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NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2012

Welcome to our Summer Newsletter, which appears just over halfway through a momentous year for the nation, the City of York, and the Yorkshire Philosophical Society.

As we put together this newsletter, the London Olympics have just ended and the Paralympics are to come, while the Diamond Jubilee celebrations and the Olympic Torch Relay are still fresh in our minds, and York's celebrations of 800 years since the granting of its royal charter have reached a peak with the opening of the Mystery Plays in the Museum Gardens.

The YPS has played its part in these national and local events. No fewer than four Royal signatures have been added to the our Visitors Book, with HM the Queen, The Duke of Edinburgh, Princess Beatrice and more recently the Duke of York spending time in the Museum and Gardens. Our image for York's Grand Science Tour, showing a leap forward in the history of aerodynamics, is attracting admiration on the wall of the Lodge, while our brand new website and email management system (of which more later) mark a modern-day leap into the world of the communications revolution. But it is not for any of these things that 2012 will be long remembered by many in the YPS, but as the year when we lost a fine Honorary Secretary and a true friend.

You should find the following with your Newsletter. If anything is missing, please contact Frances at The Lodge.

- Programme Card 2012-13
- Visit to Nottingham, 10 October
- President's Evening, 24 October
- Trip to Naples, 2013
- Information on new YPS website
- Details of York & East Yorkshire Art Fund Lecture
- Details of BALH & NDLHS Day Conference

Bill Smith (1933-2012) **Honorary Secretary 2001-11**

At a service of thanksgiving for Bill's life on 9th May this year, Alan Owen and Stephen Lusty paid tribute and shared their memories of Bill on behalf of the Society. Contributions follow from other members who also wish to express their appreciation.

It is with deep regret that we report the death of Bill Smith, Secretary of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society since 2001. On his way to retirement in York he played important roles in the development of Further Education in a wide range of institutions and his administrative skills were of great value amid the creation and expansion of Technical Colleges and Tertiary Colleges, notably in Derby and Wales. This is not the place to give a definitive account of Bill's educational contributions to the YPS and others: that will appear in the YPS Annual Report of 2012. However, it is hoped that this short resumé in the Society's Newsletter will give something of the flavour of his impact on the YPS, after he returned to York in the 1980s.

The word Secretary has a number of different meanings varying in the Oxford English Dictionary from “an official of a society who deals with its correspondence and keeps its records” to “the chief assistant of a UK Government Minister or Ambassador”. Bill’s interpretation was somewhere between the two! Coupled to an excellent job on the correspondence and meetings arrangements front he nursed the YPS along the way in a pragmatic but constructive path, for example in gently supporting the YPS taking a regional role in the British Science Association. The greeting of people at the entrance to lectures was to him an important part of the job not specified in the OED and this has undoubtedly helped in keeping the momentum of the Society going in the right direction.

The news of Bill’s serious illness was a shock to us all but the way in which he and Anne responded to adversity was a model that few of us can guarantee to match. The planning of his own funeral arrangements was as well organised as other administrative projects in his life.

We wish Anne and the family all the best in building a new life without Bill.

Jim Matthew

We members of the YPS have just lost not only a hardworking, devoted secretary, but a member who was the very epitome of the friendly academic spirit that makes our Society what it is. He is greatly missed by those who worked closely with him.

When I first learnt of the seriousness of Bill’s illness my mind was in a complete turmoil, but a visit to his hospital bed went a long way in resolving my confused state of mind. How I admired Bill’s calm, stoical, peace of mind. I sincerely hope that in my time I may face the inevitable with even half as much acceptance. Anne, his devoted wife, faced the situation with an overwhelming love; with us it was a case of admiring friendship. We have in Fairfax House, on a very fine stuccoed ceiling the figure of the Greek goddess Amicitia, the Goddess of friendship; the ribbon around the figure states in Latin: true friendship transcends ‘life or death’, ‘winter and summer’, ‘absence and presence’; a true friend is the same in adversity as in the bloom of prosperity.

On the day that Bill telephoned us from his hospital bed and thanked us for the pleasures of our friendship, I was strongly reminded of his very gentle personality and command of words; a learned skill I not only admired, but greatly envied. We both shared a love of poetry, and he was so very proud of his knowledge of Geoffrey Chaucer; indeed he could quote at length in the reconstructed ‘Middle English’ of Chaucer’s day; which impressed me very much. I was able to compare the reconstructed verse language with an old, historic recording, made in 1964, by the acknowledged expert, Professor Nevill Coghill; Bill was word and pronunciation perfect. But I never had any skills with words; hence I struggled, along with Celia, during our last meetings, to find words of comfort or even of interest to Bill. So it is I now turn to poetry to express my thoughts.

Of Heaven or Hell I have no power to sing,
I cannot ease the burden of your fears,
Or make quick-coming death a little thing,
Or bring again the pleasures of past years,
Nor for my words shall ye forget your tears,
Or hope again for aught that I can say,
The idle singer of an empty day.

William Morris

Alan Cochrane

In Memory of Bill

He was a kindly gent,
Heaven sent.
Now he is free,
Full of philosophy.
He had a kindly word,
And an eye for the absurd.

Tony Stanfield

During my years as Clerk Bill has been by far the longest serving Officer of the Society. For a decade most Monday mornings would see him arrive at the Lodge just after 10, sometimes with muffins for our elevenses, often with a bag of seed for his beloved garden birds, and almost always with some piece of news or other about YPS members. Whatever happened, whether illness, academic advancement or a bumper crop of plums, Bill would be one of the first to know.

His secret, and it was his great strength as Secretary, was that he talked to people. Manning the desk outside lectures, meeting visitors to the Lodge, on YPS trips and holidays, and even when coinciding by the supermarket cheese counter Bill took the time to chat to members. It kept him in touch with the views of our membership, enabled him to identify possible volunteers for our activities (many of our present officers and Council members might, if they think hard enough, trace the beginnings of their increased involvement with the Society to a chance remark made to Bill), and gave the YPS an atmosphere of friendly welcome which has helped us to increase our numbers at a time when many other groups have found themselves in decline.

Conversation had its place in our Monday morning sessions too. Once the paperwork was dealt with (and Bill believed that in a Society of our size it should be kept simple and minimal), our discussions could be far-ranging. I picked up hints on how to run a College of further education and how to buy stock for a gift shop, both of which Bill had done in his career. Most of the time we considered YPS activities and future plans, and occasionally his ultimate dream of becoming a "Lit & Phil".

Bill was interested in every aspect of the Society and willing to turn his hand to anything. Few people, seeing the distinguished figure presiding over the agenda at the AGM, would realise that he also packed their newsletters. In my early years, when we lacked volunteers to organise outings, Bill arranged a day trip to Cromford and the world of Richard Arkwright, every bit as successful as Alan Owen's more recent excursions, and his visit to York's flood defences was so popular it had to be repeated. The year we found ourselves without a Treasurer, Bill produced the annual accounts. (By the following year he had recruited a new Treasurer.)

His versatility stemmed from an ability to distinguish the important from the inconsequential, a determination to weigh up the options calmly before reaching a decision, and his delightful sense of humour. When he saw others becoming side-tracked from the main issue or bogged down in detail, his only reaction would be a slightly exasperated "Oh really!" "Oh really!" he said, when I told him that the British Science Association was to change its name and branding for the second time in a couple of years (necessitating changes to YPS paperwork too). "It should be quite simple. It's the British Association for Science, Technology and Engineering," and then, with the merest hint of a twinkle in his eye: "BASTE!"

During a recent severe winter, thawing snow on the roof and a blocked downpipe meant that a minor catastrophe greeted us one Monday morning at the Lodge. Water was raining through cracks in the plasterwork of the ceilings while the stair turret had turned into a cascade. As we dashed frantically about with buckets, unsuccessfully trying to dodge drips, I spotted out of the corner of my eye, an elegant figure calmly disappearing up the stairs to investigate the cause of the problem from beneath the protection of an umbrella. Quietly finding the simple solution that no one else had thought of was typical of Bill, and that is how I will remember him.

Frances Chambers

WEBSITE AND E-MAIL

Message from the Chairman

Means of communicating one with another are changing fast, and even if, like me you are worried about the effects of some of them (e.g. being bumped into in the street by a mobile phone glued to a human being), I think you will agree that it is important that the Society tries to keep up with the latest way of doing things.

I am from the pre-internet generation, and therefore a clumsy internet user ... but I am really excited about the possibilities that are opening up to us with our new website ... and, how easy it is to use the functionality that is already there.

So I invite you to try out the new website, and particularly to sign up to receiving at least some of the YPS news by e-mail. (You will then always be up to date with the latest news about lectures, excursions and social events.)

If you own up to, or are proud of being an “electronic dinosaur”, and do not like the idea, we will, of course respect that, and use our traditional means of hardcopy communications with you – at least for the foreseeable future. But this is your big chance to be kept fully in the picture about the latest news on lectures, excursions and events going on at YPS, Café Scientifique and elsewhere.

I do hope that we can tempt you to try making full use of both the website and the e-mail.

We have enclosed a very simple guide to enable you to “log on” to the system and to choose what you would like to receive by e-mail. And if you need any help we will be only too pleased to explain how it all works – preferably by e-mail, but even on the phone. You can reach Patrick Mason on web@ypsyork.org or you can phone me, Stephen Lusty, on 01904 630275.

At the same time we are very conscious of the Society’s heritage (so well embodied in the preceding tributes to Bill Smith) and of the importance of personal contact between members both in the Lodge environment, as well as in the working groups. We will try to use the new communications vehicles as a tool to supplement and enrich that culture.

Stephen Lusty

An adventure into the past

From 21st century advances in communication we turn our attention to 100 years ago. 2013 will see the centenary of the death of our former President, Dr Tempest Anderson and we propose to follow in his footsteps on a week-long trip to the Bay of Naples, an area he visited many times. Full details are on the enclosed flyer. To register your interest (without obligation) please make sure to return the form before the deadline of October 1st.

YPS Lecture Programme

The lecture programme for 2012-13 contains a wide variety of topics and mini themes: there are interesting biographies on proud and able Yorkshiremen (George Harris, Smithson Tennant and John Snow); a trio of experts analyse different aspects of global medicine and as usual there are significant archaeological and environmental components. In addition there are individual lectures varying from the God particle to dinosaurs (they may be connected!) and unexpected things in Whitby Museum.

I have been in charge of creating the YPS lecture programme for over six years and am passing the task over to Dr Avijit Datta who has excellent connections to attract exciting speakers. I leave you in good hands!

Jim Matthew

Put up a Poster!

The success of our lectures and their popularity depends substantially on our advertising. Next time you go to a lecture or call in at the Lodge, pick up a poster and advertise us in your locality. It keeps up the numbers and keeps down our subscriptions.

One of our regular helpers, John Carey, to whom we are very grateful for his efforts in distributing posters in and around Heworth for many years, has now had to relinquish this task, so we would particularly welcome help in this area.

And our posters have a new look ...

Observant members may have noticed that our two most recent lecture posters had an exciting new look about them. After ten years - and some 218 posters! - Frances felt, unsurprisingly, that she was running out of ideas. We are very grateful that Bob Anderton, YPS member and professional graphic artist, has volunteered to take over this task, and were thrilled to see the first examples of his work.

A date for your diary

Sharp-eyed members will notice that we will once again be departing from the norm and holding a lecture on a Friday evening.

Thanks to Professor John Taylor of York University Senior Common Room, King's Manor, on 26th October 2012 we shall be delighted to welcome Ffion Hague to speak to us about the subject of her recent book on Lloyd George and the women in his life.

We realise that this will be a busy week for members, with a lecture on Tuesday evening (23rd), our President's Dinner on Wednesday evening (24th) and this special lecture on Friday evening (26th) but we are sure you will agree that we couldn't pass up this opportunity.

YAT Bookfair

A reminder that this annual event will be held on Saturday 13th October in the Guildhall. As usual we will have a stand, selling our publications and spreading the word about our activities. Do come along to say Hello and look at the other stalls.

News from other Societies

Those who would like to end the Diamond Jubilee year on a cultural note with a lecture on art or who enjoyed the Day Conference on *Mapping Yorkshire's Past*, organised by PLACE, the Royal Geographical Society and the YPS back in 2003 to launch the *Historical Atlas of North Yorkshire*, may be interested in the information from two of our like-minded societies enclosed with this Newsletter.

We also have news from our friends at **York Bibliographical Society** of their first lecture of the season at 8.00 pm on Wednesday, October 10th 2012 at the York Medical Society lecture room, Stonegate, York (£3 per person payable on the door):

Cataloguing for the National Trust:

Shakespeare, Landscape and the In-Laws

By Stephen W. Massil, Research Librarian for the National Trust and the Gaelic Club