



# **STANLEY TAGGART:**

**An ordinary man who helped make  
it an extraordinary day**





# Foreword – Barry Faulkner

## Stanley Taggart



The story of Stanley Taggart is a story of an ordinary man, who did something extraordinary. It's often said that history is made by the acts of extraordinary individuals, yet it is ordinary people standing together who really make the difference as Bertolt Brecht points out in his fantastically powerful poem, **A Worker Reads History** – “Each page a victory, at whose expense, the victory ball? Every ten years a great man, who paid the piper?”

The story of a rank-and-file trade unionist, a member of the T&G, (predecessor union to Unite), is the story of us all. I'm sure on that far off morning in September 1933, when Stanley woke up, there must have been a slight temptation to roll back over in bed or choose to do other things that day. Many of us confronted by the choice of taking a stand against injustice, or simply going about our normal daily business, choose the latter.

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Stanley Taggart alongside several thousand other local people, when asked by their grandchildren, “what did you do when the fascists came to our town?” was able to stand proud in the knowledge that he wasn’t passive, that he didn’t choose to leave it to others, but that he went out to stop them from spreading their messages of hate and division.

There are lessons for us all in Stanley’s story. It’s often said that evil succeeds when good people fail to stand up to challenge it. When we decide whether to attend that demo, to join that picket line or go to that rally, we place ourselves in history. When we are asked by our grandchildren what we did to stand up to far-right extremism, we need to have a tale or two to tell.

It’s interesting that this hidden history of the Battle of Stockton was unearthed by modern technology, when a Unite young member, Tom Biggs, was surfing the net. Tom said, “it filled me with pride that my own hometown had played a part in the defeat of British fascism, I felt that its contribution should be remembered, especially in the present, when far right forces seem to be on the rise again.”

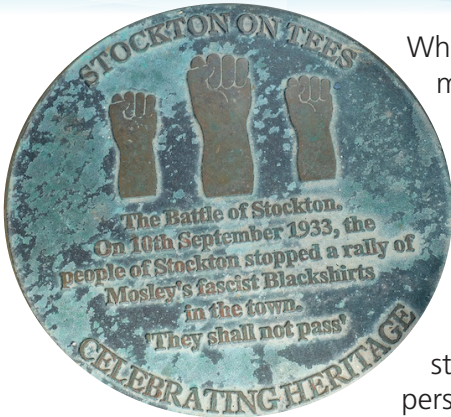
Barry Faulkner is the Unite National Political Education Coordinator and is developing the education element of the unions Unity over Division campaign, addressing the challenge of the rise of the far right in Britain and Ireland.

## **HOW A SMALL TOWN SAW OFF THE FASCISTS IN 1933**

ROSIE SERDIVILLE FOR THE BATTLE OF STOCKTON  
CAMPAIGN

Now it’s Sunday morning and the fight is o’er  
And all the world may not care or know  
But the Tees remembers as she winds her weary flow  
When our grandfathers Our hungry grandfathers Our  
desperate grandfathers Said ‘No!’

Sean Cooney



When the spectre of fascism came marching into Stockton in September 1933 it aroused great passion and anger. Ordinary people recognised that fascism would destroy democracy, the trade union and labour movement, create a permanent one-party state, crush individual identity and force the individual to serve the interests of the state. It would lead to genocide and the persecution of minorities and women.

Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler and Italy under Benito Mussolini, whose followers wore black military-like uniforms, had become fascist states. Portrayed as their nation's saviours, both men had destroyed their political opponents as they moved to take complete control of society. In Britain, Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF) had sought, with some success, to develop support for fascism. Mosley and his followers aped Mussolini by wearing Blackshirts and sought to use marches to build support by posing as an unmovable, unstoppable force.

Yet, The Battle of Stockton on Sunday 10 September 1933 saw 2,000 Teessiders humiliate the Blackshirts who had tried to secretly rally on the town's Market Cross. Protestors, who were overwhelmingly working-class, stormed into the fascists and physically drove them out of the town.

Today, there is a permanent plaque, erected by the Battle of Stockton Campaign in 2018, at Market Cross. It rightly remembers an event that for decades was hardly known about. This is perhaps not surprising as local people returned to their homes after the battle and rarely spoke about it afterwards even to their children. One such man was Stanley Taggart, who appears very briefly in The Battle of Stockton booklet that was commissioned by the Durham Branch of the Historical Association on behalf of the campaign.

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Born at the beginning of the twentieth century, Stanley made his way patiently through life. He loved his family and friends and the people around him. He was a trade unionist with a regular job, he loved sport, his car, supping a few beers, watching TV and enjoyed getting by in life. Like 99.99% of people there are no monuments to Stanley. Yet without this ordinary man and thousands of others like him at Stockton, and other similar places such as at Cable Street in East London in October 1936, then who knows what horrors would have visited our descendants and even ourselves many decades later.

This then is a short booklet on Stanley Taggart, the ordinary man on an extraordinary day.

## The Riot of Stockton

Did I tell you the tale son  
of the night your grandad ran  
the blackshirts out of our town?

A lifetime of soot and grime ago  
when yellowed becks ran to the river  
and men fed their families  
on scraps from the shipyard  
and cornerboys laid down  
their caps on the cobbles  
for a ha'penny a song  
blown through baccy'd mouth organs.

A time when men hobbled home  
from a great war of attrition  
back to a country wounded and workless.  
A time disciples of a despot  
pulled their jackboots up tight,  
squeezed themselves into charabancs,  
nursing hate and axe handles,  
come to prey on the hungry and hopeless.

And did I mention son  
that your grandad and his mates  
stood shoulder to shoulder,  
solid as steel and silenced the bellows  
with pelters and chanting?  
And when cowards did what they do  
and ran away to the shadows,  
he ran them into Silver Street,  
a tower in the furnace.

See, what those goons didn't know son  
is where your grandad was really from.  
He was from Ireland and Russia  
and Germany and Holland  
and The Steppes and all points  
North, East, South and West.

They will come back again son,  
these monsters and clowns,  
baying at the different,  
the weak and beaten down.  
Just remember whose Grandads  
ran them out of our town.

**Harry Gallacher**

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## Stanley Taggart 1903 – 1975

Stanley was born in 1903 in the port town of Blyth, Northumberland to Charles Taggart, a local man, and Jane Anderson, originally from Eyemouth in Scotland. He was the seventh of eight children with his brother Charles and sisters Ethel, Minnie, Jane, Lena, Elizabeth (Bessie) preceding him and Lily arriving after him. A large age gap existed between the brothers.

### **Blyth, Northumberland**

Blyth as a town started to develop from 1723, before then it was known through its connection with Newsham and Cowpen and there was just a handful of fishermen's cottages near the quayside.

Like the rest of Britain, Northumberland was rural based with the largest landowner, as is the case today, being the Duke of Northumberland, who owned over a sixth of the land in the county. Attempts by agricultural workers at Tolpuddle, Dorset, in 1833 to create a trade union had led to its organisers being deported under the 1797 Unlawful Oaths Act. As rural workers were unable to unite and organise, it meant their wages remained often pitifully low.

There was a large house building programme in Blyth after the 1850s followed by an extended amount of rebuilding of the older part of the town in the last decade of the nineteenth century. By the time Stanley was born the UK's population was 77% urban-based, up from 25% a century earlier. The 1870 Education Act enshrined in law universal education to allow working class children like Stanley and his siblings to receive, at least, some rudimentary schooling.

Blyth Urban District Council was formed in 1906 and on 21 September 1922 the Blyth Municipal Borough Council came into being.

In Stanley's formative years, Blyth was dominated by heavy industries such as fishing, shipping, shipbuilding, shipbreaking, mining, railways and foundry work. Pay rates were much higher within these expanding



industrial and manufacturing sectors of the economy compared to working on the land. Few women were employed in these sectors. Only much later after Stanley's death did female dominated light industries arrive off the North East coast.

## **Mining**

Stanley was the son of a mining family. After leaving school he had become a keen youth amateur boxer at bantamweight. Clearly, he was no soft touch. Yet when he descended into the pit one morning and realised he was staying for the whole day he was taken aback. He had imagined it was no more than going underground and had failed to understand that coal mining is a tough job in harsh conditions. On his return to the surface, he resolved to never go back as he hated it.

There were many other local men who felt the same. The majority had no choice except to make the best of it. They did so by joining the Northumberland Miners' Association, formed 1864, which in 1907 affiliated to the national body, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, (MFGB) and which, on 1 March 1912, signalled the start of what was then the second (the 1842 general strike was the largest but remains largely unknown) biggest dispute in British trade union history. This saw 800,000 coal miners go on strike in support of a minimum wage of not less than 5s (25p) a day.

## **Coal was, at the time, vital to the economy.**

Despite the meagre strike pay and great privation in every coalfield, the strike was rock solid leading to factories being forced on to short-time working and train services everywhere being cut. The strike was ultimately defeated by the coal owners and the Liberal Government who persuaded the strikers to return to work by passing a Parliamentary Bill conceding the principle of a minimum wage that ultimately came to a lot less than 5 shillings daily.

The miners' experience consolidated the conviction that the working class must have its own, independent political party separate to the Liberal Party. By 1922, most mining constituencies had moved to support the Labour Party at the general election.

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A much more crushing defeat for the miners came in 1926 when they were left to fight on alone against proposed cuts in wages and conditions after the General Strike, which was well supported across the North East, was called off by the TUC General Council. After WWII, the new town of Peterlee was named after Peter Lee, the agent of the Durham Miners' Association during the General Strike who was also MFGB President in 1932-33. It is one of very few places in Britain to be named after an individual and the only one named after a trade unionist.



If life was tough for the Taggart family, there was local pride in the successes of Newcastle United in the 1920s with the St James' Park club taking the League title in 1926-7. In 1924, Newcastle reached Wembley Stadium, opened the previous year, and won the FA Cup for the second time by beating Aston Villa 2-0 with goals from Neil Harris and Stan Seymour. It is not known if Stanley made the trip to London for the final but he did so in the 1950s when the Magpies captured the famous trophy in 1951, 1952 and 1955.

## Unemployment

After the Wall Street crash of 1929, the world economy was plunged into a desperate slump. The subsequent great depression had an immediate effect in Northumberland and Durham. In many villages, there was near-100-per-cent unemployment. Nationally, an average of 16.1% was unemployed. Ramsay MacDonald, who had led the second Labour administration, that was dependent on Liberal Party support, now joined with the Tories and introduced the hated Means Test, a determination of whether an individual or family is eligible for government assistance, and reduced benefits, in November 1931.

Lord Londonderry was made Secretary of State for Air, he held the post till 1935. Londonderry was a hated local coal owner. He had been leader of the Northern Ireland Senate from 1921-26. This was a time when pogroms against the Catholic and Nationalist population were conducted with the support of the Ulster government's security forces. Londonderry became a passionate supporter of fascism and a personal friend of Adolf Hitler. When the Russian Army took Berlin in 1945, they found in Hitler's bunker a personally dedicated book presented to the dictator by Lord Londonderry who had, prior to the war, used his extensive contacts with the aristocracy, politicians, business and military leaders to promote fascist ideas.

### **Moving to Teesside to find work at ICI**

The ICI factory at Billingham was the result of Britain's faltering offensives during WWI on the Western Front in 1915. A lack of shells was the result of an inability to produce enough TNT, the main ingredient for explosives. The main cause of the shortage was a lack of nitrogen (the 'N' of TNT). The problem led to Lloyd George, the Minister of Munitions in 1915 and later Prime Minister, to establish an organisation to develop and produce synthetic ammonia. Brunner, Mond and Co were chosen to proceed with the project and selected Billingham as the site from among a number put forward for consideration.

The first ammonia was produced on Christmas Eve 1923 and, with it being peacetime then, its major use was for the manufacturing of nitrogenous fertilizers.

In 1926, Brunner Mond merged with Nobel Explosives, United Alkali and British Dyestuffs Corp to form the new Imperial Chemical Industries Limited. (ICI) By the 1930s, the immense Billingham site was, at over 1,000 acres, the largest factory in the British Empire and employed over 10,000 people. ICI was to exist as an independent company until 2008. ICI quickly gained a reputation for good wages, terms and conditions. Additional benefits included, in time, a sporting complex, staff restaurant, social club and seasonal outings. The company also provided houses in the 1930s for some of its workers.

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It also generally provided secure employment, although in the height of the depression following the Wall Street crash about 6,000 were laid off between 1929 and 1931. In 1935, the company opened a new coal into petrol process plant.

At its height in the 1950s, the Billingham ICI complex employed around 16,000 workers. Men and women, especially during and after WWII, worked there. Yet even as late as 1954, a woman was dismissed if she got married as the company did not employ married women.

At ICI, there was a large range of jobs, both at white-and-blue collar level. The majority were process (semi-skilled) workers, mainly working on instrumentation at all levels of production from start to finish.

The first ICI chairman was Sir Alfred Mond who announced he hoped to win workers' loyalty by 'foreseeing reasonable demands and... granting them even before they were asked.' The company set up Works Councils and although ICI recognised unions before WWII they refused to enter closed-shop agreements – a place of work where all employees must belong to an agreed trade union. According to the book *Life at the ICI* trade union membership was low.

With radical changes taking place after the war, ICI agreed to negotiate with unions and to recommend to its employees that they join a trade union. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the company did not believe that they shared a common interest with trade unions or their members. Yet, it was not until long after Stanley Taggart had left the company that, in 1968, there was a first national ballot across the company for a strike over pay.

Clearly there was distrust between the company and the trade unions as the ICI personnel records, including anything relating to trade unions, are embargoed until 2037.

Stanley moved with his brother, mother and youngest sister, to Norton, a town in the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees, when he found employment as a process worker in 1933 at the Billingham site of ICI.

It was in the years leading up to Stanley's retirement that Billingham began to lose out to its competitors. It was a tale typical of British manufacturers. The company had seen its markets for key products rise, generating major profits, after the war. In turn, ICI management failed to invest in new technology and thus fell behind its major international competitors with parts of the plant coming to the end of its productive life by the start of the 1960s. By 1965, the number of employees at Billingham had slumped to under 14,000. It fell further to 10,000 in 1972 and to around 6,500 by the middle of the 1980s.

### **Battle of Stockton on 10 September 1933**

It was a work colleague who told Stanley that friends of his in Newcastle had discovered that the British Union of Fascists (BUF) planned to march and recruit in Stockton. The BUF had already organised a series of events on Tyneside. Some of those had proved unsuccessful. On 18 June 1933, five BUF members had their lorry overturned when they tried to organise at the Town Moor during Newcastle Race Week. Newcastle Blackshirts subsequently confirmed they were creating a 'corps of young men who were being 'taught boxing and physical training' to assist fascist leaders. Attacks on socialist meetings were organised and Labour Party offices in Blaydon and Sunderland were damaged by fascists. There were also attempts by fascists to infiltrate bus workers' branches of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) at Chester-le-Street and Newcastle. TGWU officials responded by holding meetings at the affected places and exposing and isolating the perpetrators.

None of this really stopped the advance of the BUF who were backed by the Daily Mail and funded by Italian money. BUF membership surged and new branches were opened across Northern England with premises on Clayton Street in Newcastle and Claypath in Durham.

The initial attempts by the BUF to build a base in Stockton had gone badly for the organisation. Their street meetings had been opposed by members of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, the Independent Labour Party, the Labour Party and the Communist Party.

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A decision had been taken to hold a big BUF event in Stockton and a call was made to all regional members to support a rally on the town's Market Cross, immediately south of the Town Hall.

When BUF coaches arrived at 6pm and the fascists began marching along Stockton High Street towards Market Place they had clearly not reckoned on finding such determined opposition. Stanley Taggart was there and so too were another couple of thousand like him.

A fierce battle began. With the local police caught totally unawares, both sides used wooden staves and pickaxe handles. The BUF sought sanctuary in a nearby street but the anti-fascists were determined to evict them by whatever means from Stockton and make sure they did not dare return. The Blackshirts were fortunate when a reinforced group of police officers arrived and forced them to run back up the High Street before leaping on to their waiting coaches. No arrests were made.

Many years later, Stanley recalled that the plan had been to wait in the High Street to the North of the Town Hall. He always insisted no violent confrontation had been planned – they just wanted to protest against the BUF recruitment drive. Despite this, scuffles broke out and soon became bloody. Stanley sustained a black eye when one of the fascists punched him in the face, knocking him to the ground. He never talked in any detail about the day to the younger members of his family – his granddaughter, Joanne Louise Middleton, only found out about it when she became interested in the story of the Battle and mentioned it to her mother, Joyce.

“Stanley never started fights, that was uncle Johnny, his brother-in-law who was married to his youngest sister Lily. But Stanley was not a man who was afraid of looking after himself.”

Joanne Middleton

FAMOUS DRIVERS KILLED PIER PAVILION ABLAZE

THREE DEAD IN MOTOR RACE.

Monza Tragedies. CARS CRASH OVER EMBANKMENT.

ALAN SUTHERLAND, British... Three famous drivers... killed in motor race at Monza.

Three famous drivers... killed in motor race at Monza. Details of the crash.

Three famous drivers... killed in motor race at Monza. Further details.

Three famous drivers... killed in motor race at Monza. Details of the investigation.

Three famous drivers... killed in motor race at Monza. Details of the aftermath.

Three famous drivers... killed in motor race at Monza. Details of the memorial.

Three famous drivers... killed in motor race at Monza. Details of the race.

Three famous drivers... killed in motor race at Monza. Details of the spectators.

Three famous drivers... killed in motor race at Monza. Details of the race.

Three famous drivers... killed in motor race at Monza. Details of the race.

Three famous drivers... killed in motor race at Monza. Details of the race.

Three famous drivers... killed in motor race at Monza. Details of the race.

SERIOUS CLASH WITH FASCISTS.

Stockton Clash. FREE FIGHTS FOLLOW A MEETING.

Stockton Clash. Details of the meeting and subsequent fights.

Stockton Clash. Details of the meeting and subsequent fights.

Stockton Clash. Details of the meeting and subsequent fights.

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Stockton Clash. Details of the meeting and subsequent fights.

Stockton Clash. Details of the meeting and subsequent fights.

TRAPPED IN DESERT WELL.

ADVENTURERS RESCUED BY RESCUE.

Adventure in the desert. Details of the rescue mission.

Adventure in the desert. Details of the rescue mission.

Adventure in the desert. Details of the rescue mission.

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Adventure in the desert. Details of the rescue mission.

HYPERION.

"A Good Thing" for the St. Leger? FRENCH CHALLENGE.

St. Leger horse race. Details of the French challenge.

St. Leger horse race. Details of the French challenge.

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St. Leger horse race. Details of the French challenge.

WORTHING THRILL.

Holiday Makers Rush from Teamooms. EXCITING SCENES.

Worthing holiday scene. Details of the excitement.

Worthing holiday scene. Details of the excitement.

Worthing holiday scene. Details of the excitement.

Worthing holiday scene. Details of the excitement.

Worthing holiday scene. Details of the excitement.

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Worthing holiday scene. Details of the excitement.

TAIL-WAGGER CHATS CARE OF DOGS IN THE AUTUMN. INDOORS OR OUT?

THE FAVORITE. Hyperion... details of the dog's performance.

LORD GREYS WILL. Fallon Left to His Nephew. REQUESTS TO SERVANTS.

JAIL-BREAKING DRAMA. Seasonal Fugitive Cuts Three Lives.

LOST AERONAUTS. 90-Mile Trip Through Canadian Forest.

Wet, drenching and drizzling... details of the aeronauts' journey.

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Wet, drenching and drizzling... details of the aeronauts' journey.

Wet, drenching and drizzling... details of the aeronauts' journey.

Just the ticket for doggy fare! FRIBB'S OVALS

TO-MORROW NEWSPAPER

Wardens. Details of the newspaper's content.

Wardens. Details of the newspaper's content.

FLYING BOOKS. Garden Ride in the...

FLYING BOOKS. Garden Ride in the...

FLYING BOOKS. Garden Ride in the...

FLYING BOOKS. Garden Ride in the...

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## Transport and General Workers Union

Stanley's work at ICI meant he became the main family breadwinner. On starting work, he immediately joined the TGWU of which he remained a passionate rank and file member and activist until he retired in his 60s.

The TGWU had been formed in 1922 with the amalgamation of 24 smaller unions. The nucleus of the union dated back to 1889 and the Great London Dock Strike that became famous as the 'dockers' tanner strike and in which over 30,000 dockers participated in a five-week dispute that ended in an almost complete victory for the strikers.

Success meant trade unionism was irreversibly altered for the better. Tens of thousands, including for the first time, many unskilled workers, flocked to join the new unions.

Ernest Bevin, who had started work as a carter on Bristol Docks, became the first TGWU general secretary. Right from the start, the TGWU had footholds in the emerging chemical industry. Initially, these bodies of workers were grouped alongside other groups, such as metal workers, in the general industrial sections of the union. In time, they were to be given national trade groups of their own.

In 1936, Stanley Taggart married Emma Jeffries at St Mary's Church, Norton and they lived locally at 30 Esk Road. They had two children: Joyce, born 17 July 1939 and Ann, born 1 December 1941 by which time the Second World War had been running for over two years.





## Opening to WWII: Spain 1936-39

The opening chapter to the eventual world war had commenced in Spain. Spanish Republicans had narrowly won the General Election in 1936 but had found themselves facing a rebellion led by the military leader General Franco who enjoyed the armed support of Hitler and Mussolini.

Despite the Tory Government banning volunteers from Britain going to Spain to support the Spanish Republic and fight fascism and defend democracy, at least 2,500 men and women did so. Amongst those who served from Teesside were George Bright, William Henry Carson, Bert Overton, Patrick Joseph Maroney, Joseph Myles Harding, Otto Estensen, Wilfred Cowan and Eddy John Longstaff. The story of Longstaff's boyhood in Stockton, his motivation for volunteering in Spain and his experiences there are captured in the Young'uns 'Ballad of Johnny Longstaff' at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDAcZnu-9do>

Others who served in the International Brigades were Jack Jones, who later became the TGWU general secretary, and Welshman Tom Jones, (no relation) who later became the first all Wales TGWU regional secretary in 1970. The life of the latter is covered in the Unite Education booklet Tom Jones – a fighter for freedom and working people.

See, also in the context of fighting fascism, the booklet on Benny Rothman – a fighter for the right to roam, workers' rights and socialism and which recalls Rothman's leadership of young Jewish comrades in daily street battles with the BUF across Manchester in the 1930s. Rothman is, of course, best known for his leadership of the 1932 Kinder Scout Trespass that helped pave the way for National Parks and the Right to Roam.

Opposition to fascism also features in another Unite Education booklet: Betty Tebbs – a radical working class hero. Tebbs' husband Ernest quit his job, which was a reserved occupation, as he felt that fascism had to be fought. He was killed in France in 1944.

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## **Air raid wardens: WWII**

In mid-May 1940, there were real fears of an invasion by the Germans who had advanced quickly through France. The Secretary of State for War was Anthony Eden and he appealed to those men unable, due to age or work, to join the Armed Forces and build units of Local Defence Volunteers, later renamed as the Home Guard. Middlesbrough formed two battalions. Each large industrial estate had its own defence contingent drawn from employees. 23,000 officers and men served in the Tees Garrison during the war.

The fear of gas attacks by the enemy had prompted the government to issue 38 million gas masks during the Munich Crisis period in September 1938. An embryonic Air Raid Precautions (ARP) Service was set up and in February 1939 the Police ARP Department was officially established. The department organised the Special Constabulary, the Police War Reserve, the Messenger Services and the Air Raid Wardens.

Stanley Taggart was a warden at Portrack and Kiaora Hall. Portrack is a housing and industrial estate in Stockton-on-Tees. It is situated close to Billingham opposite Thornaby and just west of Middlesbrough.

Kiaora Hall and the area around it began as an army camp for the gunners on the 4.7 naval guns that were used as anti-aircraft defence. These were not short range and they fired directly over houses in Mill Lane and out over the Tees Bay, the aim being to break up enemy attacks.

Stockton was later home to a number of Italian and German prisoners. At least one married a local woman. Some worked on the coal chutes at Norton Station filling bags of coal for the various coal merchants who took coal from there.

After the war ended, Stockton later got displaced people, who were mainly refugees from Eastern Europe plus former Nazi Germany concentration camp prisoners. While these were generally Poles, there were also many other nationalities who arrived. A lot married local women and settled permanently on Teesside.

On Friday 24 May 1940, a fleet of six ambulances, destined for use in France, called at Middlesbrough and Stockton. They had been presented to the Anglo-French Ambulance Corps at a cost of £500 each by the Durham Miners' Association.

On Bank Holiday Monday, 3 August 1942, Middlesbrough station was badly hit by two 500kg bombs, eight people being killed and 58 injured. Yet, compared to other locations, for example, Hull, Manchester and Liverpool with heavy industrial works, never mind those who had a chemicals complex like ICI, Teesside did not come under a sustained Blitz from the German Air Force. There was not even an official evacuation of Stockton's children during the conflict. According to Charlie Emmett, 'the reason was bizarre. During the 1930s a vast amount of German money had been poured into expanding ICI. Von Ribbentrop, a Nazi diplomat who became Hitler's London Ambassador, often visited the area and it is thought that it was on his orders that Teesside was spared sustained air raids.

At the end of the war, Stanley Taggart and all those who had been members of the Civil Defence Forces during it were issued with a Certificate of Service.



**BACK ROW:** Stanley's granddaughter Joanne Middleton and his daughter Ann Matthews.

**FRONT ROW:** Steve Leigh and Stanley's granddaughter Elizabeth Keogh and his daughter Joyce Middleton

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## A radical Labour Government 1945-1951

The end of the war brought the election of a radical Labour Government that, despite the difficulties in rebuilding a war-torn economy, improved the large majority of people's lives. Treatment based on need and not the ability to pay was why the NHS was created on 5 July 1948.



Before WWII only 43% of the population were covered by the National Insurance Scheme and over twenty-one million people, mainly women, children and the sick, were not covered at all. When Churchill's government during WWII brought all hospitals under public

control, the population got a taste of universal health care that ensured it remained once hostilities ended.

Churchill was defeated by Clement Attlee in the 1945 General Election; voters did not want to go back to the poverty of the 1930s. Coal mining was nationalised.

## Council housing

Legislation paving the way for mass council house building was passed in 1919. It was amid the carnage of the first World War and the 1917 Russian revolution, which appeared to put the working class in control, that all politicians were forced to guarantee that once the conflict ended there would be major social improvements.

Liberal prime minister Lloyd George promised that returning soldiers would have "homes fit for heroes". Instead of overcrowded, insanitary accommodation there would be good quality homes that would form the cornerstone of a higher living standard for all. Meanwhile, changes to election law in England, Scotland and Wales gave the vote to all

men aged over 21 and women over 30 who met minimum property qualifications. Voters wanted radical change.

The newly elected Conservative government introduced the Addison Act in 1919, paving the way for large-scale council house building. Under it, 213,000 of the originally promised half a million new homes were built. Dr Christopher Addison, like Aneurin Bevan later, held the joint role of housing and health minister as it was believed poor housing was largely responsible for poor health.

The 1924 Wheatley Act, under the first Labour government, was aimed at building more houses with indoor toilets, electricity and gardens. Thanks to subsidies from central government between the two wars, local authorities built 1.1 million council homes, around 50,000 annually. These figures were dwarfed after 1945, with an average of 110,000 new council houses constructed annually in the five years up to 1950. Almost double that year's figure was built over the next five years.

One Teessider like Stanley who benefitted from the provision of council housing after the horrors of war was Bill May, aged 95. "It was really wonderful in 1951 to get a well looked after council home that we could turn into a comfortable place to raise a family."

The Teessider had joined the Royal Navy in 1944 and saw action on the battleship HMS Nelson, the flagship in the British Far Eastern Fleet.

After leaving the navy in 1951, Bill and his wife Marjorie privately rented a wooden bungalow. But they, like millions, wanted somewhere better.

"We went to Hambleton Council offices and put our name on the housing list. Within weeks we received news that one of the houses newly built by the council was ours. We collected the keys and moved in. It had three bedrooms, a sitting room, radiators throughout, a kitchen and a garden. We were elated and felt very positive about the future as we now had a permanent place to call home," says a smiling Bill, who remained a council tenant with his wife Marjorie until 1986 when they bought a flat in Harrogate.

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Like Stanley Taggart, Bill May also worked at ICI in the 1950s. He was fortunate enough to receive support from the TGWU to study at Ruskin College from where he went on to work for many years for the Workers' Educational Association, founded 1903.



Record numbers of council homes were built in the first half of the 1950s. The Conservative Party was in government but all parties were committed to a mass public housing building programme where, to quote Nye Bevan, the labour minister of housing and health after the war, “the working man, the doctor and the clergyman will live in close proximity to one another”.

Already by the 1930s, most Labour councils had set up municipal works departments, known as Direct Labour Organisations (DLO). They carried out repair work and construction without using a private contractor. Labour council employees also tended to be paid at (or above) trade union wage rates and were subject to union-recognised conditions.

“I knew from my own experiences of council housing, without which I doubt my mother as a single person could have kept myself and my five siblings together, how important they were to working class people,” says Terry Cunliffe, a Unite tutor who worked on his local DLO in the 1970s and 80s.

“DLO workers wanted to provide good, affordable homes. As trade unionists we managed to negotiate good bonus schemes in the voids [empty homes] section. We worked quickly to refurbish rundown houses as the council then obtained rents from tenants who were usually very pleased to move in and leave behind poor private housing. Some tenants had inside toilets, central heating and shower facilities for the first time. Everyone – tenants, the council and DLO workers – won out.”

Most people remained council tenants until they purchased their council property under the so-called Right to Buy. This is best known as Margaret Thatcher's invention.

In fact, it was Edward Heath's government (1970-74) that first introduced the policy. Thatcher was, though, astute enough to expand it under the Housing Act 1980. It could be argued that, on its own terms it is the most successful policy ever introduced by government, as it undoubtedly changed the attitudes of many working class voters who would never have previously considered voting Conservative. Discounts were paid from the public purse.

Many people though remain convinced that today there is a real need for a massive council house building programme. "The divide between people across society is growing worryingly large," says Bill May. "We must address a situation where many people are unable to afford decent housing. Council housing provided for my generation the bedrock of a good upbringing and it can do so again in the future."

### **The Players' Union: football heroes need to get organised in order to obtain better pay and conditions.**

For many years, the FA Cup Final was one of the few live football matches shown on TV. In 1955, Newcastle United returned to Wembley and won the FA Cup for the third time in five seasons. The Magpies had beaten Blackpool 2-0 in the final in 1951 with Jackie Milburn scoring both goals. In 1952, Arsenal were beaten 1-0 thanks to a goal by George Robledo, a Chilean refugee. Three years later, Manchester City were beaten 3-1 with Milburn opening the scoring. 100,000 attended all three matches. Stanley attended at least one of the games.

At home games, Newcastle averaged over 50,000 on each occasion the Black and Whites played. The club was flush with money. Yet the players were badly paid. This was because they had no effective trade union to represent them.

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In December 1959 midfielder George Eastham, angry at being paid so little and disgusted with the club house he lived in, refused to sign a new contract and sought to leave Newcastle United. The Tynesiders, under the “retain-and-transfer system” operating then, refused to allow him to go and kept his registration.

This situation was not unusual at St James’ Park. Before he became the club’s record goalscorer, Jackie Milburn wanted to leave Newcastle United in 1948. He was asked like a naughty schoolboy to stand in front of the directors and plead his case to move south. Milburn was then ignored when the directors left the room without speaking to him.

The Professional Footballers’ Association [PFA] chairman Jimmy Hill, himself a player with Brentford and Fulham up until 1961, explained what all this meant in his autobiography: “When a player signed a contract with a club, that club controlled his whole future playing career. Under the standard terms of the contract, he could not leave to join another club without his original club’s consent. Even when the contract ended, the club still had the option to prevent the player moving elsewhere. If he didn’t want to re-sign, the club could retain his registration and were not obliged to pay him anything at all. The club could, however, transfer the player to another club whenever they wanted. If he refused to go, again they were not obliged to pay him anything at all.”



The PFA embraced Eastham’s case and with their assistance the player took the club to the High Court, arguing that it was an unfair restraint of trade or in rather more emotive terms “a modern form of slavery”. It was certainly a form of semi-serfdom.



Even though Newcastle relented later and allowed Eastham to move in September 1960 to Arsenal for £47,500, the PFA were not prepared to drop the legal action, seeing it as a test case between themselves and the Football League.

It was not until 1963, two years after the maximum wage had been lifted, that Mr Justice Wilberforce, one of the descendants of the great anti-slave campaigner Sir William Wilberforce, ruled that the retain-and-transfer system was in restraint of the footballer's trade and was therefore unlawful. Players could now hope to be better paid for their efforts and if they did not like the club at which they were playing they could seek different pastures.

Eastham's case was resolved after the PFA's vigorous campaign to abolish the maximum wage, which had risen to £20 by 1960, had finally been won in early 1961. Players had threatened to go on strike to force the issue and, from 1957, onwards there was continuous round of discussions between the union and Alan Hardaker, the secretary of the Football League, who finally conceded the right of players to bargain for better pay on 18 January 1961.

### **Who are you? Stanley Taggart**

It is known that Stanley was a sociable man and most of his friends, which covered a wide age range, were his workmates.

Stanley also developed a passion for cars and bought with the rest of the family an Austin 40, one of a number of different models that were made by the Austin Motor Company between 1947 and 1967.



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It was Emma, who worked locally at the supermarket chain Hinton's, formed in Middlesbrough in 1871, though, who was clearly the practical one as she passed her test and subsequently did all the driving. The family used the car to go on regular trips to many places including the coast and to visit family.

"On one trip they were all crossing a river on a steppingstone path using a rope rail. Uncle Ben went first, he was Ivy's husband, Emma's sister. Aunts Lily and May were next, Emma's sisters. They were followed by aunt Ivy. Emma and Stanley were with their daughters Joyce and Ann.

"Aunt Ivy pulled on the rope and knocked Stan, Joyce and Ann into the river. Stanley was soaked and his cigarette case that had just been filled was soaking. They got back to the bank. It was a hot day and they all dried out very quickly. Joyce's dress was ripped from the hem to the waist. Emma hurt her arm and Stanley was furious. They did all laugh about this often. My mam, Joyce and her sister Ann still do now." Joanne Middleton.

Away from work, Stanley was a member of the Norton Working Man's Club. It was a place he visited more as a younger man. He was also a member of the Buffs Social Club.

## **A black boxing hero**

As he moved towards and later retired, Stanley enjoyed watching the boxer Mohammad Ali who was viewed, by the time of his death in 2016, with great affection by the American establishment.

Yet for several years in the 1960s Ali went unchallenged as the most reviled figure in the history of American sports. Ali's important social and cultural impact would not have been possible if he had not been a truly great boxer. Fighting as Cassius Marcellus Clay, he won Gold for the USA at the 1960 Olympics before becoming World Heavyweight champion in 1964.

He then took the new Muslim name of Muhammad Ali by Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam that Ali had joined two

years earlier. This great honour helped direct Ali away from Malcolm X, the man who had originally recognised his leadership qualities, and who was to be assassinated in the very month, February 1965, when the US upped its involvement in North Vietnam by launching its intensified air war. By the time of the eventual ceasefire in the conflict eight years later, US planes had dropped three times the tonnage of bombs unloaded on all of Europe, Africa and Asia throughout World War II.

The conflict in Vietnam was to be the first American war in which the mood amongst American black people was oppositional. Previously it had largely been the case that black involvement was viewed as a way of pressing claims in times of peace for equality, long denied in a country built on racial segregation. In 1963, Malcolm X had become one of the best-known black people to condemn America’s intervention in Southeast Asia.

In early 1966, a time when opposition to the war was growing, Ali was told he had been drafted and would have to fight in Vietnam. In an era when revolutionary movements against colonialism were being constructed — and bitterly opposed by US imperialism - Ali replied: “Man, I ain’t got no quarrel with them Vietcong.” He made clear he was not going to fight even if it meant he went to prison. He was thus pilloried



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as sports commentators rushed to claim he had been 'duped' and didn't understand what was taking place in Vietnam. His forthcoming fight with Ernie Terrell in Chicago was ruled illegal by the Illinois attorney general on the grounds that he had not used his 'correct name' of Cassius Clay on the contract. Other possible venues refused to host the fight.

When the US then moved to prosecute Ali for his public opposition to the war and the draft, the boxer refused to surrender his beliefs, which were now inspiring many others to refuse to fight. Ali was sentenced to five years in prison but was released on bail pending appeal. As he continued to fight his case in the courts, he was stripped of his titles for over three and a half years. It was a time when he was arguably, as asserted by the great sports journalist Hugh McIlvanney, taking boxing into new territory and was at his physical peak.

In 1971, Ali successfully overturned his conviction for draft evasion and returned to the ring in what author Mike Marqusee describes as "a triumph over the system." Ali was to go on and defeat Joe Frazier in 1973, George Forman in the 'Rumble in the Jungle' in 1974 and Leon Spinks in 1978, thus becoming the only man to become World Heavyweight champion on three occasions. Ironically the Forman fight was bankrolled by dictator Joseph Mobutu who, with US support, had in 1960 overthrown the (only) democratically elected Congo President, the subsequently murdered Patrice Lumumba. Prior to the fight, Ali, wistfully remarked, "I wish Lumumba was here to see me."

According to Marqusee, “Between 1964 and 1975, Muhammad Ali spoke to the world as a defiantly unofficial ambassador for a dissident America..... Ali’s real heroism lies in actions we can all emulate: in placing solidarity with human beings in remote lands above loyalty to any national government, in setting conscience before personal convenience.”

After Ali retired from the ring, he later wrote a letter of thanks to “the people of Great Britain who stood with me during the difficult days of my exile from Boxing.” Many of the communities across Britain who had cheered the great singer Paul Robeson when he was reviled in his native land also backed Ali. Certainly, the two men remain the only two African-Americans to have led great parades through the streets of Tyneside, Robeson in 1949 and Ali in 1977.

## **Farewell**

Stanley died on 30 June 1975. He was out walking with Emma when he suffered a heart attack. He had very much been looking forward to attending the christening of his first granddaughter Joanne Middleton, Joyce and her husband Peter’s daughter. “He did not believe he was getting a grandchild as he had been waiting a decade,” said Joanne.

Sadly, Stanley also missed the birth of his second grandchild later that year when Ann and her husband Harry gave birth to Elizabeth, who now has one son, Harry.

Stanley was cremated with his ashes scattered in Teesside crematorium.

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To buy a copy of The Battle of Stockton Book email [battleofstocktoncampaign@gmail.com](mailto:battleofstocktoncampaign@gmail.com), the books are £8 with £2p&p.

With thanks to Louise Middleton, Elizabeth Keogh, Sharon Bailey, Nate Bailey, Barry Faulkner, Bill May, Martin May, Mark Harvey, John Harvey, Harry Gallacher, Alan Walsh, Jim Mowatt, Doug Pouch, Jim Fox, Graeme Atkinson, David Wood, Keith Palmer and Ken Nyberg.

Background to Mohammad Ali photographs by Ken Nyberg.

“I was a bus driver for 26 years with the Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive which became Stagecoach. I was a TWGU member throughout but never a rep.

“Photography was always something I hankered after from about 10 years of age but being in the 60s, we, as a family, didn’t have much money to spare and photography eats money. In 1973 and ‘74, I hitched around Canada and hooked up with a guy who was a keen photographer and he enrolled in Banff School of Fine Arts. That struck a chord with me so when I returned to South Shields, I decided to buy a Zenit Photosniper outfit and from then on, I was hooked.

“The Queen and Ali were visiting Shields on different days and I thought I may as well photograph them. The Queen was pretty much well organised but Ali’s visit was much more laid back. I took a few shots and wandered over to the bus, which was one of ours. I asked the driver, Frankie Gaffin, if I could pinch a seat upstairs. He shrugged and said yes.

“The Police security arrived and asked me what I was doing on the bus so I told them I was recording the visit on behalf of the Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive Photographic Society. They asked Frankie if this was true and he backed me up. So, I ended up sitting behind Ali.

“If this was to happen today, I would have hundreds of photos and would certainly have tried, and probably succeeded, in gaining entry into the Town Hall as well. But back then, I was careful of the cost of

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film, I was just starting out and I didn't have the confidence to approach people so readily.

"It was a great experience."

An appeal for funds for a memorial for the men from Stockton-on-Tees who volunteered to defend democracy and fight fascism in Spain from 1936 to 1939.

[https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/stocktonbrigaders?utm\\_term=WM52X28zk](https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/stocktonbrigaders?utm_term=WM52X28zk)

John Christie is a lifelong anti-fascist and owner of one of Stockton's best pubs; 'The Golden Smog'. He is raising £6,500 for a memorial to the people from Stockton who volunteered in Spain. The memorial will be placed in The Wasps Nest Yard just off Silver Street.

I'm not sure that anything has moved me as much as The Young'uns The Ballad of Johnny Longstaff which tells the tale of Johnny who was born in Stockton in 1919 and was raised by his grandmother.

During the Great Depression he begged for bread on the streets and outside the factory gates in the town, hoping the workers had saved anything from their lunch boxes for the starving kids waiting outside.

At the age of 14, he got a job in the steel rolling mills working 12 hours a day but an industrial accident left burns on his hands and back. After weeks in hospital, he discovered his job had gone to someone else.

Out of work and too young to claim dole, he joined the hunger marchers leaving the North-east and he walked 240 miles to London and slept rough on the Embankment when he got there.



Meeting Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany led him to oppose the rise of fascism in Britain, most significantly in 1936 at Cable Street in London's east end, where a march by Oswald Mosley and his followers was forced back.

Johnny then joined up to fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War, he was wounded on several occasions and even temporarily blinded. The Second World War saw him sign up again and fight in Africa and Italy and being awarded the bronze star during World War II.

The inequality he witnessed in London changed the way he saw the world. He campaigned for equality and justice for the rest of his life.

Johnny died in 2000 and is buried in Somerset and I and many others want a memorial for Johnny and the other men of Stockton-on-Tees who volunteered to defend democracy and fight fascism in Spain from 1936 to 1939.

The local International Brigaders I know of are -

George Bright – Thornaby, William Henry Carson – Stockton, Wilfred Cowan – Stockton, Otto Estensen – Thornaby, Joseph Myles Harding – Thornaby, John Eddy Longstaff - Stockton Patrick Joseph Maroney – Stockton, Bert Overton - Stockton

Written by John Christie

For more details on the Battle of Stockton Campaign

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