

Humshaugh Churchyard Story

Name: THOMAS DEWAR or 'TOMMY THE TRAMP'

Grave: New Churchyard Row 6, Plot 40

Text on Grave:

Tommy Dewar
Died 26 Dec 1981
Aged 64 years

Story

Born 5th July 1917. Died 26.12.81. age 64 years. Funeral 03.01.82.

Thomas Dewar was a very proud and fiercely independent Scotsman. Little is known about his background but he was brought up in Perth, subsequently served in the 42nd regiment of the Black Watch at the beginning of the 2nd World War. He was discharged from the army (reason unknown) and subsequently served in the Merchant Navy, we think as a stoker, for the rest of the war until 1948. He then took to the road or as he put it, became a professional independent tramp. He was scornful of money and all worldly goods. His few possessions were packed in to an old pram and he trundled the roads of Britain with his two dogs, Snowy and Blackie when we knew him. He worked in villages or towns where he arrived, as a gardener, window cleaner, on farms or in local hotels. He earned any money that he possessed and refused to accept any benefits from the state until illness forced him to do so. He 'tramped', so he told me, through other European countries and also Canada and the United States of America. He earned his passage on board ship.

He visited Humshaugh annually and would sleep in one of the outbuildings at St Peter's Church. He always said what a warm welcome he received when he came to Northumberland. He had made his visit to Humshaugh during 1980, but he returned prematurely, and claimed that he felt very tired and that maybe he should retire. He had selected Humshaugh as a place where he could expect help.

It soon became clear that he was unwell and between Humshaugh Surgery and Hexham General Hospital a diagnosis of leukaemia was established. He accepted the offer from Major John Benson from Chesters of a bothy at Park-shields Farm, near Fourstones. This was old and had a leaky roof. He moved in with his scanty possessions and also Snowy and Blackie. He furnished it courtesy of the nearby Frankham Tip. He had an old fireplace, a radio which he restored, some furniture and an outside loo. He was persuaded to accept social security benefits which amounted to £25 per week. He said that he had never had so much money. He entertained his friends in the bothy with its leaky roof and was able and willing to talk on almost any subject. He was very knowledgeable and well informed. He had a keen sense of humour. A rota was established in the village so that he received a visit every day and provided with a hot meal. He was full of praise and gratitude for the attention that he received and was most

gracious about all the visits. He told me that he loved every meal and said that he loved them all but had a particular soft spot for the 'two posh ladies' who came once weekly! So he continued quite happily during 1980. He had many visits from friends and residents. Major John Benson would call most evenings and they would discuss their war exploits.

The winter of 1981-82 was particularly vicious. Tommy had a few visits to Hexham General Hospital for blood transfusions. However on a very wintry Boxing Day he died peacefully in Hexham General Hospital at the age of 64 years. Snowy went to live out her days at the vicarage with Rev. Stanley Prins and Blackie was adopted by Doris and Alan Morrell, also of Humshaugh Village. The funeral was paid for by local residents and friends. The service was held at St. Peter's Church Humshaugh, and taken by Rev Stanley Prins and assisted by Rev. Bob Burston of Alwinton. The lesson was read by Dr John McCollum. There is a small headstone to Tommy's memory (Row 6, Plot 40) in Humshaugh Churchyard.

Thomas Dewar's story became a legend. A kind and humble man. A true Gentleman of the Road.

Further links:

Further sources and references:

Photographs:

