

THE PARAGON

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VICTORY CLUB RECORDS

The second oldest of the record books donated to the History Society on the closure of the Victory Club is dated July 20th 1922 to January 22nd 1935 at one end and Finance Meeting February 28th 1935 to July 16th 1945 at the other.

Those present at the first meeting were named as Messrs Knowles, Smith and Archer, but with new secretary Mr. P. H. Copley. Mr. Lemin attended later meetings as Treasurer. In 1924 W. S. Barrow became Secretary, with H. Bradbury as his Assistant, and the Committee was further augmented by J. Hattersley. Ulric Herbert replaced Mr. Barrow in 1926, while J. Hattersley became Chairman of the Committee. J. Goodlad became a member in 1928, with M. W. Archer in the Chair. V. Challis joined them in 1929. But the number never exceeded six and was more usually four. The exception in January 1932 was when chartered accountants attended.

The only new staff appointment made during this period seems to have been a Miss Mansell, whose Health Insurance would be paid, in July 1924.

Purchases were authorised of "tipplers" for whiskey, a second-hand piano for pianist Miss Lillian Hoyle, a copper sink and a wooden draining board.

There was a need for painting and redecorating inside and out, roof repairs and spring-cleaning.

Electricity bills were being paid from the beginning, but in July 1924 a tender for the lighting of the club was accepted from a Mr. Wilson. (This, at a time when housing was still being built with gaslight fittings.)

But high on the agenda in those early days were concerns about the recession of trade and the need for economy. Because customers had less in their pockets, losses were being made on events like the Male Voice Choir contest and the Flower Show.

The Club was still indebted to S. Fox & Co. and had to reduce repayments. The charge for Billiards was reduced from 6d to 4d.

But by July 1923 the account was paid off and by November 1928 the financial status was declared satisfactory. The price of rum and whiskey miniatures was reduced by 2d and 1d respectively. The order for new bench seating in the

Smoke Room and Snug was allowed to go ahead and a tender was accepted for paving around Billiard tables.

Accounts were now held by the Midland Bank, but in February 1929 £800 was also invested in the Cooperative Permanent Building Society, followed by another £200 in December.

But at the same time economies were being made, with grants of £10/10/- usually made to the Local Nursing Association and to the South Yorkshire Musical Festival being deferred.

A 3 months gas bill for £6/10s/11d was considered abnormal and a tap was to be put on the meter for supply to the stove in the Bar Room, with a key in charge of the steward.

Stocksbridge Cooperative Society was allowed 5% commission on sales of tickets for the Celebrity Concerts.

The Finance Committee occasionally recorded matters of behaviour in the Club, referring to a case, perhaps a dispute between, Fox Wheelers cycling club and Mr. S. Sharman. In April 1930 they recommended a condition of hire of the Large Hall should be that "No rowdiness or unseemly conduct be allowed; neither must any person be allowed on the premises who is under the influence of drink."

Economies were still being made. In November 1930 the Stocksbridge Branch of the British Legion Club were being pressed for unpaid accounts. Customers were enticed back with offers of 4d vouchers from the Free Brewery to every entrant. The charge for hiring the Large Hall was dropped by 2s. And the grants approved by the General Committee were again withheld.

"NO ROWDINESS OR UNSEEMLY CONDUCT BE ALLOWED; NEITHER MUST ANY PERSON BE ALLOWED ON THE PREMISES WHO IS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF DRINK."

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In 1931 a complaint was made about Schofields' Guinness bottles. Gas bills were even higher. The Club appealed against its Rate Assessment and sent its Income Tax Assessment to S. Fox & Co. Serious operations losses were recorded.

Payment to Geo. Oldfield for painting and decorating was sanctioned. But income from letting was down. Reference was again made to present economic conditions.

By 1932 chartered accountants had to be called in. Grants were limited to £5 and none were made to outside organisations. The Free Brewery account was withheld and no more Celebrity Concerts were to be arranged. The most stringent economy was urged. Interest from the Co-op Building Society was reduced from 5% to 4½ %

The Bernstein grand piano needed reconditioning, but the offer from the S. Yorks Festival Committee to grant £3 towards the 17-guinea cost at Wilson Peck was rejected. But a demonstration of new cash registers was allowed and a purchase was made.

Purchase of the Steward's house was mentioned but referred to the General Committee. Later in the year inquiries were being made about Mr. Creswell's property that was for sale.

Interest on the Co-op investment was now down to 3½ % Vincent Challis resigned from the Committee and was replaced as signatory by Arthur Smith.

In 1933 some accounts were still unpaid and the recommendation was that no grants at all should be made. Fear that the Club would have to draw on savings gave rise to an almost desperate comment "Necessity knows no law!"

Note

We appreciate the work put in by our Chairman and Secretary in cataloguing the enormous amount of material donated to the Society by the Victory Club. Also we thank those members who have contributed by working on individual volumes and returning their commentaries. These will all be reviewed in due course.

In the meantime we find that Stocksbridge Library is unable to continue housing this very bulky material, so it is being arranged that Sheffield Archives will take certain records that they judge to be of wider interest. Unfortunately we see no alternative but to dispose of the rest.

Brenda Duffield

I was also commandeered to fetch food from the snack bar or canteen; one young railway shunter, an evacuee from Windsor, Bill Sharpe, always sent me for his bread and dripping for breakfast. He wanted six slices, at a penny a slice, but he always gave me seven pence, because there being no paper, he would throw away the bottom slice with my extremely greasy handprint under it.

The hours we worked were 8 o'clock to 5 o'clock, Monday to Friday, and 8 to midday on Saturday. The Company believed in Education and ran a Day Continuation School throughout the week, which each 14 to 16 year-old attended on a certain day. We also had to attend Night School.

The Day School was where I first met Algebra. Having left school at 14, I wondered what on earth it was all about. It was not until I got to the age of 40, when I went in for and passed my O-level Maths and English, that I really came to terms with X and Y.

With Further Education in mind, I had already enrolled for Night School at Wisewood when I found that it was to be compulsory at Stocksbridge. One evening we came out of classes there to find that two inches of snow had fallen. I made my way to the Horse and Jockey at Wadsley to find that the buses had stopped. I had to walk a further four and a half miles home in the dark and falling snow. Walking up the Soughdyke – that is the part of the road which dips and climbs again on the way to Worrall – I passed a telegraph pole jutting onto the pavement and stumbled over a soldier and his girlfriend behind it. I don't know who got the greater shock. I continued walking up the silent road to Worrall and down Quarry Hill to Oughtibridge, for I had to get to bed in order to be ready for work in the morning. I was fourteen and had a job to go to and I couldn't take time off for a bit of snow.

The rate of pay was rather meagre. I received the princely sum of 19s. 6d. per week (ninety-seven and a half pence in today's currency). This had to pay for the laundering of overalls each week, as they were always covered in oil, and to wash them at home would ruin any other clothing. Then there was the bus fare in the form of a weekly ticket, obtainable from the Sheffield Transport Office. The cost of this for someone under 16 was 2s. 11d. per week. This seems cheap by today's rates, but it was almost a sixth of my week's wage, although it enabled me also to go by bus to the pictures at Stocksbridge, or to Hillsborough for a football match, providing I finished early enough on a Saturday.

I could only manage this when I was not playing for the Stocksbridge Works 14 to 16 year-olds team, and seeing that the Senior Office Clerk in the Traffic Department, Herbert Cook, was Secretary of the Works Football Teams, I had to take the team sheets down the road to get them printed and out in time for all the players in all three teams

to know if they would be needed that week. A coach was organised to take us to Away matches, and if it was also carrying the Ladies' Hockey Team, proceedings could get quite lively.

Football was not the only pastime. The Palace picture house at Stocksbridge changed its programme three times a week, but of course, there was no Sunday cinema in those days.

On attaining the age of fourteen one could join the Reading Room at Oughtibridge. The building is still there in Orchard Street. Upstairs there was a large room with two snooker tables and smaller tables to sit at and play dominoes. Downstairs the main room was lined with shelves full of books and you could buy a bottle of pop and a packet of crisps. The same thing applied at the Miners' Welfare Hall in Stocksbridge – now the STEP building. Many a happy evening has been spent thus, especially in inclement weather.

Roy Mallinson

THE MEMOIRS OF LILIAN BIRKHEAD

CHAPEL ALTERATIONS

That 1921 summer was a memorable one. There was the General Strike, lasting several months and bringing hard times to all. But my father having been a quarryman, my parents knew what it was to be off work for weeks.

The old chapel was deteriorating; the roof was unsafe and in fact the building was becoming a white elephant, with plaster dropping and rain coming in. A new roof was essential before any other repairs could be carried out. Then came news of a legacy of £100 from an old scholar – my great uncle, James Walton. That can be a week's wage these days, but then it was a small fortune. And this windfall encouraged the workers to venture on plans to make the old chapel habitable again. So first a building contractor was called in to fix the roof. Then it was decided to remove the pews and the choir steps, leaving a flat stage about two feet higher than the rest of the floor.

All this was done by voluntary labour from the men who could not work at Fox's during the General Strike. A grand community effort came out of what might have been an anxious, boring summer. The anxiety was there, certainly, but the knowledge of doing a worthwhile job in happy companionship helped to alleviate the worry, and the result was a fine, newly-decorated concert hall, with seats on the steps where the pews had been, giving an uninterrupted view of the stage from any seat. It was then used as a Sunday School instead of the Day School across the way. Alterations were made to the Chapel House also. It had been a four-roomed dwelling all on one level, and up above was the old Sunday School, which was approached by steps

from the outside. This area also served as a gallery, looking down as it did on the rest of the chapel. The two arches had doors that opened for this purpose, with wooden rails across to prevent people falling several feet to the chapel area below. This was made into bedrooms for the caretaker and the outside steps were removed. A staircase was built inside, making a very acceptable three-bedroom dwelling for the caretaker.

Who planned all these alterations and improvements? There is no record of any professional advice being sought. They had imagination as well as grit and determination, those village workmen!

After the "Old School", as we called it, was made into bedrooms, the Band of Hope was held in the Old Chapel (now called the Sunday School) every fortnight, and as many as 70 attended. There were three Entertainment Committees, each responsible in turn for an evening's entertainment. On most evenings there was a speaker from Stocksbridge or Thurgoland. For us, that took place of a modern Youth Club, with this difference – we had the evils of alcohol well and truly drilled into us!

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. Back on more familiar ground there was an interlude of relaxation. The Diary continues:

November 1916. I was told by my C.O. that I was to take my final course of Physical Training and Bayonet fighting for my Aldershot Certificate. I left Grantham by train on the Saturday morning and arrived at Aldershot at 4 pm., reporting to the Receiving Barracks. The Barrack room was large, with 30 beds and I found my bed very comfortable. I washed and went down to the Mess room for tea and met other N.C.O.s due to take this P.T. course. I stayed in the Barracks that night and made my bed early. Lights out was at 10 pm. and all the men were settled down. But at about midnight everyone seemed to be moving and making for the door. All I could hear was the hurried banging of doors – lavatory doors – and I was one of them.

On the Sunday morning I was too weak even to talk. Only four N.C.O.s had not been affected, and they had had tea in a café in town. We all thought something had been put in the tea to clear us out inwardly. And the P.T.

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

THE PARAGON

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MEETINGS

❖ PROGRAMME 2008 ❖

NOVEMBER 13TH

150 YEARS OF WEDDING DRESSES

MR. YOUNG

Saturday December 13th CAROL SUPPER

exercises on the Monday at 9 am were intended to put us right outwardly.

Officers and NCOs numbered between 450 and 500 for this course and were lined up in a large gymnasium at Aldershot. They were drawn from the British Army, the Colonial and Royal Naval Division, and the Royal Marines. We were formed into classes of 15 under an Instructor—mine was the 13th.

This course of 21 days was the hardest of the lot. At night, after a day's work, I didn't feel like moving out of the Barracks. It was in Bayonet training that I was in trouble with the Instructor. In the final attack by my class on dummies (bags of straw hung on a line), my bayonet thrust was not good enough to please him and he threatened me with a Half-Nelson (a wrestling hold!) and came at me as if he meant it.

I got on well with my P.T. Instructor. When I eventually received my certificate, dated 24/11/1916, it was classified GOOD. This enabled me to wear Crossed Swords above my three stripes and added 6d extra per day to my pay.



Army Physical Training Instructor's Badge—as worn by
Willis Burgin