



# MUDEFORD SANDBANK NEWS



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## Beach-hut prices fall on Mudeford Sandbank

### One shore beyond desire

On March 18<sup>th</sup> at auction (auctioneers Symonds and Sampson) a sleeping beach hut failed to meet its reserve of £80,000, confirming local knowledge that sales had stalled on the beach.

It is apparent from nearly two-dozen "For Sale" signs before the Easter holiday that although vendors are anxious to sell, buyers are currently few and far between. This is most unusual.



Vendors have been keen to sell this Spring because the progressive transfer fees payable to Christchurch Council rose on April 1<sup>st</sup> for a hut from £15,000 to £21,000 as expected. Also licence fees have spiraled to close on £2,000 per hut and although the beach has never looked better, the old cheap and informal ways are being supplanted by a new ruthless profit-led and cost-driven worldliness.

A frenzy of articles on the sudden price slump appeared in the local media and the national press and even an overseas newspaper just before Easter. Sales may yet recover if demand is restored. But this would have to be in the face of vendors passing on the increasing transfer fees to buyers. Historically, about a dozen huts have changed hands on average each year over the last 30 years. There has been something of a

buying frenzy in the last dozen years, despite the rising prices.

The 354 huts contribute £630,000 in annual licence fees. In 2002/3 the transfer fee windfall to the council was £109,000. In 2004/05 it was £239,000. In 2005/6 it should be at least £309,000 in the council's favour. The following year the rate (if not the total as it depends on the number of huts being sold or transferred) should increase by half again. The council want to gradually achieve a 50% share of a hut's profit on sale because it is the (council owned) land that has the real value.

Also any recovery in sales would have to be in the face of uncertainties over the beach lease from Bournemouth Council which is due for renewal in either 2029 (or 2036 depending on who you speak to!)

But the fact that the huts have become a "golden goose" is an assurance that the huts will continue to colonise this beach, as the values have been rising at least until the 2005 "correction".

On the other hand, it is still a paradise down here. And will be, people know, for generations to come.

But efforts to reduce the transfer fees when passed down within families, if successful, may reduce supply even more and force prices upwards again. Publicity

(even bad publicity over falling prices) has brought a new clutch of Easter weekend visitors looking for an apparent bargain. This is a perennial phenomenon it seems to me.

It is not just waves that encroach upon the shore.

It is an exiting time, not least because having sold my family's sleeping-hut (after three quarters of a century of occupation), admittedly at what has been "the top of the market",



I am no longer "Beach Hut Man". My plan to buy back into a smaller hut more suited to my needs and based on my sense of what I or my family would be prepared to pay is still in question.

Objectively I would not be able to recommend "buy" or "sell" to anyone else even if I have just more than doubled my new paper investments in six months using the American NASDAQ stock market. (AAPL and PIXR if you must know).

Distance from poverty does lend enchantment to the view, but it is a cold wind that blows if you do not have a

hut. The simplicity of beach hut-life is a more enchanting prospect than that of hut-less financial excess. Honestly.

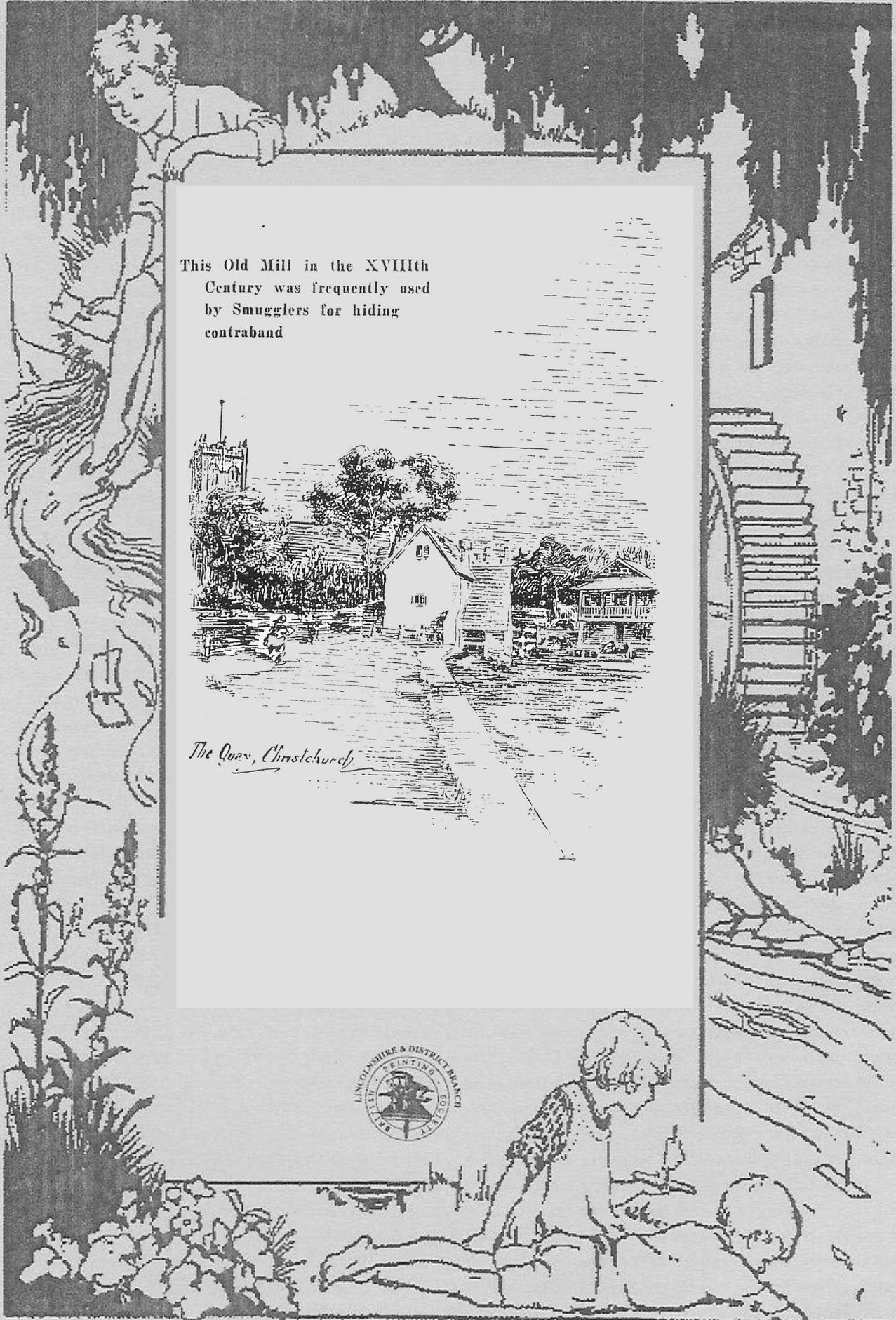
I told would-be buyers of our hut not to buy expecting prices to continue to increase, but to give themselves and their children a sanctuary from the world. I believed they would be right to buy, for that reason.

They probably were right to buy in, for whilst the hut-strewn sea-front at nearby Bournemouth has 100 arrests on average each year, our own Mudeford Sandbank has had perhaps one arrest in the last 100 years!

Oh! for the simple happy childish days of my youth, in a sanctuary untroubled by the grasping hand of greed, fear of being displaced by ruthless market forces and troubling council policies.

But thank you to everyone who has made the decision to sell last August less painful than it might otherwise have been. I currently may be found (at least out of season) in a hired hut at the end of the beach plotting my comeback. Due to council policies even that temporary solution is under threat of becoming beyond my justifiable reach.

Absence has made the heart grow fonder. I recommend a trial separation for anyone, however beautiful the "partner" you have. As Hart Crane wrote, in his poem *The Bridge*, "the best shore is one beyond our desire."

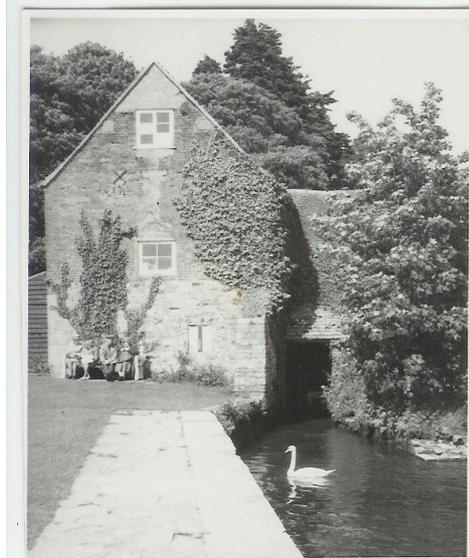


This Old Mill in the XVIIIth  
Century was frequently used  
by Smugglers for hiding  
contraband



*The Quay, Christchurch*





## *The Water Mill*

*Listen to the Water Mill through the live-long day,  
How the creaking of the wheel, wears the hours away,  
Languidly the water glides, useless on and still  
Never coming back again to the Water Mill  
And the proverb haunts my mind, like a spell that's cast  
"The Mill will never grind with the water that has passed"*

*Take this lesson to yourselves loving hearts and true  
Golden years are fleeting by, youth is fleeting too,  
Learn to make the most of life, lose no honest way,  
Time will never bring thee back chances swept away  
"Leave no tender word unsaid, love while life shall last"  
"The Mill will never grind with the water that has passed"*

*Work while yet the daylight shines, men of strength and will,  
Never does the streamlet glide useless by the mill;  
Wait not till tomorrow's sun beams upon the way,  
All that thou can't call thine own, lies in this today!  
Power, intellect and strength may not, cannot last,  
"The Mill will never grind with the water that has passed"*

*Oh! the wasted hours of life that has drifted by  
All the good we might have done - lost - without a sigh!  
Love that we might once have saved, by a single word  
Thoughts conceived but never penned, perishing unheard  
Take this lesson to your heart, take, oh! hold it fast!  
"The Mill will never grind with the water that has passed"*

From the German, (rescued and recycled from the Council tip by your editor)  
Printed in memory of Mr J Prosser who died in 2004 who was, introduced to the area  
by a Mr Luckett (who was given the pick of the beach to build a beach hut in 1947)  
and remembered by his son, a friend of this newspaper over many years [Ed]

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# The Forgotten Regency Resort

## Visit The Splendid Marine Village Of Muddiford (\*\*\* Also Known As Sandhills, Sandford and Summerford \*\*\*)

*The French Revolution and subsequent Napoleonic Wars ended the English upper class fashion for the European Grand Tour and holidays at continental spas. Instead, the new 'sea-bathing' resorts of Brighton, Lyme and Weymouth became fashionable Regency-era "watering-places," growing within a generation into popular tourism destinations. One resort however, despite meeting the basic requirements for a fashionable Georgian-Regency resort, and enjoying patronage from the nation's elite, never grew to become a household name ....*

perhaps it was due to its having such an unpromising name that the Christchurch district of Mudeford together with neighbouring Highcliffe, in what was then southwest Hampshire never grew to be another Brighton or Margate. "Muddyford," as it was previously, does not sound as if it has much of a beach, which may have made it uninviting to the public who began to frequent seaside resorts when the railway age arrived. And

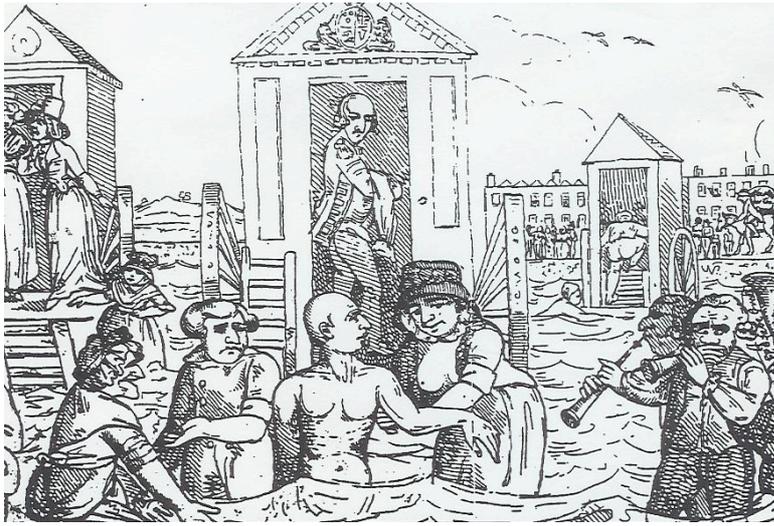


Highcliffe was not adopted as a village name until 1892, the local hamlets being known before that as Chuton, Newtown, and Slop Pond. On the other hand, names such as Mude or Muddiford had the advantage for the fashionable set of discouraging strangers and keeping the resort exclusive, away from the *hoi polloi*. In fact, the district's other name was Sandhills, after the large dunes stretching along the shore.

Wars with France and other European countries over the Colonies, then the French Revolution and subsequent 'Terror' of the 1790s, and finally the Napoleonic Wars combined to put an end the English upper class fashion

for the European cultural 'Grand Tour' and holidays at continental spas, which offered mineral-rich water to drink and sometimes, mud-baths.

In England, inland spas, notably Bath, were long established on the Continental model of health spas like Lourdes. George II's old Prime Minister, Pitt the Elder, for instance in 1768 retreated to Bath suffering from the flying gout — the age's polite label for mental-health problems. The new English seaside resorts would come into popularity during the heyday of the up-and-coming Prince Regent, in the years between the Storming Of The Bastille in 1789 and Waterloo in 1815, which ended the French threat.



## The Highcliffe-On-Sea Saga

On the neighbouring High Cliff estate along the clifftop a mile eastward, a second aristocratic home stood, for a while anyway. Here until 1794 stood the stately home called 'High Cliff,' built in a medievalist style to a Robert Adam design in 1773. It was the seaside residence of George III's first Prime Minister the 3rd Earl of Bute, John Stuart (1713-92), who had risen to power through his connections with the Royal family. The ex- Prime Minister had retired here in 1770 after being brought down by a lengthy rabble-rousing press campaign which marked the birth of crusading newspaper journalism in Britain (a saga too complex and dramatic to even attempt a summary here).

Lord Bute was one of those aristocrats prevented by hostilities with France from continuing to enjoy European 'grand tours' to look at art treasures. As well as being an art enthusiast, he was also a keen botanist (a co-founder of Kew Gardens), and in 1779 he had paid the most famous landscape designer of the time, Capability Brown, to lay out a parkland on the High Cliff estate. The house itself was built on the clifftop *"to command the finest outlook in England."* In fact it proved too close to the crum

### "Hydromania"

From 1789 on, George III suffered from mental-health problems which could not be concealed, and his re-appearance at Weymouth in the summer of 1789 to take the waters was a welcome sight, for the situation in France prompted a fear the English monarchy could also collapse. Watched by a puzzled and fascinated crowd, the King entered the sea from a bathing machine for his royal dip while a band played God Save The King. It was the King's regular public dips at Weymouth through the 1790s that helped popularise the new "spa" idea of salt-water sea-bathing had curative properties. Next, Brighton was made fashionable by the Prince Of Wales, who would become Prince Regent when the King was forced into retirement by his madness. Even Southampton became a 'spa town.' Mudeford would also soon join the short-list of fashionable new

"watering-places" when it too received the necessary official hallmark of approval – the Royal visit.

At this time, Mudeford, previously known as a smugglers' bolthole, had just begun to acquire its first veneer of respectability after a former British Museum curator and retired director of the Bank of England bought up much of the district and began to invite members of the aristocracy down to stay. The house Gustavus Brander (1720-87) had built was in downtown Christchurch itself (in the grounds of Christchurch Priory, in fact), but as a keen antiquarian and naturalist, with a summer-house on Hengistbury, he would soon be showing various VIP visitors around the area. And the selling off, by the Brander family, of High Cliff estate to Pitt's retiring Prime Minister Lord Bute would lead to a new chapter in the growth of the resort.

bling clifftop, and in the 1790s it had to be demolished stone by stone. Most of the estate was sold off following Bute's death, after being injured in a fall trying to pick wildflowers on the clifftop. In the meantime, the only house on the estate was a modest dwelling called Bure Homage. The 4th Earl of Bute, Lord Stuart de Rothesay, grew up there while contemplating his grand scheme to rebuild the family home lost to the sea. A diplomat serving in France, he bought back the rest of the estate in 1807 and began to build a magnificent house which he would furnish with stained glass windows from Rouen and other French art treasures 'rescued' from the aftermath of the French Revolution. This — the present, now-restored Highcliffe Castle—would not be completed until 1835, the eve of the Victorian era, but it would become the area's most fashionable house throughout the Victorian and subsequent Edwardian ages. Before the Castle was complete, another set of 'royalty' came to the Highcliff estate. During the era of 'The Terror' as they fled the guillotine, French aristocrats such as the Duc de Bourbon had settled in exile in southern England from 1789 on, until Napoleon's fall made possible the Royalist émigrés' return. A generation later, in 1830, revolution again broke out in France, and the new



King, Charles X, fled to Poole. Louis-Philippe, the Duc d'Orleans, was elected 'King of the French' by the new regime. He also became protector of the "Queen Of Chantilly" Baronne de Feucheres, alias Sophie Dawes, the Wight-born daughter of a local smuggler, who had reinvented herself as a *femme fatale*. She had escaped the poorhouse permanently in her teens while working as a servant in a Piccadilly brothel, where (it was said) she was won by the exiled Duc de Bourbon in a card game. She gave up her Nell Gwynn style London career as an actress and orange-seller, and taught herself French to make her way in the world as a *courtesan*. After a *ménage à trois* with the Duc and her husband the Baron de Feucheres was exposed, she was strongly suspected of faking the suicide of the aged Duc, by then a Prince, in order to obtain title to the vast Chantilly estate. Though she was never tried,

she became *persona non grata* with her former protector King Louis-Philippe. Ironically, both would end their lives in England. With the 1848 uprisings, the onetime "King Of The French" would flee here (disguised as a "Mr Smith") and often stayed in the area, at Highcliffe Castle or with Gustavus Brander at Christchurch's Priory House, while the former "Queen Of Chantilly" bought Bure Homage in the 1830s. The still-wealthy social adventuress ordered it rebuilt in the style of a French *villa*, but died soon after.

### Pitt's Rose

It was in the 1790s that the key residents in the story of Mudeford's rise to fashion appeared. In 1790 George Rose (1744-1818) became a Member of Parliament for Christchurch. Rose first served in the Navy, where he was twice wounded in action, but left when promotion failed to materialise, and became a civil servant instead.

After buying Cuffnells Park (later a hotel, since demolished) in the New Forest near Lyndhurst, he became an MP for Lymington in 1788. Rose was by now such a close friend and supporter of the new Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger, he was known as "Pitt's Rose." (Pitt, who became Prime Minister at age 24 after his father's retirement, himself had Dorset family roots.) Christchurch had two Members of Parliament, and from 1796 Christchurch's other MP was George Rose's younger son, William Stewart Rose (1775-1843). Rose's main family residence was in the New Forest at Cuffnells, where he wrote books on finance and policy, and from where he even tried to run his cabinet post of Treasurer Of The Navy. He also entertained both Pitt and the King there. George III, an acquaintance since 1784 (the year Pitt swept to power), visited him at Cuffnells in 1789 on his first visit to Weymouth, and again in 1801, when he stayed for four days at Cuffnells the week both Rose and Pitt announced their retirements, and again in 1803. Pitt would return to office in 1804 for two final, killing years to engineer the political alliance needed to combat Napoleon, staying at Cuffnells for a last time the year of Trafalgar, 1805, Rose himself dining with Nelson just before he sailed.



### Seaside Villas At Mudeford

In order to have a seaside residence for himself and his family to indulge the new fashion for sea-bathing, Rose around 1785 also built a house just east of Mudeford Quay, named Sandhills, behind the large sand dunes which then stood there. The two Christchurch MPs used their seaside properties as summer residences. Sandhills House was occupied by George Rose's eldest son, Sir George Henry Rose, who was elevated to the diplomatic service through his father's influence with Pitt (Sir George named his son George Pitt Rose). With George Snr at Cuffnells, and George Henry at Sandhills

House, the younger son William Stewart Rose from 1796 lived during the summer in a row of seaside cottages completed in 1796 on the Sandhills estate, just east of the main house. This house, and in fact the entire row of white-washed seafront houses (which still survive), would be named "Gundimore," after which Gundimore Promenade between Mudeford Quay and Avon Beach is now named.

### 'Gundimore' And The Literati

The house's famous talking point was a room designed to look like a Persian tent, this feature being the outcome of WS Rose's interests as an amateur poet and translator. The Romantic Poets of the

time often used exotic Eastern references (as with Coleridge's *Xanadu*), and dressing a room in Arabian Nights style and giving the house a Kiplingesque exotic name such as "Gundimore" (the heroine in a poem he translated) would be in keeping with this literary fashion. One can compare the Brighton Pavilion, built for the Prince Regent in the style of an Oriental pavilion-tent with minarets and cupolas, and sometimes described, after a phrase from Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," as a Royal "pleasure dome." (It had a secret tunnel so he could receive his mistress – actually his secret Catholic wife.) Several of the surviving Gundimore row of houses today have low, round domed-roof rooms or extensions. The Romantic poets also had a penchant for Mediterranean Romance-language works as well as Mid-Eastern exoticism, and the word *villa* seems to creep naturally into descriptions of these seaside houses. Pevsner's *Buildings Of England* notes a Mediterranean feature in the original Sandhills House: it was built up with exotic features in the form of a 2-storey Tuscan-colonnade verandah. Rose was himself translator of such exotic Romance-language European works as *Orlando Furioso*, *Amadis*, and *Ariosto*, of which a future Poet Laureate and visitor, Robert

Southey, composed his own version.

Southey was just one of a series of writers to be invited down to Gundimore. While George Rose invited national leaders such as Pitt, Nelson and the King, William Stewart Rose preferred writers, and to Gundimore came distinguished *literati* of the day. Having writers on hand had been a feature of court life since the Renaissance established the idea of the patron, and even for the aristocrat not interested in the arts it was what we would now call a status display. The Prince set the example, and it became part of English Regency life, adopted officially via the still-current Poet Laureate scheme. Future Poet Laureate Robert Southey not only visited Gundimore, but took a pair of cottages at Burton a mile inland to use as a country retreat, 1797-1800. Sir Walter Scott was a Gundimore visitor, while working on his poetry ('Marmion') and later on his first historical novel (*Waverley*). Southey's brother-in-law, the decadent Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, visited Gundimore later on, in 1816, when William Stewart Rose had returned (with an Italian wife) from his two years of living abroad. Coleridge grandly planned a poem about the house, but (as with "Kubla Khan") never finished it – he was, as usual, recuperating from various ailments. In-

stead, Rose wrote a poem of his own, commemorating these, and other, visits by Coleridge and Scott, called "Gundimore."



### The Royal Visits

When Southey later became Poet Laureate, his mandatory memorial poem for his late patron George III was ridiculed by Byron and others, who felt Southey might just as well depict the King entering Heaven in a bathing machine. While George III's favourite seaside resort had been Weymouth, he did visit Sandhills en route at George Rose's bidding. Rose had him stop over at Cuffnells on his first journey to Weymouth, on 29 June 1789, and some sources say he also stopped at Sandhills. He also visited Sandhills on 3 July 1801, but better known is his 1803 official visit. In 1803 Rose arranged an official Royal 'inspection' style visit to Mudeford, complete with military parade, on another stopover by the royal yacht en route to Weymouth. The Christchurch Artillery fired a 3-volley sa-

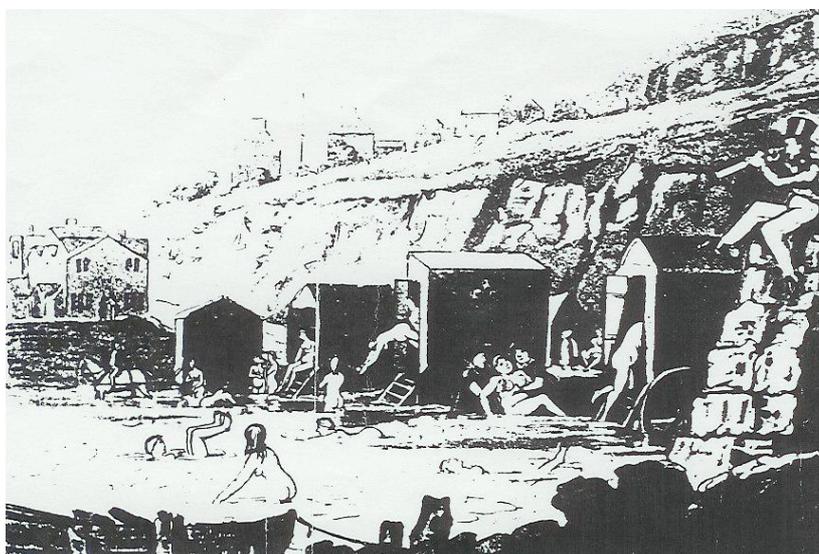
lute echoed by another on Wight opposite, while detachments of the Scots Greys and the local Volunteers stood lined up on the beach. So that the King should not get his feet wet as he re-embarked on the royal barge, the pier-less resort's three new bathing machines were laid end to end in the shallows. Sir Arthur Me adds in his The King's England guidebook series, *"After that Mudeford brightened and increased the number of its bathing machines"* (apparently from three to seven). *"...A picturesque little story which will, no doubt, ever be told of Mudeford,"* commented the *Bournemouth Times & Directory*.

Despite these claims, that was the end of George's public patronage. The Prince Regent seems not to have visited either: generally, he tended to steer clear of anywhere his disapproving father might be found. The Prince had privately married the Catholic widow of the owner of Lulworth Castle, but in 1795 he had to put aside his secret Catholic wife and remarry to help pay off his debts. This arranged marriage was disastrously unhappy for both parties. His new Princess Of Wales, Caroline Of Brunswick, did stay at Sandhills in 1796 before she moved back to the Continent. The King's brother, HRH Duke of Cumberland, also stayed with Rose on New Year's Eve

1803 to inspect, and thank for their service, the Christchurch Volunteers who had lined up for his brother, although in the event rain cancelled the official parade. However after he became King, the former Regent did visit Gundimore and Mudeford, in the 1820s. An early Cooke's guidebook of circa 1835 refers to this visit: *"the admired spot, the favourite summer residence of numerous families of distinction ... Muddiford, a beautiful village on the sea-shore, possessing every convenience for a watering-place, having good bathing machines, and a fine sandy beach. His late Majesty, George IV, honoured this spot with a visit, and his admiration of its scenery. The air here is salubrious.... These qualities were appreciated and emphatically remarked on by his Majesty George III, who with the royal family honoured Mr Rose with a visit at Sandhills."*

## The "Marine Village Of Mudiford"

Mudeford was classed as a "marine village," a term which seems to have evolved for such small new, purpose-built seaside resorts. It sounds discreet and exclusive, with a small-is-beautiful implication in the word village. But inevitably, as seaside resort holidays became more common, there were expectations that Mudeford-Sandhills would grow. An 1820s guide notes what we would now call an attempt at rebranding with a name change, from Mudiford to 'the more appropriate name of Summerford.' (The adjacent modern district of Somerford is named after the medieval Manor of that name.) A guidebook to Bournemouth and Mudeford of circa 1840 refers to a plan to build up to 90 residences as summer lodgings for 'families of respectability' on the Highcliffe estate, and comments, *'Nature has done*





*much – art and capital, judiciously applied, will make Mudeford the first watering-place on the coast.*” Another meaning of ‘watering-place’ was that traditional spas had healing wells or waters. Where Bournemouth had to import French mineral water, there was even a local well (Tutton’s Well) nearby at Stanpit on the Harbour’s edge, said to have curative properties.

New buildings appeared. The old smugglers’ inn on the Quay, Haven House (in 1784, the year Pitt had come to power, the Navy had actually bombarded it in a bloody pitched battle) was converted to respectability. It became *“a sea-bathing lodging house for fine company who came down from London for sea air,”* said Marchioness Louisa de Rothesay, who in 1845 took over Highcliffe Castle. An artist admired by Ruskin, Louisa was also the pioneer of a colony of artists drawn to the area’s picturesque views.

The adjoining estate, at Chewton Bunny, long notorious as a smuggler’s rendezvous, became the home of a naval veteran turned children’s novelist, Captain Marryat, where he wrote *Children Of The New Forest*. (He also did the original sketch of nude women bathers, bathing machines, and lurking *vo-yeur*, which the artist Cruikshank turned into an illustration that became the forerunner of the humorous seaside postcard — ‘Hydromania.’)

The Castle would continue to host aristocratic guests through the Victorian and Edwardian Eras, including members of the English Royal family. There would come Gladstone and the future Edward VII (whose mistress Lily Langtry would retire to Bournemouth). Both the Prince and Princess of Wales in fact would visit by yacht, sailing direct from Osborne. The Royal Yacht would also bring their Continental cousins, relatives of the crowned heads of Europe.

To Highcliffe Castle came the now-exiled Louis Philippe, and Queen Victoria’s grandson King Wilhelm II, alias the Kaiser. However any plan to make Mudeford *“the first watering-place on the coast”* would come to nothing.

### **End Of An Era**

The eclipse of Mudeford as the local resort was already well underway. In 1810 one of its summer residents had ventured over the heath to the west as Southey had done in 1800. But where Southey had complained he saw only “desolation,” Lewis Tregonwell saw something else at Bourne Chine, the possibility of *“an unreclaimed solitude”* away from now-busy Mudeford. There, at the mouth of the Bourne, he bought land and built a mansion in the so-called “Strawberry Hill” style of Horace Walpole’s country house of that name in Sussex, which a neighbour of Rose’s at Cuffnells had adopted for what Pevsner calls the best “Gothick” house in Hampshire, Foxlease. Tregonwell’s manor house (now the Royal Exeter Hotel) became Bournemouth’s first respectable residence. As a former High Sheriff of Dorset, based originally in Cranborne Chase and a guest and hunting companion of the Prince Regent there, he was respectable enough to attract wealthy visitors, and soon Mudeford had a rival exclusive resort, the “Marine Vil-

lage of Bourne," with a cluster of cottages and guest chalets towards the sea.

The Georgian-Regency Era ended with Victoria's accession in 1838, and part of the failure of Mudeford to develop could be attributed in part to its lack of royal favour during this lengthy era. The young Princess Victoria had stayed at Highcliffe Castle with her family, one of her Ladies-in-waiting was Louisa de Rothesay's sister Charlotte, and her son Prince Edward visited several times bringing VIPs from Osborne on the royal yacht, but the Queen herself never visited Highcliffe-Mudeford. [See sidebar, "Victoria's Seaside Days"] In the subsequent Victorian age of railway-driven mass tourism, the court set, including the young Queen Victoria and family, would flee the commuters and day-trippers on the mainland, retiring to Osborne across the Bay from Mudeford, and Wight likewise became a favoured retreat with the next generation's cultured set — Dickens, Lewis Carroll, Macaulay, Swinburne, Turgenev, and the new Poet Laureate, Tennyson, after whom Tennyson Down across the bay was named. The Prince Regent's favourite watering hole, Brighton, became the premier seaside resort town, and even William Stewart Rose retired here, dying there in 1843. It had the advantage of being within

commuting distance of London. In 1823, the journalist Cobbett noted it was home to London "stock-jobbers" who commuted daily by stage-coach.

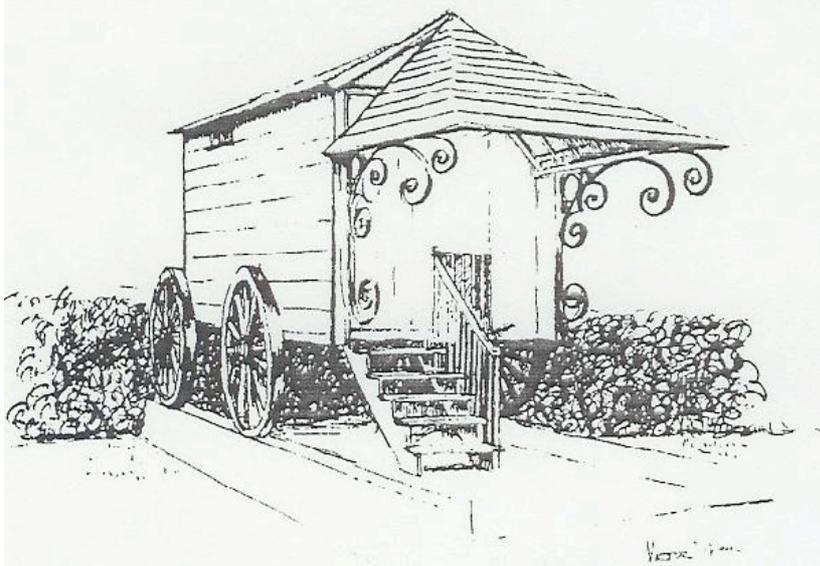
Nor did it develop as a health spa. While Bournemouth's Mont Dore Hotel (now the Town Hall) imported French mineral water, and neighbouring Boscombe exploited a clifftop mineral spring to reinvent itself as Boscombe Spa, the local healing well on Christchurch Harbour was never exploited. Locally, it was Bournemouth that would become the popular resort of the general public, soon expanding to meet up with Boscombe Spa and another upstart rival, Southbourne-On-Sea, on the other side of Hengistbury Head.

With no spa waters, no ornamental gardens, and most importantly no pier for the steamers carrying day-trippers and other hoi polloi to land at, Mudeford and

Highcliffe-On-Sea were bypassed, saved from development and *hoi polloi*. Its attractions remained old-fashioned, one local writer complaining that in speech and manners it was fifty years behind fashionable Lymington. "Fashion has not made it a watering-place," added another, "it possesses none of the recommendations of modern dissipation." Even Highcliffe Castle fell on hard times and was sold. Gordon Selfridge, of Selfridge's stores fame, took it over in the 1920s. Not content with this 'fairy palace by the sea,' he planned to build a private castle of his own the size of St Paul's on Hengistbury Head. But his personal fortunes fell, and the Head was saved from privatization and development for the time being. Highcliffe Castle was sold and re-sold, set on fire, left derelict, vandalised and looted of its magnificent artworks.



## The hut for Queen Victoria



Princess Victoria's father had originally chosen Sidmouth for a lengthy family 'sea air' retirement stay when she was an infant, but ironically he got caught in a blizzard on Christmas Day 1819 and died there of pneumonia, in the same week as his brother George III. Victoria spent her next seaside holidays on the Isle Of Wight, at Norris Castle near Cowes, from where she had begun her popular 'Royal Progress' trip of 1833 by yacht along the Dorset and Devon coast. Outbound, the 14 year old princess sailed straight to Weymouth. The return journey was partly done overland, with crowds lining the roads to cheer the royal carriage with its cavalry escort. It was decided to visit one of the exclusive new sea-bathing resorts, so the party stopped over at Swanage. Though an early industrial port serving the Purbeck stone-quarrying industry, the

local landowner and MP, William Morton Pitt (a distant relative of Prime Minister Pitt and an official in his administration), was developing it as a resort. This 'retired little town' had never had a Royal Visit before, and the enthusiastic public reception to the Royal visit helped launch Swanage as a seaside resort. From Swanage's new pier, the Royal party sailed straight back to Cowes, bypassing Mudeford and Highcliffe-On-Sea, neither of which had a landing pier.

After she became Queen, Victoria had no need to visit any 'marine village,' since she soon had what was described at the time as her own 'marine palace' built overlooking The Solent. She and Prince Albert bought up the estate next to Norris Castle, at Osborne. Just as Rose had gone for Tuscan colonnades at Sandhills, so for their sea-

side villa Victoria and Albert went for an Italianate design which would give the place some of the appeal of a sunny Mediterranean resort. The Solent view reminded Albert of the Bay Of Naples, and they had the Georgian house there rebuilt in Palladian style, including *campanile* towers, a *loggia* balcony, a pavilion, and later a hall in the obligatory Eastern style, the Durbar Room. Terraced gardens with statues and fountains in Renaissance style cascaded down towards the seashore, where Victoria had her own bathing machine (rescued in the 1920s and put on display). The result was so attractive that the 'Osborne Style' would be imitated in the USA and elsewhere.

In any case, with her 100-plus entourage, staying at a marine village was unrealistic. At Osborne Victoria had a private estate guarded at times by up to 200 soldiers (and of course her fierce Highland gillie John Brown) who kept tourists as well as anarchists out. (Her new Poet Laureate, Tennyson, also set up a home on Wight — hence 'Tennyson Down' across Christchurch Bay — but was soon besieged by tourists.) Wight had the added attraction of making her relatively inaccessible to her elderly ministers of state. (Later, when her Prime Ministers, Disraeli and Gladstone, needed a rest cure, she packed them off to the new

resort of Bournemouth.) The pair could also sail off on their new steam yacht as they did in 1843 to maintain the *Entente Cordiale* by visiting their Continental cousin, King Louis Philippe, at his summer-residence Normandy Chateau. Victoria would eventually die at Osborne in 1901.

Today, due to this Royal patronage the Cowes Yachting Regatta, originally frequented by Victoria's son the Prince of Wales and her grandson Kaiser Wilhelm II, as dignitaries in their 'Royal Yachting Squadron,' is an international event. It being a tradition that Royal princes should serve a stint in the 'Senior Service,' Osborne became in part a Royal Naval College where future kings served as cadets. Osborne House became a major tourist attraction, now kept by English Heritage as much as possible as it was when Victoria died there.

See *Princess Victoria In Dorset*, by J.F. Parsons [n.d., Bournemouth Local Studies Group, isbn 187 3887 09 4], and *Queen Victoria At Osborne* by Arnold Florance [English Heritage 1987]



## EPILOGUE

Thus, Mudeford never became a household name like Lyme, Weymouth, Swanage, Bournemouth, or Margate. And although its aristocratic Georgian-Regency heyday is now all but forgotten, this is not a tale of rise and fall, but is in its own quiet way a success story. As another 19<sup>th</sup>-Century guidebook put it, "The present inhabitants ... possibly are not sorry that Mudeford did not develop into a second Margate." It was an example of a remarked-on phenomena among seaside resorts, of an exclusive resort next to a 'mass-market' one, remaining content with being old-fashioned or behind the times — in the local motto, a place 'where time stands still.'

Today, despite all the day-trippers and their quarter of a million dogs to the adjacent ancient-monument site of Hengistbury Head, Mudeford retains much of its exclusive character. The bathing machines which the wealthy could hire for privacy have been supplanted, on the adjacent sandspit, by a line of beach huts which often feature in the national press for the record prices they bring in when sold. Originally owned long-term by local families who passed their huts on from generation to generation as family heirlooms, these are now increasingly bought up by wealthy non-residents,

with the old-timers and local families being squeezed out again as the resort moves back upmarket. On the mainland side, the established residents of Mudeford village refer to the hut owners, however wealthy they are, as "sheddiess."

Highcliffe Castle was restored to its former magnificence in the 1990s by the Council as a public amenity, while the one surviving fragment of Lord Bute's original 1773 High Cliff house, the gatehouse lodges, became an upmarket hotel and restaurant. Nearby, novelist Captain Marryat's former family home would become the area's other five-star hotel, the Chewton Glen. Muddiford House, once home to retired army officers, became the harbour-front's largest hotel, The Avonmouth.

In their 1937 retrospective piece about George IV's visit, the local newspaper, the Bournemouth Times & Directory, noted with surprise that the obscure term "Mudeford Beach" was used in the national press without reference to Christchurch or Bournemouth to indicate its location. This policy is longstanding, and continues today. Hengistbury Head, for example, is not promoted as a tourism attraction. Neither is Mudeford, even in free publicity — as when it made a TV appearance, in Bill Bryson's *Notes From A Small Island*

1999 ITV series. In it, Bryson, a former Bournemouth Echo reporter and now an English Heritage commissioner, interviews Victoria Wood, holidaying with her family in a Mudeford Sandbank beach hut, about English attitudes to seaside holidays. However to discourage anyone who saw the programme wanting to visit, the location was not identified. Even in this media-dominated age, some standards of discretion are still maintained.

©David Stanton



## On the Trail of the Wholesome Well

by the editor

As a child, drinking deep from the books and tracts available to me, I discovered a small pre-war guide to Christchurch which had the following passage;

By the roadside here and sadly neglected, is the one-time famous "Tutton's Well," which has a constant supply of pure water

fed by underground springs, whose source is far inland under the high hills of the Forest. Its wonderful purity and mineral qualities were well known to the monks of Christchurch Twynham; throughout medieval times it was known all over the countryside as a specific for diseases of the eye, and water from this well for medicinal purposes was conveyed to towns far inland. It is something of the past almost forgotten now, but as late as 1832 a traveller wrote: "It is endowed with many medicinal virtues; and held in estimation and veneration by the old inhabitants equal to that entertained by the Cambro Britons for the holy well of St Winifred's."

Sadly the very rare guide was lent to a local publican (for a friend interested in the town) and was not recoverable after a while. However a copy exists in the special collections of Christchurch Public Library, a public resource that should never be permitted to fail us when private sources dry up or become corrupted. I would have read of this vestige of the well when Charles Kingsley's "*The Water Babies*" was a distant memory, but still a potent trace in my mind, if only for the artist Jessie Wilcox Smith (who was responsible for another famous painting "Little Drops of Water" which graced the front page of my *Mudeford Sandbank News* by happy coincidence last year.)

[see [www.msbnews.co.uk](http://www.msbnews.co.uk) for the archived copy]

Jessie seems to have been displaced from the pool of our wider public memory

today by new flavours and tastes but the internet preserves her talent and a kind of homeopathic process seems still at work through earlier concentrations of her art and style still percolating in our minds.

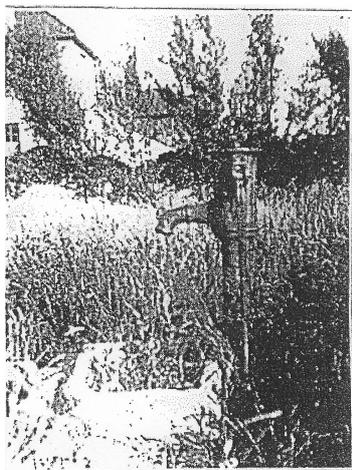
Nevertheless, although the magic hook of finding water (which when emptied by bucket from a source in the ground perpetually fills again) was to be denied me until middle age; the magic from art and literature was still there, somewhere. And, it is still available to us/our children if you knew where to look.

A brief journey back to the reservoir of our memory, the bridge over time, that is a library; finds the following from "The Water Babies" :

"At last, at the bottom of a hill, they came to a spring, not such a spring as you see here, which soaks up out of white gravel in the bog, among red fly-catchers, and pink bottle-heath, and sweet white orchis; nor such a one as you may see, too, here, which bubbles up under the warm sand-bank in the hollow lane, by the great tuft of ladyferns, and makes the sand dance reels at the bottom, day and night, all the year round; not such a spring as either of those; but a real North-country limestone fountain, like one of those in Sicily or Greece, where the old heathen fancied the nymphs sat cooling themselves the hot summer's day, while the shepherds peeped at them from behind the bushes. Out of a low cave of rock, at the foot of a limestone crag, the great fountain rose, quelling and bubbling and gurgling, so clear that you

could not tell where the water ended and the air began; and ran away under the road, a stream large enough to turn a mill – among blue geranium, and golden globe-flower, and wild raspberry, and the bird-cherry with its tassels of snow”.

Elsewhere in the local guide was a photograph of a neglected pump overgrown and unused just asking for a small boy to re-discover it in the 1960’s.



Site of “Tutton’s Well”

But, World War Two had demanded tribute from scavengeable ironwork and the old village green was bare. The old pump was gone, the water was not to be seen and the water discharging into the harbour people said came from elsewhere. A concrete circle in the centre of the plot was dismissed by locals as being “in the wrong place”! About this time as a bespectacled and blazered youth I was introduced to the world of the sensate, if only through literature. I remember and have re-discovered this from

“Cider with Rosie”:

...”I discovered water – a very different element from the green crawling scum that stank in the garden tub.

You could pump it in pure gulps out of the ground, you could swing on the pump handle and it came out sparkling like liquid sky. And it broke and ran and shone on the tiled floor, or quivered in a jug, or weighted your clothes with cold. You could drink it, draw with it, froth it with soap, swim beetles across it, or fly it in bubbles in the air.

You could put your head in it, and open your eyes, and see the sides of the bucket buckle, and hear your caught breath roar, and work your mouth like a fish, and smell the lime from the ground. Substance of magic – which you could tear or wear, confine or scatter, or send down holes, but never burn or break or destroy.”

Laurie Lee

Drinking cider and discovering the unfolding contours of the flower of holiday-time encounters was denied me, at least for a time, as a Southampton-based school-boy. But the old-as-time sensation of water, fresh or salt, was already in my young memory from Mudeford Sandbank beach hut and harbour and sea boating and fishing experiences.

The magic of holiday romances a la *Cider with Rosie* were of course to come later and the memory of such stolen moments might still escape the confines imposed in small spaces behind huts, in the backs of land-rovers and under upturned boats. Memories that even now can

re-surface and which, like water, can neither be broken, burnt or destroyed.

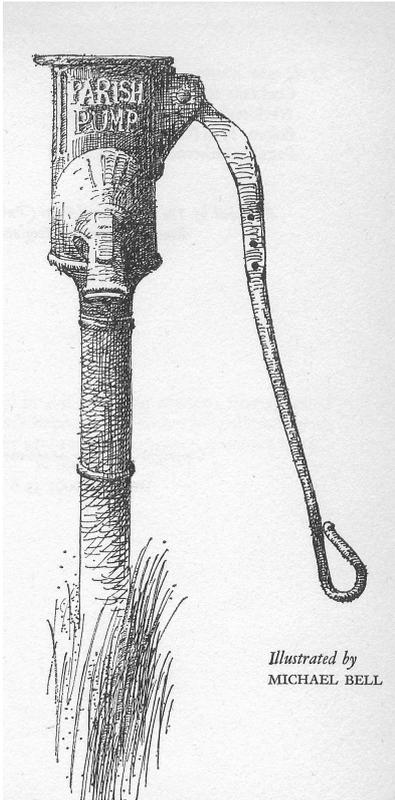
Even if all that was denied me then, the elemental force of water will not be denied for long, even if a King might be referred to “as weak as water”. Surely this quip is an insult to water. Water is water, for all that. It’s flow, direction, purity and use are beyond evil intent, unlike man

Old citizens in the town rose up when sentiment for the site of Tutton’s Well and the remembered public good was threatened with a new catalyst – a private aspiration for an enlarged Girl Guide hut intended to be built over what was recorded as the plot of this once revered resource.

The Girl Guide Hut, an ageing asbestos structure, needed renewal of its own, and old controversies over its proximity to the old water structures (there had been several) were resurrected. A tiny concentration of historians and civic minded people tried to raise the subject of the old structures and even sought to influence the Guides to build elsewhere.

Your editor, wrote the following when the subject broke through once again into the local press in 1996:





## Parish Pump Politics

Sir, –

Is there an unseen hand at work shaping the fate of Tutton's Well at the edge of Christchurch harbour? It has been something of a pantomime in recent months trying to divine not just where the well is, but whether its preservation can be achieved in the face of competing interests.

Now a new pressure group (The Tutton's Well Preservation Society) has had some success preventing the well being buried permanently under a replacement and enlarged Girl Guide Hut at Stanpit. The Guides, it is admitted on all sides, have been shabbily treated in so far as they are not yet guaranteed another suitable site.

Christopher Chope the (then) prospective parliamentary candidate has intervened on their behalf, no doubt counting thereby on the votes of perhaps 200 parents. The local residents' association decided after some delay to do the same but wondered if there was some long term, as yet unknown to them

reason for the surprising number of objections.

There are several obvious ones.

The view, the site being on a public open space, the proposed millennium footpath around the harbour, the restoration of an old public landing place, the dispute over Fisherman's Bank, the fact that in 1958 the hut was only a temporary solution, traffic problems, the delay needed to sort out the other possible options and finally sentiment for the well itself, all spring to mind.

We do know that until the water became mysteriously contaminated the water was crystal clear and had been for centuries. Were unseen forces at work, then, to pollute the well and therefore deny public access to it? Desk research suggests this may have simply been a periodic flushing of the well at exceptional high tides. From pre-Christian times wells have been extremely rich in symbolic and allegorical resonances, never mind the practical necessity for water. As such, water represents life, love, refreshment, generation, fertility, preservation, resurrection, order and harmony; whereas the lack of water represents denial, sterility, corruption, disorder and death. It is an old battle.

A Catholic Christchurch Priory who owned the well until 1539, had a resident Templar knight, Stephen de Staplebrigg, who would have drunk from Tutton's Well and probably would have fought for its continuance if, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century it had been threatened. His order knew the value of water and the penalty for losing its source, both practically and allegorically.

Before him, Vespasian, with or without his elephants, would have needed and indeed allegedly did use Tutton's Well on his journeys. After him came Oliver Cromwell's horses who watered at this old well, or so it seems. We only know so much, for wa-

ter is like our memory, it must be recycled and shared or it will be lost.

A Water Diviner

The reverential aspects associated with water are no fey imaginings, the most detailed and rigorous historical study of holy wells yet published is by museum curator James Rattue called "The Living Stream: holy wells in historical context" (1995).

Often less academically qualified, but tapping into a much older and pre-Christian tradition are the Dorset Earth Mysteries Group and the Bournemouth Dowzers, (both of whom run local groups, often entwined, and both to be found on the internet) where theories, experiments, practices and beliefs (often somewhat outside prevailing conventional scientific establishment views) may flourish.

What complicated the flow of ideas and recovered memories about the Tutton's Well story was the fact that the site had had two water features, the well which at times had had a pump upon it in the centre of the green, and a dipping place lost about three-quarters of a century ago.

The Guide hut had been reported half a century ago as threatening the dipping place, sometimes presumed to be *the* well, an encroachment presumed to be made worse by the building's replacement

etending even further towards the harbour.

Also lost to history over the last half-century was a stone quay and public landing place which campaigners wished to restore if only through a sense of history or heritage.

The well campaigners probed, researched and excavated, publicising the sorry fate of the water features and the Guides *were* prepared to move to another site – better suited as far as parking was concerned.

Former Councillor Reg Stones, a well campaigner who in committee often cut the Gordian knot had a proposal that the guide hut be simply moved to the other side of the plot; which although at the time had a Solomonic quality about it has proved to have been unnecessary.

Sadly, despite many efforts and frustrations the best prospect for the Guides became to stay put and happily as it turns out the old central well has proved the better prospect for restoration.

A stockbroker with the same surname as the well came forward and offered to fund some sort of restoration, albeit likely now to be a waterless one, as digging at the dipping place, the supposed spot from maps and memory, was frustrated by both the new building and a supposed resulting absence of the renowned water. What archaeological finds, brick

structure and groundwater that was there was inconclusive.

History can conceal and mislead, never mind reveal what you want to find. We may have been victims of, and thus for a while, fresh perpetrators, of memories just wide of the mark, and moreover, relied on others statements that had been duly recorded in print.

However, when constructing what was to be a tribute to the central well/pump structure, the opportunity was taken to probe the spot which discovered a rubble filled shaft nine foot deep in which, when emptied of the rubble, the (at first) murky water was so persistent in faithfully renewing itself, it could not be completely emptied by two pumps pumping at the combined rate of 5,000 gallons an hour. The campaigners had struck liquid sky.

It now appears that the well was the main source and probably fed by a high “overflow” still in evidence (but just beneath the then surface) the contested site of the dipping place situated by the wall close to the guide hut.



The restoration was announced in the local *New Milton Advertiser* thus:

### **Historic Tutton's Well reopened**

Tutton's Well at Stanpit, one of Christchurch's oldest landmarks, was reopened on Saturday after a long campaign by conservationists.

The Friends of Tutton's Well group was set up in the 1990's when it was feared that the rebuilding of the nearby Guide's hut would destroy the well which had been used as a source of pure water since the bronze age. However further archaeological investigations near the hut and in the centre of the plot suggested that the greatest flow of water was from the latter, with over 5,000 gallons an hour, so it was decided to reconstruct it there. Stockbroker Tom Tutton, who despite his name has no known family links to Christchurch, funded the creation of the stone features, with the rest of the work being carried out by volunteers.

The re-opening ceremony was performed by Mr Tutton and the Mayor of Christchurch, Coun. Sue Spittle, with around 50 supporters attending. Master of ceremonies was Coun. Kevin Dingley, the chairman of the Friends, and refreshments were provided by the Avonmouth Hotel. Local graphic designer Colin Bolger designed labels for commemorative bottles of water for which people gave donations. It is hoped that, after testing, the Council will be able to exploit the water supply to sell as bottled mineral water.

To mark the historic occasion members of the Friends committee dressed up variously as a monk, a well wench, a water hawker, a leper, a fisherman, a smuggler and Sir William Rose, who donated the site as a public water supply in 1885. The Friends are now hoping to restore the former fishermen's



## Tutton's Well Spring Water



Do not drink, not yet tested for potability



### THE CHRISTCHURCH ELIXIR

To commemorate the well restoration 2004



dock on the nearby edge of the harbour.

"At last one of Christchurch's oldest links to antiquity has been saved from destruction," said Friends committee member Tim Baber. "The water looks absolutely crystal clear and we hope the testing process has a positive result." (July 2004)

The plan is to establish the wholesomeness of the water beyond doubt, improve the circulation of the water by improved means if appropriate, and further improve the vista now that more of its history is understood.

A first water test has been made thanks to our sponsor, and apart from 4 rogue but probably benign coliforms that compromised a clean sheet in the first test, the water has all the qualities of an exceptional untreated mineral water, being exceptionally low in harmful heavy metals. Reputed to be a "never-failing" supply, this water (given to the town as a public supply) could be relied on to furnish the needs of Christchurch in any drought or other emergency. If treated

with chlorine, or UV light like our own tap water, there could be no objection from the authorities from these first results.

Untreated it is arguably still better than what comes through your taps, not least because what comes through your taps – treated – becomes a controversial cocktail including known carcinogens according to biologist Julie Stauffer in "*Safe to Drink? The quality of your water*" (ISBN 1898049149.)

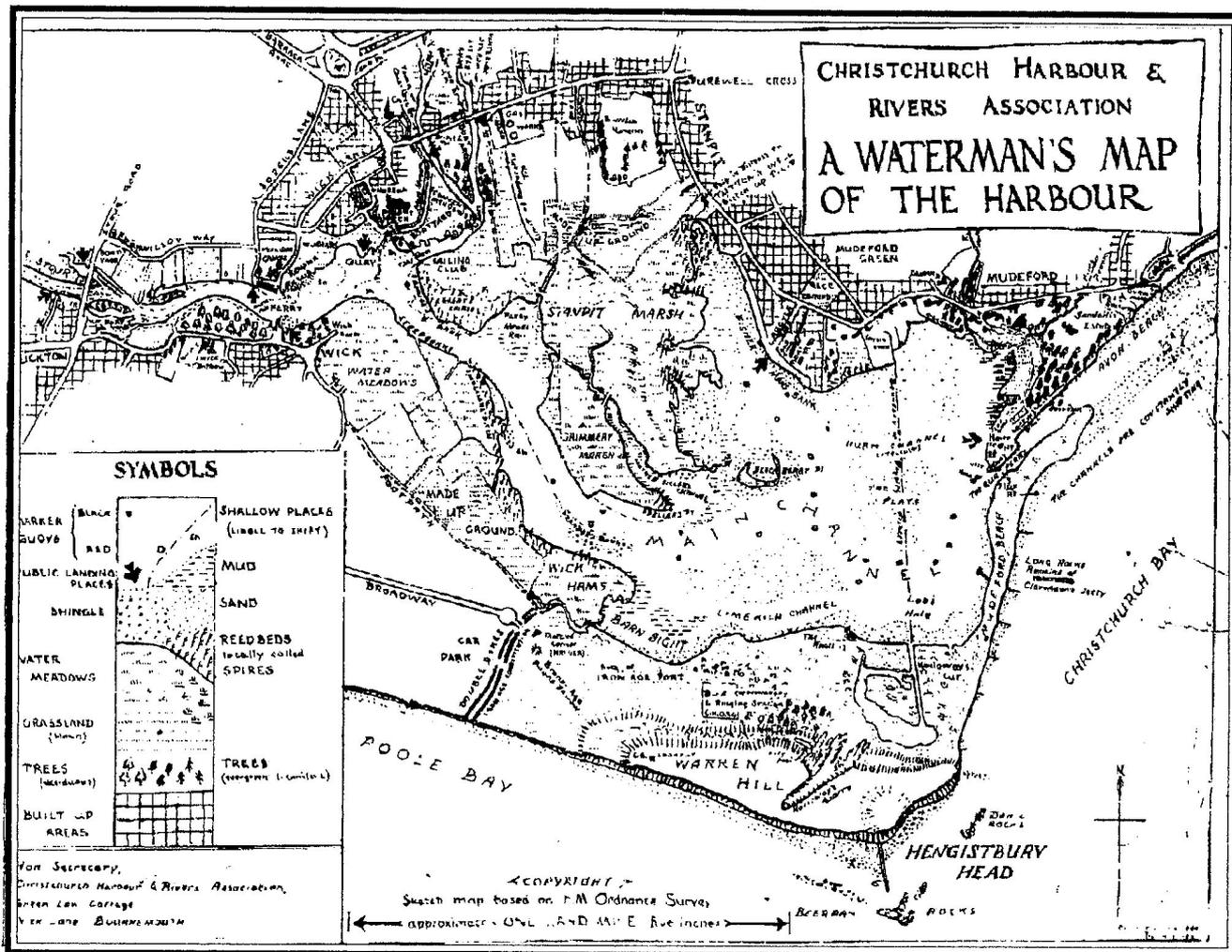
With a little work (that we overlooked in our haste)

those irritating 4 rogue but probably benign coliforms should be dispatched from Tutton's Well, and it will become; as an untreated supply no less, once more, "*the Christchurch Elixir*" of old, capable, if bottled and sold on terms favourable to the council, of making the borough a wealthy, healthy and pleasant place to live. The Friends of Tutton's Well have created a commemorative website:

[www.tuttons-well.org.uk](http://www.tuttons-well.org.uk)

where you can find out more and even make an electronic donation. But if you have a wish-list, or a pipe dream, remember not to tell anyone. Or at least *wish* for what you want by all means, but *work* for what you need, if you can. We found a childish wish to see the water again did come true, but only after hundreds of hours of voluntary committee work and someone's hard digging! But please let us know if your wish comes true, via the web-site (above).





Mudford Sandbank running North. map credit ©John Austin, by kind permission of Chris Austin, of Christchurch Sailing Club



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The sister papers the *Hengistbury Head Times* and the *Christchurch Harbour Chronicle* are in some doubt as this paper goes to press due to the editor having sold his beach hut in 2004. This *Mudford Sandbank News*, sadly should be the only current copy sold on the beach in 2005 with the sister publications the *Hengistbury Head Times* and the *Christchurch Harbour Chronicle* suspended indefinitely. But for the keen reader some unsold copies of previous editions will also be made available in the news-box [Editor]