

St. Anne's College Sanderstead through 2 World Wars

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... life during these years was not without its difficulties, not the least of these being the terrible experience of two World Wars. When the First World War broke out, the plans that were afoot for extending the school by building the badly needed new wing had to be postponed, and the shadow of the tragic happenings of every day dimmed even the celebrations of the centenary of the Foundation of the Institute of the Ladies of Mary in March 1917.

There followed 21 years of peace, during which the School grew and prospered, but in 1939 came the beginning of the worst war that the world has ever known, and the repercussions were immediate. For some ninety girls the September term opened in Hatchlands, amid all the upheaval and hardships of evacuation, while in St. Anne's there could be no school at all until there was an air-raid shelter. At last the bottom corridor was reinforced, and thus permission was granted to re-open – but there were only four nuns left to run the school: Mother Mary Michael, Mother Therese Marie, Mother Mary Brendan, and Mother Mary Dominic. They sent out pamphlets to the parents, asking if they would like their children to return to St. Anne's, but when the slips marked "yes" or "no" began to return they found to their consternation that they had forgotten to leave a space for names and addresses on the slips. In consequence, they found themselves one morning awaiting the arrival of 250 girls of completely unknown age and variety! The three nuns simply divided the time-table up between them and taught everything in turn; Mother Mary Michael just sat in a classroom and taught anything desired to anyone who came in! After a while school life returned to something like normal, except that nearly the whole day was spent in the "air-raid shelter", even to Mrs Williams' netball practices, during which the undaunted team threw the ball backwards and forwards along the corridor. The G.C.E. examinations became rather a different kind of test when the lights were dimmed just as the girls were engaged in drawing sweet peas!

However, with 1944 came the flying bombs, and in the face of this nerve-racking ordeal the great decision was taken to evacuate the whole school to Scotland. This experience will never be forgotten by those who took part, and has been recorded elsewhere in these pages. It was a wonderful day when the school was re-opened in St. Anne's, in 1945, and since then we have been thankful gradually to regain our peace and settled routine. It was still a long time before all traces of war-time and its restrictions were gone at last, but now, fourteen years after the end of the war, when only our senior pupils were even "war babies", our faces are set with determination towards the future.

