

ToCH

I grew up knowing about my Grandmother's cousin Tubby Clayton and learnt from her about ToCH.

In the late 40's and 50's I had a feeling of pride when I lunched daily during the week at the ToCH restaurant in the City of London, when I started my working life. Years later my husband Brian, told me that when he was in the Merchant Navy he was studying for his Engineering Examinations in South Shields and he and his friends in his 'digs' spent many hours at the local ToCH hall, enjoying friendships and socials with other engineers and local people.

Philip Thomas Byard Clayton (Rev Tubby) was born in Queensland, Australia, on 12th December 1885. Two years later his parents returned to England and, as Tubby used to relate, "I decided to accompany them". He was educated at St Paul's School in London and at Exeter College, Oxford, where he achieved a First Class degree in Theology.

In 1915 his real life's work began. He opened Talbot House in Poperinge, Belgium, a club just behind our lines in Flanders. Talbot House became known to thousands of British and Commonwealth soldiers, who found there a touch of home and a brief respite from the war, as ToCH (TH was the army signaller's code in those days). ToCH was not to be an ex-service organisation but an attempt to preserve and to hand on to the succeeding generations the special atmosphere which had characterised Talbot House in Poperinge. This was an atmosphere of deep, but light hearted fellowship, of friendship which made all the barriers that normally keep people apart seem totally irrelevant. Some 25,000 men are said to have visited the Chapel.

After the war many of them missed it's happy, friendly atmosphere and were instrumental in setting up ToCH branches mainly in England in the 20's. Later, branches were established in many countries throughout the world; Bridlington's was set up in 1925. Each branch was presented with a lamp in remembrance of the lamp which burned in the attic of the Chapel at Talbot House, where many men experienced their last moments of tranquillity away from the horrors of war.

Tubby was a fat round little man, who wore large black rimmed glasses. He was a man of serious devotion and serious fun but was never

married. He was a dog lover and he took his canine friend everywhere with him whilst 'at home'. In 1939 whilst abroad, his dog "General Smuts" was killed in an air raid in London. When Queen Mary heard about Smuts' death she summoned Tubby to Badminton and presented him with a golden cocker spaniel "with aristocratic connections" – named Bill! Tubby died just after his 87th Birthday in December 1972.

Moving to Bridlington nearly six years ago now, I was sad to find that ToCH in West Street had closed, despite the fact that the Society is still active in many parts of the world. For example in Australia on Anzac Day (25th April) at 5 p.m. there is a rededication of the Ceremony of Light.

I could not find anyone who could give me any information, other than it was up for sale, so I therefore contacted ToCH in London. After a great deal of phone calls, emails and correspondence I managed to persuade them to let the Bridlington Lamp and Regalia (which was luckily still held by the Estate Agents) be given to the Bayle Museum and thus remain in the town. So if you would like to see it go along to the Bayle and ask the Curator to see it, if it is not on immediate display.

And so finally, as a newcomer to Bridlington, I am very proud to think that I have preserved some of Bridlington's social history and to help the town remember – please do.

By Doreen Osborne



Tubby Clayton and the symbol of ToCH, the lamp

