

## Holidays at Home

Wainwright acolyte [Chris Butterfield](#) takes charge of a treasure trove, and details the story behind wartime Kendal's annual holiday



“Five cappuccinos coming right up, sir.” The waitress had barely stepped away before a large brown folder was pushed slowly across the table towards me. You could cut the atmosphere with a knife. I looked up, seeking permission; a slight nod in my direction was enough. I gently lifted the flap and slid out the contents.

My eyes lit up. There was a pile of black and white photos with the Westmorland Gazette copyright stamp on the reverse, several Lakes & Lune annual reports,

and a few leaflets. These were all early examples of work by guidebook author Alfred Wainwright, produced during then days when he worked in Kendal Borough Council's treasurer's department, some years before he made his name as the author of Lakeland's most revered walking guides. To many people, it might just be a collection of old pamphlets. To Wainwright's many devoted fans, however, this was a veritable treasure trove.

Then I spotted a small bag.

“What’s this?” I asked.

“Open it up and you’ll see.” I slid the contents into the palm of my hand. It was a Three Nuns tobacco tin.

“Surely it’s not?”

“Yes, Chris. The very one. In fact, it was the very last tobacco tin he used as borough treasurer before he retired in 1967.”

I was speechless, almost to the point that I wondered if I appeared rude. I then

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spotted the final envelope. I tipped it up, and three small brochures popped out.

“Oh, my goodness,” was all I could say. These were the Kendal holiday week brochures I had read all about.

“Well Chris, you are now the new custodian of all these items.”

My wife Priscilla, brothers Paul and Mike Duff and Mike’s wife Sandra were all smiling at me. It felt like everyone had been in on this. How could I possibly thank Paul Duff enough for such wonderful pieces of Wainwright history? Five cappuccinos suddenly landed on the table... coffee never tasted so good.

We were relaxing in a cafe in Kendal after a fabulous morning. Mike and Paul – the sons of Percy Duff, who succeeded Wainwright as borough treasurer – and Sandra had given Priscilla and I a

private tour of the Mayor’s Parlour in the Town Hall during which we learned much about the history of Kendal. In addition to climbing the clock tower, we had held some of Kendal’s historical artefacts, including the Sovereign Sword, and had viewed Katherine Parr’s Book of Devotions and the original Town Charters. An original drawing of the Town Hall by Wainwright also hung on the wall. We couldn’t thank tour organiser Mike enough. And now there was this treasure trove.

The history behind the brochures is fascinating. They were produced a decade before Wainwright began his now famous Pictorial Guide to the Lakeland Fells, and very few people have seen them in recent times. AW was proud of this earlier work, and always acknowledged what they did for him.

Wainwright moved from his home town Blackburn to Kendal in 1941 as an accountancy assistant. In those days, people from outside Kendal were regarded as offcomers. However, Wainwright’s period as an offcomer was to be short lived. In 1942, just a few months after his move, he was approached by the council to organise a Holidays at Home programme. Holidays at Home was a government scheme to discourage people from travelling and from using scarce resources in the holiday season during the war period.

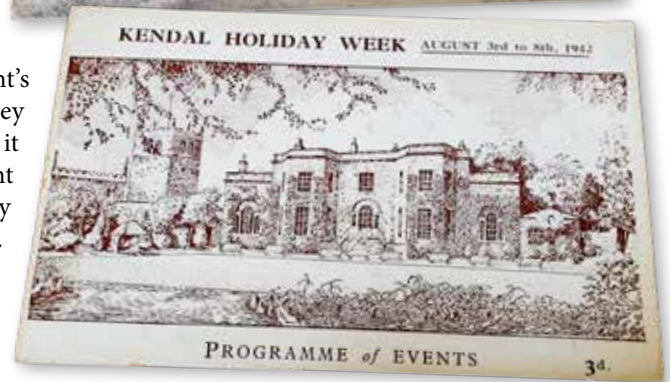
Wainwright was given free rein. He formed committees to help prepare a multitude of activities, including dances, sporting events, competitions, concerts and even Punch and Judy shows. He recruited the services of well-known local people, and that’s when his social

status started to rise. He prepared the brochures and even adorned the front covers with some of his very early Kendal drawings.

Holidays at Home week took place every year until the summer of 1944. Wainwright would often boast about the kudos the events gave him, and they obviously played a part in his rise through the ranks to the position of borough treasurer in 1948, a position he would hold until his retirement in 1967.

Percy Duff was Wainwright's natural successor. Born in Kendal in 1922, he was a junior clerk when Wainwright arrived in 1941, and became Wainwright's trainee. Though friends, they were chalk and cheese when it came to hobbies. Wainwright liked walking, whereas Percy preferred motorcycles. Wainwright was a huge Blackburn Rovers supporter, and Percy was a rugby union fan who played for Kendal. They couldn't have been more different. After a short time, Percy's career was interrupted by war. He was called up and served as an anti-tank gunner with the Royal Artillery before returning to civilian life in 1946. He eventually became Wainwright's chief assistant, next-in-line to the top job.

Before Wainwright left the Town Hall, he gave Percy many of his possessions



*Brochures for Kendal's wartime Holidays at Home scheme, detailing events organised by Alfred Wainwright and featuring early examples of the artwork which was to make him famous.*

*Previous page: borough treasurer Alfred Wainwright (centre-front) and his department – including friend and colleague Percy Duff (seated, second-right) photographed in 1951*

when clearing out his desk. Among the items were two sets of Wainwright's Kendal holiday week brochures, which had remained in his drawer for years. His last tobacco tin was also handed over, and Percy would keep these items for the rest of his life.

As the decades rolled by, Wainwright did not forget the projects he had been involved in. One of his later books, published in 1987 to commemorate his eightieth birthday, was *Ex-Fellwanderer*. It was quite controversial: he was outspoken in his opinions of modern society, but forbade anyone from changing his narrative. In one section, he spoke fondly of his love for the Holidays at Home project which had, he said, helped his status in Kendal.

In 1994, while working on the Wainwright biography, Hunter Davies interviewed Percy Duff about his relationship with Wainwright. Percy's priceless contribution would feature in the biography, along with a scan of a Kendal holiday week brochure given to him by Wainwright.

Richard Else, producer of the original Wainwright BBC TV series, remembers that Wainwright borrowed the brochures from Percy for a day, during the production of the first TV series, and was delighted when they were shown to him.

Percy died in 2011 after a successful career. A proud and respected resident of Kendal, he was awarded an MBE in 1986 and was

the only surviving Honorary Citizen of the town. As well as being treasurer to many local charities and the author of four books, he was the president of the Westmorland Motor Club, and honorary vice-life president of the Northern Centre Auto-Cycle Union. Percy and his late wife Margaret had also held an extensive library of photographs of Kendal and district, which formed the basis of many articles in the *Westmorland Gazette*.

Mike and Paul Duff inherited their father's possessions, including several unpublished pen and ink drawings produced by Wainwright as wedding presents for Percy and Margaret. Among the items were the Kendal holiday week brochures. Everything was equally split between Mike and Paul; each had a set of the brochures.

While researching Wainwright's story, I discovered that Percy, Paul and Mike had accompanied AW's wife Betty to Haystacks to lay his ashes to rest beside Innominate Tarn in 1991. I contacted the brothers, who were more than happy to speak with me and shared many stories about Percy and AW's lives, including their meetings with Wainwright. A good friendship has developed, and I am grateful to them for teaching me so much about Percy Duff and Alfred Wainwright during those early years in Kendal. ■



● *Chris Butterfield's Alfred Wainwright Books & Memorabilia group can be found on Facebook*