

THIS WAS CHRISTCHURCH IN 1855

THIS is the one hundred and tenth year of publication of the Christchurch Times; the first Issue appeared on June 30, 1855. What was the town like in those days? A past editor of the Christchurch Times anticipated that question and in June 1915 wrote his reminiscences of the town over the years from 1855 to 1915.

He was George Marshall, who, nine years after the founding of the newspaper became successively manager, editor and proprietor, and served it for 50 years and six months.

Here, for the readers of 1965, are George Marshall's memories of 1855 and subsequent years. What was the condition of things in Christchurch and its neighbourhood when the first number of the Christchurch Times was issued on 30th June, 1855, just sixty years ago? It would not be contrary in fact to say that in many ways it was simply deplorable. Just think of it! There was no railway within seven miles of either Christchurch or Bournemouth. The people of the latter place were, however, considering a parliamentary proposal for establishing an Improvement Commissioners district with a radius of half-a-mile from the beach at the foot of Bath Hill, which they succeeded in obtaining the following year.

In Christchurch itself, the old town hall blocked the major portion of the roadway at the junction of High and Castle Streets. Bargates was similarly blocked by the old Country House inn, and other ramshackle buildings; the town was practically unlighted; the cemetery had not come into existence, and burials took place in the old burial grounds close to the places of worship. The indoor paupers were housed in the "Red House", as it is now known, and some mud buildings which adjoined it, now the site of a garden; the board of Guardians consisting of ten elected members, and the resident justices of the peace *ex officio* administered the poor law and doled out the scanty allowances to the poor. The roads where they were not governed by turnpike trusts, were looked after by a Highway Board elected at a vestry meeting, one for each tithing, who had a delightful practice of putting down pieces of trees on unparelled portions of the roads and streets, so as to compel horses and vehicles to wear in new gravel placed upon other portions.

CATTLE WANDERED

Sanitary conveniences were very sparsely provided, and in many cases were common for half a street. There was no Stour Road (or Tuckton Bridge) no Portfield Road, no Beaconsfield Road or Spring Gardens, Station Road, or Fairfield; Avon Park had not been laid out and Jumpers Road was often a muddy track across a ploughed field. Sopers Lane and Wick Lane were sump holes, Quomps was a swamp, and Creedy Path was often impassable for the same reason. Portfield had not been enclosed, and was an open space in which cattle wandered at will from August till February in every year.

We are not vain enough to suppose that the establishment of our journal caused improvements such as have taken place since, but certain it is that progress has been considerable since that event happened. In 1859 the present Town Hall was built and the encumbrance of which mention has been made was removed from the street. The enclosure of Portfield in 1867 opened up for building purposes that large tract of land, and about the same time frequent outbreaks of fire disposed of much that was undesirable in Bargates, and it began to show signs of improvement. The old railway station was opened in 1862, and visitors to Bournemouth began to arrive and were taken thither by omnibus by a route through the Pit into Barrack Road. In 1870 the single line was extended to Bournemouth, the three-horse bus was disestablished, and in 1885 the line was doubled, the new railway

station opened. The new roads across the enclosed Portfield, the recreation ground, and the erection of Tuckton Bridge were indications of further development. That same enclosure gave opportunity to Land Societies to lay out building estates, and the trustees of several of the charities displayed a readiness to grant long leases and so gave an impetus to building. At Purewell and Stanpit, and at Whitehall gardens, and later at Fairfield similar facilities were made available, with the result of increasing the population three or four fold, and giving to that population, better accommodation than had formerly been the case. A later development in that same direction has arisen in Stour Road, and the streets abutting upon that road, and all along the tram route there has been a sensible addition of better class residences. The rateable value of the borough which at the date of the first Charter in 1886 stood at some £12,000 or £13,000, is now standing with the added area of 1912 at something like £32 and a quarter thousand, the latest figures showing for the original boundary £25,781 5s., and the added boundary an additional £6,481 15s

INHABITANTS

While these material improvements have been brought about, there has been much inevitable change in the personnel of the inhabitants, and men and women born in the latter half of the 18th century who were actively pursuing their allotted task at the time of our nativity have gone the way of all flesh, and since then the second generation has lived out their little day, and departed, and a third is rapidly passing away. What of a fourth? Have they the grip and shrewdness of their forefathers?

But to proceed: the parliamentary representation in 1855 was in the hands of the late Admiral Walcott, who had secured the seat on the retirement of Admiral Harris, grandfather of the present Earl of Malmesbury, on his appointment to the embassy at The Hague in 1852, his brother, the then Earl Malmesbury, being Minister for foreign affairs under Earl Derby. It was currently reported at the time that Admiral Walcott was one of those who disputed the claim that Christchurch was the pocket borough of a certain noble house, was elected upon the strength of that dispute, and was re-elected time after time without opposition until he had sat for thirteen years. In 1865, however, an opponent appeared and a contest took place, Admiral Walcott retaining his seat by 68 votes. But those were days of restricted suffrages, the total polled by the candidates being 354 only. Political historians will be aware of the fact that in the next year Lord Russell was defeated on his Bill for the extension of the suffrage and in 1867 Mr. Disraeli carried his Bill for household suffrage in boroughs. Before that measure came into operation in 1868, however, Admiral Walcott had died.

His opponent of 1865, however, had given out that he would test the new electorate to be created under that measure by coming forward as a candidate for election. He was opposed by Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, whom he defeated by 49 votes. Sir Henry came to live in the neighbourhood, and he and his friends began the development of Boscombe, which was then outside Bournemouth. The Member for Christchurch, it is not too much to say, neglected his duties and his interest in Christchurch, so that it was not unexpected, that when the election of 1874 came that Sir Henry Drummond Wolff became Member for the borough. In this case, again, something happened — was it not in the Town Hall?—that Sir Henry when next heard of as a parliamentary candidate, it was not for Christchurch, but for Portsmouth.

The story that got about at the time that Sir Henry escaped from the Town Hall, when an adverse vote to him was carried, by the window was never true. He did, however, make a hurried escape by the side door, and from that day sought pastures new. At the election of 1880 Sir Horace, afterwards Lord Davey, became the Member, and certainly did not deserve the rejection he received in 1885, when he was defeated by Mr. Baring Young. Mr. Baring Young won another election in 1886 but in 1892 he had given place to Mr. Abel H. Smith,

who in 1895 had given place to Mr. Kenneth Balfour, who also won the Khaki election in 1900. Mr. Acland Allen became Member in 1906, but in 1910 he was displaced by the present Member, Mr Henry P. Croft. The electorate has grown enormously during this period, and is now very nearly as many thousands as it was hundreds at the time of the 1868 election.

CHURCH LIFE

There have been enormous changes in the ecclesiastical side of things in the same period. The late Rev. William Francis Burrows filled the post of Vicar at the time we first saw the light, but very shortly afterwards he went to reside at Whitchurch, and affairs were conducted by the late Rev. Zachary Nash, M.A., who held up to the time of Mr. Burrows' death in 1871, the post of Curate-in-charge, in which office he so won the affections of the parishioners that men of all denominations joined in a memorial to the patrons of the living to prefer him to the Vicariate, which he held until his death in 1883.

He was succeeded by the late Rev. Thomas Henry Bush, M.A., who followed closely the paths trodden by his predecessors and won and retained to his dying day the esteem and regards of the people of the town and district. Since then the Vicarage has been held by Canon Cooke Yarborough, and the present incumbent, the Rev. E. W. Leachman. During the period under review, church buildings have been erected in all directions, but at the beginning there was no church at Mudeford, no Mission Hall at Purewell, no village room at Stanpit, or at Jumpers.

In fact, over the old Congregational Chapel standing on the site of the present in Millhams Street and an old Wesleyan Chapel on the site of the present one at Purewell were the only places of worship existing in the town. The Roman Catholics worshipped at Burton Green, in what is now a Congregational Chapel, and the Baptists Chapel was at Parley Green. There were no congregations of Brethren, and the Salvation Army had not begun to exist. The Rev. Joseph Fletcher became the Minister of the Congregational Church some half a dozen years earlier and eleven years later the present structure in Millhams Street began to be erected, was opened in the following year, and within a short period the new church was declared free of debt.

Mr. Fletcher, after a lengthened illness of over three years, and illness either originated or at least aggravated by a drowning catastrophe at Mudeford some few months previously when no less than seven of Mr. Fletcher's youthful pupils simultaneously lost their lives while bathing. Mudeford up till that time had the reputation of being a safe bathing place, and might have been but for territorial prejudices a South Coast Watering place years before more pretentious places then unknown. However, this catastrophe brought about the retirement of Mr. Fletcher, who was succeeded in time by the late Rev. J.W. Walker, M.A., the Rev. William Houghton (during whose ministry the Lecture Hall and the Boys' School in Millhams Street, were erected as well as the Manse in Barrack Road), the Rev. W. T. Moreton, the Rev. James Leamont and the present Minister—the Rev. Henry Coley.

The present Baptist Chapel is the second of its name, and is of somewhat recent construction, the present pastor, the Rev. R. J. Peden, having been responsible for its erection. The building which it replaced was erected by the first pastor, the Rev. Henry Viney Gill on his coming to reside in Christchurch in 1874, and who carried it on jointly with his other charge at Parley Green. Since then other congregations have been established in the town and neighbourhood, and the Wesleyan body designates a circuit including several village chapels as well as the chapels of that denomination at Lymington and Ringwood. These extensions of religious activity have been inaugurated during the period of our journalistic history.

EDUCATION

Facilities for elementary education have been largely added to as well. In 1855 boys and girls were taught in a building standing in High Street approached by flights of stone steps. Other schools were those in Millhams Street, in which were taught the girls on the ground floor, and the boys on the upper floor of a two storey building then standing, where is now the Lecture Hall, with a small building nearer the river in the same street, for infants. In St. Michael's loft some forty boys were taught in what was known as a "Free" School. There was no school at Purewell or Mudeford, which were provided at a later period; as were also the ranges of school buildings in Wick Lane, and in Millhams Street. They were also the days of voluntary attendance, and school pence, to which must in truth be added corporal punishment for the infraction of school regulations. It is a moot question whether we have yet arrived at a perfect, or even a satisfactory, solution of the educational problem.

Comparing the condition of things as has been described with those existing today, it must be admitted that great progress has been made. That condition of things was not satisfactory to the thinking men of that day. There was a material discontent, which at times made itself manifest, and as time went on had its effect even upon the mass of inert life apparent upon every hand. The outrageous provision in the Vestry proceedings of the plural vote had in the Church rate contests of slightly earlier period arouse considerable hostility, and had suited in a practical abandonment of the compulsory principle, anterior to the abolition of Church rates by law. But the effect was destined to be more lasting in its results.

Improvements were from time to time made to remedy the more glaring defects. Elections to the public offices were challenged as they arose, and progressive men were gradually imported into these bodies. Under the provisions of the Public Health Act of 1875 an application was made for the formation of a Local Board district but without success. Sir Charles Dilkes un-reformed Corporations Bill was passed in Parliament and a further movement was made. In that measure Christchurch was included in a schedule as a place which was entitled to a charter of incorporation, and was not to be extinguished as some minor corporations were if the inhabitants took certain steps. Christchurch up to this time had had a prescriptive corporation with a Mayor and burgesses, possessed property and other prescriptive rights and privileges.

A Memorial to the Privy Council was therefore prepared and forwarded, setting out a boundary very much like the boundary of the present borough, and an enquiry followed. A somewhat unscrupulous opposition arose, with the result that the prayer of the memorial was refused. However, the promoters were by no means crushed. A second memorial was prepared, a more restricted boundary was chosen, thereby disarming the opposition of the more influential and moneyed opponents, and on an enquiry the Charter was granted, and the Town Council came into being on the 1st November, 1886. Without cost to the locality for the Treasury returned the fees which the Charter had cost. The more recent extension need not be referred to at length here. The result of the agitation for recognition as an incorporation is apparent to all in the improved condition of the lighting of the roadways and streets and the general efficiency pervading all departments.

OTHER MEANS

In the passing of the years changes have been wrought in the business habits of the town. A list of carriers to and from Christchurch was a feature of the earlier issues, and quite a long list it was. Gradually but surely this has diminished to extinction. Not that business has decreased, on the contrary it has increased prodigiously, and other means have been devised for the distribution of the commerce of the district.

The opening of more than a dozen railway stations within the parliamentary borough and close to its boundaries has supplied facilities which were absolutely lacking in the earlier days, and the establishment of the tramway system has rendered possible communications then undreamed of: The growth of the railway facility and the dates of that growth has already been dealt with, but the establishment of the tramways and the fatuous opposition to them calls for some remark. In 1898 the first proposals for the laying down of tramways was made, and under the Light Railways Acts the Light Railways Commissioners were moved to hold an enquiry for the establishment of a line from Poole to Christchurch with contributory branch lines.

So formidable was the opposition by the Bournemouth Town Council to the scheme that the Commissioners refused sanction. A second application in the following year met with a similar result. The position taken up by Bournemouth then was that nothing of the kind was required in that town. When, however, the promoters applied for parliamentary powers, a rival scheme confined to Bournemouth was put forward by the Town Council of that borough. The House of Commons Committee decided upon both schemes going forward, giving powers to Bournemouth to link up with the lines outside, and so to establish a through route from Christchurch to Poole, within a certain period. Before that period had elapsed, the original promoters and the Bournemouth Town Council had agreed to amalgamate the schemes by purchase.

The Christchurch Town Council, fearing that in the bargain thus made they would be deprived of the advantages they had secured under the Bill, opposed the amalgamation scheme in Parliament and secured the tramways. Although not to the extent as regards route that would have been secured under the original Bill. During the period covered by these proceedings the electric light was projected and fully established in the district.

NAVAL SUCCESS

Notable events have not frequently happened in our town. Shortly after the close of the Crimean War a public reception was given to Admiral Lord Lyons, a cousin of the then Member for the borough. Admiral Walcott. An address was presented to the gallant Admiral referring to his naval success in connection with the transport of troops to the Black Sea ports, and for this purpose a huge platform was erected in High Street at its widest part, which was crowded. Triumphal arches were also erected at various points on the route from Winkton House, where Lord Lyons was the guest of Admiral Walcott, and much enthusiasm prevailed.

Another memorable event, a record of which may be seen in the western side of the cemetery of a sadder nature, was after the series of wrecks which occurred at Mudeford and on the western shore after the terrific gale of the 11th February, 1866 — when no less than twelve sailors were thrown lifeless on the beach.

Christchurch has produced many worthy sons, but few of them have ever risen to eminence in any walk of life, and during the existence of this journal scores of friendships, and hosts of acquaintances have held converse and exchanged confidences with those who were responsible for its conduct, who have ever desired to be courteous and pleasant to all with whom they have come in contact, with an entire absence of ill will towards any.

Its originators were the late Rev. Joseph Fletcher and Messrs. Henry and Risdon D. Sharp as has been said on the 30th June, 1855. Nine years later Mr. George Marshall became successively manager, editor and proprietor, and in these capacities served its interests for fifty and a half years.