

STONEHOUSE HERITAGE GROUP NEWSLETTER 18

The Stonehouse Home Guard

The Stonehouse Home Guard unit was formed in the summer of 1940 when Nazi Germany invaded the Low Countries and France. Initially this unit was called the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV) irreverently translated as “Look, Dook and Vanish”.

All men were volunteers. First World War veterans assumed officer and Non-commission positions. “Carey”? Anderson, the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages, based in Wellbrae, Stonehouse, became the Commanding Officer.

There were sufficient volunteers to form six platoons. Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO's) with the rank of sergeant took charge of the platoons. Of these I can recall Nathaniel (“Pat”) Thomson, residing in Vicars Road and running a butcher's business in Larkhall, George Gourley of King Street, a painter to trade, Mathew (Matt) Steele a miner and Robert (Bob) Whitelaw who later assumed control as Commanding Officer.



Stonehouse Home Guard around 1940

At first, the Headquarters (HQ) were in the premises of Summers the coal merchants, a large garage next door to the Miner's Welfare.

Later, HQ was transferred to the Stonehouse Violet Football Club hut, with the use of the football pitch and ground around it for training. Incidentally, during the Clydebank raid, the bombing could be heard from the football ground, the glare from the devastation observed clearly and the drone of the enemy bombers heard clearly each night as they returned to Germany.

At first the LDV were dispatched to various strategic points – the “Broo”, the old Cander Bridge, Canderside Toll, etc. – to spend a night on guard duty. Weapons of defence were anything handy like clubs, brush shanks, graips,? etc. (PTO)

STONEHOUSE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

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Secretary: Robert Freal,
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COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETING DATES 2010

Meetings are open to the public and normally scheduled for the third Monday of the Month and are held in the Public Institute Stonehouse starting at 7.30pm. (Members meeting at 7.00pm)

19th April 2010

17th May 2010

21st June 2010

16th August 2010

20th September 2010

20th October 2010

15th November 2010

20th December 2010



Later, as strategies were revised and the significance of the A71 Edinburgh to Ayr road was evaluated, the old Cander Bridge was selected as a defence point to be defended from trenches overlooking the bridge, and also by concrete blocks. Consequently, part of Canderside Farm cottage was used as a guardhouse each night for about 6 – 8 men, two of whom mounted guard on the road for approximately 2 hours each. Duties commenced at dusk in summer, and about 7pm in winter when the men finished work.

About this time, the LDV was renamed the Home Guard, and the men were issued with “Home Guard” identification strips to sew on their uniforms.



Harry Lauder with Home Guard 1942

Within a year of its foundation, the Home Guard was also issued with rifles. The government had managed to acquire from the USA WWI .303 rifles with suitable ammunition, but in limited quantities. Eventually each man was equipped and he kept his rifle at home. As time elapsed, Sten guns, hand grenades, ‘Molotov cocktails’ and other ‘modern’ weapons were issued, mainly to ensure that officers and men became accustomed to handling them without expending too much ammunition. In general these weapons were too scarce for ordinary platoons to stock them.

Training of the men involved; care of equipment, weapon handling, route marching, occasional rifle practice (dependent on availability of live ammunition), map reading and knowledge of six-figure map references.

Route marches were held regularly. The surrounding countryside lent itself to ‘sweep and search’ exercises, e.g. in the forested part of Blackwood estate and in the deep valleys of the Avon and Cander Water. One weekend was spent under canvas at Broon’s Brig, all organised by the Stonehouse Home Guard itself. On another occasion the entire Lanarkshire Home Guard participated in a large scale parade.

Selected Home Guardsmen, who could afford time off work, took part in courses with Regular Army units. While the Durham Light Infantry were based in Hamilton Barracks, I spent some days absorbing their methods and practices, and taking an active part in their manoeuvres. In contrast, Captain James Menzies, who was in charge of the Intelligence Platoon of the Home Guard in Hamilton, spent some time with a Mountain Corps in the Cairngorms.

I was seconded to Captain Menzies unit where my training included Despatch Riding which involved learning to ride a motorcycle over the ruins of an ancient village, acquiring an accurate knowledge of enemy uniforms, badges of rank, weapons, etc. My duties involved bringing up to date the large scale maps of our area, and to train other units in map reading and particularly the use of six figure map references.

As the war began to turn in our favour, after the African Campaign and

Germany’s offensive against the Soviet Union, Home Guard duties around Stonehouse, and elsewhere remote from pressure points such as along the English Channel, were relaxed.

Written by William Anderson (Caledonian Avenue) 24 November 1997

Addendum

The first Commanding Officer, ‘Carey’ Anderson, suffered a disability in that he wore an artificial leg (possibly acquired in WWI). When a lengthy route march was planned, he surmounted any obvious difficulty by borrowing one of ‘Sam’ Reid’s horses.

On one memorable occasion the six platoons of the Stonehouse Home Guard led by their CO mounted on a fine horse made an admirable sight as they departed from The Cross, marched up King Street and Townhead Street, along Strathaven Road and past Stonehouse Hospital. When clear of the hospital, the horse chose its moment to ‘backfire’ loudly and emit an aroma which stung the nostrils of the troops following on. The Sergeant Major was heard to mutter in a loud gasp “Don gas masks”!

William Anderson died at Stonehouse Hospital in September, 2003 aged 84.

Robert (Bob) Hamilton M.M. 4 Newfield was section commander of No 5 Coy, No 22 Platoon as per his Section diary August 1940, which includes the 15 names and addresses of the section, their attendance and shooting scores, Jocky Summers seems to have been the best shot of the competition. Copy of diary pages are in the resource centre.



Home Guard Fund-raising programme signed by Harry Lauder 1942

Website Additions

Stonehouse Heritage Groups website (www.stonehouseheritage.co.uk) is being updated thanks to a successful grant application to the Voluntary Action Fund "Community Chest". Some changes will take place during the Month of March mainly to two information search pages. The pages being amended are as follows



Townhead School Headmasters diary

Group member John Rogers who transcribed the headmasters diary for the Townhead public school from 1904 to 1944 recently finished an earlier diary which now takes the diary from 1881 to 1904. This gives an insight as to what information was recorded on a regular basis within the school. The search fields enable members to search on year, date and any word within the diary extract.

Townhead School Admissions

Currently the website has school admissions records for Townhead School from 1881 to 1891. A recent grant application to the Community Chest fund has been successful and this will allow the group to transcribe the remaining eight school admissions registers located in the resource room. The first book to be transcribed from this funding has now been completed and will be loaded onto the website during March. This new information will allow members to search records from 1881 to 1906. The search pages has also been expanded to include Date of Birth, last School, and reason for leaving.

Work continues on the remaining admissions registers and it is hoped that these will be completed by the end of the year.



Henry Dyer (1848-1918) – the Stonehouse Connection

This piece is to celebrate a Stonehouse connection with one of the great Scottish engineers of the 19th Century. Professor Henry Dyer was instrumental in setting up the Imperial College of Engineering in Japan which led the way for Japan to become a modern industrial nation – and a future militaristic one. There may even be a tenuous case for stating that he contributed in some way to the rise of the Japanese war machine that was to prove so effective in SE Asia and the Pacific between 1941 and 1945.

Henry Dyer was the great grandfather of Hugh Burns on his mother's side. Hugh's father was George Meikle Burns and his mother was Charlotte Murray Dyer.

Henry was born in Bellshill in 1848. His family moved to Glasgow in 1865 where he worked in a foundry and attended Anderson's College in the evenings, going on to become a student at Glasgow University and gaining a degree in Engineering.

In 1872 he was invited to become the first Principal of the newly created Imperial College of Engineering in Tokyo. He spent ten years in Japan before returning to Glasgow. He died, age 70, in 1918.

Although ignored in Britain and forgotten for generations in Japan, Henry Dyer played a critical part in laying the foundations for Japan's spectacular industrial and economic rise in the 20th Century. He was a remarkable engineer who produced two monumental volumes on Japan at the turn of the 20th Century and received the Order of the Rising Sun (3rd Class) from the Emperor, at the time the highest honour to be awarded to a foreigner.

The Mitchell Library in Glasgow and Central Library in Edinburgh were beneficiaries of much documentary and artistic material which are contained in their Henry Dyer Collections.

The Collected Writings of Henry Dyer (in 5 volumes) have been compiled and edited by Nobuhiro Miyoshi of the University of Hiroshima and are available for the sum of £650!!

The origins of Stonehouse Old Folks Welfare Committee

The following article was written by the late Jenny Bunch (Cam'nethan Street) a short time before she died last year. We are grateful to Jenny for this valuable account of the Old Folks Welfare Committee and the interest and support she gave the Heritage Group throughout the year. This article is dedicated to her memory.



“Sixty years ago, in 1948, John Gunn, a garage owner in King Street, and a few pensioner friends decided to form a Pensioner's Group in Stonehouse. He, Mr. and Mrs. Will Melvin from Queen Street and Mr. Finlay (Baker), Trongate, were the Executive.

They sent an invitation to every Club in the village asking for one representative from each Club to attend a meeting to form a Committee to raise funds and hold functions for Stonehouse Pensioners. I think it was called Stonehouse Old Folks' Welfare Committee.

Of the people who attended that first meeting I remember the above-named, plus David Brown, an O.A.P. from Lockhart Street, Marion (Murnie) Aitken, Rena Watt and myself (Jenny Paton). (The others I forget).

Our first job was to take a census of ladies 60 years and over, and men 65 years and over in our allocated districts. My district was The Cross, New Street and Lockhart Street.

At the next meeting we were surprised at the resultant vast numbers. I got a row for not including Mr. and Mrs. John Hawthorn, The Cross. He was still

employed as a gasman and I had called three times without an answer and assumed they were under age because he was still working. Meetings were held in the Lesser Public Hall.

Our next project was to raise funds, so our first venture was a Jumble Sale – loads of Wally dugs!

Then we held a monthly Whist Drive on a Monday night in the upstairs Welfare Hall. We got good turn-outs, tickets were 2/6d, tea with cakes from Mr. Finlay. If we ran out of cakes due to an extra large turn-out Rena Watt and I got the key to the bakery and carried round another board of cakes!

At Christmas we had a function in the Public Hall, caterers providing steak pie teas – Committee serving in very cramped conditions – the hall had no Fire Limit in numbers as it has today. Everyone was welcome.

At summer we had a bus run requiring six or seven buses. For at least two or three years we went to Butlin's at Ayr for the day and had our meal at the Heads of Ayr Hotel at Butlin's.

In each bus there was one Committee member and one Nurse from Stonehouse Hospital and, whisper it, one quarter bottle of brandy in case of a medical emergency. Fortunately, in my time, there were no casualties, and the bottles were then prizes of a free raffle on the way home. On these bus trips everybody looked so smart in their Sunday best – the ladies all wore hats.

At one Committee Meeting a gentleman from Sandford called to see if Sandford could be part of the Stonehouse Pensioners Club. They had been attached to Strathaven but the Strathaven Committee had forgotten to send a bus to Sandford for their outing. Straightaway, he was co-opted on the Committee and Bus No.1 was always allocated to Sandford thereafter.

One year, returning from Ayr, via Muirkirk, one bus broke down in Mauchline – right outside Poosie Nancy's Inn. The ladies walked about the village – it was a lovely evening – the gentlemen retired to the Inn. It was a merry company who occupied the duplicate bus, a sing song all the way home. They all felt they had benefited from the bus break-down.

I heard of another bus breaking down outside a farm and the farmer's wife provided everyone with a cup of tea to while away the time till the bus was fixed. She must have had some amount of crockery!

One year the outing was to Dunfermline, another year 'Doon the Watter'. By this time I had moved away with my work, so I missed the Dunoon trip.

Dr. Gemmell, Minister of St. Ninian's Church, was at the trip 'Doon the Watter'. They travelled from Stonehouse by train that year to Glasgow. There is a video of this outing. (The Heritage Group have a copy of this available).

To raise funds weekly Old Time Dances were also held every Friday in the upstairs Welfare Hall from 8 pm to Midnight. Approximately 80 people enjoyed this weekly hop.

These dances were very popular and well attended also by visitors from surrounding villages and cost only 2/6d for dance, tea and two cakes. This 2/6d covered the band expenses for an accordionist and drummer, the tea and hall let.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Hamilton, Mr. and Mrs. Jimmy Murdoch, Mr. Will Balmer and Mr. John Gunn taught us Sequence Dances and we had the usual Eightsome Reels, Quadrilles, etc. At one time we had learnt about 90 dances. All this was naturally before discos. As a matter of interest, everyone who attended this weekly dance received an invitation to Marion Gunn's Wedding Reception which took the form of a special Old Time Dance.

At Christmas a special late night dance was held in the Public Hall. This gave us the opportunity to wear evening dress – the girls in long dresses and the boys in bow ties and evening suits. We felt really posh after the austerity of the war and following years.

I always preferred the upstairs hall at the Welfare, or Institute as it is now called. There were magnificent fireplaces at either end of this hall and a local artist, Mr. Gibson from Union Street, did murals of marble pillars and between each set of pillars were beautiful paintings depicting various scenes of the River Avon.

Mrs Jenny Bunch