

Camps helped boys to forget the horrors of wartime years

Former Spondon Church Boys' Club member **Stephen Beet**, who lives in France, shares memories of leader the Rev TEM Barber and club camps.



The Rev Barber in 1978.

ON March 17, 1939, the Rev Thomas Edward Morton Barber arrived in Spondon to take up his post as vicar at St Werburgh's Church.

One of his first tasks was to set up Spondon Church Boys' Club. He had first run a boys' club in Hucknall, the parish of his father, Canon TG Barber, and, during his curacy in Lincoln, where he had become renowned for his work both as a priest and as a great leader.

"You don't know how lucky you are to have Mr Barber," wrote a Lincoln parishioner when his move to Spondon was announced. "We should have loved to have kept him."

And, early in 1939, the previous vicar at Spondon, the Rev H Brocklehurst, had written: "I am confident that [Mr Barber] will do great work and I look forward to hearing how he has been able to fill the old parish church in a way it ought to be filled."

The establishment of the boys' club was an instantly popular addition to life in the village and it proved to be a hugely successful club for many years.

One of the club's many highlights were its annual camps. Membership of the club, which met at the vicarage, had reached more than 80 by the time of the first camp in the summer of 1939.

The Camp Magazine for 1939 states that Mr Barber was carried shoulder high at the end of the camp and was declared to be: "The finest leader any club could have."

This camp was the first of many trips that Mr Barber led, without a break, for the following 48 years, a remark-

able achievement in itself; but the fact that the camp of 1940 happened at all is perhaps the most remarkable achievement of those early years.

Against all odds and in the face of opposition, Mr Barber, with just a few adult officers, took 120 boys to camp in that dark year of the war.

How did he do it? The remarkable story is revealed in the pages of the Parish Magazine as it unfolded month by month.

The following account is in the Rev Barber's own words. At the beginning of some months, an extract from his letter to his parishioners has been added before his club report.

January 1940: The passing out of the old year and the coming in of the new year leaves us wondering will 1940 see the war finished and peace and happiness restored, or will it see a Europe smashed to pieces? God only knows.

Our members have reached over 80 and we have decided to divide the club in half. The older boys will meet, as usual, on Mondays and Saturdays, and the younger boys will meet another day.

The boys are always asking if there will be a camp in 1940. I sincerely hope that it will be possible [and] I suggest that all who would like to come should start paying in now and, if it is not possible to hold a camp, the money can be returned.



February: Unless anything unforeseen happens, there will be a camp in the summer and, most probably, at Combe Martin, in North Devon. We shall be well away from German aeroplanes. By holding several whist drives we hope to keep the cost of the camp at 30s per head.

There are bound to be difficulties running a camp in war time, but I know that all who go will try to understand the problems which will confront the camp chief and do their best to help.

March: The severe winter weather has caused a tremendous amount of illness and has had a bad effect upon our congregations. We shall soon have to start oiling the cricket bats and mowing the pitch, but I am afraid the war and the bad weather have made us forget.

I have an official coming to make final arrangements about camp. I am afraid things are not going to be easy, but I know everyone will pull their weight so we can definitely say, "We are going!"

April: We are hoping to put

down a concrete pitch in the vicarage field. Arrangements are going forward for camp and we shall soon be able to state definitely the dates and address. Start paying to the vicar as soon as you like.

May: During the last month, the situation in Europe has become quite different. It seems to us almost unbelievable that the Nazi leaders should have commit-

"Mr Barber was carried shoulder high at the end of the camp."

ted such a diabolical crime as their latest adventures in Denmark and Norway and we cannot help feeling somewhat elated when we hear of Allied victories on sea, land and in the air.

The great tragedy is that nearly every ship that is sunk or aeroplane shot down means loss of human life and terrible suffering by those at home. Mr Chamberlain has said we are fighting against evil. We must be careful that

we are not fighting evil with evil. German measles seems to be flourishing still but it has been most encouraging to see a large increase in the congregations in spite of it.

Camp dates have been provisionally fixed for July 30 until August 9.

June: Three German leaders have committed further atrocities since I last wrote to you and now the whole of civilisation is threatened with destruction. The Prime Minister did not try to conceal the truth and he warned us that our island will have to suffer as other countries have been made to suffer - through the ruthless bombing by the Germans.

How must we meet this situation? There is always the possibility that our town may be bombed.

If we did suffer from heavy bombardment, and many of you lay wounded and dying, it is possible that you might like to make your peace with God and receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

It is suggested that people might wear a small piece of card, attached to a piece of

cord, bearing the inscription: "Church of England. If badly hurt I want a priest." May God give you all faith and courage to face with calm the difficulties which lie before you.

The question which everyone is asking is: "Can we go to camp?" Every time we listen to the news we become more and more doubtful. But, unless England is invaded, I think we can safely say there will be a camp.

The Government is very anxious that there should be camps this summer and they are doing all they can to help.

They say that Combe Martin will be one of the safest places in England and parents need have no anxiety since the Government will not allow us to camp if they do not think that it is wise. So, unless anything serious happens, we shall go.

By the time you read this, the summer programme will have commenced. We shall be playing cricket, tennis, deck tennis and other outdoor games. It will be difficult to arrange matches this year,

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