

THE PARAGON

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THE MEMOIRS OF LILLIAN BIRKHEAD

I left school at 14 and stayed at home to help my mother, for with my Father and three brothers, six of us, there was all the washing and baking to do at home, with no labour-saving devices. A housewife's lot was a heavy one.

Those girls who went to work either worked at Fox's in the Umbrella Department or went into domestic service. When a girl went to work at Fox's, she would wear a large shawl that served as coat and headwear, but we wore more undergarments in those days.

I did not like being at home all day, doing housework. We did not see many people and rarely had an outing. Once a week we took a grocery order to the Co-op at Stocksbridge, and this was delivered by horse-drawn dray on Friday afternoons by Tommy Marsden, who had often imbibed too freely at the Rock Inn and was somewhat garrulous.

It is much better now that girls can go out to work and take up a career. But at home they do not have a Yorkshire range to take up hours of cleaning time, no "set pot" or "peggy tub" to use on washday; they do not have to knead dough or stoke up a coal-fired oven.

At home I learned to crochet and do fancy knitting with fine cotton. This needle-work was done in the late afternoon or evening. Quite a lot of the crochet was for sham blinds – pieces of calico across the top of the window with a crocheted edge – the blind itself being on a roller behind. Also we put a deep crochet edge on bed valances, often to match the window blinds.

We made white honeycomb quilts for best wear and white calico covers for furniture – all very clean-looking and hygienic (and cold).

Our first wireless set was made in the 1920s from a plan supplied by the *Sheffield Telegraph* (or was it *The Independent* then?) The parts were bought and assembled by my brother Leslie and a pole for the aerial was carried up from Deepcar. To listen in we had to wear headphones. It was a great thrill when we heard our first programme. But it could spoil the family conversation, for everyone could not listen at once, and those not listening were expected to keep quiet. Two programmes I remember well – one was John Henry and Blossom and the other was the Sheffield

entertainer, Stainless Stephen.

The County Minor examination was only introduced in 1908, when I was twelve, and for some reason this was never mentioned at our school. This exam enabled children to a free education at Penistone Grammar School, a famous 14th century Grammar School, or they could be paid for without the examination.

So from 14 to 18 I was at home doing housework. But during that time, at 16, I was able to have piano lessons. My brother had bought a piano – a lovely Bechstein that stayed at our home until he was married – and that enabled to learn to play, an opportunity for which I have always been thankful. I am no professional, but have been able to accompany singing at school, Sunday school and chapel, as well as give myself many hours of pleasure.

At 18 the pattern of my life took a different and unexpected turn. Mrs. Prew retired as Assistant teacher and Mr. Prew retired later that same year – 1914. He sent for me and suggested that I apply for the post of Sewing mistress, for two afternoons a week. A Mr. Butcher from Penistone took Mrs. Prew's place as Assistant teacher. So, without any secondary education, but much advice from Mrs. Prew, I was appointed. After a time Mr. Butcher was directed elsewhere, and again Mr. Prew suggested that I should apply for his post. I was appointed at £33.0s.0d. a year, on condition that I studied for the qualification, called the Preliminary Certificate, being preliminary to the Teaching Certificate. It was in two parts. I took a correspondence course, my work coming by post each Friday morning, along with my corrected work from the previous week. I almost dreaded opening the envelope with criticism of my work, particularly of formal Grammar,

OUR FIRST WIRELESS SET
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FROM A PLAN SUPPLIED BY
THE *SHEFFIELD TELEGRAPH*

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which had never been done at school. There was plenty of "blue pencil" on that subject!

While studying in the evening I was teaching during the day, and not particularly enjoying it, and sometimes wished I had never embarked on this career, for which I did not at the time feel particularly suited. I have often felt the same way since. It was hard work, studying with no guidance. For one thing, I was in the same room as the Headteacher, Mr. Hamby. He was a very good teacher, keen on his work, and could infect the children with his enthusiasm. Good discipline without being harsh – it made me feel inferior.

However, the correspondence course continued and I can still remember taking Part I of the Preliminary Certificate Examination. On a dark, frosty, December morning, going down Well Hill to Wortley Station to catch the 8 o'clock train to Sheffield and in fear and trepidation, finding my way to Holly Street Pupil Teacher Centre to take this, my first exam. It lasted three days, and I stayed with my uncle and aunt in Abbeyfield Road. To my surprise and joy, I passed that examination and went on to study for Part II in the following March 1916. But this was stiffer, and a few weeks later came the sad news that I had failed. However, studies continued and on the second attempt I was successful.

Up to that time I was classed as a Supplementary Teacher with a salary of £33.0s.0d. a year. After passing the second part of the examination I became an Uncertified Teacher with a salary of £45.0s.0d. a year. That was about 17s. 6d. a week in old money.

THE DIARY OF WILLIS BURGIN

I had only been back with the Regiment for two weeks when again I was asked to see the C.O. He told me that a new Regiment was being formed called the Machine Gun Corps, to be stationed at Grantham. All Regiments in the British Army had been asked to send a number of officers, N.C.Os and soldiers. Would I like to go and try this new Regiment? I told the C.O. I had always been happy with the Battalion and would be sorry to leave, but I would like to try this new Regiment.

A week later I was reporting to the Receiving Depot at Belton Park, a mile and a half from the town of Grantham, for the Machine Gun Corps. Belton Park was full of long, tin huts, each housing 30 soldiers – a camp large enough for all 6,000 troops.

The next morning I reported to the Orderly Room to meet my new Company Commanding Officer in 1st Battalion Machine Gun Corps. What a surprise to see again Captain C. V. Walker, who was my Recruiting Officer at Doncaster!

"Well, well, well, Sergeant Burgin! This is a surprise! I am pleased to see you in my Company!", exclaimed the officer, "If there is any way I can help you, don't be afraid of coming to see me!" I thanked him and left the Orderly Room feeling very pleased.

My training on the new Vickers Machine Gun started. For the next four weeks I attended lectures, taking down notes, and learning to mount and fire the gun. Its fire power was terrific.

One afternoon, while doing exercises in the gym, Sergeant Major Towers told me to report to the Orderly Room at once. I wondered what I had been doing wrong. But as soon as the officer greeted me with "Well, Sergeant!" I knew by the tone of his voice that it was good news.

"I think I have a job for you here, at this camp, and I hope you will take it, Sergeant! This is a new Regiment and requires Physical Training Instructors. Next week at Harraby Camp, near Grantham, a course of Physical Training is about to start and will last 14 days. Can I put your name down on the list to attend it?"

"Yes, sir, I would be pleased to take the course!"

The following Monday at 9.00am forty N.C.Os reported at Harraby for this P.T. course. The first four days were hard, very hard, and legs, arms and my whole body ached. Carrying a rifle with fixed bayonet we had to jump over fences and trenches, finishing by making an attack on bags of straw. At the last, I was never sharp enough to please our instructor.

On the last three days of the course all the N.C.Os in the class had to take turns at taking the rest of the class in P. T. We were judged on our ability to control the class and on our words of command. I passed.

One month later I was taken on the Physical Training Staff at Belton Park. The staff consisted of one officer and three Sergeants. One of the other Sergeants was a rat, with a small black moustache, much older than me and was never friendly. But he was a good P.T. Instructor and had an Aldershot Certificate. The other was like a girl, the way he walked and the way he talked. The staff called him "Gertie" and the name fitted him a treat. But he also had a certificate and was a good P.T. Instructor.

On the parade ground P.T. Instructors dressed in blue cloth trousers, white jersey and white shoes. Troops turned out in open-necked shirts, with trousers tucked into the top of their socks.



The larger the class, the better I liked it, be it women, officers or soldiers. For a large class of 250 I used the Obstacle Course, standing on a plank 8 feet high, and to me it was a pleasure watching the soldiers doing their exercises.

FROM WALDERSHELF TO STOCKSBRIDGE

DOLES, CHARITIES AND SICK CLUBS.

The upkeep of Church and School, and the care of those in need in the late 19th century, still depended very much on voluntary subscription and wealthy benefactors. The compulsory Church Rate had been abolished in 1860.

Joseph Kenworthy recorded in his *Gleanings from Parish Magazines 1873-1885* a complete list of the subscribers to the cost of a hearse in 1871. A copy of this would have been supplied to his uncle, John Kenworthy of Hen Holmes, who was one of them. The hearse was a great advance on the previous method of coffin bearing, as recorded in Joseph's own account of his father's funeral in 1865, when bearers carried the coffin from Henholmes to Bolsterstone, up Ash Lane, through "the Cloo" and up the Royd - a journey of about two miles and uphill all the way.

Rates had been set for the hire of the hearse, with or without a horse, with special rates for subscribers, but in 1873 it was found necessary to revise these because it had been required to "go an unreasonable distance, viz, forty-four miles". The *Gleanings* also include a list of subscribers for that year.

Doles were the periodic allocation of charity money and goods to a limited number of needy people, usually bequeathed by the more well-to-do, who were aware of their social responsibilities. There remain ceremonial relics of this practice in some places, notably the Maundy money distribution by H.M. the Queen.

Details of the administration of the Doles, and particularly of the Samuel Fox Charity, can be found in the *Charity Commission Returns for the Parish of Ecclesfield 1898*. Some bequests made originally for the upkeep of the school

and the benefit of the poor of Bolsterstone in the 18th century, had been invested in the Wadsley and Langsett Turnpike Trust. This investment was repaid in 1870 and, together with a new bequest from John Grayson of Spink Hall, was used to pay the vicar's stipend.

In 1873 an assembly of parishioners decided that the surplus should be given to 18 poor widows, most above 60 years of age, who must be members of the Church of England. The Commissioners commented at this point in the *Returns*, "There are very few Dissenters in the village of Bolsterstone; but there are many at Stocksbridge, which is partly in Bolsterstone Chapelry, and it does not seem that they ever receive a share of the Doles. Some of the recipients also receive Poor Law Relief."

This discrimination was hardly surprising, as both the Rev. Bland and Henry Hodgkinson, former schoolmaster, physician and occupant of Spink Hall, had stipulated in their wills that Dissenters should not benefit from their

bequests. This situation was rectified by the appointment of two Congregationalists to help manage two named closes of land for the benefit of the school and its master. When one of them died, it was Samuel Fox who took his place.

The precept of the National School was "free education on presentation to the Master; reading, writing and arithmetic. Church catechism taught only by request." The children were aged from 5 upwards and there were a few adults amongst the pupils.

The Samuel Fox Benefit Fund was instigated by him in 1875 and provided for foremen, workmen, widows and deserving poor, in a descending order of specified categories.

But the villagers of Bolsterstone did not rely totally on these charities, as various bodies had been formed to care for the needy. A Friendly and Charitable Society of Tradesmen had existed since 1788 and a Clothing Society for the Benefit of the Industrious Poor since 1840, then the Charitable Society of Gentlemen, Farmers, Tradesmen and Labourers was founded in 1858 and

Bolsterstone Sick Society in 1868.

Better health in the area as a whole was assured by the Local Board, who issued Water Regulations in 1876, making charges for the use of water in all kinds of premises and for any purpose, from water closets in dwelling-houses to hose-pipes for washing carriages and shop-fronts. A ginger-beer manufacturer, Jonas Schofield of Hawthorn Brook, for example, would have to pay 40s. Only 8 years previously a

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MEETINGS ARE NORMALLY HELD ON THE SECOND
THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH, AT THE UNITED
REFORMED CHURCH HALL, MANCHESTER ROAD,
STOCKSBRIDGE AT 7.00 PM.

THE PARAGON

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MEETINGS

❖ PROGRAMME 2007 ❖

OCTOBER 11TH

A LOOK AT OLD NORTH SHEFFIELD
MALCOLM NUNN

OCTOBER 21ST

BRADFIELD FAMILY & LOCAL HISTORY FAIR

NOVEMBER 8TH

CHURCHES IN THE SOUTH YORKS.
LANDSCAPE
RAY BATTYE

SATURDAY DECEMBER 15TH
CHRISTMAS CAROL SUPPER

proposal had been made that water should be provided in the back yard of the new Works School, cans to be provided in which to carry it from Water Lane.

The first resident doctor was Dr. Ward of Penistone, who came to occupy Stocksbridge Hall.

All these developments show a varying ability to adapt to changing economic conditions. A miniature Industrial Revolution certainly took place in this area in the latter half of the 19th century, and yet parts of the valley and its inhabitants may not have been as profoundly affected as others. The following chapter considers the ways in which the area remained stable amongst all this change, and factors which contributed to its survival as a community.

Brenda Duffield

SOCIETY NEWS

Our efforts to recruit help with the study of Victory Club records have not been very successful so far. Only a handful of volunteers have shown an interest in reading the ledgers now housed in the Library. They record the activities, in Minutes of Committee meetings, of an organisation which seems to have begun as a Works canteen and developed into the centre of social activity we knew until recently and hope to see again.

Admittedly, some of it is perhaps dry, uninteresting and trivial, but there are nuggets of fascinating social comment and scraps of information vital to our understanding of a period in our quite recent history about which we have known little.

For example, a very well known name was expelled from the club for taking bets on the premises. And a real mystery – at the end of 1935 the club seems to have been wound up, given notice by S. Fox & Co. to vacate the premises, yet records begin again at the other end of the same ledger as if there had been no interruption. Can anyone explain that? Watch this space – or be the one to find out by coming to Stocksbridge Library, sign for a ledger and take it home to read for yourself.

APOLOGY

The editorial team apologise for the late production of this edition of the *Paragon*. This has been due to printer malfunctions. The next edition should be out on time.