



Y's RETIRED OF THE UK Affiliated to the World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees



Greetings from the
President

MARCH 2009

Dear Colleagues, Warm greetings to you all!

Now well into 2009 we will have recovered from Christmas and New Year celebrations enjoyed in varying degrees with family and friends to find we are in a 'recession' being interpreted as an economic downturn!

Whilst hoping that together with YMCA and State pensions we are all reasonably secure there will be some colleagues facing hardship peculiar to their circumstances, we share their concerns. A friendly reminder, the limited resources of Secours Speciaux are available to all YMCA retirees irrespective of nationality!

Within our 'fellowship' we value our work experience in the YMCA not least memories of such occasions as BSA (Skegness!), AOS, National Assemblies, BUG, WUN, Lakeside, Fairthorne, Castle Mainau, ICEP, SYMCA etc. for at such meetings many friendships were formed and continue to this day.

This leads me to share the response to holding a Y's Retired of the UK 'Gathering' (Re-union) through the questionnaire distributed with the January Newsletter. A most positive response augers well for holding the event in early autumn 2009 in or near to Birmingham. Even before the deadline some 35 supportive responses were received.

There is need to ensure commitment as numbers are important when enquiring for accommodation at reasonable cost, to this end it is intended to secure deposits from you as and when required! Suggestions for the programme highlighted, though predictable by nature of the group, are among others, socialising,

devotions, update on 'The YMCA Today', members present activities, some free time, 'The credibility of the British YMCA as a Christian process in the local community', resurrect Skegness!! Etc.,

One quote sums up many responses "Just to be there would be great!!" Three days/nights and just the one 'gathering' were uppermost in your responses.

Suffice it to say that all members will be kept informed of progress in the bi-monthly Newsletter but priority given to those who have returned their forms as 'early autumn 2009' needs clarification at the earliest.

We must all be aware that costs are uncertain at this stage, possible venues will now be explored and where feasible the link up with sharing of transport will be raised to reduce costs.

AS YET NO FINAL DECISION HAS BEEN MADE!

This rather formal letter at least illustrates that your President and Committee are busy behind the scenes!

Here together with the other committee members and on your behalf I pay particular tribute to Reg Wake, Secretary and David Smith, Editor for their unstinting service in time and effort to the Y's Retired of the UK. Healthy progress continues!

Your attention is drawn to the opportunities afforded for the Southern 'Retirees' reunion 30th March to 3rd April 09 advertised in the Jan 09 newsletter – and a visit to the Indian 'Retirees' meeting 22nd - 24th July 09, the latter having full information available in this Newsletter!

Warm regards,
Jim

GAZA APPEAL

Y Care International is supporting Gaza YMCA to provide relief to the thousands of people who are coming to terms with the devastation.

Y Care International has pledged £20,000 to support this relief work, which will include distributing food, clothes, blankets and mattresses and providing psychosocial programmes to children who have been left traumatised by the constant shelling of their homes.

If you would like to make a donation to the relief effort, please ring the Fundraising Team on:
020 7549 3175.

THE Y's RETIRED OF UK WEBSITE IS LAUNCHED

Members are encouraged to visit the Y's Retired of UK website which was launched on 1st Jan 09. It has links to YMCA Pensions Information, YMCA England News, an archive section for past Newsletters, a message from the President and a section on reunions. The site will continue to evolve over time, so please take a look and see what's been achieved to date.

The address is:- www.yretired.co.uk



THE TRUE GENTLEMAN PROUD TO WORK FOR THE YMCA, HOME AND ABROAD

It was a real delight for me as your editor and my wife Sue to meet with Arthur Heath just before Christmas. It was from a tip-off from **Reg** which led me to have the knowledge that there was a fellow YMCA retiree living nine miles away in St Just, on the Cape Cornwall Peninsular. I had lived and worked in the Penzance area for ten years and yet knew nothing of Arthur.

Born 2nd March 1921, Arthur started his career in the British Army and soon rose through the ranks to become an Army Major. Whilst in the forces and soon after the Second World War, he was seconded to the Colonial Office to work alongside displaced persons in camps based around Dortmund, Germany – displaced persons mainly from Poland and Russia. This work led Arthur to realise that he had a special talent and enjoyment when working with people.

Then between 1945 and 1948 Arthur moved on to Minden, Germany, where he became responsible for supplying the various refugee camps with a variety of goods. It was there that he met a young Wren called Peggy and soon after they were married.

The Colonial Office needed someone to administrate and manage banana plantations in Cameroon Africa - Arthur was their man.

After three to four years of organising and managing the plantations, Arthur returned to UK and travelled up and down the UK to work with various Governors of the British Prisons Service with administrative duties. Again, Arthur enjoyed this work so much that he eventually returned overseas, back to Africa, where he became the Inspector of Prisons in Lagos, Nigeria.

In the 1960's Arthur decided that he wanted to get back to UK with his young family and saw a job advertised in the telegraph for the post of Assistant YMCA Regional Secretary to **Grant Eddie**, based in Nottingham. He travelling extensively around the East Midlands area, supporting and motivating the YMCA staff.

COMPLIMENTS FROM WFYR

Sincere thanks are offered to the Chair of the World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees, Don Anderson who, in a recent addition of 'Bridges' complimented President Jim and Editor David of "Ys Retired of UK" on the excellent newsletters now produced bi-monthly. Remember, if you would like a free copy of 'Bridges' email or telephone Reg Wake, who will make arrangements for you.

ARTHUR HEATH

Mid 60's he was approached by **Bob Roberts**, who expressed that he needed help with a post and would Arthur be agreeable to help him. Arthur said yes, and so he became **General Secretary of Rhyl YMCA, North Wales**. Arthur expressed that the work was hard but enjoyable, attending to the coal fire boiler at 6am every morning on one hand, organising various activities and events with the other.

Early 70's Arthur was approached by **Dick Jones of the Welsh National Council** if he would consider the post of Assistant National Secretary, and again Arthur was delighted to be asked and able to assist.

Arthur's final ten years before his retirement in 1986 was to work again in Europe for the **YMCA in BAOR** looking after and organising the administration of some 23 centres.

Arthur expressed great sadness in the recent 'passing' of two good friends who stayed with him and his family when visiting BAOR. He spoke of the wonderful relaxed nature of both and their dedication to the YMCA Movement in their roles as Chairman of the National Council of YMCAs, **Colonel Gerald Lee and Gerard Ward**.

Sadly, Arthur 'lost' Peggy through Alzheimer's some two years ago. He became her carer until her death. He was in hospital on the day of her funeral without choice, having a pacemaker fitted, and since receiving two new hips, and goodbye to the spleen, he jokes that he is 'half the man I used to be...' Stopped driving 12 months ago which he announced with pride, as this was his own decision.

At 86, Arthur will be enjoying this Christmas like others, surrounded by members of his family, all of which he is extremely proud:-

- Richard, living in Rhyl working with the Post Office,
- Martin, living in Winchester, working as a Finance Consultant
- Nigel, Baptist Minister in East Kilbride, Near Glasgow, Scotland

He rarely ventures out as he is prone to falling, most recently out of bed.

Arthur concluded our most recent visit by expressing that he had really enjoyed his career with the YMCA and hoped that he had made a useful contribution.

Be assured Arthur, you continue to touch peoples' lives, just as you always have done.

David (Editor)

OUR PENSION REP STANDS DOWN

*On behalf of all the Officers and members of Ys Retired of UK may I sincerely express our thanks to **Chris Batten**. For more than five years, Chris has quietly and devotedly represented the interests of all members of the YMCA Pension Plan and we all have cause to be thankful for his dedication and service*

THE Y's FAMILY NEWS AND VIEWS



Dear David

The local Anglican Church has been holding a series of lectures on the life and times of the Rev George Bell, Bishop of Chichester 1928 to 1958. I went along because as a little lad George Bell had me round for tea. Treated me very well and later that night along with 50 other youngsters confirmed me into the Anglican family. When that great man of God laid his hands on my head something very special took place, I was anointed for service.

The last lecture was led by a minister who had recently retired as Secretary to the World Council of Churches based in Geneva. He spoke of the Bishop as an International Christian, he was, for example, a great friend of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and more to the point, was involved in the Bishop's role in setting up and acting as Chairman of WCC.

As he spoke the names I had only heard through reputation came pouring out, Edwin Barker, Jo Olden, Dunford and the first meetings convened there by the Bishop on Peace and Reconciliation in a broken world.

As I sat there how I wished I had my old friend and colleague, Geoffrey Palmer sitting alongside me. He could have added so much more.

But isn't it strange how different parts of one's life seem to come together at times, it must be to do with growing old and God's unfinished business.

Many thanks - Alex Cloke

**HILDA JACQUELINE
ROWELL**
**BORN 5TH AUGUST 1925 – DIED
30TH DECEMBER 2008**



Dear David – I write to inform members of the sad news of Jacqueline (known as Jackie) Rowell, who was born in Liverpool and died in Wrexham, North Wales.

In the early days of the war Jackie moved with her family to Wrexham and eventually met her husband to be Arthur who was then the General Secretary of Chester YMCA. They were married in July 1951.

Arthur's work with the YMCA took them to Birkenhead, Taunton, Torquay, Ipswich and finally based at Nottingham as Regional Secretary for the Midlands. Jackie gained employment as the manageress of the city hospital nurses home.

It was at this time that Nottingham YMCA gained considerably from a very active Women's Auxiliary where Jackie made a significant contribution.

In their retirement, Jackie and Arthur moved to Eastbourne and following Arthur's death (November 2005) Jackie moved back to Nottingham for a brief period before moving back to Wrexham.

The fellowship which Jackie and Arthur shared with others during their time with the YMCA and then in retirement, gained them many friends who will cherish memories of two splendid people for their Christian service through the YMCA, the church and in their private lives.

**Arthur Bennett – Ex Nottingham
YMCA**



John Newton writes from Sri Lanka

I spent a few weeks in September in South India- visiting Chennai and then onto Tirupattur and Yellagiri Camp where we are planning for the IFYR Meeting for July 09 and also the Old Boys Reunion. I also spent some days in Coonoor up in the Nilgiris before returning to Chennai and flying back to Colombo.

At the end of October, the Salvation Army had vacated the house which I have used for several years (They had been undertaking Tsunami relief work from there) and I moved in and have been busy getting turned from offices into a residence. It is now comfortable once again.

I also bought a 1992 Suzuki Maruti Jeep which has been useful for transport particularly as this is the monsoon season and the roads become flooded and pot holed.

We are waiting for the rains to end to start on the construction of the Montessori Pre-school for Muslim, Tamil and Sinhala children at Central Camp.

We have received a donation from the Allan and Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust for £ 7,500 towards the construction and are seeking other support for equipment and goods in due course.

I hope that you are keeping well. Please convey my Christmas greetings to all Y Retired colleagues.



**Maureen and
Sam Johnston
OBE
Celebrating
50 years of
marriage this
year**

Sam Johnston, has dedicated well over half a century to the Movement he loves, the YMCA. He's held a wide range of local and national roles, including being Associate National Secretary in the 1990s and his current position as Vice President of West Bromwich & District YMCA, an Association to which he was instrumental in expanding.

Highlights from Sam's long list of achievements includes heading up the Planning Group for the World Conference and Celebrations which coincided with the 150th anniversary of the founding of the YMCA Movement, held at Warwick University

Over 100 countries were represented and the 1500 delegates were invited to be the guests of YMCA England's Patron, the Queen, and Prince Philip at a service held at Westminster Abbey, followed by a garden party held at the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lambeth Palace.

Sam also helped to introduce the YMCA's first self contained flats in the 1970s in West Bromwich YMCA and a new youth programme in Swansea. He was rewarded for his work with an OBE in 1994 which he feels was a reward for him and others. Yet Sam claims the YMCA has done as much for him as he has for it.

"When I was younger, I was involved with the Methodist Church and the Boys' Brigade, and was very keen on sports. The YMCA gave me the opportunity to combine these ideas – a Christian purpose with youth work."

"My first role was as General Secretary of Portadown YMCA in Northern Ireland in the 1950s. It was a wonderful experience, and soon the YMCA became my life."

"What the YMCA provides – housing, recreation, health and fitness – it's just a part of helping people to be more complete in mind, body and spirit."

"Bringing people from different communities together. They may have different religions or backgrounds, be from different countries or be young or old, but the YMCA gives them a sense of belonging and involvement."

"We may have had to change our approach to meet the changing social conditions, but the basis of why the YMCA formed remains."

"The YMCA opened a new chapter for me. It was like opening a book and being able to read for the first time. It helped me to grow – in mind, body and spirit. It has meant everything to me, so much more than just work."

"It is important in this materialistic world that we never lose sight of the Christian purpose of our work. We all can get carried away with developments of bricks and mortar, that we forget God's will in the work of extending the Kingdom of God."

Since retirement, Sam has been the Chair of three organisations - the Cambridge and Ely Golf Club, the Alzheimer's Society and the Cambridge Victim Support Group. He is also organist, cleaner, gardener and binman for the Dry Drayton Methodist church.

OBITUARY -

Our movement would not have achieved so much over so many years, for so many communities in our World, if it wasn't for the great sacrifices made by truly committed lay people. They deserve our recognition. One of those lay persons was:-

REV. LIONEL FITZ

One of the key 20th Century leaders of Cheltenham YMCA, Lionel Fitz's 70 year association included no fewer than 60 years on the Board of Management, during which time he served as Chairman and for the last five years of his life as its unanimously elected President.

During the war he trained at Cranwell as an Air Wireless Operator and after being demobbed rejoined the YMCA where he became a valued member of its successful football club. Later in life he also became a very proficient golfer.

Following the deaths of the "YMCA Big Three", P.T. Smith, Horace Bush and Arthur Dye (all former mayors of Cheltenham), Lionel's anchor role on the Board oversaw many changes in buildings, personnel and equipment.

His love of young people and zest for life made sure the local Association stayed true to its Christian foundations and he also faithfully served the South West Region for many years as a Trustee on the South West YMCA Trust Fund .

After retiring from his job as a local company secretary he trained for the Anglican ministry and served with distinction on the staff of St. Matthew's Church for many years.

Extremely active until shortly before his death at the age of 84 on 30th December, Lionel will be remembered for his devotion to the Gospel message, loyal support to his peers and the encouragement he gave to generations of youth leaders.

He is survived by his wife Mavis of 53 years, their three children Joy, Jill and Tim, and by several grandchildren.

Over 300 friends and relatives attended the funeral service.



2009 - YEAR OF THE CHILD

Many Christians are concerned about how parishes and congregations can bring Christ into the lives of children and young people.

In this '2009 – Year of the Child' Sue Green and her Youth team have written a very relevant document to help all of us who are trying to find answers – read the article and follow the website address – you won't be disappointed - Editor

After months of preparation and planning, '2009 - Year of the Child' has finally arrived. For many of us working constantly with children and young people, both in Parishes and Schools, and all the other exciting and often unusual places that children like to congregate, this year aims to challenge all of us adults, to make a significant difference – a significant and sustained difference to the lives of children here in the UK.

So '2009 - Year of the Child' is an opportunity for us to celebrate the contribution our young people make and a challenge for us to recognise their needs and aspirations for the future. It is an opportunity for us to look at how we can nurture them during their spiritual journey and walk alongside them, whilst acknowledging the way the world is changing for them.

Our focus however is even broader as we look at ways of engaging with children in the wider community. There is an imperative to focus our attention on children for a number of reasons since 1979 when UNICEF announced the first International Year of the Child there have been numerous policies and initiatives aimed at improving the well being of young people.

Ten years ago there was a Government Statement declaring that childhood poverty would be halved in ten years and yet in February 2007 when UNICEF published its report entitled 'Child Poverty in Perspective', 'An Overview of Child Well Being in Rich Countries,' the UK was ranked bottom of 21 industrialised countries in terms of an assessment of child wellbeing.

Even the 'Good Childhood Enquiry,' being analysed by the Children's Society, identifies specific areas where we need to engage with young people in a new way and listen to them more carefully.

Often the key is to understand the new and very different pressures which influence their lives and find ways of supporting and helping them. Part of this is to value and celebrate what they achieve and recognise their potential in this new world.

May I point you in the direction of this web site www.truro.anglican.org then go to:– **2009, Celebrating the Year of the Child in Church pdf.** It is a 35 page document but well worth the read, if not a download.

It introduces an excellent booklet, in fact a treasure, which pulls together hundreds of ideas for parishes looking at new ways of working with children.

The Children and Youth Team of Truro Diocese hope that there is something there for everyone because as the booklet states, 'Doing nothing is not an option'.

New ways of working with children entails making our faith relevant and accessible in a busy, technological world; looking for new mission opportunities in new places, at new times and in new ways and supporting and affirming those thousands of people who have dedicated their lives to working with children, young people and their families.

So what have church groups and PCC's been thinking about in the build up to 2009? It may be a single event, a series of events or a new family service; it may be a commitment to support the local school or families looking for friendship.

Whatever it is, let's pray it brings more children and young people to know the love of Jesus in their lives.

Editor – David H Smith



(IFYR)
CONFERENCE
AT THE
YELAGIRI HILLS,
INDIA.

**YOU AND YOUR SPOUSE ARE WARMLY INVITED
TO ATTEND THE NEXT INDIA
FELLOWSHIP OF Y RETIREES**

The Conference will be held from Wednesday 22nd - Friday 24th July 2009 at the Yelagiri Hills, Tamil Nadu, India where the YMCA has a beautifully well developed campsite, with modern facilities and excellent accommodation.

Yelagiri is very close to Tirupattur, where, some of you may know that Frank C Brown established the YMCA Boy's Division, which then became a project of the National Council of YMCAs of India. **Don Anderson**, Chair of WYFR will be at the Conference.

On Thursday 23rd July, some of the former residents/staff of the YMCA Boy's Division will be join the conference participants for tea. This is a unique occasion for all.

A few from the IFYR UK Chapter will be there.

Members and spouses of the Y's Retirees are most welcome. Those interested could get in touch either with **Egbert Samraj** or **Rupert George**. Egbert is in a better position to provide further information including travel ideas.

Egbert Samraj, who is the Conference Chairman, will be delighted to offer free accommodation and hospitality to all those Y's Retirees who will be at the Conference.

Egbert Samraj email: egbertsamraj@rediffmail.com

Those Y's Retired members who would like to make this wonderful opportunity a reality should contact a long standing friend of the Indian YMCA, Prince John

Tel: 0208 599 0605

Email address: skybirdtravel@hotmail.com

who can assist with flight destinations and favourable prices. Please indicate to Prince that you are enquiring from the Y's Retirees. Please do feel free to get in touch him.

Prince may also be able to give advice for those over 70 years of age seeking travel insurance for the trip.

Rupert George writes:

It will really be nice if we do have some representation from the UK! Prince told me that fares will be slightly cheaper if the travel from London is before July 15th. Booking early will also help.

GENERAL YMCA FAMILY NEWS

Philip Cheal shares that the YMCA building he worked in between 1960 to 1964 is to become part of a £2.5 million Housing Association scheme for 17-23 year olds. The building, Whitehaven YMCA, dating back to 1730s will be restored and again resound to the enthusiastic voices of young people. Others who worked there were **Norman Ingle, J. Harding and Reg Wake**. Divisional Secretaries of the day were **Frank Baker and Jack Francis**.

David - I am sorry but I shall not find it possible to attend any function outside of Hertford. I am not able to walk even indoors without my two sticks. Outdoors I rely on my trusty scooter. I hope you are well and not frozen to the ground. We have 4 to 6 inches of snow. My consultant gives me a limited future and things can only get worse. However I console myself by singing the Ken Dodd piece. "Happiness." Best of wishes to all - Philip.

Wouldn't it be lovely to tootle off to India? Sad to say 'me sari is in the pawn shop!' I'm sure I remember meeting Prince John once in London. It will be a wonderful opportunity for anyone who can make it.

We went to see **Ray Onions** yesterday in Derriford Hospital, who has temporarily lost the use of his legs. He keeps in good spirits, but must have had a terrible fright. He has had some nerve involvement with an obscure virus. Fortunately they know how to treat it with something in a drip. He is in Mayflower Ward and we will probably go again on Wednesday. I replied on his behalf to **Jim Lamb** to say 'further afield for a 'gathering' for Ray is probably inadvisable, but he hopes to make Treloyhan Manor, St Ives, God willing.

Ray feels the need for the security of his own medical advisers near to hand; this thing struck him out of the blue. There is a question mark over whether it is an option for us too, as we have a commitment to Mervyn's elderly (95,93,87 and 80) sisters and brother, which takes us to Ireland for a whole five weeks in August and as well as that we hope to spend more time than usual in Liverpool.

A new grandchild after twelve years expected in April is an added attraction!

Mervyn at 81 keeps in reasonable form healthwise. He is however going for an ECG this morning, precautionary 'follow up', as he has been very tired latterly. He had a fall prior to Christmas which shook him up badly. He fell 'over the garden wall,' going to Ruth's. Remember he had a triple bypass some fifteen years ago at Guys, so he takes good care these days. He is very sprightly, all things considered.

Well, I've rambled on but will conclude,

Blessings,

Beryl and Mervyn Moorehead

ISRAEL – GAZA CONFLICT

Since the outbreak of violence in the Middle East, YMCAs from all over the world have been expressing their concern and support for all those affected by the conflict, and in particular the staff, volunteers and members of the Gaza YMCA.

General Secretary of the Gaza YMCA, Mr. Isa Saba, has been updating the World Alliance on the situation of the YMCA and its members. Two young YMCA members have been killed during some of the worst aerial bombardments, a young girl of 15 and a young man of 22 years of age.

Although the YMCA has had to temporarily halt its operations, over the last 4 days Isa and some of the YMCA's volunteers have been visiting internally displaced peoples in UNRWA schools, where more than 10,000 families are being sheltered. Isa said the conditions are appalling.

There is no food, water or electricity, and no blankets to spread on the floor for the people to sleep on. Ensuring their health is a major challenge. The YMCA is currently focusing on distributing lunch, supplying mattresses, blankets and cleaning agents in two schools for 1,400 people. They also started conducting psychosocial programmes among the children, who constitute the majority of the displaced.

Support from YMCAs around the world has been overwhelming; many have sent messages of solidarity, others have organised special prayer and worship services, or pledged financial support to help meet the immediate needs of the communities served by the Gaza YMCA.

East Jerusalem YMCA has been in close contact with Gaza YMCA, and is engaged in giving humanitarian aid in Gaza through its offices there.

Ecuador YMCA published a statement calling for an immediate cease-fire, and expressing its solidarity with the families of YMCA members who have been killed, as well as all those who are suffering.

The National Alliance of YMCA and YWCA of Denmark wrote: 'We wish to express our grief and sympathy with the victims of the escalating violence and our deepest concern for all of you who are in the midst of it. It is our hope and prayer that the voices of peace and justice will be heard above the terrors of bombs and rockets.'

Costa Rica YMCA prayed that with international support and solidarity we would one day be able to say together Isaiah 32:16-17, 'Justice will dwell in the desert and righteousness live in the fertile field. The fruit of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.'

The World Alliance also received copies of messages from the Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs, as well as the YMCAs of Norway, Switzerland, Spain, Lebanon, USA, Argentina, and Uruguay.

We call on all YMCAs to pray for peace in the Middle East.

The following message was sent by email to Gaza YMCA on 16th January 09

"We are in sympathy with the situation which YMCA members and staff find themselves having to face on a daily basis.

The officers and members of the Y's Retired of the UK convey their utmost concern and support for the peoples and citizens of Gaza and especially YMCA staff, helpers and members. All our thoughts and prayers go out to you at this time of conflict. May true peace prevail soonest. "

From the Officers of the Ys Retired of UK on behalf of its membership



**Ian Green extends
secondment to
YMCA England until
July 2009**

As you are aware, Ian Green has been seconded to the National Council of YMCAs as Interim National Secretary since July 2008. He has spent much of this time attending meetings in different parts of the country engaging in the "Movement Conversation". The key themes from these conversations were recently presented at the National AGM in West Bromwich.

Following discussions with my colleague Officers, Ian has been invited to continue in the role of National Secretary for a further six months (until the end of July 2009).

I am delighted to inform you that both Kingston and Wimbledon YMCA and Ian have agreed to this extension. This will enable the recommendations from the Movement Conversation to be considered by the Board as well as debated at National Assembly prior to an implementation plan being agreed.

**Tim Waldron
Chair of the National Board**

NEWLY ELECTED PENSIONS REP

Dear Members,
I had hoped to be able to tell you the results of the election onto the YMCA Pensions Committee and who the successful candidate was in place of Chris Batten, but unfortunately this information was not to hand when going to press.

WELCOME INTO MEMBERSHIP

We welcome into membership **Mike King** who was Regional Secretary for the North East and has recently taken early retirement as CEO of Newcastle YMCA.

Editor – David H Smith

BRITISH BOYS FOR BRITISH FARMS

Editor David writes that since the last Newsletter (Jan 09) **Jean Saunders** started a chain of emails which gave eventual joy to an aging **John Smith**. Jean writes:-

“ On reading our President's message a paragraph about British Boys for British Farms popped up at me!! I worked at Wilderwick House one of the many houses the YMCA used for the above work. I worked for **Ralph Elsdon** as his Secretary starting the year Wilderwick opened in 1949 and, of course, met Walter when he came to work there as Assistant Warden.

I see **Jim Lamb** now has a new friend named **John Smith** and I wondered if this new friend knows of a book about the work of BBBF (as it was known) written by **Barbara Vessey** when she took up the research for the YM. I know Barbara and have just phoned her and she has some spare copies of the book which he might be interested to read. She gave me her e-mail address and would be happy for him to contact her quite apart from being interested in his story. I would be interested to know at which place he did his training - it would be a very interesting coincidence if it was Wilderwick!! The boys at Wilderwick had a whip round when Walter and I got married and two came to our wedding so who knows he may have been one!

In the last President's message (Jan 09) Jim mentioned a meeting with a Mr John Smith (now 79) who worked at the BBBF Centre in Ham, Somerset. Jim gave his copy of British Boys for British Farms booklet to John but sought a replacement copy. Through emails conversations with Barbara Vessey, the author who researched and wrote the BBBF booklet, Jim was able to replace his copy and put John and Barbara in touch with each other. John himself had tried every way he could, to recall the name of the leader at Ham whilst he was there but failed. Barbara imagined that the YMCA would still have copies of the book but she had had no contact with them whatsoever since they agreed to pay for the publication!!

Barbara wrote:-

“When I give talks, which I still do occasionally, I sometimes sell one or two booklets. I was on the WI speakers list but am not keen these days on driving 30 miles in the dark in the middle of winter! **Ralph Elsdon** was warden at Ham Green for a number of years during and after the war I think. He left abruptly for reasons unknown even to his daughter, but did keep in touch with old boys from the scheme into the '50s.

Vera Charlesworth died last autumn, and there are very few ex-BBBF staff left it seems. Jean knows of some through the Ys-Retired group but I had a job finding any when I wrote the book and that was more than 12 years ago!

“The **Ham Green hostel** has completely gone, and in its place there is an old people's home and sheltered accommodation. It was one hostel I did not try and visit when writing the book, which is a pity as when I did eventually get there, about six years ago, the new development was not yet complete, so there might have been something to see.”

Jim responded to Barbara that **Sam Johnston** was responsible for getting National Council to underwrite the cost of publication. He himself has spoken many times on the YMCA from Rotary to church groups to Sight Impaired groups and groups of varying kinds and always refers to the BBBF and British Boys for British Yachts (Sailing). Jim questioned Barbara on whether **Stan Charlesworth**, **Frank Peebles** and **Stan and Margaret Hirst** were involved with BBBF at sometime?

Barbara recalls,

“Yes, you are right. Sam Johnston put the pressure on, thanks to the persuasion of various ex-BBBF staff I think. **Clyde Binfield** (Chairman of the YMCA at the time) helped a lot in getting the book ready as I had not done anything like that before! **Stan Charlesworth** got me going in the first place, even though he died very shortly after we met (Vera died recently, and Frank not long ago). The Hirsts' were also involved I understand.

“I am fascinated by your reference to BBFY! I knew there were other schemes but could find absolutely nothing about them in the archives. I presume that the YMCA were not responsible for the actual training, as they were in BBBF which I understood was unique in the YMCA in that respect.”

Jim adds further,

“Many thanks for the response with the information. Regarding British Boys for British Yachts the only name coming to my mind was possibly **George Reynolds**, he has always been a keen sailor. I do have memories however of seeing the publicity pamphlets many years ago. I will have a word with **Sam Johnston** and check whether he recalls the scheme. Also am I right to remember a British Boys for British Horticulture? Wisley comes to mind.”

Barbara responds

“Yes, there was briefly a move into Horticulture, and I mention it in the book. It was run from Wilderwick (and perhaps at Park Hill) for a few years in the early '60s. The scheme took just four or five boys and, I believe, girls, at a time, and they did a fairly intensive course of study and hands-on work in the gardens, and I believe some went to Kew, possibly Wisley, and also the Royal Gardens. They were well thought of but the scheme was too little, too late, and was only viable alongside BBBF. Also I guess Agricultural Colleges were beginning to run horticulture courses themselves.

I have not had any direct contact with people in this scheme. I am always pleased to get more info.!”

The final words comes from Jean:-

“My time working for BBBF was a very happy job and I became good friends with the Elsdons and especially their daughter Margaret who sadly died only a few years ago at a very early age. Many of the Wardens that came to Wilderwick are now gone - **the Haslers**, **Bob Vince** and his wife to name a few. And I wish I could find out about the very first couple **Barbara and Philip Scholey** that came in 1949 but have had no luck so far - and it is a long time ago!!!”

And from Barbara:-

“I am now in e-mail correspondence with **Tony Clegg** from Australia who was at Wilderwick in 1959 and is anxious to get in touch with any Wilderwick trainees. I have given him what limited information I have and he has responded with a wonderful account of his life which seems to have taken him all over the world, from basic farm labourer to electronics expert and diplomat! I only wish I had this when I was researching the book.

I shall be very interested to know if your article provokes any new leads - I suppose staff who were still working in the early 1990s may not have known about the book, but may now be part of Y's Retired of UK. Good luck, Barbara.”

Thanks to all concerned – any further info received on BBBF from members will be distributed by Editor, David