



I am very grateful to Christine Ashworth, who contacted the History Group with information on this little known Bear Flat society, founded by two local men, one of whom was her great great grandfather, Charles Derby. The following short article derives from the information (including photographs) sent by her and articles subsequently found in the Bath Chronicle. If you have any further information on the "C.o.B.", please do let us know at the Bear Flat History Group.

Convivial Order of the Bears

On Saturday 7th July 1928, the following short article appeared in the Bath Chronicle and Herald:

Bears Outing

The Convivial Order of the Bears, a novel Bath organisation, went for their annual outing to Weston-super-Mare on Saturday, travelling via Blagdon. The 22 who went included the President, Mr Edgar L. Knott, and the Secretary, Mr J. Uphill. The Order, which is 35 strong, began in a joke, but has now become a real comradeship, which does good by stealth and blushes to find it fame. The members meet at least once a week at the "Bear" hostelry.

The society had in fact been founded less than a year earlier in the Bear Inn, Bear Flat, in November 1927 by the aforementioned E L Knott GPB and also Mr C J Derby. It clearly struck a note, with a rise in membership from 2 to 35 in 8 months and progressing rapidly from a "joke" to a beneficial organisation, raising funds for local causes. For example, the Chronicle recorded on 5th January 1929 that the C.o.B. donated £1 1s (£60 today) to the Royal United Hospital. And the membership did not languish at 35. This from the Chronicle of 9th November 1929, 2 years after its foundation:

Order of Bears – Philanthropic Brotherhood in Bath

There is a little known but flourishing society in Bath called the Convivial Order of Bears. It was founded in 1927 and now possesses nearly 100 members.

The society's aim is to promote friendship and give help to the fraternity in the form of sick pay, etc. It has a Sport's Committee, and runs skittles and cricket teams. Mr E L Knott has been President of the Order since its inauguration.

No list of members of the Order was available at the time of writing this article, but the Chronicle reports a year later in November 1930 the funeral of Mr A G Wilkins of 65 Holloway, the attendees of which included Messrs B Hooper, E Pritchard and J Bodman, all representing the C.o.B.

It is unclear for how long the Order lasted, but it was still going with some 200 members in 1944, as can be seen from this dramatic article of 5th February 1944:



“The Bear Untamed” – help for the Red Cross Fund

One of the buildings hit in the Bath air raids in April 1942 was the Bear Inn, the well-known hostelry on the Bear Flat, Wellsway. But though the premises were badly shattered, the raiders did not succeed in taming the “Bear”! In fact, after the raids, mine host, Mr C W Roper, and his customers redoubled their efforts in the direction of practical reprisal. The limping “Bear” decided to do everything in its power to help the Red Cross Penny-a-Week Fund.

Here is the result: During the last year the “C.o.B.”, under the energetic secretaryship of Mr Silas Bodman, a well known business man, has received from the Bear’s patrons the total of £33 6s. 6d. In the past month £6 12s. 3d. has already been collected. It seems highly probable that last year’s total will be exceeded.

The letters “C.o.B.” denote “Convivial Order of the Bear”. This fraternity was founded some 20 years ago, and possessed at one time its own appropriate regalia. It is now conducted mainly as a thrift club, at last year approximately upwards of £1000 was distributed at the Christmas share-out. There are some 200 members.

The article refers to “appropriate regalia” and we are fortunate that one of the Order’s medals still exists.



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And what of the founders? Mr Edgar L Knott was evidently a very active member of society, a butcher with premises at 15 Holloway, who lived in Bloomfield Avenue and, as well as founding the C.o.B., stood for local election to the Lyncombe Ward as an independent in 1939 and was the sometime honorary secretary of the Shop Assistant’s Union. Mr Charles L Derby also lived in the vicinity of Bear Flat and would have been in his 50s at the time of founding C.o.B. He worked as a shorthand engraver for Isaac Pitman for 50 years and died in 1942, shortly after the air raids. There appears to be little to connect the two men at the professional level. It would seem therefore that C.o.B. was founded out of pure friendship - the joke that grew up!