

Public Inquiry celebratory dinner
Philip Shucksmith's speech

It is my pleasure and privilege to welcome our guests to this dinner to celebrate the result of the Public Inquiry into the proposed reservoir. I think it would be wrong to call the result a victory, I believe it to be a great virtue to be modest in victory and I would rather call it a common-sense outcome! But first of all, I feel I must say how gratifying it is to have the support of so many of the inhabitants of Alvingham on this occasion and especially those I call the new residents who have come to live here in the last year or two, as well as some of our friends from further afield who have maintained an interest in our fight against this proposal. It is just over a year since the inquiry and prior to and during the inquiry, I detected a unity of intent in this village the like of which I had not been aware of before, at least during my lifetime. The farmer objectors had the firm support of the Parish Council, the active support of many people and the moral support of practically the whole of the population. I hope this trend will continue in the future. Tonight, I feel there is evidence of this and that the communal and social life of Alvingham will thrive and prosper on this unity.

Now to get on with my real task of welcoming our guests. Mr. Loynes, the County N.F.U. secretary we welcome. He attended the Inquiry but he had done much preliminary work with the authorities on the water problems prior to the Inquiry as his executive position demanded and allowed.

Much the same can be said of Mr. Porter. He did speak at the Inquiry and gave an interesting account as to how the Trent water would find its way to Humberside via the Trent-Witham-Ancholme scheme.

Dick Pridgeon, whilst not actually in office as chairman of the Louth branch of the N.F.U. at the time of the Inquiry, the proposal was on his agenda during practically the whole of his term and he convened meetings between the farmers concerned and the Water Board and the N.F.U. and did a lot of work behind the scenes which culminated in the fact that these farmers were so well represented at the Inquiry. I think he was the only man I know who was prepared to wager a little on the result of the Inquiry, such was his faith in the outcome.

The representatives of the press who attended meetings and the Inquiry and kept the public informed of our efforts to fight the reservoir. I even got the impression that they were on our side.

The secretarial staff of the Louth N.F.U. office – Miss Hersey and Miss Johnson – who I am sure were caused a lot of work by the Inquiry and to whom the Parish Council were especially grateful for typing and duplicating its case as almost a stop press edition.

Mr. Barkworth, the secretary of the Louth branch N.F.U. who worked hard and long in the farmers' interests and produced a constructive and formidable document at the Inquiry. I know he spent a lot of time on this subject and was ever willing to help if he was asked. He helped the P.C. in no small way, at the village meeting where his inside knowledge was of

great value in informing the layman of the technicalities of the scheme and he also invented the posters which bedecked the village for quite a while.

Lastly, but certainly not least, and I make no apology for calling him our guest of honour, Mr. Neville Wallace. This gentleman created an immense impression upon all who had the honour of working with him and also those who heard him speak on behalf of the Alvingham farmer objectors. He has a tremendous appetite for work and the ability to carry it out in a most professional manner. No one who attended the Inquiry will forget his incisive searching questions to the Water Board witnesses delivered with a resonant articulation which was a joy to listen to. I was very pleased to be sitting on the same side of the court as Mr. Wallace. Of course, he was used to the procedure of a Public Inquiry. In fact, he and the Inspector Mr. Chown appeared to be quite old friends. Mr. Wallace assisted the P.C. in preparing their case on the eve of the Inquiry in that he translated a somewhat disordered series of objections into a presentable document. I believe it is on record that he said he had never spent so much time or effort on so small a project before; to Neville Wallace, it was small fry but to Alvingham, it was a very big affair, and it is good to know his efforts were successful. I consider his greatest achievement was that in his submission, he was able to convince the Inspector by skilful use of evidence that there was no justification for a reservoir at Alvingham and that there was enough water available from an alternative source. The taking of 260 acres of land out of production was a cornerstone of this evidence but both he and the Minister of the Environment were not to know how soon and how important this decision would be in the national interest in the light of recent events. To those who say, "Why stir up the Reservoir Saga again, I say let us not forget that if we as a community had allowed the intrusion of a reservoir into our midst regardless of the need for water requirement, which would certainly have occurred but for the objections, it would have meant less farmland and a pond which would have been a thing of amusement to a few urban dwellers and shattered Sunday afternoons, not forgetting being bitten to death by millions of midges as admitted by the Water Board at Covenham only this week.

In Russia, there is an award given to men who perform acts to the great benefit of their fellow citizens. It is known as Hero of the Soviet Union; if there were such an award here, then in my book, Neville Wallace qualifies as Hero of Alvingham.