

Barnard Castle Lunch Club remembers – the last 75 years

Asking some of the older members of the lunch club to look back over the last 75 years was remarkable. Their memories sharp and reminiscing was ripe. They remembered mangling the sheets to save on ironing in the 1930's around about the time that the Tyne Bridge was constructed, an event that linked County Durham in a grand way to the North and life was very much make do and mend.

In 1946 when bread rationing was removed they had their first taste of cut loaves and how wonderful that was, although it was still a "good bread" with good ingredients and no additives. They recalled how they used to mix up gravy browning and paste in on their legs and then get someone to draw as straight a line in charcoal as possible as a seam to make out they were wearing stockings. They had the feeling that tights proper, not childrens' ones, came in around the mid sixties but they didn't wear them until the early 90's! In 1947 it was the biggest snowfall Britain had seen. An ox was roasted on the Thames and up in Barnard Castle as the roads were cleaned over and over the piles of snow at the side was a tall as the houses. Life still went on operating as normally as possible. The marriage of Princess Elizabeth was celebrated in style with street parties and dancing, but the best event for them was the end of sweets rationing. There were whoops of delight and the shops were filled with sweets, leaving eyes as big as the bulls eyes on sale! By 1949 when clothes rationing was also ended there was a change of attitude, now you were able to spend any money you had on goods without coupons. A wild time I understand, 10/- for a coat, 9s 11d for a dress, one lady still has fond memories of a green evening one she bought all those years ago which then reminded her of all the things she got up to whilst wearing it, a dashing white sergeant in particular. There was also the opportunity to buy shoes with heels, they really thought they were someone if they managed to get a pair, size wasn't so important Cramming and stuffing of shoe toes was a regular feature, having the heels on your feet the triumph.

Although most people were unaware of what was going on in the World and often quite local issues they were very excited about the Festival of Britain in 1951 and some local supporting events took place, they were not sure about in Durham but Newcastle had a show of local talent and manufacturing at Exhibition Park. Things were more gloomy by 1959 with Fidel Castro seizing power in Cuba but people responded by joining the revamped Civil Defence Corps.

They knew about the launch of television although not many of them had sets but everyone remembered the start of Coronation Street in 1960, the first heart transplant, Neil Armstrong on the Moon and that the Durham Light Infantry disbanded in 1968. Wicked was how they described the closing of the railways it caused severe problems with travelling to work and as small shops in villages were closing down accessing ones further away became more difficult, they remembered 1964 for that. Talking about us winning the world cup in 1966 was not a favourite topic as they felt very badly let down by the pathetic attempt this year.

They didn't know if it was hindsight that made them so anti the European Union but they would like to think they hadn't wanted it then and didn't want it now and they don't ever want to go Euro, decimalization was bad enough and VAT an unwelcome extra. Also during the 70's they recall the long hot summer, and the Queens silver Jubilee again with street parties and re-building community spirit. They were rather shocked at the changing world during the 80's, 90's and into the new millennium and at least felt secure in their own world of County Durham away from the violence and antisocial behaviour especially when they went to the lunch club on a Tuesday and met friends and especially today to have talked over the good times they had.