

Northumbrian Language Society

"Keepin Ahada Wor Tung"



Registered Charity No: 515179
Website: www.northumbriana.org.uk



Newsletter 42 - Winter 2002

Society Patrons: Their Graces the Duke and Duchess of Northumberland

Next Event

Friday 15th February at 7.30pm- Gathering Concert in Morpeth Town Hall

Grand Northumbrian Winter Concert of song, story, music and dance, with Alistair Anderson and students from Newcastle University Traditional Music degree course, plus

Peter Athey - the Bard of Felton

Kim & John Bibby - sibling songsters and instrumentalists

Clock Tower Clog Dancers - clivvor clittor-clatter

Raymond Reed - Stakeford Stumor

Anne & Alex Swailes - a smile, a song, and an MC

Tickets (including light refreshments): Adults £6, Concessions £4

From Morpeth Tourist Information Centre, Bridge Street, Morpeth, 01670-511323
or ring Janet Brown on 01670-790465, or Kim Bibby-Wilson on 01670-513308

Gaffor's Grumlins

Theor's nowt much Aa want ti say this time, except Aa hope yu'll aall hev a reet gud reed o wor nyoosletta, cos theor's lots ov intrestin bits an peeces. Thanks tiv aall them folks wot sent wu articles efter th'appeal in the last nyoosletta. An divvent forgit to tek a note o the closin dates fer the Gathrin competishuns, cos theor gettin varry close. Can Canny.

The Gaffor

Master Thomas Tweedy - record star of the 1930s

by Ray Stephenson

Thomas Henry Tweedy was born above the handyshop in Shankhouse (like Nelson and Bassington before it, now engulfed by Cramlington New Town sprawl) on St George's day 1918 and, when just a babe in arms, the family moved to Stepping Stone Yard in Morpeth. Judging by the modest accommodations the family occupied, it is fairly

safe to suggest that they were at that time of limited means. Mother Mary Elizabeth (Lizzie) and father Ernest found employment at St Georges Hospital (mental institution).

Thomas grew up in Morpeth and attended St. James' church, becoming a member of the choir. His greatest influence was John Wyatt organist and music teacher at King Edward VI Grammar School. Kathleen McVey's Grandmother brought up Thomas Tweedy's mother and it was Kathleen's father Albert Limer who took Thomas to many of his early singing venues. Thomas' father Ernest

played flute and piccolo to accompany silent films at a Morpeth picture hall in the old market place (The Playhouse [Coliseum?] – where Iceland is today) before becoming a manager for Deuchars' breweries, and his brother, uncle John Tweedy, was pipe major in the Morpeth Pipe Band (Scottish rather than English bagpipes). So Thomas was certainly from a musical family.

In the year that Thomas became a pupil of King Edward VI Grammar, John Wyatt died. When Thomas' term as choir boy for St. James' ended, he left but continued to perform for the Morpeth Chorale Society. Winifred Barron's husband Normanton Barron played the organ at the Central Hall, Ashington accompanying Thomas Tweedy singing the then extremely popular *O for the wings of a dove* that Ernest Lough, probably the most famous choirboy in the world, had recently popularised. In the early 21st century it may not be apparent to readers that Lough's record was a million seller and so popular in the late 1920s that the HMV factory had six presses set aside for the exclusive manufacture of that disc. (No wonder it appears to be present in almost every pile of old 78s I investigate.)

Rev. Stanley Parker, Normanton Baron and Alf Shepherd (who ran the dance hall) had just prior to this organised the movement of the organ from the Miners' Hall (which became the Regal cinema). Stanley Parker packed the Central Hall every week not only by having local guest celebrities but ones of world fame such as Peter Dawson, Joan Sutherland, Elisabeth Schwartzkopf, Reginald Foort, and Reginald Dixon (of Blackpool Tower organ fame). Mrs Rowe, now 85 years old, of Morpeth remembers Thomas Tweedy singing the boy solo from *Elijah* as part of a Morpeth Chorale Society Concert.

Herby Davidson of Morpeth who was a good friend of Thomas when they were lads told me that Jack Nicholson, who had a gentleman's outfitters shop in Seaton Delaval, arranged for Thomas to appear at the Hippodrome, Newcastle and that it was his first big venue.

By this time the family had moved to a newly built council house on St Mary's field, Morpeth and had grown to include brother Denis and two sisters Kathleen and Margaret Mary. It seems likely that Thomas' appearances at the Hippodrome alerted the interests of a Decca talent scout for Thomas cut two sides in 1932, and a further six the following year for this major record company. For reasons unknown some of the records spelled Thomas'

surname as Tweedie, some labelled him as "boy soprano", others as "treble":-

The Rosary (Nevin)
By an Old Abbey Door (Tower, Leon, Nicholls)
Decca F 3260

Loves Old Sweet Song
Danny Boy
Decca F 3376

Sweetheart Darlin' (Stothart, Kahn)
In the Valley of the Moon (Tobias, Burke)
Decca F3656

On Wings of Song (Mendelssohn)
Hark Hark! the Lark (Schubert)
Decca F3704

At the time of recording, Thomas had an association with Lawrence Wright an accompanist (who wrote songs under a different name [?]) to his wife Betty Warren, a popular music-hall act. When Thomas toured and performed with them he was billed as "The boy with the golden voice". Even at this young age Thomas's ambition was to save his money to train to become a doctor.

Thomas' daughter Carolyn of Sand Hutton near York suggested that later in life her father "Resented grossly that his childhood had been taken away from him." Fame took him away from home, touring the halls and theatres. He even appeared on the Royal Variety Performance. On one of his tours (Kathleen McVey remembers Thomas telling this tale in later life) Thomas was given the sole use of Jack Hylton's Rolls Royce and driver on the express understanding that the driver would at some point take Thomas to see Jack's mother. For those of younger years Jack Hylton was not only a top dance band leader of the day but he was famed for his racehorse ownership.

Before the war Thomas went to University to study medicine and, after the declaration of war, joined the navy. It has been suggested that part of his war work was on Royal Navy vessels escorting North Atlantic convoys to Russia.

When war ended neither Thomas nor his previous audiences had any interest in further performances. Thomas still had a fine voice but marketing vagaries in the 1930s and 1940s were just as fickle as they are today. Little Mary Hagan, Newcastle's answer to Shirley Temple also had a contract with Decca and her records

sold in even greater numbers than Thomas's. When she grew up, she made several records for *Columbia* as plain Mary Hagan but no one was interested in these despite her improved voice and the records are so rare even her family have never been able to locate one.

Money earned from Thomas's short career on the stage was put to good use. He trained (probably at) the Royal Victoria Infirmary (or less likely the General Hospital) in Newcastle as a surgeon and he retired as consultant surgeon for Queen Elizabeth hospital in Gateshead in 1983 after 31 years at the post. Winifred Barron remembers him for a period working at Ashington old hospital. Thomas married the sister of the maternity ward of Ashington hospital and together as a young couple they lived in the Grand Hotel. A school friend of Thomas, Ron Cook of Morpeth, says that Thomas tried to live down his years as boy soprano supreme and that old friends would poke fun at him for many years afterwards with regard to "*O for the wings of a dove*".

Thomas Tweedy died peacefully at home in Gosforth on August 20th 2000 outliving his wife Monica, and his obituary appeared in the *Telegraph*. Thomas's son Denis lives locally in Brunswick, his daughter Carolyn in Sand Hutton, Yorkshire, his sister Kathleen moved to St. Albans from Morpeth recently after her husband passed away, and Margaret Mary, the baby of the family lives in Ulgham.

In addition to being interested in locals who made records (especially those in dialect) the research carried out to complete this article was in response to a research project underway to document long-forgotten boy singers. At least 100 recorded in the early part of last century and almost nothing has been written about them ... was Michael Morley a local lad? If any reader is able to help in any way please phone 01670 817901.

Advance Notice

Saturday 4th May 2002
Society AGM, 7pm & Reed Neet, 8pm
Comrades Club, Morpeth

Subscriptions are due from the 1st of April:-
Adults £5
Joint £6
Concessions £2
(unwaged adults & children)

Obituary: Herbie Davidson 1914-2002

When I told one of my sons that Herbert Davidson had died, his immediate reply was "There goes a Beacon of the Church in Morpeth".

Herbie was a beacon in more senses than one, his imposing height singled him out as one in authority to many a choirboy and many a Sunday school pupil in the '30's, '40's and '50's of the last century.

He was born on the first day of the Great War in August 1914 and spent his early years in Clifton village. His intellectual ability earned him a place at Morpeth Grammar School, to which highly respected institution he walked daily from Clifton.

While at school his musical gifts were encouraged by one of the masters, Mr. John Wyatt, who taught him to sight read using the Tonic Sol-Fa method. On leaving school he became a keen member of St. Mary's choir and also a Sunday school teacher.

He followed his elder brother in to the Boy's Brigade, was a founder member of the Toc-H movement in Morpeth and gave a life-time of service to the YMCA.

Herby and Kathleen were married on "D" Day in 1944, by which time he was working for the Haulage Contractors R.T&J. Hewitt.

For a number of years Herbie served on the Morpeth Town Council as an Independant and also served on the PCC until he became a Diocesan Lay Reader in 1947.

There will be many in the Morpeth Deanery and beyond who will remember the quiet dignity with which he sang Matins and Evensong and his well-thought-out and thought-provoking sermons.

One of his abiding passions was Astronomy and he often managed to work some of the wonders of God's creation into his talks. He had a thirst for knowledge and amassed a small library of reference books from which many a Crossword puzzle was solved in his retirement. He will be sadly missed by his many friends in all walks of life, and not least by Kathleen, Mary and Roy to whom Herbie was a loyal and loving husband and father. May he rest in peace.

Information provided courtesy of Nicholas Wright from "Concord", the Morpeth Anglican Parish magazine

Book Review

by Julia Wood

The Northumbrian Language Society is of course in the business of promoting all authentic literature in "wor tung" but we also, and equally naturally have an interest in related languages and dialects.

For those who share an interest in Cumbrian dialect and its affinities to, and differences from Northumbrian, I would like to commend a book first published in 1992 "Quatered Safe Out Here" by George Macdonald-Fraser (Published by Harper-Collins). This is a memoir of the later campaigns in the war in Burma which the author took part in as a private in the Border Regiment.

Many will be familiar with the author's superb renderings of Glaswegian dialect in the McAuslan books, but he is in fact a Cumbrian born and bred, and his mastery of dialogue is never better displayed than in this book where he deals extensively with the character and distinctive speech of his Cumbrian comrades-in-arms. This book, even without the language interest, is a classic of military autobiography.

One of the interesting points to emerge in his discussions of the various varieties of Cumbrian speech is the fact that the Carlisle and West Coast dialects seem to be closer in some respects to Northumbrian than the more rural eastern areas (eg: Penrith) nearest to us geographically. Has anyone else found this to be the case, or can think of an explanation?

35th Morpeth Northumbrian Gathering, 5th-7th April 2002

Competition Categories

1. Writing Competitions:

Judged in advance - closing dates: adults, Saturday 16 March; children, Saturday 23 March.

2. Dialect:

Northumbrian Verse (Novice & Open); Prose.

3. Standard English:

(in Northumbrian where appropriate): Stage Sketch; Short Story; Essay; Local History Article; 3 Act Play.

4. Children's:

Dialect Verse; Dialect Prose; Short Story; History Project; (Junior, Senior & Group).

5. Composing:

Song Writing; Melody; Composing Excellence.

PS: One of our members, Dick Lowes, a past poetry winner, is looking for a collaborator to set his words to music for an entry to the song composition class. Does anyone out there have the time to help? Please get in touch with Dick at 120 Joan Street, Benwell, Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 8QN.

6. Crafts:

Judged in advance; please bring your entries to the Crafts Exhibition setting-up at the Town Hall on the evening of Thursday 4th April. Crafts include: proggy mats; paintings; photography; needlecrafts; models; ceramics; Easter cracket flowers; dyed eggs; stick dressing, etc, etc. Adult, children and disabled categories.

7. Reciting & Story-Telling:

In St Robert's Church Hall at 1.30pm on Saturday 6th April.

For full rules leaflets, and entry forms,
please send a stamped, addressed
envelope to:-

John Bibby, Competitions Secretary,
Westgate House,
Dogger Bank,
Morpeth,
Northumberland,
NE61 1RE,

or look at the website soon on
www.northumbriana.org.uk