



## *The Probus Club of Berwick-upon-Tweed*

Welcome to our 'It's Good to stay in touch' Newsletter –

Issue 18 – 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021

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Dear Member,

Your committee met on 22<sup>nd</sup> June to discuss possible plans to resume our meetings in the Parish Hall if all lockdown restrictions are lifted on 19<sup>th</sup> July. Whilst it will depend on the Parish Church's ability to reopen the hall it was agreed that we would resume on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> September subject to government regulations at that time.  
**Something to look forward to.**

I hope you enjoy this edition's articles by Alan Dumble, William Hall, John Harper and Michael Wright.

### Who Said?

"Nothing brings me more happiness than trying to help the most vulnerable people in society. It is a goal and an essential part of my life - a kind of destiny. Whoever is in distress can call on me. I will come running wherever they are."

*Answer on last page of the newsletter*

*HL*

## I drove my way through National Service

*An interview with William Hall*

National Service in peacetime came into force in 1949 and meant that all physically fit males between the ages of 17 and 21 had to serve in one of the armed forces for an 18-month period. Students and apprentices were allowed to defer their call-up until they completed their studies or training. Conscientious objectors had to undergo the same tribunal tests as in wartime.

William Hall was able to defer his call-up until the end of his apprenticeship as a builder until 1956.

"I was all ready to go when I took the yellow jaundice. That delayed us another 6 weeks. After that, off we went; railway passes all the way to Swindon. Of course, the first thing you have to do is to get all your kit; we were taken to this huge hangar where there was a great long bench. You get a kit bag first, of course, then this man just looks at you and throws a jacket; 'waist size?' – trousers are flung at you; then tie, two shirts, two pairs of socks; you get a fine pair of boots and a workwear pair of boots. There were 20 other new recruits coming along

behind you so you couldn't hang about or you'd get a bollocking."

**HL:** "Were the clothes the right size when you got them back to your billet?"

**WH:** "Yes; then you got a knife, fork, spoon and a big white mug. Then off we go, not marching, of course, just walking as you like: then you got a mattress, a couple of sheets, pillows and a blanket and off you go again to the bunkhouse. Then they show you where your bed is."

**HL:** "Did you have to sign for all this kit?"

**WH:** "No, it's all on the inventory, you see. Then you're left for the rest of the day; they call on you at 8 o'clock the next morning."

**HL:** "8 o'clock! I would have thought it would be 6 o'clock in the morning."

**WH:** "Of course, you had to spend the first two nights getting your boots polished. You polished them with a hot spoon – that was a good method. You had to see your face in them!"

**WH:** "Because of the jaundice I was on light duties. I didn't do the parades to start with. I had to go round and light the little stoves in the Officers' offices. That was for a fortnight, then I did some square-bashing after that. You then had to decide where you were going, and I wanted to be a driver. So off we went to Yeovil in Somerset. A lovely place. There was four of us in this wagon. We all took a turn, you see, but I couldn't stand it; I was bored to tears – the other ones hadn't been driving before, they were learning."

**HL:** "You already were an expert."

**WH:** "We had to sit and drive a three-ton truck at thirty miles an hour! I got out of a lot of it, then I can't stand any more of this, I wanted something different, so I got to drive staff cars. That was absolutely great because I could drive; there was three of us. You got to take the car for the day, just driving turnabout. We used to go to Weston-Super-Mare and all the other resorts; we had some lovely days out."

**WH:** "Then you get a call, 'You've got an appointment; you are going to Swindon.'

"So all that gear had to be handed back in."

**HL:** "You mean you get issued with a replacement set when you get to Swindon?"

**WH:** "Yes. You had to leave the place tidy, then off we went. You were transported back to the depot. They were pulling my leg when we got there, they said, 'You'll not be staying long.'

"I said, 'why is that?'" 'Well, you're the fifth one in three weeks!'

**HL:** "Who were you driving for?"

**WH:** "Major General Charles Richardson. Off we went the first morning. The man that was turned down, he was with us, like. He was driving to start with. He had to show me the routes. 'Til one day we went to the station; the Major General gave him such a bollocking for something, I can't remember what. But that was him finished. I was told I would have to get on with it. So, I was on my own after that. Then I got my first stripe – I was Lance-Corporal - you've got to have a little protection, you see. You can't let anybody mess you about.

I enjoyed it. We had to go to the War Office once a month. I took him to Sandhurst, he was doing some duty there. What a lovely place it was. The Boss came down for tank displays; the best seats for those kinds of things."

**HL:** "Were you still based at Swindon at this time?"

**WH:** "Swindon, yes. Once I got my sidebar I got my own room, you see. I didn't do any other duties there. If I wasn't working, I just cleaned his car and I helped the gardener at the Major General's house if he was away.

Sometimes you had to take his car into Oxford for its service. It was a Rover. It was the petrol rationing that put the Humber Super Snipe off the road. Then I got a little Vauxhall – it was like a bullet – a beautiful little car.

**WH:** “Off to London, first trip. ‘Oh!’ he says,

‘**MGCR:** Corporal Hall, do you think I could have a drive at this car?’

**WH:** “Certainly, Sir. He drove off at about a hundred mile an hour down the motorway.”

‘**MGCR:** Thank you very much.’

**WH:** “Then I took over. Of course, when we got into London, I didn’t know London. He directed us,

‘**MGCR:** We are coming to a busy part here, keep to the right-hand lane; and when there’s a gap, in you go. Go, go go, get your nose in!’

**WH:** “You see, once you get your nose in, you’re in. It was quite a change from Branxton, like. Such a shock, when he shouts ‘Go, go, go!’”

**HL:** “I can imagine, yes.”

**WH:** “After the petrol rationing, it was a Humber Super Snipe after that, a green one.



Until the accident, then I had that other Vauxhall. He wasn’t annoyed when I bumped the car; he didn’t fly off the handle, he said it could happen to anybody. General was in the car at the time, I was waiting to turn into the road. It was an old, retired gentleman. The only bump I ever had.

**MGCR:** ‘I get paid about £35 an hour so I can’t afford to be early, and I can’t afford to be late’.

“I had to drive so that his book didn’t fall off his knees. You had to do the right speed going around corners, braking at the right speed to avoid anything sliding off. You got a black mark if anything fell on the floor.”

“Then when I went back, I had a fall off the wagon and hurt my back. I was in hospital for a few weeks, then a plaster cast for six weeks.”

“Then it was back for the last three months of my service. Driving again. Earlier on, I got a second stripe because he got promotion.”

**HL:** “His driver had to be at a certain level, did he?”

**WH:** “I went up when he went up. I got a nice set of blue uniforms, for special occasions; when he was in his dress uniform, I had to be as well. At the Royal Military College there was always Americans and people from the hierarchy coming for a tour; it was a very interesting place, a lovely place; it was all officers, like.”

“At the end of my term you had the choice if you’d like to stay on, because he was going to Germany. I have no time for Germany. So, it came to an end. When I was leaving, the doctor checks you over.

“Now he says ‘I’ve got a little bit of advice for you. You hurt your back when you were here, so I would advise you to claim for it.’

“So, I did. I claimed and eventually I got five shillings a week. It is still going on yet.”

**HL:** “Well, five shillings was worth something back in 1958.”

**WH:** “He was a civilian doctor, you see.

He says, 'You have to get whatever you can. I'll make it sound worse than it really is.'

"Then I went back home and worked at the same firm I had been with. I had worked for them all the time. In Branxton. There was two builders in Branxton and a joiner and a large tailors business. All the farmers got their suits made at Branxton; very good tailors, they were."

**William Hall**



## Sumburgh Airfield

*© John Harper*

The first aircraft to touchdown in Shetland was a charter from the Commercial Bank of Scotland. The plane touched down on the Sumburgh Links on the 9th of April 1933. By this time two airways were considering adding Shetland to their existing operations to Wick and Orkney. The companies were Scottish Airways based in Inverness and Allied Airways based in Aberdeen.

Progress was slow until 1936 when a DF radio beacon was installed and larger aircraft could be acquired. The aircraft chosen was the de Havilland Dragon Rapide. These were twin-engine biplanes made from plywood covered in cloth which was painted with dope to stretch the material and make it airtight. The planes could fly from



Aberdeen to Shetland in 1 1/2 hours. They could accommodate eight passengers. Controls were very basic and the cockpit extremely small.

The inauguration of services was planned for the 3rd of June 1936 by Scottish Airways. However, Allied jumped the gun and appeared on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, claiming to be the first company to operate the Aberdeen to Shetland service. The services were initially run on alternate days by each company. This was increased in stages to four flights daily. While operating from grass strips two teenage boys were employed to keep the strip clear of cattle. They were called 'bull chasers.' After serving in the Royal Navy one of the boys joined Scottish Airways and ultimately became local manager for BEA in Sumburgh.

When war came the grass strips were covered in tarmac. Services continued throughout the war. Some over sea routes were altered and aircraft encouraged to fly over land wherever possible. The Rapides were camouflaged and windows covered over. During the time Allied and Scottish Airways operated Shetland services, no aircraft or passengers were lost. One Rapide was blown off the runway and it ended up amongst parked Spitfires. The Spitfires were unharmed as were the pilot and passengers. The wings of the Rapide had to be replaced

and it returned to service after six weeks. British European Airways (BEA) took over the two airways serving the Highlands and Islands in early 1947. BEA replaced the Rapides with German JU52's. The JU52, a powerful three-engine aircraft, could only carry 14 passengers hence where uneconomical and expensive to run. They were constantly breaking down. Engines were found to have exceeded their maximum permitted flying hours. They were most unpopular. They ultimately got shot of these aircraft at the end of August after crew and passengers arrived at Aberdeen on the point of asphyxiation by carbon monoxide in exhaust gases.

With the introduction of the Dakota DC3

services settled down and continued with the introduction of the Handley Page Herald followed by the four-engine Vickers Viscount. BEA referred to their fleet of Dakotas as Pion-air's and individual planes were named after World War 1 VCs. I remember Albert Ball, James McCudden and William Bishop.

When my years at school came to an end, I was offered a job with BEA as a temporary traffic clerk during the summer. Of course, I accepted! At this time BEA used Dakotas on the Sumburgh service. They were very reliable aircraft with few problems. After four summers this wonderful job came to an end when I qualified as a pharmacist. This was the best job I ever had.

© John Harper

## Suez

© Alan Dumble

The recent trouble in the canal caused by that huge container ship brought to my mind the first time Suez was of any concern to me. This was sixty-five years ago when that fellow Nasser had a go at claiming the canal should become completely under his control.

At the time I was doing my National Service serving in a heavy Ack Ack regiment in the Northwest which would be a strong competitor for being a younger version of 'Dads' Army, should one ever be required. It was a regiment which was used for compassionate postings for the northern areas of England (I'll save the stories for another day).

However, some wit had decided to use the area as a base for pulling together a regiment to face the mighty Nasser.



I suppose that someone had given an order for the troop I was in, to be given a talk on the reasons behind the possibility of being 'called to arms.'

Thus one found oneself and the rest of the troop being lectured to by a lieutenant trying to convince us of the necessity of the forthcoming conflict.

"Now, Bombardier could you give us your views on the matter?"

<p>Taken by surprise and having been sent almost to sleep by his talk, instead of producing complete agreement I pointed out that Nasser, considering how Disraeli and Co had fiddled the acquisition of the Canal rights, then Nasser surely had a right to be heard. As for Anthony Eden and an alliance with Israel there seemed to be a lot of unofficial shady business going on which had not yet been made public.</p>	<p>Consequently, all I could offer was to follow whatever orders our superiors were to give. Hopefully this was enough to save me from the guardroom! Several years later when chatting to an old friend about our army days it sadly turned out that the sole parachutist to lose his life in the Suez farce was a friend of his from his intake group.</p> <p>Nil Desperandum!</p> <p style="text-align: right;">© Alan Dumble</p>
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## A History of the Parish Church

© Michael Wright

I thought members of Berwick Probus might be interested to read a little about the interesting and indeed unique Church in whose Parish Centre (or Hall) we normally meet and to which we hope to return before long.

In no sense is this a substitute for a Guide Book (of which there are many available – see also the Church’s website → <https://berwickparishchurch.co.uk/>) nor is it a treatise on the religious activities of the Church but rather a brief glimpse of the Church’s history and architecture.

There was an 11th century Church on the site of the current Holy Trinity Church (slightly to the south of the present Church where the current churchyard is) and there may have been an even earlier one. Of course, in the 11th century the Church would have been a Roman Catholic Church since it was before the Reformation. This point is significant because, with the Reformation in England and elsewhere in the 16th century, the Church of England was established in its current form with the reigning monarch being the head of the church. The current Holy Trinity Church was consecrated in the 1660s so has always been a Church of England Church. By the 1640s, the old Church was in serious disrepair and the King (Charles 1) gave permission in 1641 to build a new one. Money was raised locally.

Unfortunately, Charles 1 was executed in 1649 so permission was subsequently sought from Oliver Cromwell, the Lord High Protector. As he returned south after victory over the Scots at the Battle of Dunbar in 1650, he visited Berwick and renewed permission to build a new Church. Holy Trinity was one of a small number of Churches approved by Oliver Cromwell and is the only one still being used for regular worship. Being a Puritan, Cromwell believed that churches should not be ornate but essentially a “preaching box”. Therefore the church we see today was very different from when it was built. In particular, over the years there have been many modifications, especially in Victorian times, which have seen the addition of an organ, the Choir and Chancel (in which the High Altar and communion table are located, stained glass windows and pews). The galleries have also been removed except at the back of the Church. Nevertheless, the Church continues to have a large capacity with over 300 people being able

to be seated. It is regularly full at Christmas and Easter and was full to capacity when the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, came to preach at the first Communion Service of the Church's then Curate (trainee priest), Revd John Vilaseca. John spoke to the Club some years ago on the topic of the architecture of Catalonia. He is now Vicar of his "own" Church in Whitley Bay. In recent times, the Vicar of the Church has been an Honorary Member of the Club and spoken at meetings. The Church is also used for concerts by the Berwick Arts Choir and others.

The current Church was built during the 1650s, partly using stone from Berwick Castle. The monarch was restored in England in the person of Charles II and the Church was eventually consecrated in 1660 by the Bishop of Durham (Berwick-Upon-Tweed was then in that Diocese before the Newcastle Diocese was created in the 19th century reflecting the development of Northumberland as an industrial area) but not before a Communion



Table and a baptismal font were added thereby reflecting the restored traditions of the Church of England. Holy Trinity became established as the town's civic church with the Freemen having the right to nominate two church wardens in addition to the two elected by the church itself. That right is no longer exercised but the Church continues to host civic occasions involving the Mayor, Sheriff and Town Councillors. However, many such events are shared with St Andrew's Church of Scotland next door to Holy Trinity, a reflection of Berwick's geographical position. Berwick upon Tweed is unsurprisingly the northernmost Parish of the Church of England but covers the town alongside the parishes of Tweedmouth, Spittal and Scremerston.

Because of its Puritan origins, the Church has no tower and only a single bell which is tolled to announce Services so if a peal of bells is required, they are rung at the Guildhall. Since this is not an architectural treatise, it is not intended to detail the architectural features of the Church but mention should be made of the altar screen added at the turn of the 20th century. It was designed by the well-renowned architect Edwin Lutyens.

One significant earlier Vicar was the father of the World War I poet, Noel Hodgson, whose most well-known poem is "Before Action". It is thought to have been written just before he was killed in action, possibly even the day before There is a memorial tablet in the Church. Until the 1980s, there was a separate parish (largely covering the Greenses and that area) centred on St Mary's Church in Castlegate (now the North Star Centre) but Holy Trinity merged with St Mary's and "our" Church is now properly called the Church of Holy Trinity with St Mary's although commonly referred to simply as Holy Trinity or Berwick Parish Church. There continue to be two Church First Schools in Berwick, Holy Trinity and also St Mary's with the latter particularly serving the northern part of the town.

Around 1990, it was decided to build the current Parish Centre and the Vicarage next door. At more or less the same time, Berwick Parish Church Trust was established with the remit of receiving and distributing funds for maintaining the Church and developing its activities in Berwick. The most significant donor in recent years was a legacy from Frank Lough, a former member of the Berwick Probus Club, and his wife, Pat. The Parish Centre is used by many church and other organisations including the Bridge Club and, of course, the Probus Club of Berwick-upon-Tweed.

© Michael Wright

## Who Said?

"Nothing brings me more happiness than trying to help the most vulnerable people in society. It is a goal and an essential part of my life - a kind of destiny. Whoever is in distress can call on me. I will come running wherever they are."

Born on this day in 1961, **Diana Spencer**



### Princess of Wales

During her life she was a supporter of many charitable causes, notably land-mine clearance, AIDS, and Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital.

On 31 August 1997 she died in a car crash in Paris. Global attention and mourning was extensive, and 2 billion people tuned in to her funeral on 6 September 1997.

**Born:** 1<sup>st</sup> July 1961

**Birthplace:** Sandringham, Norfolk

**Died:** 31<sup>st</sup> August 1997 (aged 36)

**Was this Newsletter worthwhile? Your feedback would be appreciated, along with suggestions and contributions for future editions during the COVID-19 crisis. Contact details on page 1.**