

# WESTENDER

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## THEN AND NOW



A little over 100 years can make a difference to the corner shop. The picture above shows the general store on the corner of Chapel Road and High Street around 1900 whilst at the left our picture shows that the building is now occupied by the charity shop Vitalise - this photo taken in 2008.

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## MY MEMORIES OF THE O.S.

By Roy Andrews



ORDNANCE SURVEY HQ, LONDON RD, SOUTHAMPTON



ORDNANCE SURVEY AT MAYBUSH

The talk given at the October meeting of the W.E.L.H.S on the Ordnance Survey brought back to me memories of my first job after leaving school. As I had approached the ending of my school days, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life work wise, so I was dispatched to see the Youth Employment Officer in his office on Shirley High Street.

After I explained my predicament to him, he handed me an A4 sheet with about twenty-five types of jobs thereon. Having perused the list with not much enthusiasm for any of them, I finally settled on the Forestry Commission with the thought of outdoor physical work sounding quite attractive. With my school I had visited the Ford Motor Company at its vast factory at Dagenham which had put me off ever wanting to work in a factory.

Somehow, and to this day I don't know how he managed it, the Employment Officer persuaded me not to apply to the Forestry Commission but to the Ordnance Survey for a job, which is what I duly did. I was given an interview at which I gathered I was applying for a job on the Reproduction (Printing) side of map production. Having received notification that I had been offered a job a few weeks later, on a salary of £325 per year, I arrived at the London Road, Southampton, offices of the O.S. where I found three other fresh faced youths waiting to start their careers.

We were told that four departments made up the reproduction side of map making and we would spend time in each one before a decision would be made as to which one would be best for us. The departments were Printing (where the finished map was made), Proving (where the finished printing plates, before going to the Printing Department, were tested and very small print runs made), Studio (where any photographic work was carried out) and Litho (short for Lithographic, the basic job here being the making of printing plates). We were also told that the four departments at London Road were duplicated at the Maybush Office where we would also work.

And so for the first year I spent about six weeks in each of the Departments going backwards and forwards between London Road and the Maybush Office. Maybush was a newer venue for the O.S, and consisted of a series of single-storey huts all leading off one central corridor. This passage ran straight for about a quarter of a mile and followed the contour of the land so that when standing at one end, the opposite end could not be seen because of a dip in the middle. My first department was Studio where all sorts of camera work was carried out. Some cameras were the size of a room where the staff could work inside them using the body as a dark room and where a map the size of a wall could be reduced to an A4 size in one go. While I was working in the biggest camera of the lot, at Maybush, one day we were photographing a very large map for the military which had TOP SECRET in red stamped all over it when in waltzed the milkman who placed his cash bag by the map and proceeded to collect his outstanding dues. This made me think, so much for me signing the Official Secrets Act, I bet the milkman hadn't!



*Continued from page 2*

Next for me was the Printing Dept. which I found fascinating, especially working on the first “three colour at once” printing press recently delivered to the O.S. It was also while in this dept. that I worked on the antiquated Victorian printing press, a picture of which, taken in 1920, Geoff May showed us at his presentation and which I was able to point out to him afterwards was still in use in the 1960’s as I had worked on it. It had to be retained to print from the old printing plates that modern presses could not handle.

The Proving Dept. I found somewhat dull as small flat bed presses were used just to check that each print plate worked before being installed in the large printing presses.

The Litho Department carried out many operations towards the ultimate goal of a finished, ready-to-use printing plate. This started with the But Plates: these were four metal plates butted together and held in a wooden frame which the surveyor in the field carried and drew on. These were photographed onto a plastic sheet and the result sent to a drawing department where cartographers would draw over the image and generally tidy it up and placed in a grid. Returned to Litho, the plastic sheet was photographed onto a glass sheet which, in house, had been given a light sensitive coating. Many other procedures then followed involving coating plastic or glass to create negatives or positives which went backwards and forwards to the cartographers, ultimately finishing as a negative on glass up to two feet six inches by three feet in size which could be photographed onto a Litho printing plate.

The printing plates were made at the London Road site in a small department which only employed deaf people. The reason for this was because blank metal plates were clamped to the bed of a machine, covered in what can be best described as ball bearings, hundreds of them, and then the machine when turned on created an horrendous noise as it vibrated very rapidly causing the vibrating balls to form a very fine rough surface on the printing plate which would enable the lithographic printing process to occur.

And so, having spent time in all of the departments, I was told that I was to be appointed to the Litho Department as a Photo-Lithographic Compositor, Grade Five, at the London Road office. The building housing the department, as all of those at London Road were, was a very solid, built to last, Victorian construction but dingy and dark and very cluttered with space being found every time a new process evolved. A lot of the equipment was heavy and bulky and much of it had been in use since Victorian times. Apart from many large sinks used for washing glass sheets and many chemical processes, the main equipment used was a vacuum frame; this was a large sheet of glass surrounded by an iron frame which could swivel, supported on a frame on wheels. Backing the glass was a large rubber mat which, when clamped to the iron frame, enabled all of the air between the mat and the glass to be sucked out. This was vital to insure that what was to be photographed in the frame, for instance a glass negative on a light sensitive printing plate, was completely flat. A tungsten filament ark lamp was used to expose what was in the frame. The lamps consisted of two sticks of carbon which when electricity was passed through them, where they touched, a very bright light was created. As the sticks burnt down, they would sometimes loose contact with each other, stopping the light so the practice then was to tap the end of one of the sticks to regain the contact, always remembering to only touch one stick at a time as to touch both, given the amount of electricity passing between them, might not have been too healthy.

And so, with the moveable frames and ark lamps all over the place, the cables and vacuum pipes which fed these, racks for storing glass plates, benches for working on, brick wall partitions and a floor at various levels I don’t think health and safety often visited; no clearer sign of this was to be seen in several locations on the ceiling, albeit a high one, where sprays of black dots were visible. These were dried blood where various unfortunates, who had been carrying large sheets of the thick and sometimes decades’ old glass that we used, had managed, while walking amongst the clutter, to tap the corner of the glass which had instantly shattered, the resultant shards severing veins/artries in the bare forearm and thus spraying the ceiling.

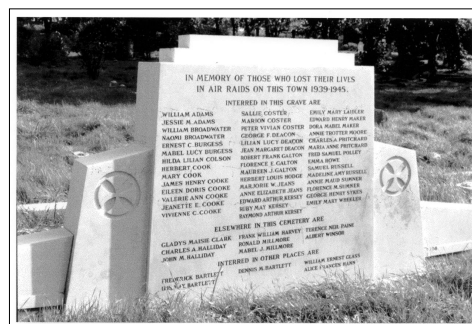
Although I had found a lot of the work interesting, I had decided early on that I did not see me carving a career at the O.S. and after two and a half years working there, I left, having found a job that I did want as my career.

## A MONDAY NIGHT IN MAY

### A personal account by Stan Waight



Left:  
ORP Blyskawica



Right:  
The mass grave in the  
cemetery at East Cowes

Geoff Watts' talk about the Commonwealth War Graves Commission at the Society's November meeting struck a particular chord with me; this was because civilian casualties of WW2 are also recorded in the Commission's register and there is an entry for my grandmother, Emma Rowe.

In 1935, the J.S. White shipyard on the Isle of Wight was awarded a contract to build two destroyers for the Polish navy. If they had not done so this story would never have been told. White's were expert in building such ships and the *Grom* and the *Blyskawica* (*Thunder* and *Lightning*) were the fastest naval vessels afloat in their time. The order brought welcome employment to the twin towns of Cowes and East Cowes, but was to be paid for by a great deal of human loss less than ten years later.

I was only 13 when the raids on Cowes took place. Although I have some vivid memories of them, I knew little of the background until I came across a wonderful book in our local library. Adrian Searle's *Isle of Wight at War 1939-1945* told me all I wanted to know about it. Mr. Searle kindly gave me permission to make extracts from it [reproduced in Italics herein] and I have already written a similar piece for the Hampshire Genealogical Society.

In the late spring of 1942, *Blyskawica* was lying alongside White's undergoing periodic refit, and drew the attention of the Luftwaffe. *The process of 'softening up' Cowes for its night of devastation one week later was achieved shortly before 7am on the morning of 28 April when seven Messerschmidt 109 fighter-bombers came in from the south, made for Newport and, flying just above the waters of the River Medina, roared on towards the Solent. Over the sea, the Messerschmitts made an abrupt turn and, in classic 'tip and run' fashion, attacked both Cowes and East Cowes with cannons, machine guns and, finally, their single high-explosive bombs.*

All I can recall was that, for a few moments, there was more noise than I had ever heard in my life before. This raid was over in a flash; there had been no time even for the siren to give a warning. When the Messerschmitts had gone we looked out to see smoke rising from White's and the top of *Blyskawica's* mast hanging at a crazy angle. There had been casualties and damage on shore, but *Blyskawica* wasn't seriously damaged - we were to know just how important that was a week later. I went to school in Newport, if not that day then the day after, and *while the twin towns at the mouth of the Medina licked their wounds, the Isle of Wight was able to enjoy some glorious spring sunshine on most of the succeeding six days .....* But we had not heard the last of the Luftwaffe.

*Across the Channel on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> May, some 150 Dornier 217s were being prepared by the Luftwaffe bomber bases of KG66 and KG2 for an overnight raid on an important industrial target in the still sunny south of England. At 10.50 in the evening the first of them was approaching the Island, heading north through a clear and moonlit sky. The rising and falling note of the sirens wailed out its warning at 10.55. In Cowes, people thought Southampton was about to suffer yet another heavy onslaught from the air. Then, at exactly 11 pm, the sky above the Island's most northerly towns, and out across the Solent, was spectacularly illuminated by chandeliers of parachuted flares. At that moment the awful realisation began to dawn on the residents of Cowes and East Cowes.*

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My stepfather was away at sea, so Mum and I were alone in the house in Osborne Road, East Cowes when the bombs started to fall. The house was barely 100 yards from White's, so we were in the thick of it. We dived into the cupboard under the stairs, which was reckoned to be the safest part of the house, but Mum had recently piled some redundant crockery in there, and more broke under our weight every time another bomb fell close by. It seemed to go on for hours, but the sounds of guns and planes eventually died away and we were able to come out. Gran Rowe and my uncle Ron lived just up the road, with Aunt Hilda and her family right next door to them, so it was natural that the family should get together in Gran's house.

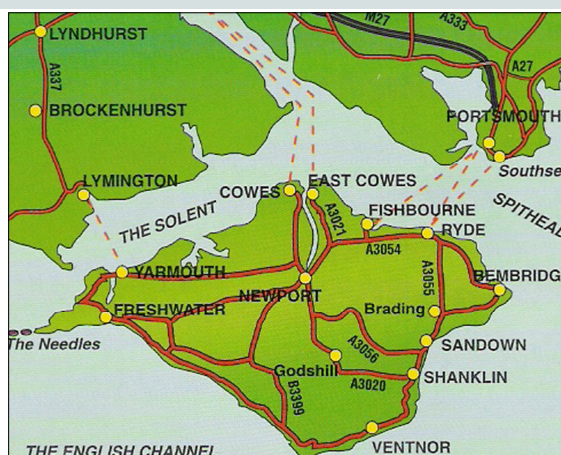
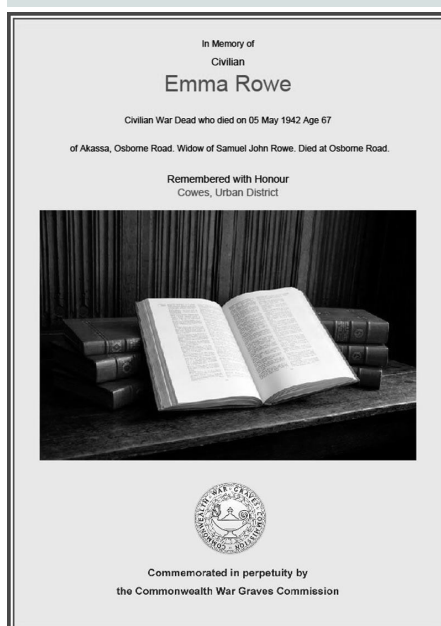
There was now no electricity, and Cowes and East Cowes were cut off from the rest of the Island, communications being maintained by despatch riders. It transpired that extensive damage had been done to the industrial sites, and there had been a number of civilian casualties. We were all in a state of shock, and I can't remember whether there was even gas to boil water for tea, but it seemed that in no time at all it started again.... *the air raid sirens sounded again all over the Island. The notable exception was Cowes itself, still deprived of its electricity supply. From there, however, the new alert was clearly heard wailing on the mainland opposite. It was 3.45am. Wardens at Cowes and East Cowes did their best to usher everyone - including the many people helping with the rescue operation - into the comparative safety of the shelters, but time was against them. The Dorniers reappeared overhead and, for the best part of the next hour, unleashed further bombs on the already beleaguered towns below.*

We were all still at Gran's, but the nearest public shelter was at the end of the road, and it was decided to stay put. Not for long, however, for Uncle Ron - himself an Air Raid Warden - soon came in to say that the house was on fire and we must get out. If I remember nothing else about the war it will be of the fireman who emerged from the smoke and flames to usher us down to the shelter. It was all too much for Gran, and she had died by the time we got into the shelter.

*The 'All Clear' was finally sounded at 4.40, by which time the best part of 200 tons of high-explosive, and thousands of incendiary bombs, had been dropped in the two-stage assault.*

I remember little of the following day, except that, along with the rest of the family and a few possessions, I was loaded onto a lorry and carried off to Aunt Midge and Uncle George's home near Shalfleet. It was only a cottage, and I can't imagine how they coped with the influx of shocked and tired relations.

In all, eighty people had died in the twin towns that night, so the councils decided to bury them in communal graves. On Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> May, a service was held beside the mass grave in the cemetery at East Cowes, where 43 of the 56 who had died in the town were to be interred. *The coffins for the raid victims of that town had been placed in the communal grave the previous day, and the grave itself draped by Union Jacks on either side ... the drab austerity of wartime was poignantly lifted at the graveside by hundreds of floral tributes.*



Above: Map of the Isle of Wight showing position of East Cowes

Left: The entry for Emma Rowe in the War Graves Commission register

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*Continued from page 6*

We didn't know it then, but that was the end of our time in East Cowes. None of the family ever went back to live, although cousin, Daphne, continued to go to work at the Trinity House depot there, where I joined her towards the end of the war.

It would be wrong not to mention the role of the *ORP Blyskawica* in this story, or of the ground-based anti-aircraft gunners for that matter. *The name of the 2144-ton Polish destroyer is still spoken with reverence in Cowes. People will tell you that, had it not been for the non-stop anti-aircraft barrage put up by her gunners that night, Cowes and East Cowes might well have been totally obliterated ... Often recounted is the story of how the Blyskawica, having left her moorings and dropped anchor outside the harbour, fired at the raiders with such fury that her guns, literally too hot to handle, had to be doused repeatedly with water.*

## THE PRE-CHRISTMAS GET-TOGETHER

**A Review by Stan Waight**



As has become the custom, the December meeting took the form of a members-only social evening. The Parish Centre hall was set up with a skittle alley down the centre and a dozen tables arranged around it, each with a team of up to four players. Two long tables at the back of the hall groaned with the food that members had brought (it never ceases to amaze me that there is such variety, and no predominance of savoury over sweet or vice versa). As usual, the Society provided wine and orange juice.

The skittle alley and its keeper had been hired for the occasion and each team had two attempts to clear the board. In the end First Prize went to a team that called itself 'The Cruisers' - maybe an indication of their favourite holiday occupation (if so, they did not dress for this occasion). Second Prize went to 'The Hollyberries' - aptly named after three of the four whose surnames were Berry (modesty prevents me from naming the fourth member, or who was one of only three players to obtain a nine-skittle strike!).

The final event of the evening was the draw for the raffle, and so many prizes had been donated that it seemed to go on for ever.

Chairman Neville did, as ever, a fine job as MC and raffle 'caller', and the whole Committee is to be warmly applauded for having put on such a pleasant evening.



## THE LOSS OF THE DRUMMOND CASTLE

By John Avery

As the S.S. Werfa continued on her course on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1896, the bridge officers could see in the poor visibility that another vessel was heading dangerously close to the tide race and submerged rocks off Ushant. The ship hoisted a warning signal with no success and carried on course but recorded the incident in the ship's log.

The vessel heading into danger was the S.S. Drummond Castle on her voyage from Cape Town to London under the command of Captain W.W. Pierce. In the poor visibility the navigator had misjudged their position and the infamous shoal off Ushant was soon to wreck the ship and cause a large loss of life. Somewhat similar to the famous Titanic incident, the lookouts were trying to site waves breaking as a sign of any obstructive danger ahead but this too was a night of calm seas.

The Drummond Castle and her sister ship Garth Castle had been built in 1881 by John Elder of Glasgow for Donald Currie's Castle line. The vessels were iron hulls, single funnelled and two masted and carried about 150 passengers and 100 crew.

As they struck the shoal Captain Pierce at first thought that they had run aground but they had over run the jagged rocks ripping away much of the keel<sup>1</sup>. He ordered the lifeboats to be made ready and there was much noise as steam was released from the boilers. The ship was to sink within about 4 minutes and before the passengers had even boarded the lifeboats resulting in a huge loss of life.

The world learned of the news as news items recorded the discipline on board "In spite of the maintenance of wonderful discipline, and the absence of all panic, only one passenger and, two members of the crew were saved by Breton fishermen, after being in the water for many hours."

London June 22 newspaper report Bodies recovered The bodies of those who were drowned in the steamer Drummond Castle, which was wrecked on a sunken reef off the island of Molene, on the North West coast of France, on Tuesday night last, when all the crew and passengers except three perished, continue to be washed ashore on the coast of Brittany. Already 73 bodies have been recovered,

London June 24 newspaper report Relief Fund The fund for the relief of the families of those lost in the South African liner Drummond Castle now amounts to £10,000. Her Majesty the Queen has donated £100.

Mr. C. A. R. Hoare<sup>2</sup>, writing from the training ship Mercury, Hamble, Southampton, said: "In view of the disaster to the Drummond Castle, I should be very glad to be of assistance to some of those left destitute by the calamity, and I think the most practical way in which I could show my sympathy would be by taking four boys who would come up to the requisite physical standard from the families of those lost in the catastrophe. These four boys I would keep entirely for three years, and would either send them into the Royal Navy or obtain other means of livelihood for them. Every boy on the above ship costs £30 per annum to maintain."

Other offers were received from the National Orphan Home for Fatherless Girls, to provide for six of those rendered fatherless through the loss of the Drummond Castle. Similar generous offers were also been received by Sir Donald Currie from the Orphanage for Boys at Southampton, through Mr. W. H. Roland, Hon. Secretary, and from the Sailors' Orphans Society of Scotland, through Mr. R. W. Hunter, Glasgow. Sir Donald Currie has written to thank these societies.

Sir Donald Currie was a proud and respected ship owner and ran an efficient and well managed shipping fleet. He was greatly moved by such a large loss of life and determined to help families in financial difficulty. He was saddened at the various rumours circulating after the incident and published the following statement.

Sir Donald Currie wishes the public to be correctly informed upon the following points: --

(1) It is not true, as has been stated, that the captains of the Castle liners are expected to make Ushant light and to signal from there when they pass. The captains have no instructions whatever to go near Ushant signal.

(2) It has been publicly stated that the Drummond Castle might have been saved if she had had bulkheads. This vessel was fully provided with bulkheads.

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(3) There is no foundation for the report that boat drill is neglected in these vessels. Ever since the line was established boat drill has been a regular part of the discipline of the steamers of the Company. The quartermaster and seaman saved have stated that all were called to their boat stations upon the first indication of danger.

(4) There is no foundation for the statement that this vessel, of moderate speed, in the intermediate service, was steaming at fourteen knots an hour to make what is termed a "record passage."

A few years after the incident, his Castle line merged with Union Steamship. We remember Currie particularly today for donating the Calcutta Cup awarded for international rugby match championships.

London 8<sup>th</sup> August newspaper report: A reward for bravery The Queen is to present a special medal to the inhabitants of the inland of Ushant who assisted in rescuing the survivors from the recent wreck of the Drummond Castle several weeks ago, in order to mark her appreciation of the great bravery they displayed.

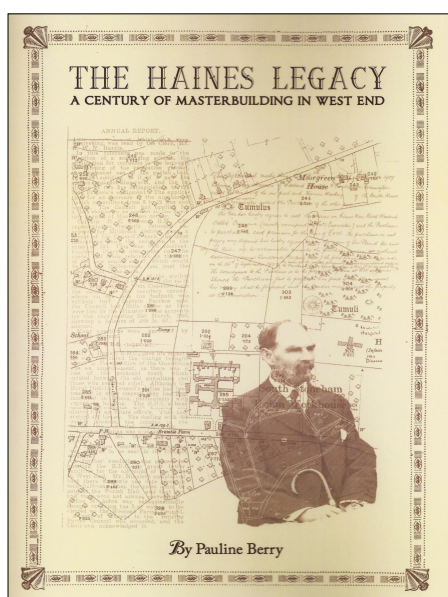
Fifty-three bodies were recovered, of which 51 were identified through the assistance of Alphonse Bertillon of France's Criminal Investigation Dept., who was given a gold medal by Queen Victoria.

It was announced that the British government proposed to give some tangible recognition of the humanity and sympathetic kindness shown by the inhabitants of Molene, Ushant, and the mainland in connection with the loss of the Drummond Castle, but the exact form of the public tribute to be paid by the State had not yet been decided upon. The fund rapidly accumulating on the initiative of Messrs. Donald Currie and Co. would provide boats and fishing tackle, if such appliances should be desired by the people.[In fact the dedication was clock tower for the village which remains as a memorial to the incident].

Notes: 1. A 1929 Italian salvage crew searching for gold bullion aboard P&O's Egypt located the hull of Drummond Castle and discovered that the rocks had caused a long gash that ran from the keel to the waterline.

2. Charles Arthur Richard Hoare was a member of a wealthy banking family who provided financial support to C.B. Fry the cricketer. Hoare took a mistress Beatrice Holme-Summer [age 15] by whom he had children [one apparently after her marriage to Fry]. Beatrice and Fry took over the running of T.S. Mercury known for its hard and domineering attitude to young boys, often orphans or from deprived families. Survivors relate to sleeping on deck in winter and boxing matches arranged by Beattie wherein small puny boys were matched against fearful opponents and were often knocked out.

## A NEW LOCAL HISTORY BOOK AVAILABLE



A long awaited tome has reached us, the story of the Haines family in West End. Entitled "THE HAINES LEGACY a century of masterbuilding in West End" it is well written by local author and WELHS member Pauline Berry. Reasonably priced at £6 it is well worth purchasing, telling the story of the well known local building firm who rose to prominence in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Originating from Wiltshire, the family moved to this area in the 1840's and were responsible for building a large part of early Westend. The book containing 44 pages is well illustrated with many pictures, a large proportion coming from the WELHS archive held at the museum. The book is dedicated to the late Gordon Haines who was a long standing member of WELHS and donated a large amount of archive material regarding the Haines family to our archive. I commend the book, Pauline's latest offering, to you as a fascinating read. Ed.

*ISBN 0-9540899-0-2 Available from the author (Tel: 02380 462490)  
price £6 plus p+p*

## DAVEY JONES OF THE MONKEES

By Roy Andrews

In the mid 1960's American TV created a pop group called The Monkees to take on the likes of the Beatles. The TV show that was created around The Monkees ran for many years and was shown all around the world making the four members of the group world famous and giving them several pop chart hits. Of the four members of the group, one was an English boy called Davey Jones. I often watched their zany TV show and even knew the words to some of their hit songs, never realising that one day I would spend a day with Davey Jones.

Fast forward to the beginning of the 1990's when I was a police Crime Prevention Officer based in the Fareham Division. Over a period of a couple of years, the police had dealt with sadistic attacks on horses, for which nobody had been apprehended as the attacks took place in isolated fields. At this time, Neighbourhood Watch Schemes, set up to combat crime, were proving very popular and so we felt that a similar type of scheme run by and for horse owners could be useful. Most horse owners knew who owned the horses in their locality and would know if something suspicious were occurring, and so the idea of Horse Watch was born.

To launch the scheme, several horsey organisations were involved and it was decided that a high profile horse enthusiast at the launch would ensure plenty of publicity. At this time Davey Jones, known for his love of horse riding, owned and lived at a stables in the Meon Valley near Droxford. His then wife, he had three, was a teacher at Fareham Tertiary College. He was contacted and agreed to launch the scheme at the police training school at Netley.

On the day, thanks probably in no small part to Davey's presence, a large number of the media descended on the school. As there were to be several presentations as well as Davey's speech, I was asked to stick with him during the day, so much of the time we just sat in a corner chatting. I found him to be a very likeable person with no airs or graces who still spent much of his time jetting around the world giving cabaret-type shows. He had that strange tanned/yellow skin beloved of entertainers who appear to spend too much time under a sun lamp. He stressed however that his first love was horses, having spent some time training as a jockey, and he was small enough! His life time ambition was to win a race, preferably a famous one. This he eventually achieved in 1996 at Lingfield.

The launch of Horse Watch amongst the fraternity proved very popular and in no time at all other police forces around the country - attacks on horses were not unique to Hampshire - had set up their own schemes which soon required national co-ordination.

In spite of having no interest in horses (the French had the right idea, I thought. They eat them!) and never even having been on the back of one, if you don't include a couple of donkey rides at the beach, somehow I found that I had become the Hampshire Police Rep for the various national meetings around the country. At these meetings, new ideas were promulgated and successes reported and although the non police representatives seemed to be dressed in their Sunday best there was always a strong scent of horse pervading the room.

Davey Jones died at the age of 64 from a heart attack in 2012 and is buried in the USA.

## YOUR ARTICLES FOR WESTENDER

If any of our readers would like to contribute articles to Westender you can either send them as an e-mail to: [westendlhs@aol.com](mailto:westendlhs@aol.com) marked "article for Westender" or by mail to the editor at: **40 Hatch Mead, West End, Southampton, Hants, SO303NE.**

Preferably articles or snippets of information regarding West End and the surrounding area and of a historical nature. Remember, without your help and support we would not have this newsletter, at the end of the day it is all about your memories of OUR history. Ed.

## "CALSHOT - a place in Time"

A review by Pauline Berry



I hope I will be forgiven for not expecting this to be a particularly interesting subject for a talk on Wednesday 2nd January, but Colin van Geffen held our members enrapt for over an hour, recalling the complex history of Calshot Castle and its surrounds on the spit which juts out into Southampton Water and The Solent.

This cold, draughty spot was chosen by Henry VIII as one of a series of fortresses built to repel French and other foreign invaders. The castle was built in 1539 with guns mounted on the seaward side, making it heavily fortified for sometime.

During the Civil War gunboats were sent out from here to fight the rebels. Later in the 1700's it became a lookout station for pirates and smugglers on the South Coast. During a long period of repair and subsequent neglect the castle was brought under the control of the Admiralty in 1856.

Colin also described the use of the land around the castle to accommodate the military and also coastguards. He went into great detail concerning the continuous change of use of this area over the next century. Its use as a Royal Naval Air Service station and also an RAF station in the 20th century until the 1950's and 1960's: jetties, repair sheds, hangars, 'met' office, telephone exchange and even a pigeon loft. It also played its part in the rescue of the British Army at Dunkirk in 1940. After the RAF left in 1961, their deserted camp became a temporary home for the many refugees from the volcanic eruption on Tristan da Cunha, the remote island in the Atlantic.

Several famous names were mentioned as having connections with Calshot: Winston Churchill, Lawrence of Arabia, R.J.Mitchell and Arthur Wellesley Bigsforth (the inspiration for 'Biggles' who lived in West End). Today, Calshot Spit is a sports venue, tourist attraction and nature reserve. Times have changed for today the only enemy is vandalism.





## A 'TITANIC' MYTH DEBUNKED

By Roy Andrews



**EDITH ANNE COLLINGS**

### The Myth

After the White Star Line's TITANIC sank beneath the cold waters of the North Atlantic, over the following years, as with many traumatic events, stories began to circulate that it was not a pure accident which caused the sinking. One such story was that it was not the TITANIC which sank but her slightly older sister ship, the OLYMPIC, disguised as the TITANIC.

The OLYMPIC had gone into service while the TITANIC was still fitting out in its Belfast shipyard. She completed four Atlantic crossings but on the fifth, just after leaving Southampton and off the Isle of Wight, on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 1911, OLYMPIC collided with HMS Hawke which almost sank; a later board of enquiry would blame the OLYMPIC for the collision. OLYMPIC sailed back to Southampton where two weeks were spent making temporary repairs before she could sail to Belfast where permanent repairs would take a further six weeks.

Once in Belfast, it was found that the damage to the ship was much greater than had been thought, in fact she was a write off, so White Star Line, who were in severe financial difficulties at the time, decided to disguise the OLYMPIC as the TITANIC, send her to sea and sink her in the Atlantic, ensuring several boats

would be in the vicinity to rescue ALL the crew and passengers. Then the insurance could be claimed for the loss of the ship. The plan however went wrong when the TITANIC/OLYMPIC struck the ice berg before reaching the pre-planned location for the sinking.

This story, or similar, has been repeated many times in books, articles and television programmes. There is much evidence to prove the story is a myth, not least how did White Star Line stop all of the 15,000 shipyard workers in Belfast from 'spilling the beans' over the following decades.

Into the WELHS Museum one Saturday came a West End resident with a story to tell that should dispel the above story once and for all.

### Ron Pattinson's Story as told to Roy Andrews

My mother Edith Anne Collings was born in Liverpool in 1888 and in 1908, she took her first sea voyage when she started working for the White Star Line, with whom she would spend all of her working life, as a Stewardess, firstly in 2<sup>nd</sup> class and later 1<sup>st</sup> class. She worked on most of the Line's ships and during this time she obtained and kitted out a needle- work box with all of the equipment she needed when pandering to the needs of her passengers for running repairs.

She joined the OLYMPIC for the first time for its fourth voyage and remained for its ill fated fifth when the collision occurred. When the ship returned to Southampton, the crew were given the option of signing off there or remain with the ship when it returned to Belfast from where they could make their way to Liverpool. Edith was desperate to get onto another ship so she signed off in Southampton and quickly got another one. It was only when it was too late, she realised she had left her irreplaceable needlework box on the OLYMPIC in her cabin locker. Over the following weeks she worked on various ships but had to make do with a few needlework tools as she was unable to afford the cost of replacing her box.

When the OLYMPIC returned, after repairs, to Southampton, Edith was able to sign on for its inaugural voyage. She was allocated the same crew cabin she had previously occupied and, while unpacking her belongings, was amazed to find at the back of her locker, where she had left it, her needlework box!

This was the last time Edith was to sail on the OLYMPIC, although she continued at sea until 1913 when she married. She died in 1944.

*Editors note: This is one of many stories visitors to our Museum recall on various subjects and I would like to thank both the West End resident who retold the story and Roy Andrews for putting it in writing, it makes fascinating reading. Ed.*

## OBITUARY

**Joseph 'Joe' Molloy**

1914 - 2013



It is with great regret that we report the death of former West End resident, Joe Molloy, on 2nd January 2013. Born in 1914, he was only 14 months short of achieving his one hundredth birthday. Always youthful for his age, he packed a lot into his long life and regular readers of 'Westender' will know that Joe was an endless fount of stories. He recounted his childhood in West End, the Boys' Brigade and St. James' School; also his experiences as a police officer in the Southampton Blitz, followed by his joining the RAF in 1942, before returning to the Police Force after the war. This modest, sometimes shy man attributed his long life to the sport he enjoyed in his youth. We send our condolences to Joe's son David and relatives.

## THE NEXT MEETINGS ARE....

March 6

**LIFE IN NELSON'E NAVY***Anne Baxandall, MBE*

April 3

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

plus

**DEAD ON ARRIVAL ... a Policeman's Story***Roy Andrews*

## ON THIS DAY.....

**On this day (February 6th) in.....**

**1685** Death of King Charles II, stricken with apoplexy - accession of his brother as James II.

**1783** Lancelot Brown known as 'Capability' Brown, English landscape gardener, noted especially for the gardens at Blenheim and Kew, died.

**1840** The Treaty of Waitangi was concluded by Captain Hobson, between Britain and the Maori chiefs of New Zealand - proclaiming British sovereignty and protection.

**1895** 'Babe' Ruth, the legendary American baseball player, born at Baltimore in Maryland as George Herman Ruth.

**1911** Ronald Reagan, American Republican statesman and 40th President, born at Tampico in Illinois.

**1918** A Parliamentary candidature deposit of £150 was introduced in Britain. Women were first permitted to vote in elections to the Parliament in Westminster - their first vote actually came in the General Election on 14th December 1918.

**1924** Billy Wright, English footballer and international with 105 caps, born at Ironbridge in Shropshire.

**1958** Manchester United lost 8 of their players when the aircraft bringing the team home from Belgrade crashed on take-off at Munich airport - also killed were 3 club officials and 8 sporting journalists.