled trailer brought the milk daily in big churns. My Mother took out her quart jug to be filled. Of, course, all primary foods were rationed, as was clothing. At home we had no radio or telephone, whilst mobile phones and televisions had not been invented. Some of the children told of listening to 'Children's Hour'. I was envious, until we had a radio, and I had arrived! Pocket money was two pence weekly (240 to £1 then) Sweeping the snow from the neighbour's paths brought 6d and I was in the money!

Purchases were not financed and Hire-Purchase Agreements were rare. All desires had to be saved for. Despite the comparative privations, the standard of people's health was good.

The original Tramcars ran then, but did not go out to the environs in the way that the new system does. Their advantage was that they kept running in the 'pea-soup' fogs that were common in the winter months. In the early summer, there was the 'Tonsil Tram' which ran around collecting children and their mothers, taking them to the hospital where their tonsils were removed before mounting the tram again for the homeward journey on the same day! This was common practice for children.

The first computer (it filled a room) had not yet been built by Manchester University.

The local Cinema had a Children's Matinee on Saturday mornings when Western and Flash Gordon films were shown. (Forerunner of Star Wars?)

I left your School in 1940 in some trepidation for Wm Hulme's Grammar School.

W David Cheadle

