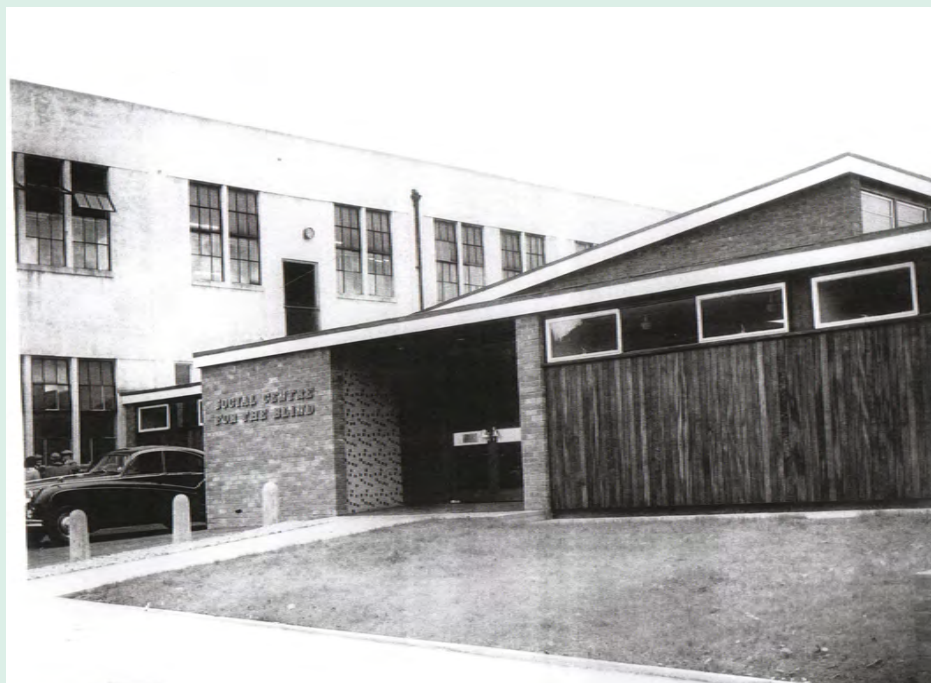


Teesside & District Society for the Blind



CLEVELAND, DURHAM AND NORTH YORKSHIRE INSTITUTE FOR THE BLIND

Revival after the war. The Institute's Social Club, which was run by its own Sub-Committee, was closed on 18 July 1940 because of wartime restrictions. It only met on Thursday nights and the blackout that was introduced during the war made it too dangerous for blind people to travel there during the evenings - even though most blind people lived in a permanent blackout.

It reopened on 8 June 1944 when blackout restrictions were lifted. The inaugural meeting was attended by 52 blind people, 5 works representatives, 2 teachers, the Secretary and Chairman. It was decided not to fully reopen the Social Club but to have "Social Evening Gatherings" on Thursday evenings. No refreshments were to be provided.

In May 1945 the League of the Blind wrote to request a full reopening of the Social Club to what it used to be before hostilities commenced. This was agreed and the Social Club fully reopened in June 1945.

Activities after the war. The Social Club met on Thursday evenings in the dining room of the workshops in Newport Road. The evening was changed to Tuesday because Thursday clashed with Middlesbrough Speedway, which attracted large crowds on Thursdays.

Activities included dominos, cards, trips out and concert parties. The Albert Club, also in Newport Road, often provided the opposition for dominos and in September 1945 provided a concert party. Attendances varied but at one concert party 230 people were present. Concert parties were also provided by “The Orpheans” and Synthonia Male Voice Choir.



Ideas were sought for new activities. Dances were arranged but were not well attended. The pianist cost the club 5 shillings for each dance. New games were purchased including draughts, lexicon and bagatelle, and it was proposed to hold whist drives.

The Piano. When the first concert party was held after the war it was discovered that the piano had been damaged and was in need of urgent repair. No entertainments could be held without the piano. A letter was sent to the Institute's Welfare Committee for permission to use another piano that was in the building and for funds to repair their own broken piano.

The Institute's main Management Committee now got involved. They investigated the situation and came to the conclusion that, sometime during the war years, the piano had been deliberately and wilfully damaged by a person who knew something about pianos. All of the damage was on the inside. The culprit was never found.

The cost of the repair was estimated at £25-£30. It was agreed that the repair should be done on condition that the piano was always

kept locked when not in use.

Independence for the Social Club? The Social Club had their own active sub-committee appointed by the Institute's Management Committee. This sub-committee wanted to do a lot more and raise their own funds but this led to a serious conflict with the Institute.

This came to a head when the Social Club authorised expenditure amounting to £18 for the Christmas party in 1947. This included fees for artistes and a microphone. The Institute were appalled at this independent action, especially when they had already authorised expenditure of £7 10s for refreshments for the party. "It was a very foolish policy to engage artistes" was recorded in the minutes.

The Social Club regarded this as a matter of censure and demanded that a deputation attend the next meeting of the Institute to argue for the right to raise and spend their own money.

The Institute took very firm action. They were responsible to the Charity Commission for the way public money was spent. The Charity

Commission would not allow two organisations to exist in the same area. There would have to be a “readjustment of officers” if the Social Club did not do as they were told. They could not be allowed to raise their own funds.

It was agreed that the deputation would be received but they did not turn up claiming that the letter of invitation had not been received. Resignations followed but the Social Club continued as before except that every item of proposed expenditure and every suggestion for fundraising had to be to the Institute for Consideration.

The Institute 1 the Labour Government 0.

Immediately after the war the Institute wrote to the new Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Labour Government to ask him to consider making an exemption for purchase tax on wireless sets for the blind. Three months later a reply was received to say that it was not possible to make such an exception.

The Institute refused to accept this decision and wrote to 13 MPs in the area to inform them of the unfairness of the decision and to ask them to raise the issue in Parliament.

The issue was brought up in the House of Commons and the Chancellor of the Exchequer was impressed by the arguments. He agreed to insert a clause in the Finance Bill to waive tax on wirelesses for the blind.

This was not the end of the storey. The National Institute for the Blind apparently claimed the credit for this concession on purchase tax and made no mention of the part played by the Institute. A very strong letter was sent to the National Institute for the Blind who gave full credit and glowing praise to the Institute in their "New Beacon" magazine in February 1946.

Music while you work - and football? During the war employees in the workshops had been allowed to listen to the wireless programme "Music While You Work". This practice continued after the war and was much appreciated by the employees.

In 1947 Arsenal had arranged to play Russian Dynamos in a football match that had captured the imagination of the whole country. The employees asked for permission to be able to listen to the football match while they worked.

(This would be played in the afternoon - there were no floodlights in those days). For good measure they also asked to be allowed to listen to the Grand National, the Derby and the other classics.

A heated debate followed within the main committee of the Institute before it was decided by a majority vote not to allow the employees to listen to either football or horse racing. It was argued that it would prove to be too much of a distraction and result in poor quality work. The only concession was that all workers would be allowed to listen to any broadcasts made by His Majesty the King but only if all worked stopped for the duration of the broadcast.

Artificial eyes are not necessary. The Institute took up the case of a Durham man who had had both of his eyes removed. The Health Authority concerned had refused to provide him with artificial eyes, as it was not their policy to do so. They did not consider that artificial eyes were at all necessary.

Unfortunately the records do not show what happened in this case.

Anyone for tea? A member of the kitchen staff was disciplined for taking cups of tea to the workers when it was their tea break. The workers had to go and queue outside the kitchen door for their tea. Unfortunately there were not enough cups to go round and those at the back of the queue had to wait until the cups being used by those at the front had been washed.

All supervisors had their tea taken to them at their place of work but as was explained to Committee members, supervisors had “certain privileges” and it would be wrong for ordinary workers to expect the same treatment.

However common sense prevailed and the last reference of this matter was that all workers could have their tea at their place of work and a system should be devised to make this Possible.

Self-employed firewood seller. The Institute were able to make grants to individuals if they felt that the need was genuine and urgent. Most of these grants were for clothing or household goods and it was unusual for them to be asked for a grant to enable a blind man to

set up his own business.

A blind man from Guisborough asked for a grant of £25 or £50 to enable him to set up a firewood business. This would make him a home worker. The Institute though that this request was “a bit shady” and asked for a full investigation to be made.

After a visit his request was rejected. Apparently his horse and cart were in excellent condition but the building he intended to use was dilapidated and not fit for use.

Equal rights for women? There are several examples in the years immediately after the war of women who had been employed for some time in the workshops and had decided to get married.

Such women had no automatic right to retain their jobs. Applications had to be made to the Institute for them to be kept on in employment. In all cases recorded in the Institute’s minutes all such applications were approved but only for a temporary period of three months. There is no record of what happened at the end of the

three-month extension.

Long service. A lady called Hilda Read died on 6 March 1946. She had been employed in the Knitting Department in the workshops since 1911.

Social club attendance. In the late 1940s it had been noticed that very few of the workers attended the social evenings. The workers had pressed for it to be reopened after the war but seemed to have little interest in supporting it.

A survey was done and the view was that it was not easy to attend in the evenings if you lived out of town. It was felt that the “unemployable blind” found the social evenings a welcome break after their boring days at home. The fact that the only regular activity was dominos did not help because dominos was usually played during the lunch hour at work.

Practical joke. The minutes of the Institute described a serious incident as a practical joke. Burning paper was placed against the feet of a certain employee. Because all those involved

were blind the wrong person was burned and not the intended victim.

The incident was fully investigated and it was believed to be a practical joke that went wrong. Warnings were issued but no further action taken.

Appointment of Treasurer for the Social club.
The main committee of the Institute decided that the Social Club should have a Treasurer and made the necessary appointment.

Unfortunately they did not consult the Social Club sub-committee and the appointment resulted in the immediate resignation of their Secretary who was extremely offended. He had always looked after the money and regarded what he considered to be an unnecessary appointment as a personal insult.

It was not as if there was a lot of money involved. The Social Club's cash balance at that time was £8/4/3d. It would appear that the Treasurer was appointed following the Institute's concern over the Social Club's fundraising ambitions.

Merry Christmas. It was the Institute's policy to make a Christmas gift of five shillings to every blind person on the register. This policy was continued after the war. The necessary funds were raised by means of public subscription.

In 1946 the register was 1213 blind people and the amount collected was £309/3/11d. This ensured that everybody had a merry and prosperous Christmas.

March 25th 1955

Trade and Workshops Report

1 Brush Dept

Full time employment during the whole of the month. 50doz Bahia Brooms have been completed on behalf of Newcastle Institute and despatched to British Railways. Several good orders for gross lots have been received from Messrs Dorman Long and Co. Ltd. Stocks have been slightly increased during this month. It is estimated this month's sales will be in the region of £1,300 from this department.

2 Basket Dept

Full time employment during the whole of this month on day to day orders. It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain full time employment. Several Basket Work Strainers from I.C.I. 20 Hampers from Hollingdrake and Clegg of Skelton Trading Estate and waste paper baskets from Middlesbrough Education Committee have eased the situation in this dept. Stocks have increased this month.

3 Mat Dept

Full time employment during the whole of this month on day to day orders. Stocks have reduced during the month. One weeks work on hand.

4 Knitting Dept

Full time employment during the whole of month on day to day orders. Orders are required for flat machines. Four weeks work on hand for the round machines.

5 Wire Dept

Temporarily closed

May 25th 1956

Wire Dept

The Chairman reported he had written to Mr. H.E.I. Turner of Messers J.T. Thompson and Sons Ltd. Scrap Merchants of Stockton on Tees asking if they could supply 3 steel plates for use with new machinery in the wire dept. This request had been dealt with immediately and the steel plates were delivered within 2 days of receipt of our letter together with an invoice marked Not Charged. It was recommended that a letter expressing the appreciation of the Board for his kind and generous action be despatched as soon as possible. Approved.

November 30th 1956

J Myres retired from the Basket Dept. and was now receiving his pension of 10s. per week from the welfare funds. A retirement grant of £ to this man has been approved by the Finance and Staff sub committee.

Committee Reports

March 25th 1955

Thomas Hewitt,

3, Arthur Street, Middlesbrough

The Secretary-Superintendent had visited the above named with Mr. Bradshaw (Regional

Supervisor) and found Mr.Hewitt living in very poor conditions. He had no towels with which to wash himself and the Secretary-Superintendent purchased 2 towels at a cost of 4s 4d for this man. The Committee approved the action of the Secretary-Superintendent.

Holiday

The Committee approved of the Scheme to send 12 blind people for 2 weeks holiday each year, 4 from each area.



Blind Register Figures for June 24th 1955

| | |
|----------|-------|
| D.C.C. | 567 |
| N.R.C.C. | 387 |
| M.C.B.C. | 293 |
| Total | 1,247 |

Home Visitor/Teacher requests throughout the 1950's included requests for money for new frames for glasses, denture repairs, fur lined boots, wallpaper, Braille watches, blankets, a raincoat and holidays after illness. Most requests were granted if the person had saved some money towards the item themselves and the committee deemed it necessary. However..

25th May 1956

Charles Belward - application for grant towards the cost of a suit £8.10s.0d. Mr Belward had borrowed £5 in order to make this purchase. It was also reported the Mr Belward is 86 years of age.

Recommended: that the Chairman and Secretary -Superintendent obtain further information from Mr Eddie (home visitor/teacher) as to why a new suit was purchased in view of the age of the applicant and if a satisfactory explanation is gained the

grant would be made at the discretion of the Chairman and Secretary - Superintendent.

April 3rd 1959

Mr D Rowley

The Secretary - Superintendent read out a letter received from Mr Rowley of 93 Langford Street Middlesbrough the substance of which was that he had purchased an electric razor for Mr Preston who had died, leaving the sum of £1 18s 2d owing to Mr Rowley it was recommended that Mr Rowley be reimbursed with the sum of £1 18s 2d.

Miss Jacqueline Seagrove

Letter received giving a list of clothes etc. Miss Seagrove would require when she goes to Victoria School for the Blind, Benwell,

Newcastle on 15th April next. The total cost of these items will be £15 and financial assistance was requested towards their purchase.

Recommended that a grant of £7 10s 0d be made subject to enquiring as to whether a grant could be obtained from Durham Education Committee.

Holidays 1960

The Secretary Superintendent expressed his

disappointment that the only allocations available for holidays in the RNIB Holiday Homes were April and October at a weekly cost of £3 15s 0d per person. The Secretary Superintendent also informed the committee that private holidays could be arranged at a cost of £4 7s 6d per person per week. Recommended that the sending of blind persons with their guides to a private residence for holidays should be given a trial this year.

October 30th 1959

Social centre

The Chairman reported to the committee that initial payments for the centre have been approved today. He also stated that no reply had been received from the Marquis of Normanby to an invitation sent asking him to lay the foundation stone for the social centre. The Finance and Staff sub committee have agreed to waive the question of the foundation stone and to concentrate on the Opening Ceremony when the installation of a plaque will be considered.

June 29th 1960

Social Centre

It was reported that good progress was being made and that the roof structure is completed.

January 29th 1960

Social Centre

It was anticipated that the opening of the centre will take place in June 1960.

February 26th 1960

Social Centre

It is the opinion of the architects and builders the the centre should be ready for use in July or August this year. In anticipation of this letters have been sent to the Marquis of Normanby and Sir Simon Marks inviting the former to preside at he opening ceremony and the latter to unveil a portrait of the late Agnes Spencer.

March 25th 1960

Social Centre

The Secretary Superintendent reported that the windows were fitted and work up to schedule.

Authority for making the 3rd payment to the contractors had been recommended today by the F and S sub committee.

Information had been received that one of the trustees of the Agnes Spencer Trust had agreed to unveil a picture of Mrs Spencer at the opening ceremony.



May 27th 1960

Social Centre

The Chairman stated that he had just visited the Social Centre and he gave a summary of the extent of the progress made. The Secretary Superintendent informed the meeting of donations made to the Centre

£200 from Clothworkers Company

£100 from Anon

£32 from the proceeds of the Indopackistan Society Film Show held in Middlesbrough

It was further stated that our letter to the RNIB asking for a further grant has been acknowledged and that successful developments were hoped for. It was suggested that the ground at the side of the building be made into a green and seats be placed around it.

BlindVoice UK

Oral History Project

“Blindness Through the Decades”

The Oral History of Sight Loss in the
Tees Valley from 1945 to date.

Funded by

The Heritage Lottery

This leaflet is available in Braille, Large Print
and Audio CD.



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