

History of the Holmwood



The Twilight of the Victorian era and the early years from the turn of the last century saw EGYPT POINT enjoying the patronage of more crowned heads, Kings, Queens, Tsar and Kaiser Wilhelm II, than any otherworld locale of comparable size.

A number of distinguished persons graced HOLMWOOD HOUSE, built in 1872 by Mr Charles Maw, head of the pharmaceutical firm known for babies' bottles, teats and other nursery impedimenta, during this period. Maw rented the house to continental royalty (as did the owners of the other few Victorian houses nearby) and Mr Denys Maw, recently retired Chairman of the Company, has recalled for us that his grandfather's tenants occasionally included the Prince and Princess of Liechtenstein.

Attending the Liechtenstein's gay HOLMWOOD parties was their German kinsman, the keen Yacht-racing Kaiser Wilhelm II, sometimes accompanied by his English cousin, King Edward VII. Mr Maw has said how a member of the Maw family, then aged 10, remembers being told in the hall by the new King, "You are going to be a very pretty girl when you grow up". From the front lawn, the young royals would watch the yachts racing by, the Kaiser often sitting on the stone bench, which is still in the garden below the wall, with binoculars glued to the scene.

Mr Frank Beken, outstanding marine photographer of his time, whose numerous royal subjects included the Kaiser. We were told how once he watched the German Emperor standing on the stone waving to a friend in a passing yacht some fifty to sixty feet away. "I was certain he would

overbalance and fall into the road". Sadly, for history it did not happen!

It is no secret that outside the HOLMWOOD in the summer of 1874, Lord Randolph Churchill met a young woman, for the second time, to whom he had already been introduced. She was spending that summer vacation in the small white cottage (known then as "Rose Villa") which is immediately to our right, which her mother had rented for the fashionable season. On the cottage lawn, Churchill proposed-their engagement announced at a party in Egypt House, a hundred yards or so to our left, which Queen Victoria herself attended.

The girl's name was Jenny Jerome, mother to be of Winston Churchill. While it is believed that Winston Churchill once paid a sentimental pilgrimage to the cottage as a youth, the Baroness Clementine Spencer-Churchill wrote recently to say that during their lifetime together he never visited Cowes. The two 70 feet Monterey Cypress trees that tower over the hotel lawn were planted at Osborne House for Queen Victoria. By the 1900's standing almost as high as they are today, they were favourites of the tree-loving Kaiser who nicknamed them "Gig and Magog". (Unfortunately the trees were cut down in 1994, due to disease).

In 1903, King Edward liked the idea of a post-box being installed on the wall of HOLMWOOD to "match" the one further up the road bearing his mother's royal cipher. He is believed to be the only reigning monarch to post correspondence in a box with his personal cipher!

It might be of interest to know that Victoria and Albert used to stroll past HOLMWOOD after dinner at Osborne for the express purpose of watching the late sunsets at the Point, which was their favourite place on the Parade.



Egypt Point Poses a Riddle

Origin of the name EGYPT POINT has always been shrouded in mystery. Some people believe it was named after a ship called “Egypt”, others claim that wreckers using false beacons lured “Egypt” to her doom at the Point. Another section insists that “Egypt” foundered in the worst storm of the 19th century, and of course, there is the popular yarn that the Government named it to commemorate the peace with Napoleon in Egypt in 1802.

A search of various impeccably maintained records, including those at Lloyds of London and in the British Museum, fail to reveal any registration of an “Egypt” ship or of any “Egypt” wrecks. The Napoleonic theory is disproved with the publication of the first large scale map of the country, by Isaac Taylor in 1759, showing “Egypt” as a building after which, in time, the point itself was named.

Why Egypt? As far back as 1678 (circa) gypsies from Dorset was living near Gurnard. This provides the vital clue. For it should be borne in mind that the gypsies were formerly known as “Egyptians”, since that is where they were thought to have come from (see Oxford English Dictionary definition of “Gypsy”)