

No. 23: 'Marsh's famous son' – or 'From Parish Hall to Hollywood'

Who am I?

1. I was born on 15th May 1909 and died 27th July 1984
2. I registered as a conscientious objector during the Second World War
3. My father was a wealthy textile merchant.
4. I was educated at Marlborough College, and earned a first in Architecture at Peterhouse, Cambridge.
5. With my brother, I helped start the Holy Trinity scout troop.
6. I was a devoted lover of animals, particularly cats. I co-authored the book 'The Cats in Our Lives', with my wife Pamela in 1949.
7. My headstone reads: "Never say in grief you are sorry he's gone. Rather, say in thankfulness you are grateful he was here,"
8. I made a documentary for ITV about Huddersfield that features Holy Trinity.
9. I have a street named after me in Marsh
10. I played the part of Joseph of Arimathea in the TV Epic Jesus of Nazareth in 1977
11. I was the first recipient of the BAFTA Award for Best British Film.
12. I starred in over 120 films

Answer: **James Neville Mason**

Holy Trinity, for much of its history, has been the 'society church' of the town. The congregation included many inhabitants from the large villas of Edgerton. One of these families was the Mason family, whose son James became a famous Hollywood actor.

James Mason made a documentary for Yorkshire Television in 1972 featuring Holy Trinity and Gledholt Methodist, which is available on YouTube. Search for 'Home James Huddersfield' or click on the photo below, which is taken outside his family home, Croft House in Marsh. The house stood on the site of Arncliffe Court and the road opposite is named after him.



The Mason family were regular worshippers at Holy Trinity. James was the youngest of 3 sons. It was at University that James first decided to consider acting as a career rather than architecture. He made his stage debut with a Croydon based rep company in November 1931, much to the initial disapproval of his family. He made his first big screen appearance in the thriller 'Late Extra' in 1935.

James' mother, Mabel Hattersley Mason, attended church up until her death in 1970, aged 91. She remained living at Croft House until her death, after which the house was sold and demolished.

The 11th Huddersfield (Holy Trinity) Scout troop was formed by James and his older brother Colin while James was at University in Cambridge, where he had joined a crew of Rover Scouts. The troop began meeting at Croft House and was registered (No 934) in 1927. The first scout camp was held in Wakefield in 1928, where the boys wore full uniform for the first time and paraded in the presence of Baden Powell, the founder of the Scout movement. By 1929, the troop had outgrown Croft House and started meeting at the Parish Hall.

The scouts regularly organised entertainment nights and 'Gang-Shows', with James often taking the starring roles. It could be said that he first 'walked the boards' at Holy Trinity's Parish Hall, including as the back-end of a pantomime horse in a review held in 1933 to raise money for the scout camp which was held on the Isle of Man.

The Mason family regularly subsidised the activities of the troop to enable all the boys to take a full part in the events organised. Camps, fire-lighting and outdoor activities took place in the gardens at Croft House and a Scout 'Den' was maintained there for many years.



The outbreak of the Second World War saw most of the scout leaders joining up to fight. The scouts helped to run the YMCA canteen for servicemen and acted as messengers for the Air-Raid Wardens and Police. Some undertook 'gas training' and helped in gas detection and warning work, others helped as first-aiders. To help with the war effort the troop was involved in the collection of aluminium and glass for recycling.

James Mason registered as a conscientious objector during the war, causing a family rift which lasted several years. He was allowed a general exemption for non-combatant military service to continue his film work.



After the war James moved to Hollywood but regularly returned to his home town to visit his family.

Church parade (which later became the family service) took place on the third Sunday of the month, where the cubs and scouts paraded their flags and presented them in the morning service. Originally they would march from St James' Road to the church for the service, together with the members of the 60th Huddersfield Girl Guide Company.

The Scout troop continued at the Parish Hall, using the basement as their 'Scout Hut' before closing in the year 2000.

Scouting was an important part of my childhood as a member of the 24th Croydon troop, now also sadly disbanded, and the experience was invaluable. I am certain that there are many boys (and later girls) who can be very grateful to the services of the Mason family and the many others associated with the 11th Huddersfield down the years.

There are still a number of local scout troops locally – more information can be found on their website -

<http://www.huddersfieldnorth.org.uk/>

Andy Barber
October '18

References:

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Notes on the 11th Huddersfield from Keith Moss

Scrapbook about Holy Trinity, made by Win Ritchie 1997

James Mason: A Bio-bibliography [Kevin Sweeney]

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11th Huddersfield Scouts win a go-carting competition 1990, photographed outside the Parish Hall, Marsh