

Notable figures

John Menlove Edwards (18 June 1910 – 2 February 1958)

The father of modern rock climbing

LUMC founding member



"I grew up exuberant in body but with a nervy, craving mind. It was wanting something more, something tangible. It sought for reality intensely, always as if it were not there... But you see at once what I do. I climb."

John Menlove Edwards was one of the leading British rock climbers in the 30's and 40's. He was born in Southport, the son of a vicar and the youngest of four children. He studied medicine at the University of Liverpool where he founded the Liverpool University Rock Climbing Club before going on to become a child psychiatrist. He was a talented writer and the author of several guide books (including the Climbing Club handbooks on

Cwm Idwal, Tryfan and Lliwedd), essays, stories, and poems based on his experiences of climbing.

Edwards learnt to climb on the sandstone of Helsby and enjoyed the challenge of 'poor conditions, poor rock and poor boots'. A combination of his exceptional boldness, strength and taste for loose rock, vegetation and overhangs led him to pioneer climbs in areas shunned by his peers. His most important contribution to climbing was his exploration of the cliffs of Llanberis Pass, which had previously been disregarded due to the looseness of the rock. He made hundreds of first ascents, including many now-classic routes such as Flying Buttress, Spiral Stairs, Crackstone Rib, Nea and Brant. He completed the first free ascent of Central Buttress on Scafell and the first solo traverse of the whole Cuillin ridge in Skye. He had a modern attitude to training, making daily visits to the gym below the Adelphi Hotel to improve his strength and balance. Outside of climbing he was a strong swimmer and rower, completing an 80 mile round rowing trip from the Scottish mainland to the Outer Hebrides, alone and in winter.

Edwards struggled with a difficult personal life, exacerbated by the times in which he lived. He was openly homosexual at a time when homosexuality was illegal in Britain, and registered as a conscientious objector during World War II. Both society and his peers were less than accepting of Edwards because of this. He battled with mental health problems and tragically committed suicide in 1958 by swallowing a cyanide capsule.

"My reasoning, if one can call it that, was inflamed by the scatter shot passions of youth and a literary diet overly rich in the works of Nietzsche, Kerouac, and John Menlove Edwards..."

— Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild*

Sources

Perrin, Jim (1993). *Menlove: The life of John Menlove Edwards*. Holyhead: Ernest Press. p.298. ISBN 0-948153-28-8.

Stuart Pregnall, "Climbing" 1985, December, No. 93, p. 67-69

<http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/s2-EDWA-MEN-1910.html>

<http://www.mountain-heritage.org/entity.php?ID=146>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Menlove_Edwards

Sandy Edge

Sandy Edge will be remembered in climbing circles as one of the earliest of Menlove Edwards' climbing companions. A fellow medical student and a co-founder of the Liverpool University club, Sandy had the distinction, rare in students of those days, of owning a car, an open sports car with a dicky seat. On one occasion when they were returning from a weekend in Wales, the car overturned, ejecting and concussing them. They were found sitting happily side by side on the dicky seat in a ditch. They were a sharply contrasted pair, Menlove with his shambling gait and always in scruff order, Sandy neat and orderly, a nattily dressed gent climbing in plus fours and porkpie hat, as is shown in Ralph ColUnson's splendid photograph of him in Geoff Milburn's "Helyg" (p.92). Between 1930 and 1935 Sandy accompanied Menlove on some half dozen of his new climbs and variations, most of which are described in Jim Perrin's "Menlove". There were occasions when he declined to follow his leader up slimy grass and moss; Perrin describes him on one occasion as being "understandably unimpressed" and as leaving Menlove "to his own devices for the rest of the weekend" (p. 142).

Extract from obituary written by Bill Stallybrass, featured in www.climbers-club.co.uk/journal/.../1986-87%20Journal-p95-123.pdf

John Clements

Following graduation at Durham University, Clements studied for a PhD in Organic Chemistry at Liverpool University. In Liverpool, his presence transformed the LUMC; within a year, he was elected as President of the club. Having a good 'eye for a line', he made some brilliant first ascents, especially on the Castell Cidwm and Llech Du in North Wales. He wrote a section in the Climbers' Club Cidwm guidebook, published in 1966. After LUMC's trip to Glencoe, he was due to visit California to continue his research. He would probably have made his mark climbing in Yosemite. Unfortunately, he was tragically killed in Glencoe early in 1966, when his climbing partner, Tim Osgathorpe, fell with crampons and landed on Clements' helmetless head¹. Described at one of the twenty best climbers in Britain

Arthur Evans

Arthur studied for his degree and received a doctorate at the University of Liverpool. He climbed with Colin Kirkus during this time and was involved in the opening up of Helsby Crag. He is not credited with any first ascents at Helsby, but certainly took part in its early exploration. While at university, he made the first ascent of Corrugated Cracks (S) on the Pillar of Elidir (Gwynedd). At the time, it was considered quite an achievement and to this day, it is thought to be quite a struggle. Evans was credited with playing a key role in re-establishing the LUMC in 1937. Evans was chosen as the first treasurer. He was the founder of the Cleveland Mountaineering Club (CMC) in 1953.

George Graham MacPhee

MacPhee was an active member of the LUMC for 30 years; he attended meets and helped students by giving them lifts to meets in his motorcar. With his authority and reputation, he was able to obtain huts for LUMC meets, "MacPhee's devotion to the LUMC was all the more commendable since he was so efficient and punctilious, and the student members were so feckless and awkward². At the time, it was not unusual for university clubs to have a 'father figure', like MacPhee, who Hon. President. Macphee was a prominent alpinist and pioneered many routes on Ben Nevis, Scotland. In fact, he authored the first guidebook to the cliffs of Ben Nevis³. Dr McPhee practised denistry in Liverpool - he ran two practices in the city and held at academic role at Liverpool University. MacPhee was President of the Scottish Mountaineering Club (SMC) from 1952-54⁸. In the early 1930s, MacPhee climbed with Colin Kirkus, especially on Clogwyn Du'r Arduu, in North Wales. MacPhee climbed with Menlove Edwards in 1933, but following a trip to the Alps in 1934, they began to dislike each other³. MacPhee left his association with the club in 1962. "The steadying effect of a permanent President in a Club provides a feeling of continuity form year to year, which dampens down sudden inevitable changes of climbing atmosphere, when groups of members finish their courses of study" - Michael Edwards, LUMC journal 61/62.

Bill Stallybrass

Ken Tarbuck

Hon Pres 62-64. Associated with club in 1962.

References

1. Perrin, Jim (2006). *The Villain: A Portrait of Don Whillans*. Arrow. p. 368. ISBN 978-0099416722.
2. Price, Tom (2000). *Travail So Gladly Spent*. The Ernest Press. p. 279. ISBN 0948153679.
3. Perrin, Jim (1993). *Menlove: The life of John Menlove Edwards*. Holyhead: Ernest Press. p.298. ISBN 0-948153-28-8.
4. "SMC Pioneers - George Graham McPhee"
(<http://www.smc.org.uk/Gallery/SMC%20Pioneers/GGM.php>). Scottish Mountaineering Club. Retrieved 14 January 2013.