

# STORIES OF THE PAST.

## THE MEMORIES OF BENJAMIN JOY TUCKER.

C.T. September 2, 1933

By the request of many of our subscribers we print below further interesting items from the memoirs recorded by Benjamin Joy Tucker about old Christchurch.

### WHEN THE PRESS GANG WORKED.

John Bone Tucker, son of Benjamin Tucker, was pressed into His Majesty's Service (about 1797), the press gang landing at night and taking him to join a frigate at Spithead, leaving children to be cared for by the wife at home, with bread at 4s. per gallon.

After joining the frigate he feigned ignorance of everything appertaining the ship, with the result the Admiralty was informed to the effect that Tucker was quite useless and must be discharged. The order came back "hold Tucker on, you have got one of the best men in His Majesty's Service." When he found he was not to be released, he showed great ability, with the result that he was appointed King's Pilot, and sailed for the North Sea. While there a severe and sudden squall struck the ship, throwing her on her beam ends, the pilot gave instant orders and she was released just in time, but, having exceeded his duty as pilot, he was made a prisoner.

When the trial came on the crew said the ship was virtually lost when the order was given. The result of the trial was that he was exonerated.

Some time after the pilot received parchments from the Admiralty complimenting and thanking him for his promptitude in saving the ship.

### THE OLD WORKHOUSE.

The house in the Quay Road, called the Red House, was, for more than a century, the work-house. The master's name was John Gould, who was succeeded by his son-in-law, and there were rarely more than 100 inmates.

Men's clothing, shoes, stockings, etc., were made by the inmates, the clothing and shoes were cut out by the master, who also attended to the vagrants, as well as being porter.

The master's sitting room had a sanded floor, no carpet, a common table, and rush-bottomed chairs. When he asked the Guardians to allow him a piece of carpet, and another chair or two, the Chairman said: "No, what you have is quite sufficient." I believe this Chairman was nicknamed "Old Far and near" (Farr).

The water for the use of the house was dipped up at the quay into a barrel and wheeled to the premises by a half-witted man, whose name was Charlie Chisel, and who also blew the bellows for the organist at church.

On one occasion, after the service was over, Miss Tullock (the organist) said to Charlie: "Didn't I play well to-day?" The next Sunday the organist could not play until she told Charlie that it was he who helped her to do so well.

The organ at that time was on the Rood Screen, and I used to sit in a pew with my cousins by the side of it, and give Charlie pieces of tallow candle, which he ate.

At the workhouse, in a cell facing south, a lunatic, by the name of Jones, was chained to a post in the rear; in fine weather the door was kept open and he could be seen crouched on haunches and singing, "I'm going to London, to London, I'm going to London."

Knowing one of the sons of the master, I often went with him to see Jones, and I regret to say we sometimes teased him, but woe betide the person who got within his spring!

#### THE WITTY CURATE.

The duty at Highcliffe Church was performed by the Rev. Mr. Dobson, who lived at Mundeford. A curate by the name of Thomas Pearce assisted him. This curate was a very clever draughtsman, as well as a fancier and breeder of Gordon Setters.

I have a sketch which was sent to my uncle, showing the Vicar and his wife in a four-wheeler "Old Nick" sitting in the back seat, a trident over his shoulder, and his tail extending and dragging on the ground behind.

The curate, when writing to my uncle, seldom signed his name, but attached his likeness to a Gordon Setters body.

After leaving he was appointed Vicar of a village church in Dorsetshire. While there, thinking the villagers required some amusements, he got up amongst other events some donkey racing, entering his own donkey.

This so annoyed his parishioners that they wrote to the Bishop complaining of the unseemly conduct of the Vicar.

#### SMUGGLING.

Smuggling was carried on to a great extent on this coast. The last case I recollect was when a raft of tubs was moored in the bay, and a man named Coakes intended to tow it into the harbour on a flowing tide by holding a small line in his mouth, but as he was late the ebb tide caught him and the flagons were cast up on the shore by Sandhills.

A man who evaded capture for some time was Billy Whicher. This man had a wooden leg which he had bored, and use to fire off on high days and holidays.

Billy sold some cottages and bought a vessel named "Chance," and he ran several successful cargoes. At last he and his cargo were taken by a Lymington revenue cutter. The crew were put on board the cutter as well as a flagon of "Schidam."

To commemorate the event Billy "fired off" his wooden leg to the amusement of the cutter's crew. The "Chance" was sawn in two parts.

#### LOVE IS BLIND.

Dr. Tancred, with his daughter, lodged at a house by the river. In a store adjoining were a lot of tubs of spirits secreted. A revenue officer courted Miss Tancred, and in walking round the garden with her passed the store, and for some time the door was open, but, love being blind, no seizure of the spirits was made.