

LIMELIGHT ON POKESDOWN

Words by TONY CRAWLEY Pictures by ROLAND EVANS

THEY WON WITH PETITION

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POKESDOWN conjures up many pictures in people's minds. It's Little Pokesdown to most—unfair really, as it's a widespread, bustling area of industry and social life. It's the place where the trains don't stop — to those who are glad they don't.

And, let's be honest, to the majority, it's the subject of ridicule in many a joke. Example: Q: Where are you spending your holiday? A: Pokesdown by the sea. And so on.

It goes without saying, these ideas are wrong.

Pokesdown is older than Bournemouth itself. Of course, so are most areas around here. Only in this case, Pokesdown happens to be the one older still — older even than the areas older than Bournemouth.

It was here in feudal times. It was there under its present name as long ago as 1734. It stood on its own as an Urban District Council while Bournemouth's newly formed Council dallied around for nearly nine years before absorbing it.

Pokesdown today has a railway-station, a fire station, parish church and school. It has crowded shopping areas in more than one long street— a cinema too. It has its inns—and no doubt for some, its outs.

But make no mistake about it, Pokesdown is no lowly hamlet. It's a busy place, serving the needs of many.

Even as far back as 1858, it had enough of these features to rate it as the largest community within the area known as The Liberty of Westover. And the population then was only 70.

Its history, then, is quite immense. Its future? Well, there's the rub. This could be very uncertain. But before going further, I'll make one point clear—this feature is **NOT** concerned with what might happen to Pokesdown **IF** that big, bad road comes through. Instead, let's look at Pokesdown past and present.....

Tything



COUN. MICHAEL GREEN
Campaigner for Pokesdown in
Bournemouth Town Council,
champion pint-puller for the coun-
try—and licensee of the New Bell
Inn beside the railway.

In the latter half of the 18th century Pokesdown was a tything (along with Iford), forming part of the parish of Christchurch—within the Liberty of Westover.

This was the area covering six tythings in all (Muscliff, Muccleshell, Throop, Holdenhurst, Pokesdown and Tuckton with Wick, and Pokesdown with Iford), being roughly the site of the eventual County Borough of Bournemouth, with the part which until 1930, was in the County of Dorset.

In the feudal days, this Westover area constituted another "liberty" — belonging to the honour of Christchurch. It had been a royal estate, and before the Norman conquest had been held by Earl Tostig.

In the Domesday Book, it is included with the manor called Holeest (Holdenhurst) entered as the King's.

Later, Henry the First granted it, along with the rest of the honour of Christchurch, to Richard de Revers, and it has always remained part of his estate.

For many centuries, Christchurch and Westover were administered as a single "hundred." The slight breakaway came in the year 1500, when Westover became a separate unit, though for many purposes, still included with the Hundred of Christchurch.

Purchase



In 1708, Westover was purchased by one, Sir Peter Mews—and so the Lord of this manor at this closing half of the 18th century was Sir George Ivison Tapps (an ancestor of Sir George Meyrick, of Hinton Admiral) who had inherited it through the female line of Sir Peter.

(As mentioned in the recent Tuckton feature, it was Sir George Tapps' son— Sir George Elliot Thomas Gervis Meyrick—who created most of today's Bournemouth with Christchurch architect, Benjamin

Ferrey).

The Pokesdown tything consisted of 21 allotments. For this was rural land.

Pokesdown's most famous residence, Stourfield House (now part of the Douglas House Home in Southbourne-road) was built earlier, in 1776, by Edmund Bott.

He was a barrister, an authority on the poor law and a Justice of the Peace for the county. And, so it's said, "entertained some of the best men in the neighbourhood in a more intellectual fashion than was customary at the other homes of that time."

Bott died in 1788, and Stourfield was snapped up by Sir George Tapps. During the next 50 years, it was occupied in succession by a number of important tenants:

The Countess of Strathmore, widow of the ninth earl, 1796-1800; Sir Henry Harpur, 1801-1807; and Lieut.-Col. Sir William Maxwell, 1810-17.

In 1844, the house was bought by Admiral William Charnock Popham— who as will be seen later, was connected with the birth of St. James' Church—in whose family the residence stayed until the whole estate was broken up in 1893.

By 1870 considerable progress had been made in Pokesdown—mainly due to the natural expansion of a long-established agricultural community which had sprung up around both Stourfield House and the nearby Pokesdown Farm.

Railway

Also playing its part in the rise of Pokesdown, though, was the arrival in a big way of Bournemouth itself— and in particular, the coming of the railway, which was responsible for the workmen's cottages similar to those at Springbourne and Boscombe.

These were mostly sited around Seabourne-road—then Cobden-road. Cobden was a name, along with those of Hampden and Cromwell, given to other neighbourhood roads, which indicated something of the great independent character of the Pokesdown inhabitants of the time.

An independence associated with the long tradition of Congregationalism centred around the village chapel. This little church was by this time receiving new impetus, with the formation of Pokesdown in 1870, into a separate diaconate.

This was inaugurated by the appointment to the pastorate of the Rev. Elijah Pickford. He began his ministry in 1871 and was a much respected, indeed revered Pokesdown personality for the rest of his life.

So one way and another, Pokesdown had by these late 19th century years acquired something of the self-sufficiency which (before becoming part of Bournemouth) won the township the status of an Urban District.

And what a proud district it was. The largest community then existing in the Liberty of Westover area lying outside the boundary of the Bournemouth Commissioners . . . with its own parish church of St. James, the National School, Congregational chapel, Post Office, Mechanic's Institute and two inns—the New Bell and the Three Horseshoes (no longer existing), which had a blacksmiths' shop adjoining it.

Rumble

Pokesdown now sat still, quietly expanded, built further its independences — and waited for the rumblings in Bournemouth to cease.

The rumblings? It was in August 1890 that Bournemouth (2,414 acres; rateable value, £246,530) was granted its charter. First municipal elections were held on November 1—18 councillors representing six wards.

Nine years later Bournemouth (with 178 more acres; rateable value £300,000) became a County Borough. Proof indeed of the progress made once the Council had taken over from the Commissioners. Proof also of the demand for still wider power and growth.

So well before the turn of the century, it was clear indeed that Pokesdown would soon be absorbed.

This had, in fact, been proposed at Council in 1892, when it was agreed (by ten votes to three; six abstentions) that Pokesdown (and Winton) should join Bournemouth.

No steps, however, were taken to implement this for another **NINE** years.

Understandably the Pokesdownians were rather disgruntled by such a long waiting period.

Continuing on its own, Pokesdown was constituted as a civil parish in 1894, under the provision of the year's Local Government Act.

Eager

Two years later — no holding Pokesdown — the town became an Urban District. Winton following suit three years later, although having outstripped Pokesdown as regards population.

While Pokesdown — "one of those artisan communities" — had jumped from just over 2,000 to an estimated 5,500 in 1900, Winton housed 7,245 in 1899.

Still eager to even relinquish this Urban District status symbol and join forces with Bournemouth, the Pokesdown folk started a petition.

As has been proved in recent months, they're still good at petitions. And this one certainly worked. By 1901, they were absorbed, taken-over, accepted as part of the County Borough of Bournemouth.

A happy day for Pokesdown. Even happier for Bournemouth Council. Although faced as they are with that most recent petition and outcry against the Council, they may be not quite so happy today.

Pokesdown today is a big business centre — electrics seeming to be the most popular. Second-hand shops run a close second — they certainly attract the most window-gazers, rummagers and even eventual buyers.

The township also houses a Blind Centre in Harrington-road, a Deaf Centre in Morley-road—and the Civil Defence Centre in Seabourne-road.

The Astoria Cinema, in Christchurch-road, is owned by Ald. Marry Mears —part of his South Coast chain—and is quick to bring back successful new British and American films for their second local run.

How old is Pokesdown? The answer lies in the soil! For in 1909, several late Bronze Age burial grounds were unearthed at Hillbrow, Pokesdown — some years after the discovery of 97 urns containing fragments of burnt bone at Moordown's Redbreast-hill.

It's one of Puck's tales

WHEN it comes to trying to work out the actual origin of Pokesdown—the name, that is, not the place—all the experts on such matters become a mass of frowning doubts. It is, they have to admit, a very trying matter indeed.

Even ex-librarian David Young, whose Bournemouth area history is the sort of Bible on these matters, lets us down.

"A name of doubtful origin," he says. And we've already heard that before somewhere

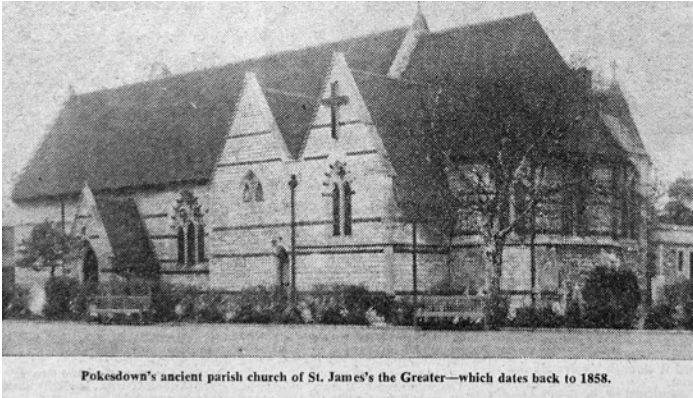
"Whether a corruption of some early name or not," he goes on, "it existed in its present form as Pokesdown as long ago as 1734."

Proof of this, for any sceptics who think the name is more modern, lies in the dusty pages of the Christchurch Poor Rate Book for that year. One item referred to "The Lady's Mews for Bugby's at Pokesdown." So there!

Mr. Young then goes on to suggest that Pokesdown could be a corruption of Pooks Down. Now this is the most popular theory. Many people are sure that Pooks (or Puck's) Down it was—referring to the fairies living, playing and dancing merrily on the downs in question.

Really, this is just another of Puck's Tales! Mr. Young, for instance, prefers the view that the very adjective "Pooks" was in fact nothing to do with fairies, or even goblins of any kind—but was the dialect word of that day and age for "hay cock."

THE PARISH OF THE FRIENDLIEST FOLK IN BOURNEMOUTH



LIKE everything else in Pokesdown, the parish Anglican church of St. James the Greater is historic. One look at the memorial gold plaques on the inside walls, a walk around the (now closed down) graveyard surrounding the church, will tell you this,

So many stories abound about the church. So many happenings. Yet so much has not been written down....

At least little has been recorded for posterity until recently. The vicar, the Rev. John V. Skinner, is also the head of a special parish team of historians—

who have spent years already in noting down and, compiling the full and complete story of St. James'.

"It's a long job," Mr. Skinner told me. "At first we had hoped to have it published to coincide with our centenary in 1958. But all the gathering, the checking, the writing, the assembling of it all is taking much more time than we originally anticipated.

"No matter." It has been fascinating work—and cannot be rushed, needless to say. The end is now in sight. "Yes, we think we'll be finished in time for publication this year. In fact, we already have some teams of typists at work on the final manuscripts."

Petition

It was back in 1854 that the first demands for a Pokesdown parish church were murmured—more than ten years after the arrival of the Congregational chapel.

The petition for the church (Pokesdown was then in the diocese of Christchurch) came from a group who had banded themselves together under the name: The Memorialists.

These included the Lord Malmesbury of the day—and Admiral William Charnock Popham, who went on to fight for the school as well. (Admiral Popham and his family are buried in the churchyard; and have just about the largest gold memorial plaque inside the church.

Within a few years the petition was accepted. The battle won. The church built — and consecrated for an 1858 opening, with the Rev. William Battersby as the first vicar.

As expected from such a vast demand, St. James' was an instant success. And 12 years later an aisle had to be added to make more room in the over-crowded building.

But as far as alterations—and other things—go, 1931 was the **BIG** year for St. James'. Just about everything happened. First some £10,000 was spent on modernising redevelopment.

Fortunate

Then the parish was split into three. All the proceeds from the sale of the Parkwood-road vicarage, being enough to purchase vicarages for the two new parishes of All Saints', Southbourne, and St. Andrew's, Bennett-road, Boscombe, plus the new St. James' Vicarage, in Harewood-avenue. Quite a business coup.

As Mr. Skinner points out, St. James' were very fortunate in having the Rev. Eric Southon as vicar that year. "He was a very clever man when it came to raising money," comments his successor.

"And following the division of the parish into three, he took charge of All Saints'. Later he left the area, to become the first Provost of Guildford Cathedral in 1936."

Today St. James' is a big, bustling, busy community. The churchgoers in the parish take part in such diverse group activities as the Women' Fellowship, Mothers' Union, Young Wives' Group, Church Choir Junior Church, Sunday School—and the Men's Society, which has a number of auxiliary groups covering gardening, art, golf and even archaeology.

Both young and old take part in special evenings set aside for dancing lessons, which is one of the most popular new items on the parish's heavy agenda. Meanwhile the women are very proud of their new

keep-fit classes. These started as a joke and have now developed into a must for the Young Wives in particular, who have even formed a special display team.

Family

Above all, the youngsters are given every possible encouragement in this parish. Even as babies they are welcome in the church. There is, for example, an annual (and very well attended) Pram Service, organised jointly by the Mothers' Union and the Young Wives' Group.

"Oh, yes," Mr. Skinner remarked with a smile, "we let the mother bring their babies into any service. At the parish communion service, the children go up to the rails with their parents and receive a special blessing

"The idea, you see, is to make the parish church a family unit. No one must be forgotten."

And, so it seems, no one is forgotten at St. James'—the parish called by many, the friendliest in all Bournemouth.

Trips on trolleys

UNTIL the mechanical age in transport arrived in January, 1900, Pokesdown had been the home for the stables of the Bournemouth, Boscombe and Westbourne Omnibus Company—the horse-drawn variety of omnibus, of course.

Two years later, the Bournemouth Corporation constructed the first tramlines from Pokesdown to the Lansdowne. The trams set off for their first trips in July.

But like the trams did away with the horse, the trollies did away with the trams. It was on May 13, 1933 that the trolley service began with an experimental route from the Square to Westbourne. Result: an outstanding success

So during the next two years, work continued on the full change-over.

THAT WAS IN 1795—THAT WAS

TURN the clock back. Far, far back. And imagine Pokesdown then. What was the general appearance of the place and its surrounds in ... let's say 1795, for instance?

Oh, yes, Pokesdown was still around in those olde days. Lying as the final outpost between Christchurch and Poole on the edge of the great open wilderness of heath that's now Bournemouth. One old journal tells:

"From Christchurch ... we proceeded on horseback towards Poole. After going about two miles on the high road, we turned off by the advice of a farmer, who told us we should find a much shorter way by going to the left, which however would not do for a carriage. We accordingly followed his direction till we came to the top of a high cliff, where we could not find the least track of a road. We were however in some degree recompensed by a most delightful view of the seas.

Noble scene

"After enjoying this noble scene, we turned our horses' heads in order to discover some road, which we at least effect. We rode as we thought in the direction towards Poole, for on the barren, uncultivated heath where we were, there was not a human being to direct us.

"We were not however mistaken, as after a most dreary ride, we found ourselves on the high road, from whence we looked down upon Poole and its environs."

Times, thankfully, have changed. No longer are the sights barren, uncultivated; dreary, maybe! And of course making the journey in 1963, there is no difficulty in finding the road . . . only the car-parks.

Boy Bishops go back to Middle Ages

PRINCE Philip's gold medals, and the Church Lads' Brigade aside, the greatest honour open to any boy at St. James's Church is to become Boy Bishop.

To take part in several services in a year, garbed in miniature robes exact in every detail to any real bishop's—having been elected to this position by all the other children in the parish.



Current boy bishop (No. 9) is 12-year-old Patrick Carter, youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. Neal Carter, of Christchurch-road. As is the custom, he was installed in time for Christmas, and this December, he will carry out the enthroning ceremony on the next lad chosen. As the actual idea of boy bishops goes right back to medieval times, it is very apt that Pokesdown is one of the only two parishes locally keeping up the custom.

The St. James' boy is chosen in time for Christmas services; though it is a summer feature of St. Christopher's Church, West Southbourne, coupled with a Summer Queen idea for the patronal festival.

"Naturally enough," explains Mr. Skinner, "it is a great honour for the lad chosen; something eagerly looked forward to by them all. The boy bishop is used in various services and events during the year. For instance, he will be on hand at the Christmas tree service and again at our harvest festival.

"And in the children's events of the year—pageants, processions and so forth—he will take part in full outfit: mitre, cope and crook."

Controversy

Two years ago—when the vicar's son, Stephen, was installed—the boy bishop ceremony ran into controversy, when the choirmaster-organist of All Saints' Church, Emscote, Warwick, attacked the Pokesdown scheme for "several inaccuracies," including the actual date of the ceremony.

However, Mr. Skinner defended himself at that time by declaring: "This Middle Ages tradition was abolished, like many others, during the Reformation. Other customs used to go along with the boy bishop idea—such as door-to-door collections. So Henry VIII stopped all that.

"These days in Britain, clergy still continue the admirable boy bishop plan, generally adopting it to fit in with their church year. In other words they begin it when they like—on any day.

Man at the top

THE tallest priest in the Bournemouth area—he tops 6ft. 6ins., and that's no tall story—the Rev. John Victor Skinner is only the seventh Vicar of St. James's in its 105 years of life. He took over the parish in 1953; his predecessor, the Rev. W. H. Fox Robinson, is now Vicar of Bournemouth's mother church, St. Peter's, built 15 years before St. James's.

Born in Cardiff 46 years ago, Mr. Skinner is married, with two children, Ruth 17, at secretarial college, and 13-year-old Stephen—a former Boy Bishop at the church—who goes to Boscombe Secondary School. They live together at the Vicarage, at 12 Harewood-avenue. Mr. Skinner was educated at Cardiff High School, the University of Wales, and went to St. Stephen's House, Oxford, in 1938. The following year he was made a deacon—being ordained priest in 1941.

His first curacy back home at Cardiff, was followed by others at Portishead and King's Norton—where he also acted as chaplain to the Monyhull Hall Hospital and Residential School. In 1950, he went to St. Alban's, Rochdale, and three years later came to Pokesdown—where one of his greatest successes has been the continuing of his Rochdale plan—bigger attendances at special Sunday morning family communion services.

His main interests both in and outside the church, is children, their education and their spare time. He is a member of the Winchester Diocesan Education Committee, and for the past five years has been the Anglican representative on the Bournemouth Education Committee. He serves as one of the 18 secondary school governors,

And as far as children and relaxation is concerned. Mr Skinner has such groups in the church's social life as the Girl Guides and the St. John Ambulance Brigade Nursing Cadets for the girls. And the boys are exceedingly well looked after in their Church Lads' Brigade activities. Chief among these being yet another pet delight of the vicar's—the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme

MAN OF SCHOOLING

IT'S the oldest school in Bournemouth. It's bang up to date, latest alterations costing £26,000. It is—St. James's Voluntary Primary School, Pokesdown.

And just like the vicar and the church, headmaster Mr. John Allsop has in recent months been compiling a detailed history of this remarkable school.

Man behind the founding of this and all other church schools in the borough was the Rev. A. Morden Bennett, vicar of St. Peter's church, Bournemouth from 1845-1880.

Within five years of taking over St. Peter's he was attending the foundation stone ceremony of St. Peter's School—and started plans for others in the eight other church centres established by him in the area—Pokesdown included.

In 1857, a Mission and school began there—and it is believed that part of the present school was the Mission Hall, probably the part of the classroom housing Form Three.

"The earliest records we possessed of the school history," Mr. Allsop told me, "are the old log books. These records go back to 1862 when the 'Revised Code of Regulations' for schools was introduced and it was obligatory to keep a Log Book."

First entry in the log covers the visit of one of her Majesty's Inspectors, the Rev. J. W. F. Nutt. His report to the committee, in a letter dated November 13, 1862, commented: "The school is going well in all aspects."

The premises were then the Pokesdown National School; its committee being: Admiral William Popham; the St. James' vicar, the Rev. W. Battersby; Mr. Morden Bennett, Mr. W.W. Farr and the Rev. W. F. Burrows.

Old days

And the pupils? School roll on November 24, 1862, was 49—taught by one mistress-in-charge, a Miss Amelia Dike, who had a monitor, an older child seconded from the Bournemouth National (St. Peter's) School, in charge of the infants.

Today there are 281 children—and a staff of eight teachers. And they leave at the age of 11 for another school—and not for good, like those old days.

Although the children may not admit it, they obviously have a better deal today. So do the teachers...

Their salary, a 100 years ago, came mainly from the parents—who paid a penny per child at school, the maximum being 4d. per family. This sum was subsidised by a grant from "My Lords of Bournemouth," depending on the number of children at school and the standard of attainment reached as assessed by a clergyman inspector.

So woe indeed to the unfortunate teacher receiving a bad report. This meant a salary cut or the sack for the one in charge.

The Education Act — and homework — came in 1870, making school compulsory from the age of five. Cleaning and potato picking were accepted as reasons for non-attendance. Lessons? The Three R's and Scripture. When Miss Dike resigned in 1871, Mr. C. Burge became Master-in-charge. He left after a year and Miss Emma Mills took over—the only assistance, still, being a pupil-teacher from the infants.

Imperative

As today, the school was then used as a polling station, a further cause of joy for the kiddies—a day off from school work, which was done, by the way, on slate. Writing paper or books were only issued for examinations.

As the number of pupils increased, the need of a larger school soon became imperative. And on November 3, 1874, the foundation stone was laid for the extensions—the building of the present east side as used by Form Two.

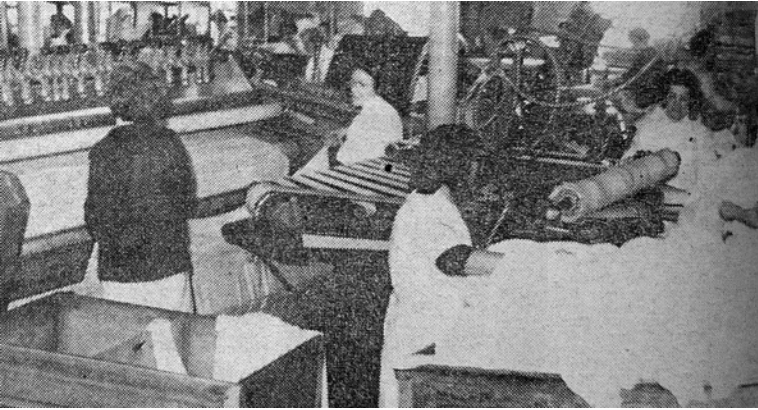
At one time during this building, the children had to be transferred to the Mechanics' Institute. But by April 15, 1875, the new school was opened.

The next few years saw more and more changes in staff—and great excitement on December 3, 1879, when a classroom caught fire and the floor was badly burned.

On October 13, 1881, a severe gale blew down a large tree in the playground. No one hurt. And the wood was sawn up to provide extra school fuel.

By 1886, costs were rising and the charge for attending school became 3d. per pupil: family maximum being 8d. Any child failing to pay up 3d. on a Monday morning was sent home until the money was paid.

Extensions



WHITER THAN WHITER THAN.....These sheets have been washed and now enter the £15,000 ironing machine at the New Era Laundry. Can you see yours.

Great unemployment in 1889 naturally created many cases of non-payment of school fees. Yet good attendances were encouraged by the introduction of certificates presented each quarter.

Two years previously the Infant School was opened; Miss Jane Kitley being headmistress for 25 years. This school was called St. James, while the junior and senior sections still clung to "The Pokesdown National School"

More teachers and extensions followed—Miss Henrietta Griffin succeeded Miss Kitley in 1912 and stayed for 27 years. Her department was then incorporated with the

upper school—Mr. W. J. Keeling, headmaster—under title of The Pokesdown Church of England School.

The current name — St. James VP School — did not come until September 1950, during the 1944-1952 reign as headmaster of Mr. Thomas Llewellyn Bevans, who left to take over the New South Kinson Junior School. His successor: Today's head, Mr. John Allsop, who came from Lynton VP School in North Devon, on September 1, 1952.

When he took over, the school buildings were in urgent need of modernisation. And the subsequent £26,000 alterations — aided by the demands of the Vicar, the Managers, Education Officer Mr. W. Smedley and the then Bournemouth East and Christchurch MP. Mr. Nigel Nicolson — began in 1954.

Stages



JOHN ALLSOP
Headmaster of Bournemouth's
oldest school.

"These extensions," explains Mr. Allsop, "consisted of a new hall, serving both the school and church and new girls' toilet — costing £11,000.

"However these new buildings were only part of our requirements and we were fortunate in obtaining the second stage of the modernisation in 1957: Three more toilets, a new classroom for Form Four, and the linking up of the old and new premises with enclosed corridors. Cost £10,000.

"The third and final stages are now completed — alterations to the existing infant school and the absorption of the old porch into Class Three, the installation of total central heating and oil-fired boilers and the lowering of the ceilings in all the old classrooms.

With a chuckle, Mr. Allsop added: "I'm glad that history did not repeat itself. Otherwise we would have had to wait 16 years— as in 1898— for the modernisation to be completed. As it is, it's all over inside 10 years, costing £26,000, of which the Parent-Teachers' Association has raised £1,000 in three years."

Pioneers built thatch church on the heath

PICTURE the scene—if you can. Christchurch, with its church over there: Poole with its church over there. And nothing in between but a wasteland of heath. A few other small communities like Pokesdown—but no other churches on the horizon.

Then a small group of Christchurch folk decided to open a centre for Congregational services. And they chose Pokesdown—in 1820.

They met together in a thatched cottage at the bottom of Pokesdown Hill. As the number of worshippers increased month by month, they soon had to move up the hill—to a larger room in yet another thatched cottage.

Eventually the need for a church was greatly felt. And so the first church—a chapel actually—to stand between those two other lonely religious outposts in Christchurch and Poole was built. Admittedly it was only a mud and thatch affair. But many a large business, community or industry has started from less.

Same site

Today's church—seating 440—stands roughly on the same site; on the corner of Stourvale-road and Southbourne-road. The minister is the Rev. Ian Hope—who like the Vicar of St. James' Church, came here from Rochdale. But Mr. Hope was here first—in 1944.

Married—their daughter is now a teacher—Mr. Hope lives at The Manse, at 9 Queensland-road.

ALL STATIONS GO



FIRE! Fire! No worry. Right on their doorstep, Pokesdown folk have their own fire station, a branch unit of the Bournemouth Fire Brigade—manned by 15 trusty firefighters, working under a capable station office, and keeping a full round-the-clock 24-hour fire-cover.

From the all-destroying blaze to a small chimney or motorbike fire outbreak . . . from the special service call for water (or flood water to be pumped out) to the perennial plea to cut some toddler's "chubby chops" free from an iron railing. The men are always there, always ready,

Some people may think that on a corner of a three-way crossroads, with traffic lights on all three entrances, is not the best position to put a fire station in. But they don't

Members of Pokesdown Fire Station's Red Watch learn all about the new breathing apparatus soon to be in general use. Station Officer Harold Smith is instructing (left to right) Fireman D.C. Newman, K. Brocklesby (with the new set), I.F. House (wearing the old set) and Leading Fireman H. Andrews.

know, or haven't seen, this anti fire squad in action

As soon as a call comes in, one of the first things done before the pump-escape appliance rolls out is the pressing of one Very Important Button.

This button, which usually has a red light glowing above it, immediately switches all the traffic lights to the red-stop signal. The button's red light turns to green—and it's "all stations go" as the clanging bell does the rest.

The busy road traffic freezes like a halted film, and the fire engine speeds on its way—the traffic lights reverting to normality within 30 seconds.

Not alone

"Our position here is to cover the whole area from Boscombe to Southbourne," explains Station Officer Harold Smith, who is always there in the centre of things as he lives in one of the flats above the station.

"We're not on our own, of course," he continued. "We have aid from the Central or other stations if and when required, just as we are called out to give them extra aid on their calls."

The 15 firemen who are the Pokesdown fire-fleet, work in three separate watches—Red, White and Blue—a nine-hour stint during the day: 15 on the night shift.

Their day—fire and other calls aside—is divided up between drill and lectures (either at Pokesdown or in the Central or Redhill Park stations) and a fair number of chores—from maintaining all the numerous equipment, to generally keeping their station spick and span.

Lectures include the one we found on during our visit this week—about the new-style breathing apparatus. The BA set is the fireman's best friend when it comes to dealing with smokey or gas-filled rooms.

Masked

But where the old set, although still very useful, is a cumbersome, weighty affair, this new set weighs at least 7lbs. lighter at 43lbs., and all the weight on the back—no bulk on a man's chest.

Not only is it easier to manage, it has a full face mask, giving the fireman a clear vision, and what's more important, full freedom to talk to his partner.

"We always go in pairs on BA work," explained one fireman. "But we could never talk before—sometimes it's important—because we'd be breathing through mouthpieces."

Railwayman Bill took a shilling—and bought a lobster tea trip



UNTIL moaning about their capabilities and efficiency, one thinks of the railways as being something rather new in our transport system. But remember old George Stephenson was at the drawing board and his effort running on rails around 1821.

Bournemouth itself was encircled by the railways as early as 1847. And the town's first station (Bournemouth West) opened in 1870.

Bournemouth East followed in 1885, not being called Bournemouth Central until 1899—and within that same year, Pokesdown had a station of its own.

This opened on July 1, 1886—and is still there today, though, naturally, much more modernised.

The station was conceived, originally, to deal with the passengers to and from the then rapidly advancing resort of Southbourne-on-Sea. And to start with this was called Boscombe Station. In fact it kept this title until the present Boscombe Station in Ashley-road was opened on May 29, 1897.

Today's Pokesdown Station—"a very valuable piece of furniture," as one railwayman calls it—is purely a passenger station.

It serves trains to and from London, Weymouth, and the through trains from Liverpool and York—and is on the direct route to the Midlands.

Holidays

On a "residential basis" it takes in the East End of Bournemouth, of course, and both New Milton and Southampton.

Summer time is its busiest time, both for the day excursions snapped up by the local and Southbourne folk—and the incoming holidaymakers.

The stationmaster is Mr. A. J. Matthews—who has the dual responsibility of being in charge of both Boscombe and Pokesdown stations. He took over this twin task when transferred from Kent two years ago.

And one Pokesdown man who knows all there is to know about the station, old and new, is 76-year-old William Dodge, of 5 Stourvale-place.

Bill Dodge ("the 'r' fell off!") worked as a Pokesdown porter for 33 years, including four at Boscombe. He started in 1919, moved to Boscombe in 1922, returned in 1926 until his retirement in 1952.

Born in Crewkerne, Somerset—"that makes me English, but I'm Scottish by choice; go up there every year for my holidays"—Bill has a mind full of reminiscences about the old days.

He still remembers the names of many of his regular passengers—"the travelling salesmen, for instance, they were real gentlemen, stood on their dignity, you know."

Forge

In those long bygone days of the railway at Pokesdown, the station was a much smaller affair, of course—and more homelier because of it.

As a real sign of those times, there was, on the site of today's entrance and booking-offices, just off the main Christchurch - road, a blacksmith's forge.

"Fortunately for him, he had already retired through ill-health when the big re-development happened," recalled Mr. Dodge.

"The old platform, you see, had only been 250 feet long. And soon got out of date as the traffic on the railways increased. So the demolition of the old station began in June, 1929. It all took some time, and was not finished until 1931.

"Finished but 'not complete' as a Ministry inspector noted then. For somewhere along the line, they had forgotten to brick up one wall."

Today's Pokesdown—so handy to the main road, buses and taxis on alighting from the trains—has a lift, which is always put at the disposal of the crippled or wheelchair-bound.

'Lug stuff'

"Never had a lift though in my early days," chuckled Bill Dodge. "Admittedly there were only some 42 steps from the platform to the road— but in those days we dealt with freight as well as passengers. So we porters got to know each one of those steps like a friend.

"We'd have to lug stuff up the stairs to the delivery lorries—and once up top, the driver would almost always have another great pile for us to carry down.

"Most difficult job, I remember, was carrying the 17-gallon milk churns. Took three of us to manhandle one up top."

Having worked on both the old and the new Pokesdown stations, which did Mr. Dodge prefer? "Oh, that's easy. The old station. Much more handy for the porter.

"Anything for Pokesdown was always dropped off at the front of the train. So it was not too long a stroll after dealing with an in train, to deal with the next out one. Today it's a marathon."

Relaxation

Just like he is today, Mr. Dodge was a man for trains—even in his off-duty time. "My favourite relaxation," he reminisced, "was the Sunday afternoon trip to Christchurch. Then it was 1s. ride to Muscliff—and another 1s. for a lobster tea."

And today. Bill still enjoys his trips —his annual holidays to Scotland, for instance. And he always looks in at Pokesdown station after collecting his pension on a Thursday, to have a chat about old times with his successor, genial Cecil Catley, of 3 Carlisle-road, Southbourne.

"He's a great old lad, is Bill," says Cecil. "A real railwayman."

Washing—for 60 years

THE sheets have been washed thoroughly. Now whiter than white, they start their fantastic journey through an ironing process on a vast £15,000 machine at the New Era laundry works in Scotter-road, Pokesdown.

More than 60 years old, this laundry concern was started as a small family business by the father of the present chairman, Mr. S. F. Bell.

It is now an immense business—dealing with some 90,000 articles in their summer peak periods. And that includes 20,000 sheets.

With its dry-cleaning subsidiary firm, New Era employs a staff of 170, including office personnel—plus a fleet of 15 delivery vans, covering an area from the New Forest to Swanage.



MRS. NELLIE COSSER
78 not out.

Age mark

Most of the staff have been on the company's books for all their lives. For instance, five of the van-drivers total 200 years' service—and one chap who started there aged 14 is still working, having passed the half-century age mark.

One of the best-loved veterans of the firm is Mrs. Nellie Cosser, of Grove-road West, Christchurch. She is 78 not out —and still dashing away with the smoothing iron.

She started work before the First World War and intends retiring in the near future—a retirement well and truly earned.

Mrs. Cosser is a "gopherer." A highly-accomplished artist in ironing the frills in nurses and waitresses' caps by means of a special heating instrument very similar to the old-fashioned curling tongs—with which, Mrs. Cosser was very likely a dab hand with as well in days gone by.