

Local History News

The newsletter of the
South Molton & District Archive
Local History Society

The Constables Room, Town Hall, Broad Street, South Molton EX36 3AB

Charity No. 900293

December 2014

Editor – Shirley Bray



Wishing you a Happy Christmas and a Healthy New Year

Continued from September edition. Lilian and Denny Lock talking to Shirley Bray, 4th March 1987, about the King's Arms, South Molton

By the time I can remember, my father came back and settled down and was looking after the pub. My mother used to keep a girl in the kitchen because servants were very cheap so we always had someone living in but they didn't serve in the bar. There used to be big legs of ham hanging up.

There were some wonderful characters – Mr. Charlie Milton the postman. I remember saying to him when I was quite young “*I hope I get some birthday cards*” and he sent me a birthday card. He hung himself down Gas Lane; he was quite old by that time, but he was a charming man.

The other thing about Thursday was that the gypsies used to come into town to sell their horses; they would run with the horse up and down the street to prove to the farmer that it was a good horse.

When I was 14, I started helping my parents in the bar; before that I was not allowed into that part of the pub. I was never allowed in the bar on a Sunday morning because that was when they used to tell jokes I believe, or something, or use bad language. Washing glasses, running up the back and getting a pint of cider – that was an awful job because it was bitterly cold and I used to have to go up this passage and the wind was blowing; it was ever such a cold place, of course it got altered through the years. We had open fires – huge fireplaces – but nothing behind the bar that used to be a draughty old place. But the cider cellar at the back was terribly cold. Father used to get a truck of coal for £10 a time. It came over from Wales; I think mother must have known someone over there.

During the (*second world*) war service men used to come in, Americans and Canadians. I can remember when war was declared my brother was in the territorials and the yeomanry was here and all these young fellows got called up. So they all went out in the middle of the Square and

everybody went over, all the mums and dads and relations. I went over and said goodbye to my brother - he was off to war. He went up to the drill hall; they left late afternoon and was home again by 10 o'clock – they sent them home for the night! In the morning we all said goodbye to Tom, and cried; he went up to the drill hall again and was back again by dinnertime, so the next time we said goodbye we “*gived up*” and said “*for goodness sake go on, twas time to go*”. We got so fed up with all these goodbyes so he popped off to war. We did hear from him for quite a while as he was stationed at Plymouth; it took him a bit of time to settle.

Then I got called up, I had to go down to Barnstaple for an interview, they were interviewing all these people and my turn came and they asked me what I would like to do, so I thought well “*I'd better be a nurse*”, so I went to war. My father died in 1942 so I came back, my mother was running the pub on her own. I got released and came back just about the time the boys from Canada and America; and the black ones! By this time all our own young men had gone to war and the town was full of coloured men. They were billeted all different places around the town. Not billeted at the Kings Arms although at one time the army did take over. I think early on in the war we had a field kitchen in the back yard. The Skittle Alley was rented to International Stores and then Mr. Alford bought it for a furniture store.

The American and Canadian soldiers loved the pubs and most of them were quite nice. Only one thing upset my mother and I when we opened the bar one Sunday night and there wasn't a white man in the bar, it was all coloured ones; the place was packed but they weren't troublesome. The coloured soldiers were accepted very well in the town and I think they were very well behaved.

They evacuated a lot of people to South Molton. We had a couple of evacuee children. Then some of the wives, the ladies; they were Londoners and more broadminded than our women. That's when I remember women coming into the bar on their own without husbands; most times if someone came into the bar they were with somebody but

most of them you see, they would stay together; they were ever such good company; they had a different outlook; they were jollier. Then after that you met their families and their husbands because when they came down on leave they would bring them in, so you got to know them all very well. Of course some settled here after. Then of course a lot of people married the service men.

To be continued...

Recently Sallie Fewings received a letter from William (Bill) Lyddon, a former South Moltonian, in which he writes about his memories of South Molton in the 1930s and 1940s. Bill has kindly given me permission to print extracts from his most interesting letter:

.....“In your letter you mention Ken Ayres¹ and others of our day who died. Bert Ayres and my mother were cousins, and when Ken married Joan Sanders my brother Tom² was best man and I was an usher. Ken was a bomber pilot and was shot down over Denmark 3 weeks before the war ended. Only one of the crew survived and I understand Ken insisted on being last to jump. Joan had a daughter, Cherry³, born a few months after Ken died.....Joan didn't remarry and after retirement went out to Australia where she died a few years ago.....

I look forward to hearing your tales of Johnny Ford in due course. I recall him, bowler hatted, and his “house keeper” Black Lil residing in Medical Hall. The cat was out of the bag after a maroon went off in the middle of the night and woke the whole of South Molton up. Next morning Johnny was heard to say, “I woke up in shock and gave Lil such a kick”.

I spent yesterday afternoon watching Alistair Cook and his England team just failing to beat the Sri Lankans. I was aware that I am a blood relative of Alistair – my Grandma Lyddon (née Cook) and Alistair's great great grandfather Nicholas Cook were brother and sister. Their

father was a rope maker at Molland Cross (1815-1892). A long time ago!! We do know a lot about them thanks to Peggy Hobbs research.

The loss of the Old Assembly Rooms chandelier⁴ is much more modern history and deserves some detective work. What a privilege it was to be able to play games in such historical surroundings. I seem to remember your dad⁵ making us clear up afterwards and also sweep out the New Assembly Rooms after a do. He was never too pleased if a wayward ball broke a gas mantle. Happy days – nowadays kids just gawp at TV and get fat.....

My grandfather, John Lyddon a local preacher of some note, in 1898 preached a sermon at Duke Street Methodist Church on strong drink. He said that the Band of Hope and Temperance League were making such progress that by the year 1920 there would not be a public house left in England. How wrong he was. I didn't know him as he died in 1920 and was much loved and respected. He was a very fine musician, and played the church organ at Twitchen before he was nine years old.....⁶

Notes:

- 1 The Ayres family had a shoe shop at 27, Broad Street, South Molton. The business was started by Walter Ayres and then run by his son Albert (Bert), the father of Ken.
- 2 Tom Lyddon who took over the family music business at 24, Broad Street, South Molton
- 3 Cherry married and went to live in Australia
- 4 The chandelier in the New Assembly Rooms was packed away at the beginning of WW2 and has not been seen since

- 5 He is talking about Sallie Fewings' father, William (Bill) Webber who was Bailiff and lived with his family in the house that has since been converted into the Museum.
- 6 John was adopted as a boy by his Uncle William who ran a music shop at 100 East Street. After the death of his uncle, John inherited the business. John's son Charles learnt the music business and on his father's death took it over and later moved it to 24 Broad Street. Charles had two sons Thomas born 1917 and William (Bill), who wrote the letter, born 1924.



Walter Ayres, Shoe Shop, 27 Broad Street



Lyddon's Music Shop c 1951, the gentleman with folded arms standing outside the shop is believed to be Tom Lyddon

REMINDER

If you have not paid your subscription for the year 2014/5, this is now due.

Please send your cheque (£7.50 individual, £10 family) to our Treasurer:

Mrs. Pam Eastman,
Branksome,
North Road,
South Molton EX36 3AZ

Dates for your diary

- Dec 7th** **No Archive Meeting this month.**
Late night shopping etc., at South Molton
- Dec 4 – 8** Christmas Tree Festival at South Molton Parish Church
- Dec 10** Filleigh History Society – Bring and Share Supper
- Dec 16** 7.30 p.m. North Molton History Society – Pictures & films of North Molton in past times @ the Victory Hall
- Jan 9** **7.30 p.m. South Molton Archive Business Meeting at Sainsbury's**
- Jan 20** 7.30 p.m. North Molton History Society – George Copp talking about the clay pits of North Devon
- Jan 28** 7.30 p.m. Filleigh History Society
- Feb 6** **7.30 p.m South Molton Archive Business Meeting at Sainsbury's**
- Feb 17** 7.30 p.m. North Molton History Society "Exmoor Characters"
- Mar 13** **7.30 p.m. South Molton Archive Annual Slide Show at the Methodist Church Hall, North Street, South Molton**

Please send your contributions to the March 2015 issue of the News to Shirley, if possible via email – ndlink@tiscali.co.uk
Deadline – February 22nd 2015 Can you write an article/piece for the next edition? If different members write something the newsletter will become more interesting!