

HOGMANAY

By Bob Crickard (Body Platoon 1954-57)

Some of the boys at Blackdown came from deprived homes or abusive parents and this was a contributory factor for their presence in the Army. Pete Roberts was definitely not one of these although I was.

He had a loving family of whom he was rightfully proud. He also had a desire to visit Scotland particularly at Hogmanay. Since he and I were mates he suggested that we spend Christmas at his home in Selly Oak and New Year at mine near Brechin in Scotland.

His home was a delight to share. His Mum made me welcome like a family member and his Dad, realising that Boy Soldiers were not particularly well off, and as a contractor in painting and decorating, was able to employ us as unskilled casual labour during the week leading up to Christmas. I remember we worked in Edgbaston Girls High stripping and priming walls. The girls had already broken up for the holidays. It was a particularly mild winter that year and we diverted ourselves by catching flies and bluebottles on the skylights in the girls' toilets and incinerating them in a special gadget, mounted on the wall that appeared to be specially designed for that purpose.

Shortly after Christmas we left by train for my home in Scotland. The days were uneventful until New Year's Eve. During the course of the evening we would stagger from pub to pub, down a pint of bitter and move onto the next. On the street we would drink copiously from half pint bottles of spirits, offered by strangers, who in turn would drink from ours, and everyone would wish all and sundry A Happy New Year.

During our walkabout we arrived at the bus depot and collapsed in the shelter beside the departure stop for Arbroath, a town which is on the coast and roughly eight miles distant from Brechin. At some point we became aware of a sleeping figure on the bench at the other end of the shelter. In our befuddled state we were convinced that he was a kindred spirit, rather the worst for wear, who had fallen asleep while waiting for the bus for Arbroath. Full of good intentions we attempted to waken him but failed, so we compromised by carrying his inert form out of the shelter and onto the Arbroath bus which had just arrived.

On the third of January, I read in the local newspaper:

"At the magistrates court this morning James Gellatly of 12 Bank Street, Brechin was found guilty of breach of the peace. He was fined 30 shillings and bound over for a year. Gellatly alleged that he had been manhandled aboard the bus for Arbroath but being the worse for wear was in no state to fight off his assailants. He had lost consciousness only to awake in Arbroath, where, being penniless had demanded passage back to Brechin. When the conductor had refused Gellatly became abusive and offered violence. In passing sentence the magistrate, Mr Archibald Henry, complimented Gellatly on his original defence but stated the court had long since ceased to believe such fanciful tales. Mr Gellatly was given seven days in which to pay. "