

HIGHCLIFFE 1958 (Part 1).

The story of Highcliffe is rich and full of romantic history. It is a story which revolves round a castle, once described as "a fairy palace by the sea."

And of the many famous historical personalities who visited the castle some of them were drawn by the enchantment of the spot.

When the third Earl of Bute stood on the cliff at its highest point, just opposite the Needles, the full beauty of the landscape caught his enthusiastic eye. "It is fairest outlook in all England," was his remark.

He lost no time sending for his architect, Robert Adam, and there and then commissioned him to build a house.

The Earl was a keen botanist and had been hunting the New Forest for some rare specimens. The end of his search brought him to the fringe of the forest and the edge of the sea.

A wonderful prospect it was in those days, when only the fishermen's huts at the entrance of the harbour, and a few discreet houses at Mudeford arrested the eye for a moment till the square tower of the Priory came in view and, beyond, the blue, undulating lines of the Purbeck Hills.



A photo of the waterfall at Chewton Glen or Bunny, a favourite spot for holiday makers.

The Bunny, as it is called locally, extends from the bridge, where the Lymington Road crosses the brook, to the sea, and a footpath winds its way through the whole length of the beautiful wooded glen.

About half way down the Bunny is Mill House, now a charming private residence, but once a water mill.

WENT TO AMERICA.

It was from Highcliffe that Lord Bute and his youngest daughter, Louisa, watched the vessel that bore away his favourite son, Charles, when he went out to America to join his regiment, then engaged in the War of Independence.

Sadly these two turned away from the horizon, empty now of the sailing convoy. For Louisa it meant not only parting from an adored brother, but from that brother's greatest friend, William Medows, who had won Louisa's heart, only to be told by the young lady's parent that he was too insignificant to be considered as a suitor for her hand.

If there are ghosts, then the cliff walk at Highcliffe must surely be haunted by the wistful Louisa, who renounced a lover at the behest of a father, and to the end of a very long life abjured marriage, devoting to friends and relatives those considerable gifts which earned for her the profound esteem of Sir Walter Scott. She was one of the few initiated into the secret of the authorship of the Waverley novels, but she never succumbed to Sir Walter's earnest persuasions to publish writings of her own.

Lord Bute's death in 1792 was indirectly caused by the pursuit of his favourite hobby. Reaching after a rare specimen on the steep face of the cliff, he slipped and fell, injuring himself internally. His death ensued two years later.

The house did not long survive him, owing to the fact that his son who inherited it, Charles the soldier, could not afford to keep up so great a mansion and because his professional duties precluded residence there.

So an 11-day sale scattered the contents and the building was pulled down, the site reverting to its original loneliness—the nesting place of wild birds, the haunt of the foxes and the chosen landing ground of smugglers.

The present Highcliffe Castle was built in 1830-40 by the Ambassador Lord Stuart de Rothesay with materials of the Manoir des Andelys, near Rouen, to replace a house built in 1773 by his grandfather, John, third Earl of Bute, the Prime Minister.

Lord Stuart de Rothesay, a great diplomat, retired to the present castle. His two daughters, Charlotte and Louisa, were both noted beauties. Charlotte married Viscount Canning, the first Viceroy of India and Louisa married the Marquis of Waterford.

In the second half of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century Highcliffe Castle had many distinguished guests and was on occasions, let to tenants, including Sir Harold Harmsworth and Mr. Gordon Selfridge.

CROWN PRINCE'S VISIT.

The Crown Prince of Sweden paid a visit in 1879 and between 1880 and 1890 the Prince and Princess of Wales with the family came over from Osborne on several occasions when visiting the Queen at her Isle of Wight residence.

In 1881 they brought with them the Prince's sister, who had married the Crown Prince of Germany. Other visitors were the Duke of Connaught and King Alfonso of Spain.

A very welcome guest in 1900 was King Edward VII and in 1907 at his special request, the Castle was placed at the disposal of his nephew, Wilhelm II, Emperor of Germany.

The Kaiser duly arrived with a very large retinue and spent three weeks there during November and December of that year. Although he was in daily communication with Berlin, the visit was intended to be a sort of rest cure and the Emperor thoroughly enjoyed his stay.

He visited the well-known sights and a memento of his visit to Christchurch Priory can still be seen as he signed the visitors' book and it remains open at that page behind a glass in a recess on the wall of the south choir aisle.

It is said that when the Kaiser visited the Priory he remarked that the organ was "shabby", and added: "When I am King of England I will buy you a new organ"!

Owner of the Castle at that time was Col. Stuart Wortley, with whom the Kaiser had long talks. The following year the Kaiser invited Col. Stuart Wortley to be present during the annual Grand Army manoeuvres. The gist of their conversations were subsequently published and created a far different impression from that anticipated by the impetuous ruler of the Reich.

"THE MAGIC OF HIGHCLIFFE"

In an article on Highcliffe and the Stuarts, The Hon. Mrs. E. Stuart Wortley wrote: "The magic of Highcliffe lies in the fabric of its beauty, made up of the warm sands, curving line of the bay, white sharply-cut outline of the Needles against the blue sea and sky.

"And the rich human nature of the lives lived here, men of action, frustrated in their highest aspirations, women of surpassing loveliness of face, radiantly endowed.

"No one having known this casket of sweet memories will ever forget its charm, the calm moonlit summer nights, the scent of the magnolias, the rustle of the ilexes, and shadows of the heavy-branched pinus

insignis." Highcliffe Castle was taken over by the Claretian Missionary Fathers in 1953 and is a training college for the priesthood.

There have been several minor alterations to the building but I was told that it is the intention of the Order to leave the fabric of the Castle, both inside and out, intact and restore the grounds to their original beauty. The great hall is now a chapel and the handrails of the famous staircase are incorporated in the choir loft. Nearly opposite the Castle gates and approached by a very fine avenue of ilex, or evergreen oak trees, is the Parish Church, built in 1843 and dedicated to St. Mark.

"NINEPENNY TREES"

The avenue of trees are said to have been planted by Lord Stuart de Rothesay who contributed a considerable amount towards the building of the church. These trees used to be known locally as the "ninepenny trees", the price of the young saplings having been ninepence each.

First stone of the church laid by the future Lady Waterford, who painted the east window, whilst her sister, who was to become Lady Canning, was responsible for the two smaller ones on the north and south sides of the sanctuary.

From 1838 until the church was built, services were conducted in a room in Lymington Road by the Rev. John Dobson, a curate of Christchurch. This is now part of the Highcliffe School, for it was laid down that whenever a church was built in the village the room should become a school.

The Rev. R. T. Barnett, Vicar of Highcliffe, has in his possession an old harmonium used at the services in the school room.

For the first 20 years, St. Mark's was a daughter church of the Priory with its own incumbent, the Rev. Dobson. When he died, the connection with Christchurch was severed and Highcliffe was established as a completely independent parish, the first vicar being the Rev. Albert Aitken. Funds were raised and the Vicarage was built in 1862.

The church was built in a similar way to Highcliffe Castle, the Communion rails and reredos being contrived out of Continental woodwork and the pulpit is reputed to have come from the refectory of the Abbey of Jumieges. Around the chancel of the church are tablets to the memory of the family of Lord and Lady Stuart de Rothesay. The church was lengthened and a new roof put on towards the end of the last century and the present chancel was extended about 30 years ago. Verger of the church is Mr. Kenneth Whitcombe, who succeeded his father in the position.

50th ANNIVERSARY.

In June this year the 50th anniversary of Highcliffe Methodist Church will be celebrated. Prime movers of the Free Church in the village were Mr. and Mrs. John Frampton and a group of their friends.

They began by meeting in Mr. Frampton's workshop behind the present church. When they decided to build a chapel they linked up with the Curzon Road Primitive Methodist Circuit in Bournemouth. The church is now in the Bournemouth Methodist Circuit.

In the beginning members were very few. The church was under the charge of a Bournemouth minister and services were conducted by a lay pastor. Serving the church in this way for many years was Pastor Matthew Hill.

A number of retired ministers then took care of the church and services were conducted by the Rev. John H. Bedford, followed by the Rev. Thomas Jukes. In 1954 the Rev. John Myer was ordained minister in full connection.

In recent years the church has increased its membership to 107 and the Sunday school, started about 10 years ago by Mr. Frank Knight, has grown to a strength of about 80.

For a long time there has been a Women's Bright Hour, one of its pioneers being Mrs. Ethel Birch, who recently retired from the position of president. Membership is now about 50.

A Wesley Guild was formed in 1956 and two months ago a Boys' Brigade was started, captained by Mr John Davies. A choir of 18 members has also been formed this year, under the leadership of Miss E. Hannah.

NEW CHURCH.

In this golden jubilee year members are reaching the stage when they hope to be able to start building a new church on the present site to seat 250 people. The old church will be converted into a hall and extended so that it will be capable of seating about 180 people.

Another large impressive house with an interesting history is Marydale Convent, formerly named Wolhayes. The house was once owned by a Miss Mills, grand-daughter of Glyn Mills, the famous banker.

The story is told that the house had a wonderful wine cellar, but when Miss Mills took possession she bricked it up. When she died there was revealed a well-stocked cellar of wines and spirits!

It is also said there was a very pure stream running through the grounds and Miss Mills used to send her servants to fetch the water for her early morning cup of tea.

The Convent moved to the house in 1955 and although only minor alterations have been made to the house itself, a magnificent job has been made of the conversion of stables into modern classrooms. Further extensions are planned with the intention of providing an independent grammar school, ,

In Highcliffe Castle grounds and situated on the main Lymington Road is the house known as "The Hoy", probably one of the oldest houses in the parish. It was originally an inn known as the Isle of Wight Hoy, after the type of boats which used to ply between the Island and the mainland. The house was previously thatched.

One of the oldest residents of Highcliffe who has seen many changes during her life in the village is Mrs. E. M. Benham, who, on her retirement in 1955, was one of the oldest traders in Highcliffe. She had a drapery business in Lymington Road. Mrs. Benham moved to Highcliffe from Boscombe over 60 years ago and among many of the notable people she has served are Lady Curzon Howe and Lady Hilston. Her sister, who helped in the shop, repaired the Kaiser's coat during his visit to Highcliffe. The biggest change she has seen during her long business career is transport. There was no delivery in the early days and Mrs. Benham often walked to Hinton Admiral station to collect goods sent by rail. And there was a time when 12 oil lamps attracted customers to her shop which had the biggest window space in Highcliffe.

FIRST DELIVERY LORRY.

When parcel delivery by horse and cart was introduced one of the drivers was Mr. Tom Hopkins, of Chewton Common Road. The roads were gravel in those days and Mr. Hopkins later became one of the first to drive a delivery lorry in the village.

Highcliffe has many interesting personalities. One of them is Mr. W. Gordon Palmer, who has on many occasions, stood firm for the preservation of the village's historical possessions and its natural beauty.