

What are we going to do with the Horse?

Percy Duff was born in 1922 and interviewed in 1996

When I was a boy we lived on Kendal Green near the workhouse for local people but there was also the 'casual ward' for the tramps who were on the road. The 'Casual Ward' used to close at a certain time of night. I don't know what time it was, but a lot of old soldiers who were on the road – and me father had been in the army – and it used to annoy him that they were locked out. He kept a rope so that he could lower them down over the wall so that they could sleep under the shed; that was a better protection than sleeping on the Green. He felt very strongly about it; the treatment of old soldiers.

In those days of course, that was in 1938, everyone got a job. There was no real unemployment if you had been to the Grammar School and I went to the Borough Treasurer's office when I was 16 for a job as a junior clerk. I remember there was eleven of us lined up outside the Committee Room waiting to be interviewed and I think I got the job because I'd been top of the form in maths.

I remember I got a letter saying would I call in and tell them when I could start, and I had been playing rugby at school. So I called in on the way home just in an open-necked shirt and the girls in the office told me afterwards that the Borough Treasurer, W.E.Carter, had said "I don't like the way he came into the office, he wasn't properly dressed."

My first job was in the Town Hall as an office boy and my employer was Mr Alfred Wainwright. Everything had to be absolutely right and he did not like any additions in pencil. All the additions would be done in your head in those days. There were no machines. You never went in to him with anything in pencil. He would say "Have you no faith in your ability to add?"

I remember getting the first calculating machine, which was quite a complicated thing. Mr Wainwright wouldn't have anything to do with it. The initials for our professional organisation were M.T. and A which stood for 'Institute of Municipal Treasurers and Accountants,' Mr Wainwright said "When it becomes the Institute of Mechanical Treasurers and Accountants I'm quitting."

I specialised in housing and used to be responsible for looking after housing. It was a major job. There was all the slum clearance. One family we moved on Fellside were rather dirty and the Public Health Inspector took all the male members of the family to the baths in Allhallows Lane and the District Nurse took the female members and they were all scrubbed and washed.

Mr Camm and I (he used to take me along) we went down White Lion Yard – Yard 44 Stricklandgate [*near where WH Smiths are now.*] There was a common lodging house at the entrance and down the bottom there were several cottages. When we were making arrangements to demolish these cottages, we went along with the keys for the properties the family was moving into – this particular family were going to Kirkbarrow. When we got to this house there were two chaps in the house and they had a horse in the living room with them. And they said to Mr Camm, "Well what are we going to do with the horse?" Well I won't tell you his reply and I don't know what happened to the horse.

Kendal's first market charter was given to the town in 1189 and that was granted by King Richard the Lionheart. At the time he was on a crusade and he was in Rouen and the Baron of Kendal was with him. I think the King was short of money – kings in those days were always short of money – and so the Baron paid a certain amount of money and received, in exchange,

a charter giving the town the right to have a market on Saturday, and we have had a market ever since.

There is an early Charter about 1246, referring to an earlier Charter and granted by the Baron's uncle. This sets out where the citizens could graze their pigs and cattle; where you can get your firewood, where you can get wood for building and where you've got to take your wool and such like ... All this was set out in that original charter.

Moving on to 1575, when we got the charter incorporating the town as a Borough from Queen Elizabeth the First. That charter not only laid down other privileges such as town planning and who would be clerk to the market, but it laid down that we would have two bearers of mace who would precede the mayor on all civic occasions. At that time, it wasn't the mayor but a senior alderman. We didn't have the right to have a mayor until the second charter in 1636. That gave us the right to have a mayor and also a sword-bearer who would precede the mayor on Mayor's Sunday and all similar occasions. Those three gentlemen, clad in Kendal Green, walk in front of the processions. We had a later charter in 1684 from Charles the Second.

The Westmorland Motor Club was founded in 1910 and is one of the oldest motor clubs in the country and has always been fortunate in having, not only old and experienced members but youngsters coming in to the club.

We organise a great variety of events – grass tracks and scrambles, trials but Margaret and I have been responsible for the Barbon Hill Climb since its formation in 1960. We started in 1960 to celebrate the golden jubilee of the club and we started with a hill climb in 1910 so it was appropriate to have the hill climb to celebrate its golden jubilee. It was such a success that it's just gone on and now it covers, well it attracts competitor from all over the country. The original was up Huck's Brow on Shap Fell, when you could use public roads. The machines were belt-driven and no gears, rather different from what you get now. In those days the bikes were classified according to weight and cylinder capacity. In actual fact we used public roads, I think, until about 1925, 1926 when the law was passed forbidding the use of public roads for competitive events. That actually put the club into limbo for about a couple of years. It was still there, but not very active. It was resuscitated by people like Bernard Crabtree and one or two others and eventually got going again and it is very, very active.

I am President of what's called the Northern Centre – that's all the motor cycle clubs in the North of England. My immediate superior, who is President of all Motorcycle clubs is our MP Michael Jopling.

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