

THE ORGANIST WORE SHORT TROUSERS

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Philip Bell was born on 21st December, 1901 in the village of Naburn which stands on the River Ouse about four miles south of York. At the north end of the village the East Coast main line crossed the river on a swing bridge until 1983. To the south of the village are the locks, below which the river is tidal. At the locks was a watermill and many barges passed through the locks on their way upstream to warehouses and chocolate factories on the rivers Ouse and Foss. The bridge needed to open to allow barges and other vessels to pass. Philip's father, William Bell, was one of the signalmen who manned the signal-box which straddled the railway track on the bridge. Philip was born at Laurel Cottage in Maypole Grove which leads into Naburn Hall. The cottage still stands and, although it has been altered a bit externally, it looks very much the same as I remember it almost eighty years ago and as it would have done in 1901.

The scene is set, except to say that Philip's mother, Alice, had two ambitions for him: one was for him to become the church organist and the other was for him to become the village station master. You will see that he achieved the first of these. He worked as a railway clerk for 48 years and achieved more than he would have done as the station master at Naburn.

On his fourteenth birthday, 21st December 1915, Philip was given a diary for 1916 by his mother. The diary is a Collins' Handy Diary No. 163. It has a red leather-effect cover and the pages, one for each day, are gold edged. The cost was one shilling.

Some of the entries from the diary follow, with added explanations given in blue.

Personal Memoranda

Size in collars - 13 and a half

Weight - 7st. 2lbs

Height – 4ft. 11in.

Size in hats - 6 and 3/4

Size in boots - 4

Notes from 1915

I played the organ at Church for morning and afternoon service on Sunday 14th November. (He already played the piano well.) I started learning the organ on 24th November.

1916

Saturday 1st January. I went to Church in the morning for an hour to practice on the organ. Sawing wood afterwards. I was indoors most of the day. Went to meet mother at the three train. Reading at night. The day was showery, very windy and it thundered and lightened about noon. One or two accidents occurred on account of the wind. (Mother went shopping in York almost every Saturday and Philip usually met her at the village station.)

2nd January. Before Church I practised on the piano. Fairly large choir, 12 boys. Reading in the afternoon until Church time. Collection on behalf of the Red Cross society. No sermon in the morning. Reading after tea and writing a letter to Lily. (Lily was an older sister who emigrated with her husband and son to Australia in 1912. They never met again.)

3rd January. I went to Church for an hour in the morning to practice. Mother went with me. I was playing in the Hall Croft most of the day on a tree that was blown down by the wind. It was a large elm. The river was very high. The Ings was flooded. It came on to the road at the end of the village. We had our pig killed in the afternoon. Fairly large. I helped to hang it up. Harry and another man. Dad came off work at two. Killed it when he got home. (Laurel Cottage had a number of outbuildings at the rear – one of them a pig-sty. Google Earth still shows a building in the same position but it looks like accommodation now.)

4th January. Mrs. Gray at the Moorend died of dropsy. I was playing in the Park on the fallen elm. Father, May (Philip's younger sister) and myself went to York by the four train. Went to Mr. Forth's and the Electric Theatre. Very good pictures. Came home by the eight train. Mr. Silversides died in the afternoon. Was at the Workhouse Asylum at York.

10th January. We started school again today. Three new children, Drakes from farmhouse. Practising operetta at

school. After school I went for my lesson at the organ. I did some shorthand afterwards. Then went to school to practise "The Dentist's Den ". We had some fun.

11th January. Before school in the morning I did some shorthand. We were practising the operetta after school. I went to practice on the organ for an hour. I did some shorthand when I came back then I was painting until nearly bedtime.

15th January. At nine o'clock I went to the garden piece. I was digging for an hour. Then I was playing until dinner-time. I went to Mrs. Benson's funeral at two o'clock. (This was the third funeral that he had attended in ten days.). Went to the organ at half past three. Reading the rest of the night.

23rd January. I went to church in the morning. Harold (His elder brother who was serving in the army) came home for his dinner. We had another cockbird. Wilf Eastwood and I went with Dad to the bridge. We had a swing. (The boys were not playing! That refers to the railway swing bridge opening for river traffic.) Two men inspecting bridge.

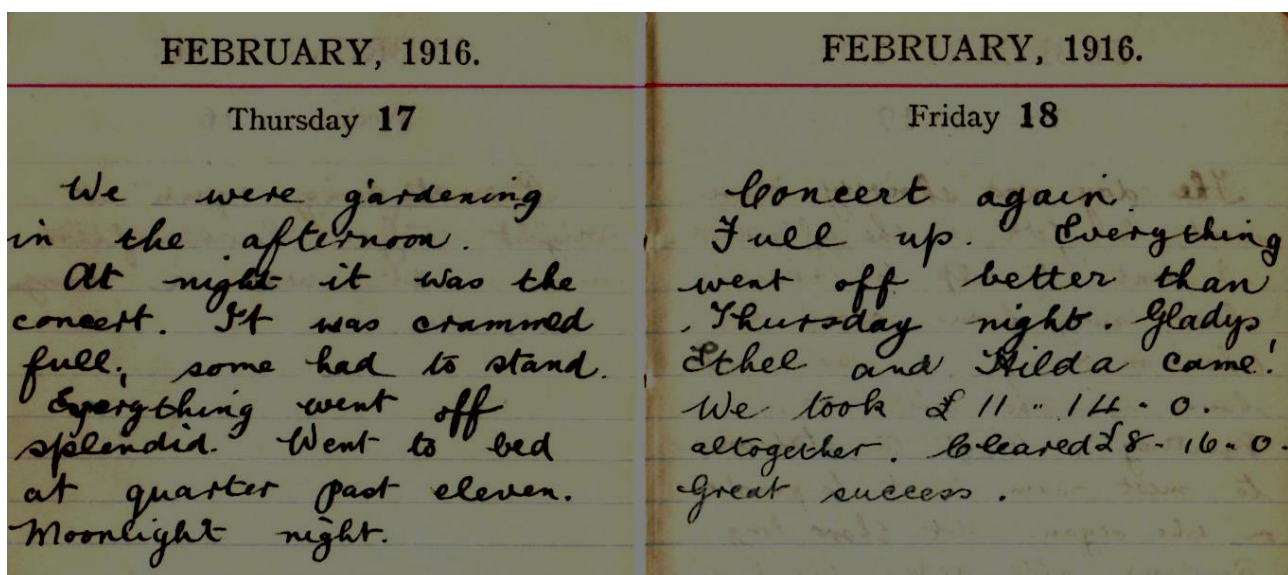
27th January. It was a grand day. We didn't do any digging in the school garden as we had not any manure. We were practising "Sir Roger de Coverley" at night. We went to practise The Dentist's Den at 7 o'clock. Choir practice afterwards.

Sunday, 30th January. I went to church both times (i.e. morning and afternoon,) I went to Stillingfleet church at night, Got home at nine. (Stillingfleet is 3miles to the south. I don't think Philip was so keen on going to church – there may have been an ulterior motive!)

7th February. We were practising the operetta at school. I was playing the piano for them. At night they put the stage up. I went to Stillingfleet on my bicycle to Mr. Best's with some concert bills. (Mr. Best was the Headmaster at Stillingfleet and Philip's future wife, Hilda, worked as a maid at his house having left school at 13 years of age)

12th February. Very frosty morning. Helping dad to unload cart of pig potatoes. Went sliding with W.E. Met mother at train. Then went for organ practice. (It was his mother who usually pumped the organ when he was practising).

17th February. We were gardening in the afternoon. At night it was the concert. It was crammed full, some had to stand. Everything went off splendid. Went to bed at quarter past eleven.



18th February. Concert again. Full up. Everything went off better than Thursday night Gladys, Ethel and Hilda came! We took £11.14.0 altogether. Cleared £8.16.0. Great success.

24th February. It was a fine day. In the afternoon we were digging. I went for my organ practice at night. At night a man gave a lecture on "Poultry keeping". He illustrated it by a magic lantern. Very good and clear pictures.

Monday 6th March. I did not go to school. First time I had missed for more than eight years. (Philip had had bad headaches and cold for the previous four days. He returned to school the following afternoon. He received several medals for his good attendance.).

10th March. School children went by one o'clock train to York to entertain soldiers. I went to Burdekin's for the programmes. Grand afternoon. Looked round museum. Soldiers enjoyed it. Came home 5 train. Had our tea at school. Singing songs and operetta.

Sunday 12th March. Went to church in morning. Boy organist, Horace Henderson. Organ practice in the afternoon. Church again. Mr. Calvert came at night and told me I was to play on Sunday. (Mr. Calvert was the village school's headmaster and I think that he was the choirmaster. He gave Philip piano and organ lessons. Philip held him in high regard and often spoke about him throughout his life. Mr. Calvert went on to teach in Hessle and is buried in the churchyard at Sheriff Hutton)

Philip went to the church for organ practice each day until.....

Sunday 19th March. I played the organ at church. I did very well. Fine day. I was made organist. (Aged 14 years and three months – and still in short trousers)

Saturday 25th March. My eyes were bad again. I felt poorly and I could not eat any dinner. I went to church practice in the afternoon. I felt better towards night.

Sunday 26th March. I was poorly, therefore I could not go to church. Mr. Calvert played the organ for me.

Sunday 2nd April. A fine day again. I played at church. Did alright.

8th April. We went to York by the eleven train. I got a new suit at the Stores. Dad, May and I went to the Victoria Hall. It was "Britain Prepared ". We came back by the five train. I got my tea and then went to church to practice.

10th April. It was the annual scripture examination in the morning. We had holiday in the afternoon. Mam and I went to see about the clerk's job at the Locks. We met Mr. Mummery on the road. Mr. Calvert was there. Mr. Mummery said I could start on Wednesday. I went for my shorthand lesson at night.

11th April. This was my last day at school. We were gardening.

12th April. I started work at the Locks. Went at nine o'clock. Easy work. Left at 5.30pm. I went for my organ practice at night.

Sunday 16th April. I played the organ at church. I had my new suit on. Grey colour. Long trousers (1st.)

Monday 24th April. It was bank holiday so I had holiday all day. Very rainy morning. Went to church to practise. They were putting an arch up in the Church for the wedding. It cleared up after dinner. The wedding was at two o'clock. 12 little girls with flowers and 1 bridesmaid. I played the organ. I got 10/-. Everything went off very well. Mrs. J. Bell's funeral at 3-30. Not many there. Playing afterwards.

29th April. I was at work in the morning. I was cleaning my bicycle in the afternoon. Then I went to meet mam at the three train. Soon afterwards we went to church to practice. C. Greaves got to know about his examination. (Greaves was a similar age to Philip and the examination was probably for the North Eastern Railway) Mr. Calvert came to our house at night. He gave me some homework to do.

Sunday 30th April. It was hot today. I went to church as usual. After tea I did some homework. I went to church again at night. We went for a walk as far as the garden piece after church. Mr. Eccles at the public house died today.

1st May. I was at work as usual. After tea we went to church to practise. I was doing homework afterwards. I sent a letter to the railway enquiring about the examination.

2nd May. Fine day again. Bit windy. I had Organ practice at night. I went to bed about nine o'clock. Suddenly woke up

and heard a lot of people talking. A Zepp was just coming over Naburn. Mam and I got dressed and went downstairs. Dad stopped in bed. May was asleep. We went outside. Everybody was out at our end. We heard the bombs which dropped at York. We also saw the searchlights. We went back to bed a bit before twelve. (www.historyofyork.org.uk says that this was the worst zeppelin raid on York and confirms the figures of dead and injured)

3rd May. Everybody was talking about Zeppelins. They did a lot of damage at York. Nine or ten people killed. Forty or fifty injured. The bombs were dropped in St. Saviour Gate, Price St. and all around that district. They buried Mr. Eccles today at 2.30. Not many there. C. Greaves went in for his exam. I got a letter from the N.E.R. this morning. They said I was not old enough to go for the exam.

Sunday 7th May. I went to church as usual. Mr. Scaife from the Minster was there. In the afternoon we went to York to see the ruins of the Zepp. raid. Some parts were damaged very badly. We took the tram both ways. ([This meant that they walked about 3 miles to Fulford from where the trams ran into the city](#)) Church again at night.

16th May. It was a hot day but a bit dull at times. We had a little rook pie for our dinner. After tea we went to church to practise. Uncle Walter came. He looked at my shorthand.

27th May. It was another fine day. In the afternoon I went to York. I met mam again the "Stores". I bought a new straw hat then I went to get my hair cut. We went to church when I got home.

Sunday 28th May. It was a grand morn. I was at church as usual. In the afternoon I went to the Knavesmire with W.E., S.B. & C.G. We were listening to the band. It rained, thundered and lightened. We meant coming home across the ferry but the aero's were up so they wouldn't let us. I left the others and caught a tram. I got home at 5 mins. past 6. Went to church without my tea. After church I went to Bartram's and played the piano. Mr. Bartram was fiddling. I got home at 10-0.

5th June. It was a very rainy day. At night I was practising some voluntaries. In the morning Dad fell off the ladder and broke his collarbone. He went to the hospital. He came back at 4 o'clock. C.G. got to know he had passed his exam.

8th June. I got a letter from the N.E.R. I had to go in for my exam on Tuesday. They gave me a pass. I had my organ lesson at night. Then I went to the choir practice. I did some homework afterwards.

13th June. I did not go to work today. I had to go for my railway exam. I went with the eleven train. We started at 5 mins past one. They were all big boys. I think there were 48 altogether. I came home with the 5 train.

14th June. Harold came home on leave for another week. ([Before joining the army I think Harold had been working as a gardener at a big house near Doncaster where he lived in. When he came on leave there was no room for him at Laurel Cottage and he slept elsewhere, possibly with his sister, Violet who, with husband, Albert, ran the village pub at Bubwith](#))

19th June. I was at the Locks as usual. At night we went to church. Harold came home with the kitchen-maid. They went back at nine o'clock. ([At this point the kitchen maid is a mystery.](#))

3rd July. Grand morning. When I was getting my breakfast a British airship came over. Many people were frightened. Harold turned up again this morning.

4th July. It was a splendid day. In the morning I went to York to get medically examined. Went with the eleven train. I walked back. There were five of us there. I went to work in the afternoon. We went to church after I had my tea. I was riding my bike afterwards. Dad started work again this afternoon.

5th July. I got to know I had passed my examination this morning. Miss Barcroft came with Harold. At night we went to church. ([These references to going to church at night refer, I think, to going for organ practice in the early evening. Many of the entries that I have excluded refer to this](#)) I was helping mam to pull gooseberries afterwards. Then I was riding on my bike.

8th July. I went to meet mam at the three train. I went to York on my bike. I went to the Electric Theatre. Got back about 7 o'clock.

Sunday 9th July I was at church in the morning. Mr Palmes (the vicar) became ill in church. We had no sermon. There wasn't any church at night so Mam, May and I went to Grandma's.

13th July. It was a grand morning. At night it came in very dark and rained fast. Mr. & Mrs. Bycroft came to see us (perhaps the parents of "Miss Barcroft" - Edie Bycroft - who became Harold's wife.)

17th July. It was a very rainy morning. I got a letter to say that I had to go to Leeds to see about a place. (With the N.E.R. as a clerk) Dad went with me. Manager said I had an exceptionally good paper. We came back by the seven train. Selby way back.

20th July. It was a splendid day. Very hot. Mam and Dad were haymaking. I went and helped them at dinner time and after tea. I got word to say I had to start work at Balne station. (Between Selby and Doncaster)

22nd July. I left the Locks today. After dinner I was haymaking. Three men helping us.

Monday 24th July. It was splendid weather. Today was my first day at Balne station. The Stationmaster was showing me all the books today. I had a walk round the village at dinnertime. I got home by the seven train, we went to church afterwards.

1st August. It was a nice warm day again today. Miss Burn and Arthur Hurworth got married at Naburn Church today. (Arthur Hurworth was Deputy Headmaster at Nunthorpe Grammar School, York during my time there from 1942 to 1947. His father was a signalman, with Philip's father, on the swing bridge at Naburn and it is my understanding that he died following a fall from the signal-box)

18th September. Very cold this morning. Mrs. Atkinson died at 7am this morning. We went to church to practise Burial Service all Dead March in Saul. (This would be in the evening after he had returned from work.) Then W.E. and I went to Atkinson's to get to know the hymns. Then we went round the village telling choir boys about the funeral. We got home about 20 mins to 10.

20th September. It was a nice fine day. I left Balne with the 12.20 train. It was Mrs. Atkinson's funeral. I played the organ. Dead March, 2 hymns (Rock of Ages and Jesu Lover of my Soul) and other necessities. After that I went to the Locks to pay Rook's bill. (Rook may have been the miller) Playing with boys then came home and got my tea. We went to church afterwards. After that I was out with S.B.

21st September. At Balne as usual. I got to know I had to work at Temple Hirst as well.

22nd September. Today was my first day at Temple Hirst. I do not like it. Practice as usual tonight.

27th September. I got to know I had only to work at Balne on Mondays and Wednesdays. Temple Hirst 4 days a week. I went for my usual organ practice tonight. When we came out of church we looked up into the sky and saw several beautiful searchlights. Many people were watching them.

28th September. I was working at Temple Hirst today. I did not get on very well with the Station Master. He expected too much of me.

29th September. The searchlights are out every night now. One at Crockey Hill. Others at Escrick, Acomb, Poppleton and Tadcaster.

Sunday 1st October. Church as usual in morning and evening. We had green blinds and shades on the lamps in church. No bells were rung tonight and henceforth. The clocks were altered to normal time again tonight.

6th October. We got a rise in our wages today, 2/6. Wage 12/8 altogether.

3rd November. I was at Temple Hirst. Mr. Appleyard (Station Master) and I do not get on at all well.

7th November. Appleyard in a very bad mood.

8th November. Mam, May and I went to church at night. We stopped about an hour. I was doing shorthand etc. afterwards. I went to Bartram's and he gave me my organ money, £4-0-0 for half year.

Saturday 11th November. Mr. Appleyard had a day off so we had a Relief Station Master. I was very glad. I rode straight through to York. Mam got in at Naburn. We went to take my money into the Bank, £5-10-0. I got an Exchequer Bond. £5 at 6% for 3 years.

Sunday 12th November. It was a nice fine day. I was at Church as usual both services. In the afternoon I was with WE and SB. Mam and I went to church about 2 o'clock. I also went to the bridge with part of Dad's tea. I walked back through Mr. Tasker's field and watched the fishermen. They caught a lot of roach, bags full.

14th November. I was at Temple Hirst. Mr. Appleyard got a letter saying I should start work at Garforth on the 20th inst. He spoke a lot nicer to me today.

16th November. I was at Temple Hirst. They sent me a week-end pass from Leeds so it looks as though I have got to lodge at Garforth. Mother wrote a letter to Mr. Brown ([Probably at the N.E.R. Staff Dept.](#)) about me having to lodge. I went to the choir practice tonight. I gave up my concert work.

Saturday 18th November. It was my last day at Temple Hirst. After dinner I went to Uncle Joe's to get my hair cut, Mr. Brown sent us a letter explaining about lodging at Garforth. I was to get 5/9 SA ([Subsistence allowance](#)) making a total wage of 18/5 per week.

20th November. We got up early this morning. Mam and I went with the 8 train to York. We arrived at Garforth about 11am. Then we went to seek lodgings. We found one. They call her Miss Luford. I went to work about 1pm. They are all nice men. I got on well.

21st November. It was a grand night so Donald and I went for a walk to see the searchlights. We had some fried fish and chips afterwards. ([Donald also lodged with Miss. Luford](#))

22nd November. Donald and I went to the pictures tonight. They were very good. I was playing draughts etc. afterwards.

23rd November. I like being at Garforth. We did not go anywhere tonight, we were playing games instead. ([It is not surprising that Philip liked being at Garforth – going to the pictures at night, fish and chips, playing draughts instead of practising the organ. It was a different world away from his mother. Then he was back home for the weekend with two Sunday services and organ practice in between](#))

27th November. I got to Garforth about 11am. I took Miss Luford some beetroot etc. At night we had another Zepp raid. We were up till 2am. We heard a lot of bombs dropping. They were at York. Two were brought down.

21st December. It was very cold and frosty. Snow still lying on the roads. Today is my 15th. Birthday. First time I have spent my birthday away from home. I was playing dominoes etc. tonight.

Saturday 23rd December. I got home as usual by the 4 train. Mam and I went to church at 6 o'clock. Afterwards I was reading and I wrote my Church papers.

24th December. It was a fine but cold day. I went to church both morning and evening. In the afternoon I went to the ice on Mr. Tasker's field.

25th December. The weather was dull and showery. I went to church in the morning. At night I was getting my skates ready.

26th December. It was a nice day today. C.G. And I went to Mr. Tasker's field to skate about 9 am. We had a fine time. After dinner we went over the river to skate. Stopped until 4.30 pm

Saturday 30th December. I left Garforth by the 12.3 today. The York express was stopped outside Garforth on account of some wagons being derailed. We reached York at 3.15pm so I missed the 3pm train. I walked home (About five miles.) We went to church for an hour tonight.

Sunday 31st December 1916. The river Ouse was flooded. I was at church as usual. In the afternoon I had a walk to the Locks. Mam and I went to church for an hour. I was reading the rest of the day.

Christmas Day, New Year's Day and New Year's Eve received no special mention – they seemed like any other day.

I hope that you have found these diary extracts interesting. They are the notes, from 100 years ago, of a young country boy who was greatly influenced by his mother and his schoolteacher. The diary shows his transition from school to the world of work with the constant practising of piano and church organ always there. It also shows how he was quickly able to switch from the responsibility of playing the organ for a church service to playing with his mates. A comparison with a fourteen year-old boy of today would be difficult. Philip retired as organist at St. Matthew's Church, Naburn after 30 years of service. For most of this time he cycled twice a day from Stillingfleet or York in all weathers. It wasn't until many years later that he said he hadn't wanted to be a musician but an artist instead.

Reading the diary makes me proud of Philip, but then, he was my Dad.

Edwin Bell