

Foreword

“We all have a story in us.” These are the words of our dad, Cecil Hallas, and he should know – he’s been telling stories for the better part of 90 plus years, and counting!

This natural gift of his was undoubtedly honed from over 50 years of jocular exchanges revolving around the barber’s chair, in more ways than one. Later, at the sprightly age of sixty-seven when he retired from snipping duties, he swapped the spoken work for the written one, committing his many thoughts, first to paper, and then to the computer screen.

To say he has a story to tell is a wild understatement! At home, whenever any one or more of his grown-up children roll up, he “regales” us with a seemingly endless set of anecdotes, stories and jokes; all punctuated with the cheeky question, “Have you heard that one before?” Of course, it matters little what the answer is. Despite the frequent rolling of eyes, it’s most definitely worth it, as the story is always delivered masterfully, and of course, with a mischievous twinkle of the eye.

This delightful collection of stories, poems and recollections serves as a faithful reflection of the immense warmth, humour and keen observation that characterise our dad, Cecil.

Jane, Anna Jeremy and Simon.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Arthur Heeley	1
The Invasion	3
Penistone Station	10
Bill Harrison	12
A Bit On A Natter	15
Paradise Lost?	17
A Wonderful Person	22
The Undertaker	25
Bulhouse Recollections	28
Impressions	31
Denby Dale	37
Ahr John	43
Christmas Music	45
Time's Archive	47
A Christmas Story	50
Penistone Sing	54
Gloria	57
Passengers	59
Spaw Sunday	63
Hartcliff Hill	66
Harry	69
The Final Dream	73

	PAGE
This Penistone (1)	76
This Penistone (2)	79
Further Impressions	82
The Roads	87
Penistone	91
North America	94
The Auction	96
Different In My Day	106
Threshing Day	109
Dyson Roebuck (The Stranger)	112
More Penistone Stories	118
Modern Art	126
Canaletto	132
The Feast	137
The Reception	140
Entertainment	159
The Parson	164
Morning Surgery	167
The Test Case	170
Amnesia	173
Christmas At The Bridge	175
In A Country Churchyard	178

Arthur Heeley

My first real introduction to Penistone was in 1942, when I began work as an apprentice to George Ashworth, whose barber's shop was in the High Street, the site which is now a Chinese takeaway. Penistone then was a very different place to the town of 2014.

In 1942, the population of Penistone would be somewhere about half of what it is today, then largely due to petrol rationing only so-called "Essential personnel" could put a vehicle on the road. Besides, at that time, hardly anyone owned a car, which at times made the streets seem very quiet. This was particularly noticeable on half-day closing when Penistone might have given the impression of being a ghost town. This meant that any movement wouldn't be missed by the eagle eye of the native Penistonian, whose purpose was to be the first to inform the general community about anything untoward.

As a regular intrusion into this oasis of peace, once or twice during the week, the sound of a horse's hooves would break the silence, then on looking above the curtains of George Ashworth's shop, Arthur Heeley's greengrocer's horse and cart would appear, Arthur walking alongside his horse, Dolly. This was particularly noticeable if you happened to be in the street at night, the blackout making everything dark, with the exception of Arthur's cart, which was lit by a swinging storm lantern suspended beneath the canopy. This lit up all his fruit, vegetables and flowers as he set off on his rounds.

Arthur and his horse Dolly, had been together for many years, so many that they'd come to look alike. For many years Arthur wore a dun-coloured suit and trilby, an exact match to Dolly's hide. He also sported a big yellowing moustache, which again was an uncanny match for Dolly's mane and fetlocks. But there was more to it than that. Arthur and Dolly, having been on the same rounds at the same times on the same days for twenty years, Dolly seemed to have developed an internal clock. Without prompting, she knew to spend exactly five minutes at Mrs. Parker's house,

ten minutes at the two houses by the Police station and twenty at the four terrace houses down Green Road.

It was Friday night, and as usual, they arrived at the row of four houses down Green Road at precisely eight o' clock. On their arrival, three of the four doors opened, a lady coming out of each, carrying carrier bags or baskets down to Arthur's cart. They chatted amiably with each other, and with Arthur, before buying for the weekend and returning to their respective houses. As the three doors closed, the door of the fourth opened to reveal the face of a woman who began to look anxiously down the street, and then up again. When she decided that nobody was about, she quickly tiptoed down the steps to where Arthur was getting ready to leave - whispering something in his ear. The thing was, she hadn't paid him for three weeks and obviously didn't want to talk about it on the pavement, so she invited Arthur into the house to discuss terms. After entering the house, they must have been there for several minutes before Dolly's time clock kicked in. Her twenty minutes were up, then as always, she began her clip-clop, clip-clop down the street, when a breathless voice from a bedroom window shouted "whoa."

The Invasion

In 1942, petrol rationing meant that only a handful of "Essential personnel" were able to run a car. This ensured that the streets of Penistone were virtually empty, the exception being the occasional bus. Today one or two female residents were peering into a shop window in the forlorn hope that they might see something new, then on hearing something quite unfamiliar their heads turned towards a distant drone followed by a rumble, which within half a minute developed into a roar. This gradually increased in volume until, above the curtains of George Ashworth's hairdresser's shop window, we watched in silent astonishment as these shadows briefly obscured the light.

Like frames from a moving picture, their images flickered across the sight as this convoy of wagons and jeeps painted in drab khaki rumbled purposefully down the High Street, big white stars painted on their flanks and in the driver's seats, men none of us had ever before seen- they were black. Waving enthusiastically, accompanied by big grins showing acres of white teeth, the newcomers, some, feet on dashboard, chewed on big cigars and gum as they performed a racing change round the bank corner. Like it or not, these were to be our new neighbours.

Straightaway, they began to build a camp beside Scout Dike, a compensation water reservoir, soon completing the project with the usual resources and confident expertise we've come to associate with Americans.

In general, Penistone people have long had a reputation for being welcoming - and canny. Now they viewed their new neighbours with surprised curiosity - and caution.

But this adjustment hadn't to be made just by the residents; for the black American it wasn't so simple either. It's easy to forget that in the America of sixty-five years ago, segregation was a way of life, the black man or woman being considered second or third- class. Even worse, some regarded them rather like the "Untouchable" caste in the Indian sub-

continent.

In the Southern States black people were naturally expected to step off the sidewalk to make way for the white, black and white attended different schools, rode on different buses and to attempt intermarriage or have a liaison with a white woman would likely be a capital offence. The "Ku Klux Klan," operating in the Southern States, took it upon themselves to enforce their own form of "justice" outside the law. However, these were very powerful people, privately seeming to have the backing of the authorities.

This being the attitude of the day, black soldiers weren't thought fit to undertake combat duties. Not until 1945, when came the heavy and totally underestimated losses sustained during the European campaign, were black soldiers considered necessary to plug the gap and be fit for operational duties. However, in the Penistone of 1942, they were considered quite suitable for picking up loads of bombs which arrived by rail, before delivering them to various guarded sites and stacking them beside the quiet lanes of the Penistone countryside.

For these Americans, their first outing into Penistone must have been confusing, to say the least. Quite naturally Penistone people would welcome a stranger with a "good morning, looks like rain," or something like that, and although people regarded the newcomers as curiosities, they could now speak and be spoken to on equal terms. They could shop in the same shops, ride on the same buses and visit the same pubs. However, they were hardly ever seen in the shops. What was the point when the locals had to show a ration book to obtain such meagre fare? These men lived on a different plane.

Cycling past the camp on my way home, I'd see them walking from the mess, carrying trays containing steaks, peach halves and ice cream; items which in 1942, we couldn't provide even for a special occasion. And of course, beside their new found freedoms, these men, almost all sourced from areas with traditions of slavery, had suddenly been catapulted into regular employment. For the first time in their lives, they now had good pay, smart uniforms and excellent food. They were given training, taught

to drive and given paid leave. For them this had to be a world previously undreamt of. They'd travelled from "The New World" to "The Old," exchanging the old life for the exciting, unimaginable new.

This sudden release from the constraints of being the underdog now began to open up all kinds of possibilities. After their initial and understandable wariness, these young men soon became introduced to the delights of the English pub. After all, the "White Hart," less than a mile away, was the first pub they'd pass on their way into Penistone. In earlier years, these spittoon and sawdust establishments, once the stubborn preserve of the Penistone male and "Barnsley Bitter" exponent, were now to be superseded by the free spending whiskey drinker. In Penistone, the pubs began to have a "good war." I recall hearing Charlie Fenton, landlord of the "White Hart," boast of making "my first ten thousand" there. At the time, ten thousand would have bought a small village. In 1942 it wasn't unusual for a pub to run out of beer; Charlie's didn't. Then, whiskey was just about unobtainable, but never in Charlie's "White Hart."

However, there had to be a down side, though it never seemed to be a serious problem. Like all fit young men, especially in uniform and with money in their pockets, they did attract some hostility, especially after a few drinks and the inevitable encounters with our own servicemen, who understandably resented the huge difference in pay. Often, these "situations" were due to no more than high spirits, sometimes more than that. However, rarely were our own police involved. Following a brief phone call to the camp, within minutes a truck could be heard screeching to a halt outside. In gaiters and white helmets, two giant MPs would leap out of the cab before purposefully entering the pub, long batons in hand. Each in the region of six-eight, this pair of powerful, heavy boned, no-nonsense characters dispensed summary justice with scant mercy, throwing the offenders out of the pub and into the truck as one might hurl sacks of wheat. These two specimens were called "Tiny" and "Cash." I'd readily have given way to either on any pavement.

And yet I was often puzzled by the disciplinary situation. These men, not

long since regarded as inferiors now sometimes showed signs of disrespect to their senior officers. I looked on once, as a black soldier refused an order from his lieutenant. Not only did he refuse, but pointedly ignored the order, continuing to throw a baseball into the hands of his opposite number. An argument ensued, the man was repeatedly warned, each time saying something vague. The officer eventually retired exasperated as the soldier, glove in hand, continued to receive the ball from his comrade. This I found inexplicable. Such conduct in certain other military units would have attracted dire consequences.

And whilst riding to work on the bus, we'd sometimes meet a marching column. On slowly driving past, white eyeballs would scan the interior, then on catching sight of a young female, rifles were raised, handkerchiefs waved and shouting heard. As the bus moved away, they continued their march, this time walking backwards, still waving!

On my way home one evening, the driver stopped the bus immediately after turning across Scout Bridge. As the passengers looked on it soon became clear that the driver of a bomb-carrying truck had cornered too quickly. Its previous load, a five-hundred pounder, was now lying in the road. Chains were quickly fastened round the bomb, and routinely lifted onto the truck by an onboard crane, before being driven away at speed.

Bobby Sparling, the local law enforcer, looked round the door of George Ashworth's shop, not without justification deciding that this was the most likely place to pick up some information. "A truck's just run outa corner on Thurlstone Bridge an' gone through t'wall, you wouldn't 'ave 'eard owt?"

"We've 'eard n-n-n-n-n-n-n-nothin' 'ere," George replied, stammering as he always did at anything untoward. "Nay," Sparling continued, "t'truck's done a nosedive over t'wall an' I 'eard it said 'at sumbdy'd seen three black blokes splashin' up t'river." "We'll l-l-l-l-l-l-l-let you know if we 'ear owt," George replied.

During this time, I worked as an apprentice to hairdresser George Ashworth, and for the three years I was there, no black American ever

came into the shop, but white NCO's and officers did. The first we ever encountered was a Texan. Mr. Ashworth, as I was decreed to address him, insisted that he cut this man's hair, this of course, being an historic moment. The smartly-dressed, olive-skinned man told us that he'd been a cowboy, later showing us the calluses across the palms of his hands, due, he said, to the roping of steers. I had goosebumps, this was the Holy Grail, a cowboy, in the flesh, and in Penistone?

Sometimes we'd visit a cinema in Huddersfield, and walking along Buxton Road meant passing "The Picturedrome," otherwise known as "The Ranchouse." I'm sure that on walking past the entrance, people could be seen ducking their heads before crossing the road to safety, an immediate and urgent response to the loud bangs issuing from inside, besides quite naturally swearing that they'd smelt gun smoke. Due to all this, we had great respect for cowboys and now, here, for a moment, we had our very own.

George Ashworth had always been a "short back and sides" man, the only allowable variation from this principle being "a bit off the top." George, an earlier version of Captain Mainwaring, was now faced with the dilemma of a man who wanted "a bit off hearrrr," and "a bit off theyrrrrr," and on that account, he became thoroughly nonplussed. No regular customer had ever before addressed him in this manner. The haircut was completed and, I might add, to the customer's satisfaction. His uniform was brushed down, then as the Texan closed the door behind him, George gave me a curious look, "yon were a fancy bugger, weren't 'ee?"

But this wasn't the only population movement in Penistone. All men of military age had either been enlisted in the armed forces, or on essential war work. Penistone had become a place of the very young, the over-forties and now, disproportionately female. This created an imbalance which had been adjusted by the arrival of these soldiers from America. Besides being gratefully received by a number of the female population, these young soldiers were fit, wore smart uniforms and had money in their pockets, attributes not to pass unnoticed.

For many years Penistone had been a very important rail link, at certain

times perhaps three trains in an hour would arrive from Manchester on their way to London. Cattle trains came from Ireland, fish trains from Grimsby, petrol tanker, milk and mail trains all took their place besides the boat train from Liverpool to Harwich. These were the more colourful cargoes, in contrast to the many heavily-laden coal trains struggling to climb the gradient from the South Yorkshire coalfields to Dunford Bridge. But now they had a different cargo.

Ladies in substantial numbers began travelling to Penistone from Sheffield and as far away as Nottingham; their purpose, to make the lives of the Scout Dike incumbents less lonely. Many of these became familiar faces. One, a small, pretty, dark-haired young woman, wearing a hat and camel style coat, modest jewellery and of cultured appearance, was a regular visitor - one might guess she worked behind the counter of a bank.

At the other end of the spectrum, an older woman could be seen wrestling a pram from the train, before pushing it the two miles to the camp - the pram having a bedroll across its bows!

Yet amongst all these absorbing goings-on, there was a chill reminder that the life of the black American was at the behest of his white brother. A soldier from Scout Dike was charged with raping a white woman (not from these parts.) He was tried, convicted and executed. Might this have happened had he been white?

Early in 1945, I left all this behind, the war was soon to end and so did my supply of "Lucky Strikes" and "Camel" cigarettes, bought from the soldiers for my dad, who once again had to return to smoking his less exotic "Woodbine."

The purpose of these servicemen was rapidly coming to a close. They now had to say their "goodbyes" to the friends they'd made, besides saying "goodbye" to the way of life of which they'd come to be a part. And although, after a long absence, they'd be eagerly returning home to their families, there'd inevitably be some sadness and nostalgia for this green country which had accepted them into its fold. For these soldiers there can be no doubt that this stay had been life-changing. They'd drawn back the veil of despair to discover that, in fact, freedom wasn't just an abstract

idea, but that it was real - and achievable. Here they'd become self-confident, better equipped to deal with the looming reminders they'd have to face on their return.

Some time ago I found myself walking past Scout Dike. Looking over the site, or rather what's left of it, now remains buried beneath swathes of nettles and seeding willow-herb, the rest swallowed up by blackberry bushes. Today there's little indication that anyone was ever here, its former residents long gone, now just memories.

It was mid-day. A few men, barely awake were sitting, fishing rods in hand, staring into the water. Turning towards Gunthwaite, I looked over the valley to the wide, unchanged landscape to the east. Off Carr Lane, a herd of Friesians had found shade beneath a big horse-chestnut, their tails swishing away persistent flies. Then I pondered the Americans' struggle for freedom. The survivors, now old men, will no doubt speak of Scout Dike with affection. This for many would be their introduction to a new, unimagined world. Here and places like it would have demonstrated what freedom is really like. For a time, they'd return to their homes to once again be forced to ride on different buses, face police dogs and endure the burning of their churches by people for whom they'd travelled halfway across the globe to protect.

But this was soon to change. Here and elsewhere a tiny ignition had begun, the initial sparks which did indeed fire the tinder of liberation. I like to think so.

And now they have a black president - now who'd have thought that?

Penistone Station

When you talk about Penistone Station

Whisper with reverent air,

You see, you may be overheard by the spirits resident there.

Walk there alone one evening

And peer through the mist beyond the curving viaduct's length,

Then listen intently for an hour, perhaps till midnight,

Then at first you'll hear the faint, the sudden issue from the tunnel,

A distant shrieking whistle,

And the hissing piston's strength.

Closer now, the thunder and the throbbing

Advancing on the track,

Its pulsating, unstoppable power,

Its increasing clackety-clack.

Its rhythmic rattle across the joints

Displacing swirling wraiths of fog as it navigates the points.

Breathe in the sulphur and carbon,

The platform vibrates beneath your feet

Yet the cloud of all-enveloping steam is devoid of any heat

Did you see the driver's face, whilst racing through the night,

Of grimy face and greasy hands -

Or was it a trick of the light?

Was that the signalman calling me as I cowered beside the line?
The ice with creeping fingers now crawling about my spine.
My mouth now open, said "You shouldn't be here,"
But the voice as I spoke wasn't mine.
When you walk into Penistone Station at night
Be prudent and take care,
Don't try and be inquisitive, be never emboldened to stare
At who might be the residents,
Or make them half-aware of your intentions.
Never pry round the comer, never dare to interfere,
They know you're of mortal consequence,
They're the incumbents here.
"Where are you from?" they always ask
In a holiday conversation.
"Oh, you'll never have heard of Penistone, the usual explanation.
Then to winks and nods and nudges and sounds of curious mirth,
" Yes, we've passed through Penistone station, it' s the coldest place on
earth."
Then we feel the west wind from the cutting
And the threatening moorland sky.
And those mutterings from the waiting-room
It is – only we know why!

Bill Harrison

For many, the thirties weren't years to look back on with much affection. These were times of hanging around streets, exchanging strong views on why there was no work, and partly due to boredom, but mainly from necessity, the unemployed dug their allotments alongside their unemployed sons, their womenfolk using every ruse imaginable to put food on the table. And though beer was cheap, the pubs were empty. It was even said that some men from Bradford went as far as Pakistan to look for work.

Each day must have seemed to be like the last dreary day with a past best forgotten - and the future - what future?

Then abruptly there was an audible change in the atmosphere as a whisper spread around Penistone. Surely this couldn't be true, could David Brown Foundry really be coming to Penistone?

The weekend "Chronicle" settled the matter. "David Brown to build a factory in Penistone" was the headline, on its advertising page asking for twelve hundred people to apply for jobs in the foundry. This totally unexpected news spread like a fever, and not just in Penistone. Out of work people from as far apart as Sheffield, Barnsley and Huddersfield were now also applying for jobs at David Browns. One of these, was Bill Harrison.

The new factory opening couldn't have come at a better time for Bill. He'd just left school at age fourteen, been granted an interview at David Brown's and been accepted as a foundry apprentice. Wonderful news, a cause for celebration, but then there was the small print.

Bill lived at Goldthorpe, several miles beyond Barnsley. Work at David Brown's started at 7.30 am and he was expected to be there on time, no ifs or buts. But how could anyone reasonably get to Penistone from Goldthorpe for 7.30?

After careful thought, it seemed that the only practical solution would be

to buy a bike. At first this may have seemed to be the answer. However, travelling from Goldthorpe to Barnsley, through Barnsley town centre and then to Penistone for 7.30 was some challenge, especially for a boy of fourteen. This, besides having to return to Goldthorpe after finishing work at 5 in all kinds of weather. The situation quickly induced a rethink, leading Bill to search for lodgings, which he eventually found with Mrs. Peace in Penistone.

Mrs. Peace's road was a house just off the High Street, then a road without street lights. On first arriving on that dark, January evening, Bill found the yard behind the house to be in total darkness. Putting his suitcase down on the step, he knocked on the door, which after a few seconds, was opened by Mrs. Peace to reveal a brightly-lit living room. "Come in lad, come in," she said brightly, wiping her hands on her pinny. "Now then, from now on I want you to treat this as your home. If you'll follow me upstairs, I'll show you to your room." On reaching the room she added, "If I were you, I wouldn't bother to unpack, if you just want to tidy yourself up t'tea'll be ready when you come down."

Several minutes later Bill walked down the stairs to see Mr. and Mrs. Peace seated at the table on which sat a steaming bowl of stew and an apple pie, indicating that he sit opposite her. However, straight away she noticed that the lad was looking distinctly uncomfortable. He was fidgeting in his chair, besides looking distinctly uncomfortable. For several seconds, he said nothing, just looking more and more agitated. Straightaway, Mrs. Peace noticed what was going on and of course, having brought up a family of her own, she felt that she could read the signs.

"Oh," she said, "When you came in lad, there's one thing I forgot to mention, I didn't tell you where t'lavatory was." This was obviously the source of the problem, Bill half standing up from his chair. "Come wi' me," she said briskly, as she rose from the table, "I'll show you." Bill left the table, quickly following her to the door which she opened before pointing to a vaguely dim shape twenty-five yards away across the yard. Bill needed no further instruction, then leaving him to bolt across the yard,

Mrs. Peace closed the door behind her, before returning to her seat at the table.

But what she'd forgotten to tell him was that the lavatory was shared with a couple who lived further down the yard, and of the couple with whom they shared, the man had two wooden legs. She'd only just returned to her seat when the door burst open to reveal Bill in the doorway, in a state of some distress, "What's up lad?" she asked earnestly.

Breathlessly he said, "I can't get in, I can't get in." "Can't get in, what do you mean?" He retorted, "sumbdy's left a wheelbarrer in t'closet."

A Bit On A Natter

"Put both kettles on t'ob Mavis, it's cold in this kitchen, when me mam gets inter t'peggy tub she dun't want cowl metal on 'er back, yer knows 'ow she goes on."

"Ee lass, do you remember when me dad got inter t'tub an' got stuck, ahr mam were out so 'e couldn't ask us ter 'elp 'im, 'e got reight mad, rubbin t'soap on 't rubbin' board at back ter ease 'is way out, 'is knees were red raw when 'e gor aht but we durn't laugh, 'e'd a gone up t'wall."

"But it were a bit diff'rent when we got that little tin bath, weren't it, ahr Albert buildin' t'fire up on a Friday night when we'd all gone ter bed. But 'e said that yer'd ter be careful not ter lean agin t'side 'at were nearest fire, it gor a bit 'ot."

"But ahr Albert were allus a bit pertic'lar, weren't e Phyllis, if yer remember when we gor us first telly, t'Queen used ter come on on 'er 'orse at eleven just as t'National Anthem were bein' played. Well, there 'e were standin' up wi' nowt on, straight away thinkin' 'at t'Queen might be lookin in at 'im. 'E says 'e allus turned 'is back until she went off."

"Ah wonder what soort on a weshday it's gonna be terday Mavis. Befoor 'e gor on 'is bike this mornin', 'arry said 'e felt a bit on a slart. Look, yer can just see a bit o' black cloud over 'is fust wife's mother's."

"It's funny you should mention that, Mave, when Jack were talkin' abaht that dog o' Robinsons 'at's allus roamin' t'street 'e called that a slart, not in their 'earin' o' course, but weer does 'e get "slart" fra?"

"Ah thowt yer'd 'ave known that, Phyllis, a slart's a mongrel, yer know, a slart fra t'causey edge." "Ther' must 'a been a lot o' slartin' around 'ere then. Ter me, most o' t'dogs in this street come inter that category."

"'arry sometimes calls fer fish an' chips fra Bert's on a Friday night, t'trouble is, Bert allus gie's yer too many chips an' o' course 'arry were browt up not ter leave owt, an' befor 'e's done, 'e's fair gizzened."