

# THE PARAGON

Journal of Stocksbridge & District History Society



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## Merry Christmas

The Editors welcome our 80+ Members to the 50<sup>th</sup> edition of the Paragon. The first was issued in Spring 1992 as the successor to the Society's Quarterly Newsletter.

On perusing these back numbers in search of inspiration, I feel that some of the contributions made by members in the Christmas editions will bear repetition.

The first Christmas edition of the Newsletter in 1992 contained an article by Mary Hepworth, whom many will remember as a stalwart of our Society, entitled

### A CHRISTMAS REMEMBERED

Father Christmas used to pop his head around the door on Christmas Eve and we would scuttle off to bed early. Sometimes if we had gone to bed he would come upstairs and shake the bed to see if we were really asleep – and of course we always pretended that we were!

Then one year I realised that Father Christmas was really the tall, thin man who came round in the evenings to light the street gas lamps with a light twinkling on the end of a long pole.

The following Christmas I well remember! My younger sisters went to bed early as usual but I was allowed to stay up. We opened drawers and cupboards, finding things that had been hidden away. There was a doll each, fully dressed – furtively by Mum – with a red coat with a real fur collar and Tam O'Shanter to match; under this a pretty floral cotton dress and cami-knickers, all lace-trimmed and with tiny socks and patent leather shoes.

There were chocolates, fruit and nuts, and all these I put into two white pillowcases, which were hung on the each end of the brass rail across the fireplace, beneath the mantelpiece. Then a sack was filled. Into the toe was put a



The Lord of Misrule

packet of cigarettes, wrapped in layer after layer of paper with a final Christmas wrap. More paper was pushed in to cover the cinders (!?) and yet more paper. This was a joke played on Dad for years – and he always acted surprised!

The artificial tree was brought out of its hiding place and I helped to put on the glass baubles and the final touch – the angel doll on top. The tiny candles in their brass holders were carefully clipped to the branches and placed so that they could be carefully lighted. The Christmas tree had been bought from Woolworth's. It had dropped off the pushchair on the way home and broken. But it was easily repaired and did good service for many years, travelling to Lancashire and later to Ireland, where it was still trimmed for my sister's grandchildren. It had cost half-a-crown – certainly good value for money!

That year I walked into town with Dad to the Parish Church and heard the bells ring out "Christians Awake!" at midnight, followed by carols, and I joined in the singing. I returned home tired but happy and tiptoed upstairs to bed – but still wakened early to see what was in MY pillowcase and to watch my sisters open theirs!

[The Newsletters were compiled, edited, typed and printed entirely by Mike Spick.]

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# CHRISTMAS QUIZ

1 PARAGON 2 (Winter 1995) featured a representation of which personality, who presided over all Christmas festivities in Medieval and Tudor times?

2 PARAGON 6 (Winter 1996) Whose Family Christmas did Maureen Newton describe? His tea on Christmas Day would be a rabbit pie, shot in Sheepphouse Wood.

3. PARAGON 10 (Winter 1997) consisted of another article by Maureen Newton and one by which other prolific contributor, who reached his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday that month?

4 PARAGON 14 (Winter 1998) Which one of our present members wrote about his life in Deepcar, including escapades on Mischief Night?

5 PARAGON 18 (Winter 1999) – the Millennium Edition – featured a photograph of St. Matthias from Nanny Hill after 20 inches of snow. Who was the photographer, who spent countless dinner breaks around Fox's Works on his hobby in the Fifties?

6 In PARAGON 22 (Winter 2000) for those who sometimes ask "Who *was* Willis Burgin?" you will find the name of his father.

7 PARAGON 26 (Winter 2001) Which Historian featured in the *Waldershelf to Stocksbridge* series, just before Jack Brantston?

8 PARAGON 30 (Winter 2002) In the article *Round Deepcar and Stocksbridge Shops in 1902* which draper's and tailoring shop had a Christmas display in one window of children's toys?

9 PARAGON 34 (Winter 2003) My own memorable Christmases. What expensive gift for Mum had my brother and I saved up all year for?

10 PARAGON 38 (Winter 2004) contained a description of Deepcar buildings and businesses by which of our oldest members?

11 PARAGON 42 (Winter 2005) To mark the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Band of Hope Cooperative Society in Stocksbridge, Joseph Kenworthy produced a *Jubilee* booklet – in what year?

12 PARAGON 46 (Winter 2006) Roy Mallinson's article *Rails in the Little Don Valley* informed us that the Woodhead Tunnel opened in December of which year?

Prizes for the most correct answers will be awarded at the January meeting 2008 perhaps with allowances made for length of membership.

# THE DIARY OF WILLIS BURGIN

## BAYONETS AND BOXING GLOVES

In July 1916 my name was listed in Battalion Orders to take a further course of Physical Training for 14 days at Newcastle-on-Tyne. Before I went I had to see the Company Officer and was surprised to see a new C.O. Captain Walker had been posted overseas. My new C.O. wished me luck and told me that if I were successful in this course, my next posting would be to Aldershot.

I made the journey by train to Newcastle and reported to Barracks on a hilltop. It was full of troops and many of the N.C.Os attending the course had to sleep in closed school buildings. The Barracks gymnasium was used for P.T., but we were outside if the weather was kind.

Bayonet training was harder and stiffer. The ground was a grass field with trenches six feet deep every 20 yards and into these we had to jump with rifle and bayonet fixed and attack bags stuffed with straw.

On the last day of this training I slipped on the wet clay on the top of a trench and strained my right heel muscle so I was only able to walk on the front part of that foot. My instructor was helpful and excused me from marching exercises for the last day of the course. I managed to pass the course.

I went back to Belton by fast train on the Monday morning and in the afternoon was taking a troop for P.T. in the camp.

Then our P.T. Officer got the idea to start a Boxing Club in the Y.M.C.A. room. All the P.T. sergeants in the Battalion were expected to be present and on that Saturday night at 7.00 pm I was in the front row of seats. A boxing ring had been roped off in the middle of the room with seats all around. At each corner were two soldiers with towels over their shoulders to act as seconds. The officer had staged the show very well and the first fight was on. He had a soldier ready in the ring with gloves on and any soldier or N. C.O. was invited to take him on for two three-minute rounds.

There were no volunteers and I was beginning to feel sorry that I had put myself in the front row. "You would not mind taking on Corporal Smith, do you, Sergeant Burgin?" said the officer. I swallowed and tried to get rid of the lump in my throat. "No sir, I shall be pleased!" (That was a thumping lie!)

Into the corner of the ring I went and sat down on the stool. My seconds took off my tunic and while putting on my boxing gloves were giving me advice – that I must keep moving. Bang! went the bell for Round 1 and I received my first blow on the ear and I was knocked to my left. It was the longest three minutes I ever remembered. When the bell went for the end of the round I was too dizzy to find my corner.

Round 2 - I kept moving to my opponent's right and got nearly to the end of the round before he landed a blow to my head and knocked me across the ring. I hit the ropes and was catapulted back into the ring so quickly that I was able to land a couple of blows to his head and body – the only two in the fight. I was no boxer, but I was still on my feet at the end.

## THE MEMOIRS OF LILLIAN BIRKHEAD

### COLLEGE

In those days one could take a Teacher's Certificate Examination and qualify as a Certified Teacher without going to college. I know of two teachers who did this: my friend Madge Swallow and Ida Grayson, who later became Mrs. Arthur Glover of Wortley. But they had the advantage of having five or six years at Penistone Grammar School, while I was at home doing housework.

Although one could go on teaching indefinitely as an uncertified teacher in those days, I felt that I should like to take this examination, so that I could apply for a post outside my own village. So, back to the old correspondence course again – Clough's this time, and much stiffer than before. Evening activities had to be given up. After two years hard grind came the certificate examination, but alas, I failed.

Now I felt that I could never pass this exam, studying on my own, without any secondary school background. Then a friend suggested, why not go to college? It was something hitherto quite unthought of. There were financial difficulties – my father only on a low wage, my two older brothers were married, and my youngest brother was also on a low wage. Besides this, I was nearly 24 – past the normal age for entering college. But the idea was discussed and thrashed out at home. College grants would not be sufficient and money would have to be spent on me, instead of me contributing to the family income. But the decision was finally made – college it would be. I applied to two colleges, Edge Hill and Manchester, and was accepted at Manchester in 1920.

Manchester was a Day Training College, and most of the students lived at home, travelling in each morning from all parts of South Lancashire. About six of us had to live in "digs", on condition that we should live with relatives. It was arranged that I should lodge with a half-cousin in the Cheetham Hill area. Unfortunately, she began to have spinal trouble and had to go into Pendleton Hospital, and she was there nearly all the time I was at college. She had let off two rooms to a young couple and I occupied the other two.

It was a great contrast, going from our rural community to a town like Manchester, and a college of 120

students, all strangers. But I found it exhilarating, even though I felt homesick at times. To go out each morning and be a student all day, instead of teaching during the day and only being able to study in the evening, was really enjoyable. The other girls were very friendly and, what was most important to me, seemed to be no more brilliant than I was myself. My four years of private study stood me in good stead. Homework in the evenings was no hardship – I was alone and had nothing else to do. Saturdays were the worst, but after doing my Saturday chores, I did quite a bit of exploring around Manchester, making good use of my street map. Sometimes I went to good and very cheap concerts at the Central Hall, but I didn't like coming back late at night to the not very salubrious district where I was living.

On Sundays I went to a Methodist Church, but was rather dismayed to find that all the pews had name – plates on them of the people who rented them. Finally I rented a pew myself and felt I had a right to be there. But the people were not very friendly and seemed a rather select little company, not caring to have outsiders made welcome. What impact could such a church have on the outside world?

During the first term my mother and father came for a weekend (having walked to and from Penistone Station to catch the Manchester train). My mother had been in service in that part of Manchester and they enjoyed looking round the old haunts.

On Sunday afternoons I visited my cousin in Pendleton Hospital – a longish journey to the other side of Manchester. I felt very sorry for her, lying there helpless with no certainty about the future, while my life seemed to be opening up to "fresh fields and pastures new".

My marks for that first term seemed to compare favourably with those of the other girls, but in December there was a lot of excitement and apprehension about end-of-term exams and I wondered how I should fare. I had certainly done all homework and reading most conscientiously, having no distractions, and finding work alongside the other girls and real, live lectures most satisfactory, after ploughing a lone furrow at home.

The exams came along, involving revision each evening, then the lists of results in each subject appeared each morning in the hall, and on each list my name appeared either top or near the top of my class. Then came the final list with L. Walton at the top of the class. What a glow of satisfaction my success brought after this, the first term of a new way of life, with all its new experiences, so different from being a solitary student in a remote country village! This may sound boastful, but it is simply a recording of thankfulness and surprise that my venture into the unknown had been so successful.



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

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

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## SOCIETY NEWS

Our Secretary is busy arranging a programme of Speakers and visits for 2008. We have been promised a presentation of the recent achievements and current plans of the Steel Valley Project by Rebecca Hughes, whom some of us met at Bradfield History Fair in October.

At Bradfield we renewed acquaintance, among others, of two ladies who joined as Postal members at that event last year, as well as recruiting some new local members. We were able to thank in person Terry Allcroft, ex-Stocksbridge man, now living in Bradwell and present Chairman of Sheffield Family History Society, for the framed photograph of Stocksbridge Works that he donated.

Our M.P. Angela Smith visited us in Stocksbridge Library in October, and showed great interest in a particular item in the Archive about Brass Bands. She also agreed that we as a Society really need a place of our own to store material all in one, readily accessible place.

Meanwhile, work goes on assessing the contents of the Victory Club records, compiling our own record of local casualties of war, helping applicants with their own family histories, indexing reference books, etc. If you can help in any way, please do.

## ITEMS FROM VICTORY CLUB MINUTE BOOKS

December 1943

Resolved, that we engage Mr. & Mrs. Sharman to decorate the rooms in the Club as in previous years for the sum of £2-10-0.

Resolved Mr. Sharman be appointed to assist the MCs at the Annual Ball and also to borrow his mike for the same event - he to be paid 20/-

Resolved we engage Mrs. Sharman to play records at the Kiddies' Treat at a fee of 7/6

Resolved that certain profits from the Annual Ball be set aside to distribute as gifts to old age pensioners who attend the Club regularly and who are not now working.

Resolved 1000 threepenny pieces be obtained for distribution at the Kiddies' Treat.

## 100 YEARS AGO

FROM HINCHLIFFE'S STOCKSBRIDGE ALMANACK

1907

January 16<sup>th</sup> The Combined choirs of Nonconformist bodies performed the *Messiah* in Stocksbridge Congregational Church.

February 2<sup>nd</sup> The operas *Bohemian Girl* and *Maritana* were given four nights by the Stocksbridge Tonic Sol-Fa Association.

March 12<sup>th</sup> Mr. Marsden, Clerk to the U.D.C., received £13.6s.8d from the Tonic Sol-Fa Association towards the upkeep of the Allen Croft Isolation Hospital.

May 1<sup>st</sup> Burglars broke into the jeweller's shop of Mr. Shaw of Manchester Road.

June 24<sup>th</sup> A Supper was held in connection with Stocksbridge Fire Brigade.

July 9<sup>th</sup> A Presentation was made to Rev. H. Robertshaw to mark his retirement.

August 9<sup>th</sup> A Dividend of 10 % was declared at the Annual Meeting of the Directors of Messrs. Samuel Fox & Co., Ltd., Deepcar.

September 23<sup>rd</sup> Dr. W.M. Robertshaw, President of the Gardeners' Society, entertained the Committee to a "spread" at Langsett.

And Forecast for 1908: There will be three Eclipses of the sun and one of the moon.