

# Tommy Lee...”a man of the people”...1891 – 1951

(Taken from an article written by his son Eric).

## The Early Years

Thomas Lee was born in Stalybridge in Lancashire. He went to sea, at age fifteen, working on coal- ships sailing between Liverpool and Swansea. He probably “jumped ship” after docking in Swansea in 1909, finding work with TG Thorne and Gower RDC as a roadman and later as a steam roller driver. It was a hard and nomadic life, travelling all over Gower, resurfacing the roads. Tommy lived in the caravan trailer, towed by the roller. In the 1911 census he was listed as “*road-roller driver in contractors van on Pengwern Common*”. Later he lodged with the Lucas family in Church Cottage, Reynoldston.

## **The War Years**

In 1913, Tommy enrolled with the Swansea Rifles and then joined the 6<sup>th</sup> (Glamorgan Battalion, the Welsh Regiment, Territorial Force). The Battalion sailed for France in October 1914 with 28 officers and 812 men. Their first engagement was at the battle of Loos in 1915, before moving to Ypres. At this time Tommy was promoted to Corporal. The Battalion was transferred to the Somme in August 1916 and it was in the fighting at High Wood that Tommy was awarded the Military Medal for gallantry and promoted to Sergeant. Further battles followed, Ypres, Amiens, Arras, Salle and Sambre. At the end of the war the Battalion entered Germany, through the Ardennes to Munstereifel and Altendorf. Tommy returned home to Reynoldston in early 1919. A dinner was held in the King Arthur in December 1919 for ex-serviceman and Col Benson DSO presented gifts to each man *“Colour Sgt T Lee MM responded amid great cheering and after a vote of thanks they all retired to the Vestry Hall for a dance”*.

( Tommy had in fact been promoted to Warrant Officer. E.L.).

## **Tommy’s Work in the Community Begins**

After demob, Tommy rejoined TG Thorne at Ilston Quarry, becoming foreman and later superintendant .

Tommy joined the church choir and was noted for his tenor voice. He was soon helping Miss Howell raise money for the Vestry Hall with concert parties and operatic recitals. He became the “resident MC” for the regular dances and whist drives. When, in 1922, a parcel of land was bequeathed to the church to build a new hall, *“the Funding Committee was chaired by Mr Percy Rowland\**

*of Fairy Hill and the Building Committee by Mr T. Lee*". 1924 saw Tommy elected to the Church Council, then Church Sidesman. He stage managed "*Cinderella*" for Miss Howell in 1926 and was the soloist in the Harvest Thanksgiving.

In 1928, Tommy was appointed Clerk to the Parish Council (he held this post until 1946). The Gower Church Magazine is full of references to Tommy's energy within the community.... directing a concert "*in gratitude for all of Miss Howell's artistic and benevolence activities to raise funds for the village*".....Father Christmas at the Sunday School Tea and Prize Giving Party (a role he played for the next fifteen years!)....the MC for the monthly dances at the hall for over ten years....auditing the Church accounts.....

## Family Life

In January 1924 Tommy married Margaret Louisa Jones (Louie), of Western House, Castle Ditty. His Best Man was Tommy Thorne and the reception was in the Church Hall. They started married life in the Brewery House but later that year moved to Bryn-y-Mor. Their daughter, Rosamund was born in 1925, with Lyndon in 1930 and Eric in 1934.

## The Next War

When war broke out, Tommy joined the Royal Observer Corps as a Watch Keeper at Rhossili. In 1940, Tommy, organised the village section of the Local Defence Volunteer Force (the Home Guard). He was the Sergeant. The Church Hall was used for drill and the field behind for tent erection and mini war games. The rifles arrived much later, initially the American "Springfields" and then the

Lee Enfield.

## Domestic Events

In September 1942, Tommy broke his leg which disabled him for many years. He never returned to Ilston Quarry. The compensation was minimal so he had to find ways to boost the family income. He was manager/caretaker of the Church Hall, minder of the graveyard, barber and local cobbler as well as part time farm labourer at the Brewery. In 1944 the family moved to Brynfield Cottage.

## **The Original Reynoldston Film Club!**

In the 1940s, the Church purchased a film projector to show religious films during Lent. Tommy adapted the pay box at the hall to house the equipment. The films were so popular that it was decided to hire full-length films and cartoons, showing twice per week. Tommy then acquired a second projector so "three reelers" could be shown without a break.

## The Fire Service in Reynoldston in the 1940s

Tommy was approached by the Glamorgan Fire Service to form a unit of Retained Fireman in Reynoldston. In the early years the truck and trailer pump were garaged in the Rectory, later moving to Ronnie Jefford's garage. Mains water had only recently been laid in the area and one of the first tasks was to identify the best positions for the water hydrants. An old style telephone was installed in Brynfield Cottage for call-outs and then, when called, a hand operated siren had to be carried onto the top road to alert the squad. Sub Officer Lee and Leading Fireman

Jefford led the training nights, teaching and demonstrating fire-fighting techniques.

### **Community Work Continues**

Tommy was appointed “Peoples’ Warden” at the Church in 1946. In the same year, the Young Mens’ and Boys’ Clubs were restarted at the hall. Godfrey Jefford was secretary and Mr Doherty\*, the Rev Martin and Tommy Lee were the supervisors. The upstairs room housed a billiard table; table tennis was played on the stage and board games in the kitchen. Tommy built a new proscenium arch for the stage and installed a pulley system for the stage curtains.

\*Former Supt of Sudan Police, who lived at Green Lodge.

### **The Final Years**

In 1948, Tommy was appointed manager of a new grain drying plant in Knelston. His daughter Rosamund married a member of the Foreign Office and ‘in 1950, his eldest son Lyndon married Linda Grove of the Lower Shop. Eric, his youngest son, joined the RAF in 1951 as an Engineering Apprentice.

Tommy died at Brynfield Cottage from cancer on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1951 in the presence of Dr WA Harries. His obituary in the Gower Church Magazine states...*He will be greatly missed in the church and the parish as a fine type of churchman, a loyal friend and a most ready helper of all good causes.*

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