

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 25th and the new date forecast for the opening was the 12th June.



On Friday 7th 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 31st 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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