

152 NORWEGIAN MEMORIES

A Letter to the Editor
from BILL BREEZE

Dear Madam Editor,

In the last issue of the *Newsletter* which I thought was one of the most interesting, as it covered so many subjects, I was particularly interested in Budge Adams' article on the presentation of Life Membership Certificates in Norway to the ex-members of Norwegian crews stationed in Dover during the last war and I heartily agree with all he writes about the country of Norway and the character of its people.

During the nineteen-seventies my wife and I were very friendly with a Norwegian family and exchanged visits to our respective countries besides communicating a great deal by letter.

Unfortunately the head of the Norwegian family (a veterinary surgeon specialising in farm animals) had a bad stroke from which he has only partially recovered and his attempts at letter-writing have been such that it is almost impossible to decipher his writing owing to his disability. Before his stroke he was able to send the most interesting letters in excellent English.

Our friends lived in Kolbu, about 60 miles north of Oslo and when we paid them a visit we travelled from Ostend to Oslo by train. This may seem strange considering Norway is mainly surrounded by sea but our route was via Belgium, Germany, Denmark and western Sweden. From north Germany to Denmark our train travelled by train ferry to the eastern part of Denmark where Copenhagen is situated, which was the destination of our first train.

After a wait of about three hours, giving us time for breakfast, we took our second train bound for Oslo. This journey necessitated another short train ferry trip of about three miles from Helsingør (Elsinore of the famous castle) to Helsingborg in Sweden, thence up the west coast of Sweden via Gothenburg to the Norwegian frontier and finally to Oslo where our friends were waiting for us with a car.

As Budge observed, the Norwegians are very similar to the British. They seem to view things from the same angle and have the same sense of

humour. At the time we were in close contact they seemed to have a high regard for the British for which I felt we were not worthy.

Among the older people this is doubtless due to our war-time relationship and the fact that while the Germans were advancing from the south of Norway our Royal Navy brought their royal family and gold reserves to safety in Britain. It was manifest that their feeling against the Germans had not lessened and I saw examples of this. But who would not feel bitter after one's country had been occupied by a foreign power?

Nowhere did the war-time situation in Norway come to mind as much as in Gjøvik. When looking at a war memorial, I saw three names spelt in Norwegian but obviously a Jewish family, followed by the words "Auschwitz 1941". I could picture these people being dragged from their home, transported by cattle truck and finally meeting their death by gas chamber or starvation in the notorious concentration camp.

Karen, the wife of our Norwegian friend, came from farming stock in Lillehammer, fifty or so miles north of our friend's home and on one occasion when we were with them it was the occasion of her mother's eightieth birthday. We all went off to Lillehammer by car where members of the family assembled. The mother was a rosy-cheeked Norwegian farmer's wife (now a widow) and one immediately warmed to her.

A custom among the farming families in Norway is that the best farmhouse is occupied by the head of the family and another is the home of the eldest son. On the death of the father the son and his family move into the larger farmhouse, whilst the widow takes over the son's house. The eighty year old widow we visited was living in the smaller farmhouse, although this was quite a large building. There was much Norwegian flower-painted furniture in evidence.

Enormous quantities of food were served to us on wooden plates and a wooden plate was given to my wife and me as a memento of the occasion.

We started on our way back in the early hours of

the morning and although Lillehammer is not very far north the light resembled twilight in Britain.

We did on one occasion travel by the railway described by Budge as over the 'roof' of southern Norway but did not go the whole way to Bergen. We left by a little branch line about three-quarters of the way to Bergen in order to reach Flåm on Sognefjord. This necessitated a very steep descent to sea level through picturesque country.

Sognefjord is a beautiful area and several times a day a ferry would call at the landing stage. On one occasion we took the ferry to visit another part of the fjord and to our surprise our ferry ran alongside another ferry in mid-fjord and we had to transfer to the other ferry in order to reach our destination.

The Norwegians seem to have a partiality for the colour red. It is their favourite for barns, other farm buildings, railway trains and ships.

On one of our visits we joined our friends at their home in Kolbu and then we all went on a

holiday by car to the south-east of Norway where they had booked accommodation at a place near Lillesand. This little resort was on the sea between southern Norway and north Denmark known as the Skagerrak (where the famous battle of Jutland took place in the First World War). The sea just off the coast contained many rocky islands known as skerries.

On our way to the south-east coast we stopped at Stavanger for a few days where our friends wanted to contact people they had known for many years. This proved a very interesting port which is now the equivalent of our Aberdeen in so far as the North Sea oil industry is concerned.

Budge Adams' report on the ceremony in Norway brought back to me many happy memories of that country.

Yours sincerely,

BILL BREEZE,

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Dover.

A LETTER FROM MORETONHAMPSTEAD

29th August 1995

Dear Editor

Thank you for Dover Society *Newsletter* No.

23. I find the articles so very interesting

(1) the nostalgia of years gone by, (2) the information regarding Dover of today and (3) the proposals for the future of the Town.

I was most interested in the mention of the Pent. My paternal grandmother was born there in 1849, spent her youth there before moving to George Street, then to a bungalow near the 'King Edward VII' at Tower Hamlets in the parish of Charlton. My grandfather was foreman at the brickfield on the site of the Grammar School's lower playing field and in 1898 he moved to Manor Road where he built the original houses in conjunction with Stiff the builder and was in charge of the brickfield beyond Farthingloe.

In 1914 I saw a Zeppelin over Dover and told my mother there was a pig in the sky. In the same year I remember my aunt leaving Manor Road on a bicycle with a bright red rear lamp. Rear lamps or reflectors on cycles were not compulsory until the 1930s. Then in 1915 there were the chalk trenches on the site of the present Farthingloe and

Mount Roads. That year we moved to the Alexandria Tea Rooms by the Docks which were full of drifters (minesweepers) and the crews were from Yarmouth and Lowestoft. We were very near the Grand Shaft entrance where the sentry was on guard. In 1916 we moved to Wolverton and the Alkham valley was a quiet flint road with rarely a motor car to be seen. Kelcey the baker at Temple Ewell delivered bread with a horse and trap. The butcher also came from Temple Ewell twice a week on a bicycle. The postmaster (Dick Smith) cycled twice a day from River but only once a day to Ewell Minnis.

I frequently walked on a Sunday from the age of five to relatives at Temple Farm, Whitfield or to Abbots Land Farm at Capel. It was at Temple Farm we heard of the tram accident at Langley's Hill. Forty years later at Maidstone I was to meet a lady who had been on the tram – a relative of Edwards, the butcher, near the Alma Inn in Folkestone Road. For some time we had to walk up and down Langley's Hill until we were allowed to ride on the lower deck only. The tram rails were laid on a grass track from Crabble Ground to River School.