

## Chapter One

### Prelude

*'I thought it would be like Sunday School all week. But it isn't.'*

*Comment of a surprised camper.*

In the distance is the tang of breezes coming in from the nearby sea. In the cookhouse you wouldn't know. Gleaming ovens are giving fragrant hints of good food to come, and all around there is a bustle of activity as tables are laid and work surfaces scrubbed down.

Outside there are groups of young people behaving as if they haven't seen each other for at least a year. The beginnings of a queue are forming at the dining hall door, but many of the people outside are too busy talking and laughing to join it yet.

On a field near the cookhouse an impromptu game of football has started, and somewhere else a sing-song can be heard. Near the main road a coach is departing bearing the departing campers from the week before. The new arrivals wave a frantic farewell. The coach disappears down the lane on its homeward journey.

A boy of about fourteen hovers uncertainly, watching what is going on. Someone comes across to him.

'Hi! This is your first time? What's your name? Mine's Jim. Look, we need someone to make up the team, we've got ten minutes before tea. Plenty of time. Come on...'

No longer feeling quite so out of things, the new boy is soon playing enthusiastically with the others, and by the time supper is ready he feels as if he has been at Tyn-y-Nant for weeks instead of just ten minutes.

What is this place? It is Tyn-y-Nant, 'The House in the Valley', the home of the Merseyside Christian Youth Camps.

Now it is Sunday afternoon and down on the beach, boys and girls are singing choruses. The

Director of the Camp is leading the singing. Holidaymakers turn and listen as a hundred voices are raised in thanksgiving and praise.

A few hundred yards away, a man is enjoying the singing. He nods amicably to his neighbour. 'That'll be the Camp,' he remarks. 'One of their services. Nice kids. Went to their sing-song last year. Open-house. Quite enjoyed it, in fact.'

His neighbour raised an eyebrow. 'You don't say!' 'I did, though,' he replies. 'Not my cup of tea at all, usually, preaching, and all that. Not that it went on long. Five minutes, now that's what I *call* a sermon.'

The voices of the campers rise again in song, and then fall silent as an officer leads in prayer. The holidaymaker on the beach begins to collect his things together. 'Nothing like that when *I* was a lad,' he declares regretfully.

Wednesday morning, and a straggle of boys and girls, brave enough to take up the offer of a mountain walk excursion, slowly makes its way up the hillside track. Up front are the energetic ones, sitting in comfort waiting for the slower ones to catch up. As the last of the climbers reach the rest point the energetic walkers pick up their things and start off again. There is a chorus of protest.

'Hey, that's not fair! We haven't had a chance to sit down!  
As the others give in, the last arrival, still puffing, turns to her companions.  
'Tell me, am I enjoying myself?'  
'I think so, Annie.'  
'Oh, well, that's all right, then.'

Twenty minutes later the summit is reached. A late afternoon glow makes the distant sea look like golden glass. The hubbub of laughter and conversation slowly dies away as the beauty of the scene exerts its spell. After a while, somebody begins spontaneously to sing a chorus, and as the others join in, words of Scripture in song echo in the hillsides.

Thursday night. On the beach again; the flames of an enormous campfire leap up against a sky full of sparks and stars. The sausages and steaming cocoa add an air of cosiness to the scene.

Around the fire can be seen the shadowy shapes of campers, but there is no difficulty in hearing what they say. It is a 'testimony meeting'. One after another, some hesitant and barely audible, others stronger and more confident, campers speak of what the week has meant to them. For some, Camp has been a time of strengthening, of reaffirming what they came to Camp already believing.

For others, it has been a place where problems and difficulties have been sorted out, where the Lord has dealt with sorrows and resentments. And for others, it has been a place where for the first time in their lives they have acknowledged the claims of the living God upon their hearts and minds and wills, and have bowed before Him and entered into eternal life.

Watching the scene is a group of visitors. Back in Camp, in conversation with a Camp officer, one of the visitors - a Christian holidaymaker from the south of England - asks curiously, 'I suppose this is the latest thing? The officer stirs a cup of cocoa and hands it to the visitor with a smile. 'What do you mean?'

The visitor waves his hand to indicate the field, the buildings, the tents, the campers chattering as they head for their tents. You know - camping, adventure training, that sort of thing - all very fashionable these days. Nice to see the Assemblies getting in on the act. About time!'

Not at all!' The officer smiles. 'I'm afraid you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick. This isn't a new thing at all.'

The visitor looks surprised. 'Oh! How long has it been going on, then?' Forty years, in fact. The first Camp was held the year the war ended.'

Forty! I wouldn't have believed it. So how did it all start?'

The officer motions to a bench. 'Well, it's quite a story. Sit down, and I'll tell you about it. Cocoa warm enough for you? Right Well, the story really starts back in 1945...'

As Camp settles down to a cheerful hubbub of muffled voices inside tents and chalets the visitor makes himself comfortable and begins to listen.



## Chapter Two

### New Generation

*The new generation, made up of those for whom the war was a shadow across childhood or who were born into the postwar world, revealed itself ready and waiting for un-apologetic spiritual leadership.*

*J.C. Pollock, The Good Seed.*

In 1945 the war ended, and Britain faced the task of rebuilding the future. Few areas of the United Kingdom had suffered so much destruction as Merseyside.

Few today still bear so many scars. Blocks of buildings were left as rubble, others were so badly damaged that they were declared unsafe to live in. City amenities were unusable, numerous interruptions and inconveniences in daily life had long since been taken for granted, and many Merseyside children were still away from home under the evacuation plan

Two world wars had changed Britain, more profoundly than by simply altering the urban landscape. The character of individual, family and national life was changing. In many ways, at first largely unrecognised, the revolution had begun by 1945 which was to change our society more drastically than either the Kaiser or Adolf Hitler ever could. Just as certain city landmarks had been destroyed in the blitz, and the unwary visitor might suddenly find he had lost his bearings, so certain spiritual values had not survived wartime and had thereby lost their ability to guide. The price to be paid for the loss would not be fully seen until the traumatic youth upheavals of the sixties and seventies. In the excitement of peace and the challenge of rebuilding, many did not realise that anything important had changed at all.

One who did was a young Bible Class leader in the Merseyside Assemblies. Bill Buckley was one of two men who led a group of boys who met each week in the kitchen of David Street Chapel, Liverpool. He was challenged by the need to get to know them well enough to be able to

share the Gospel with them as a friend, not merely as a teacher in a Sunday environment. He and his fellow class-leader, Bert Hardy, took the boys hiking and playing football -which, in those days, was something of an innovation in young people's work on Merseyside. The opportunities for reaching youngsters were obvious.

A friend and mentor, Trevor Holden, who had been involved in the Liverpool Boys' Clubs all his life, was sympathetic and helpful. The possibility of forming an 'official' David Street Boys' Club was discussed. In due course Bill found himself at a meeting of the David Street elders, making out a case that one should be started. After due consideration the proposal was thought to be inappropriate for the Assembly's endorsement, but the seed had been sown, and though the decision had been against the Club, the mood of the meeting was not destructive. One of the elders took Bill's arm as he left.

'Look Bill, I know you're disappointed, but if and when you do get something going, I'll be ready to help.'

The war was still in progress when Bill noticed a letter in the *Harvester* magazine from a Manchester man, Frank Parish, asking for help in a camping project at Staithes in Yorkshire. Bill wrote by return. I'm interested - can I bring my Bible class?

The reply was friendly and immediate. 'Yes! Marvellous!' In due course he enlisted as a helper along with Frank Parish, who brought a group of boys from Manchester; Arnold Pickering, who brought a group from the Stockport Assembly (and his wife); and a group from the David Street class

The Staithes Camp which Frank Parish ran was a mixed Camp, partly composed of youth club boys. The Assemblies were not very keen on youth clubs, and Bill Buckley's interest in Camps was very much a part of his interest in bringing young people into the fellowship of the assemblies. Then, as now, there was a serious problem of young people dropping out of Sunday School and all Christian involvement, in their early teens.

With the problems in the cities - minimal play-space, and the continual danger of playing in unsafe buildings - there was a social dimension to the problem as well. Though in some respects the Camp in Yorkshire was not the sort of project he had in mind, Bill Buckley watched everything that went on with a thoughtful and prayerful interest

He came back with a vision. The Bible Class boys should have their own Camp. More than that, it should be a project to which the young people of Merseyside could be invited. In congenial surroundings, with ample opportunity to share recreation, exercise and day-to-day chores with other young people, the Gospel could be lived out in front of them as well as expounded from a platform. Instead of someone wearing Sunday best (Bill Buckley's own usual Sunday attire was a black suit, black boots and a black Homburg), the Bible teacher might well be someone wearing shorts whom they had just beaten at table-tennis. Where, on a Sunday, the Bible class students perched on hard chairs in a circle round their teacher, in such a Camp as Bill Buckley envisaged, they might just as easily hear God's word as they hiked up a mountain together or washed up a stack of dishes after supper.

It was an exciting, attractive vision. Bill Buckley lost no time in getting others excited too. Among them was Don Millar, who had been involved in a Camp in the Isle of Man. He caught Bill Buckley's vision and, with other young men from David Street, joined him in urging the Assembly to endorse a Summer Camp.

Objections were not slow in coming. Public transport was still not back to normal, and petrol rationing was in force. The idea of getting a group of children to some distant place and returning them in due course to Merseyside was in itself a daunting prospect and what about tents? Every available piece of canvas was still in the hands of the armed forces. The older and wiser heads in David Street pointed out the difficulties, and for the moment it seemed as if the great idea was doomed to die prematurely, despite the many prayers that had been offered up and the hard work which had already gone into planning how such a scheme should operate.

The North Africa missionary who visited the Assembly shortly afterwards might have seemed an unlikely ally, but it quickly became clear that whatever other blessings Mr. M. E. Hepburn was bringing to David Street, to the embryonic Camp Committee he was an answer to their prayers. He talked enthusiastically about Boy's Camps in the south of England at which he had been Padre. So enthusiastic was he that the more cautious in the Assembly were won over to an appreciation of the value of Camps. Speaking later of those early days Bill Buckley was to speak warmly of the 'characteristic zeal and generosity' with which their earlier hesitation was abandoned and the full support and energy of the Assembly was put behind the new venture.

One obvious possibility was that the Assembly might become involved in the Harvest Camps, a government-sponsored scheme intended to recruit volunteer labour for harvest work by offering an all-expenses-paid canvas Camp and pocket money. Many Christians had been quick to see the opportunity that these offered, and had taken parties of young people to the Camps and had arranged evening epilogues and a Christian Framework to the day. Bill Buckley and Gordon Sainty spent an evening with Laurence Porter, who with his family was very involved in the Harvest Camps. They discussed all sorts of possibilities and explored various ways of getting involved.

The conclusion that Bill and Gordon came to that evening was that the Harvest Camps were a fine project, but not what they had in mind. So they decided to forge ahead with the original idea of an independent Camp, to which the boys of David Street and neighbouring Assemblies could be invited. This time, the project had the blessing and support of the elders.

The first Camp Committee comprised seven men from David Street Messrs. Buckley, Brown, Hardy, Hind (the elder who had earlier promised support), Millar (who began that year an involvement with Camp catering that still exists), Proudfoot and Sainty. In addition John Robertson, of the David Street eldership, was asked to be Chairman. He was one of the 'older and wiser heads who had expressed caution about the project earlier. The Committee felt that as a group of young men, enthusiastic and excited about their vision, appointing a Chairman known and revered among the Assemblies would add respectability to their cause and would be quite a strategic move. In fact he never was content to serve merely as a figurehead, and became a wise and much-loved friend and counsellor to the Merseyside Camps for the rest of his life.

None of the Committee had much experience of young people's Camps. With its formation, the long process of planning began. Every step was supported by prayer, both by the members of the Committee and by the Assembly in general.

The first decision to be made was obvious. Where should the proposed Camp be held?

There was a ready answer - North Wales. The Welsh countryside had been a retreat for the people of Merseyside for generations. On a clear day in 1945 it was possible to stand among the ruins of Liverpool's splendid Georgian squares and avenues and see, away in the distance, the long low lines of the Flintshire mountains, as peaceful and unspoilt as they had been in happier days. If one took the ferry to Birkenhead, itself still pockmarked with rubble, bomb sites and shells of buildings, the high ground of Oxton, Bidston and Tranmere provided a vantage point from which one could even see individual fields and houses far over the Dee. It was the natural place to Camp.

When it came to choosing the exact location for the Camp, the Committee met what seemed to be a major problem. It was 1945. Tents were almost impossible to obtain. But the Committee was sure that God's hand was in the project and went on looking. Eventually they found a firm (Bradfields) in Old Hall Street advertising tents. Bradfields were sympathetic, but could offer no help until a member of their staff remembered that in Abergele the firm owned a wooden hut full of tents that had been in store.

It was a dramatic demonstration of the Lord's perfect planning. Bradfields were willing to hire out the hut, the tents and the field. At a stroke, ten bell tents and a cook-house (complete with fitted stove!) were available, together with space to hold the Camp.

With the two major problems of site and housing solved, other difficulties seemed somewhat less depressing, but difficulties they were. Transport was strictly controlled and vehicles were scarce; one moved by permission of the Army. The Transport and Movement Control Officer (a Christian, Harold Oakley) was reassuring. 'Leave it to me,' he said. Later he rang Bill Buckley. 'I've rustled up two buses,' he announced. Food rationing was also an obstacle, as was the need to plan meals for a large number of campers. In this the Committee was fortunate in having the advice of a scout master, a Boys Brigade officer, and a member of staff in the local Food Office who was a Christian. In addition, Don Millar made several visits to the Ministry of Food Catering Department, which then had offices in Liverpool's Walker Art Gallery.

There was no way round the ration allowance, nor did the Committee feel it right to seek one. But it was amazing the way in which food could be eked out, and many tips were given by experienced caterers. Butter, for example, could be persuaded to go further by beating a little milk into it.

The Advance Party for the pioneering 1945 Boy's Camp set off for Abergele on Friday, 13th July. A superstitious observer might have been needlessly worried watching the three men leaving by lorry to prepare the site for the campers who would follow them. The Lord's hand was clearly on this vital preliminary stage.

The tasks were straightforward - and hard work. The team of three was reduced to two very quickly, as the driver had to return to Merseyside with the lorry the next morning. The sixteen tents had to be erected, pits had to be dug for latrines, and a meal had to be prepared for the party of forty boys and a dozen officers who were travelling down in the buses the next day. They left from Bridge Street, Birkenhead on Saturday, 14th July - a stately convoy of two extremely ancient and venerable buses watched only by a few interested bystanders.

In Abergele, the work was still unfinished. The two remaining members of the Advance Party were beginning to wonder whether the site would be ready on time when news came through that one of the buses had broken down. The delay was warmly welcomed. It meant that preparations were complete in time after all.

The first arrival was a boy called John Vernon, whose parents delivered him to the site on the way back from school Camp. He was immediately put to work helping to erect tents. The last of them was safely up when the coaches arrived at the site. As the passengers disembarked, a massive thunderstorm split the heavens. It was a dramatic opening to the first of what were to become the Merseyside Assemblies Youth Camps, and a further indication (if one were needed) that God's timing is perfect, and that seeming disasters can turn out to be blessings from the Lord. Had the coaches not broken down, the campers would have arrived to find incomplete preparations, no meal waiting for them, and a scene of confusion - hardly the most comfortable situation in which to watch a thunderstorm.

What was it like, to be camping in Abergele in that first summer after the war?

Those who can look back to it do so with affection and something of a sense of wonder. Apart from anything else, a Camp in Wales away from the inner city and its problems would have been a wonderful holiday even had the war not happened. Many of the boys in the Assembly and its neighbourhood came from families that struggled to make ends meet, and country vacations were an impossible luxury for them, but the Camp was cheap. 'We charged about thirty-five shillings,' Bill Buckley remembers, 'and we supplemented that ourselves.'

The holiday must also have been a culinary paradise for the boys, for though the Camp supplies had been purchased in strict conformity with rationing regulations, the local shopkeepers in Abergele were very sympathetic to the Camp and were often glad to sell leftover goodies at closing time. It became a regular spectacle in the town to see a group of campers marching purposefully from shop to shop bearing a stretcher, on which were piled high the generous gifts and bargains that had been provided. How typical of the Lord's abundance, that not only were the boys fed substantial and nourishing food, but that luxuries were provided as well, such as were next to impossible to obtain at home!

One gift that was much appreciated was a sack of porridge oats. Don Millar, unsure of the correct method of calculating the quantities required for the numbers in Camp, adopted a rule-of-thumb and simply multiplied a normal four-person quantity by the necessary amount. Leaving the oats to soak overnight, he retired to his bed to recover from a hard day's work attending to tents. He was woken up next morning stiff and sore, by a camper peering in to the tent.

‘What are we going to do about breakfast? The porridge is set solid - it’s so thick, we can’t get the spoon into it!’

‘Cut it into quarters,’ advised Don, ‘and mash up one of the quarters with water, and a drop of condensed milk.’

It worked, and condensed porridge was on the breakfast menu for four days.

Anecdotes abound from that first Camp. Several campers are believed to have survived the Camp without ever washing once; one leading figure in the Merseyside Assemblies today is reported to have brought his soap back from Abergele still in its packing. Then there was Sausage Horace (Now a Christian family man,’ remarks Bill Buckley charitably).

The official activities of the Camp were very similar to those of subsequent years. The main difference was that there was no Padre. One of the officers slept in each tent and led the Quiet Times for that group of boys, and all the officers provided spiritual guidance and counselling as and when the need arose.

The aim of the Camp was to spread the Good News. By the end of the Camp, half the boys had given their lives to the Lord. One of them was John Vernon who had arrived first at Camp. He went on to become Camp Secretary. Many of the others who professed conversion that summer at Abergele later became leaders and teachers in the local Assemblies and further afield. Had no more Camps been held, and the Abergele adventure proved to have been a short-lived project that was soon abandoned, the results of that one Camp in the lives of individuals and Assemblies far and near would have amply justified all the hard work, dedication and sacrificial prayer that preceded it.

But it was not an end to the Camp. It was a beginning. Already, as the boys returned to school on Merseyside and the Welsh beaches at Abergele turned to autumnal gold, applications were arriving for next year’s Camp. Those who had been in 1945 had spread the word. Their schoolfriends wanted to know more; then they wanted to come to Camp themselves. Nor was it boys only who applied. By 1946, not only had twice as many boys enrolled for Camp from a greatly increased catchment area; girls too were beginning to ask why they should be left out. An excitement was growing among young people and those responsible for their spiritual welfare. Only God knew where it might lead.



## Chapter Three

### Equal Opportunities

*So many things have happened since that it is hazy, except for the fact that I loved it and SQ many people came to know the Lord. It was a wonderful time..*

*A 1946 girl camper reminiscing in 1980.*

The Committee returned from Camp enthusiastic about the venture, and almost immediately called an open meeting (in a room over a store in Lord Street) to report to the Assemblies and discuss the next step. The enthusiasm of the Committee was contagious. Many who came to the meeting went on to become involved in the work in a variety of ways. Amongst them, for example, were Les and Rita Coates, of Hebron Hall Assembly in Wallasey, whose son Peter had been one of the first campers. The meeting achieved Bill Buckley's purpose, which was that the Camps should not simply be a David Street enterprise but one which would involve all of Merseyside's Assemblies. Several representatives of other Assemblies were invited to join the Committee.

One priority was to find a site for the Camp which, it was taken for granted, would be held the next year. For the second Camp, the newly expanded

Committee ventured further afield. The Lake District was another oasis of beauty and tranquility beyond the devastation of South Lancashire and Merseyside. It also offered the prospect of more sites to choose from. Both boys and girls had to be considered. Bradfield's 'Mrs. Sam cooking stove would no longer be adequate.

In 1946 the Committee adopted (and by 1947 had dropped) the title Merseyside Sunday School Camps'. It added a touch of formality to an operation that was already demanding a very high level of organisation. Two hundred campers and officers were now involved, all of whom had to be fed, housed and occupied.

For the first-ever Merseyside Girls' Camp, the site chosen was Grasmere Village Hall. Bill Buckley had approached Rita Coates and asked if she would be interested in organising a Girls' Camp. Yes!' said Rita enthusiastically. After diligent searches, the Grasmere Hall was found to be very suitable. It had a kitchen with a certain amount of equipment already provided. It was possible to sleep the girls in the corridors adjoining the hall itself and make use of various rooms adjoining as counselling rooms and officer accommodation. Next to the hall was a playing field with swings and roundabouts (duly tested for soundness on one occasion by a Mr. Scarth visiting from the Boys' Camp!).

The boys were accommodated in the grounds of Brathay Hall, Lake Windermere. A colleague of Bill Buckley mentioned the Hall to him after several months' frustrating search for a suitable place. It was an imposing mansion which stood north of Pull Wyke Bay, its grounds falling away in a bay formed by two folds of mountains sweeping down to the most beautiful of all the Lakes. The Hall and its estate had been donated to the National Trust by its previous owner, and the Government had designated the building as the location for a training centre for youth club leaders. A Warden was in residence, and as part of the arrangements was responsible for catering. The boys slept in double bunks down both sides of a large marquee, at each end of which an officer slept

The preparations for the Camps involved the formation of an 'Equipment Committee', comprising Bill Buckley, Norman Brown, and Les Coates. The problems were formidable. Planning which in normal times would have been complicated enough was made much more so by the fact that everything was in short supply. It was impossible to find blankets in the shops, for example.

Meeting once a week over lunch in Liverpool, the Equipment Committee planned strategy. The Government was at that time winding down the Air Raid Precaution centres (which had been well stocked with emergency equipment and provisions) and occasionally a notice would appear in the *Liverpool Echo*, advertising a sale of ARP equipment. The main depot was in Lodge Lane, and the man in charge got to know the Committee's requirements and would often ring them to tell them of special items that had become available.

One particular instance occurred in 1947, when it became possible to purchase 400 blankets in the Autumn. The price was six shillings and eight pence each. That in itself was a wonderful miracle, because hiring blankets was extremely expensive (two shillings for the first week, a shilling for each succeeding week); outright purchase was a much better idea in view of the fact that the Merseyside Camps looked like becoming a regular feature. The events following the placing of the order were even more remarkable. Because the blankets were not needed until the following summer, the Committee agreed to allow the blankets designated for them to go to another customer who needed them in a hurry, and to wait for further blankets to become available. In following months blankets arrived in the stores from outlying ARP posts, and the organiser at the depot picked out the best for the Camp. In some instances the rolls of blanket had not even been taken from the wrapping in which they had left the factory. Second-hand blankets would have been acceptable enough, but the Lord had more luxurious provision in mind for His people!

The Equipment Committee in those early years became expert at seeking out buckets, enamel-ware, and a score of useful utensils and necessities. They even acquired a flair as entrepreneurs, acquiring some equipment for nothing which was useless for Camp needs but was readily saleable for cash to swell the funds.

In 1946 there was a problem that had not existed the year before; that of transporting the equipment which had been so laboriously collected, to the Lake District. Don Millar obtained annual leave for the Friday before Camp (arguing successfully that it was the equivalent of Territorial Army annual training release). Other men from local Assemblies helped as the lorry (provided by Bibbys of Merseyside) made its way from collecting place to collecting place - first picking up the bookstall from Rock ferry, then on to Woodside for stores and tent poles; further equipment collections at Waterloo and St. Helens were followed by a trip to Hillside laundry for blankets and David Street for the food supplies.

The lorry expedition became an annual highlight of the Camp season for those taking part, and provided some memorable moments. One year the lorry was piled so high with blankets that the last to be loaded were tossed on to the lorry from a window - and even then the throwers were throwing upwards, not downwards. Mother year the lorry broke down in Burscough, and the reloading of its replacement took so long that Camp was not reached until 2 am on Saturday morning.

Those who made the trip each year can recall a hair-raising gear slippage when the fully laden lorry was descending Kirkstone Pass, a soaked and bedraggled working party cheerfully singing 'Heavenly Sunshine' as the coach sped through a very rainy Colwyn Bay, and a hired piano, lovingly transported to Camp, sliding from the platform as the marquee fell in folds around it. Such incidents are fun to look back on, and form the bulk of the conversation at any Camp reunion. But at the time, some were not so amusing, and much prayer was offered up as crises developed. Almost always, the crisis prayer meeting would be followed after a matter of hours by a thanksgiving one. Through the various ups and downs, the Lord was teaching valuable lessons concerning the impossibility of trying to do any serious work for Him without continual, sacrificial, dependent prayer. It is not only in the Quiet Times and Padre's talks that the spiritual milestones of Camp history are to be found.

But what of those 200 campers and their officers who arrived at Grasmere Village Hall and Brathay Hall in 1946, many of them completely unaware that a large part of the work of Camp had been taking place for months, culminating only a few minutes before their coach arrived?

The boys regarded the facilities at Brathay Hall with mixed feelings. The Warden, who was handling catering, zealously observed austerity measures to such an extent that the Committee vowed that they would never again entrust the Camp catering to an outside organiser. It was felt that there was no point in ministering to boys' souls while undernourishing their bodies. The scale of the problem was realised when no meal was waiting when the campers arrived. Fortunately, a consignment of meat pies had been offered cheaply to Mr. Buchanan of St. Helens Assembly a few days before Camp, and these had been brought along. They saved the day. On another occasion the boys were so hungry that the girl campers took pity on them and fed them when they appeared on their doorstep, having walked across in desperation.

The Warden, despite his austerity, was regarded as something of a character, especially by the officers who had to negotiate with him. He on his part was anxious to help the struggling townies. On one occasion, obviously with something on his mind, he approached a senior officer. ‘The trouble with your officers,’ he said flatly, ‘is that half of them know about camping, but don’t know how to look after boys. The other half know about boys, but don’t know anything about camping.’

The officer looked at him perplexed. The Warden waved a hand. I’ll show you how to deal with boys.’

The Officer trotted after the Warden as he strode manfully into the main room, which was full of the cheerful uproar of talking, laughing, shouting boys. He took up a commanding position and held up the stick he always carried, which was a cleverly carved swagger-stick made up of two intertwined spirals. Holding it between his palms, he rotated it back and forth dexterously, and it seemed to the nearby onlookers as if it alternately disappeared and reappeared from between his hands. The nearest boys fell silent in awe; their neighbours followed suit; and in a few minutes the entire room was silent, as the boys watched the undulating stick.

That’s how you deal with boys,’ said the Warden complacently, and went on his way.

If bread was short, water was plentiful - but hard work was needed to get at it. An old hand-pump was used to pump water up twenty feet above the level of the stream. For lighting, Aladdin lamps were used, and they needed frequent cleaning (Les Coates spent most of his day preparing them for the night to come). The cramped sleeping accommodation caused a few problems also. Originally bell tents had been promised, but these failed to appear and the marquee was pressed into service. One camper, returning late to what he believed to be his own bed, clambered into it only to plant his foot firmly in the face of a sleeping officer.

The girls arrived at the Village Hall in Grasmere to find long sacks stuffed with straw, standing in the corners of the sleeping corridors. ‘What on earth are these?’ demanded the new arrivals, to be informed that the sacks were the palliasses beds on which they were going to sleep. The girls accepted the situation philosophically and even cheerfully (‘What’s a pally-ass? A friendly donkey!’).

As the boys were finding over at Windermere, Camp chores inevitably took up time. Catering was made extraordinarily complicated by rationing - on the first night, coupons had to be carefully collected so that the food rations could be correctly administered. Some of the girls’ parents had used the coupons for the week, before the child left for Camp; these girls arrived with their contribution of sugar and jam, usually imperfectly packed. The Catering Officer at the Grasmere Camp recalls:

‘Oh, the jam - what a mess! Mother would send the sticky blob in some sort of container, until we were nearly as sticky as the jam itself in trying to extract it. So we ended up putting all the jam together and made it one lovely mess of mixed flavours. But it was precious, and folk were hungry . . . on Monday morning we hastened to Cockermouth, eager to get all in order with the Ministry of Food Office, then all was well.’

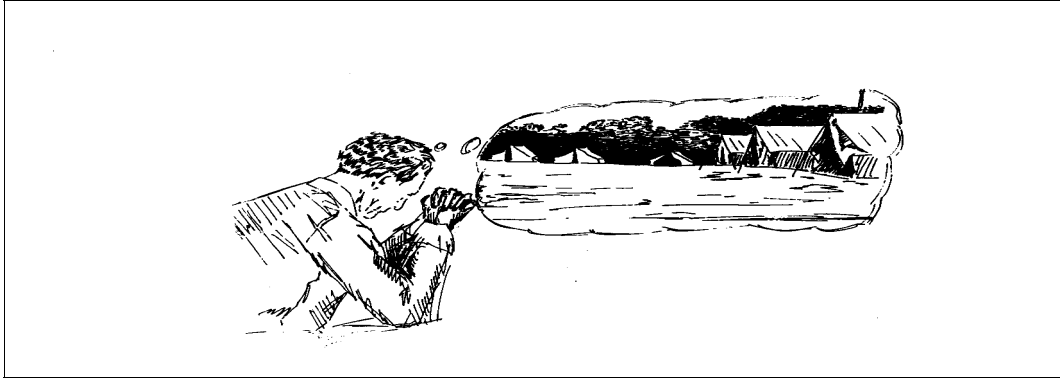
But despite the administrative difficulties and the hard work in the kitchen, the catering department was a place of laughter and song. 'Praise the Lord, O my soul' was a favourite, and the singing in the kitchens spilled over into the rest of Camp life, as notably during one evening's sing-song when a cook emerged from the kitchen, still wearing her pinafore, and led the campers in a rousing chorus. Who knows how many girls - and no less boys - discovered from those early Camps that housework and domestic chores can be no less glorifying to God than the apparently more 'spiritual' labours of Bible Study and 'Christian work'?

Nevertheless, in both boys' and girls' Camps, the opportunity was taken in 1946 to build on the spiritual foundations of the year before. Where in the Abergele Camp there had been no official Padre, the Camps of succeeding years gradually acquired a pattern of activities, teaching and worship, supervised by Commy, Adjy, Padre and supporting officers. The Quiet Time was used both as an opportunity for campers to have their own devotions and also to read the Scripture Union Bible passage for the day, which was later in the day used as the basis of a quiz.

Thus daily Bible reading was an essential part of the early Camps, and biblical talks, often given round a campfire in an atmosphere of quiet, total concentration. Many campers returned home having tasted the rewards of regular Bible study, briefly, but for the first time; and many also found that having heard the expected Bible teaching Sunday by Sunday in a safe 'Sunday' compartment of their lives, it was quite a different matter to hear the Word of God expounded at the end of a day that had been spent in recreation, exercise, or other holiday activities.

In this new environment, many boys and girls faced up to the challenge of the Gospel in a way that they never had before. Throughout the period of the Camp, campers sought out officers for private conversations, either to seek counselling, or to share with them the fact that they had made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. There were scenes of great joy in the tents and round the campfires. Some who had always fought shy of drawing attention to themselves spoke simply and movingly of the change that the Camp had made to their lives. Others spoke of having recommitted themselves after a time of falling away. One by one, boys and girls throughout the week witnessed to what God was doing in the work He had brought into being.

The first organisers of the Merseyside Camps had decided to follow a different pattern to that of the Harvest Camps. But there was a very real sense in which all Christian Camps of the period were 'Harvest Camps'. The seed which had been planted in David Street Assembly at the end of the war was growing apace



## Chapter Four

### Shared Vision

*'First Week-ers' will never forget the long and losing battle with wind and rain, which ended with the rather abrupt descent of the large marquee - although fortunately without damage or injury; their successors invariably think of the moving song of welcome, which still persisted when the singers had returned to Merseyside; whilst those who camped for the last week of the three still talk of the crowning grandeur of the Campfire when the blessing, long looked for, came flooding in.*

*An Officer at the 1949 Patterdale Camp.*

From the earliest days, the Camp Committee and those who shared the vision envisaged a time when the Merseyside Camps would have a permanent site. As succeeding years went by, the physical problems of storing Camp equipment through the winter, transporting it to the Camp sites, preparing the site from scratch each year by means of strenuous efforts from an overworked Advance Party and all the other associated complications, increased at an alarming rate. But it was early days, and for the time being, the Camps were a pilgrim enterprise.

A list of Camp sites over the immediate postwar years makes interesting reading.

The Boys' Camp in 1947 declined to sample the Brathay Hall catering again and moved to Grasmere. In 1948 the boys returned to Wales and Penmaenmawr. In 1949, the Lake District saw the return of the Boys' Camp, and for three years the Camps were held in Patterdale. In 1952 the Boys Camps occupied a five-week period at Arthog in Wales.

Over the same period, the girls returned to the Grasmere Hall in 1947, and were again neighbours of the Boys' Camp in 1948 when they moved to Penmaenmawr. In 1949, they joined the exodus to the Lake District, camping in Chapel Stile, Great Langdale. Legburthwaite in the Lake District was the home for the Girls' Camp from 1950 to 1951, when there were four week's camping. In 1952 the girls camped at Towyn in Merionethshire.

To stop at 1952 is really to impose an artificial division on the Camp history -those who worked

with the Camps would have appreciated such a nice dividing line between 1952 and 1953, so that they could have taken some time *off* from the continuing work of planning the Camps! However, looking back, the date does appear something of a landmark. By the end of 1952, both Boys' and Girls' Camps had gained experience of returning to the same place in successive years; by that time, many helpers and officers at Camp had themselves been campers in previous years; the Camps had become an institution. In 1952 five Camps were run on successive weeks, such were the numbers who wanted to come. Furthermore, 1952 saw the publication of the first Camp Magazine ('incorporating Annual Reports and Balance Sheets'). And finally, the Festival of Britain the year before had marked the official end of the immediate postwar years.

One striking thing about those years is the clarity with which those who remember them recall individual episodes. Many people who contributed information to this book forty years after the Camps they attended apologised for the fact that they had not kept written records; then proceeded to haul out from their memories precise and detailed reminiscences. It's an indication of the importance that the Camps held in the lives of those who attended (how many of those who remember the names of those in the cookhouse with them in, say, Legburthwaite for one week in 1950, could as easily remember the names of the colleagues they worked with in their careers, every week for the same year?). Although there are no convenient magazines for the years 1945-51,--illustrated with photographs of beaming boys and girls peeling potatoes, running races, toiling up Langdale Pike or singing round the Camp fire,-- the memories of campers and officers bring it all to life better than any photograph.

Such memories include a conversation that began one afternoon during the 1947 Boys' Camp, high up on Helvellyn, while a group of boys were relaxing before the onslaught on the next part of the ascent. It was the birthday of one of the officers, and the talk turned to that subject. The officer pointed out that he was 'really only thirteen years old - counting from my "second birthday"! 'Several of the boys joined in, and described their own 'second birthdays'. One boy had been listening thoughtfully. When there was a pause in the conversation, he volunteered, 'I'm forty-eight! - hours, that is. I was saved on Sunday morning, when we had the Breaking of Bread.'

This, of course, prompted further conversation, until another boy, who had been listening in some perplexity, broke his silence:

'I'm not sure I understand what you're all talking about. What do you mean - "Second Birthday"??'

The officer gently explained what it meant to be born again. When they reached the summit, the clear Lake District light slanted across the hills and the patchwork fields, glimpsed between peaks, seemed like pocket-handkerchiefs. As they gazed at the lovely scenery, the officer quietly remarked how appropriate it would be for somebody to have their 'second birthday' in such a spot. Wisely, he did not press the point, but as the party made its way down the hillside, one boy who had taken no part in the conversation before testified that he had indeed committed his life to Jesus on the summit.

Before that week's Camp was over, the boy who had asked for an explanation of 'second birthday' also had a second birthday to celebrate.

'Mountain top experiences' are sometimes regarded as suspect, and there is some truth in that. The officer from a certain Camp (not a MAYC one) who claimed matter-of-factly 'Give me fifty boys for a week in the country, and I can get a profession out of all of them by the end of the week' was not being arrogant but merely pointing out a danger. On the other hand, there are so many testimonies to God's lasting work in people's lives in Camp that one can only put scepticism aside and give thanks for the work that He raised up on Merseyside. Several generations of children have professed conversion and went on to lives of service and joy. In those weeks at Camp, away from the pressures of everyday life and the distractions which make it all too easy to postpone thinking about spiritual things, many were brought face to face with a truth which they could no longer escape. It was a fact well caught by Ethel Lockett, recalling a Camp of 1949: 'It was strange coming home to ordinary life again. Somehow Camp seems to be a world all of its own. It is wonderful to think, though, of so many girls going back knowing our Saviour and so many Christians going back strengthened.'

'Ordinary life' was a only a brief interlude for Miss Lockett. She is mentioned in the Camp Magazine for 1952, by which time she was serving the Lord on the Borders of Tibet - one example out of many of those who went out from the Merseyside Camps to service and labour in the wider world.

The Boys' Camp at Patterdale grew from three weeks camping in 1949 to four weeks in 1951. The 1949 Camps are remembered chiefly for torrential rain and wind during the first week (a certain John Knipe volunteered to sleep at the back of the tent so that he could warn others of imminent floods), and a memorable Camp fire in the third. 1950 was the first year in which some of those boys who came to know the Lord in the 1945 Camp at Abergele served as officers. Those who heard their testimonies, and the testimony of other campers to the fellowship experienced in Camp year by year since the war, began to feel that they were part of a growing tradition - the tradition of MAYC.

As traditions grow, some characters become legendary. Such was the much-loved Mr. Mashiter who was in charge of catering for the four weeks of the 1952 Patterdale Camps. Universally known as 'Mashie', he was a sprightly 77-year old, a saddler by trade, who not only organised the kitchens to the entire satisfaction of several hundred hungry campers but doubled as Camp handyman, mending shoes, torn clothes, and tents in need of repair. When Camp was over, during the months before the next season's activities he repaired stretchers which had been damaged in the previous summer. A man of radiant spirituality and an infectious love for Jesus, he was, for hundreds of campers, a convincing illustration of what the Gospel meant in practical living.

In 1951, a new venture was launched; an experimental training Camp for Christian boys. It was held in August in the beautiful surroundings of Bwlch Gwyn Farm, Arthog, Wales. Twenty-two boys and eight officers took part.

*Who of us will ever forget the glory of the view from that hillside, the breakers marking with a white line the mile or so of the Fairbourne sands, the patterns in green, brown and grey of the hills beyond Barmouth, the calm of the Mawddach Estuary, the changing*

*colours of the sea and of the far off Caernarvonshire mountains?*

The physical side of the Camp's activities involved bathing, cycling to Harlech and climbing Cader Idris. One of the daily activities was the construction of a pipeline to bring water from a hillside spring to the campsite. In the mornings and evenings Bible study sessions in the book of Nehemiah were led by Geoff Scott, a missionary from China. A deep fellowship grew up between the thirty, which impressed several visitors to the site, including a Roman Catholic schoolmaster, a local vicar and a Girl Guide leader. Despite the usual Camp catastrophes (including some alarming exploits involving the wanderings of a cast-iron cooking range around Arthog - unceremoniously dumped in a ditch, it was later delivered back to the Camp by a somewhat irate farmer), the Camp was a great success. In 1952 the Boys Camps moved en bloc to Arthog, where five week's camping was held.

Before the Boys' Camp that year, there was an advance training Camp for Christian boys, following the success of the 1951 experiment, though somewhat hampered this time by a lack of senior officers. The advance party preceded the main Camp, preparing the site, erecting the tents and marquee, and reconstructing the water conduit that the previous summer's training Camp had created. The spiritual side of the training Camp was expanded by readings aloud from *Echoes of Service*, thereby cultivating an interest among the boys in missionary work. The evening sessions took the form of discussions based on the day's Scripture Union readings, first in groups and then together to share the findings of the groups. In all respects it was a time of great growth and fellowship.

Of the main Camps, there are reports that it was a wet and windy summer, but also that after a first week in which Alf Clapham had spent most of his time securing the marquee which otherwise threatened to blow clean away, the weather improved considerably. There were long walks (returning walkers from Cader Idris were greeted back at Camp with loud cheers), strenuous exercise and games (netball and sand-hockey were novelties, and football and cricket returned as old favourites), and times of blessing around the Camp fire, when many campers testified to what God had done in their lives at Camp and at home.

Among the invaluable resources that were ferried to Arthog in 1952 was Mashie, who once again combined the roles of cook-general, seamstress and general handyman with apparent ease. The quality of the food is happily recalled by several campers -- proof that Mashie had not lost his touch. The cookhouse was a steel-scaffolding erection, considerably more weather-proof than the marquee that year.

Mashie's increasing years seemed to make little difference to his work-output, but the Camp Committee in due course decided to make life more comfortable for him by installing a proper bed in his tent. From that time onwards, he rested from his labours each night in majestic splendour, while his assistants and the other occupants of the tent curled up like watchdogs on the ground around him.

It will have been noticed that the Boys' and Girls' Camps were always held within reasonable distance of each other. This was of course a matter of administrative convenience and economical use of resources (though there *were* several times when the two Camps came

together, both for social occasions and also for some memorable times of worship).

When the Boys' Camp moved to Grasmere in 1947 from Brathay Hall the previous year, the girls camped in the Grasmere Village Hall. The arrangements were much as before, including the straw palliases, and the fellowship was as enjoyable. One highlight was an *indoor* Camp fire - truly a Camp 'first'. A hurricane lamp was wrapped around with red paper, and in its light the girls sang choruses and shared testimonies.

One song devised at Grasmere became, with appropriate modifications to cater for different Camp locations, a Camp favourite for several years:

We are the girls of Grasmere Camp  
And to the Saviour, Lord and King  
We gladly raise our songs of praise  
And of His full salvation sing.  
To Him who bought us by his blood  
And lives to keep us by His Power  
Be all the praise, through all our days  
From the girls of Grasmere Camp.

The 1948 Girls' Camp at Penmaenmawr was quite close to the Boys' Camp, and many of the campers duly recorded the fact! Other reminiscences include the fact that while the officers were at prayer meetings some campers were having midnight feasts of cream cakes bought from a passing van.

Chapel Stile, where the Girls' Camp was sited in 1949, was a lovely location, and the strains of 'The Lord's my Shepherd' sung to the melody Crimond fitted well with the timeless fields and hills of Great Langdale behind. It was a well regimented Camp, with daily inspection a necessity -- other activities were to take place in the sleeping quarters during the day, and the camp beds had to be placed against the wall and all bedding neatly folded. It is a Camp remembered for an unusually high number of medical problems, and there were considerable difficulties in finding a field to hire suitable for the Camp sports day - most fields were being harvested. The problems were eventually solved in good time for Camp, and the playground behind the school, with its backdrop of mountains, became a fine site for the camp fire.

So to 1950 and Legburthwaite, where for two years the Girls' Camp was to be held. The advance party in 1950 collected the remainder of the Camp equipment from Grasmere Village Hall, where it had been stored in the basement, and proceeded in a characteristically damp progress through a Lakeland rainstorm, to Legburthwaite where a meal was waiting.

The pattern of those two years was by now a well-established one; a natural pool near the Camp with a diving-board was a favourite spot for swimming, and hikes and excursions were popular -- including one longish hike to the Boys' Camp. There was an open-air service on the banks of Derwent Water which attracted the attention of many residents and holiday-makers, and there were several testimonies shared at that meeting which spoke of the work of the Lord in individual lives.

A programme for the third week (11-18th August) of the 1951 Camp survives. Commandant was Miss Holme, Adjutant Miss Hatch, Padre Miss Whitby and a catering team of three was led by Miss Williams. The Camp was divided into four houses named after missionaries - Proudfoot, Lockett, Slinn and Lower. A marks system was operated whereby conduct, tidiness and carrying out of fatigues were all rewarded. A whole page is devoted to the duties of the various officers, of which that of the Dining Room Officer can serve as an example. Mrs Shaw's duties were listed as follows:

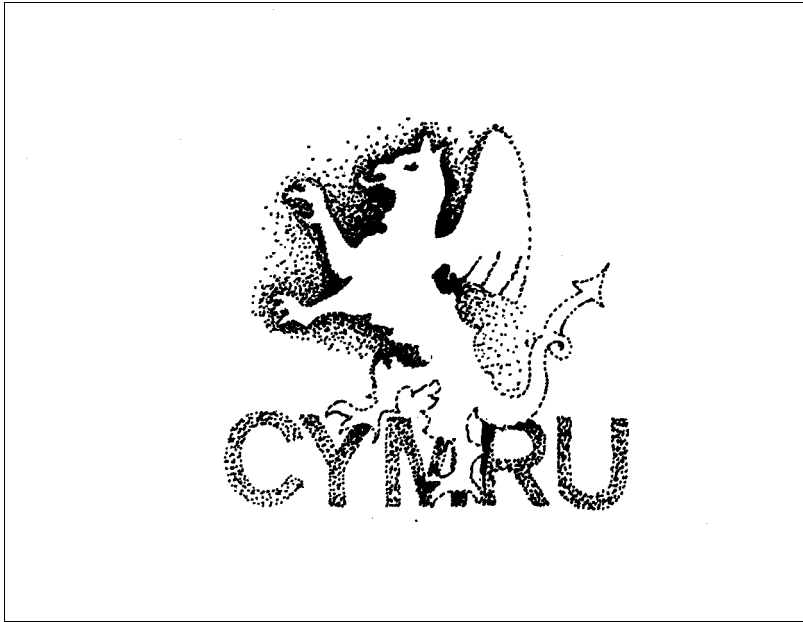
Rise 6 a.m.  
Breakfast with kitchen staff - 7.15 a.m.  
Prepare sandwiches for picnic lunch: also bread and butter for other meals.  
Set tables for meals (Corn flakes, Jam, Salt & Pepper, etc.) and help serve.  
Supervise washing up after meals (girls, officers and kitchen dishes).  
Wash through tea towels each evening.  
Take charge of staff cutlery and crockery.

At the end of the page an optimistic little note is addressed to all officers -help with sandwiches would be appreciated if anyone has a few minutes to spare.' This document is a salutary reminder that for many who help in Camp have done so over the years, it is hard slog in time taken from annual leave; many officers sacrifice part of their annual holidays for what they regard as the privilege of washing tea towels and serving baked beans to hordes of hungry campers. Truly the Lord uses all who seek to serve Him, and does not only rely on those who speak with their mouths.

The demands of the Legburthwaite local flower show made it necessary for Camp to move on to Towyn in 1952. It was only possible to hold two weeks of Camp that summer, and as an experiment the two were divided between junior and senior girls -- about sixty of the former and thirty of the latter came each week. Once again the four houses bore the names of the four missionaries commemorated in previous Camps. The programme was very full, and the spiritual rewards great

That, indeed, could serve as a summary of the camping experience of 1945-52; the programme was full, and the spiritual blessings were great. What had begun as a germ of an idea in the mind of one Bible Class leader had become a major part of the life of the Assemblies on Merseyside. Through the Camps, many hundreds had heard the Gospel clearly and challengingly preached, and had watched Christian men and women and boys and girls living Out the Christian life in circumstances ranging from the Lord's Supper to the peeling of potatoes. Hundreds of those children are known to have been brought to Christ directly as a result of those Camps; and who knows for how many more it was a vital instrument in their path to salvation?

A wonderful beginning, and a great testimony. But only a beginning. There was yet more to come...



## Chapter Five

CYMRU...

*Friday: Testimony meeting. A thrilling experience –  
No time for Officers to testify, so many girls following one another.  
Real 'Babes in Christ' testifying as Officers prayed  
One and another came down weeping their way to the Cross  
Wonder of wonders, whole Camp saved.  
Praise His name.*

*Extracted from Commy's Daily Diary, 2nd Week Girls' Camp, Dyffryn Ardudwy 1958.*

In the small hours of Friday, 24th July, 1953, the streets of Liverpool were silent in an early morning half-light. Suddenly there was the noise of a vehicle approaching. A lorry and trailer trundled into the view of the waiting boys, with a few shadowy figures perched on top of the load. The Camp Secretary leaned out of the cab window.

'Here they are, lads!' he exclaimed. 'Jump on top, boys!'

And, to the strains of 'Land of my Fathers', the Camp equipment and section one of the Advance Party left town.

An hour and a half later, section two was waiting in two groups at either end of the Mersey Tunnel. The driver of the Mobile Gospel Fellowship's van, generously provided for the use of the Camps, picked up both groups and managed to squeeze in more further along the road, thus filling the van far beyond what had been thought to be its capacity.

The various pieces of the Advance Party were reunited in a field in Wales, at a place called Dyffryn Ardudwy.

1953 saw the Girls' Camps sited on the island of Anglesey. The girls had great difficulty in finding suitable sites that year and eventually settled on Pentraeth. The site was not so scenic as other years' had been, but the facilities in the school which served as base were very good. There was active outreach to the villagers; first in the form of a meeting in the school grounds to which they were warmly invited, and subsequently in the form of visitation under the direction of brethren who were holidaying at Llanfairfechan and had come to Camp earlier to help in the Breaking of Bread service.

In the written accounts of the Pentraeth Camp, perhaps one can detect an underlying acceptance that, though the spiritual opportunities and blessings were great, the Camp had not been *quite* so memorable as other years. Following the Towyn Camp the previous year, which had been limited to two weeks (and had forced the organisers afterwards to concede that a 'divided Camp' of juniors and seniors had caused some problems), this disappointment must have caused some concern among the Committee as to exactly where the Lord wanted them to go next. But the worries were not to be unresolved for long. In the very summer that the girls were camping at Pentraeth, the boys had discovered Dyffryn Ardudwy.

The Advance party had twenty-four hours in which to set up Camp, and much of that time, it rained. The work was completed on schedule (when did the coaches ever arrive at Camp and find that things were *not* ready?). For the first few days it was wet and windy, and the marquee required constant attention. But after the weekend the weather was glorious, a week of unbelievably fine days and dry nights; the best, remarked experienced veterans, that any Merseyside Camp had ever had.

The site was unanimously approved. Halfway between Dyffryn village and the seashore, from which it was separated by rolling sand-dunes, it was within sight of Snowdon and had a golf course (which the Camp was allowed to use for some activities and for its sports day) and putting green nearby. It was ideal walking country, and there were plenty of interesting historic places nearby - some equipped with resident ghosts; in Dyffryn Ardudwy itself was an ancient burial mound, 150 feet long, which was acknowledged to be one of the oldest of such sites in the British Isles.

Even in such a fascinating place, there was little time for sightseeing. Campers in the first week enjoyed swimming, sports day, and Officers versus Boys cricket and football matches (rather hurried over in Commy's report in the Camp Magazine that year, except for a determined assertion that 'honours were even'); the excellent weather brought many holidaymakers to the Sunday evening service, following some energetic visitation among the caravans by Campers; and some Campers became Christians.

The boys of the second week seemed to spend a lot of time singing, according to the memories of some who were there. Not just in the formal services, again attended by outsiders as well (on the Wednesday evening, Mr. Frank Fenton gave an illustrated talk on Jamaica, which was much enjoyed); but also while 'spud-bashing', doing fatigues, and tramping through the Welsh

countryside. On one occasion five bathing parades were recorded, and the weather remained good. A memorable testimony meeting was a highlight.

The third week began in baking heat and ended in soaking rain. In between, the Camp had its share of sunshine. As an experiment, a much more relaxed discipline was tried, with a flexibility as to activities. In fact, there was so much to do in Camp that most campers stayed together, playing puddox, sand-hockey, cricket and all the other regular Camp sports. It was the year of the conquest of Everest, and this was duly recognised by an ascent of Snowdon, in which the venerable and athletic Mashie figured large. A Testimony Meeting around a thirty-foot campfire rounded off a week in which boys had been saved, believers had been strengthened, and the Gospel had been preached to those 'outside the Camp'.

Word quickly went round that the Boys' Camp at Dyffryn had been enormously successful. The Camp Magazine for 1952 carried the following announcement:

After receiving such excellent reports of the Boys' Camp, the Committee decided to take immediate steps to secure the site for next year. We are happy to be able to announce that, God willing, the Boys' Camp will be held at Dyffryn Arduwy again in 1954... at the moment we cannot make a similar announcement for the Girls' Camp, but we hope to do so in the near future.

By the time the 1954 camping season arrived, an announcement had been made which was to determine the pattern of camping for the next few years. The girls were to Camp in a wing of a sixteenth-century mansion which had been made available to the Merseyside Camps.

Cors-y-Gedol Hall was the seat of an ancient Welsh family, and among its former inhabitants was a certain Richard Vaughan, MP for the county in the seventeenth century. His place in local history is assured by the interesting fact that he was so overweight that the folding doors of the House of Commons had to be opened to their full extent to let him in. (This was an honour normally only bestowed on the Usher of the Black Rod, and when the doors opened there was some uncertainty in the House as to whether it was Black Rod or Richard Vaughan who was entering.) Charles II stayed in the house, and local society revolved around it until at the end of the eighteenth century the Vaughan family became extinct.

No more exciting location for a Camp could be imagined. It had secret passages, winding staircases, panelled walls, and a satisfying air of general crumbling antiquity.

When the Committee approached the owner of the Hall to investigate the possibility of hiring accommodation for the Girls' Camp (primarily because it was a mere two miles away from the Dyffryn site where the boys had had such a tremendous time the year before), the unfurnished west wing was offered. The potential was immediately recognised, though the Advance Party were faced with a most unusual task of preparation (the owner was a farmer, and used to graze his sheep in the grounds during winter; when the weather turned cold, the sheep often preferred the cosier quarters of the ground floor rooms!)

The west wing adapted very well to the needs of Camp. The billiard room became a staff

bedroom; the 'court room' became the kitchen, and most of the girls slept in the 'beam attic', which quickly acquired the title 'Bend-or-Bump'. 'Commy's Corridor' did double duty as the Camp infirmary, equipped with first-aid materials and a supply of hot water kept in a staff thermos flask.

There were five weeks of Camp that year, and each of them saw great blessings. A fitting summary of the first year's Girls' Camp at Cors-y-Gedol is the comment of an officer at the fifth week:

'Four things in particular impressed me about Camp.

First - the happy spirit.

Even as we settled in, happy laughter could be heard from all quarters and this cheerful atmosphere remained throughout the week.

Secondly - the keen spirit which was evidenced among the girls individually and as teams, on fatigues, at the Scripture Reading and Quiz or at games.

Thirdly - the *willing spirit* of the girls to co-operate to the full.

Fourthly - the spontaneous response - to the appeal of the Gospel. Many girls, moved by the Holy Spirit, yielded their hearts and lives to the Lord Jesus Christ, and for them the object of Camp was realised - they went home with a Saviour and Friend.'

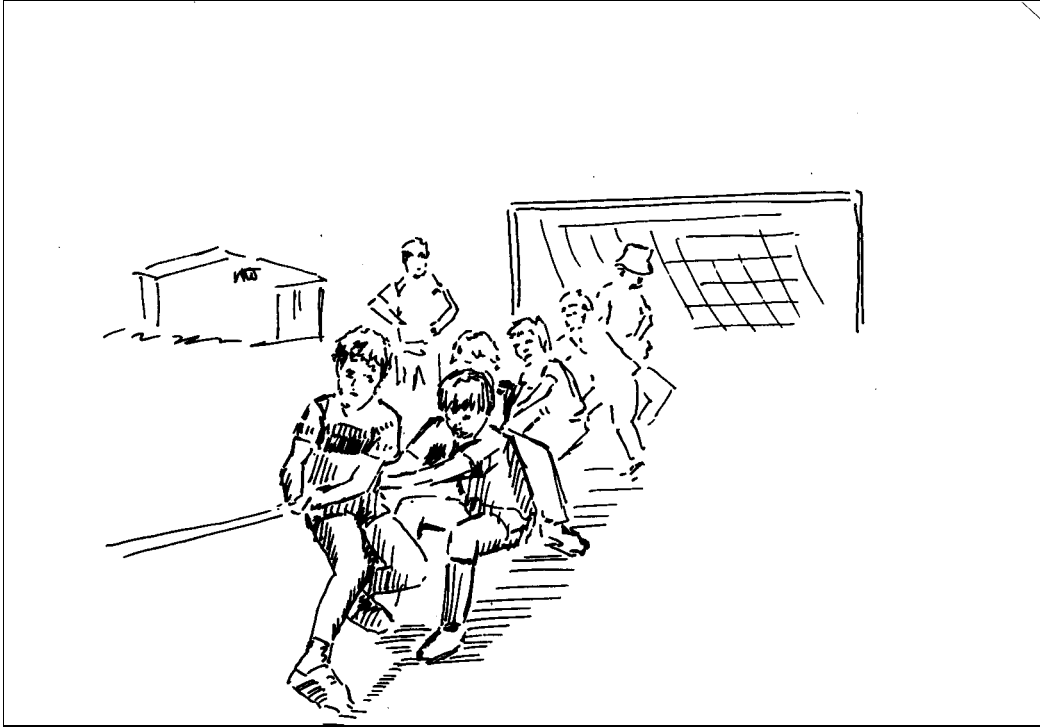
There were also, of course, scores of episodes of the type which make Camp such a unique experience. The second week campers climbed Snowdon, but found their way blocked at one point by a deep river and a submerged bridge. A kindly passer-by carried a number of girls across on his back, in order to save them taking their shoes off - a courtly gesture appropriate enough for a group staying in a courtier's mansion! And so many of the third week girls turned out to be queasy travellers that it was necessary for Ady to speak to them quite sternly: 'Please refrain, the queue for sickness is quite long enough...'

Over at Dyffryn Ardudwy, two miles away, the boys were having just as good a time as they had had the previous year. The weather was not so consistently fine, and the first week had several days of gale force winds. The Camp marquee survived the worst battering it had ever had, but all concerned were quite sure that it survived more by strength of prayer than by strength of guy ropes. Indeed, had the marquee been damaged or even lost, the Camps would have been ruined, and the Lord's protection was something for which to be profoundly grateful.

The first week that year seems to have had more than its fair share of hilarity. Water-pistols were popular. One sleeping boy was carefully carried from his tent and laid to rest beneath the stars, where he was discovered by the officers, still dreaming peacefully. There were two medical officers on duty - which was just as well, as a second opinion was necessary when dealing with one camper who had eaten seven kippers that day as well as the usual ice cream and fizzy d~.

The second week called its three houses, not after missionaries, but after sea food -- Shrimps, Crabs and Lobsters. The third week was characterised by some formidable sporting achievements, and the fourth and final week featured a birthday party-in-advance for Mashie, who at the age of eighty was still an indispensable part of Camp life. And week after week, just as in the Girls' Camp at Cors-y-Gedol, the officers saw boys saved, enquirers counselled, some

with deep personal problems ministered to, and holidaymakers witnessed to. A tide of God's blessing was sweeping Dyffryn Camp, and seemed to be a special confirmation that this Welsh town had a special place in His plans for the Merseyside Assemblies Youth Camps. So it proved to be. In all, the Camps were to be held there for a total of eleven years.



## Chapter Six

### Developing in Strength

*Statistics to most people are a cold, icy waste of space, devoid of interest, and best left alone. Yet for all that an examination of them can be a heart-warming experience...*

*A. E. (Bert) Roberts, 1955*

1955 was, of course, the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Camps, and the Camp Committee took the opportunity for a time of analysis, evaluation and thanksgiving. The statistics which Bert Roberts was commending to his readers still make heartwarming reading today.

It is at once obvious that the totals of those attending rose consistently during the period, apart from the slight drop in 1953. Other interesting facts can be gleaned from the statistics. The number of campers at a given Camp in a given week has varied quite dramatically, but the average was in the region of fifty. Also in 1946 (the first year that figures for costs are available) the cost of Camp worked out at £2.85 per camper. In 1955, the cost was £3.69. When it is taken into account that there were two weeks of camping in 1946 and nine in 1955, and that inflation was operating even then, such a modest increase over nine years indicates that the Camp Committee had proved themselves wise stewards.

In case this might give the unfortunate impression that the Camps had suffered from stringent economy, there are some reassuring statistics from the Catering Committee. In the same ten-year period, the Camps ate twelve tons of potatoes (the same quantity would have fed a family for fifty years, using 10 lb per week!). 11 tons of bread (12,320 2 lb loaves), 2,604 gallons of milk (20,832 pints), over one-and-a-half tons of meat were consumed, and 5,000 gallons of tea made. Ten hundred weight of bacon and 8,000 eggs ensured that campers started the day with enough energy to see them through to lunch.

Such quantities emphasise the need that had been recognised increasingly, to regularize effective management of resources and proper purchasing methods. Quite apart from the responsibility that the Camps had for the health and well being of those temporarily in their care, there was the matter of making best use of the many gifts of money and labour which had been donated. Over the years, as was pointed out above, the money had been carefully and wisely spent, but with the numbers now attending, it had become increasingly necessary to put things on to a more formal basis.

One development was the formation of the Catering Committee, which had been established to co-ordinate purchasing so that effective use could be made of the various bulk-purchase opportunities available to customers buying in large quantities. Organisation had become an absolute necessity; the Camps had become a major event, with dozens of details having to be worked out in conjunction with each other. Each year the programmes for the following year's Camps had to be devised, officers invited, application forms designed, and a major publicity outreach undertaken to Merseyside Assemblies and their Sunday Schools. Often serious administrative problems arose because of difficulties with the previous Year's Camp site, and these had to be resolved or a new site found. The finances had to be carefully calculated and a reasonable fee determined for attendance at Camp. Reports from officers had to be studied, and arrangements made for campers with special needs.

The Equipment Committee comprised three out of the four that had formed the Committee in the days of ARP blankets and detective work in the Ministry of Food. The specialist skills of Messrs. Coates, Brown and Roberts were as valuable as ever, which was why their annual offer to resign and make way for others had been determinedly refused by the main Committee. An amazing assortment of items ranging from cooking stoves, stretchers and piping to tent poles and soya flour was assembled each year, transported to the Camp site, and gathered in readiness for the campers' arrival. They were helped by many volunteers, and a friend of the Camps who offered the use of year-round storage in Garston for the equipment.

A sad note in the ten-year celebration was the death of Mr. John Robertson in October 1955. He was the first chairman of the Camp Committee in 1945, and remained as such until his passing. The tribute to him in the Camp Magazine expressed the deep sense of loss that all involved in the organisation of Camp felt:

His characteristic keenness and love for the Lord's work generally, of which he had gained a wide experience over a number of years, gave much encouragement to his colleagues. We have lost a wise counsellor, one whose advice was always expressed with deep conviction. There has been taken from our midst 'A man approved of God'.

Many personalities such as Mr. Robertson play a part in the Camp story, and the dry facts and figures are only the written records of meetings long into the night, hours of hard work, and much travelling by vehicle and on foot. It would be interesting, for example, to have some statistics as to the number of miles walked by committee members in search of suitable sites (often precious days snatched from a family holiday); or to have, perhaps, a chart showing the number of days freely donated out of annual holidays by Camp officers. It would be illuminating to have a note of how many letters have been written by officers after Camp to those whose lives were changed there, and how many hours have been spent in following up discussions that began at Camp. No records exist of the amount of time devoted, over the years, to preparation of the talks given. Nor for that matter has anybody maintained a register of the hours spent in prayer.

That is, of course, a good thing. Apart from anything else, the keeping of those records would involve enormous book-keeping to add to the many Camp labours! But the records are well maintained by the Lord, who knows and rewards in His own good time and His own good way all service done for Him.

From the written records that do survive, what is the picture we can compile of the sort of boy and girl who camped with MAYC during those ten years after the war?

One thing is certain: they lived in a different world. It was a pre-television, pre-pop age, and consequently a great many of the pressures that the modern young person has to deal with were not yet thought of. It was a world still overshadowed by the war: a teenager of that period would have spent at least some of his pre-school years in wartime, and would have been brought up in the austerity of rationing. Money was short and luxuries were in even shorter supply. Today's young people, holidaying abroad and wandering the streets with Walkman tape-players plugged into their ears, would find it a massive culture shock to be transported back thirty years.

It was an age, also, when the shadow of unemployment did not fall across schooldays in the way it does today. Today's schoolchild on Merseyside has, humanly speaking, a slender chance of finding employment on finishing his or her education. By contrast, the articles in the early Camp magazines took it for granted that one would go on to work after school, and college or university was something that most children accepted as a relevant possibility. The present writer's father, a schoolmaster who contributed in various ways to the Camps over the years, was able to write an article on the historicity of Christ for the 1953 issue of the Camp Magazine, in which he spoke of 'classical schools' and Latin texts, in the reasonable assumption that most of his readers would know what he was talking about. One wonders how such academic chitchat would go down today when few children take 'O' levels and fewer still have the opportunity to study Latin.

The slang was different, too; the word 'grand' was a serviceable label to describe anything of which one approved, and one boy is described as saying to an officer, "Well, here's the jolly old bus, Sir." A similar unfamiliarity pervades the photographs - boys wearing fair-isle slipovers and long, long shorts; girls wearing cardigans and the characteristic hairstyle of the period, pulled back sideways from the face and wrapped in a tight roll at the neck.

A different age, indeed, and it is hard to avoid being envious, in many ways, of those who lived

in that rather less complicated world. But what emerges from the records of the first ten years, much more than any fashion or cultural difference, is that spiritually speaking, the children who camped then were no different to those who Camp today. The messages which were preached and the talks which were given had no need to preach a different Gospel, and the needs of those who heard were the same. Children of the forties and fifties needed a Saviour as much as any child of the eighties, and the despair of those under conviction of sin was as deep.

So it is appropriate to finish this brief glance at the facts and figures of the Camps with the remarks of a Committee member in 1955:

The ever-widening influence of Camp gives reason to hope that, as through Israel blessing flowed to all the world, so too, through M.A.Y.C., God 'purposeth a crop' - a crop of young lives, and older ones, for His great 'harvest-home. Pray with us, therefore, and for us, that with purpose of heart' we may go forward with God.'



## Chapter Seven

### Memories of a Mansion

*We thought it was a well-known fact that 'all paths lead to Cors-y-Gedol Hall' -but ask the opinion of half the group who went out walking after tea on Saturday.*

*Extract from Commy's daily diary, 5th week Girls' Camp. Cors-y-Gedol 1956.*

The second decade of Merseyside Assemblies Youth Camps began with Don Millar, who had been involved with the Camps since the beginning, being invited to become the new Chairman of the Committee. In his first 'Foreword' to the Camp Magazine he remarked that 1956 had in many respects been a difficult year for the Camps. One of the things he mentioned was the weather, and this had certainly been one of the outstanding features of the summer. Bill Buckley wrote a piece for the magazine that year about a boy who made a decision for Christ some time after Camp, reflecting on the teaching he had received. As the memory which prompted the boy's reflections in the first place, Bill made use of the impression that the officers' cheerfulness had made in a week in which it had rained 'nearly all day and every day', who knows how many campers found as much food for thought in the spectacle of people getting on with things when the weather had not turned out the way they wanted, as in Padre's talks and the Sunday services?

Wet the summer certainly was. The girls at Cors-y-Gedol had their share. In the first week they dressed in shick shoes and macintoshes to walk through pouring rain to the Boys' Camp for the Sunday Service. They were met by a male officer who told them that the service could not now be held as the marquee had blown down. They returned to Cors-y-Gedol soaked through; it took two days to dry the macintoshes. The story continued, on and off, for the rest of the Camps. The

third week girls successfully made the trip to the Boys' Camp, but for the rest of the week had to keep changing their programme to cope with the weather's tantrums. The fourth and fifth weeks had rather better weather, but the year as a whole is remembered as a distinctly damp one. The same story can be told of the Boys' Camp at Dyffryn Ardudwy. The day's events were often changed at the last minute to cater for unexpected changes in the weather.

It is easy to underestimate the disappointment that a wet week in Camp causes. Back by one's fireside, reminiscing with friends, the wettest day is amusing to look back on. Actually being there, huddled under cover, watching the rain slanting down and breathing the perpetual steamy smell of drying clothes, can be a very different matter yet, as the rain poured down, so did the blessing. The service which had been cancelled on the first Sunday at the Boys' Camp was held later in the day in one of the tents, following the erection of the marquee which then had to be lowered again because of the high winds. There was a wonderful spirit among the boys and officers in that meeting, and the same was true of many services in both Boys' and Girls' Camps held in downpours and gales.

There were fine days as well, and each week's campers in both Camps managed sports, walks and shopping expeditions; but the abiding memory of the 1956 Camps is the radiant joy which flowed out of the Camps. So infectious was it that people holidaying nearby were intrigued, and many came to the services. One family that came to the Camp and heard the Word of God expounded committed their lives to Christ as a result. It was part of a joyful harvest.

The next few years were full of highlights. Dyffryn Ardudwy rapidly established itself in the hearts of Merseyside Assemblies Youth Camps, and Merseyside Assemblies Youth Camps established themselves as a feature of local life, making many friends in the locality. In 1957, the Girls' Camp inaugurated 'Hunt the Officer', the Boys' Camp once again wrestled with the marquee, and Bert Roberts wrote 270 letters and made 500 phone calls in the twelve months leading up to Camp.

Anecdotes abound. There was the following exchange, for example during Monday inspection:

Where's your towel?

'In my case.'

Don't put your wet towel in your case with your clothes!

'But it isn't wet - I haven't used it yet!'

(History tactfully omits to mention whether this was a boy or a girl).

Then there was the comment of a girl camper walking back to Cors-y-Gedol: 'When you've been down to the Boys' Camp once or twice, the walk seems to get shorter each time.' The social aspect of Camp that year was emphasised by the sport of 'fraternising', which takes up a great deal of space in the report of the first week of Camp - (one statistic it would be interesting to have is the number of marriages that have resulted from meetings at Camp!).

Camp activities enabled campers to explore more and more of the surrounding countryside, and outings to Aberystwyth, Beddgelert, and other places of interest were much enjoyed. There was also an emphasis on following up Camp with practical, daily Bible reading - the Emmaus Bible School was recommended and many campers registered for study courses. This was a

continuation of the theme of growth in the Christian life which had been emphasised over the years. The growing concern for evangelism as part of Camp activities removed any lingering thoughts that might have remained in anyone's mind that Camp was a 'holy huddle' designed to protect Christian children from the realities of everyday life.

A very happy relationship was established with the Bailey family, the owners of Cors-y-Gedol Hall, who lived with their three children in part of the house. Mr. Bailey helped the Camps in many ways over the years at the Hall, and Mrs. Bailey described the girls as 'very well-behaved indeed'.

Now that Camp had an established home, the rhythm of activities settled into a smooth-running pattern. The continuity given by the simple fact that equipment could be stored between Camps, and the growing relationship with local suppliers and the Bailey family, was considerable; many of the problems of Camp that had taken up long hours of Committee work and voluntary labour to resolve simply did not exist any more. The benefits were felt by the Equipment Committee and several other departments of Camp work.

A typical Camp day of the period can be imagined from this timetable from a Cors-y-Gedol week.

06.30	House officers reveille and sandwich making in the kitchen
07.00	Staff prayer meeting
07.40	Campers' reveille
07.50	P.T.
08.15	Quiet Time
08.30	Breakfast
09.15	Inter-house quiz on the day's Scripture Union portion
09.30	Fatigues and duties
10.30	Commy's inspection
10.45	Leave for excursion, with packed lunch
17.00	(approx.) - return from walk, ablutions
17.30	Tea, evening meal
18.45	Duties followed by bookstall, surgery and free time
20.00	Choruses, followed by short talk
20.45	Cocoa and biscuits; bedtime
21.30	Staff supper and prayer meeting.

There were variations between weeks, and Boys' and Girls' Camps had different activities. But there was an increasing amount of collaboration between the two Camps, involving many meetings for worship and for fellowship. One famous evening, the girls were offered the choice of either attending a service at the Boys' Camp or having a sing-song at Cors-y-Gedol. The Camp divided fairly evenly on the issue - it was raining at the time - and half the girls set out for Dyffryn Ardudwy. After a very good evening they were on their way back when they found an exceptionally boggy patch of ground and floundered the rest of the way home. Wrapped in blankets and sipping mugs of hot cocoa, the adventurers regaled their friends with lurid accounts of their perilous journey.

The next step in the history of Merseyside Assemblies Youth Camps was perhaps an obvious one to take, but it took a minor crisis to make it happen.

The Girls' Camp of 1958 had been a very successful one, and when the application forms for the next year's Camp were handed out the following February, the response was overwhelming. 390 girls applied for Camp, only seven of them wanting to attend the fifth week. Obviously Cors-y-Gedol could not take them all; the average weekly attendance had been fifty, and that was nearing the limit of what could be safely achieved.

Cancelling the fifth week was an obvious step, and after those applicants had been reallocated to the other weeks there remained the problem of the excessive numbers. It was finally decided to hold a Canvas Camp concurrently with the Boys' Camp at Dyffryn, at the other end of the field. It was of course necessary to go back to the girls' parents for approval, but the Canvas Camp went ahead, and marked a new step forward.

It was certainly progress in the social life of Camp. While boy-girl fraternising had not been actively discouraged (witness the 'fratting' of a previous year), the two miles between Cors-y-Gedol and Dyffryn Ardudwy had imposed its own limitations on the amount of time each could spend with the other. Meetings for worship, joint excursions, and the occasional encounter on a mountain-top had all been aspects of Camp life, but having boys and girls at the opposite ends of the same field was obviously a new situation. It worked very well.

From those years many anecdotes can be told. The Camp magazine had by 1960 acquired the title of The Dyffryn Digest, incorporating the Cors-y-Gedol Gazette; it recorded new Committee members, such as Jim Ross and Eric Avery in 1960 and Alex McMinn in 1961; Irene Slinn, whose name had become familiar to many girl campers as the name of a Camp house, arrived in person one year as Padre; and the same year the girls' campfire disappeared in mysterious circumstances before it could be lit - one disadvantage of having two Camps close together, for it was eventually found that 'Fuel rivalry' was to blame. The affair ended with a memorable combined boys' and girls' campfire, at which many campers yielded their lives to the Lord Jesus.

'It is many years since I've laughed so much in the space of one hour,' remarked a visitor to the Boys' Camp concert, but over in Cors-y-Gedol the campers there were not to be outdone as they staged an Endeavour night' which revealed a wealth of dramatic and musical talent

The achievements of the 1961 Camps included the consumption of 1,200 packets of crisps and 480 lbs. of potatoes (there were other items on the menu as well!). In the same year the Padre of the Boys' Second-week Camp fell victim to what was confidently diagnosed as 'open-mile-itis' as he collapsed exhausted on sports day.

From another year a letter survives from a catering officer (Boys' Camp) to a kitchen helper shortly before Camp. Apparently the catering officer of the Girls' Camp had been letting the cat out of the bag.

'Mrs. X tells me they always have ice cream at least once - charged to Camp; if they do, I don't see why we can't, can you?'

it is not recorded whether the boys had ice cream that summer or not, but at least their catering officer was on their side.

By the end of the decade, the canvas Camp had become such a success that there were some campers who were quite disappointed to find that their application had been unsuccessful and that they were 'only' accepted for Cors-y-Gedol. But the two Camps maintained their separate and quite distinct identities, and in both the Lord harvested souls. From the report of a Cors-y-Gedol Officer, the following is typical:

I wonder if it is the days which will be remembered best, or the evenings? Singing in the Recreation Room, especially our lovely Camp hymn:

*'Master, speak! Thy servant heareth...  
I am listening, Lord for Thee;  
What hast Thou to say to me?'*

and the chorus which summed up our evening talks -

*'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life'...*

And the highlight of the week - our Camp Fire on the lawn - when several girls who had trusted the Lord Jesus as their Saviour during the week bore testimony to that fact, together with others who had been travelling on the Way a little longer.

One of the girls who had been very disappointed at not being accepted for the canvas Camp summed it up: 'It's been a wonderful week - it couldn't possibly have been better under canvas!'

But it all depended on your point of view, because similar reports came in each year from the canvas Camps; from the girls:

What will I remember most about Camp? The spontaneous laughter the one-ness of the staff .... the rapt attention as, at the end of each day, we met together to hear God's message for us - and most of all the fact that so many went home knowing that their names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

And also from the boys:

It thrilled us to know that while all the hustle and bustle of Camp was carried on day by day, the Holy Spirit was active in our Camp. Which officer could forget the evening when from out of the noise of midnight feasting, eleven boys made their way to officers' tents to inquire the way of Salvation, and to confess haltingly to a new-found faith in Jesus Christ.

The campers from those days look back to a time when each New Year's Camp built on what had gone before, and two whole generations of Sunday School children came to know and love Dyffryn and Cors-y-Gedol Hall. It seemed for a while as though the Lord had brought the work to the place where it was to make its permanent home. But that was not to be. The Lord's best was yet to come.



## Chapter Eight

### Land of Promise

*Come what may the site at Dyffryn will hold a special place in the annals of evangelism amongst the youth of Merseyside, and a thousand occasions connected with Camp there will be recalled over the years to come.*

*MAYC Report 1963*

The years at Dyffryn and Cors-y-Gedol were indeed happy ones, but the seclusion which had been such a large part of Dyffryn's charm was gradually being swallowed up by the increasing number of holiday/makers. The Site, which had originally had just enough contact with the villagers and holidaymakers to ensure that campers had contact with the outside world but not too much of it, was now far from ideal as a Camp site.

The problem with Cors-y-Gedol Hall, on the other hand, was that it was by now showing its age. Built in the reign of Elizabeth I, it was suffering increasingly from rot and fabric decay, and by now had become a serious threat to the safety and comfort of the several hundred girls who stayed there each year. The pressures of both situations forced the Committee regretfully in 1963 to begin looking elsewhere for a home for the Camps.

Once the decision to leave Dyffryn and Cors-y-Gedol had been made, the acquisition of a new site was tackled with all the thoroughness of a military operation. George Reaney, an Incorporated Surveyor from die Merseyside Assemblies who was already involved in the Camps played an expert role. The Committee drew up the short-list of its requirements and it was

circulated to over 240 estate offices in Lancashire, Cheshire and North Wales.

WANTED: A level site of 6 to 10 acres within approx. 100 miles of Merseyside, with reasonable access to mains water, electric supply, and having bathing facilities within 2 to 3 miles. Alternatively, the purchase of 2 to 3 acres for the erection of huts, with facilities for hiring for rent 5 to 6 acres during July/August for tents, sports etc. Essential that said site be somewhat removed from existing Camp sites.

Forty agents replied offering sites. George and Vera Reaney, with Les and Rita Coates, went to look at them. After travelling a total of approximately 3,500 miles in twelve trips, they returned with disappointing news. None of the sites had the necessary facilities. Returning from the last of them at 2 a.m. one morning, after a 320-mile return journey to Aberystwyth, George Reaney and Rita Coates simultaneously expressed the group's feelings. 'There isn't a place in Wales,' they exclaimed, 'that will suit our needs'. One promising site had turned out to be mostly marshland, approached by a barely passable track.

Over the years the Committee had reached very definite conclusions about what was necessary for a working Camp-site. Now they had to face the possibility that their expectations were too optimistic; that the site did not exist which measured up to their requirements. Had they been too demanding? Was the lesson they were meant to learn from all this that there should be no new site, that they would have to make do with Cors-y-Gedol and Dyffryn and their numerous problems - or even that they would have to settle for less? If so, would it mean a drastic curtailing of the work?

With these troubling questions in mind the Committee prayed even more earnestly. In a matter of days, those prayers were answered. Geoff Bibby reported that a smallholding in the Llyn Peninsula was being advertised in the North Wales Weekly News. From the description, it sounded promising. A telephone call was made to the solicitor handling the sale and a visit to the site quickly arranged. On May 4th, 1963, twelve days after the advertisement had appeared, the deputation again set out, to inspect the smallholding at Abererch.

Tyn-y-Nant, the Welsh name of the house on the six-and-a-half acre site, means 'The House in the Valley'; and in a valley it lies, less than a mile from Abererch beach. A private road approaches the property - its only means of access - and it was on this road that the deputation, not realising how near they were to the site, stopped a passer-by to ask directions. The man they stopped was a Mr. David Jones, and he turned out to be the owner of Tyn-y-Nant. A coincidence? Those involved in finding and purchasing the site rapidly learned to abandon the use of the word 'coincidence'.

Under the guidance of Mr. Jones, the deputation began its tour of inspection. They enjoyed the beauty of the early rhododendrons and the salty breeze from the beach as they noted the seclusion of the site, bounded by high embankments on two sides, a neat stone wall on the third side and a wood on the fourth, in front of which a stream flowed. An immediate contrast to Dyffryn, where privacy was being surrendered to progress!

This first, favourable impression was confirmed as the party inspected the house and

outbuildings, all in excellent repair and equipped with electricity and up-to-date fittings. There were two flat fields, which could form part of the sale. The site not only fulfilled all the requirements that had been circulated to the Estate Agents, but had much more to offer than the Committee had expected or hoped for. The 200-year old spring (a vital factor, as it turned out), the lush banks of rhododendron and hydrangea, the apple and plum trees and soft fruit trees, and the quiet seclusion of the site -- proof yet again, if proof were needed, that when we pray, God provides out of generous love rather than merely supplying our requests.

Mr. Jones was moving from Tyn-y-Nant further up the hillside, for the sake of his daughter's health. He listened sympathetically to the story of the Merseyside Camps and their present difficulties, but pointed out that he had already had two other offers; one from a dog-breeder, and another from a pig-farmer.

Despite the warning, the Reanneys and Coates started home in an optimistic mood. Now they could see why the other sites had not been possible. Tyn-y-Nant illustrated what was possible. George Reaney himself had no doubt that they had found God's place for the Camps. Years later he recalled: We realised after three-and-a-half months of searching that the Lord would not give us what we did not go out and look for ourselves. He wouldn't give it us on a plate. He let us get to our extremity. He was telling us, 'You go and look for it, and when you've finished, I'll show you where it is. It's been there all the time.'

The deputation reported back to the Committee enthusiastically. The site was ideal; an offer for its purchase should go forward without delay. The offer was finally accepted in preference to the others because the requirements of Camp would mean that the site would still be available to Mr. Jones for nine months of the year. In recognition of this the purchase price was also settled at a lower figure than the asking price. Planning permission was officially sought on 16th, June 1963, and the property was purchased on 22nd, June. The whole search had taken a little less than four months.

On 14th, August the Merseyside Assemblies Youth Camps Trust was officially formed. Many times, in the weeks that followed, members of the Committee found themselves wondering whether Tyn-y-Nant was ever going to be available as a Camp site. The difficulties of finding a suitable site, it turned out, paled in comparison to the problems involved in actually buying one. The enormous effort already put in was now to be followed by even more strenuous work, as the project went forward painfully slowly.

A single episode from that period will serve to show the kind of problem that arose. While George Reaney was at Dyffryn Camp that summer, he heard from Bert Roberts that a hearing was to take place in Pwllheli that afternoon at 3.15, to hear a objection being brought to the Council against issuing of the licence for purchase of Tyn-y-Nant for Camp use. He drove to Pwllheli, and miraculously managed to find Mr. Jones's solicitor - miraculously, because it was lunchtime and the solicitor invariably ate at restaurants but had on this occasion decided to stay in his office after being in court.

The problem was that the property was part of a larger estate, and though sold separately was still governed by an agreement which was in existence and controlled the use to which later

purchasers of any part of the estate could put their land. In particular it controlled the water facilities, and the complaint had been brought by the neighbouring landowner, the owner of the bulk of the original estate, who was claiming that the agreement stipulated that the spring at Tyn-y-Nant must be kept flowing clean. How, argued the complainants, could a Camp with numerous young people possibly maintain the limited water resources of Tyn-y-Nant in good condition?

The miracle of Mr. Jones's solicitor's lack of appetite that lunchtime became apparent when, searching through a quantity of original documents that he had brought with him to the hearing, he and George Reaney discovered a clause in the deeds of Tyn-y-Nant exempting the property from the water controls and giving the owner of the land the unconditional right to a water supply.

Who's the solicitor acting for the estate?' asked George.

'His office is just down the road.'

Armed with a photocopy of the original documents, George Reaney ran to the solicitor's office. 'Oh, I'm afraid it's not possible to see him,' he was told. After a number of such setbacks, George finally drove to the complainants residence.

He was received politely by a short, dapper man, who asked to be told what the Merseyside Camps were. A few moments after George had launched into his account, he held up a hand.

'Just a minute - this is very interesting, and I'd like my wife to hear about it.' So she was brought in, and she also heard the story.

When George finished, his hearer thrust his hand into his pocket and took out his wallet. "I'd like to contribute something to what you're doing. I think it's a good work.". George shook his head. 'Thank you, but it's not money we need from you, sir. What we need is your co-operation.'

Back at the Council offices, George bumped into an old colleague from Merseyside, now the Public Health Officer at Pwllheli. No longer taken aback by coincidences, George explained the situation to him. After seeing the Clerk to the Council, the matter was resolved a short time later, and the estate's objections were withdrawn.

When at the end of the afternoon George phoned Bert Roberts to tell him the good news he realised that he had had nothing to eat all day. Well,' came the reassurance from Bert, 'you've been fasting - and we've been praying!'

Prayer was the key factor in that and in all the miracles which were taking place in connection with the Camp. It was not the skills and expertise of those involved, nor the strenuous hard work that everybody put in, that brought the blessing - though they were part of it. All over Merseyside and North Wales, and farther afield, people were praying for the new venture, and God was honouring their prayers. And even in the brief glimpses that this history can record of the events and conversations that were going on, it is significant that so many potential critics, and even enemies, were won over by simply hearing from one person or another the wonderful story of what God had done and was still doing in the Merseyside Assemblies Youth Camps.

Among the local authorities and Council officers were some who were lukewarm about what was proposed, and much of George Reaney's labours of the Merseyside Assemblies Camps - and, in some cases, explanation of who the Assemblies were and how they came to be organising Camps for young people in the heart of the Welsh countryside.

Perhaps those conversations had results in the lives of the hearers which are part of the untold story of Tyn-y-Nant - a story which will only begin to be told in heaven! Today, the relationship between MAYC and the local authorities is a very good one, and many local officials have been exceptionally kind and helpful.

The licence which the Caernarvonshire County Council and Lleyn District Council issued on 28th October of that year was the first permission to hold a private Camp ever given in the area. The application (a delicate one, as it involved change of use of the land) was handled by George Reaney, the Committee's representative for most of these negotiations. It included the provisional plans that had been drawn up immediately the site had been decided on; the first visible indication of what the new Camp site would look like.

The plans showed tents, a cookhouse, huts and all the other necessary accommodation for a thriving Camp season. They were now approved, and things were really under way.

There were numerous things that had to be done to the site itself. The levelling of some of the land, to make it usable for sports and recreation, was miraculously made easier by an introduction to a local excavating contractor who did the whole job at virtually cost price. Wooden buildings were brought from Dyffryn and temporarily erected on the site. In November the 'Robertson Hall' was partly erected, a splendid wooden hall which had been presented to the Camps by a Widnes firm on the condition that the Committee arranged disassembly and transport. The name, of course, was a tribute to the Committee chairman for the first ten years of its existence. But when it was almost erected, apart from the roof, a storm arose one night and the building collapsed into a sea of wet clay from the excavation work.

The weather was deteriorating, and work had to halt for the winter months. The Robertson Hall spent December and January stacked under cover, in pieces, on the site. In February it was repaired and rebuilt, and it remained there for seventeen years until 1981.

Despite such setbacks, nobody doubted that the site would be ready for the 1964 campers. Between March and June, a 7,000 brick boys' toilet building was built complete with plumbing and drains. The girls' toilets were converted from the outhouses of the original cottage. 1,000 feet of water mains and 500 feet of land drains were dug (a major undertaking: after a foot or so, the diggers struck rock). A large septic tank and sewage system were built. A wooden shop and six huts (each sleeping three) were erected.

The whole thing was made much easier by generous voluntary labour and gifts, including a mechanical dumper which was the gift of a Merseyside builder, Charles Peers, who had recently retired. His generosity, in fact, was crucial to the progress of the work. Two months before the site's purchase George Reaney had met Mr. Peers at the opening of Prenton Assembly's new hall, and had been given an amazing offer. 'I'm giving up the business, George. Come along to

the yard and take whatever you need for the Camps. Neither knew at that time the amazing things that were to happen that year, but by the time arrangements had been made to collect the materials, Tyn-y-Nant had been purchased. It took six twenty-ton vehicles (kindly loaned by Harold Smethurst) three Saturdays to transport Charles Peers' gift. Six huts, hundreds of bricks, a hundred ex-RAF beds (which are still in use), the dumper, a concrete mixer - the list seemed endless.

The history of Tyn-y-Nant Camp is the history of Merseyside Assemblies Youth Camps from this point, for the site has been their permanent home for the past twenty years. The years of being a 'pilgrim Camp', moving from place to place, were over. The story from 1963 onwards is of the site developing and growing, to reflect year by year the way in which God has guided the work into ever new areas and activities.

The end of uncertainty as to the Camp's whereabouts each year did not mean the end of excitement or anticipation, and certainly did not mean the end of the necessity to look constantly to God for guidance and help. Of course, the Camp is not the site, but the people in it. But the story of the site is a part of it, and is itself part of the testimony that the work bears to the continuing hand of God. It's appropriate, therefore, to interpose at this point in the history a summary of the way that Tyn-y-Nant has grown and changed. The chapter that follows is not simply the summarised reports of the Committee's labours. It is the record of a work of God, recorded in sewers, huts, pathways, and numerous other feats of hard work and long hours.

Over the past two decades many young people have gone to Tyn-y-Nant and found eternal life there. The spiritual impact of the work will only be fully recognised in heaven. That will also be the time and place when the many sacrifices and generousities involved in providing the physical comforts and amenities of the Camp site will begin to be known.



## Chapter Nine

### House in the Valley

*Nehemiah had an immense task so, 'He went before the Lord', and them said,  
'The God of Heaven will prosper us, therefore we His servants will arise and build.'  
If God's hand is in the work, our hands should be too.*

*Site Committee Chairman's Report November 1983.*

This chapter is an attempt to briefly record some highlights of the twenty years of work-parties at Tyn-y-Nant. It is based on the meticulous records of George Reaney.

Readers of this history who are not familiar with the site or its location should bear in mind that the journey from Merseyside to Abererch is a long one, and though the countryside through which the route goes is some of the loveliest and least spoilt in North Wales, those who made the journey regularly to help at the site were adding a tiring journey to the heavy physical work involved. Consider, further, the fact that almost everybody working on the site was doing so without pay, and that many were giving up holidays in order to be able to help, and the scale of the enterprise in terms of human effort can begin to be understood.

The work parties' main work was done in the months of February to July and September to October each year. 1965 saw the building of two large (36ft x 14ft) cedarwood chalets on concrete bases in preparation for the Summer Camp. They were assembled in Liverpool in the yard and garage behind George Reaney's office, by volunteers working every night for 28

nights, and then transported to Abererch and installed on the site. Bunks were fitted in them, and the 100 beds which had come from Charles Peers were put into service with two-inch thick sponge mattresses. The next year saw little construction work, chiefly owing to the fact that George Reaney was seriously ill for seven months. Routine maintenance of the site went on, such as painting, and an electrical pump system was installed to carry water from the spring to the toilets and fire hydrants. In the Autumn of 1966 plans were finalised, submitted to the local authorities and approved, for the construction of a concrete block cookhouse and adjacent foodstore.

In 1967, 650 feet of 3 inch steel gas pipe (every inch of which had to be wrapped in regulation tape) were laid underground from the main gate to the cookhouse. It was only then that it was discovered that on the private road to Tyn-y-Nant (which is hundreds of yards away from, and two hundred feet above, the main road) there was a gas main - a mere fifteen feet from the present coach-park gate. All that was necessary was to arrange for the Gas Board to link the new pipes to the old main - a far cheaper exercise than had been planned for. Not for the first time, those working on the project were struck by the fact that so many of the good things available on the site had been put there many years before the Camps Committee ever saw it. When the gas main was installed in the private road nobody knew that the smallholding fifteen feet away would become the Camp site. But the Lord did.

What is remarkable about the gradual introduction of permanent buildings and major reconstruction work is how closely the development of the site followed that initial sketch map that George Reaney produced for the Committee shortly after seeing the site in 1963. Slowly the vision took shape. Most of the sleeping accommodation was intended for use by the girl campers. The boys sleep under canvas in the field at the top of the property. That too was a remarkable aspect of the site; the ease with which the two Camps could be separately run as necessary, yet come together for food, worship and recreation.

One problem about the new cookhouse was equipping it, but again the Lord overruled; not only were some excellent serviceable cookers found which were about to be scrapped (and were offered to the Trustees at scrap price), but in similar ways fluorescent lighting, four fine sinks and many other cooking necessities were obtained for nothing or next to nothing, and much of the equipment is still giving good use today. Free repair and replacement has often been given, even by firms which knew nothing about the Camps until a Trustee contacted them to say that the equipment was in need of attention. It has been the pattern of Camp through the years that everything that has been needed has been provided, often before it has been asked for.

In June 1967 a rather unwelcome letter arrived stating that the rateable value of the site had been reassessed, owing to the building work that had been carried out, and had risen from £19 to £186 -- a ten-fold increase. This resulted in George Reaney appearing before a Rate Tribunal in Pwllheli for four hours. He began his argument by explaining to the Tribunal who the Merseyside Assemblies were and what they believed, and went on to explain that many of the new buildings, despite the fact that they had required planning permission, were not in fact permanent structures. In addition, the camping licence was only granted from March to October each year.

The Merseyside experts who had been asked to advise on the situation before George went to the Tribunal had been uniformly gloomy about his prospects. One builder in the Assemblies assured him, 'You're wasting your time, George. You'll never get a team of District Valuers to reduce their valuation by more than a few pounds.'

But the Lord overruled wonderfully. At the end of the morning, it was announced that the Tribunal would adjourn for lunch. As George left the room a member of the Tribunal caught up with him and tapped him on the shoulder.

'Just wanted to say - I found that very interesting, you know, what you were telling me about who you all are and what you believe. Very interesting.'

After lunch, during which the three Commissioners held private session, it was announced that the assessment had been revised and lowered to £100. Back on Merseyside the news was greeted with incredulous enthusiasm. Such a reduction was normally unheard of, and was a great encouragement. The rate increase had been a serious problem, a heavy financial burden (remember, these are 1967 prices!), and was the most serious crisis that the Tyn-y-Nant project had faced since the objection to the original licence four years earlier.

In 1968 a further patch of land was purchased from Mr. Jones for use as a coach park and turning place. Further maintenance work was carried out and a tools and material store was built. In August, Tyn-y-Nant was visited by the Mayor of Pwllheli and civic heads from three local councils. The Mayor was a Jewish gentleman from Liverpool who had already been helpful to the Camps in a number of ways, the most important of which was his part in reversing a proposal to meter the water supply to the Camp. A further cedarwood chalet (*54ft x 14ft*) was completed on the girls' site in 1970.

The preparation and erection of the new Dining Hall was not completed until 1970. Over the next two or three years the site acquired a Craft Room (another building which arrived at Abererch in pieces, having been disassembled and transported from Liverpool). This also needed a concrete base, and it will give some idea of the effort that these preliminaries involved if it is noted that the Dining Hall required the mixing of 100 tons of concrete, and the Craft Room 70 tons. The same period saw the installation of a new electricity supply by the Regional Electricity Authority - the Camp Trustees were asked to pay only £300 out of the total costs of £1,000.

The tenth anniversary of Tyn-y-Nant was marked by the local council's new reservoir. For the first four years there had been constant problems with the main water supply, chiefly because the site was 200 feet above sea level. Often in the summer months, when holidaymakers on the beach were using the supply heavily, the supply up at Tyn-y-Nant dwindled to nothing for days on end. The work that had been done already had resulted in the provision of several storage tanks and electric pumps to maintain emergency supplies from the spring, using some mains water as well. Nevertheless, because in dry weather the spring often ran dry, it was a constant problem, and there were occasions when convoys of cars had to take plastic containers to the village to bring back water from the public taps.

All this changed dramatically when the new reservoir was built behind and above Tyn-y-Nant, so

that the water pressure on the site improved immediately; and though occasionally in an exceptionally hot dry summer there are a few problems, the days of ferrying water from Abererch are over. It was just one of many local Council works which have benefited the Camps even though the needs of Camp were not a factor in the Council's decision to undertake them.

In 1975 the shop was extended **to** provide extra sleeping accommodation and a bookroom, and a concrete-block drying room was provided, with comprehensive facilities. Adjacent to this a blanket room was erected to provide storage for 1500 blankets. In the same year the cookhouse received another deep frying tank. More campers, more chips.

Following seasons saw rocks removed from what was to become the boys field and the fencing of the coach park. In 1976 the Mayor of Pwllheli and local Civic Heads made a second visit to the site, and on this occasion were formally presented with Bibles. In 1978 a highly sophisticated sewage system was constructed to cope with the fact that an increasing number of people were living on the site each summer. An improved single-phase electricity system was fitted the next year for the same reason -- many of the Camp facilities were having to be re-examined, because they had originally been designed for work loads below what was now normal.

Still the improvements continued, in part as fulfillment of the plan originally conceived in 1963, and in part simply to serve the increased numbers of campers and the developing activities and needs. (it has never been the policy of the Camp Trustees to greatly expand the number of campers who can be accommodated at Tyn-y-Nant, for a variety of reasons. Most of the new buildings have increased the facilities and the amenities.) Stores were built in 1980. In 1981 the beloved Robertson Hall was finally dismantled to make way for a new and larger building (a development which would have given joy to John Robertson for reasons quite other than that the new building still bore his name). The new building project involved rock-blasting, laying of foundations and the usual enormous quantities of concrete and hundreds of yards of drainage. The new building, now the dining hall and sleeping rooms, was completed in 1982. It is 70ft x 28ft, made of concrete blocks and cavity walls lined with brick. The cost was over £30,000. The old Robertson Hall was retired with dignity. Visitors to the Camp pass it every year where it still stands by the Llanwrst road, giving good services to its new owner.

In July 1982 a third visit was made by the Mayor and local dignitaries. In 1983 a road surfacing project was completed which gave the car park and main Camp area dry surfaces in bad weather.

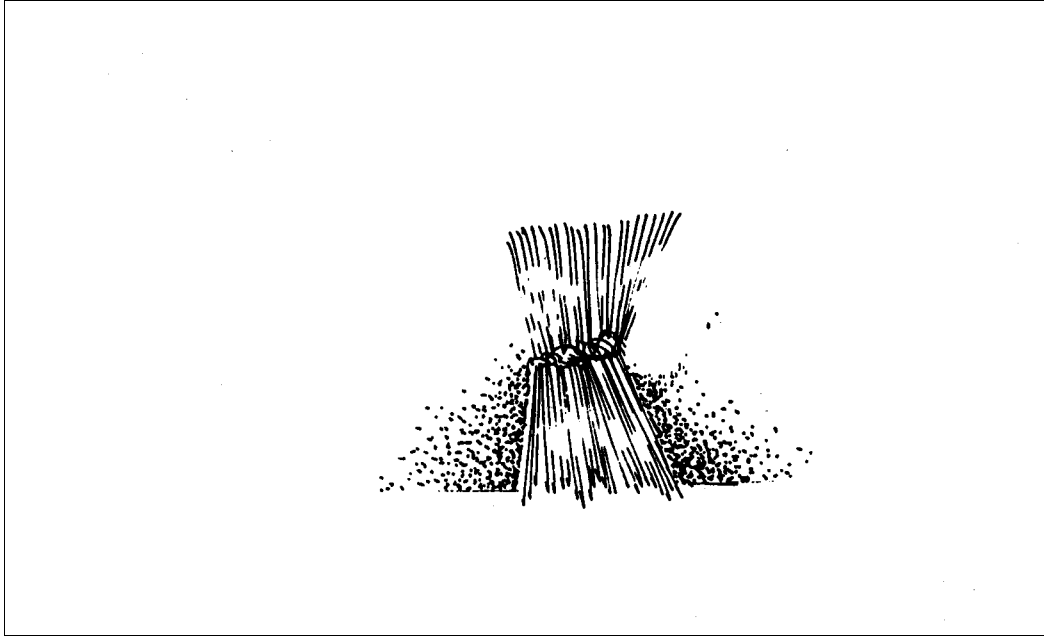
This history is being written in 1984, which, if the Staithes Camp to which Bill Buckley took his Bible Class in 1944 be regarded as the first Camp, is the fortieth anniversary year. The site, even though so much work has been done on it and so many structures added, retains that quiet peaceful beauty which so struck the first arrivals in 1963. If you stand on the highest point of the Boys' Camp you can see the coast less than a mile away. From there the eye sweeps down the gentle slope to the overgrown area at the bottom of the property, now being cleared for a rounders pitch. Beyond that, the trees crowd in, and the site merges into woodland. If, when you arrive, you drive past the coach park and enter instead by the old driveway, the cottage still welcomes you as you turn in. The buildings have been sensitively incorporated into the landscape, and there is little visible evidence of the constant building work that goes on.

1984 projects included a hot water supply for the girls' toilets together with a new shower unit for the same room. Electricity services for the new development cost over £1,000. In July consent was obtained under the Building Regulations for phases two and three of the building plans; the joining together of the Dining Hall, the cookhouse, and the drying and blanket rooms to provide an under-cover servery, toilet, stores and director's room.

In sharp contrast to Dyffryn, the site has not been affected by neighbouring development of any kind since the day of its purchase. The nearest major changes are on the beach, ten minutes walk away and only visible from the highest point of Tyn-y-nant. By the same token, the changes in Tyn-y-Nant itself are mostly unseen from outside the property, because of the site's seclusion, which is guaranteed by a thickly-wooded copse, a stone wall, and an earth embankment - all ideal for maintaining privacy, and all in place long before the Camps went to the site. In case one is tempted to take for granted the generosity of the Lord's provision, it is an interesting exercise to calculate the cost, even at 1963 prices, of fencing or otherwise enclosing a six-and-a-half acre site. It is a major expense which the Camps have been spared.

When Campers are not at Tyn-y-Nant, Mr. Jones, under the terms of the original terms of sale, grazes livestock on the property. But in addition he visits the site every day and if anything is amiss reports back to the Trustees. He has been a very good friend to MAYC since the earliest days of Abererch. There are also good relationships with the people of Abererch, as we shall see in the next chapter.

To visit the site and see with one's own eyes the extraordinary progress that has been made over the years might tempt one to think that the entire focus of the Merseyside Assemblies' Christian Camps is the House in the Valley, the place where for the last twenty years the Camps have had their home. But of course this is not the case. The Camps are about the campers. To them we will now return.



## Chapter Ten

Hitherto the Lord Helped

*1947: A boy's impression - 'A super Camp with smashing grub'.*

*1955: A girls' impression - The dinner was simply super'.*

*1964: An Officer's impression –  
The new Camp site is fabulous, the successful Tuck Shop  
was a rendezvous for boys and girls and the food rivalled  
a Five-Star Hotel.'*

*Camp Magazine, 1964*

Now, having taken a broad survey of the development of Tyn-y-Nant from its purchase to the present day, we must return to 1964, to take up the story of the campers themselves.

### **The sixties: settling in at Tyn-y-Nant**

The Camp magazine issued after the first Tyn-y-Nant season also marked the twentieth anniversary of the Camps. The Committee Recorded 'a great sense of gratitude to God for His answers to our prayers', and gave thanks for 'the constant evidence of His faithfulness'. There was a photograph of Dr. Peter Coates, one of the earliest campers, and at that time a medical missionary in the Congo. Statistics were provided for 1945-1964, providing a 'league table' of the Assemblies which had sent most children to Camp each year (Ebenezer Chapel topped the list four times, Newsham Park Chapel twice). The latest figures for twenty years' worth of food eaten at Camp were published, presumably to inspire campers to greater efforts; by 1964 milk

consumption stood at 6,654 gallons, breakfast cereal at 3,600 12oz packets, and bacon at 1.5 tons. 22,000 eggs had been eaten, and 4 tons of fresh meat.

There were several reminders that the passing of years meant that many who had been involved in the early Camps were now getting on in years, or had gone to be with the Lord. There were affectionate memories of Mr. Mashiter and John Robertson, and an obituary of Charles Peers of Heswall, who had given so much in friendship and practical gifts to the new site.

But it was not merely a look back. There was a sense of excitement among campers that year, not simply because of all the fun and interest of a new site, but because the possibilities for the future were glimpsed. 'Just like the garden of Eden,' reported one awestruck camper. Having boys and girls on one site was an immediate success, and there was a noticeable unity of atmosphere. The Tuck Shop, run by the Proudfoots - retired missionaries from Africa - became a social gathering point as well as a source of sweets and snacks. The unexplored countryside around was a great attraction as well, and the unfinished sports facilities were turned to advantage in some weeks when 'crazy sports' were arranged.

In each of the five weeks of Camp, boys and girls heard the Gospel preached, and the new Camp site saw its first harvest of souls as many committed their lives to Jesus. One boy returned home with a new resolution.

'I'm going to give up my morning paper-round,' he declared to his parents. 'I'm going to have a Quiet Time every morning instead, before I go to school.'

The following year the usual Advance Party week was used as a training week for potential Camp officers. Training was given in practical aspects of Camp life, a series of talks was given. The venture was highly successful and became a regular feature of the Camp year. In 1966, despite an unusually high number of minor accidents and an unusually low pressure of water supply, things went from good to better and, as in every year, campers became Christians and those who were already Christians were built up and encouraged.

The 1967 Camps reflected something of the turbulence of the youth explosion then taking place world-wide, and which had of course some of its origins on Merseyside. The senior Camp arrived at Tyn-y-Nant with twelve guitars in its luggage ('Is this a record?' enquired the Camp magazine), and the Camp Rally later that year featured a folk group from Newsham Park Chapel - 'The Gospel Messengers'. The magazine featured a full-page advertisement for New Singer, New song, the Cliff Richard story. Looking back on that time Rita Coates recalls that there was never any prohibition of pop music, and the children were not given a flat command to abstain from such worldly temptations.

Personally I had some reservations about occasional things - but we never said to them, you must not do this or that. We emphasised good solid Bible teaching, and put together a satisfying and wholesome programme, and I think that this counteracted other influences.

The sixties came to an end, with more and more children coming to Camp. The development of the site has been described in the last chapter. As each new facility was added the range of

activities increased. The Craft Room, for example, enabled campers to try their hands at woodwork, painting, drawing, carving, shellcraft, and numerous other pursuits. 1969 appears to have been something of a highlight: 'These are some of the best Camp reports we have read', said MAYC News, 'in twenty years of camping.'

There were sadnesses too, as various members of the Committee and the Trustees retired from Camp work and, in some cases, were called home. In November 1968 Bert Roberts died. He had been Honorary Secretary of the Camps for twenty years. A gracious and much-loved man, he wore his considerable learning lightly, and did an enormous amount of tedious clerical work for the Camps with unfailing good humour. Throughout the whole of this period he was ably supported by the devotion to Camp work of his sister, Margaret.

### **The seventies new directions**

1970 was a year of new developments as the Camps entered a new decade. A 'Junior girls only' Camp offered the chance to provide a programme suited to the younger age group and at the same time to do some systematic teaching. While this Camp was taking place seniors were enjoying 'Adventure Week', which involved travel to various parts of the Snowdonia National Park, and some camping experience rather more hardy than that offered in the, by now, very comfortable Tyn-y-Nant. The third innovation was Bible Study Week, of which one participant wrote afterwards:

If the value of Camp can be summed up in a sentence, it is this personal involvement of committed Christians of various age groups and backgrounds living with boys and girls and young people, witnessing to the abundant life which the Lord Jesus came to bring.'

### **Adventure Camps**

The Adventure Camps became a feature of Camp each year for several years. After the 1970 Adventure Week, they were held at Llyn Geirionydd, near Llanrwst, 700 feet above sea level in the Snowdonia National Park. The site was a field overlooking a lake with a forest behind, discovered by Les and Rita Coates who had discovered so many of the sites used by the Camps over the years. It was an ideal place, surrounded by mountains, with limitless opportunities for adventure. The Camps were started to give those who had been campers for four or five years the chance to do something different. The older boys and girls were beginning to want something more demanding, and the Adventure Camps - advertised as 'completely under canvas - a more strenuous holiday' - met that need.

They were much tougher than the Tyn-y-Nant Camps. There was a great deal of organised walking, and water had to be collected from the farm for drinking and nearby streams for washing. Those who wanted a full-scale wash bathed in the Lake. Cooking was by calor gas. Toilets had to be built over holes dug in the ground.

It was a return to Camping as it had been right at the beginning. Advance party work was more difficult because of the location of the Camp, and much voluntary help was needed to make the Camp ready, despite the fact that when the campers arrived they were expected to organise a

good deal of their own comforts! Numbers were limited, so it was possible for the leaders to get to know each camper well. The only source of lighting in the evening was oil lamps, and there was a Camp fire each evening, for which Wood had to be gathered and chopped during the day. A nightly bedtime ritual was to stand on the hillside staring at the stars, which were crisp and beautiful in the velvet black, lampless sky. Miles away from distraction, with campers close to nature and part of a small group, the spiritual side of Camp was very special. One highlight was an open-air service in Llanrwst, held by the river in fine weather, and usually attended by large numbers. Sometimes a service was held in the tiny chapel at Crafnant, which is opened only once a year.

Those who went Adventure Camping enjoyed it enormously - even when it rained! Some said that they found 'ordinary' camping hard to come back to. A large number of those who came each year were Christians, but there were also many converted there, and some campers were challenged at Adventure Camp and went on to spend their lives in full-time Christian work.

The Adventure Camps developed over the years, but numbers gradually dropped until towards the end there were more staff than campers. In their last year there was a sudden increase in numbers, both of campers and helpers, but by then the Committee had come to the conclusion that as it was becoming more difficult to find staff for the Tyn-y-Nant Camps, it was unwise to spread resources over two geographically separate camping projects. So the Adventure Camps became part of the Tyn-y-Nant programme once more in the form of 'Camp ex', which preserves the toughness and includes elements of Outward Bound camping. It is divided into three sections - sports, art and activities; the activities include backpacking and sometimes youth-hostelling for part of the week. So it has been possible to preserve the adventurous aspect of the Llyn Geirionydd Camps, while keeping within the overall framework of conventional Camp structure.

### **A decade of growth**

To return to the early seventies: in January 1971 it was formally announced that the camping activities of the Merseyside Assemblies Youth Camps Trust would be known in future as Merseyside Christian Youth Camps, and the familiar initials MAYC became MCYC.

Sampling various years from the crowded seventies, we find that in 1973 the Camp brochure advertised an enticing range of camping opportunities. The Inters and Seniors were offered at Tyn-y-Nant five weeks of Inters camping, emphasising the facilities of the site (special mention being made of the good food to be provided), and one week of Senior Camp, emphasising pony trekking, archery, barbecues and 'Camp outs' among other activities. The hardier souls who had seen it all before were offered two weeks of Adventure Camp, and a further week for Seniors was designated the Young People's Bible Study Camp and offered Bible Study workshops, practical sessions, modern methods and a Children's Beach Mission besides a range of recreational activities.

To illustrate how much preparation was needed for the Camps, the following example (1975) of the annual Calendar of Events is interesting.

March 7 - General Staff meeting in West Derby  
March 27-31 - Training Weekend for Team Leaders & catering Staff at Tyn-y-Nant  
March 31 to April 5 - Work Camp 1 at Tyn-y-Nant  
April 25 & 26 - Day Visits to the site  
May 24-31 - Junior Camp  
June 21-28 - Work Camp 2  
July 19 - Senior 1 Camp  
July 26 - Adventrue Camp at Llyn Geirionydd  
July 26 to Aug 30 - Inters I, II, III, IV, V Camps at Tyn-y-Nant  
Aug 30 - Bible Study Camp at Tyn-y-Nant  
November 15 - Annual General Meeting

### **Annual General Meeting**

When not being used by the Merseyside Camps the site is made available to other groups and organisations connected with the Assemblies. For several years a group of young people from Northern Ireland visited Abererch in early July. They included some on parole from prison hospitals, and some young offenders who had been converted while at Abererch and were now being considered for early release because of the evident change in their life.

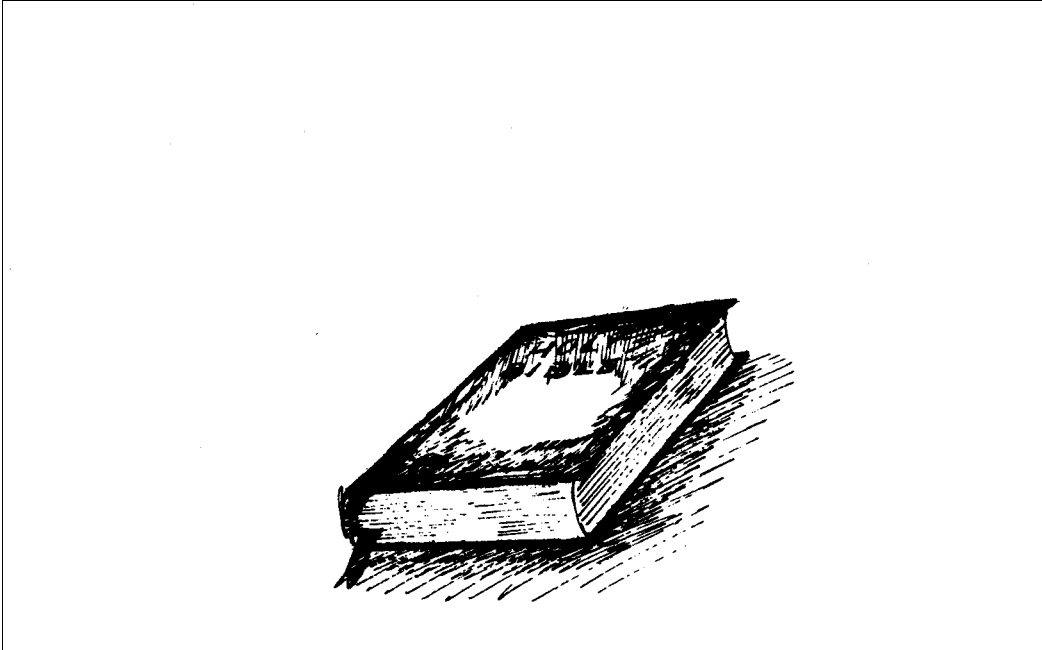
Another aspect of Tyn-y-Nant outside the normal Camp calendar was the New Year visitation. Some of the campers from the 1975 Bible Study Camp returned on 3rd January the following year. In the bitterly cold winter weather (a very different climate to that when the party had last been at Camp) they visited homes in Abererch and nearby Chwilog and presented Scripture calendars. They were very warmly welcomed by the villagers, many of whom obviously took a great interest in the campers and subsequently looked forward to their arrival each year. The Camp Committee received a letter from the Abererch Village Committee, thanking MCYC for the calendars, and inviting the campers to use the Village Hall to entertain the villagers - an open door indeed.

The following year a Carol Service was held in December, and once more Scripture calendars were distributed. In response to the Abererch Village Committee's invitation, the villagers were personally invited to attend 'The Crown Court', where campers shared the lessons they had learned at Camp. The local children learned choruses, and the evening ended with a Welsh meal provided by the villagers.

The support and encouragement of local officials was never more evident than in August 1976, when the visit of local dignitaries already referred to in the previous chapter took place. On the day of the visit the Camp was looking at its best. Various members of the Committee were already there as officers, and others came down to Abererch for the occasion, including Don Millar (the Chairman of the Trust), W. J. Garner (Chairman of the Committee) and John Vernon (Camp Secretary). Wives were also invited. The distinguished visitors were taken on a conducted tour of the site, and were able to watch the Sports Day and chat to the campers and the officers as they went round. At the end of the afternoon tea was served in the Dining Hall, speeches were made by guests and hosts, and special copies of the Bible in Welsh, individually inscribed, were

presented to the visitors. It was very noticeable in the speeches and in private conversations over tea that several of the visitors were people who really loved the Lord and were thrilled to see the work going on at Tyn-y-Nant. The Mayor, replying to the presentation, held up the Bible he had been given and said, 'My wife and I will read this together daily'.

A 1976 MCYC newsletter contained the sober comment: 'Abererch is "our" village. It needs our prayers.' It has been a great encouragement over the years at Abererch to know that there are many who live and work in or near the village who are also praying for the Camps and the young people who come to them.



## Epilogue

*'The Lord has helped us all the way' (1 Samuel 7:12)*

*Heading of a 1980 MCYC Prayer letter.*

### **The eighties: looking to the future**

The next decade found the Camps as active and exciting as ever. By now the old military titles of 'Commy', 'Adjy' and 'padre' had given way to the less imposing 'Director', 'Assistant' and 'padre'. It was one example out of many of the way in which the Camps, which had begun in the dark days of post-war England, were changing flexibly to encounter whatever the future might hold.

In 1980 the total number attending the Camps was 850. A new item in the Camp calendar was the introduction of counselling classes in April. The Camps themselves offered the by now usual alternatives: Site Camps, Bible Study Week, Junior Week and Adventure Camp. The Junior Camp comprised 110 eleven-year olds. The Bible Study Camp studied Ephesians. The Adventure Camp at Llyn Geirionydd was so wet that the Padre dug a trench system round the cooking tent to prevent the floods from entering. But nothing dampened the enthusiasm of the Adventure Campers or any of the rest of the 850 who camped that year, and the experience of one young man is typical:

'At Camp this year some of my doubts were clarified. From all the talks one thing stood out - to become a Christian I must come to Christ with the faith of a little child. I had never realised this before.... A week later I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ into my life.'

Over ninety of the local residents attended an open evening during Bible Study Camp, when a Fact and Faith film was shown, followed by a second film the next evening at Abererch School. It was evident, from comments made by the residents, that the friendly relationships between Camp and villagers continued, and that the Christmas visits were much appreciated.

Financially, the Camps paid their way handsomely, due to careful planning by the various committees and officers. The cost of a week's camping was £17, and the season ended with £6,700 in hand to be used in future projects.

And so the Camps approached their fortieth anniversary. It is a long story, and this account has merely skimmed the surface. Today, the Camps cover so many aspects of young people's work that it would fill a small book simply to give an adequate account of the current year's activities.

Over the forty years of Camps, many things have changed. Much of the change has simply reflected fashion, as in the dropping of the old officers' titles, and the sort of books which appear on the bookstall (predominantly Authorised and Revised Standard Versions and missionary biographies in the old days, now a wider range of versions - New International and Good News being the most popular - and a much more varied selection of books). The provision of a Camp Book Room has meant in fact that, in the hands of the right person, it can have a powerful ministry of its own.

Catering has reflected the general rise in the standard of living since the war. Use of refrigerators on the site has meant that a wider range of good food can be served and advantage taken of bulk purchase opportunities. Fresh meat instead of tinned is now normal. The catering is of a high standard, and helpings are generous - some of the more figure-conscious campers skip courses, and complaints of under-feeding are unknown. The rise in standards of catering is not only the result of twenty years' experience at Tyn-y-Nant but also a response to higher expectations on the part of campers. Young people of 1984 are used to eating well on holiday, and expect Camp to be no different.

Camp does not disappoint them! Mother aspect of this is that young people of today are used to being taken to places in the family car; walking is not nearly so popular. The announcement at Camp of a Sunday afternoon stroll of two or three miles is sometimes greeted by campers with honor - 'We don't have to walk, do we?'

Other changes have reflected corresponding changes in Christian conventions. The idea of girls camping under canvas, for example, was thought of as not quite correct in the 40s, but was found at Dyffryn to work well and to have distinct advantages administratively - an advantage which operates at Tyn-y-Nant, where the movement has been from two separate Camps on the same land to a much more integrated approach nowadays. Also, whereas in the early Camps it would have been thought most improper for a girl to wear anything but a dress to Camp, trousers and T-shirts are now normal and are indeed essential for some activities.

Scripture Union materials were a favourite resource in earlier Camps. The younger children, according to the Committee minutes of 1967, were encouraged to read Daily Bread. It is vital to acquire the habit of Bible reading, and in 1967 Daily Bread was thought to be quite suitable for

young teenagers; but nowadays material more suited to a younger readership is used for the twelve-year olds (and much of the material is still from Scripture Union). Materials have generally become much more versatile these days, and include films and videos where these are considered helpful. Evening talks, which have been a feature since the inception of Camp, continue to be a focal point of overall teaching.

Formality, which was a byword in earlier Camps, is now much more relaxed, and most officers are called by their Christian names. There used to be a Gospel service every Sunday evening at Camp which was very formal, and that too has changed. Nowadays the Inters Camps often perform biblical charades on a Sunday afternoon, or in the evening there might be a multi-media presentation of a Bible story or theme, in which the various groups of Campers would take different parts - mime, drama, and so on. Visitors to Camp on a Sunday evening have sometimes raised eyebrows at this because they assumed a Gospel service would be held, identical in all respects to those at the home Assemblies; but the needs of the Campers have been the guiding factor in planning activities on Sundays as on any other day.

The impact of the relaxed informality of today's Camp is invaluable, for it shows the children and young people very vividly that formality and pews are not the essence of the Christian life. At Camp they are forced to come to terms with the fact that the Gospel is relevant to all aspects of life, not just those that happen to fall on Sunday.

Following on from this is the increasing emphasis on getting campers to do things for themselves and to assume responsibility. Early Camps were highly organised, and those in the sixties and early seventies had quite firm timetables. Commy ruled the Camp. Today, apart from activities such as swimming and mountain walking where discipline and organisation are absolutely necessary, campers are encouraged to think for themselves and not expect every moment of the day to be mapped out for them.

Not all the changes have gone unregretted. One Camp officer from the earlier days of Camp is sad to see the decline in walking, and her reasons are not entirely to do with the fact that she thinks youngsters today don't use their legs enough . . . 'When you had the whole Camp going for a long hike two or three days in every Camp, it was an unrivalled opportunity to get alongside the young people and have long, uninterrupted, really worthwhile conversations.' Mountain walks and long hikes have not disappeared from the Camp scene completely, however, and there are new opportunities for conversation that were not possible in the older Camps (over a particularly complicated project in shellcraft, for instance, or watching an archery contest).

What then of the Camps beyond 1984? Perhaps a good way to indicate something of the work of today's Camps would be to quote from the MCYC Training Handbook, published by the Training Sub-Committee in 1982 in response to suggestions made at the Training Weekend. It is an attractively produced book, put together with help from the Liverpool Daily Post & Echo and illustrated with cartoons by Frank Harris. Though it is intended as a handbook for those preparing to be officers and helpers at Tyn-y-Nant, it is useful reading for anybody working in a Camp situation.

Outlined in the Handbook is the present administrative structure, which is as follows.

The **Trustees** are responsible for the site, all financial aspects, and the application of doctrine and practice.

The **Main Camp Committee** delegates much of its work to the following five sub-committees: **Administration, Appointments, Amenities, Catering, and Training**. Some sub-committees include co-opted members who have special skills. There is a **Camp Site Sub-Committee**, which is made up of Trustees, Camp Committee members and co-opted members; this is responsible to the Trustees for the care, maintenance and development of the Camp site and property.

For each week of Camp, the following administrative posts have to be filled: Director, Assistant Director (male and female) and Padres (male and female). The campers, who attend youth activities in the Assemblies, have their applications endorsed by their Assembly representatives. They apply for their particular age groups: Juniors, Inters, or Seniors.

The Handbook discusses the crucial role of Group Leaders. These may be of any age from 19 upwards. Also mentioned are Medical Officers (recent developments at Tyn-y-Nant have included an efficient sick bay and medical post), Sports Officers, Craft Officers, and supervisors of mountain walks. Of course, there are many others not mentioned in the handbook whose contribution is vital - Catering and Dining Room Officers, Cookhouse staff, and many more.

It would be easy to assume that the increase in organisation, so important when facilities, activities and numbers of campers on site increase, means that Camp has become depersonalised, but that is not the case. From the moment that his or her application arrives (They're not just pieces of paper, they're people,' said one secretary), to the moment when, full of memories, they board the coach to return home, each of the campers is an individual, individually seen as a precious and important human being in the eyes of God.

It is seen as the abiding priority of Camp. The Training Weekends are painstaking in their concern to help Camp officers realise how precious the children are who will be in their care. Sample discussion questions from the 1984 Training Weekend included the following:

On Tuesday Mary, 14 and a keen Christian, comes to find you to tell you that three of the group in her chalet have just been saved. I've told them that they will go to hell if they don't get saved,' she says, and adds that the other girls are crying because they are scared and want to get saved too.

As group leader, what would you do in this situation?

What help could you give the girls?

What help and guidance, if any, would you give Mary?

By such methods young people are being trained to deal sensitively and positively with those in their care. No hint here of 'dragging them into the Kingdom by the scruff of the neck'! Simply a thoughtful and thorough application of the concern which remains central to the whole Camp vision; so to apply Scripture to the needs of young people that the free gift of the Gospel will appear in all its bright splendour, and the Lord who brought the Camps into being will be seen

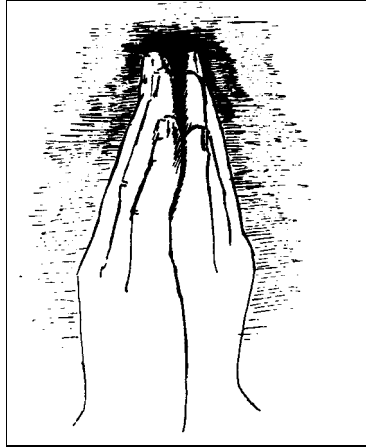
and worshipped.

There have been many changes, and in some respects the bustling activity and facilities of Tyn-y-Nant are light-years away from the hut in the field at Abergele where it all began. It is all a long way in time from Bill Buckley's wartime vision; but the vision has been gloriously fulfilled. It is a wonderful demonstration of how God will take what is offered to Him and change it, make it grow, and use it for His glory.

What of the future? After the events of forty years, and the disappointments and rewards, the ups and downs, it would be a rash prophet who ventured to look far ahead. But if the future is unknown, the Lord is not. And forty years of blessings will serve as reminder, should any involved in this work ever lose heart

'Before me no god was formed,  
nor will there be one after me.  
'I, even I, am the Lord,  
and apart from me there is no Saviour...  
'You are my witnesses', declares the Lord, that I am God.  
'Yes, and from ancient days I am He...  
When I act, who can reverse it?'

Isaiah 43: 10-11, 12-13



...and the work goes on ...

What of the future, now beyond those forty years the Camp Story continues and the house in the valley expands its facilities. The intention to forge ahead with the development of the catering accommodation was completed one year ahead of schedule and by Camp 1985 the caterers were installed in a well equipped new servery with the additional facilities of a director's office and a wash and shower room.

In 1986 the energies of dedicated workers were turned to the renovation and a significant improvement of the old 'COMMY' room and ladies wash and toilet facilities. Planning application had to be sought and the local Council responded admirably, within ten days! Demolition and drainage were achieved by April 1986, followed quickly by electrics, pipework and joinery, which were all put into place by workers with the appropriate skills.

These developments in 1985 and 1986 have been of great help to those caring for the spiritual and physical welfare of the campers.

The cries from the upper reaches of the "boys' field" for replacement and improvement to their living quarters were heard by the provision of seven larger tents in 1986 with promise of more in the future. These units with steel frames secured to the ground with the assistance of concrete blocks are far improved from the khaki tents of 1945.

For 1987 and thereafter significant site maintenance work will require many more willing hands.