

NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2013

**Colwall
Village
Society**

Revealing Our Heritage

Here is the continuation (and final part) of the article written by David Goodwin's father

THE RUNT by L. T. E. Goodwin

... just nod her head in someone's direction and that child who had bolted was as good as caught and would be returned to the class. This was a good system and I am sure it helped to cement a good relation between teachers and parents, which must have lasted for years. It did in my particular case; long after I left school I returned for a character reference to help me to join the Army. I attended the infants' school between the years of 1913 and 1918, so one can see that it was during a pretty hectic time.



Doctor Smythe and wife with Tom Goodwin in attendance (as mentioned in the July Newsletter)

Old Kaiser Bill was about and doing his worst and we, as young Englishmen and Englishwomen, were doing our best to stop him carrying it out. We took our pennies to school and the more we handed to teacher the higher we could send our Tommies up a ladder and the further Tommy could see over No-man's Land and the safer we would become. I remember the soldier wearing puttees, a steel-helmeted, khaki-clad figure on the ladder, who all the class were trying to send to his destruction. That poor soldier's ankles must have been killing him, the length of time we left him climbing. Those were the days; even we were forced to save daylight by altering the time of going to school by one hour. This I have never been able to see any sense in. We might as well have got up an hour earlier in the first place and left the clocks alone. No matter how you try, you cannot save daylight; it did not get our little soldiers up the ladder any faster.

We merrily sang our times table until we could say the times table without effort. We teased the females in front of us and got played up by the ones sitting behind us. We were each issued with a slate and a slate pencil, which I can remember we clutched in our little hot fists and scratched away at the slate trying to copy the samples which had been set on the blackboard. Some of us got quite good at scratching out a tune between the slate and slate pencil, very much to the annoyance of the one who was in charge of the class. The teachers knew how to stop that of course, simply by breaking a long pencil into a shorter length; they of course knew all the answers. I still remember some of those people who went to school at the same time. Some faces stay in one's memory; others seem to be getting a bit harder to conjure up. Some faces have gone forever; two wars' dead have passed on. May we all have the privilege one day to thank them for the sacrifice they made; I am sure that we shall.

What fun we had in our school days, and how we progressed upwards from one type of game to another, from tops and hoops to tip cat. This game was played with two sticks, one about four inches long and sharpened to a point at both ends. This, when struck sharply with the other, would jump up to allow the person on strike to hit at it. If he or she were lucky, the stick could be hit quite a long way down the road where, placed strategically, were the fielders or catchers, who would return the retrieved short stick to the catcher or lay. Meanwhile the lucky one who had taken strike would be tearing round the piles of clothing cast down to make markers as in the game of rounders. This I think was only played when we could not afford to get a ball; at least it kept ourselves out of mischief. In playing that game usually even the youngest was allowed to take part, if only to bring back the cat if it had been hit a very long way; this of course was the start of the then trade union - all in or all out. We played nine holes dropsy and flicks with our fag cards, hoping to get full sets in a quicker time than was achieved by the family who were old enough to smoke. When we had collected the full sets we raided Mother's work basket to obtain a bit of wool to tie round the precious bundles. This exercise having been satisfactorily completed, all ends were tucked in so as to make it impossible to pick two bundles together accidentally. You could not be too careful if showing your collection to friends; it did not do the ego any good to have a pack accidentally, for the purpose, dropped into the mud or water. Sunday after church would normally be set aside to take stock, re-sorting and replacing torn, creased or even slightly soiled cards for better ones, if it were possible. After this had been done, the little bundles would be re-wrapped and then re-boxed until being produced on another occasion to show off. Those were great times. I can still see in my mind's eye some of those series of cigarette cards we so lovingly collected and saved for many years. There were uniforms of famous regiments, flags and colours of British regiments, British wild flowers and their struggles for existence, English motor cars, methods of travel; the list was endless. We did at times manage to get hold of a 'silky'; this was a design worked in silk. When these came into our possession it was usually a reminder that a war was still taking place.

Our khaki-clad soldiers were still going up and down their ladders and about twice a week were managing to get a look over No-Man's Land. One Sunday morning we got up to find that Colwall Green had been invaded by real soldiers, who put up huge masts and suspended some wire to them. This we were told was a wireless station, so we must have had a wireless station long before it was realised what it was to become. I do not know what regiment the soldiers came from, but I think it must have been the signal regiment, before they became known as The Royal Corps of Signals, sections of which I became acquainted with in later years. Those soldiers did not stay with us for very long, so I take it that this was a case of showing the flag to the natives. This was another reminder that there was a war going on. We as schoolboys could not help in many ways to hurry the war along to its close, so we were set to in whatever way possible, such as picking up fruit which would normally have gone to waste. We helped to gather almost anything that was edible and could be preserved or help to make up a food parcel for our loved ones, who were doing their best at stopping Old Kaiser Bill getting to us. I remember that around the Colwall Green area we had a type of tree that produced a seed pouch which in turn produced a cotton-like sort of material. This we gathered and took to school to help to make dressings for the troops who had the misfortune to get himself (sic) injured.

A local hospital had been started at Brands Lodge which was owned by the Holland family. This had been set up to help the soldiers who were convalescing. We were to get used to seeing these hospital blue-clad soldiers knocking about the village, and also some of the local girls, who were later on in turn knocked about by those who had been knocked about. A soldier's life is sometimes a happy one. We all played a part in making him as happy to fight to save us as was possible. We sent him food to sustain him and smokes to comfort him, picked hops to dye his clothes to make him invisible to the enemy, and still gave all our pennies to keep him going up and down on his little cardboard ladder, to see if there was anything better coming along. If there was anything better, it was a long time in coming. I am afraid the children of my age were not at all interested as much as we might have been. We were too busy getting on with our side of life. We had to run errands in the wood and make ourselves as useful as possible. We took the part that our fathers had done before this war had come along to stop them. The mothers were doing their bit as well. Mother was working in a factory called the Galvo where they were making boxes to put the ammunition in for transportation to the men at the front. Some wages had to be earned and food had to be obtained to feed our growing bodies. Who was to know how long this war was to go on; we little ones might have to go eventually and sort something out. Mules were being brought over from South America, and Colwall became known as a remount depot. A great number of horses were being killed in France, and from these remount depots their losses were being made up. These remounts had to be exercised and trained and put ready to take part in the war. Some of the local lads thought that they were not, in their opinion, being given enough encouragement, because they started to ride them round the field in which they were supposed to be getting a rest. This apparently got to be a weekly exercise until the local policeman, Constable Knight, spotted them and put a stop to their dangerous game. It was as well that I was not old enough to join in the fun, for I always followed in their footsteps in the examples they set before me, so goodness knows what could have happened to yours truly — I might have been killed.



European War - Wounded Soldiers at Brand Lodge Hospital, Near Malvern. March 1915

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We on occasions had a visit paid to us by Dad, who could get home only briefly. He thank goodness did not have to go abroad in the Great War, as it became known. I suppose it was because he had volunteered and besides he had served through the South African war. He was put in charge of a group of German prisoners, who were put to work in helping to grow food on various farms around Salisbury. The horse he had joined ... [unfortunately the rest is missing...]



Night Mail: Wystan Hugh Auden, Benjamin Britten and the Colwall Connection

by Robin Everett

Auden [1907-1973] and Britten [1913-1976] had both been educated at Gresham's School, Holt, Norfolk, but had not been contemporaries. Their first meeting was the result of their both being involved with the renowned GPO Film Unit, led by John Grierson. Britten's diary for 5 July 1935 includes an entry: '*Basil Wright (a director with the Unit) calls for me in his car at 10.0 & takes me down to Colwall near MalvernWe come here to talk over matters for films with Wystan Auden (who is a master at the Downs School here). Auden is the most amazing man, a very brilliant and attractive personality – he was at Farfield, Greshams, but before my time.*' This was the start of a long period of friendship and collaboration and through Auden, Britten, less than two years after graduating from the Royal College of Music, was to meet other creative artists beyond his own field of music. Although he had already had some compositions performed to critical acclaim, he was still very unsure of himself and slightly overawed by those more established in the arts. Auden was connected with a left wing theatre group, the Group Theatre, and Britten was soon engaged to provide incidental music for their productions of plays by Louis MacNeice, Auden, Christopher Isherwood and Stephen Spender. Auden and Britten continued to collaborate during the early war years when they were both domiciled in the USA, notably on Britten's first opera, *Paul Bunyan*. This collaboration was not wholly successful and, when Britten, while still in America in 1941-2, began to think about *Peter Grimes*, Auden was not approached to work on the libretto.

The first completed work which Britten and Auden worked on for the GPO Film Unit was *Coal Face* (1935), directed by Alberto Cavalcanti. Experimental in concept, Britten set Auden's lyric *O lurcher-loving collier*, and in an attempt to fuse sight, sound and narrative, created many ingenious musical 'effects'. Work on *Night Mail* (working title – Travelling Post Office) began in late 1935. Britten's diary for 18 November 1935 reads: "*I start work at GPO Films again today. Work – first at Soho Square at 10.15 & then later at Blackheath on a new film T.P.O. with Cavalcanti and Watt. Night Mail, ultimately directed by Basil Wright and Harry Watt, tells the story of the collecting, sorting and dispatch of mail on the express travelling between London and Scotland.*

Britten worked on the soundtrack during November and December 1935 and, in January 1936, devised a novel setting for Auden's specially composed poem, of which the following is an abridged extract:

*Letters of thanks, letters from banks,
Letters of joy from the girl and boy,
Receipted bills and invitations.....
And applications for situations,
And timid lovers' declarations,.....
Letters with holiday snaps to enlarge in,
Letters with faces scrawled in the margin,.....
Written on paper of every hue,
The pink, the violet, the white and the blue,
The chatty, the catty, the boring, adoring,
The cold and official and the heart's outpouring,
Clever, stupid, short and long,
The typed and the printed and the spelt all wrong.*

Britten's professional collaborations with Auden at this time extended to the setting of a group of Auden's Cabaret Songs, first performed by Hedli Anderson, a singer whose range extended from opera to revue. She later married Louis MacNeice. The Britten Archive holds photographs showing Anderson, William Coldstream (who also worked with the GPO Film Unit) and Britten with Auden in 1937, taken in Colwall – perhaps at The Downs School.

There is one other Britten connection with Colwall. In 1931 a diary entry records the arrival of a new (second hand) Erard grand piano in the Britten household to replace their Kemmler boudoir grand, which was dispatched to Britten's elder brother, Robert. An editor's note informs that at that time Robert was teaching at the Elms School, Colwall.

It may be of interest to some that during the Autumn in Malvern Festival some GPO Unit films featuring Auden's verse and Britten's music (including *Night Mail*) were shown at the Coach House Theatre in September, and there will be a performance of Auden's verse and prose, including Britten's *Cabaret Songs* at The Downs School in October.

Reference

Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed (Eds): *Letters from a Life – Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten. Volume One 1923-39; Volume Two 1939-45.* Faber & Faber, London. 1991.



Edward Elgar

There has been much speculation about the connections between Edward Elgar and Colwall. Elgar's love of the Malvern Hills is well known, but it is believed it was his mother, Ann Elgar, who first suggested that he should write a work set on the hills. 'Caractacus' tells the story of a British chieftain who fought the Roman invaders and was defeated at British Camp. The third scene begins with a woodland interlude which reflects the woods and trees of the Malvern hills area in which Elgar found his inspiration.

The Society is interested in any information that you might have that confirms, or relates to, connections between the Elgar family and Colwall.

Future Talks

27th January 2014:

Gordon Wood: The Building of the Hereford to Worcester Railway.

28th April 2014: AGM

followed by a talk from

Professor Richard (Dick) Bryant:
The Ice Age in Colwall

From the Editor

My thanks to our contributors. Any article on Colwall related subjects (however tenuous!) are always welcome. If you are prepared to receive your newsletters by electronic means, please register with the email address below. Corrections and additions to the information in newsletters are always welcome, as are **CONTRIBUTIONS!**

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