



# *It's FAB!*

## *The Newsletter for Friends of Ayr Battalion Issue 82 January 2021*

*Wishing all our readers a Happy and Healthy New Year!!*

What a strange year 2020 has been and I am sure that most of us will be glad to see the back of it. I know that everyone is totally tired of all the restrictions which have been placed on us and are looking forward to the light at the end of what has been a very dark tunnel. Can I take this opportunity on behalf of everyone in the Battalion to reiterate the header above and wish all our readers a Very Happy and Healthy New Year!

### **Battalion Update**

Covid restrictions are continuing to play havoc with both Battalion and Company activities and as mentioned in the last FAB Newsletter to date only two Companies viz. the 8th Ayr (St. James) and the 17th Ayr (Castlehill) have managed to restart and hold face to face meetings. Having been involved in the initial preparation of a Covid Risk Assessment for Kingcase Church in Prestwick and seen the myriad of obstacles placed in front of churches by the Church of Scotland and our national government it is a surprise that even two Companies can manage to operate. Perhaps some guidance and leadership could be shown by our local Presbytery to learn from the steps taken by the Companies who are managing to operate and encourage other churches to look at opening up some of their activities. We seem to be lacking in leaders like our Founder Sir William Smith who saw the problems facing youth in his generation and tackled the problems face on to establish the Brigade as we know it. Whilst the vaccines which are coming on stream now will give a bit of respite in the present pandemic it is possible that Covid could be with us for some years to come and we may have to learn to live with it. A question for our national leaders in the Brigade at this time must, therefore, be this:- If a Company is unable to hold meetings and operate is its membership zero and as a result should it not be liable to pay any membership levy in the form of annual capitation levy? I would be interested to hear if anyone is prepared to back up our leaders in the Brigade and even those in the Church of Scotland who appear to think that our local churches have a money tree in their back garden which can continue to supply funds when none or very little are coming in. I can only hope that my in box might be overwhelmed in the coming weeks as I receive a barrage of replies.

Given that the Battalion's 134th Annual General Meeting which should have been held in June had to be cancelled by the Covid restrictions which were in place the Executive agreed to hold a Zoom AGM on Wednesday 25th November at 7.30pm. Given that I am currently working remotely from Stonehaven this gave me the chance to join with fellow officers and leaders to attend this Zoom meeting. It was pleasing to see that Helen Moonie, the South Ayrshire Provost and one of the Battalion's Honorary Vice Presidents, had taken the time from her official duties to attend the meeting. It was also gratifying to hear from those attending that given all the restrictions which are in place everyone was upbeat about the challenges facing them in restarting their Companies. If ever there was one thing that sets apart BB Officers from other people it is that they are always prepared to rise to the difficulties placed before them. Sadly at the start of the meeting the President had to advise of the death of a number of stalwarts of the Battalion and I felt it appropriate to detail them in this newsletter.

### **Edith White**

Edith White, an officer in the 7th Ayr Junior Section, died at the beginning of November. When I started my career as an Officer in the Brigade some 57 years ago it was as a Leader in the 11th Ayr (Monkton and Prestwick) Life Boy Team. Those of you who are as old as I am will remember that the Life Boys had their own structure and weren't part of Ayr Battalion proper but of Ayr Area of the

Life Boys. It was at some of these Area Meetings that I first met Edith and her long-time friend the late Grace Heron who, like Edith, was an Honorary Officer in the Battalion. Their dedication to the work of the 7th Ayr and the Ayr Area very quickly became apparent to me and helped start me on a career in the Brigade which I have yet to retire from.

### **Norman Thorrat**

Norman Thorrat, a past Captain of the 10th Ayr (United Free) Company and a past Battalion President, died at the beginning of October. He was a staunch supporter of the Battalion and my personal memories of him are in the period of the Battalion's Centenary when he was Battalion President. Along with Ronnie McCreath, my assistant for the day, we videoed the Battalion Centenary Scroll Run all the way from Girvan back to Ayr via Maybole, Patna, Coylton, Tarbolton, Troon, Prestwick and Ayr North before arriving at Wellington Square for the final Parade back to Headquarters in Limekiln Road. Norman and his assistant, Archie Monkhouse, enjoyed the comfort of a new Audi Quattro which had been supplied by Alex Ingram! That was followed the next day by what in my memory must be the largest Battalion Church Parade in my time. The Battalion marched from Wellington Square to the Auld Kirk where among the invited guests was the then Brigade President Lord Thurso. Two special days in the history of the Battalion and never to be forgotten.

### **Christine Jakeman**

Most of us will remember Christine's late husband Peter who served the Battalion well as an officer in the 1st Alloway Company and also as Battalion Treasurer. When Peter died some years ago Christine presented the Battalion with a new trophy in his memory. Council agreed that this was to be used for the Swimming Gala and I was fortunate in being President at that time and present at the Gala when she presented the cup for the first time. She was a lovely lady and when asked if she would like to present the other trophies that night was happy to oblige.

The business of the AGM was then swiftly gone through with the Treasurer reporting that the Battalion's finances were not a cause for concern at the present time. Although Battalion Supplies contributed a negative figure to the balance sheet stock levels are good and will stand the depot in good stead once Companies are able to operate again. Since the 2020 AGM and Church Parade could not take place due to the Covid restrictions it is difficult to plan for any events in 2021. The 1st Troon Company was asked if they were prepared to host the AGM and Battalion Church Parade in 2022. This they readily agreed to do.

### **Down Memory Lane:**

After printing a photograph of the floral display at Ayr sea front for the Brigade's Centenary I received the following notes from Ian Queen, Captain of the 17th Ayr (Castlehill) Company.

The gardener on the left is a Mr Colin Blair, a well-known character in the town. He was a deaf mute who plied his trade mainly around the town centre for his entire working life. His son also Colin Blair, gained his Queen's Badge with the 17th Ayr in 1976 alongside myself, Billy Otterson, son of the Company's Founding Captain and Graeme Bloomer, son of the then Captain Jim Bloomer. As part of the Company's 60th Birthday celebrations this quartet recreated the picture which was in the Ayrshire Post in 1976 as it was the first time that the four of them had been together in Castlehill Church Halls since they were Boys. Billy now lives in Nottingham and Graeme in Chelmsford. Colin Blair and I went on to become each other's Best Man and remain best friends.



**The Boys in 1976 after gaining their Queen's Badges**



**The same group in 2019 with present Company Captain Ian Queen on the extreme right.**



Also in the last issue I included a picture of the Clansman Public Bar in Stonehaven and I was delighted to receive a reply from Tom Hogg, the owner of that establishment, who advised me that he was brought up in Girvan and even worked at Monktonhill Farm in Troon at one point. It just goes to show that Ayrshire people can turn up just about anywhere you go!

### **The Death of The Boys' Brigade Heritage Society**

As many of you will be aware the 2nd Prestwick Company was a member of the BB Heritage Society since its formation from the BB Collectors Club some years ago. Up until last year the Company actually funded two memberships one for itself and one for the Smith Memorial Museum in Thurso. At that point the Company membership was allowed to lapse and the museum membership continued. In December the Management Committee of the Society submitted a proposal that the Boys' Brigade Archive Trust should form a Members Association and that if this was agreed then the Society would cease to operate. A questionnaire was sent out to members and 36 replies received (no details of the percentage of the membership that this involved was given). Of the 36 replies 35 were in favour of the change and as result this change will now take place and the Boys' Brigade Archive Trust Members Association will be formed. One cause for concern about all of this is in a statement issued to Society members which states "**The Brigade Archive Trust is responsible for the management and preservation of the Brigade Archive which is held in different locations throughout the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.**" To my knowledge there are two archive centres open to the public in the UK viz. the Smith Memorial Museum in Thurso and the Belfast Battalion Heritage Centre in the Ards Peninsula in Northern Ireland. In addition to them Glasgow Battalion hold numerous BB artefacts which are held in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow and periodically put on public display. The BB Archive Trust have taken no responsibility for any of these locations in the past but now appear to be trying to detail what archive material Battalions and Companies currently hold. I would like to take this opportunity to advise readers that following a conversation with the 1st Thurso Company Captain I can confirm that the archive material held in the Thurso museum will be staying there and not be moving to Hemel Hempstead at any point in the future. The main reason for the 2nd Prestwick Company Archive being moved to the Thurso museum was to allow greater

numbers of the public to see the artefacts which were held and both the Company and Ayr Battalion have received many positive comments about the displays which have been constructed. Rather than trying to take control of material currently held safely by Battalions and Companies perhaps the BB Archive Trust could expend some of its energy into trying to get some of the material currently held in private hands back into the Brigade. Rant now over!!

### **Thought for the Day:**

Given the present situation with the pandemic and the fact that we are unable to meet friends and family in the way that we would like I was reminded of a verse which I received from a dear friend some time ago and I thought that it should be included here as my thought for the day.

#### ***What is Friendship***

*It's someone to walk with,  
Someone to talk with  
Someone to laugh with too;  
It's someone to sigh with,  
Someone to cry with,  
Someone who cares when you are blue;  
It's someone to sing with, (though not in church at the moment!)  
Welcome in spring with.  
Walk through the leaves with in fall;  
It's someone to dream with,  
Sit by a stream with -  
Doing nothing at all;  
It's someone to share with -  
Every small care with  
And all the bigger ones too;  
It's sharing together  
In all kinds of weather  
Whatever the days bring to you.*

When I received this verse I thought how lucky I am that I have friends who are with me through life's journey giving help and support when needed. I hope that these words will remind you of a special friend and make you realise how lucky we all are to have so many friends especially within this wonderful movement of ours.

I am always looking out for pictures or stories about Company events and if you have any material available please pass it to me at the E Mail address below. Thanks.

Your points of contact for all the information you would like to see included in, or deleted from this newsletter or any comments about it are as follows:

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