

The Fire, March 2nd 1958

FUTURE Cottesmore 'events' may tend, in our minds, to be dated henceforth from THE FIRE of Sunday, March 2nd.

Least of all do we on the spot belittle it, yet our gratitude is deep that we were spared really tragic consequences – and our present members have learnt early, and vividly that not all in newspaper print should be accepted without question.

Some of the boys were invited to fill in a few minutes of the term's last day by penning their 'outstanding memories' of the conflagration. 'Nothing much came of what should have been a very exciting event for everyone was shut up in the school-room.'

That extract very truthfully 'nut-shells' what many boys must have felt. The same writer's indignation that morning must indeed have burnt as brightly as the fire itself, for he adds without a tingle 'The masters rang up our parents and asked them to come and take us away; they complied and we had ten days of holiday.' Hints of frustration in these, too: 'Although one always associates fires with deeds of heroism, none was done,' and 'When we got down we went into the schoolroom where we were bottled up till half-past seven.'

But most of them admitted much more clearly that ten days' holiday was real compensation for being robbed of the fun'. 'I think my outstanding memory is that of the high spirits of everyone.' 'The fire itself was very nice, I thought.' 'From our point of view it was a splendid thing; lots of fun and above all, we were going home.' 'We all stank of smoke, but that didn't matter – we were all going home!'

And here are some further extracts that instance other prevalent trends of youthful thought: 'My first impression was 'Oh, corks – another fire practice. However, I dragged myself out of bed and took my thermometer just in case' – 'I didn't know what was happening, and I didn't much care. All I know is that I very unwillingly got out of bed, and eventually found myself seated in a noisy schoolroom. It wasn't much fun; nobody had any narrow escapes, and the only enjoyable sight were masters in their dressing-gowns.' – 'It was the first time I ever saw a master in his dressing-gown (except once when Mr Rogerson walked in just as I was in the act of throwing a slipper.)' – 'Nurse enters. "Fire, boys – do your stuff" ... she took it so wonderfully calmly that we thought it was a fire-practice.' – 'Only when I got downstairs in the schoolroom did I realise that the clock was pointing to a quarter-past five, and so, even though schoolmasters are brutal, I somehow did not think they would have got us up on a Sunday morning at that hour just for practice.'

A miscellany: 'Fire! a deadly thing was managed marvellously by the firemen, Harrington, and the Staff . . . the thing that surprised me most was that no-one panicked. I do not know if it was sleepiness or what that kept everyone quiet.' – 'Everything was carried out with complete calmness and order.' – 'In the Gym all was quick and exasperated.' – " 'Is my cake burnt?' he asked.'

Finally, a boy's expression of what our feelings were for Mr and Mrs Rogerson: 'Fun – but when some boys were taken round the wreck they thought different.'