Do You Speak Pandemic?

As I think most of us will have experienced during the last five months, ‘normal’ life as we have lived for many years has been vastly different.

Some have adapted quite easily while others have had great problems which have caused upsets. The changes are now becoming almost routine and in typical British fashion, have introduced new (or plagiarized) words to define or explain our current lifestyle or “modus operandi”.

Our Government has detailed, how we should live our lives at present. My wife, Margaret, and I are now, (fortunately only because of age) in ‘lockdown’. My recent (1985) Collins Concise Dictionary does not contain that word. It does have ‘lock up’ which means to imprison or confine, and also jail or cell. This could not possibly apply to two innocents like us, but is exactly what was required of people to control Covid19. So, to avoid any upset to the voting public, the new term was coined.

While the Government is well known for its verbosity, it then introduced the term ‘social isolation’ to describe how people, who may have been in contact with the virus, must live. Which brings us back to the definition of ‘lock up’ which they did not like!!!

I have every sympathy with the Government officials as, in dealing with the pandemic, they had no previous experience in their lifetime to rely on. ‘They were flying by the seat of their pants’ I think is the expression and did not always get things correct. Hopefully they are learning from their mistakes. However, the situation has brought out assorted critics, many of whom were unaware they were demonstrating their rudeness and ignorance while producing no solutions of their own. TV and newspaper reporters were especially bad and many MPs equally so.

As students we were taught to criticize diagnoses in a supportive manner, whilst putting forward our own ideas. That made it a learning experience, not a schoolyard squabble.

Government announcements also leave a lot to be desired. All public statements must be understood by everyone, which means they are couched in language that all understand, no matter what the education level achieved by the listener or their mother tongue. No one should fail to understand the message and there is no place for intellectual snobbery.

Strangely, with National Service and TA membership, I have experience of good communication methods. Part 1 orders in the British Army, produced daily, state what will occur the next day, who will be involved, with what and when. These are read by all ranks and explained to the newest recruit. It is called ‘shared information’ which is supposed to be the buzz word at present.

By Chairman: Peter Moran

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However, the Army had facilities for dealing with non-conformists not available to the Government!!

I was in General Practice in 1968, the year of the influenza epidemic known as Hong Kong ‘Flu. I do not recall any ‘lockdown’ equivalent, but I do remember lots of housecalls. This imbalance was the result of the Government’s decision that patients had to have a ‘sick note’ within three days of missing work. As they were unable to attend surgery, a home call out was necessary.

Fortunately, the B.M.A. soon sorted out this pointless anomaly, but successive Governments still seem to have no idea when they have the wrong finger in the wrong pie and the NHS continues to suffer.

When I was a child and started going to Saturday afternoon cinema, ‘The Lone Ranger’ was a weekly episode film. He, the goodie, always wore a white mask while the baddies always wore black. Admittedly, this was over their eyes.

Now that the general public are wearing masks (of all colours) it reminds me of my surgical houseman days.

But, in those days, no-touch technique slowly became second nature, helped by taps being controlled by foot or elbow. But, we were not expected to keep two metres distance apart, a current additional difficulty. Sadly, we have not been to the Bowls Club yet this season for those reasons.

The human race has always had a huge mixture of people of varying inclinations. Recently, this has been very pronounced when good deeds and helpfulness across both sexes and all age groups, have received deserved acclamation.

Alas, there are those who have sought for personal gain at other’s distress. Why is it that the latter seem to get most publicity? However, I remember an old newspaper reporter patient telling me, “Doc, only bad or shocking news sells!”
My Life as a Newcastle City Guide

I am sure you will all have been on a guided walk or guided tour on several occasions. What made it a worthwhile experience or what made it pure torture? Lawrence Bryson takes us on a journey on how he became involved in guiding, what guides do and how they do it..

I live in Gateshead and was born and brought up on Tyneside, as were my parents and one set of grandparents, so I have personal knowledge of the area for more than 60 years and through family much longer than that.

My paternal grandfather evidently had an interest in local history and we acquired a small collection of printed material and anecdote from him. I have a dilettante interest in history, particularly local history, and an appreciation of architecture, but apart from working in the Health Service in South Shields I had no contact with local affairs and certainly no relevant educational or working background.

I retired 13 years ago. Shortly before retirement I had become a friend of St. Mary’s, the oldest church building in Gateshead, of an age with the four medieval parish churches in Newcastle. St. Mary’s is the church on your right as you start to cross the Tyne Bridge towards Newcastle. It ceased to function as such in 1979. After a troublesome period during which the building was damaged in two serious fires and then for 10 years was used as auction house, and then as Gateshead’s Visitor Centre, in 2007 St. Mary’s was undergoing an extensive renovation to become Gateshead’s Heritage Centre.

The handful of Friends who had volunteered to be guides at St. Mary’s was brought together and we had sessions on the history of the building and a few practical tips on guiding.

We continue to offer guided tours of St. Mary’s on the 3rd Saturday of the month, when coffee and home-made cakes and scones are also available along with advice on Family History research from members of the Northumberland and Durham Family History Society and often other events such as book launches. For groups we also offer tours with or without tea and cakes at other times by arrangement.

The “Friends of St. Mary’s” is now “St. Mary’s Heritage Group Gateshead” who have undertaken additional research into the church and graveyard, and that has resulted in explanatory leaflets and information boards in the churchyard.

Showing people the building and the churchyard was a good introduction to guiding, although guiding in a building is different in several respects from being a City Guide. For a start, the script is much the same each time. There should be some variation according to the nature and interest of the audience but nevertheless, once the tour has been done a few times it is less of a challenge to the memory.

On the other hand, a guided walk by Newcastle City Guides may be done once in a season and never again, or not until the next season, and although it is possible to draw on a general body of knowledge about the area, details specific to the walk need to be researched and remembered.
In 2010 Newcastle City Guides were recruiting to their number and it was suggested to those of us who were guiding at St. Mary’s that we should consider applying to their training course.

“Newcastle City Guides” was established in 1962, so this is their 58th year. There are over 50 active guides at the moment from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some have worked in town planning or other Local Government roles and bring useful information particularly on more recent changes. Some have worked in the Fire Service which also brings special memories and insights. A teaching background assumes talents in researching, assembling and presenting information. The diversity of previous experience in itself brings to the group different interests, attitudes and knowledge and style of presentation.

To keep up the number of active guides, training courses take place about every 3 years. There was a selection procedure and I started the training programme in January 2011 which lasted for nearly the whole year. Within that time we had weekly training sessions of lectures or activities, usually in the Guildhall, we followed trained guides leading walks and as the year went on we were encouraged to take over for a part of the walk. There were also walks of small groups or individual trainees with qualified guides. This involved a significant time commitment both of the trainees and the trainers, particularly those trained guides who organized the course. At the end of the year there was the inevitable examination in the form of an assessment of knowledge and the traumatizing experience of leading a walk in front of examiners and some of your fellow trainees.

I’m often asked if we are Blue Badge Guides, and for most of us the answer is “no”. The “Blue Badge” is awarded by a national professional association founded in 1950 called the Guild of Tourist Guides, “dedicated to raising and maintaining the professional standards of its membership”.

Blue Badge Guides are trained under the auspices of the Institute of Tourist Training which accredits training courses throughout England, (I think there is a similar organization for Scotland) in courses which can last from 2 terms to 2 years in the case of London guides.

Anyone can set themselves up as a guide, but generally the Tourist Industry uses the Blue Badge qualification as a convenient way of ensuring the competence of guides. I think you would have to work hard to make a decent living as a tour guide and even those Newcastle City Guides who also do paid guiding must earn little more than pin money, particularly set against the cost of the course, which several years ago was £3,000. Newcastle City Guides are volunteers, only claim expenses which are few and most like myself are motivated by an interest in our local area, particularly its history but also its present and future, and enjoy communicating with those who attend the walks.

**What do Newcastle City Guides do?**

In normal times, every day from May to September and every Saturday in April and October there is a “City Highlights” walk which starts at 10.30 am at Windows in the Central Arcade and ends at 12 MD on the Quayside to coincide with the opening of the Gateshead Millennium Bridge.

This walk is mainly for visitors to Newcastle as an introduction to the City, although it is attended and enjoyed by locals as well. Usually one guide is scheduled for each of these walks, unless for some reason a large number is expected. There is no booking system, and sometimes no customers show up. On other occasions there can be a large number.

Last season word got round a cruise ship visiting the Tyne and one of my colleagues was nearly overwhelmed. The charge is £5, under 16s free.

In addition to the City Highlights walks, during the week, usually on Wednesday evenings or on another weekday and every Sunday afternoon from April to October we lead Heritage walks.

These walks may be based on an area, such as the Summerhill area of Newcastle and we do extend to areas outside the City such as Gosforth, Gateshead and the Coast, or there may be a theme such as Theatres, Women’s Suffrage or Lord Armstrong.

Popular walks may take place more than once in a season. Jesmond Old Cemetery always attracts good numbers, partly because the volunteer group working to improve and
preserve the site are uncovering more graves of interest every year. There is a constant effort to introduce new walks for the interest of the guides as well as frequent attenders, and if there is a topical subject, such as the Great War, that is reflected in the programme. A few of the walks are costumed, for instance 2016 was the 800th anniversary of the Mayoralty of Newcastle and a pageant of mayors over the 800 years was presented in the Guildhall.

Usually no prior booking is required for Heritage Walks unless we are visiting a site where access is restricted to a fixed number. Otherwise we take as many as turn up, and as long as there are willing participants, the walks go ahead whatever the weather. Four guides are usually scheduled for Heritage Walks. The charge is £5, £3 for over 60s, and accompanied under 16s free. We do sell season tickets at a considerable reduction.

An activity which is particularly popular with locals and visitors is an ascent of Grey’s Monument. All open days are staffed by Volunteer City Guides. Three are required on site, 2 at the bottom and one 164 steps up at the top, and last summer we managed to staff at least one Saturday a month and extra sessions for private groups.

These can be booked on the Guides’ website. These are the core activities of the City Guides. In the last year or two with the reduction in funding for cultural activities there has been a change in the umbrella organization of the guides and some unexpected additions to activities.

Until 2 years ago the Guides were managed by the City Council through the Tourist Information Service, hence the Central Arcade rendezvous for the City Highlights walks.

Since the Visitor Information Centre on the corner of Market Street and the Arcade closed 2 years ago we have lost that base so outside Windows is the rendezvous for City Highlights walks. The Guides now report to NGI - the Newcastle Gateshead Initiative. This is the local agency responsible for inspiring people to visit and invest in the area. There are nearly 2 million visitors a year to Newcastle Gateshead for business and tourism. The main source of overseas visitors is Ireland, Holland and Norway. 50% of business visitors have never been to the area before.

One initiative of NGI is to offer a training day to staff in any organization in direct contact with the public-so-called “front line staff”, such as hotel
receptionists, museum staff and staff at tourist attractions, to increase their ability to offer advice to visitors. City Guides have assisted these courses by taking participants on a guided walk through Newcastle.

An unexpected addition to requests for our services has been from Cruise ships, of which there is an increasing number visiting the Tyne. Occasionally there may be 2 or 3 cruise ships and an army of blue badge guides descend from all parts of the country to escort the bus tours, but with the diminution in Tourist Information services City Guides have been asked to volunteer to meet and greet, and help those passengers setting out independently to visit local attractions.

Throughout the off season we have weekly meetings to expand knowledge, and at least once a year a visit outside the area is organized to broaden knowledge and get ideas of how other areas and visitor sites manage their activities. There is also an informal exchange of knowledge between guides, particularly for upcoming and new walks, and a quarterly publication with relevant material to expand knowledge and keep guides informed of current activity in the area.

How do you do it?
It seems obvious—you talk a bit, you walk awhile, stop and talk some more. It turned out to be a bit more complicated than that. A small sub-committee decides which walks will be included in the season’s programme. Guides are asked for their availability and preference as to which walks they would like to lead. The sub-committee then has the unenviable task of trying to match these up to everyone’s satisfaction.

All the walks have been researched, walked, and notes are provided by whoever devised the walk, so there is almost always a resource to help start preparation for the walks you have been allotted.

People who have been on the same walk with different guides invariably comment that the walks are different, and it is inevitable that some aspects of the route will appeal differently. One guide may concentrate on architecture, another on industry and another on history. Delivery is also personal to the individual. Some are conversational, some more formal, some tell jokes, some are better advised to avoid attempting to do so. Some like using visual aids.

The most useful and to me enjoyable preparation is to walk the route myself, and we usually do what we call a Dummy Walk with the four guides scheduled to lead and any others interested. You then decide where you are going to stop and what you are going to say at each stopping place.

I think it is important to have in mind that it is a guided walk, not a walking lecture, so you should be talking about what the group is looking at, and if possible you should try to pick out themes recurring throughout so there is some connection between the stopping places. Having done that and any additional research necessary there is the really hard bit which is trying to remember it all.

There are some important general considerations applicable to all guided walks. Introductions may reveal a special interest of a participant which can be accommodated. For example visitors from Portugal can have their attention drawn to commemorative plaque on Grey Street to a nationally famous author, or an audience with an interest in health may be interested in the insanitary past of an area.

We don’t want visitors to come to harm, so safety warnings are necessary, both general (always wait for the green man) and specific (watch out...
from cyclists on the Quayside, and in season the kittiwakes). This forms a part of Guides’ training and part of the relationship with NGI is that the organization covers us for public indemnity insurance should anyone come to harm and consider the guide to have been negligent.

The same cover is provided to Blue Badge Guides by their organization and this is worth bearing in mind by anyone taking what may be portrayed as a position responsible for another’s welfare in these litigious times.

Safety applies to guides as well as the public. In the group with which I trained on the very first training walk one of the trainees suffered a leg injury on the Castle Stairs, and 3 years later when the next group started training, again at the first session a trainee fell in St. Mary’s churchyard injuring his leg.

Audibility is essential, so the guide should always face the group, and that means you are looking away from whatever you are talking about and you are deprived of the visual clues which might jog your memory.

Lastly, I think it is important to keep to time. The walks should last 1½ hours which is enough for me whether guide or guided, and certainly no longer than 2 hours.

History and heritage is under severe strain at the moment with Councils needing to channel dwindling resources into essential social services, and Heritage sites have to show that they are self-sufficient if not profitable in order to survive so please use them and visit them and support them in any way you can.

Guiding has many lighter moments. One visitor at the Castle Keep wondered why it had been built so near the railway. On another occasion a cruise-lagged visitor at Royal Quays announced she particularly wanted to see Kirkwall Cathedral. (That was actually the next stop).

If you come on “Discovering Bensham” you will see the blue plaque to a Gateshead Doctor who trained at the Newcastle College of Medicine, but don’t tell Alan Craft I said so, or he’ll want another article for the Newsletter.

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ThesamecoverisprovidedtoBlueBadgeGuidesbytheirorganizationandthisisworthbearinginmindbyanyonetakingwhatmaybeportrayedasapositionresponsibleforanother’swelfareintheselitigioustimes.

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It was a chance meeting in 1996 between ex-miner, artist Tom McGuinness, with long-time friend Gillian Wales and myself, that would lead Gillian and me on our own journey down the pit-road to investigate, research and record the phenomenon of mining art. Bob McManners reflects on...

The Phenomenon of Mining Art

Gillian and I had independently collected Tom’s work for several years. He asked us to help catalogue his work; an invitation we readily accepted but rapidly our objective became his biography, ‘Mines a McGuinness’. Here was a very noteworthy artist, and a local artist at that, whose life, work and inspirations all demanded study and formal record.

Whilst researching Tom’s book we became aware of not only the familiar mining artists, such as Norman Cornish and the Ashington Group members, but of dozens of other mining artists of whom little had been studied and certainly nothing had been written. Over 50 were from the Great Northern Coalfield alone. These men took their art seriously. We should take it seriously too. This important aspect of the great canon of British art was about to disappear from living memory. The industry was, by then, already consigned to history. There was a great risk that first-hand observers, the creators of this experiential art, and their imagery, would follow suit without ever making it to the history books.

This was art with an honesty and integrity. It was true art - art for art’s sake, not painted for sale or exhibition. The mining artists did it for themselves - pictures created by working people, for working people, about working people. It gave voice to a community whose words were often not being heard - a language which could speak with eloquence - and a catharsis for its exponents.

Gillian and I decided we should undertake this, and study not only miners who painted the mines but also professional artists who found inspiration in the colliers’ world.

Our research raised many questions.

Why did the miners paint the mines? Why, after a gruelling shift of tough physicality in the dark, confines of the clamorous, dangerous underground, paint that same inhospitable world? Why not paint from nature’s open spaces or from the vibrant palette of abstraction? Why do we not find similar bodies of experiential art from the other heavy industries abounding the North East of that time - the ship builders, bridge constructors, petro-chemical workers, steel smelters - when all these dynamic industries were more persuasive to the artist’s eye than the arcane world of coalmining?

These questions all demanded answers.
I was raised in Ferryhill with my two elder bothers and was always fascinated by the majestic clamour of the all-pervading coalmines that surrounded the town. Five large collieries were within three miles of home.

I would spend hours drawing and painting - indeed a drawing pad was an almost constant childhood companion. I drew what I knew and what impressed me. On both counts that was the collieries.

Ferryhill has ancient origins and indeed is a Saxon walled ‘green’ village. It remained so until the late industrial revolution. The coalmines weren’t sunk until the 1880s - indeed the daddy of them all, the huge Dean and Chapter colliery wasn’t commissioned until 1906. The miners’ terraces, housing for the various pits, were simply annexed to the old village. I thought everywhere was like Ferryhill.

As far as I could walk or allowed to ride my bike, there was a majestic landscape for me to draw. Only this majesty, this landscape, was industrial. The sheer magnificence of the towering headgear, the sounds of an ever bustling industry, mellowed into music from distance but akin to warfare at proximity, the pungent sulphurous gases, the unexpected white heat from the opening coke ovens, all commanded my full junior artist’s attention.

I am not, therefore, at all surprised that coalminers produced such a huge and legitimate genre of industrial art. I suspect my familiarity with and fascination for the subject had prevented me from ever asking myself - why all this mining art? That question now demanded our answer.

Our research of the coalfield artists and their work took five years. It was never a chore. We were always met with enthusiastic help. Folk quickly understood the necessity and urgency of this project.

This resulted in our second book, ‘Shafts of Light - mining art in the Great Northern Coalfield’, which we published in 2002. Now in its fourth edition it won a prestigious Arts Council Independent Publishers Award in 2004 being considered the definitive text on the subject. We were delighted that the ‘art establishment’ readily accepted the concept of a genre of mining art and understood that within its huge gamete of styles and abilities mining art transcended many established preconceptions about art by and for the working man and at times reached the heights of ‘great’ art. It was experiential, intelligent art telling us what it felt like to be a miner not simply what it looked like. A photograph could do that. It engages us at an emotional level, one of the first prerequisites of any great art form.

Could we answer the fundamental question ‘why did they do it?’ from the work itself? Let’s look at four examples.

Norman Cornish is probably the most renowned of the mining artists both regionally and nationally. His work almost exclusively treats us to life in the mining community - we’re very rarely taken underground. An artist with a confident, bold style, Norman was a great observer of human behaviour; his subjects are always engaged in some form of conversation. Slightly exaggerated characters are all without malice; his folk are friendly whom we’d like to meet. This makes Norman’s work very accessible; what you see is what you get. He rarely shows the dark side of coalmining.

We can deduce one discomfort he found with mining in his huge series of pit-road paintings; miners trudging the three mile track from Spennymoor, his, and Gillian’s hometown, to Dean and Chapter. Norman was not a keen pitman, seeing himself as an artist who
happened to be a miner. In every pit-road scene the weather is inclement with some major impediment to comfort for the journeying colliers, for us as observers and for Norman as the artist. Invariably we are all going to the pit. Norman is telling us he doesn’t want to do this. He doesn’t want to go to work there.

His main incentives to paint the mining fraternity, therefore, seem to be pride, friendship and camaraderie in his mining community. Becoming a professional artist in 1966, Norman asked us to write his biography. The Quintessential Cornish was published in 2008 in anticipation of his 80th birthday.

Fellow member of the Spennymoor Settlement, Bishop Auckland’s Tom McGuinness tells a very different story through his art. With Tom we are plunged straight underground. Conscripted to the mines as a Bevin Boy in 1944 Tom remained a collier until redundancy in 1983.

His tortured figures are much more distorted than Norman’s. This emotive device, and the wraith-like appearance of the figures in Tom’s glazed-oils, brings mystery and spirituality. The message can be difficult to interpret as Tom often adds more overtly religious symbolism, but, once we understand the encrypted story the rewarding depth of insight revealed make him one of the great mining artists.

A quiet man by nature Tom spoke with great eloquence through his art. Both in life and art he presented something of an enigmatic conundrum.

Published in 2006 to coincide with his eightieth birthday ‘Tom McGuinness - interpreting his art’, our second book about the artist, analyses his iconography in much greater depth. Sadly he died two weeks before its publication.

For Tom his faith, apprehension and uncertainty appear to be his significant artistic drivers. Like Tom a Bevin Boy and member of Gill Harman’s extramural class at Durham, Ted Holloway was from rural Hampshire but took to Durham life as an enthusiastic collier, returning to work here after his demobilisation in 1948.

His zest for his job and his imagination are clearly reflected in his vigorous portrayal of the miner at work.

Best seen in ‘Testing for Gas’ (above), an athletic young deputy lifts his safety lamp high, seeking firedamp. The effect of placing the light source within the picture is dramatic. The background is thrust into full illumination, consigning the foreground to deep shadow - the very opposite of what we are attuned to see.

Ted became an art teacher in 1981, producing a retrospective of forty bold graphite drawings of every task his mining career had demanded. He died of malaria on a field trip in 1987. The influence of light-source and exposing the physicality of coalmining are Ted’s powerful inspirations.
Bob Olley is one of only six living mining artists, discussed in Shafts of Light, still actively painting. He worked in South Shields collieries for 27 years before redundancy in 1983 precipitated him into professional art. Like the three artists discussed, Bob’s personality speaks through his art. An articulate, thoughtful and quietly spoken man Bob harbours a fertile humour. This reflects in the ‘gallows humour’, apparent in his paintings. Black comedy, proffered in any dangerous circumstance, was stock in trade underground.

All Bob’s paintings narrate a story with humour never far away. In his beautifully crafted images, balance and light source tell of his graphic art legacy. Unlike the previous artists, the beams from Bob’s powerfully built colliers’ cap lamps - those very ‘shafts of light’ - play vital roles in the construction of his paintings.

Holding a long-term ambition to be a magazine illustrator, Bob had undertaken lengthy correspondence courses in graphic art and an apprenticeship in signwriting. This training still influences his work with his dramatic command of colour, great spatial awareness and sense of design melded with the intuitive eye of an artist. With a unique style, his work, like Norman’s, is easily accessible to the viewer. Their work differs significantly, however. Where Norman captures mood, Bob relates narrative.

Physicality and the humour of camaraderie are strong influences on Bob’s work but undoubtedly the most powerful inspiration comes from his fascination with the multi-directional light source of the cap-lamps, unique to the underground.

These four artists provide us with abundant reasons why miners painted the mines - humour, camaraderie, pride, respect, physicality, danger, faith and fear must all be amongst them. But the most powerful visual driver seems to be the very preciousness of underground light. However valid these thoughts may be, consider who knows the most about the arcane world of the coalminer? Who, therefore, better to tell the story than the miner himself?

What about the other questions? Oh, they are best answered by reading Shafts of Light - available from all good libraries, bookstores and robertmcmanners@hotmail.com!

Footnote - Gillian and I soon understood that it was the artworks themselves that really needed saving. Over three decades we acquired a huge collection, always with the intention of creating a gallery for public display.

In 2017 we donated, in trust, our collection of 423 works of art to The Auckland Project to create the country’s first dedicated Mining Art Gallery - aptly in our now home town - Bishop Auckland. The gallery opened to the public on 21st October 2017.

Dr Robert McManners OBE. DL
“Are you married?” This was the first question asked by Mr Linton Snaith at an informal interview I had for an SHO post in O &G at the Newcastle General Hospital. When I announced that I was engaged I was told that normally they didn’t approve of these arrangements.

This was obviously a hangover from the days when aspiring trainees had to keep their marital secrets under wraps or consigned them to abandon a hospital career for General Practice. I got the job despite my prenuptial predicament and started as SHO in my chosen career after completing my House Year in 1969.

During my Elective stint in the USA three years earlier I had decided on Orthopaedics but the two month experience of delivering babies in my final Undergraduate years engineered a major change in my intentions.

The General Hospital post proved to be an interesting experience. The three Consultants were an odd bunch bringing their skills and eccentricities to the specialty. Standing at about 6 ft 5 in, Linton Snaith had made his name in the field of Pelvic Tuberculosis and developing surgical techniques to tackle the consequences of solid adhesions in the pelvis.

His “Retrograde Hysterectomy” (in effect a vaginal hysterectomy performed as an abdominal procedure) was helped by the employment of very large dissecting scissors (one for the right side and one for the left side of the pelvis) which, I’m sure, had spent an earlier life as plaster cutting scissors in a Fracture Clinic!

The operation was internationally known and attracted many visitors from over the world to watch the maestro. However it was rumoured that they returned to their own practices doing entirely different procedures as Linton never did the same thing twice!

He tackled instrumental deliveries wearing large white Waders which might have resulted from years of dealing with intrapartum and postpartum haemorrhage. Hugh Arthur was a superb surgical technician who never used scissors (“Surgeons only use scalpels!”) and his urethral sling operations were performed totally from the abdominal approach.

He successfully threaded a dissected sliver of Rectus sheath around the urethra using a Cholecystectomy clamp. Seeing was believing.

The third member of the team was Dorothea Kerslake, a formidable character who led the way with Abortion Law Reform and announced to us as students that the Act of 1967 hadn’t made a lot of difference to the number of patients she dealt with. She eschewed total hysterectomy, maintaining that the presence of the cervix was essential for total sexual pleasure.

Always accompanied by her German Shepherd dog, she was an imposing character at clinics but showed a genuine empathy to those woman unfortunate to find themselves pregnant.

I am sure she considerably reduced the appalling number of illegal, backstreet and at times septic abortions we had to deal with in the west end of the City.

Newcastle leading the way in O&G

In the last edition Stuart Walton (68) reflected on his student and early career. Here he takes the story on...
Obstetrics and Gynaecology was at an exciting developmental stage in the late sixties and early seventies.

Our Senior Registrar, Pete Maskery, having spent time in Birmingham with Joe Jordan, was keen to start laparoscopic investigation and treatment in the wake of the groundbreaking work of Patrick Steptoe.

With the help of his anaesthetist, they rigged up a Heath Robinson method of delivering CO2 into the abdomen from the anaesthetic machine using manual compression of a urinary catheter bag attached to a sphygmomanometer.

Sadly gone are the days when major innovations were heralded by makeshift, trial and error employment of “what was available and could be adapted”.

Another aspect of the uniqueness of the Unit was the regular Labour Ward round performed by a Cardiologist! Paul Szekely had collaborated with Linton on the antenatal and intrapartum management of patients with heart disease (remember rheumatic heart disease was still common then) and this interest meant that he took an active role in managing his patients when they went into labour.

During my first year my learning curve was exponential and I became proficient in many obstetric and gynaecological techniques.

Forceps delivery including manual and Kjellands rotation were taught by enthusiastic registrars and I quickly became adept at placental removal, breech and twin delivery and Caesarean Section. Gynaecologically I gained experience in prolapse repair, sterilisation techniques, vaginal and abdominal hysterectomy and, of course, suction termination of pregnancy (aided by the Kerslake Curette). On call involved first on at the General and second on call looking after convalescent patients at the Walker Park Hospital.

Affectionately called “Walker Palace Hotel”, it was an opportunity to take one’s wife and family to spend the night in the Flat and enjoy waitress service breakfast the next morning. One of the anomalies of the Ward at this Hospital was that it accommodated Dorothea’s Second Trimester Abortions opposite Hugh Arthur’s infertility patients.

The major change that occurred in my first year was the appointment of a fourth Consultant. John Lawson had for many years been Professor of O&G at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria and was an internationally recognised expert on the management of vesicovaginal fistula.

The appointment included sessions at the Princess Mary Maternity Hospital which brought the two Units in Newcastle together to establish a unified approach to the practice and, more importantly, the training in the specialty.

Another physical giant of a man (6ft 5in again) John didn’t suffer fools gladly but demanded a high level of discipline, dedication and attitude to the management of his patients.

I was fortunate to be assigned as his first SHO and, along with my registrar, we quickly established good rapport with him. He set up a national referral service for dealing with fistulae, the aetiology of which was considerably different to that experienced in Africa.

With the advent of this joint appointment, Newcastle became the first to explore the possibility of a structured and coordinated training which was regionally based.

Until then units, even in the same city, organised their own recruitment and training appointing junior and senior staff independently.

The foresight of the senior Consultants in Newcastle (Jake Russell, Derek Tacchi,
Len Barron and John Lawson to name but a few) led to an embryonic, regionally based training programme.

Trainees appointed to the scheme had 4 years of guaranteed training involving one year as SHO, 2 years as Registrar and 1 year elective (determined as a requirement by the Royal College) paid for by the Regional Health Authority and had organised placements in the two Newcastle units and a peripheral hospital.

I was one of the first two appointees and there followed a further year at the General, one year at the RVI/ PMMH and the final year out at Dryburn in Durham during which time I sat and obtained my Membership. I was given free rein to decide on my elective year and chose 6 months in Radiotherapy and 6 months with Gerald Neligan in Neonatal Paediatrics.

This heralded major changes in the philosophy and training of hospital based specialties which would ultimately result in the national integrated development of structured training. It should be said that Newcastle had already led the way in this training approach by the establishment of a Regional and sub Regional Training programme in General Practice.

To be in the right place at the right time is an axiom from which I obviously benefitted. The training programme gave trainees a good clinical grounding in regional and academic practice whilst ensuring four years of employment. I had the experience of dealing with the Regional management of Rhesus negative compromised pregnancies which was further helped by my time in the Neonatal Unit.

Exchange transfusions were a daily task, usually coming about at the time my wife and family visited the PMMH for tea on the front lawn of the hospital. Completion of the work usually coincided with watching my family disappearing off home!

I came into contact with the groundbreaking research of the MRC Unit and the intellectual heavyweights of Frank Hytten, Tom Lind and Euan Robertson all of whom assisted in my career journey.

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The Dryburn placements were invaluable as the sole rworking with Martin Williamson and John McGlone, I was given a fair degree of freedom to introduce the new procedures of active management of labour and partogram monitoring.

The hospital was built on the pattern of a central corridor (uphill!) with wards coming off either side. Labour ward was half way up and the Theatres were at the top. This created occasional embarrassing incidents when having to trundle patients with a prolapsed cord (in a knee chest position) up for Caesarean Section in the middle of visiting hours!

My trainee years were exciting and instructive and I wouldn’t have wanted to miss any of it, despite the hard arduous work and disruption to family life.

I pay particular thanks to John Lawson who helped to guide my career from those humble beginnings as his SHO through academic posts in Africa and New Zealand and ultimately back in the Northern Region (but more of that in the next edition). Obstetrics and Gynaecology was undergoing a massive development in understanding, practice and training and there is no doubt that Newcastle played a substantial part in its direction.

Stuart Walton FRCOG
Retired Consultant & Senior Lecturer
North Tees General Hospital
William Edward Mandell Wardill was born 1894 in Gateshead where his father was mayor on several occasions.

William E M Wardill
1894 - 1960

by David McKinley

Wardill attended Newcastle Royal Grammer School for one year, entering in June 1907 and leaving in December 1908 before moving to Mill Hill School. He returned to train at Newcastle Medical School (then part of Durham University) entering in 1913.

He was part of a group of RGS medics including Natty Armstrong (1909), Sir John Charles (1907), Harvey Evers (1905), Albert Hindmarsh (1900) and Sir James Spence (1904)(1).

Prof Henry Miller said of the group ‘no such glittering constellation has since enlivened the scene.’(2).

World War One severely disrupted medical training however after one year Wardill became a surgeon probationer in the Royal Naval Reserve returning to Newcastle to qualify in 1918. He then served as a temporary surgeon in the Royal Navy.

On demobilisation he returned as surgical registrar at the RVI. It was here that he trained under Grey Turner, another surgical great, and was given time to develop his specialist interests.

Remarkably he passed the difficult FRCS surgical qualification in 1920 only two years after graduating and by 1928 was giving a Hunterian Lecture at the Royal College of Surgeons (3).

These were the days before hyperspecialisation and as such he remained a general surgeon. Truly covering both ends!

His special interests were in prostate surgery (introducing techniques he learnt at the Mayo clinic including punch surgery) and cleft palate repair. He founded the Department of Urology at Newcastle General.

He developed his pioneering pharyngoplasty, which has a Garrison Morton citation (4) for cleft palate, at Tynemouth Infirmary and the Babies Hospital (founded by Sir James Spence). His classification of speech defects is still used (5). He was also curator of the Pathology Museum.

From his school days he had been a keen field naturalist with a special bent towards marine biology.

He was a competent musician and an accomplished metal worker, and in Baghdad he added archeology to his interests. There were few scientific subjects on which he could not talk with intelligent and lively understanding.

He wrote comparatively little, though his published papers were important, but as a conversationalist he excelled, and he could talk for hours, with an amazing command of vivid
imagery and pertinent and at times pungent language and wit.

It was this gift of communication by the spoken word which made him an outstanding teacher both in the museum and by the bedside. His museum classes at Newcastle came to be recognised as an essential part of the education of every final year student, and were invariably crowded to overflowing.

He was a northerner of northerners, independent, blunt, resolute to the point of obstinacy at times, but he had the saving gift of humour and charm of manner when he felt at ease and in understanding company, which made him a delightful companion.’(6)

Wardill knew Sir Harold Gillies well and was the obvious choice to establish the northern Emergency Medical Services Plastic Surgery and Jaw Unit during World War Two which opened in Shotley Bridge in 1939, treating both military and civilian casualties.

Gillies visited him frequently and noted in his book ‘visits to Wardill at Shotley Bridge were always stimulating and produced argument.’ He clearly liked to provoke discussion and once described an excitable adversary as ‘like a bee in heat.’(6).

During the war the hospital provided beds for 650 patients of which 150 were jaw cases. The Unit admitted general adult plastic surgery cases, burns, and later military cases from France including German prisoners.

The young cleft palates were treated at the Babies hospital. After the war industrial accidents from Consett and Sunderland, RTAs and congenital deformities took over.(7)

Wardill was offered the Chair of Surgery at Newcastle in 1942 but refused it because he felt he had not been given the correct facilities.

After the war he became unsettled as he was strongly opposed to socialism, organisation and direction by committees.(6) In 1948 he opted out of the new NHS and emigrated to South Africa to take up a new life as a farmer but returned in 1952 shortly before being appointed to the chair of surgery at the Royal Medical College, Baghdad where he did burns work but no cleft palates after 1948.

He spent six happy years there before retiring back to the North East (8). He died at home in Newcastle on 24th December 1960 aged 66. He was known as an excellent teacher, clinician and surgeon. He was ahead of his time and had he been practicing in the current era of specialisation would probably have given more scope to further his pioneering approach and innovations.

Sources:
1. McKinlay W.J.D.: Medical Alumni of Newcastle RGS, ONA Magazine supplement Sept 1993
4. Royal College of Surgeons: Plarr’s Lives of the Fellows Online.