

EXTRACTS FROM THE DEVON24 ARCHIVE

Lympstone's chequered past

NOSTALGIA can be deceptive. Most older people will claim that things were better in the past, but a peep into life in Lympstone in the 1920s and 1930s reveals tales of disaster – from fatal fires and car accidents, to infant deaths, famine and unidentified corpses.

While community spirit was especially strong at this time, with the building of the village hall and reconstruction of the boat shelter, the battle against anti-social behaviour was not a new phenomenon as one Lympstone drunk found out to his cost in 1931.

These stories of village life have been unearthed by Angela Coles, of Birch Road, who has been searching the archives of the Exmouth Journal from 1928 to 1945. Mrs Coles said: "Researching the newspaper reports have helped to make the past come alive and reveal the main characters of the day.

"There seems to have been a lot more accidents back then, especially fires started by stray candles. Funeral notices would list the principal mourners so they are ideal for tracing family history."

PART 1 - A step back in time

November 24, 1928

A cyclist was exonerated of blame after a collision killed a pedestrian. Edward Bowker, of Topsham, said he was riding along the Exeter/Exmouth Road when he saw a man walking in the same direction. He rang his bell and the man started to move to the side of the road, but slipped and fell backwards, causing the cyclist to crash into him. The victim, John Stuart, of Woodbury, died at Exmouth College *[sic]* Hospital.

May 25, 1929

On the eve of the 1929 general election, Lympstone voters flocked to hear Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin speak at the Manor Hall, Exmouth, and the Public Hall, Budleigh Salterton.

June 22, 1929

Potter's Farm, Lympstone, was almost completely destroyed by fire, causing £700 damage. The fire was blamed on sparks from a road engine, which set the building's thatched roof alight. Three onlookers rushed to the blaze and battled the flames with buckets of water, but could not stop them engulfing the farmhouse. Exmouth fire engine arrived and the fire was finally extinguished three hours later. The blaze attracted hundreds of locals who stood and watched the drama. Two years later, the farmhouse owner, Captain A Peters, successfully sued the road engine owners, Carter and Carter, of Exmouth, for £338.5s.

December 14, 1929

A six-year-old Lympstone boy died in his sister's arms after choking to death on a balloon. Herbert Parker, of Harefield Cottages, was walking home from Lympstone Primary School with sister Violet, when they stopped off at Mr Cobley's village shop to buy a balloon attached to a piece of liquorice. Violet said Herbert ate the liquorice and was running along trying to blow up the balloon when he began stamping his feet and waving his arms. She picked her brother up and ran with him in her arms to Doctor

Sydenham's surgery, but he was out on call and Herbert died in her arms. At an inquest into Herbert's death, the coroner said the balloons, which were attached to a liquorice tube, should be not be given to children.

April 12, 1930

A 65-year-old former Royal Naval Reservist committed suicide after being served with an eviction notice. Frank Bamsey was ordered to leave his home at Bakers and Bassetts Cottages, Lypstone, after falling 31 weeks behind with his rent. He had no pension and was forced into casual work as a farm labourer to try to make ends meet. Mr Bamsey barricaded himself inside the cottage and gassed himself.

The year of 1930

Plans for a village hall were given unanimous approval by the parish council. A one-and-a-half acre site near Candy's Field was earmarked for the building. The Women's Institute said that since 1928 it had raised £54 10s towards the hall's construction. The scheme was enthusiastically supported by villagers and, by September 1931, they had raised £845 towards the £2,000 cost of the hall.

January 10, 1931

A Lypstone woman was killed and 13 people seriously injured when the bus they were travelling on collided with a car at Halsdon Cross, Exeter Road. Mrs S Parsons, of Sowden Lane, died in Exmouth hospital. At the inquest, the car driver was exonerated of blame.

August 15, 1931

William Miller, of Ridge Cottages, Lypstone, was ordered to pay a £2 fine or face a month in prison after he was convicted of using obscene language. PC White said he heard Miller, a notorious cider drinker, shouting foul language from his home at 11.50pm on July 28 and ordered him to stop, but the defendant ignored him and continued swearing until 12.15am. Miller was also banned from all pubs in the area for two years.

January 16, 1932

A Lypstone fisherman had a lucky escape when his boat sank in the River Exe. Mr F Litton, 60, was heading for Topsham when his boat was sunk by a sudden gust of wind. Fortunately, the boat struck a sand bank, keeping the mast above water, and he clung to this until rescued an hour later.

June 11, 1932

Four Lypstone teenagers were each fined a shilling after being convicted of playing football in Station Road.

July 2, 1932

Two Lypstone fisherman made a gruesome discovery when they found a badly decomposed woman's body floating in the sea off Pole Sands. The woman was estimated to be between 35 and 40 years old, five foot six inches tall, with long auburn hair. The body had been in the water for four to 27 days. An inquest recorded an open verdict. The woman was never identified.

April 22, 1933

A labourer working in a sewer at Rectory Hill, Lypstone, was buried alive after a trench wall collapsed on top of him. William Hawkins, 34, of Ottery St Mary, was working nine feet below ground level when one side gave way and he was buried by two tonnes of earth. Colleagues frantically tried to reach him, but he could not be revived.

July 8, 1933

Lympstone Village Hall was officially opened by Lady Clinton.

December 2, 1933

A 56-year-old Lympstone woman was killed in a fire at her home in Brookside Cottages. Neighbours found Marjorie Marks, 56, in flames in her kitchen and she was taken to Exmouth Hospital where she subsequently died.

March 3, 1934

Today's drinkers in Lympstone should be grateful to their pre-war predecessors for campaigning to keep The Globe open. In March, 1934, more than 200 people signed a petition to save the pub after the police lobbied for it to be shut when its licence came up for renewal. The police claimed the pub's three entrances would prevent them from apprehending a suspect if he were to run inside. Officers also said the pub was not needed because Lympstone's population of 1,042 was served by four others, with the Railway Hotel, London Hotel and Spirit Vaults all within 300 yards. Concerns were also raised that female visitors to the tea room upstairs would face an unpleasant walk through the bar. Magistrates backed the villagers and renewed The Globe's licence for another year.

April 18, 1936 – see picture

Forty years after it was first erected, Lympstone's fisherman rebuilt the village's boat shelter. The revamped store was officially opened by Sir Garbutt Knott.

July 18, 1936 – see picture

The annual Lympstone Revels summer fair was staged despite torrential rain. Miss Lympstone 1936 was Violet Moore and she arrived for her coronation by boat. She was described as a "vivacious brunette, her dark beauty enhanced by truly regal deportment"



Miss Lympstone, Violet Moore, with runners-up.



Lympstone dignitaries Garbutt Knott, Norman Jenkins and Major Barton Aitken lay the foundation stones for the restored boat shelter.

January 23, 1937

Life for Lympstone's 40 fisherman could be extremely tough. After going weeks without landing a catch, village philanthropist Sir Garbutt Knott organised a soup kitchen for the starving men and their families. The kitchen was staged during a flu epidemic which saw more than 70 villagers struck down and these were all fed too. The

gargantuan vats of soup were cooked up in the Methodist Hall, with Mr Knott keeping a close eye to ensure no outside 'slicker scroungers' shared the village treat.

April 23, 1938

Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria had dramatically stoked tensions in Europe as war looked increasingly likely. Lympstone began to prepare and, 17 months before hostilities broke out, a village air raid precaution (ARP) scheme was founded. Villagers were warned that bombers headed for Plymouth and Falmouth could jettison additional bombs anywhere and people could be killed by bombs exploding 150 yards away.

Part 2 - Lympstone's sacrifice for wartime effort

Our two-part trip back into Lympstone village life from 1928 to 1945 as unearthed by Angela Coles, of Birch Road, continues...

War came to Lympstone in 1939. The village's sleepy tranquillity was smashed as many of its sons were lost in the battle to defeat Nazi Germany.

The village home guard unit was formed, blackouts and rationing were imposed and German bombers flew overhead on their way to Plymouth and Exeter.

These wartime stories, discovered by amateur historian Mrs Coles, are retold again here....

September 23, 1939

WORLD War Two claimed its first Lympstone casualties just two weeks into the conflict. Marine George Cornish, of Underhill, drowned when German U-boats torpedoed HMS Courageous 350 miles off Land's End. Mr Cornish was one of 576 sailors to lose their lives in the attack. He left a wife and five children and was a veteran of the First World War.

March 2, 1940

A Lympstone Sunday school teacher escaped conscription into the armed forces after convincing a tribunal he was a conscientious objector. William Bastin, 23, of the Ridges, was a baker's van man. He said he could not take any part in the war because it was contrary to his beliefs. His objection even extended to non-combatant work in the army because it was part of the war organisation. Mr Bastin was granted conditional exemption provided he remained in his job.

Jan 11, 1941

The privations of war were frustrating for many Britons, from the rationing of food, clothes and petrol, to nightly blackouts. And the latter proved too much for one Lympstone woman when she refused to obey a policeman's order to turn off a light in her home. Exmouth magistrates heard how Mildred Packard, of Western Home, told the policeman: "I'm sorry, I don't care. You can fine me. I am fed up." The JPs agreed and fined her £2.

May 9, 1942

A former member of the Lympstone Boys' Brigade was killed while serving with the Royal Engineers. Leonard Soper, 22, died in combat.

September 26, 1942

It was announced that Lympstone residents' tireless fundraising had netted £102 19s 11d for the Red Cross. The money was raised through a penny-a-week scheme.

Villagers were urged to turn out their weekly coppers because more money was needed for aid to Russia and prisoners of war.

October 3, 1942

Prayers were said for a Lymptstone man missing in action. War-time censorship meant no more details were offered on the disappearance of pilot Bill Randle, 21, of Barn Close. Mr Randle was a former pupil at Exmouth Grammar School. He joined the RAF in February 1941 and received his wings in June that year after undergoing training in the USA. He was posted to Bomber Command as first pilot of a Wellington bomber and had flown 25 operations over Germany by the time he disappeared, including raids on Hamburg, Dusseldorf, Bremen and Essen. Mr Randle was praised by his superiors for his coolness in difficult situations. On one occasion he managed to safely land his plane, despite it being on fire, while his crew discharged the plane's bombs just three seconds before fire would have engulfed them.



Lymptstone home guard: Back row (l-r) Lloyd England, George Morrish, Vick Norton, Tom Stamps. Front row Alf Langmead, Jack Haydon, Cap. Young, Dick Adams, Fred Blight, Richard Vanstone.

October 31, 1942

There was much rejoicing in Lymptstone with the news that missing pilot Bill Randle was safe and back in England. Again, no details were released of how Bill made it back to the UK, but it was revealed that one of Bill's crew was now a prisoner of war. Bill's family had been inundated with letters of support from his old school friends, all confident he would emerge unscathed. One said: "When he was at school, Bill was always a genius at getting out of trouble." Bill sent his mother a telegram to wish her a happy birthday on October 24.

April 24, 1943

War may have forever changed the lives of Lymptstone's human residents, but for the birds on the River Exe it was business as usual. Mad-keen bird watcher and village resident Richard Adams reported a bumper flock of golden-eyed ducks on the estuary. Eight of these birds wintered there in 1943, compared to just three in previous years. The smew, a species of duck, also returned to the river. This breed of diving duck was normally only seen during harsh winters, but 1943 saw a male and three females nest on the Exe.

May 1, 1943

Lymptstone staged a flag day to raise money for the United Aid to China Fund. The parish council also organised a whist drive and the two events netted £51 8s 5d.

June 19, 1943

Lympstone First Boys' Brigade celebrated its diamond jubilee. The group staged a display featuring club swinging, physical training, parallel bars and singing.

September 11, 1943

The funeral of a village war-hero was held. Lieutenant Arthur Lennard was second in command of the Lympstone home guard, a position he had held since the force's inception in May 1940. Mr Lennard served in the Royal Navy during World War One and lost a leg as a result of severe wounds. After the war, an accident permanently damaged his remaining foot, but despite his misfortune he was renowned for his cheery nature. More than 50 people attended his funeral.

April 15, 1944

Thieves broke into Lympstone railway station. They got in through a window and tried to force open the safe, but failed and so left with 'little booty'.

May 13, 1944

A potato shaped like a pig helped Lympstone's Mrs Vanstone raise £1 5s 1d for the British Red Cross Society. Mrs Vanstone also exhibited another potato shaped like a rat.

June 10, 1944

Lympstone staged Salute the Solider Week. The week began with a dance at the village hall, followed by a coffee morning the next day and a display by the boys' brigade in the evening. Lympstone Home Guard staged a procession through the village to Cliff Field, while children from the village primary school followed with a fancy dress parade. Some of the prize winners were Dorothy Vickery (Russian peasant maid), Brenda Hutchings (newspaper boy), Christine Litton (Miss America), May Stone (Red Cross nurse), and Alan Rolls (Indian brave). The festival's climax was a whist drive on the Saturday night. The previous week, the annual Furry Dance raised £26 1s for the Lympstone's Prisoners of War Fund. The Topsham Band headed the dance, which was again led by Mr T Kerslake and Mrs C Tolman.

June 24, 1944

Sympathy was offered to the family of Bernard Palfrey, 20, of Sowdenia, Lympstone, who died of his wounds while fighting the Japanese in Burma. He joined the army in December 1942 and was sent to Asia as part of the Devonshire Regiment. Prior to joining up he worked for village philanthropist Sir Garbutt Knott at Courtlands. His twin brother Rodney was serving in the RAF in Rhodesia.

July 29, 1944

Lympstone lost another son when Private Ralph Bennett, 23, was killed fighting in Normandy. Mr Bennett was serving in an airborne division. He was a former member of Lympstone Football Club.

June 15, 1945

Lympstone's war heroes were welcomed home at a victory dinner at the village hall. Vice-Admiral Sir Arthur Peters was joined by more than 150 guests. The meal began in respectful silence while the names of villagers who had lost their lives in combat during the war were read out. Sir Arthur



Bernard Palfrey, 20, of Sowdenia, Lympstone, who died of his wounds while fighting the Japanese in Burma.



said: "There is a spirit abroad that is apt to forget and belittle our magnificent victory. That is, perhaps, rather natural, and due to shortages of food and materials, inconvenience and hardships and rationing. "But at the same time it only requires a moment's contemplation of what would have been their lot had we not achieved victory to realise how utterly thankful they should be. So this victory should be a time of very great rejoicing."

CARNIVAL ATMOSPHERE: VE Day celebrations outside the Swan Inn, formerly the Railway Hotel.