

## **THE BLUE LAGOON**

a.k.a. Sandown Canoe Lake

By Dave Bambrough (Part one)

Development of the ground east of the Old Coastguard Station in Culver Road had begun



with the opening of Sandham Grounds in 1924. It had transformed part of this area from a wilderness into an array of beauty. Further enhancement was about to be constructed by private enterprise by way of a boating lake, right next door to the Grounds.

Rumours of a Canoe Lake for Sandown were rife in the year of 1928. The success of similar ventures at Ryde and Southsea had strengthened the claims of those responsible for providing more entertainment for the visiting

children to the Island. The majority of these came from London between Easter and the beginning of July, which greatly helped the local economy over this rather quiet period. Competition from Shanklin had been strengthened that year with the opening of Fairy Court House, which had been presented to the School Journey Association specifically for the use as a hostel for visiting children from London.

The selected site for the boating lake was 5 acres of land owned by the War Department adjoining the Sandham Grounds. A meeting was convened between the Chairman of the General Purposes Committee (Mr A.J. Harman), the Chairman of the Sandham Grounds Committee (Mr A. Dutton), with their surveyor and representatives of the promoters of the Canoe Lake.

This it was hoped would broker an agreement for submission to the council of the filling in of a ditch that separated the two ventures, the carrying off of the water and a connecting entrance between the two concerns.

Development of the site was as usual, slower than predicted. A letter from the Clerk to the County Council stated that the Roads Committee had received application from two sources during December 1928 for permission to open the Yaverland Road, in order to put in a pipe for supply of water from the sea to the proposed Canoe Lake.

The two applicants were Messrs Simmonds of Brading and Messrs Hooper and Denness of Sandown. The development was finally awarded to Messrs Simmonds of Brading.

By the end of January 1929 the slow progress was exacerbated by way of difficulties that had been put in the way of the proprietors, but it was stressed in the local paper, not by the Council. The Council maintained that they welcomed a Canoe Lake, especially if there was an agreement to provide an entrance from the Sandham Grounds, this desire would

eventually cause a lot of consternation between the two parties.

By May 1929 work was still proceeding, but not fast enough for the envisaged opening at Whitsuntide. The laying of the pipe for which to fill the Lake directly was completed by May 25<sup>th</sup> and the new date forecast for the opening was the 12<sup>th</sup> June.



On Friday 7<sup>th</sup> June a local dignitary, Mrs B. Metts, opened the valve. There was a high tide at the time but being nearly 4 acres in extent, the flooding was not enough to cover half the surface so the procedure had to be repeated until the required depth was attained. The depth of the lake was no more than 18 inches at any point and this was considered a safe situation even for the smallest child.

Boating commenced at this unofficial opening when eager youngsters commissioned dozens of miniature paddleboats, canoes and rowing boats, with Sunday attracting even more participants, in fact there seemed to be a ceaseless demand.



The official opening eventually took place on Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> July 1929 by Henry De Vere Stacpoole the author of the novel "The Blue Lagoon". This then became the adopted name for the Lake and was considered a good choice as the book told of a romantic adventure in the picturesque South Sea Islands, the popularity of the book had made Mr Stacpoole a household name. A film of the book was originally made as a silent in 1923 not long after publication, a second version made in 1949

included some evil traders for which to spice the film up a little. This was not part of the original story but had the desired effect of frightening the younger element of the audience. Despite the inclement weather a large crowd assembled for the opening ceremony under the presidency of Mr W.J. Board (Chairman of the Sandown Urban District Council). Mrs Stacpoole accompanied her husband and among those also present were the following members of Sandown Council:- Mrs C. Taylor, Miss Baillie, Messrs. J. Humphreys, (Vice Chairman) A. Dutton, A.J. Harman, H.Hawkins, J.F. Hubert, J.F. Latham, L.A.Moorman, W. Riddick, Mr C.E. Saunders (Deputy Clerk). Mr P.W. Simmonds the contractor, R. Hooper, I. Hooper and C. B. Denham (the proprietors), and representing Ventnor, Messrs. A.J. Sharpe. Apologies were announced from Messrs. E. F. Gray and H. Baker, Clerk of the Shanklin Council. It does appear that Shanklin deity of the time did not always wish to partake in the good fortunes of Sandown, even though the councils were now united.

Mr Stacpoole, addressing the large crowd, said it gave him great pleasure to perform the opening ceremony and he highlighted the many pretty girls that now adorned Sandown Seafront during the summer season. He said he felt it an honour that the lake had been named after his book and he felt that Sandown should be proud that three of their citizens, Messrs. R. Hooper, C. Hooper and Mr C. Denham had privately added this amenity, rather than the council. He added that in his opinion it was the finest Boating Lake on the South Coast putting Ryde's completely in the shade, then acknowledging that Blackpool where everything is on an immense scale, might just eclipse it. He finished by wishing it God speed and good luck to the proprietors.

Mrs Stacpoole was then presented with a bouquet by little Lorna Kennedy, the daughter of Mr & Mrs Kennedy of Leighton House St. John's Road. Proposing thanks to the opener, Mr W.H. Findon (proprietor of the Chronicle at this time) hoped that the lake would equal the charm and success of the book's South Sea Island story. Mr & Mrs Stacpoole then enjoyed a trip over the waters of the lake in "Paddy Button" the name given to the large motor punt (a character from the book) which had been prettily decorated in honour of the occasion. After this the guests inspected the modern refreshment chalet built within the grounds, whereupon a large gathering remained to tea as guests of the proprietors. (Read part two in the next Chronicle).



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By Dave Bambrough (Part two)

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August 1929 saw the first ever-sports day gala/regatta to be held on "The Blue Lagoon". Numerous bright flags leant a touch of colour to the surroundings and the bright attire of the holidaymakers made a pleasing picture. The competitions were open to both locals and visitors alike.

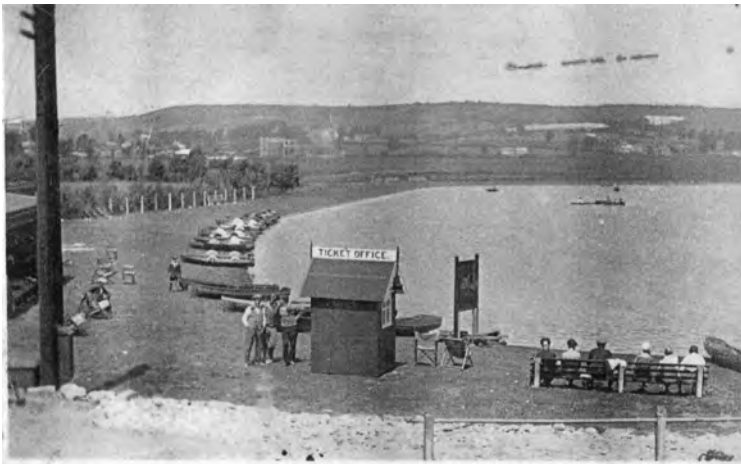


Spring-cleaning took place prior to the opening of the 1930 season at Easter with both the boating lake and the catering facilities due for improvement. The lake having being emptied for the purpose, plus an extension to the café providing space for 14 more tables.

Such was the popularity of the Lake now that the 68 boats initially placed thereon had proved insufficient to meet the demand. To overcome this shortage Mr.C.B. Denham (proprietor) built 25 more, which then brought the fleet up to a total of 100 boats. The

newer boats were bigger than their counterparts to cater for the older children.

Nothing in this world it seems is devoid of problems, and so it was for the proprietors of The Blue Lagoon Boating Lake. The boundary between the Sandham Grounds was untidy, part of the newly built Blue Lagoon café encroached on to the Grounds property, the septic tank was actually placed underneath the Sandham boundary, part of one hut protruded slightly over the boundary and there was still no gate to allow passage between the two sites. The issue over the gate was a financial problem concerning both parties.



The fence separating the two concerns was part owned by both but was far from straight, in fact it was very zigzag. The posts belonged to the Council, whilst the wire that connected them, to the Blue Lagoon proprietors. The owners of the Lake refuted all of the accusations brought by the Sandham Grounds Committee, stating that they were making mountains out of molehills.

A meeting had taken place between the two parties in May 1929 and the feeling was, that an amicable agreement had been reached on all

subjects, not quite the case however.

The dispute festered on until June 1930 when the Sandham Grounds committee gave instructions for the drafting of the necessary agreement with the Canoe Lake Company as regards to boundaries etc. and for plans to accompany them.

The hut, septic tank, concessions regarding squaring up the boundary were agreed on. The major issue was provision of a gate between the two social amenities. By now a café had been built in the Sandham Grounds and it was felt that letting people from the grounds to the Canoe Lake would take away business from the Sandham Café lessee who in turn would seek a smaller yearly rent payable to the Council. Even after the Council had conceded and constructed the adjoining gate visitors would find it impossible to walk from one to the other, as the gate would be locked, therefore the long inconvenient route via the road had to be taken. Letters from visitors were frequently printed in the Chronicle criticising this annoying situation. With the continual bickering between the two businesses over boundary problems seemingly over there was still one more agreement to be reached regarding the filling of the Lake.

To enable the lake to be filled necessitated an intake pipe from the foreshore under the



Yaverland road direct into the Lake. For this facility it had been necessary to enter into an agreement with the Isle of Wight County Council, the owners of the foreshore at this section of the beach. Although boating had commenced two years previously this agreement between the County authority and the Sandown Canoe Lake Company Ltd. was finally sealed during mid summer 1931.

A reprimand for the Blue Lagoon Company in 1932 from the general-purpose committee was administered

to the proprietors for dumping their silt on the beach whilst spring-cleaning the Lake. This spring clean took place every three years due to the clay bed of the Lake being stirred up by the paddles and oars of the boats. The shore inspector although condemned by the Canoe Lake Company was strongly supported for his action in giving instructions to remove the silt forthwith and the company were requested not to dump on the shore again. From then on the silt was dumped on the land at the back of the Lake.

Further improvements in the summer of 1932 consisted of the replacement of the worn and muddy grass in front of the café with paving. (See first picture part one). There was a request for the replacing of the rather unsightly railing between the lake and Culver road but this was a matter for the roads committee of the County Council not the Canoe Lake Company.

New open-air tearooms were built for the opening of the 1933 season providing comfortable accommodation for between 200 and 300 people, also a number of bushy trees were planted on the Culver Road side of the grounds. This work and the removal of the silt was carried out by Messrs. Simmonds & Sons of Brading, surely highlighting the prosperity of the



concern at this juncture.

The annual regatta of 1935 offered the old and young ample opportunity of showing their prowess in various types of boats in a variety of competitions. This was enjoyed by a large crowd many having a grandstand view from the sea wall opposite.

Showers interrupted the proceedings on occasions and one or two of the younger competitors got into difficulties through losing their oars but the whole day was an unqualified success. An interesting statistic is that

the only local member of the organising committee was Mr W.G.H. Donaldson, a teacher at Sandown C. E. School, now the centre of activity and offices of the Sandown Town Council. Of the others, three hailed from Southsea and one from London. The winners of most of the events were visitors.

Along with the neighbouring Golf Course and Granite Fort the Government requisitioned the whole area during the early years of World War 2. The Lake with its vast volume of water became a static water supply for the National Fire Service and in the closing stages of the war its buildings were utilised in connection with the "Pluto" scheme for pumping oil through the pipelines beneath the English Channel to France. As a result of its war service, the Canoe Lake café accommodation and boat sheds emerged in a somewhat sorry condition. On August the 23rd 1940, a German bomber diverted from another target, jettisoned one of five small bombs into the Lake adding slightly to the depth at one point, but this was perhaps the least disturbance of the normal functions of the property occasioned by the war. Local boys who commandeered a boat, rowed out to view the damage and inspect the bomb crater. (Final part next Chronicle).



## **THE BLUE LAGOON**

a.k.a. Sandown Canoe Lake

By Dave Bambrough (Part 3 Conclusion)

After the war the Sandown Canoe Lake Company relinquished possession to Browns Golf Course, a private limited company, managed by Mr A. Kennedy, son of the previous managing director Mr. A.R. Kennedy who had died in 1942. The two enterprises would now be run in conjunction with one another, Mr Kennedy stated that they hoped to carry out considerable improvements but were finding it difficult obtaining licenses for constructional work. The café did not re-open for the 1946 season but the boating lake did, the boats had been stored in various parts of the town during the war years and maintained in good condition. Mr Kennedy promoted one of his sisters, Edith, to manage the Boating Lake whilst the other, Lorna, managed Browns Golf Course.

The Lake's former title "The Blue Lagoon" was transferred to the new swimming pool, built at the western end of the esplanade, opening in 1934 and from then on it was simply referred to as the "Canoe Lake". (The Napoleon Landings flats now occupy the Blue Lagoon swimming pool site).



In 1948 the then manager of Browns, Mr A.G. Wittamore applied to the Isle of Wight County Council for planning permission to extend the existing bakery for which to satisfy the ever-increasing trade.

The restructured building consisted of a café, china washing dept., cloakroom and bakery, which required an inspection every five years by the health department for approval of continued use.

The eventual result of the modern facilities were the production of the

finest doughnuts and cakes to be found anywhere on the Isle of Wight. Coupled with the famous Browns Golf Course ice cream (also made on the premises) this magnificent combination attracted thousands of visitors and local people every summer who purchased these delicacies in large quantities.

Occasionally there were a few unsold cakes at the end of the day (seldom doughnuts) and these would be distributed to local boys at the Café closing time of 6pm, who would be eagerly waiting at the back of the bakery, where a window opened to the adjoining Sandham Grounds Park



Having extended the bakery the next quest was to improve the redundant land adjoining the two ventures so as to provide vehicular access between the golf course and the bakery. Claude Pardey would be seen regularly driving a three-wheeled vehicle (that the staff endearingly nicknamed "The Pony") between the two concerns, transporting the deliciously baked cakes as demand required.

Close scrutiny of the top picture shows the state of the land at the emergence of the two businesses,

very much in the hands of nature. Some well spent money and a bit of hard graft soon produced the beautifully landscaped area in the adjoining picture. This not only provided the required connection between the two businesses it also gave the public a pleasant walk from one amenity to the other and a rest if required on one of the seats provided, but additionally and more importantly to certain locals, a flat area of grass.

The flat newly grassed area provided local boys from the Avenue Road and Fort Street area with a piece of land where they could play football. Prior to this they had had to make do with the streets or perhaps the beach when the tide was out. Throughout the 1950's hours of football and cricket were enjoyed not only by the boys but also by the many visitors who would stand and watch the entertainment. The situation was kindly accepted by the management, as there was never a word of complaint from the owners when the youngsters initially descended on to their newly created lawn for purposes other than which it had probably been designed for. Eventually there were times when the ground was fenced off due to flooding, in order to protect the grass. This was initially a bonus as it provided greater protection to the ball ending in the Canoe Lake from wild shots at goal, which sometimes meant a long wait before the game resumed. There were occasions when a boat would be requisitioned in order to retrieve it post haste, the wind being the determining factor. Eventually, fencing was erected through the middle of the lawn, which meant waiting until the ground dried out in the spring when the fencing would be removed and normal service resumed. Three of the boys who played there on a regular basis, namely Ron Heatley, Oscar Stretch and Ray (Tich) Pardey went on to play for Brading Town football club, winning many honours over the years.

Whilst the Golf Course remains today, sadly the Canoe Lake bakery and boating area succumbed to closure in the late 1990's, amidst a plethora of ideas for developing the area, which as of yet have not come to fruition. Browns football pitch ceased to exist with the building of the Dinosaur Museum in 2001.

Both businesses were purchased by a Mr & Mrs Snelling in 1979, (entrepreneurs from Bembridge), they in turn sold out to Leading Leisure, (a company full of radical ideas that unfortunately went bankrupt), South Wight Borough Council then took over for a period, followed by the Isle of Wight County Council. The Lake is now jointly owned by the Isle of Wight County Council and Colonnade Developments. The Council own the seaward half, whilst Colonnade Developments own the western end and land beyond.

Finally, I would like to thank Ken and Maureen Chiverton for their help with the photographs in this article.



Youngsters have other interests these days, the Canoe Lake devoid of business in 2001 and the football pitch rendered extinct by a dinosaur museum.

THE END