

## Chapter Eleven - Clifton School

(1936) My first day at school lives in my memory as if it happened yesterday, I could not wait to get there. My mother made me as smart as she could and holding her hand, we walked the short distance from our house on the green to the school, others had already arrived, holding on tightly to their respective parents, few of them as eager as I to get inside. I was tugging at my mother's hand, impatiently. At the age of five, everything seems to take forever. We were in, mother talking to the teacher, Miss Deakin, but I was already playing with the wooden bricks, placing them neatly in front of a smart little wooden Dolls house. Then the parents had left, there were still lots of tears and cries of "I want my mummy, I want to go home" etc. Not 'little George', he was so happy to be there. Soon teacher had control and placed us in our little chairs, each with a tiny desk and served us up with a glass of fresh milk and a nice wafer biscuit. Playtime came and I soon made friends with Peter, Chris and Horace, as mentioned Aubrey being a little older came more into my life later. Of course there were girls at the school too, Pam, Eldrith, Kathleen, to name a few, more boys and girls coming along each year as some were leaving to go on to high school at Deddington. We were only allowed to use pencils, crayons and pastels at first, pens were considered too messy in the hands of little children, coming into use quite a few terms later. We did, however, use knitting needles and sewing needles for craft and knitting. At Easter and Christmas, we made things to suit those occasions, such as paper chains, egg decorating etc. Teacher used to set up a nativity scene prior to Christmas break up, with Mary and Joseph, the baby Jesus in his manger, with sheep and donkeys, the shepherds with their crooks kneeling and the wise men on their camels, all so real and fascinating to our young minds. In the spring and summer months, we would go on nature walks in the local lanes and fields, bringing back to class, a variety of plants and flowers for identification and in some cases pressing them into books. I loved these walks and the ensuing lessons related to them. Teacher would put a dead nettle into a small jar of water and add red ink, the ink would gradually be absorbed by the nettle and turn red. She also placed a broad bean in blotting paper and put it in the top of a jar filled with water so that we were able to watch it develop, I don't think it actually got to the stage of producing beans. Another of teacher's favourite flowers, was the hyacinth and each year she would place two or three bulbs in a nicely coloured bowl, filled with soil and place them in a dark cupboard until they had grown a couple of inches and then place them on the window sill, where they would bloom and send off a

pleasant smell, which would greet you as you entered the classroom. In winter it was cosy and warm as the pot belly stove was kept stoked up with coke, very often the top would go quite red with heat. When Harold (Wiggy) brought the can of fresh milk, teacher would stand it on the stove and serve it warm, whilst in the warmer months we were happy to drink it as delivered. At lunch time, which lasted an hour, Mrs Whitlock, Wiggy's mum, who lived on the opposite side of the road to the school, would bring teachers lunch each day at twelve o'clock. She carried it on a silver tray with a silver hood, the aroma lingering in the room. Teacher boiled a little tin kettle on the stove to make herself a cuppa. She would then pour the water into a small bowl, adding Sylvan soap flakes to wash the dishes for Mrs Whitlock to collect. We children had packed lunches, in my case it would probably be bread and jam. In the cold winter months we would take a potato to cook on the stove top, teacher would look after this, as the stove had a sturdy mesh fence guard around it, to keep us at a safe distance. She would serve them up when ready, adding a little butter and salt for us. Teacher also had a little paraffin stove, which she used in the summer months, when the pot belly was not fired up. At playtime, we would play hopscotch, skipping and tag. The playground was only very small and not big enough for kicking a ball around that came later at Deddington. I remember so well the little coloured stamps, that teacher would award for effort, there were three of these; 'Excellent', 'Good' and 'Poor'. The 'Excellent' stamp depicted a song thrush, sitting on a branch, where he would whistle his beautiful tune. The 'Good' stamp, a horse pulling a harvester in the cornfield and the 'Poor', a rainy, gloomy scene. The awarded stamp would be placed in one's exercise book at the end of the appropriate subject. I wonder if any still exist? In 1938 I was awarded the prize for nature study, a book, which I still have and treasure, called 'Trees', by Janet Harvey Kelman, with thirty two coloured pictures, which have weathered remarkably well, considering that the book has not been looked after as well as it might have been. Whilst still at Clifton school I was recognised by the RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), someone had told them of how I cared for a bird with a broken wing. They used to send me their monthly magazine, called the 'Winged Messenger' and other publications. The district nurse would visit the school often to check ones head for lice and nits, as well as general cleanliness. Once a year the dentist would come along with her caravan and all pupils would have a dental check and treatment as necessary. I hated the hand turned drill for fillings, cocaine was used for extractions. At the end of treatment, each child would get a tin of Gibbs toothpaste and a toothbrush. After an extraction, a warm glass of milk and a soft

sponge cake. I had a filling in one of my back teeth and it lasted till sometime in the eighties or nineties. I can't remember whether these treatments continued at high school or not, I think probably not. I regret not taking more care of my teeth. I recall a little concert that we put on and I had to recite "The North wind doth blow" "And we shall have snow" "Where will the poor robin go" "He will go in the barn and put his head under his wing" "Poor thing". Christopher had a little difficulty with his , causing a few smiles, "The camel's hump" "Is a Huggley hump" "Which you may well see at the zoo" "But Hugglier yet is the hump we get" "By having to little to do". Horace started off "I have found the bowl that was in the snow" then shyness took over. Many more stories to recall of those early days.

On sixth May 1935, King George the fifth and Queen Mary celebrated their Silver Jubilee and a public holiday was declared. Cities, towns and villages decorated for the occasion and street parties and games took place, although barley four years of age I remember taking part in the sports that took place in Garrett's field, opposite the school and I won a few pence for winning the three legged race, with Horace as my other leg. Welford's wagon shed was decked out and tables of food, made ready by the village ladies, was available to all. I had never seen so many goodies before. Sadly King George died on 20<sup>th</sup> January the following year and Edward, the Duke of Windsor became King, but was never crowned because of his romance with Mrs Simpson. Therefore, George, the Duke of York became king and was crowned on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1937. Once again the streets of the cities, towns and villages were, once again, decorated to celebrate this great occasion, but this is all well documented, so I will not add any further reference to it. Miss Deakin retired and a Miss Blackler took over Clifton School. She was a different type of person to Miss Deakin and for some reason I did not take to her very well and got into trouble a few times, even having my name put in the black book, had the arrival of the war and the evacuees had an influence on me. I will continue my school days and the war years later.