

THE PARAGON

Journal of Stocksbridge & District History Society



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VICTORY CLUB RECORDS

THE MINUTE BOOK COVERING THE PERIOD MARCH 1950 TO DECEMBER 1951 WAS ALSO REVIEWED BY SOCIETY MEMBER VAL DODGSON.

The Ministry of Labour compelled the Club to pay for holiday cover for in the steward's absence, but then Mr. Crapper (the stand-in) must pay it back and the Club would pay the necessary Income Tax.

There was concern about receipts from Billiards and the Bar falling, which was believed to be due to a general downturn in the trade.

Expenditure was authorised on £3-worth of gramophone records, a gross (144) of pint pots and three chalk suspenders (!) for the Billiards Room, but to build extra toilets or even supply paper towels in the lavatories would be too expensive. The idea of installing a public telephone was dismissed and even to buy an electric fan to keep the beer cellar cool was out of the question. The last problem was tackled by whitewashing the cellar inside and out and piling earth over it; the towel situation was solved by arranging for one to be kept under the Bar and Members expected to ask for it, returning it after use.

The U.D.C. eventually relieved one problem somewhat by committing to build a public convenience behind the bus shelter, also to provide a new fence.

Funds that were made available were devoted to a Children's Treat, when June Wood's School of Dancing was engaged for £5, plus a ventriloquist and S. Sharman to provide the music. Each child was to be given 6d.

Les Buxton's Band was engaged to play at a Midsummer's Day dance for a fee of £8 (Admission 2/-) and would be paid £14/10/- for the Boxing Day Ball (Admission 2/6); MCs were each to be paid 10/- and the doorman 5/- an hour. Members volunteering to be watchmen would also be paid. Eight Spot Prizes of 5/- each would be given. The following year the Orchestral Section was asked to play Carols in the Bar and was paid £2 for refreshments.

A Concert Chairman and Secretary were appointed, each to be paid £25 a year, and a trip to Stones' Brewery was also arranged.

A connection with Stocksbridge Works was maintained and the Club now was to receive steam heating direct from the Works, although the Committee continued to resist requests from the Parent Committee for copies of their Minutes.

SOCIETY NEWS

We are sponsoring the plant containers now placed on the corner of Hole House Lane and Manchester Road, as our contribution to Stocksbridge in Bloom. Businessman Paul Cotterill has offered to tend them, and we hope that they help to brighten up the west end of the town centre.

The Autumn issue of *Paragon* will resume the saga *From Waldershelf to Stocksbridge* with Chapter V, which analyses those aspects of our town in 1881, after all the upheaval of the Industrial Revolution, that remained stable.

...AN ELECTRIC FAN TO KEEP
THE BEER CELLAR COOL WAS
OUT OF THE QUESTION...



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THE DIARY OF WILLIS BURGIN

UNDER FIRE

The next move of 16th Section was towards the Front Line. The Section should have numbered 30, but we only had 18 soldiers, one corporal, a sergeant and the Section Officer. We carried four machine guns and boxes of ammunition.

We marched through a number of small villages, all badly knocked about by shell-fire, and we could see the town of Amiens under fire. We noticed air activity by enemy planes, darting in and out of the clouds, firing machine guns in short bursts. We were ordered to take cover off the road and move into the undergrowth. From there we got a good view of what the enemy aircraft were after – four Observation balloons of ours. One of them was on fire and we watched the flaming remnants of fabric falling to the ground, but we all cheered when we saw the observation crew parachuting safely to the ground.

Two miles from Frandlier we stopped for a meal of biscuits not unlike dog biscuits, three inches square, that we had to dip in tea to soften them. And each soldier opened a small can of corned beef. After an hour's rest we marched to Bonny, and here we took up reserved positions in the trenches, with our four machine guns thirty yards apart, muzzles peeping over the trench tops. That first night we received a heavy bombardment from the Jerries, one shell falling near a gun and covering the gun team with soil. There was no bang and we thought it was a dud. Then our eyes started watering and we were choking – it was gas – so it was on with our gasmasks.

We had little sleep that night as the shells came over, thick and heavy. It was enough to put the wind up anyone and a real baptism of fire for yours truly. An hour later I went to the Section headquarters to report that the guns were OK. I found the officer trembling and unable to answer me, as windy as I was.

Later things quietened down. One of the gun team had been hit on the head by a piece of shrapnel and was suffering badly from shock. It was pitiful to see the poor chap, all his limbs trembling. He was sent to a rest camp to receive attention. After 14 days he was back with the Section and I was glad – he was a good Number One on the gun.

In the afternoon of the same day the Section officer called me to the dugout. He had a fighting map opened out on the table and marked a point where he ordered me to take four men as a pick and shovel party to dig positions for two machine guns. But before doing this I had to contact

Infantry Battalion Headquarters on the way. This I did, only to learn that the enemy had attacked during the night and captured a trench and the ground we had to dig. Back I went with the pick and shovel party to report to the officer in the Section dugout. There new orders awaited me to take my Section, with guns and ammunition, to report to him at 18th Battalion HQ at 3.45 am. I got them on the move along a communication trench, just wide enough and deep enough for one man. After a mile we came to a halt behind a company of infantry, who were there for the morning "show." I scrambled up the side of the trench and along the top to enquire of the sergeant how long it would be before they moved. "Half an hour", he told me, and I crawled back to the Section.

I could hear the men cursing me. It was 2.30 am and dark until Jerry sent up Very lights, red and green, hanging in the sky and lighting up "no man's land" so he could shell our trenches. I sat on top of the trench and suggested to the men that we crawl along that way. This brought a lot of grumbles from the Section but I managed to get together two teams and their guns. Then Jerry sent up a string of lights, shells flew over our heads and all the gunners jumped back into the trench. I stayed on the top – not through bravery, no one had got the wind up more than me. I lectured them, telling them we would all be in trouble if we did not reach 18th Battalion by 3.45 am.

Then a Section corporal shouted "You take no notice of the sergeant, lads – he's only just come out here! Take my advice and stick here and wait!" This insubordination, from a N.C.O., almost took my breath away. In fact, to me, it was worse than stopping an enemy bullet. But I asked for a

volunteer to take a message to the Section officer at 18th Battalion: that we were pinned down by enemy fire. Only one soldier stepped forward, took the message and crawled away along the trench top. He was back three-quarters of an hour later, having delivered the message. The officer's reaction was that the Section was doing this on purpose and that we were a bunch of cowards. The runner said that the officer had demanded to be brought back to our position, but before they had moved 300 yards, the officer had turned back.

Now the Infantry blocking our way along the trenches moved on and we were able to proceed. When we reached 18th Battalion position we found that the officer had gone forward to the gun position. The Colonel found me a runner to guide us to the gun position, and we moved off again in single file. I was immediately behind the runner and I told the men to keep his eyes on the man in front. It was dark and foggy as we moved along a sunken road. German shells were raining down and it was a shambles –



dead horses and mules, smashed wagons and the bodies of their drivers.

Every now and again there would be a hail of machine-gun bullets pinging into the soil by the roadside,



and the runner ran like hell until I told him to go steady, because of the heavy loads we were carrying. But suddenly he disappeared into a slit trench at the roadside, and following him, I tripped and fell over something. My hands touched something soft like a cushion that sent a shudder down my spine. Only then did the runner shout, "Mind that dead horse, sergeant!"

As I got to my feet I could see, 50 yards away, the Section officer awaiting my men and me. He greeted me with a few choice words, calling me a coward, trying to dodge the show. As I stammered a reply he demanded, "Where is your Section, sergeant?" and I turned to find only six soldiers and one machine gun following. The others had missed the slit trench and continued along up the road toward the German front line with their three guns.

About a quarter of an hour later, wasn't I pleased to see the other part of the Section reappear, led by Private Turner? He told me that they had pressed on until they heard German voices, quickly turned and retraced their route until they found the slit trench.

All the Section then worked hard to get the machine guns into position at ten-yard intervals, ready to fire a barrage at Zero hour.

THE MEMOIRS OF LILIAN BIRKHEAD 1896 - 1987

SCHOOLTEACHER

I began teaching at the old Stocksbridge "Works" School in 1922, and after all the high-principled theories instilled into us at college, I came down to earth with a bang. For the Works School was indeed very close to the

works, with engines constantly going up and down close to the window, making deafening noises, and sending out smuts through any window one might venture to open. ("Please Miss, there's some muck on my book!")

There were 61 children in my class of seven-year olds, so one child had to go next door to be marked in the register, because the registers only had enough lines for 60 names. "Every child is unique" was the favourite slogan of our college principal. How could any teacher get to know each child's "uniqueness" in a class that size?

There were rows of iron-framed desks – desk and seat combined. Steps led down from the playground to the classroom. One staff member used to call it the "Black Hole of Calcutta."

This was 1922, when privately owned cars were almost unheard of in our district. There was no form of transport to Stocksbridge – everyone walked. Most Green Moor people worked at Fox's steel works in Stocksbridge (now B.S.C.) and walked there in all weathers. In winter the walk home was always in the dark, and the winters seemed more severe in those days. The normal footpaths were all blocked, as were the narrow lanes like Dun Hill, Hill Top Lane and Chapel Lane. I can remember more than once having to walk in drifts level with the wall tops, when the lane was full of snow and the trek of walkers had hardened a track on top of the drift. We looked out anxiously every morning to see if any more snow had fallen. Conditions more recently in 1979 have been almost like that, but now it is the cars getting stuck. It used to be the walkers who got in difficulty, although now drivers have problems when they have to abandon their vehicles and continue on foot.

But in summer it was worth the long, uphill climb home and to get up over the hilltop and into a different world, away from the smoke and noise of Stocksbridge. Once over Windy Bank the dingy, noisy, overcrowded classroom was forgotten.

The salary was £163 per annum. I was not very happy in this, my first post. The school and classroom were very dismal and those 61 seven-year olds took some handling. Several times I almost lost my voice that first winter. There was a terrific amount of marking to do (Was it any good? I sometimes wondered.) There was never enough time to the backward ones – all the college ideals of individual teaching seemed hopeless.

After two years of teaching "mixed" classes, we became a Girls' School, when the Boys moved over to the British Hall (now demolished) – another unsuitable building. There three or four classes were taught in the same room. Ironically, this now happens in modern open-plan schools, but with much smaller classes.

Our new Head teacher was Miss Hood Williams, a rather dainty, but very capable Head, who could maintain discipline in a quiet, but firm manner. How I envied her! But her pet theory was the Dalton Plan, chiefly for the older girls. I was asked to take Standard V/ We had to prepare a month's work in Geography, History, English and Nature Study, and the girls had to work through these at their own pace. Maths was taken more formally. Perhaps this was more

STOCKSBRIDGE & DISTRICT
HISTORY SOCIETY

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MEETINGS ARE NORMALLY HELD ON THE SECOND
THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH, AT CHRIST CHURCH
HALL, STOCKSBRIDGE AT 7.00 PM.

THE PARAGON

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MEETINGS

❖ PROGRAMME 2009 ❖

AUGUST

SUMMER RECESS

SEPTEMBER 10TH

AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

ROBERT BRAGG

OCTOBER 8TH

SOUTH YORKSHIRE CHURCHES

PATRICK McCLAUGHLAN

NOVEMBER 12TH

A CORNISH MISCELLANY

CHRISTINE MCKAY

SAT. 12TH DECEMBER

CAROL SUPPER

like some of the modern Project methods, but today's children are more conditioned to this individual work. It did not work well with us.

After a year Miss Hood Williams left, to take her new methods to Lowestoft. A little later, she wrote to invite to go and join her staff there, but I had not the slightest desire to leave home and surroundings and put down new roots. Perhaps I was unambitious, but home and church and village have always meant so much to me.

In complete contrast came Miss Hawkins – all formal teaching, certainly the 3 Rs – and a very high standard in these. She was very cultured; part of her education had been in France. We all had to keep our noses to the grindstone, with never a word of conversation to other staff members. We dreaded her appearance in the classroom – always critical, with never a word of praise. I think she was almost distracted by the muddle our previous Head had left us, and so were we. I dreaded going to school, wondering what wrong I, or my class, would be doing today.

One thing I could do – although with only moderate ability – was accompany the singing. Miss Hawkins herself had musical ability, and entered a school choir for the South Yorkshire Musical Festival, and for a Barnsley Music Festival. She certainly could train a choir. I spent hours practising the difficult accompaniments, much to my own benefit. But the bass runs in the Trout accompaniment I could not master. I learned much from her methods and, however inadequate my playing may have been, there never came another on the staff who could play better. This has been the case throughout my teaching career. I did not have a long period of piano lessons (from Miss Lillian Hoyle of Deepcar) but have always been called on to play, and I enjoyed music lessons, whether accompanying or training. It has been useful in our church services too. I have played the organ, but never had enough enthusiasm to learn to use the pedals.

