

Odd stories of Sheet

The purpose of this talk is not to go through through the whole history of Sheet, but rather to pick out some facts and stories that might be of interest, and which you could pass on to visitors and friends, so that they are more informed about this area. See map at the end.

1. What does the name 'SHEET' mean? – It is almost certain that it is derived from the Saxon name for a mire or bog, which is SHITE, SCHYTE or SHEATE. The importance of Sheet is that it lies on a river crossing, with a ford.
2. Who owned Sheet? - The lands of Sheet are part of Durford Abbey and also the large Mapledurham Estate, centred on Buriton, which were given to Matilda, the wife of William the Conqueror, and which passed to William II, then to his brother, Henry I, and thence to his illegitimate son Robert, Earl of Gloucester, to make him a better prospect for marriage. It was Robert who founded Petersfield.
3. Sheet is really 2 villages, Sheet and Little Sheet (the area around Old Mill Lane) – see map. The oldest buildings are in Little Sheet.
4. St Mary's Well, which is on Durford Abbey land, was a place of pilgrimage in the 13th and 14th centuries and also a source of pure water.
5. Durford Abbey - In 1536 Durford Abbey was one of the first monasteries to be dissolved by Henry VIII, and the land was given to Magdalen College, Oxford, who continued to own it up to the 1930s.
6. Where was the Ship Inn? - The deeds of the Ship Inn, dated 1698 state that it consisted of a 'Dwelling house, stable and garden room and orchard in the Tything of Sheet with the southern end abutting onto the north east parts of the King's Highway, leading from Petersfield towards London and on the south to the orchard of one William Stocker and a certain close called Dutchman's field and on the west to the orchard of one William Mould. This suggested it was close to the present 'Half Moon Inn'. It brewed its own ale as it had a malthouse, and was owned for some years by the Cherrymans who owned the tanyard. In 1747 a local smuggling gang led by 'Black Dick', which was linked to the Hawkhurst Gang, caught 2 witnesses who were going to testify against them after a raid on the custom house in Poole. One witness was buried alive, other was held in the Ship Inn for three days before being drowned in a well. The Gang were all caught, all hanged and their bodies, covered in tar, were left in cages at various X rds in the area as a warning to others. In 1786, it is thought to be the site where the 3 Hindhead murderers of a sailor, were arrested trying to sell his clothes. The inn was pulled down in about 1789.

7. Roads – The state of the roads in the 1600s was appalling. To improve matters all villages were made responsible, and if they failed, they were heavily fined. All the villages between Sheet and Portsmouth had a bill passed through Parliament in 1711, to make it the second Toll Trust Road in the UK, after the Great North Road. 30 commissioners were appointed (15 from Portsmouth and 15 from Petersfield) to control the road. They set the charges, appointed the toll keepers, put up the toll gates, surveyed the whole road and started building the toll houses and opened the road in 18 days. Who paid tolls? – not the mail coach, the military, royalty, or persons going to and from funeral or market. People tried to avoid tolls – the toll charges for horses was 1d, so travellers used mules instead, and there were also ways to unharness some horses from a carriage before reaching a toll gate to reduce the tolls. When the Sheet to Kingston section was completed in 1749, the mail coach time from London to Portsmouth reduced from 16 to 9 hours. There were highwaymen on the section of road between Petersfield & Horndean – and the whole road was known as the Road of Assassination, because of the number of persons killed. By 1820 about 100 coaches a week passed through Sheet
8. One of the owners of Sheet house in the early 1800s was a Dr Daniel Quarrier. In 1803, a young boy named William Chamberlain emigrated to Australia with his parents and settled in an area which is now Sidney Harbour. In Oct 1811 aged 8 he was kidnapped by the captain of a whaling vessel named 'Frederick'. At the end of a season's whaling the ship set sail to England, but not joining other ships to sail in convoy, it was captured by a French privateer, with the captain being killed and the crew locked below deck. Several days later the pirate ship was attacked and captured by the Royal Naval ship 'Andromache', but William Chamberlain was injured. Dr Daniel Quarrier, being the surgeon on the Navy ship, repaired his wounds and also taught him to read and write. When the ship was paid off in 1814, Dr Quarrier sent him to his family in Scotland for further education, and in 1816 had him join him on his latest ship, HMS Leander, which was then involved in a bloody naval battle, named the Battle of Algiers. Finally, when that ship was paid off, Dr Quarrier paid for William's passage on a convict ship back to Australia, where he was reunited with his parents some 6 years after leaving. William Chamberlain went on to become Australia's most distinguished whaling captain, whilst Dr Quarrier became the Deputy Lord Lieutenant for Hampshire.
9. The most famous Mail Coach Race 1810. - The time allowed between Anchor Inn in Liphook and Dolphin Inn in Petersfield was 1hr 3 mins. Two mail coaches, the Regulator and Hero, which had stopped to change horses at the Anchor Inn in Liphook, decided to have a race and were joined by a third coach from the Wheatsheaf Inn, just outside Liphook. This mail coach overtook the Regulator going up the hill coming out of Rake, and tried to overtake the Hero down Adhurst Hill approaching Sheet. However, the Hero prevented this by driving the other coach up the bank and causing a post chaise, coming the other way, to finish up in a ditch. The

Hero reached the Dolphin Inn in just over 20mins. Three of the horses were never used again.

10. Midhurst Toll Road 1824 – the original road from Petersfield to Midhurst crossed Sheet Bridge and then went up the sunken road beside Sheet Common. In 1824 a new toll road was started from Sheet Bridge to Midhurst and, as part of the improvements, a new junction was created at the top of Adhurst Hill.
11. Railways - The railway between Godalming and Havant, named the Portsmouth Direct Line, was opened in 1859. It is 37 miles long. It shortened the distance between London and Portsmouth, but was built on spec, knowing that neighbouring railway companies would buy it up. It has a number of steep curves and some steep hills. The builders of the line had no permission to join it to the Brighton & Portsmouth line, which went through Havant, but did so, with the result that there was an enormous fight between the two groups of navvies, which was called the 'Battle of Havant'. The line was originally single track, but was doubled in 1878. In the 1860s there was a plan for 3 other railway lines through Sheet. In the 1950s there were 35 staff at Petersfield Station
12. Flower Festival 1900 – Today we think that we are a generous village and support all kinds of charities and events. In 1900 St Mary's Church was linked to All Hallows in the East India Docks. Every year there would be a service with flowers in Sheet and the flowers would be donated to the church in the East India Docks. In 1900 some 950 bunches of flowers were sent, which was no mean achievement, as the village was much smaller than it is today, and also all the flowers would have to be self grown.
13. 1915 Street lights and Zeppelins – Sheet had 17 gas street lights in 1914. Street lights were only turned on in the winter and only between dusk and 11pm. In 1914 there was a fear that Sheet might be attacked by zeppelins and so the lights were all left off. It was not until the end of the war that the Parish Council realised that they had been paying for the use of the lights, even though the lights were not on. They, therefore, refused to pay the bill, and in return the Gas Company threatened to remove all the lamps. The matter was not resolved until 1920, when a compromise was reached.
14. 1919 Library book – In 1919 a Mrs Pullen of School Lane was reported to the Parish Council for not returning a library book, or being prepared to replace the 3/6 cost of the book, claiming that it was her daughter who had borrowed it. The Parish Council took her to the County Court, and it was only on the day of the hearing that the 3/6 was paid.
15. 1927 Postal service – There was a complaint in the Village that the last collection each evening was as early as 7pm, and a suggestion was made that, since the mail

van from Longmoor Camp passed through the village much later in the evening, then it could collect the post. This was refused, but now, some 90 years later, the last post is at 9.30am!!

16. Village Green – In 1929 the Village Green was reduced in size and levels altered. This was caused by the road at the top of the green being widened and the slope of the road changed. At around the same time, there was a suggestion to erect a large transformer on the Green, to supply power to local houses, and have a 100W bulb on the top to illuminate the area. This was turned down as an eyesore.
17. Sheet WI founded 1935 - In 1937 they provided funds to build the stage and for the making of a kitchen and dressing room out of the library. In the Second World War they collected foxglove seeds (sent to the Ministry of Supply for medicinal purposes), organised the weekly dances in the Village Hall, knitted 217 garments a year, which were sent to Russia, and purchased 4 pistols a month and 100 rounds of ammo. They also sponsored a tank in 1942, a ship in 1944 and a 500lb bomb. As well as that they also started the Horticultural Shows that were such a feature in the village for many years.
18. 1942 Killing cows – The Church is always decorated at Christmas. However in 1942, at the end of the festive season, the greenery that had been used was thrown over the church wall and eaten by the cows, which were owned by George Money, killing 2 of them. The Insurance Company would not pay the £70 bill, so the curate sat all day on the 28th Feb to collect contributions, and £189 was raised.
19. Secret store for aircraft – Stocklands Riding School in Pulens Lane was the site of a secret store for 16 dismantled Spitfires, after the factory in Southampton was bombed. Some Hawker Typhoons were also stored there
20. Schools in wartime - Several schools were evacuated to Sheet in the Second World War. 130 pupils and staff from Portsmouth High School were at Adhurst St Mary, 120 pupils and staff from Portsmouth were at Westmark Camp School and 560 pupils and staff from Emanuel School in London shared Churchers College for 6 years.
21. There was nearly a Juvenile Detention Centre in Sheet – There was a proposal in 1958 to site a Juvenile Detention Centre at Westmark Camp, which would involve high mesh fences and floodlighting all night. This was vigorously opposed by the village, and it was never built.
22. 1992/3 HQ for the International Global Challenge Yacht Race - Sir Chey Blyth was the first person to sail solo the 'wrong way' around the world in 1970/1. In 1992 he decided to start the Global Challenge Yacht Race, where 10 identical boats with 1 professional sailor and 10 amateurs in each boat would sail around the world. After

151 days sailing only 2hrs separated the first 2 boats. The HQ for the whole race was the house on the corner of Inmans Road and London Road in Sheet.

