

An Insight into Emsworth Life in the 19th Century
The Recollections of Mrs Jane Anne Jewell (née King)

Jane Anne Jewell was born in Emsworth in 1826, the daughter of John King, an Auctioneer and Timber Merchant and his wife Jane. Her grandfather was John King the shipbuilder after whom King Street is named and the builder of The Hut, King Street. Writing in 1898 Jane says that John King built The Hut in 1795 and goes on to say "it has now stood more than 100 years, much enlarged at the back, but it looks as if it would last another 100 years". How right she has proved to be. The Hut still stands.

Jane Jewell lived all her life in Emsworth and died in 1931. In October 1898 she wrote her recollections of life and events in Emsworth and in the mid 1920's, having lived 100 years in the town, she added further information. As well as her own recollections she includes information about her grandfather's shipbuilding business, particularly during the Napoleonic Wars, and stories told to her by her mother, who was born in Sidlesham in 1795 and grew up in Bosham. Her recollections therefore span over a century and give us a wonderful glimpse of life in the area during a period of great change.

As a member of the King family Jane was part of an affluent but hard working business family and community. When her father died in 1840 her mother took over the running of the family Timber and Coal Merchants; similarly when Jane herself was widowed she and her daughter ran a school at numbers 5 and 7 King Street, the two houses having been converted into one.

Among the earliest recollections that Jane Jewell recounts are stories of the Napoleonic Wars told to her by her parents and local people. Her mother told her how as a little girl she and her brothers walked to Chichester to school each day and as they went they "talked of Bonaparte and his dreaded coming....and thought the best place to hide would be in a bunny by the roadside". Bunnies were the large brick drains beside the

roads. In the early 1800's the threat of invasion was very real and one can picture these little children earnestly discussing how to hide, much as children in World War II discussed how to deal with a German invasion.

On a more dramatic and serious note she recounts stories of the Press Gang told to her by people who had experienced what she refers to as "one of the great terrors of the reigns of George II and George IIIthe seizure of men for the Navy". Two Naval ships were stationed in the harbour off Bosham and Emsworth and her Mother told her of hearing the screams of the men and the women as men were seized and taken away. Of a man cutting off the fingers on his right hand to avoid being taken and a mother hiding her son in an apple tree and only letting him come down after dark. One Emsworth girl begged the officer of the Press Gang to let her have one last kiss when her sweetheart, a member of the well-known Dridge family of Emsworth, was taken. The officer agreed and the girl stood beside the boat and embraced her sweetheart as it prepared to row away then, with great presence of mind "dragged him over the side shouting, *Run, you lubber, run*". Run he did and the couple later married and had a large family.

Even King's shipyard was not immune from attack; on one occasion the Press Gang came to the shipyard to take King's workmen despite their being engaged on Naval contracts. John King closed the great gates of the yard and "seizing a hatchet stood saying that he would chop off any hand that was laid on the gate". Written exemption was subsequently obtained for all King's workmen. This must have been a tremendous relief for the men and their families as other diaries and accounts for this period confirm the terror of being taken by the Press Gang and "shipped foreign".

Coming from a well-off section of the community Jane Jewell could, like so many people in similar circumstances, have distanced herself from other sections of the community. Instead she involved herself in local life, including visiting people in their homes and, I am told, writing letters for people who were not literate. She was an astute observer and her experiences enabled her to describe the homes of the wealthy and the less so. Describing the poorest cottages in Emsworth she tells of "little rows of cottages, low and very small, a kitchen with a

brick floor, a tiny scullery, a ladder leading up to one bedroom and a back room, the latter often without door or window. Water was scarce and cleanliness well nigh impossible".

Coppers, she says "were for the rich"; the poor could only heat water in a pan hanging "over the fire". Such was the difficulty of keeping clean that children going to the "charity school had their heads shaved" to prevent spread of lice.

Conversely she is able to tell us that when she was a child Sir George Staunton regularly came to dine with their neighbour in King Street. He would arrive in a coach-and-four and bring with him his "footman to stand behind his chair" while he ate.

As a child and a young woman Jane would have observed and experienced the terrible unemployment and poverty which gripped England, particularly the South, during the 1830's and 40's. She tells how "the dread of unemployment and its inevitable complement, the Poor House, led men in 1835 to destroy threshing machines" and goes on to say "an old resident who died in the Work House remembers the first machine breaking. Seven men were transported, to all intents and purposes they were dead and in several cases their wives remarried". This straightforward and factual account relates to the Captain Swing Riots that gripped the South East of England in the 1830's. Locally the rioters were particularly active around Bosham, Nutbourne, Funtington and Westbourne and seven men were indeed transported, several of them from Westbourne. It is interesting to note her comment relating to the men sentenced to transportation that "in several cases their wives remarried". Although many of the men transported were sentenced to seven or fifteen years transportation, no provision was made to bring transportees home when they had served their sentence. The women, particularly those with young children, would have had great difficulty supporting themselves and their families and would have become "a charge on the parish". Remarriage would have been the practical solution. The matter-of-fact way in which she states this suggests that it was accepted by church and state that women who found themselves in this situation could regard themselves as widowed. This is one of the great strengths of Jane Jewell's recollections; they are straightforward

and practical and as a result they give insights not often found elsewhere.

She deals with a wide variety of other social issues, for example: "I remember in the first years of Victoria's reign men here in Emsworth used to beat their wives but I never heard them summoned for bad usage. Other people used to take up their wrongs and used to serenade the brutes with rough music".

Rough music was an accepted way of "naming and shaming" a wrongdoer and there are many recorded instances of it going on, in some cases right up to the beginning of the 20th Century. A crowd would gather outside the house of the wrongdoer and beat pans, buckets or any other article to make as much noise as possible to shame the person into mending his ways; sometimes people were even driven out of town by this method. Apparently in Emsworth "Mrs Underwood, wife of the principal butcher, kept a good horn for such occasions"!

As well as her comments on daily life Jane Jewell describes how Emsworth developed over the years. She describes the buildings and how they and their uses changed. She brings to life how the layout of houses altered when changes in domestic routine reduced the need for big kitchen areas. How the need for protection and security resulted in houses being built close together, frequently with the door at the side rather than the front and that "all the doors had tremendous bolts and the windows had very heavy shutters and bells". She even describes how the Window Tax and the much less well known Brick Taxes changed the way in which buildings were designed as people attempted to reduce their tax burden. In her description of the Brick Tax applying to bricks but not tiles she is factually accurate, and her comment that as a result "houses were built with very deep roofs" seems to be an extremely practical way of avoiding tax — increase the roof area and create upper storey rooms with dormers.

She also describes the industries and commerce, listing types of business operating in the town and where it was conducted, from clay pipe making "by the Mill Pond leading to Lumley" to the cordwainer "who made leather breeches, gaiters and harness". The fishing industry is not neglected even down to the types of fish that were brought into the

harbour and the trouble caused by fishermen from the East Coast over-fishing the area.

Jane Jewell's recollections cover all aspects of life in Emsworth and provide a rich insight into life in the 19th Century generally. Taken alongside other diaries and recollections of this period it is apparent that they are a concise and factual account written by a woman who observed her surroundings with a practical and compassionate eye, an eye that also twinkled with humour. Jane Jewell regularly attended church at Warblington and the Chapel of Ease in Emsworth, and later St James'. Who can fail to smile at the Vicar of Bosham who in 1812 centred his Confirmation Class questions to her mother (then 17) around whether she would have a glass of port or sherry? Or the Clerk at Emsworth Chapel of Ease who could not say his H's or V's "so we always had the *Wirgin*". Or at the thought of little boys collecting grasshoppers in boxes and "setting them loose among the congregation with startling results". These, and her other recollections, bring the past to life.

Jennifer Goldsmith MA

WEA lecturer in Local and Social History

Source: Recollections of Jane Anne Jewell
Courtesy of Emsworth Museum