

We will probably never know now the complete history of this tragic accident as it is not fully detailed in the club annals and the other participants are all, presumably, now dead too. Even if they were not, I for one would not care to revive for them what must have been extremely painful memories. Here, from what records we have, is a photograph of the young victim, John (Jack) Whitehead, and a moving tribute to him from Jerry Wright, plus a subsequent appeal letter to the club membership for recovery of expenses. Before you criticise this action, remember please, this was before the days of our much maligned National Health Service; before, too, organised Mountain Rescue. It seems Jack took a bad fall off Tophet Bastion on Great Gable on Christmas Day 1932. Horrifically, Jack did not die until January 9th and despite the morphine was in agony for much of that time. Although Jack lived and worked in London, he was from a Borrowdale family and his grave lies in the churchyard at Rosthwaite.



THE TRIBUTE BY JERRY WRIGHT

JOHN ALFRED WHITEHEAD.

On a cloudless summer evening, nearly five years ago, I met Eccles in the upper reaches of the Eskdale valley. He was accompanied by a slip of a boy. "This is Jack Whitehead," said Eccles, and my scrutiny was met by a pair of twinkling, but unwavering eyes.

A little more than a year later I dragged my weary bones up the snow-covered slopes of Win Hill. I was following in the wake of a crowd of carefree climbers, and I remember that this same cheeky impudent boy was the life and soul of the party. How the laughter rang out over those hills on that glorious winter morning!

I wonder how many who will read this note remember that crowd of ragged scamps which gathered under the clock at Charing Cross and followed the lead of Lionel Sproule over Epsom Downs and through Little Switzerland, where George Starkey acted with such chivalry to two unknown ladies, where Kathleen O'Brien damaged her ankle, and where we were treated, once again, to the bubbling good fellowship of Jack Whitehead.

During the midsummer of two years ago most of us predicted that the Borrowdale "meet" of your club would be a failure. Bill Marston, Mary Green, Evelyn Leak, Jack Whitehead and Ronnie Mustchin were the only contestants for the opportunity to conquer the difficulties of Pillar and Gimmer. I was spending a hectic week-end in Wales, following Andrews, Starkey and Mitchell, where even the lively six hours spent in the deep recesses of Craig-Yr-Ysfa and a scorching day on Glyder Fawr were not able to prevent my thoughts wandering back to Seatoller, and I wondered how the tiny club "meet" was faring. I returned to a house of laughter to find Jack and Ronnie in charge. They had already established a spirit of good comradeship, and we all stepped light-heartedly into ten of the most delectable days of climbing I have ever experienced.

On Gable, Ronnie and Jack gave some slight assistance to a party on the Needle. The last man of this strange party gave himself an invitation to join Mustchin's rope.

" Who are you? " asked Jack.

" Just a wanderer," answered the stranger.

" What's your name? " insisted Jack.

" F. Courtney-Bryson," said the man, offering his card.

" Right—you can join us, but your name is ' Mud ' from now on," said Jack.

And ' Mud ' he has been from that moment to this day.

The following winter I spent a few days in London. I gave a lecture at the Claremont Boys' Club as a natural outcome of my friendship with this boy. Here I saw another Jack Whitehead. How tenderly he watched over the interests of those youngsters, and how those boys loved him. No service seemed too trivial for him to render to any of those bairns. I was talking to Sir George Gillett in the office of the club when Jack barged in, followed by a youngster of no more than twelve years.

" This young man craves an interview with you, Jerry," said Jack.

" Hello, son," I said.

" Mr. Whitehead said I could see you," piped the twelve-year-old.

" Mr. Whitehead was right," I said.

" Are you Mr. Wright from Borrowdale? " asked the youngster, doubtfully, eyeing my lounge suit with some suspicion..

" Yes."

" Are you a guide? " still doubting. " Yes."

" Did you climb the Needle with Mr. Nicholson? " " Yes, I did."

" Well, he's my daddy," and out he walked with the bearing of a Roman gladiator.

Jack and I both roared.

During those few days in London we spent many enjoyable hours together. I have vivid recollections of being " picked up " at Lionel Sproule's place in Kingswood and being driven by Jack at an amazing speed in a little car to Bill Marston's flat in Brighton. I wonder if the little room remembers how eagerly we recalled the good days of the previous August and our expressions of hope for future years.

When I arrived back in Borrowdale I found a letter waiting for me, from which the following is an extract:— " Your visit has put five quid into the club funds. I know you will understand when I say just—thank you. The brat who spoke to you is still swaggering around saying that you know his father. It is ridiculous to thank me for anything I did for you in London. I've got to say this to you. I find the reward for all I do here in coming up to see you and being accepted by the crowd who swarm so joyously round Seatoller. I feel happier after our talk in London. I am going on climbing as long as you will all put up with me, and I'll try and never let you down. Give Ronnie my love.

Jack."

It was the only serious letter he ever wrote to me.

A few weeks ago he came back to Borrowdale for the last time. Ling and he immediately took to each other, and they were the storm centre at every meal. What a racket they made on Christmas Eve !

On Christmas morning Kathleen O'Brien, Bill Marston, Mary Green, Muriel Currant, Muriel Dick, Thompson, Ritson, Haslam and myself were the happier for having Jack with us.

I do not know what twist of fate turned me from Bowfell and sent me to the Napes on that day. Perhaps Thompson was mainly responsible. The two Muriels wanted to climb, and Bill and Mary offered no objection to being left to their

own resources. I am grateful to them all for giving me the opportunity to be near Jack on that fateful day.

When Alice Craven and I had moved him on to dry mackintoshes he lay in the arms of Muriel Carrant, while Dickie supported his left side. I teased him about his luck in being cuddled by two such girls.

" I hope they both realise that I haven't as much experience of this sort of thing as you have, you old devil," he flashed back at me.

That journey down to Seathwaite was plain hell for him and he joked the whole time.

When we brought him to the motor ambulance he pleaded with me to go with him to the hospital and I had to tell him that I had other work to do in his interests.

" Alright," he said, " but take all these chaps to the ' Scawfell '—the beer is on me."

On his express instructions I asked Arthur Wakefield to leave his Christmas party and make his way to the hospital. Only a few of us are aware of the magnificent fight which he made for Jack's recovery.

But all our efforts were of no avail.

The last two days of his life were the most terrible I have ever experienced. Jack knew that he was dying and he faced the prospect with a courage which will be an example to all who saw him. He knew Bobby Files. He knew Mary Green. He gave me a number of messages for his friends. He talked to me quite intelligently, describing his dreams, due to the after effects of morphine injections, and asking me to try and explain them. I have never seen any human being suffer such agonies as those last hours brought to him; yet he was able to say " Hello, Jerry," as he would have said it had I been meeting him for a day's climbing, and he smiled through it all. His mother and father behaved with great fortitude and commanded our deep respect and admiration.

Jack died at one o'clock on the morning of January 9th.

On the following Thursday, Muriel Dick, Alice Barlow, Muriel Carrant, Tom Barlow, Cliff Downham, Harold Eccles, Tubby Haigh, Bobby Files and I walked up Honister Pass to a point where you may look over Sty Head and Grain Gill towards Great End. The mountain was shrouded in white ice and raised its proud head to an azure sky. It was a perfect day, a day of bright sunshine after a night of sharp frost, the whole countryside was white and green and brown, the fullness of the winter colours held us spellbound, and the higher snow-capped mountains were a challenge and an invitation. We sat and watched and waited for the coming of our friend.

There is a quiet, picturesque little churchyard in Rossthwaite at the head of the Borrowdale Valley, overlooked by a complete circle of mountains, and nestling at the foot of Glaramara. In this resting place we laid Jack Whitehead. Some three-score dalesfolk and climbers were his companions on this last journey when his mother and father, his sister and his brother brought him back to the hills.

On the following day I went to London and had occasion to call at the office where Jack had worked. There I met his business friends and spoke to Mr. Grace, the general manager of the company. In the centre of this palatial building there was an empty space. Jack Whitehead's desk had been removed to the cellars of the Australian Mutual Provident Society's offices.

" He was the darling of this office," said Mr. Grace to me. " I couldn't stand the sight of his desk so I've had it removed. He has left two empty spaces behind him, one in the office and one in our lives."

I could find no reply to make to this gracious businessman.

A thousand people, business men, climbers, scouts, boys from among the teeming millions of the metropolis, his mother, father, brothers and sister and the members of his own mountaineering club are the better for their human associations with this fine boy. With unrivalled skill he was able to concoct the finest medicine in the world. He was a maker of laughter. We have all loved him and we shall miss him more deeply than any words of mine can express.

The lives of all his friends will follow varying roads.

My own way lies along the road which leads always to the hills. I hope that many of you will stand at my side in future years. Wherever we are, fighting our way through rain or blizzard, strolling through charming valleys, wandering along high places, watching the sunset or the sunrise, journeying over strange hills in far lands or following well-known trails—we will remember him.

J.E.B.W.

THE APPEAL LETTER

C.H.A. MOUNTAINEERING CLUB.

Christmas Day Accident on Tophet Bastion.

Tree Road,
Brampton.
1st Feb., 1933.

Dear Fellow Member,

It has been decided to make an appeal to members to cover numerous expenses incurred by the Secretary and by Mr. Wright, with the authorisation of the Secretary, in connection with the above accident. These expenses, totalling £21 15s.6d., include telephone calls, telegrams, postages, transport costs and expenses incurred in getting volunteers for blood transfusion to Keswick Hospital in time for the operation.

It has further been decided to send a Memorial Subscription to the Claremont Boys' Club, at which Jack Whitehead was a worker, in lieu of a wreath, and to send a further donation to the Borrowdale Ambulance Brigade, which did such excellent work after the accident.

Will you please send any subscription to the Treasurer, Mr. A. Pepworth, Brandon, Moss Lane, Bramhall, Cheshire.

Members may earmark subscriptions for expenses, Memorial Subscription or donation to the Ambulance Brigade, otherwise the money will be used for these objects at the discretion of the President, Treasurer and Secretaries.

An offer was made to Mr. Whitehead, Senr., on behalf of the Club, to assist with medical expenses, but this assistance is not required.

Mr. Whitehead wishes me to convey his grateful thanks to all those who assisted after the accident or sent messages of sympathy.

Yours sincerely,
J. R. FILES,
Hon. General Secretary,

(Surprisingly, apart from this appeal letter and Jerry Wright's tribute, I can find no other references to the accident in the Club annals, either in the subsequent AGM minutes, or in the Committee minutes - Archivist)