

Factsheet

Looking Back...



NUMBER 16: THE CLB FOUNDER - WALTER MALLOCK GEE



Birth

On the 3rd March 1845 at the Marldon, Devon home of Rev. Robert Gee, Vicar of Paignton with Marldon and his wife Jane, their third son was born. It is likely that the new baby boy did not exhibit the best of health because his father decided to baptise him at home on the following day. Robert and Jane already had three children, a girl, Althea, and two boys; eight - year old Robert William, and five year old John. The new arrival was christened Walter Mallock by his father. 'Mallock' being his mother's maiden name, she being from a very well known land-owning family who lived at Cockington House (now called Cockington Court.) Robert, a Yorkshire Man from Hull, had previously been Vicar of Tormohun with Cockington. We know that Walter was born in Marldon because in June 1896 the Parish magazine refers to a CLB company being formed there and in a letter to a Mr Scragg who was connected with it Gee had written 'I will always take a great interest in the Marldon Detachment, as Marldon was my birthplace'. The exact location of the Marldon home is not known, but it could well have been a farm called Stantor Barton owned by the Mallock family.

Youth

Sometime after 1845 and certainly prior to the census of 1851, the family moved to the large and well appointed 'Stearfield House' in Paignton a residence worthy of the Rev. Gee's status as Vicar. Although it was probably only a wing of the house and Gee was a tenant not owner. A footman and three domestic ser-

vants lived - in. In 1851 the household consisted of Rev. Robert Gee aged 65, Jane aged 51, 'Robert William' (who was later known as William to avoid confusion with his father) aged 14, John aged 11 and Walter aged 6. All the boys were described as 'Scholar at home' on the census return. Walter, more than forty years later in 1895, whilst he was the principal guest of the Paignton CLB Company for the presentation of Colours by the wife of the then Vicar of Paignton Dr J. T. Trelawny-Ross, described Stearfield as the 'old home where my youth was spent'. The Company Fife and Drum Band marched on to the Green that day and Gee added that it was 'almost under the shadow' of his former home. Now called the 'Palace Hotel' it overlooks Paignton Green where, in 1993, another Brigade Band, the CLCGB National Band, performed...many taking part being totally unaware of the local CLB connection!

Family

By 1861, Walter's brother William R. Gee, now 24, was serving in the Gloucestershire Regiment as a Lieutenant and both John and Walter had left home. Walter's father had died that same year aged 75. His mother Jane lived to be 85 and died in 1884. Her eldest son William, Walter's brother, died within months of his mother, aged only 48. John Gee died in 1889 he too being only 49 years of age. It seems likely that both brothers lived in the Middlesex and Buckinghamshire area. It is quite evident, however that the baby who it was thought may not live more than a few days lived longer than both of his siblings. In 1867, now aged 22 and living at St Peter's Chester Square, London he married Miss Fanny Daniel who was three years his senior. Fanny was from Ashby de la Zouch in Leicestershire, and the wedding took place at Holy Trinity Church in Ashby on 25th March. Sadly Fanny died leaving Walter with no children.

Businessman

On 17th July 1873 Walter, who was living at 86, Mansfield Road, Iver Heath, Bucks, re-married. His new wife was Elizabeth Mary Gertrude Hilton of Uxbridge, Middlesex. Born in Blackdown, Dorset, Elizabeth was a niece of Rev. Arthur Denne Hilton, Vicar of St. John's Uxbridge Moor and she lived at the Vicarage with her father Rev. John Denne Hilton. Their first child, Collingwood W. Gee was born in 1874 at Halstead, Kent, presumably where Gee was living at the time. Two years later a second son, Hilton was born, also at Halstead. Walter was officially termed 'Esquire' as his occupation, on his marriage certificate, although contemporary census returns describe him as 'Wine Merchant'. Evidently the wine business was a family concern involving brother John. We can presume that it was John Gee's health and premature death which may have contributed to, if not caused, Walter's seemingly sudden departure both from the Wine business and from Surrey. More of his life after Paignton is revealed in the 1881 census returns. In 1878 the family moved to 'The





Factsheet 16 continued:

Woodlands', a large house, set in its own grounds next door to the 'Four Horseshoes' Pub in Frimley Road, Frimley, Surrey now part of Camberley. It was here that their first daughter, Nora was born. The following year another daughter, Bertha was added to the family with another son, Herbert R. H. following in 1880. Gee's mother, Jane was living in the family home at The Woodlands along with six servants including a groom. More children followed, Dorothy in 1881-2, Kathleen Hilton 1883, Bridget Hilton 1884. Walter had become a successful businessman and his occupation as Wine Merchant was remarkable considering the direction his life would take over the next few years. However, by 1888, the Gees had moved to 22 Edith Villas, West Kensington, now W14. The family continued to grow with Monica Hilton being born in 1888, Rodney Hilton 1889, and Ethne Hilton 1891.

The Volunteer

Reference is made in the official 'Brigade List' of Walter Gee being (late Captain 1st V. B. Berkshire Regiment) and we can assume that this was sometime in the 1870s whilst he was living at Iver Heath. At present no details are available. The 1911, 21st Anniversary Souvenir Book, describes him as an 'Old Volunteer'.

Churchman and Brigade Pioneer

Sometime between 1884 and 1888 Walter Gee took up a position as Secretary to the Junior Division of the Church of England Temperance Society, based at Church House Westminster. This was a complete change considering his former occupation as a wine merchant. The rest of the story is quite well known, having been introduced to The Boys' Brigade, and with the assistance of the C. E. T. S. he went on to form the St Andrew's Lads' Brigade at St. Andrew's Church, Fulham. This company becoming known as the 'Pioneer' company of the Church Lads' Brigade. He had formed the Church Lads' Brigade to be wholly part of the Anglican Church rather than Interdenominational like the Boys' Brigade. For the whole of January 1892 the Headquarters of the CLB was the Dressing Room at Edith Villas. It was the start of February before the Brigade could move back to Church House into a third-floor back-room.

CLB Colonel and Chief Staff Officer

Mr Gee, Colonel (CLB) from 1893, was a creature of habit. Every morning he would attend the Eucharist at St. Cuthbert's Philbeach Gardens S.W. The CLB became his whole life, It was said of him: 'He is a red-hot enthusiast. He eats, drinks, sleeps and talks CLB. It is his great passion in life.' To all who knew him he exhibited a magnetic personality with a transparent faith. He had a heart full of love, in fact he was described as 'the most lovable of men' which conquered all of the problems facing the organisation. He was seemingly tireless in his enthusiasm, for instance visiting Canada and Newfoundland and spending three months crossing the Dominion and along the way forming 'Old Comrades Lodges'. Absolute unselfishness was the very keynote of his life. He had a self-effacing attitude and deeply hated publicity and advertisement. Only while he was away in Canada in 1912 did a photograph of him appear in 'The Brigade' his devotion being equalled only by his modesty. It was also said that: 'He never tired, he never grew stale; he never ceased to be a lad at heart.'

The 'Colonist'

His later home was 12, The Orchard, Bedford Park, now W4. Bedford Park was something of an experiment in living styles, the first 'Garden Suburb' a brand-new self-contained middle-class 'community' adjoining the Turnham Green Station of the Metropolitan Railway. It was architecturally and socially unified containing houses more or less in the Queen Anne Revival style, many by leading 'Arts and Crafts' exponents such as Norman Shaw and Charles Voysey. Its residents were often described as 'Colonists' many were artistic types who looked upon it as a mini utopia.

With his maker

He died at his house on 23rd December 1916 after a short illness. The Funeral took place on 29th December. The first part of the burial service was held at St. Cuthbert's Philbeach Gardens among those present, other than family members, being the Revd. Lord Victor Seymour, Brigadier General John Craigie, The Bishop of Barking and Mr Adrian Pollock. This was followed by an Interment at the family grave at Hillingdon Cemetery, Uxbridge. The cortege was escorted by a party of the 109th Reserve Battalion (late 19th) King's Royal Rifle Corps, formerly members of the Church Lads' Brigade. At the Cemetery the body was borne through a guard of troops with reversed rifles, by six Sergeants of the original 16th K.R.R.s who were trained at Denham. The Rev. Edgar Rogers read the committal prayers, and afterwards three volleys were fired over the open grave, followed by the sounding of the clear notes of the 'Last Post'. In 'The Brigade' of February 1917 Field-Marshal Lord Methuen, late Governor and Commandant of the CLB, stated 'No man has done more for the youth of England than Mr Gee...'

In Memorium

A memorial service was held on 27th January 1917 at Southwark Cathedral, the sermon being delivered by Rev. Edgar Rogers, Brigade Secretary.

On the 80th Anniversary, in 1971, as part of a Brigade Festival Day in Fulham, a memorial plaque at St. Andrew's Church was unveiled by the Governor and Commandant, Air Chief Marshal Sir Augustus Walker. It reads:

'To the memory of Walter Mallock Gee who founded The Church Lads' Brigade for Love of his Master Christ. 11th November 1891. Monumentum Aere Perennius.'

