

INSIDEOut

20 years of the **DAas**

Back in 1989 Bill Pertwee's book *'Dad's Army The Making of a Television Legend'* opened the doors on this well loved programme. It had been shown at regular intervals but this was a time before the onslaught of cable TV that has diluted the impact of television's output.

The original programmes and first repeats were normally scheduled on Thursdays and, until recently, subsequent showings were slotted-in at teatime on a Saturday. The radio shows were even more elusive.

Videos of the show had just started to appear, although there was no structure to their release – we weren't treated to a specific series, more a selection of 'best of's'.

Such was the interest in the programme that Bill received requests asking if there was a 'fan club'. He always replied to these letters and stated that he would pass on the enquirer's details if anything was set up.

In the meantime, Dave Lovering from Exeter had set up the Dad's Army Appreciation Society (we're not sure if Bill had supplied him with some of his enquirers) and produced a newsletter dated February 1990. And for a time, that was it. Any enquiries were not responded to and all the promises of a society disappeared – even Bill had no response from him.

Undeterred, Bill was keen to set something up but was too busy to do this himself. His attention was drawn to an individual by the name of Tadge Muldoon, a mad keen Tony Hancock and Dad's Army fan. Bill approached Tadge with the suggestion of setting up a Society and supplied him with the names he had accumulated.

Tadge sent out a rough and ready invitation to join the 'New' Dad's Army Appreciation Society.

Tadge was not shy of publicity and the new Society got mentioned in the national press and Tadge made a few appearances on local radio.

The first newsletter appeared in September 1993 and Tadge's enthusiasm jumped out of the pages. He had great plans.

The 16-page newsletter contained a welcome note, a message from Bill Pertwee, video release information and a couple of articles - one by Jack Wheeler and a quiz put together by Paul Carpenter, both of whom would continue to contribute to all future newsletters.

At the Imperial War museum, there was 'An Evening with Bill Pertwee' based around his book. The event attracted a few of his DA chums and it was a missed opportunity not to have had this as a fledgling DA society event.

With membership numbers rising, more plans were hatched, but a follow-up newsletter was slow to appear. Many members who had joined the original society may have been dreading the worst!

Thankfully, the second newsletter appeared in the same breezy style in February 1994.

Tadge was beginning to get very difficult to pin down. He had loads of enthusiasm but it seemed he had problems in seeing a project through to the end, and perhaps the scale of the society was beginning to overwhelm him.

Tadge formed a solid relationship with his nearest DA star, Colin Bean, and he soon arranged what was to be the DAAS event 'An Evening with Colin Bean' held at London's Victory Services Club on Saturday 4 March 1995. Here, for the first time, a group of like-minded individuals sat and listened to someone who had actually appeared in their favourite show. From this meeting, names and addresses were exchanged, with promises to keep in touch. As a result of the evening, there were plans made to film an extensive interview with Colin and make it available to members, and deposits for the project were taken.

By 1995, the word 'New' was dropped from the Society title and over the other side of the world, Dave Homewood set up a New Zealand branch of the DAAS which was to run for nearly ten years producing many informative newsletters (Platoon Attention!). A film locations visit to Chalfont St Giles was arranged by Jack Wheeler on a chilly day in March.

Tragedy struck later in the year with the sad news that Tadge had been taken to hospital as a result of an accident at work. He ran a skip hire business and was struck on the side of the head by a loose chain. Unfortunately he died of his injuries and it was the sad duty of his close helper, Steph Castle to inform all members that the Society would be 'on hold' for a short time. Tadge left behind his wife and two young sons.

Undeterred, DAAS President Bill Pertwee stepped in again and contacted someone who he knew had a very keen interest in the programme. This was retired Civil Servant Jack Wheeler. Being retired, Jack could devote more time to running the society, which now had a membership of about 480 and was growing fast. He was very 'old school' and would answer all enquiries, using his trusty typewriter, with extreme care. Jack was aware of his limitations and did not want to let the membership down, so he enlisted the help of Paul Carpenter as his right-hand man and Nick Randall, who would handle the fledgling Audio/Video Library and merchandise. Later, Chris Leather stepped forward to create the Press Cuttings Archive.

A quick-fix photocopied newsletter (No6) was put together and sent out to members to let them know the society was in good hands. It was only much later that Jack revealed he had paid for this out of his own pocket, since the DAAS funds had not been sorted out. He would never accept any payment for this.

When Jack and Paul sat down to go over what had been sent by Steph, it became clear that the Society needed a restructure. The deposits for the Colin Bean video (now shelved) had contributed to the printing of the previous newsletter, leaving very little in the bank. The first priority was to return all monies from this project. Luckily there was a list of payees, but it took some time to get the books back on track. A bold decision was made to reduce the membership fees. This paid off as it opened the floodgates for new members, and before long the membership was in excess of 1500. Additional help was called for and Tony Pritchard stepped up in the autumn of 1996.

October 1996 saw the first 'Convention', arranged by Nick Randall and held at the Bonding Warehouse, York. Special guests included Bill Pertwee, Frank Williams and Eric Longworth. It was at this event that Frank was made Vice President.

The Society began to be more stable, with issues of 'Permission to Speak, Sir' being sent out at regular intervals. More events were planned and the first full locations tour of Norfolk was undertaken in April 1997. The DAAS website was launched in September 1997 and The Dad's Army Information and Continuity Project (DAICOP) was launched by Gordon Brodie with help from Chris Leather in 1998.

With a larger membership, several projects could be undertaken for the benefit of members. The first of these was the Dad's Army Handbook in April 1998, based on the 'Dad's Army Guide to Television, Radio & Stage' by Hamilton & Hayes but expanded to include more information. The book proved very popular, and a second updated edition was produced in 1999. DAAS Publications was set up from the proceeds of the book.

The programme's 30th anniversary was celebrated by a convention held at the Oval Cricket Ground, London. Clive Dunn managed to make an appearance, as did a number of the remaining 'back row' members. The event nearly didn't go ahead as a mistake had been made with the booking. Bill Pertwee again stepped in to smooth things over and the relaxed event went ahead without a hitch.

A weekend locations tour saw the society's first visit to the Stanta Training area, which is normally restricted access. The DAAS built up a close relationship with Anne Webster who worked there when the cast and crew were filming. She continued to maintain her links with the Army and was a welcome escort during our trips there.

Due to other commitments, Nick Randall handed over the Video Library to Tony Carville in March 1999.

A taste of things to come occurred when the DAAS arranged a Dad's Army Day at Bressingham on 25 July 1999. Bressingham had supplied several vehicles for the location filming and a relationship had been forged. Special guests included Bill Pertwee, Frank Williams and Pamela Cundell. During subsequent discussions DAAS representatives Jack, Tony, Paul & Bill were shown extensive drawings of a scale model of Walmington on Sea set inside one of their display buildings. The original meeting was to discuss the Society only having a corner of a room to display some Dad's Army memorabilia. The Society had also met previously with Thetford Town Council to suggest a display there but the idea came to nothing (at least for a time...)

And so the Dad's Army Collection at Bressingham was born. Opened with great celebration on 14 May 2000 and attended by many of the original cast. The previous day Thetford Town Council acknowledged the occasion by hosting a Civic reception at the Town Council Offices, followed by a parade of historic and Dad's Army related vehicles around the town, culminating at the Thetford Guildhall and pleasing huge crowds who had turned out to see the stars. This was probably the high point of the Society's achievements and the Collection provided a unique experience for visitors.

Member Barry Homer took over the Audio Library from Nick Randall in the summer of 2000 for what ended up as a short period as he went 'missing' in March 2001 with the DAAS collection, property and money! Chris Leather eventually helped rebuild the library with some tapes from its former host, Nick Randall. Maurice Tondelier took over the Video Library from Tony Carville as well as the NZ 'Platoon Attention!' orders ('Platoon Attention!' was later passed on to Roger Partridge).

More local events (three took place in September/October 2000), tours and members meals followed at regular intervals and a regular event was held at Bressingham each May.

The Society hosted a special 10th anniversary event at The Court Theatre, Tring, in October 2003 where each member received a bottle of Dad's Army Anniversary Ale as well as a special programme and a performance of 'Dad's Army, The Lost Episodes', which was followed by interviews with some of the special guests. Oh, and fish and chips!

The long awaited and delayed Dad's Army Companion (based on the DA Handbook) was published by DAAS Publications in 2004 and was snapped-up by members hungry for more information on the programme.

In February 2005 we received the sad news that Jack Wheeler had peacefully passed away (while watching television!). He was 83. Bill Pertwee was unable to attend his funeral due to ill health so Charles Garland attended on his behalf and said a few words.

Undeterred, the Society carried on without a blip. It had worked 'like a smooth, well oiled machine' thanks to Jack's organisation, and (due to the size of the growing membership) some of the load had been taken off his shoulders, but he had still corresponded with many using his trusty typewriter. An investment had been made in a franking machine to speed things up, but this worried Jack, he was more comfortable with stamps! (Strangely enough, stamps made a comeback as several people could 'stamp' whereas only one person could frank!)

The Society had been putting pressure on the BBC since 1996 to, not only release the many episodes unavailable on video, but also to release them in order. More episodes started to appear, but never as complete series - we'd have to wait until the DVD releases for that. The relationship with the BBC via Carolyn Bartholomew, was an important one. Carolyn managed to pull a few strings now and again and even managed to get members a discount at the BBC Shop.

It was soon 2008 and the 40th Anniversary of the programme. London's Imperial War Museum was the venue for the event in July which enticed Clive Dunn over from Portugal. Circumstances meant the event had to take place during the week, although this helped the event achieve widespread press coverage.

The last major event was the unveiling at Thetford of the Captain Mainwaring statue in June 2010. The statue forms part of the town's celebration of the programme which includes their Dad's Army Museum. The weekend event included a performance of 'Dad's Army Comes Home' at the Carnegie Rooms, a member's Meal in the evening, plus the Dad's Army Day at Bressingham the following day!

The Society has never run without the help of many volunteers over the years who have given up their time willingly (with the exception of rotter Barry Homer, of course!). The support of both writers and others involved in the making of the programme should also not go without a mention.

DAAS 2013

