THE PARAGON

*Journal of Stockbridge & District History Society*

**Issue Number 37** **Autumn 2004**

## P.G.S. IN WARTIME

WRITTEN IN 1992 FOR THE 600TH. ANNIVERSARY

As we were a country school, situated on the extreme edge of an industrial area, the effect of World War II on the average Penistonian was much less severe than on many of the nation's schoolchildren at that time. We were not evacuated; and since no other school was imposed upon us, we were spared the disruption caused elsewhere by the sharing of classrooms, text-books and even staff, with pupils from afar. Moreover, the major events of the day had little impact on the younger pupils, at any rate. Few of my fourth-form contemporaries, many of whose fathers had served in the First World War, had parents, older brothers or sisters who were called up.

In a kind of log-book, which I kept spasmodically during my time at school (1937-1944), scarcely any mention is made of current events. Where references do occur, they tend to be subordinated to the trivialities of school life.

For example, at the age of 14, on April 8th. 1940, I record:

"6/10 French Verbs. Pen nib broke. Hitler invaded Norway and Denmark."

Although there were frequent air-raid warnings during 1940 and 41, these were received not, as might be supposed, with trembling heart, but with such ecstatic comments as:

"10 am. Sirens sounded. Missed most of Double Chemistry. Whoopee!" And when Stocksbridge was bombed on August 23rd. 1940, in what now seems a remarkably accurate attack, it was seen as exciting rather than frightening. Even my dreary log-book picks up at this point; tedious references to stamp-swaps, late buses and indifferent Maths marks give way to a brief description of the damage done:

"Seamans (sic) hit. Springmill hit. Crater 15 ft. deep, 30 ft. wide. Shop at bottom of Park wrecked. At night went to see crater and got souvenirs." These were bomb splinters, to be hoarded for years at the back of dusty drawers. In fact I had to eat humble pie over this episode, as I had repeatedly declared to anyone willing to listen, that our village was too remote, too insignificant, to merit the attentions of the Luftwaffe. The rumour that Lord Haw-haw, the German propagandist, had spoken of Hitler's determination to "seek out and destroy the Fox in the Valley", was, I assured everyone, merely a scare story put out by those always ready to spread alarm and despondency.

> HITLER'S DETERMINATION TO "SEEK OUT AND DESTROY THE FOX IN THE VALLEY"

More bombs fell near the village in November. On December 15th. , the Denby Dalers proudly reported that they had been attacked. Finally, when walking on our moors towards the end of that year, we came across fragments of invoices from Cockayne's and Walsh's, blown there by the fire-storms of the ferocious Blitz on Sheffield. Shopping in town early in the New Year, we saw the ruins of bombed buildings which, I wrote "looked horrible and cold under their covering of snow."

But the event of that period which remains most vividly in mind had little to do with the War. This was the Big Snow of February 1941, during which Stocksbridge pupils were forced to struggle home through a fierce blizzard, when our bus got stuck in a drift near the Flouch Inn. As we battled through the storm, the Form wit remarked grimly "I wish I had never passed my County Minor!" Stumbling wearily up Victoria Street, we were met by anxious parents, bearing flasks of Ovaltine. "Here come the heroes!" someone said. "Almost the late heroes!" came the response.

A little more encouraging was the sight some months later, on a never-to be forgotten cycle ride into Derbyshire, of several Lancaster bombers roaring dangerously low over the Derwent reservoirs. We were not to know then that these were almost certainly from the famed 617 Squadron, rehearsing for the Dambusters Raid of May 1943.

### IN THIS ISSUE

P G S IN WARTIME — PAGE 1
THE SANDERSON FAMILY — PAGE 3
THE PONIES AND A STRIKE — PAGE 3

Not surprisingly, some attempt was made to protect our own catchment area from reprisal raids by erecting huge steel masts on the banks of Langsett and Midhope dams. From hawsers stretched between the mast tops were strung massive weights, which, it was assumed, would deter any hedge-hopping intruders.

Despite the occasional burst of enemy activity, life at school ran fairly smoothly. In fact, in many ways we benefited from the War. Exams, geared to the problems of those who had been evacuated, were probably easier than they had been. At any rate, our respected Head of Languages, Mr. Robinson, comforted us by saying that any fool could get a Higher Certificate in wartime! Clearly, academic standards had begun their long decline as early as the 1940s.

But at least, food was cheap. Even if we bought raw carrots at the little Bridge End shop to eke out our limited sweet ration, and even if Black Market toffees fetched a shocking penny each in the playground, school dinners cost a mere 2/- per week. In 1940, I noted that a three-course meal could be obtained in one of Sheffield's Municipal Restaurants for 8d.- an incredibly low price, even in those pre-inflation days!

So with cheaply, if not luxuriously-filled stomachs, we were presumably in fair shape to play a part in the many social and cultural activities stimulated by the war.

As the menacing Reds were transformed into "our gallant Russian allies", funds were raised for the Soviet forces by the curious method of selling duplicated copies of a letter to the school, signed by the Russian Ambassador, M. Maisky.

Plays were regularly staged, and we felt we were truly entering the Groves of Academe when, in July 1940, as Hurricanes and Messerschmidts battled over the Channel, Euripides' "Iphiginia in Tauris" was performed on the school's grass courts in aid of some war charity.

At a more popular level, even the quality of Radio shows improved. After the Americans entered the war, the "with-it" sixth-former left the inanities of ITMA and the Hippodrome to his parents, while he turned to the sophisticated Bob Hope and Jack Benny Shows. Form room seminars followed the broadcasts, so that difficult allusions to the Californian climate, K.P., Pfc.(?) and the like, could be discussed in the manner of Anglo-Saxon scholars interpreting some obscure text.

As the war drew towards its end, we dealt with the problems of reconstruction in the company of other sixth-formers at meetings of the impressively-named Council for Education in World Citizenship, held during the holidays in Sheffield

A more direct contribution to the war effort was made at the summer agricultural camps for seniors, where we logged, harvested or picked apples, as the War Ag. demanded.

In 1942 squadrons of the Air Training Corps, and at their request, the girls' equivalent, were formed. We were drilled, taught navigation and aircraft recognition under the leadership of our officers, Messrs. Bowman, Brabban, Craggs and Lightfoot. Eventually our somewhat old-fashioned uniforms arrived, and we strutted around on parade days, trying hard not to look as if we had stepped from the pages of *Biggles and the Camel Squadron.* In due course, we had our very own aircraft, an emasculated Gloster Gauntlet bi-plane, which appeared one morning on the school playing-field, generously loaned by the R.A.F. so that we could be taught the principles of flight by more direct methods.

It seems astonishing in today's litigious times, when a master can be sued if a boy smears his cricket whites, that we were allowed to visit our A.T.C. aerodrome, not in a luxury coach, but on a flat truck, fitted only with a tailboard, hired from Messrs. Goldthorpe. On the open wagon about two dozen of us would huddle together, literally for dear life, yelling ribald greetings at bemused passers-by, as we were whirled to RAF Station Doncaster. There we swarmed over Handley Page Sparrows, to the exasperation of hardworking riggers and fitters, who described us as "the locusts" as we ate our way through the best food in the NAAFI. They did not disguise their relief when we were removed for a short time for a flight round our native villages.

That the school was well disciplined there is no doubt, but paradoxically, in certain matters, the authorities were remarkably lax. One prank, which now seems highly irresponsible, given the wartime context, arose from the good-hearted Mr. Jenkins allowing the Sixth to make unsupervised use of the Physics lab during lunch hours. As a member of the Arts Sixth, I was invited in to be entertained by Science friends with shocking coils and other fascinating instruments, Only when I was shown the sonic power of heated wire gauze in wide glass tubing did things begin to go wrong. As the gauze cooled, the air sucked in made a frightful howling and two such tubes in tandem created a sound not unlike a highly-amplified chime-whistle on the Canadian- Pacific Railway. This awesome din terrified the scores of pupils taking their ease on the tennis courts and school field on a summer's day in 1944. At this time, when there was endless talk of secret weapons, ("Hitler Will Send No Warning!" the posters told us), the strange noise must have seemed like the prelude to the arrival of the ultimate in Third Reich rocketry, winging its way from the North Sea to the industrial heartland of Manchester. Once the performance was over, we were made aware of our stupidity by the enraged cries of the mistress on duty, who sent us slinking shame-facedly back to our formrooms.

We were lucky to escape so lightly, needless to say. Things could be very different. By the time I reached the Sixth Form late in 1942, my logbook had become an ill-written diary, and I recorded that in the Autumn of 1943 we were given a fortnight holiday specifically to help with the late harvest. Although most of us in the Upper Sixth seem to have offered our services, the Lower Sixth, no doubt sensing that beet-pulling on the windy plains of S.E. Yorks. (for such was our destination) would be quite as attractive as the previous summer's apple-picking in sunny Norfolk, found that patriotism was not enough and made no move to put forward their names. How to deal with the problem? Determined not to be beaten, Mr. Bowman called in the

Head Boy and ordered him to make it plain to the "refuseniks" that he would cancel the holiday of all those who failed to toe the line. Magically, the lists were filled and, in due course, the trains with their lukewarm volunteers rumbled off to our base at the aptly-named village of Marr near Doncaster.

Thus honour was satisfied, but whether our efforts amongst the potatoes, beet and chaff made a significant contribution to The Great Struggle we shall never know. However, by the end of the following year most of the boys and some of the girls, who had fumbled with their gasmasks in the daily drill under the redoubtable Mrs. Hoyland in 1939, had been, or were about to be, called up. We had assumed at 13 that we should never be directly involved in the war that had just begun. Few, perhaps, saw active service; but to my knowledge, one boy, older than the rest, was a member of an invasion landing-craft crew, and there were others who took part in the war in Europe and the conflict in the Middle-East during the aftermath. They were amongst the last to be given a demob number before National Service began in 1947.

*Harland M. Thickett*

## THE SANDERSON FAMILY

### Chapter 6 The Foreigner

As time went on, trade grew better as people were able to pay, but the strike had taken a lot out of them, and things would have to improve even more before people could begin to feel good about life again.

One day, as Mr. Sanderson was standing at the shop door, a man came by, who he knew straight away, by his clothes, was not English, but had come from some foreign country. He eyed Mr. Sanderson keenly, then looked at the store. He was a short man, wearing a thick, brown, tweed suit. His trousers were of quite a different cut, very wide at the top but tight around the ankles – very funny to look at. On his feet were heavy-looking shoes and he walked in a very farmer-like fashion.

He walked up to Mr. Sanderson and asked if this was where Ruth Crossland lived. Mr. Sanderson, much surprised, said that it was, for Ruth was his wife. Wondering what the stranger wanted with his wife, Mr. Sanderson led him into the kitchen, where she was cooking. The girls were lounging on the sofa, Fanny reading and Miriam trying to add up a few figures. They were much amused when the stranger came in with his funny suit on.

The foreigner turned out to be a Mr. Pickford, a wealthy farmer from America. He introduced himself to Mrs. Sanderson, telling her that he was her mother's cousin. He had gone to America when quite a young man and, having made his fortune, was now back on a visit and was staying with his sister, Mrs. Spencer.

Mrs. Spencer was an old lady who lived not far from the Sandersons and they knew her quite well. She lived in an old –fashioned cottage, which was so comfortable. It was white, but not much white could be seen for the ivy which had spread all over it. She had a big and beautiful garden where all kinds of flowers grew. She had a nice big vegetable garden which was looked after by her son.

*(This would be Elizabeth Spencer, widow of Samuel, who was living in Low Lane – later Victoria Road – and her son John.)*

Mr. Pickford became a frequent visitor. He told them interesting stories about America, how a person in America could get along so much better than in England, how good the trade was and how much more money the working man got. Eventually, after he had made them believe what a beautiful country it was and how much better off they would be there, he suggested that they go back to America with him.

The Sandersons thought it over for a long time. They knew that if they left the store, there would be plenty of people after it. Mr. Bamford, for instance, who had a store down Stocksbridge, was very jealous because they were doing better than he was, and would be delighted to hear that they were thinking of leaving.

But trade was not any better and Mrs. Sanderson was just sick of the store and was ready to go back with her cousin. Her husband knew that her health was failing through overwork, and felt that if he could get a job in America with a good wage and make a comfortable home, it would build her up. So he said "I think it will be fine!"

Mr. Pickford told them that if they would come, he would see that they were never left wanting. So they all made their minds up to go, except Fanny. Miriam, now ten, was delighted She had always wanted to travel and cross the great ocean, and now was her chance. But Fanny cried when they said they were leaving, and was very sad.

When people heard that they were going, they flocked in to buy their furniture and effects. But when Mrs. Sanderson saw people looking at her wedding presents and all the lovely things she had got ready for her new house, she could not bear the thought of selling them, and told her husband she had changed her mind. It was all too much for her and she would not go!

Miriam was broken-hearted, but Fanny was delighted. Their father did not know what to think, but they decided to stay a little longer. Mr. Pickford was very disappointed, and told them that, if they ever felt they would like to come after all, just to write to him and he would tell them what to do. But now he had to go back, so bid them goodbye and set sail for America.

## THE PONIES AND A STRIKE

### WILLIS BURGIN 37

All we lads tramming on this level were puzzled about the road being made higher by the rippers working the night shift. Then we heard the good news, that ponies were to be used on the level, and a new pass-by had been

## Stocksbridge & District History Society Committee

**Chairman**
Roy Mallinson ---------------------------- Tel. 288 8362

**Secretary**
Basil Spooner---------------------------------- Tel 288 4456

**Treasurer**
Betty McKay------------------------------------- Tel 288 2269

**Archive Liaison**
Brenda Duffield---------------------------- Tel. 288 2349

Meetings Are Normally Held On The Second Thursday Of Each Month, At The Library, Manchester Road, Stocksbridge At 7.00 pm.

**The Paragon**
Next Edition—December 2004
Publication Deadline—11th November

**Meetings ❁ Programme 2004 ❁**

**October 14th**
Open Forum—Members' Evening

**November 11th**
David Hey:
The History of the Moors

**Saturday December 11th**
Christmas Carol Supper

Designed & printed by Mike's DTP 0114 246 4200 mike@spidz.co.uk

The 'fox under umbrella' and Paragon label are registered trademarks of Hoyland Fox Ltd, whose permission to use these in the Paragon has been given. This publication has no connection with Hoyland Fox Ltd.

made near the stalls, and would be used the following week.

That Monday morning, the start of the ponies, the deputy at the pit-head had no trouble with the trammers – all were anxious to see the new system at work with the pony. Arriving down the mine at the new pass-by, we first found that we had to find somewhere else to hang our coats. Then we heard the pony coming on the level with the first run of empties. No sooner had the pony been taken off the wagon and the first trammer got hold of his tub, ready to go, than the deputy stood in front of him. He announced that he had received new orders for the trammers. We each had to man two stalls now, instead of one!

This was like a red rag to a bull – all the trammers' tempers were aroused. The lad holding the first tub said "Not bloody likely! I'm getting my jacket and going home! Who's coming with me?" We all did. When the trammers on the afternoon shift heard of the trouble, they decided to support us and this closed the mine.

On the Tuesday morning a meeting was held at the Friendship Hotel at 10.30 am. The Union Secretary took the meeting. It took him some time to get the lads to order, but when at last he did, he suggested that we should return to work and try the new working system. All the lads stamped their feet and made a hell of a noise, shouting "No, no, no!" When it was put to the vote, all voted "No" and the strike went on. By the end of the second week it was an Unofficial Strike.

What a shock for the trammers and the people of Stocksbridge and Deepcar, when a policeman called at the door of each striking trammer with a blue paper summons to appear on the given date and time at the County Court at Sheffield!

The Union officials engaged a lawyer to help us fight our case.

All too soon the day came to make our trip to Sheffield. Many people turned out to give us a cheery send-off on the eight-mile drive to Sheffield, in horse-driven wagonettes. It was a fine day. I looked at the faces of the other lads in my wagonette – they all looked sombre and none of the usual jokes were exchanged.

We entered the Court House through a large wooden door. Standing in the hall was a very large policeman, who ushered us into the Public Gallery, which that day was to be used as the dock, on account of our number, and some even had to sit on the steps leading to the gallery.

The Courtroom looked to me like a church, with its pew-like seats, and the silence made me feel nervous. A lad sitting on the steps below me whispered to his pal "Has ta gorra pack o' cards, Joe?" and the policeman in front turned sharply and, looking straight at me, shouted "Silence in Court!" This made me even more nervous.

As the magistrate walked into Court everyone stood Our case was second on the list. As the solicitor for the Company stated their case, I felt more and more down-hearted. I thought we should all be sent to prison!

Then it was our solicitor's turn. He was good to listen to and by the time he had finished, things didn't look half as black against us trammers.

The magistrate began his summing-up. He said "You lads should have given 7 days notice to the firm. I shall fine each of you 10/-. Go back home and don't do it again!"

We all enjoyed the ride back home and a good welcome we got. We started work next day – the ponies were there, but it was ONE TRAMMER, ONE STALL!