

Although my memories of life at Clifton Road School are few, I do remember Mr. Bennett who organized the school soccer team. Neither the school nor our parents had the money to buy soccer kit, so most of us played in our normal clothing and the boots we wore to school. I still have a photo of that school team and only the boys who had soccer boots and/or a soccer shirt sat on the front row. Those without these items stood in the back row, which is where I am to be seen. In these times clothing was not only scarce, but relatively expensive and the practice in any family was for clothing to be handed down from the eldest to the youngest. Thus most of my clothing had been my elder brothers and had seen a lot of wear before I received it. Consequently, it was often patched and whilst darned socks were out of sight in shoes, patched trousers were visible. In the school assembly I often stood with my hands behind my back covering the patches, because I felt ashamed. Even at that young age I had some vanity about my appearance!

In several of the classrooms there was a pot of glue, which sat on a gas ring on a shelf. The glue pot rested inside a container filled with boiling water to keep the glue melted and one day it was knocked off the shelf. I was near the glue pot at the time and some of the hot water splashed down the left side of my face. Having been treated and bandaged, I was sent to an aunt's house, since mother was at work. The scalding was painful, but I had the most caring treatment from my aunt.

These years at Clifton Road occurred whilst the war was on and Birmingham as an industrial city was subjected to German bomber raids. I do not remember being scared by these air raids, probably because I did not understand how dangerous they were. The sound of the air raid warning sirens prompted our mother to get us out of bed and take us across the yard to the air raid shelter, where all the other families would gather. I found this exciting compared to being asleep in bed, because now I could see the searchlights reaching up into the night sky as we crossed the yard. The sound of airplanes and of bombs dropping and exploding and the chatter of the ack- ack guns had little meaning for a young boy, who did not know what damage bombs could cause. However, on one night a bomb fell across the road from our house and the next morning we could see that several houses had been completely destroyed. This brought home the dangers we faced, but the fact that people had died did not register in my mind at the time, probably because none of the children we knew had died.

To get away from this almost nightly bombing mother decided to take us to her parents, who lived in Swansea. This entailed travelling by train from Birmingham, which I always found exciting. The sight of the engine with clouds of steam issuing from the pistons, the sound of the whistle and being able to stick my head out of the window and to look down the length of the train was thrilling for a young boy. This move was a classic example of jumping out of the frying pan and into the fire. Swansea was on the coast and was a shipping port and when we arrived German planes were bombing and strafing the docks. It was not long before mother had returned us to Birmingham, where the air raids were easing slightly. We returned to Swansea for short holidays on other occasions during the war and it was during one of these visits that I was scalded again. Mother had a pan of boiled potatoes in her hand taking them to the kitchen sink, when I ran into the kitchen and jogged her arm. The hot water went over the back of my head and down my neck and back. Fortunately, it left no visible marks.

The war, however, did leave scars on our family. My father had served in North Africa and also in the Normandy campaign and through to the end of the war and managed to survive. His brothers Harold and Ron also came through the war alive. Mother's family was not so fortunate and mother's elder brother Wilf was killed fighting in the war.

Her younger brother Alfie was captured by the Japanese at Singapore in February 1942 and spent the rest of the war in a Japanese internment camp. When he came home he stayed with us in Oldfield Road for a time to recover from the physical effects of his internment. What the internment had done to him mentally we did not discover, since he would never talk about what had happened whilst he was in the Japanese camps. Suffice it to say that he had no love for the Japanese.