

Staveley & District History Society

Journal Summer 2014

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The views expressed in articles in this Journal are those of the individual authors and not necessarily those of the Society.

Cover photo: Staveley Boys from WW1 at Catterick Camp

The next issue of the *Journal* (No 32, the Winter 2014-15 issue) will be published about the 12th December 2014. All contributions (letters, articles, etc.) are welcome at any time but should be with the Editor no later than early November.

From the Chairman

Iain Johnston's retiral from the Chairman's post has duly come to pass. We owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude for all that he has done for the History Society. His gracious hosting of our talks was exemplary: the pertinent question at the ready; the gentle humour; rarely did he not know a questioner's name. We are fortunate that his vast knowledge of local history and people is not lost to us; he will remain on the committee. His successor has much to live up to!



Iain and I had the same History teacher, Desmond Levi Bradshaw Hartley, who passed away on 31st May 2014, aged 96. He was Senior History Master at Windermere Grammar School and at the Lakes School, from 1944 to 1978. The Gazette succinctly reports 'remembered by many for his humour and intellect.' Dizzy Des, as he was affectionately known, certainly opened my eyes to history, particularly the Industrial Revolution. He always said 'history is everywhere, look around you'. A year or so ago, there was a letter in the Gazette from another of his pupils, grateful for this advice. He had, after 50 years, belatedly visited the Elba Monument by the A591 near Plumgarths. Thank you Des.

As members of a History Society, we should 'look around us'. Iain said much the same in his editorial in Journal 30. History is happening in front of our eyes and we need to document it for our successors. Take photographs of your house renovation, before and after, and leave notes with the Society. People are important too. Take photos, make notes and oral history recordings. Please don't think that your bit of history is inconsequential to others. Coupled with this plea is a need to add to the committee and, in particular, as you all send in your 'history', someone to look after and add to our wonderful archive. We also badly need someone with a particular interest in recording the changes to our built environment.

One of our members, Alan Lord, has been 'looking around' and has written our latest Occasional Paper, on the topic of Barley Bridge. It is an excellent piece of research and a 'good read'. Thanks Alan. It is available on the website for downloading or you can purchase a copy for £1. Those of us on the June Walk got a verbal preview from Alan in a downpour. You can now read the words you might have missed because of the rushing waters of the Kent and the beating of raindrops on umbrellas.

In conclusion, Journal 30 saw the start of a WW1 theme, which we intend to run through forthcoming Journals, as we have material to do so. On that subject, our AGM in April had lively contributions from Alan Lord, Jack Castling, David Shackleton and Claire Brockbank. We hope to revisit their subject material in future Journals, but please contribute yours.

John Hiley

Staveley Operatic Society celebrates 60 years

Staveley Operatic Society was formed by a group of enthusiastic music lovers at a general meeting at the Wesleyan School, Staveley on Friday 30th October 1953. It was proposed by Mr. D Loug to produce the Gilbert and Sullivan opera, *The Mikado*. On 10th November 1953, the first rehearsal of *The Mikado* took place at the Eagle and Child, Staveley, at a cost of 4/6d per hour.

The society was led by Miss Elsie Storey as the first chair and a social committee was quickly formed to help with funding the production. Subscriptions were introduced at a cost of 5/-. The committee appointed Mr Hayton as the first musical director and he



Staveley Operatic Society's *Gondoliers* - 1955

was charged with giving as many ladies as possible a voice test to obtain good voice blending for "the three little maids" (minutes of meeting, 21/02/54). *The Mikado* was produced at Staveley Village Hall in October 1954. It was well received by the village and the

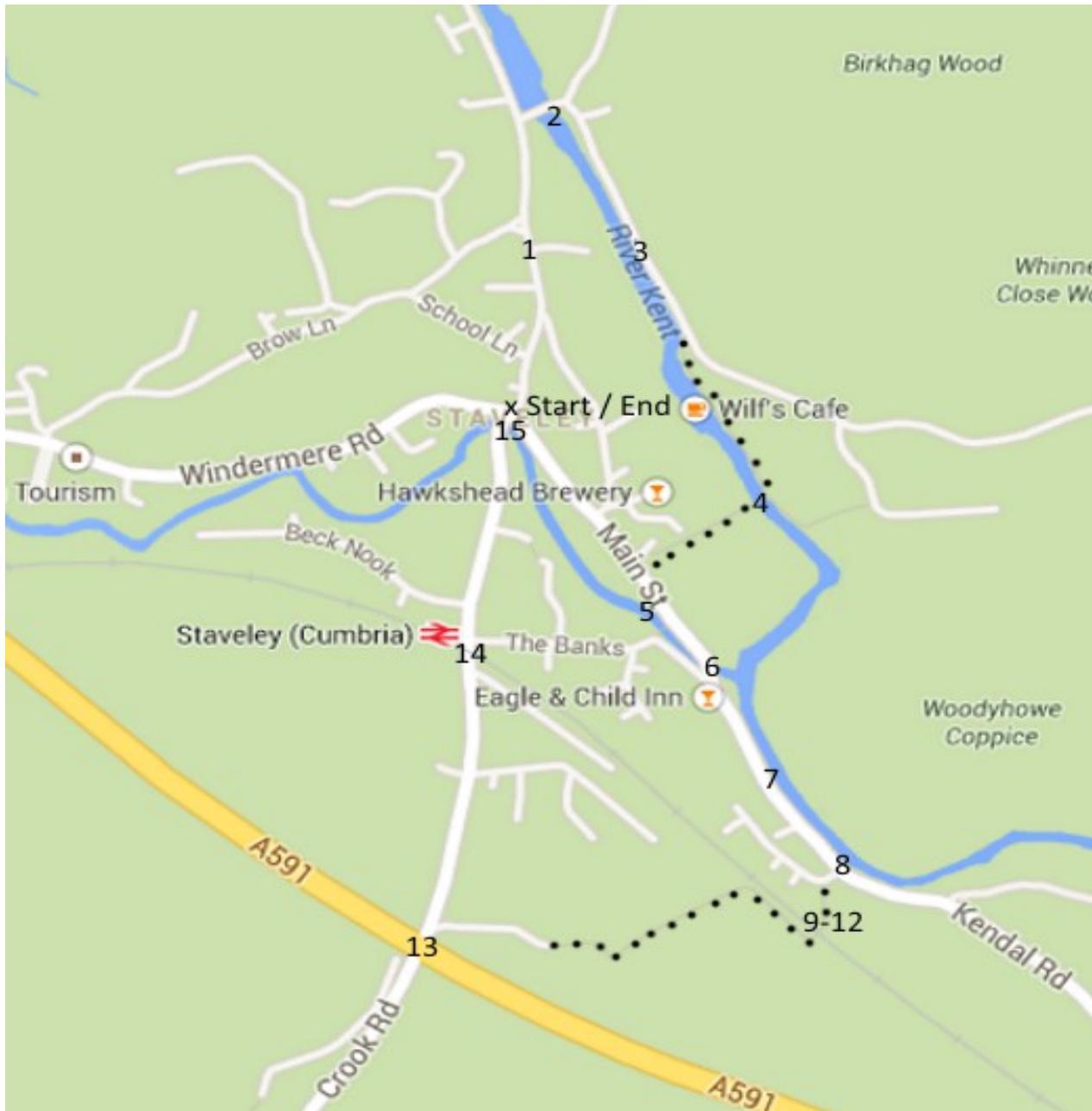
society proposed to put on *The Gondoliers* the following year. This was the beginning of Staveley Operatic Society. The society has put on a show every year since then, except for 1964 when it was decided to cancel the forthcoming production of *Miss Hook of Holland* when the producer resigned due to lack of enthusiasm and poor attendance. Since 1964 the society has only produced Gilbert and Sullivan Operettas.

This year we will be putting on a performance of *The Sorcerer*, from Wednesday 15th to Saturday 20th September. As part of our 60th year we are looking for former members of the society to share memories, photographs and memorabilia. It is hoped to produce a booklet about the society's history over the past 60 years. If you have been a member of the society or have seen our productions we would love to hear from you.

Contact: Angela Dixon (chairman) 01539 727998 or ahdbubbles@hotmail.com
The Society's facebook page is www.facebook.com/StaveleyAOS

Angela Dixon

June Walk: The bridges of Staveley – led by Mike Houston



- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Thirlmere pipeline | 2. Barley Bridge |
| 3. Thirlmere pipeline | 4. New footbridge over Kent |
| 5. Footbridge to Gypsy Well | 6. Road bridge at Eagle and Child |
| 7. Bridge over F.P. opposite 'Glencoe' | 8. Stockbridge |
| 9–11. Various bridges over Stock Beck | 12. Railway bridge |
| 13. Bridge over bypass | 14. Railway Bridge |
| 15. Bridge at Abbey Square | |

Note: The walk did not include every bridge in Staveley, but confined itself to those that could be accomplished in a two-hour stroll.

May Walk

Twenty-three members and friends had a splendid conducted tour of the Heron Corn Mill at Beetham in May. Stuart Hobbs who is the miller and largely responsible for the very recent £900,000 renovation, gave a fascinating and instructive talk as he guided us through the workings of an operational 18th century corn mill and he shared his obvious enthusiasm for future development and more regular production of high quality wheat flour. The evening was rounded off in the barn with refreshments including freshly baked bread made with recently milled spelt and videos of the progress made in renovating an almost derelict site since the 1960s. A very interesting and informative get together - a bargain at £6 a head - and flour on sale too.



Iain Johnston

July Walk



A splendid evening with hosts Trevor Hughes and Patricia Hovey was spent in the Mayor's Parlour within Kendal Town Hall. A goodly number of members managed to turn the Parlour into a Snug; it was fortunate there were only fourteen members in total.

All the items on display belong exclusively to 'the people of Kendal' rather than the town council. Considering the incredible amount of silver and

gold on display this is a wise move. One year's lower rates would never compensate for the permanent loss of these treasures. These varied from Katherine Parr's exquisite self written prayer book to a violin that George Romney made in 1750 whilst he was an apprentice, to a cabinet maker. Our Chairman attempted to give a bravura display on this instrument; look how pleased he seems with himself! God willing, Patricia has promised to escort SDHS members on a visit to the glories of Dent next year.

Don Morris



The WW1 letters of Murray Crofts

These are contributed by our President, Clare Brockbank, who writes about the background to these letters, the first of which is transcribed here. We hope to publish others in forthcoming Journals.

The Crofts family lived at Fellfoot, Staveley. There were six children living with their mother who was the widow of the Revd. John Crofts. Granny Crofts was widowed at the age of 36, so times were pretty hard. Three sons served in WW1. John the eldest was in the Medical Corps and survived to become Professor of English at Bristol University. The second son, Guy, who served in the Manchester Regiment also survived. The third, Murray, joined the Welch regiment in September 1914. He was killed on 9th May 1915, not at the battle of Ypres, but nearby. He wrote every few days to his mother and to his sister Alice (my mother in law). Murray was 22 when these letters were written and 23 when he died. One of these letters is transcribed here.



The Trenches - Tuesday Night (2nd April 1915)

Dear Mother. Have just got a letter from you tonight, for which many thanks. We are still going along quite comfortably, but now, instead of being relieved tonight as we expected, I believe we are to stay in till about Saturday, which is rather a long spell. We are in a most uncanny place here. Our trenches are those which the Germans held in the last phase of the great recent battle (one mustn't mention names). You remember that we had about 500 guns concentrated on the frontage of about two miles in that battle. Well we are right in between the houses of the village, which are very scattered. It is the most extraordinary sight you could imagine. All round us

are houses, but they are mere shells when they are left standing at all and all the trees are smashed and twisted, so that the whole landscape looks dead and unreal, the scenery of some ghastly play. Our bit of the line is in what was once a big orchard but in front and behind are absolutely blighted open fields. There are hundreds of German dead in front, and the men go out at night right up near the German lines to get 'souvenirs' (which is a polite term for robbing the dead). Of course it does no-one any harm and gives them a little excitement. I went out to look around last night; what

surprised me was the peaceful expressions that these dead have, they lie there just like waxworks — all good looking men that I saw.

(Tuesday. The part was written in the dark last night — hence the poetic fervour and the bad writing). Our days and nights here are more or less inverted, as we have to do all our digging and building at night. I am in charge of No 8 Platoon of A Company, there being of course three other Platoons each with its' subaltern in command in the company. We divide the night from 10 to 4 into 4 watches: during one's watch one has to go up and down the trenches and see that the sentries (one man in every three) are alert; it is rather a tiresome process, as one has to scramble over men and burning braziers all the way. Then from 4 to 5, which dawn breaks, everybody 'Hands to' and there is always a lot of firing at this time by the Germans, though we fire very little at any time. After 5, one has a drink of tea and rum (by the way, this is one of the lessons of the Great War - I shall always have rum in my tea in future) and then retire for rest. Breakfast is any time from 9am to 6pm and consists of anything that there is. We meal separately as there is no dugout big enough for a mess.

I think I told you that the Germans give us two spells of bombardment, one in the morning and one at tea-time. They have become much worse lately, and this morning they have for the first time turned Jack Johnson* (*Editor: "A 'Jack Johnson' was the British nickname used to describe a heavy German 15-cm artillery shell. Jack Johnson (1878-1946) was the name of the popular black U.S. world heavyweight boxing champion who held the title from 1908-15)*) onto our trenches. It is really a horrible thing: you can hear it trundling along 'whirr, whirr, whirr' through the air and the crash when it alights is really stupendous. They've just pitched one in front of the parapet of my platoon's trench, 30 yds in front of where I'm writing and all the mud and debris come plinking down on top of my dugout. I've just been to see, there's been no damage luckily, but all the men a bit dazed; it was a narrow squeak.

The JJ's seem to have shut up now, but they are still plugging away with the common stuff; however it's quite snug in here. It rather looks as if they were working up for an attack, especially as tomorrow's Bismark's Birthday, they say. The line is certainly thinly held here (our battalion has about 100 yds I should say) but still if they do decide to come I fancy it will be their funeral, not ours. The ground's so open, for one thing, and they have quite 600 yds to come. The men are very funny, with all the correct British Tommy cheeriness. They have little contests in the evening, and one of them a genius on the concertina, one of their best songs has the very sincere refrain: 'Oh, My, I don't want to die, I want to go home'. We can hear the Germans singing too, very often English songs, By the way their guns don't seem to be playing the game at all today.

It is half past three now, and this shelling has been going on for over an hour. The Welshmen are a very plucky lot; there was a man shot badly in the neck just by us yesterday and his only remark was that we had better keep down, as the sniper would be sure to have another go. Our casualties have been quite slight since we

strengthened the dug-outs (on Saturday night) - just two or three wounded a day perhaps and occasionally one killed. The shells have only wounded one man since Saturday. As to sending things, there is no immediate hurry, as it isn't as if we are up to our knees in mud now. The weather is lovely at present, though cold, bright sun by day and bright moon by night. Socks, a pair of gloves, a shirt, and that sort of thing will always come in handy. Not less acceptable would be your home-made cakes and anything good to eat; we get enough to eat but there is always room for luxuries. No, I didn't get Eileen's parcel but it wouldn't have arrived here yet anyhow, it's probably on the way. Well, this letter's rather long and tedious, but it's an occupation. Must go out now and see what damage there is.

My Love to all. From Murray.

Full Address is: A company, 2nd Welch, 3rd Brigade, 1st Division Expeditionary Force

HP Plantation, any information?

A conversation with my next door neighbour, Fred Holdsworth, prompts me to ask if any members can shed light on the genesis of the HP Plantation. I understand the initials are those of (E) Harold Pattinson who was a member of the family of the early Windermere builders. Diane Matthews, who recently spoke to the Society, has subsequently confirmed this.



HP Plantation from the opposite side of Kentmere Valley, above Sawmill Cottage – July 2014

For any members who are unaware of this woodland it is centred on grid reference NW457016. There is a footpath off the Kentmere road, going up through it, which leads to Staveley Head Fell. Fred came to Staveley in the early fifties, and he tells me that, from an elevated position, it was once possible to see the letters HP emblazoned within the plantation, 'constructed' from the foliage of trees distinguishable from that of the conifers that are mostly present. Can any members confirm this? Does anybody have a photograph that shows the initials?

Don Morris

Tales from the Tapes: Growing up in the Abbey orphanage. Part 1

*This is the transcript of an interview of Conrad McNamara made by Joe Scott
20/9/1997*

JS: I'm conducting an interview with Conrad McNamara who lived in the Abbey orphanage. Conrad, can you say when you first went there?

CM: Maybe 1941 to about 1955-56.

JS: How old were you?

CM: I was four year old when I first went in and nearly 18 when I came out.

JS: That was a long time, was that more than most?

CM: I would think that was one of the longest on record actually. Then I went into the forces straight after being in lodgings for maybe 6 months in Kendal.

JS: I think you said that some members of your family were there as well. Can you tell us?

CM: Yes, there was my elder brother Jimmy who was four years older than me, my elder sister Maureen who was two years older than me and my younger sister, Hazel, who was two years younger than me. And we were all in there.

JS: Your parents had died, had they?

CM: Well, I was told they'd died, you know, but you never know, do you?

JS: They didn't tell you about that, then?

CM: No, I was told they were dead and I accepted it, and that was it.

JS: So you were four when you first went in. Do you remember that? What were your first impressions of the Abbey when you first went there?

CM: First impressions really were lots and lots of children. My estimation would be something like 70 to 80 children, when I first went in there. And by the time I finished and came out, there were 9 left.

JS: It had been run down then, ready to be closed?

CM: Yes, it had been run down and I think they moved to Milnthorpe, knocked two council houses together and re-started there. But it was later on I heard that, when I'd left and been back on a little holiday. But what happened after that, I don't know.

JS: So you won't have very clear memories of it what it was when you were a little boy of four?

CM: Not really, no, But I can remember more, say, when I was five or four and a half when I started school. Every day we used to have to walk up to school. All the children in twos, holding hands, go to the school, church three times on a Sunday, then if we didn't go to church or the local chapel where Mr Jones was a lay preacher,

he'd give you your own service at night in the orphanage, and it was a bit of a hellfire and brimstone affair,

JS: Jones was the master, the head?

CM: The head, yes, Mr & Mrs Jones.

JS: Well, I'll ask you to tell us about them later on, but, perhaps you can tell us about the conditions in the Abbey, what it was like, that's the main thing really, what was it like being a pupil, an orphan there?

CM: Well, I didn't like it, I hated it, I thought it was horrendous, some of the things that went on.

JS: Well, go on, you'd better tell us some of those.

CM: Things like corporal punishment, but not as most people know it in schools, it was much more severe than that.

JS: Oh dear, what did they use?

CM: He used a cane which he could bend and touch it from end to end in a circle. And he used to swish this cane, even before he hit you with it and sometimes, if one person was misbehaving, then you had sort of a gang code that if they got caught you wouldn't split on anybody else and when he tried to get the truth out of anybody, if they wouldn't admit he'd cane all of you. In which case you had to line up outside his study and then you were next in tum and you could hear the other kids having the cane before you and screaming in there, which was a bit of a harrowing experience.

JS: Awful, what age were you - they didn't cane people of four, did they?

CM: No, but I wasn't very old, 5-6 year old when I started to get the cane and I got it from then until I left there.

JS: Oh dear...on your bottom or on your hand?

CM: Both - mainly on your backside if you had what he termed absconded, and you ran



away, which I did do once and we got as far as, I think it was Brough, and we got picked up by the police. It was in the dead of winter. My brother was with me, and the local sergeant come swinging his truncheon and said, "I've just broke the ice in the pond at the back, who's first in?" My other friend, Georgie Austinson, he started crying and saying, "I don't want to go in" and he said "you'd better behave and we'll take you back there now."

JS: You got a long way then? Had you walked?

CM: We walked, we had a bike between nine of us, a push bike, which one of the lads, Gordon Bousfield had been given because he used to do a lady's garden and of course we'd pinched this bike as we absconded and we used to take turns on riding it up and down the hills. I forget what the hills are called now. You go over.. er. . . over Shap, I would think, and it was in the middle of winter and I can remember we used to get over the walls in the fields and they used to pile turnips in heaps - they used to make your gums bleed - 'cos we had nothing to eat, see,

JS: How long were you absconded for then, several days it must have been?

CM: No, as far as I recollect it was just that day and into the middle of the night, so whether it was the next morning we were taken back, I can't remember, but I remember being spreadeagled across the table and flogged for that.

JS: Oh dear, that sounds awful.

CM: And there was another incident where my brother and one lad called Gordon Bousfield and another one called Mickie Bresling, I think they actually went to Blackpool, absconded and tied all the sheets together and got out of the bedroom window on the top storey, and on that occasion, they were brought into the dining room in front of everybody and spreadeagled across tables but the girls were all sent out and they had, to my recollection, I reckon they had 20 or 30 strokes each, and there was marks on their backsides like stripes, black and blue, and it's not something you like to talk about.

JS: No, I'm sure. There wasn't much love lost there between the boys and Mr Jones.

CM: I think everybody hated Mr Jones and Mrs Jones.

JS: Oh, she was the same, was she?

CM: Well, yes, she used to do things like, if you sat having your meals, she'd come behind you and give you what she called a 'woolling'. She'd grab hold of your hair and pull your head back and forward and in some cases, she'd pull tufts out of your head. There was one lad there that was called Norman Falder, he was quite a big lad, and he always used to cry so they called him "Cry Baby". She'd go and stand behind him and pull his hair and say "We haven't turned the waterworks on yet" and of course the lad would start to cry and hence he got this nickname "Cry Baby", which didn't really fit his description because he was quite a big lad, you see.

JS: What about the other boys. Was there some bullying and that sort of thing, as well?

CM: Oh yes, there was a hierarchy where the little lads got bullied by the big lads – things like locking you in wicker baskets and chucking you down the cellar.

JS: And that happened to you as well?

CM: Oh it happened to me on a number of occasions.

JS: You can support that story?

CM: I can support John Acaster a hundred per cent. That happened on lots of occasions with me. And also another trick was to unscrew the electric cover off the switch and make you stand in line and the first one would hold a poker and you'd all hold hands and you touched the live terminals and that would then go right down the line and the last one would have his hand in a bowl of water, which would make it even worse. But there were lots of things like that went on.

JS: It doesn't sound very pleasant.

CM: At one stage in my span there, this Mr Jones put me in the top storey of the house for what he termed I was 'no good to nobody'. I don't know why he said that and put me in this bedroom on my own, and what I thought was happening was that I was having nightmares, and dreaming and seeing ghostly faces and things, and I suddenly realised later on in life, when I'd left there, that he'd been coming up there and holding a torch underneath his chin and waking me up in the middle of the night and frightening me, you know.

JS: Oh. That's an awful story, isn't it! How old were you then?

CM: I'd be about 13-14 then, and then this went on for I would think about six months, and then he said, "if you've had enough, you're allowed to go back in the dormitory with the



other boys now". It was one of the things Johnny Acaster related to you about doing this thing crossing hands across the cupboards and the other lads smacking your buttocks and your legs with a stick, if you failed to get from one side to the other, and then you had to do it all over again, because you couldn't hold on because it hurt that much you had to let go. So then they'd tell you to get back up there again. But er, I wasn't an angel you know, but I never did anything like that myself, because I couldn't do it. I haven't got that sort of nature, but it was like this hierarchy, when the younger kids got older they then did that to the younger than them, you see, so it was as if it was drummed into you. But I couldn't bring myself to do it, so I suppose in that light I was always looked on as a bit of a rebel and Mr Jones, he hated me, my brother Jimmy, my sister Hazel and my sister Maureen. He used to say "You McNamaras are all tarred with the same brush". I mean half the time you didn't know what he was saying that for anyway...none of the time really. He just said we were worthless, and things like that.

JS: That was awful, yes.

To be continued