

## Memories of Harlow College 1936 - 1941

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My life was somewhat changed in 1936 when my headmaster decided I, and Aubrey Hoy, should be entered for the Essex Education Committee scholarship. Prior to the 1944 Education Act children in country villages attended one school from infants to the age of 14, and a very few places were available at the County's expense at local grammar schools. In the event I succeeded and Aubrey did not, although I always thought he was at least as bright as me.

So, from strolling half a mile down the road to school, a new bike (Vindee £4 10s) was purchased and a school uniform as well. The County allowed parents £5 towards costs. Harlow College was OK. It was 50% day pupils and boarders and never more than 150 altogether. Its big disadvantage was it lacked a sixth form - school ended at 16. Subjects were the basic grammar school curriculum - English, French, Latin, maths, history, geography and art with a nod to science and handicrafts. PT was included and as the timetable was for half-days on Wednesdays and Saturdays both days gave opportunity for team sports on two afternoons a week.

As we reached 1937/38, political rumblings began to disturb our lives. Most of the staff were of military age and very alive to the events in Germany. I remember Mr Harper, the history master, announcing one afternoon that Hitler had just annexed Austria. It was all part of the general deterioration of European politics at that time but I don't think it made much impression on a bunch of fourteen year olds - except that I have remembered it!

A further sign of the trouble in Germany was the appearance of one or two Jewish boarders in the school. One or two of them had little or no English and were completely isolated. It must have been absolute misery for them, but nobody explained their predicament to us and they got little sympathy. Only one of them stayed on and he had good English and was a good footballer. His name was Moses. He later joined the Army in the Pioneer Corps.

In the summer of 1940 we were due to sit our Matriculation exams. Already the reservist call-up had denuded the staff of its younger members and wives of staff were called in to fill gaps where possible. War became increasingly likely and, with war having broken out in earnest with the German blitzkrieg in April and May, the Chamberlain government collapsed. I recall an evening classroom doing a late prep and Peter Cairns, the French master, entering and announcing dramatically "Gentlemen, the umbrella is closed" (Chamberlain was identified by cartoonists always carrying an umbrella).

So, we took the exams, term ended and the class dispersed, most of whom, especially the boarders, I would never see again. However, I still had a year of my scholarship left as I had jumped the Upper Remove years. The obvious move, with hindsight, would have been to transfer to another grammar school with an Upper Sixth, but this occurred to nobody. So I drifted around, took some extra subjects, the ones I was good at (not maths) and ended up taking some intermediate exams at the university of London. That was the end of my schooldays.