

THE PARAGON

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MY WORKING LIFE

I became fourteen years of age on the second of October 1944 and left school at what was then known as the Potato-picking holiday, about a fortnight after my birthday. I began trying to find work locally but some of the firms would not accept you unless you had a relative already working there, and apprenticeships were not being allowed due to the shortage of materials during the war.

On 7th November I finally found myself at Samuel Fox & Co., Stocksbridge. I was directed to the office of Mr. Goodram, the Youth Employment officer at Works House, from where I was taken by another youth of my own age, Doug Lindley, to various departments to find employment, and I was accepted in the Traffic Department as a locomotive cleaner.

I was introduced to Mr. Tom Marsh Crossley, who was responsible for keeping the shed area immaculate, and he lost no time in equipping me with a shovel and barrow in order to remove the slag from the side of the tracks that had been dug out of the engine fireboxes at the change of shifts. The next task was to clean the pits within the Locomotive shed where the ash pans had been washed out by the firemen before they could begin their breakfast. The rubbish then had to be emptied into one of six large bins sunk into a concrete pit in the floor between numbers two and three shed roads. When these bins became full they were emptied into railway wagons, which, in turn, were emptied at Morehall, tip.

When it came time for Tom's pipe of tobacco, he would then start relating tales of the mining accidents he had witnessed while working in the coal mining industry. He would tell us about all the bodies, some with their faces blown off – really exhilarating stuff for a fourteen year old to have to listen to!

Before long the shed foreman appeared on the scene. This was Mr. Oliver Barraclough, a former engine driver, who had been badly gassed in the First World War. When he began to cough and splutter it was truly terrifying and it seemed he would never come round sufficiently to get home at the end of the day

There was never an idle moment with Oliver around. If there were nothing immediate to do he would be showing me how to make woollen trimmings to fit into the bearings along the locomotive side rods. This consisted of getting a

thin piece of wire, bending it to shape, then binding some thick wool around it, leaving a pair of woollen leads to go into the oil and draw oil from the reservoir within the side rod in order to supply oil to the main body of the trimming, which allowed a slow drip-feed of oil into the bearing. The thing to do next was to cut corks in order that oil would not escape from the bearing, but would allow air in to let the oil run through the wool.

After meeting Oliver, it was not long before I got additional duties, which included filling the locomotive water tanks when they came in at break times and also at change of shifts. This job, along with all the oil and grease I handled, made my hands thickly greased up, and there being no hot water, the soft soap and sand I had to use to clean myself up made the job not really pleasant on frosty days.

The talk of frost brings to mind the steel drums that we had to find and pierce with a plate-layer's pick to make fire buckets to stand by the water pipes outside the engine shed during any really frosty winter.

Wartime conditions were still ongoing at this time and rationing in progress. Being employed in the steelworks meant that I got an extra ½ lb of tea and ½ lb of sugar. I felt so proud taking this home to Mother. Don't laugh when you see anyone who experienced these shortages tear open a tea packet to get the last few leaves. It was no use having the extra money – rationing meant shortages. This was the first time I experienced bacon fried on a shovel – oh boy, what luxury!

Being somewhat on the thin side, I always got the job if the fitters wanted to remove or replace fire-bars in the bottom of a dead locomotive firebox. This was a job

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undertaken with caution; it only took a bit of cheek from me and the firebox would be shut on me – very claustrophobic!

With the end of the war approaching, I was given the task of trying to restore the shine on the dome of Loco No. 14. This loco had originally been purchased for Stocksbridge Railway, but when the company bought a replacement, this became a Samuel Fox engine. The shiny brass dome became a victim of Air Raid precautions and was covered in thick, black paint and tallow for the duration of hostilities. What a task to try and regain that shine!

(to be continued)

Roy Mallinson

VICTORY CLUB RECORDS

The earliest of the record books donated to the History Society on the closure of the Victory Club is dated July 7th 1920 to March 15th 1921. There is no label or heading other than *General Meeting held Wednesday July 7/20*, followed by two brief resolutions:

that the Committee, as at the **Old Institute**, stand for the **New Institute** as Committee for the next six months and that Mr. J. Lemin be elected as Treasurer and Chairman of the Committee. They were to meet every Tuesday at 7.30 pm.

More familiar names appearing as Committeemen are Whittaker, Kaye, Sykes, Brown, Rowbottom, Archer, Davy, Dale, Knowles and Kilner. They were joined by Messrs. Booth, Eastwood, Webb, Vardy, Hampshire and A. Smith, and it is evident that the new premises and organisation were going to be more extensive than those of its predecessor.

A Games Committee was formed with a separate Billiards Subcommittee; a Social Committee with responsibility to engage artistes and a Liquor Committee were formed.

The Secretary was to be paid £1/-/- a week, the Treasurer 10/- plus an honorarium for work at the Club opening.

Staff were appointed. Hawkins – surely the same Harold Hawkins, steward of the Miners' Welfare – was put in charge of the Bar and the premises in general until a Club Manager could be found. The post was advertised in the *Yorkshire Post* and Sheffield newspapers. Four candidates were interviewed and the post was given to Mr. Crowther @ £4/-/- a week. Later a Mr. Lyons took over this post, with his wife as assistant.

A Mrs. Brooks was paid 30/- a week to clean the Bar and the Boys Room and Miss Brooks £1/-/- a week to assist in the Bar. A Billiard marker was paid 4/- a night (from 6 to 10 pm) and was expected to deal with any breach of rules and exert his authority – he could suspend a player and report him to the Committee. Mr. Armitage was paid £1/-/- for an odd job, 30/- a week as door attendant and 7/6 for his help in the bar.

Sometimes payments were made in kind – the cleaner was allowed one drink daily and Mr. Dale was given the choice of any two bottles of spirit for his help to the steward on the opening of the Club.

An allowance was to be paid to Committee members of 5/- per journey to Sheffield on business. The Bank used by the Club was the London, City and Midland.

The steward's and his assistant's dinner hours and ½ days were fixed. Among the steward's duties was to keep a record of the name, time and date of sale of every bottle of spirit. (No member was to be allowed more than one bottle of spirit a month.) He was to report to the Committee on his conduct of the Club at every meeting.

A stock list was drawn up for the cellar and a weekly stock sheet kept.

250 pint glasses and 250 ½ pint glasses were purchased.

The Secretary was to conduct the sale of daily and weekly newspapers and purchase all stationery.

Rules and regulations were drawn up to ensure the orderly conduct of the Club. Subscriptions were due on 1st October and Membership cards issued.

- Premises would remain open until 10.30 pm.
- The dartboard would be taken down on Saturday night at 7.00 pm and replaced on Monday morning.
- Skittle Pool stakes were limited to 6d, with the Billiard marker in charge of the pool.
- The charge for Billiards was fixed at 6d for 30 minutes. Use of the rest was compulsory and smoking while playing forbidden.
- Games in the big room were to be suspended at 6 pm on concert nights.
- No dogs would be allowed on Club premises.
- Collecting and Ruffling were not allowed.
- Intoxicants were not allowed in the Reading Room.
- Swearing was not allowed and even Committee members would be fined for "abusive language".
- Senior Members were not allowed access to the Bar through the Boys' Room.

The Boys' Club was evidently already established and there are frequent references to its management, a Boys' Football team and the Boys' Gymnasium.

Incidents requiring discipline had to be dealt with occasionally, although only one specifically involved boys, when four boys were given a warning after a window was broken. Others were summoned before the Committee to explain their behaviour, such as J.G., who apologised and was let off with a warning. E.B. was cautioned and P.C. was suspended. A "slight disturbance" caused by R.R. was overlooked, while C.G. was suspended for three months. Three members were suspended from playing Pool. For more serious offences three others were expelled and eventually threatened with prosecution. F.M.'s letter of apology and appeal against expulsion were not accepted, but what they had done is not recorded.

It is evident that this new club was being set up almost from nothing. We must remember that it was only a short time after the end of World War I and equipment and furnishing would have to be obtained from wherever possible. The Committee had to consider begging for second-hand linoleum and coconut matting from the Old Institute, carpet and cash registers from the Girls' Canteen. A ¾ size billiard table was obtained from Arksey W.M.C.

There was an obvious connection with, and dependency upon, S. Fox & Co. Works. After some negotiation, billiard tables were purchased for the Club by the Company at the cost of £100. Reference was sometimes made to Works Manager W.H. Robinson, to whom the Club Committee applied for cigars, beer gannies and a cash drawer.

They accepted a quote of £200 from the firm for a partition for the big room.

Alterations and improvements to the premises were necessary. A lock was fitted to the door between the Boys' Room and the Bar and a draught screen for the entrance to the Reading Room. Redfearn's tender was accepted for painting the urinals and quotations were sought for boarding up the walls of the Foreman's room and the Boys' Room up to the roof.

Eventually they were able to purchase linoleum from J. Benson & Sons @ 12s/6d sq. yard, measured and fitted. They bought goal posts, a football bladder (7s/6d) and twelve pairs of knickers for the Boys Football team. But they chose to hire cash registers from the National Cash Register Co.

Other dealers contacted were Duncan Gilmour & Co. for beer and spirits, Salt & Co. for beer and Stocksbridge Bottling Co. for mineral water, bottled beer and stout. They gave a trial to Seth Senior & Co. of two 5-degree hogsheads of beer. Newspapers were ordered from local dealers Abson's and cigarettes and tobacco from Bradbury's.

They looked at Boots, Suggs and Thomas for dominoes, darts and marking boards and applied to Burroughs & Watts for two sets of long cue rests and table hooks, a case and trough for the pyramid balls. A gross of billiard chalk was bought from Pinder's.

Other equipment bought for the Club included twenty spittoons and two sets of four beer pumps. New ivory balls for the Billiards room were obtained and two sets of Bangolene balls – whatever they might be!

Sports fixtures with other clubs were begun with a Billiards tournament and a Billiards exhibition. A football match with Lowoods Club and a Chess match with Walkley Reform Club were arranged and the Boys' team were due to play a benefit match in aid of the Nursing Association.

Concerts were arranged in the big room on Saturday evenings for which a pianist and singers were engaged and other artistes sought. A conveyance was considered to bring visiting artistes from Sheffield. Flower shows were held on Sundays for a while but

eventually discontinued. A whist drive was held and a dance on Easter Monday. The Brass Band was allowed to make the premises their Headquarters and practise there on Sunday mornings.

A Club stamp and seal were ordered and a set of crockery embossed with the Club's name – we are left to wonder what that name was. A clue as to its eventual adoption of the **Victory Club** lies in the title of the Victory Concert to be held by the Victory Concert Party on March 26th 1921. In fact just such a concert had been reported in the *Express* on January 24th 1920 – “held before members of the Stocksbridge Works Institute” and another in February to Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers.

THE DIARY OF WILLIS BURGIN

BIOGRAPHICAL UPDATE

Willis Burgin was born 16th February 1894 at Haywood Park, Deepcar. He worked as a miner, like his father before him, at Lowoods and S. Fox & Co. Ltd. When his father died, aged 40, the family moved to Thorne, near Doncaster, where he continued as a miner until war broke out. He volunteered to serve in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and, after a spell as a recruiting officer and another in the Military Police, became a Sergeant P.T. Instructor. By 1916 he had just had to endure three weeks of quarantine with 200 Australian troops at Belton Park, near Grantham.

The Diary continues: -

It was nice to be back on the parade ground in our camp with British soldiers. But my first morning group of men at P.T. seemed slow and lazy, especially one man in the front row. The P.T. Officer was watching the class and drew my attention to this lazy soldier. I immediately went up to the man and tapping him on the shoulder, said “Now then, my lad, you had better pull your socks up!” “Yes, Sergeant!” he replied and, bending down, pulled up both socks. All the class yelled with laughter. But I had to keep a straight face and try to bring the men to order. Later, the officer told me that he had to turn away to hide his own amusement. “But he did obey your order, Sergeant!” he said.

In Belton Park camp we had a good Sergeants' Mess, where all the meals were nicely served by orderlies in white coats, and attached to the mess was a Bar room, where we sergeants could meet and have a drink and a chat. The Orderly Officer of the week would call in the mess on his rounds and treat any sergeant present to a drink. It happened to be there on one occasion.

“What is yours, Sergeant Burgin?” asked the officer. “Just a lemonade, please, sir!” I replied. After asking the other sergeants for theirs, he went up to the bar and ordered several beers, plus “a bucket of lemonade for Sgt.

STOCKSBRIDGE & DISTRICT
HISTORY SOCIETY

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MEETINGS ARE NORMALLY HELD ON THE SECOND
THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH, AT THE LIBRARY,
MANCHESTER ROAD, STOCKSBRIDGE AT 7.00 PM.

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MEETINGS

❖ PROGRAMME 2008 ❖

AUGUST SUMMER RECESS

SEPTEMBER 11TH

MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS IN CAPTIVITY

MR. D. TEMPLEMAN

OCTOBER 9TH

BEHIND THE BROWN PAPER

MRS. G. BOOTH

NOVEMBER 13TH

150 YEARS OF WEDDING DRESSES

MR. YOUNG

Saturday December 13th CAROL SUPPER

Burgin!" All the mess heard this and it caused much laughter. "No, sir," I responded, "Just a glass will do!" and got the biggest laugh of all.

One time I was sitting having my midday meal in the mess when a red-faced, very angry sergeant came and sat opposite me. This drill sergeant had had many years in the army and was responsible for the drafts of soldiers for overseas. He had to make sure that they were clean and smart for the Commanding Officer's inspection. He had just held one of these parades and told us all what had happened, with much swearing in between mouthfuls of soup. A certain soldier, whom he named, had been unshaven had a dirty rifle and a backpack that was not in order. The sergeant had been ticked off by the C.O. Then I pricked up my ears at his next remark, as I recognised the man's name. "The recruiting sergeant who accepted this man for the army should bloody well be shot!"

I looked across at the sergeant and said, "That lad was one of my Doncaster recruits, and I got a shilling for him!" This made the Sergeant even more vexed and he said, "Then you must have been bloody well hard up for a shilling, Burgin, to take that bloke on!" When I saw that soldier on parade I could see that his assessment was correct and I felt sorry for the drill sergeant.

The Dance

Regimental Sergeant Major Towers called a meeting for all the sergeants of the Battalion to organise our first dance, to be held at the Y.M.C.A. hall in Belton Park. A good number of sergeants attended the meeting, with the Sgt. Major in the chair. His opening remark was that our one problem would be how to contact the young ladies of Grantham and nearby villages. My pal Sgt. Brooks was sitting next to me and he stood up to offer the suggestion that each of us should be asked how many we could bring to the dance. "That is a very good idea, Sgt. Brooks – In fact I think each man could bring one lady," replied the Sgt. Major. "Let us start with you, Sgt. Brooks, how many could you bring?" All those present laughed when the reply was "Six, sir!" "Six, Sergeant?" asked the Sgt. Major with a huge grin on his face, "That's a good start. Rather you than me!" "Oh, I can manage them, all right!" replied Sgt. Brooks, as the others all offered to bring one lady.

The dance was fixed for a Saturday in September (1916) from 8.00 pm to 12.00 pm. Sgt. Major Towers was M. C. and the Regimental Band played dance music. The busiest N.C.O. in the camp was, of course, Sgt. Brooks. He had arranged to meet each of the six ladies he had invited at different times at the main gate, and it was a walk of 200 yards to the dance hall.

The dance was a great success and the Sgt. Major was well satisfied. Army trucks were fitted with seats to take the ladies home. Even Sgt. Brooks' young ladies made new friends at the dance and thanked him for his invitation.