

WEST CLIFF HOUSEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WEST CLIFF ESTATE

(Basil Trevor-Morgan Hon. Sec. 2000-2002)

I thought it might be of interest and some value to relate to you a brief history of this very beautiful area in which we live and our estate in particular.

Where should I begin ?

1388 when a local merchant, John Huddersfield began to construct a harbour here where the river Brit runs into the sea? Or 1444 when the Bishop of Sarum granted an 'indulgence' for the purpose of repairing Brydport Haven? Or 1740 when the river was diverted from under the East Cliff to its present route? Or 1884 when the first GWR steam train puffed its way down from Bridport to West Bay Station. It was the GWR which gave the name West Bay to what had been Bridport Harbour or Haven; probably bringing the first real holiday traffic?

In late Victorian times there were 3 bathing machines on the beach owned by an enormously fat lady called "Auntie Slater"; and a 9 hole golf course on the West Cliff where we now live. The esplanade along the West Beach was laid down in 1887 and extended along under the West Cliff in 1969. Pier Terrace was built in 1882. The last ship that left the Shipyard was when the "Lilian" was launched from Elias Cox shipyard in 1879 and probably the largest was the "Speedy" 1,002 tons in 1853. However I am reliably informed that this was 'berthen or (berthon) weight. (Meaning I think ,weight when fully laden, from the word to bear as in bearing a load)

The harbour was originally part of the parishes of Burton Bradstock and Symondsbury and not Bridport at all. The West Cliff is still in the civil parish of Symondsbury. Competitive rope making was started in Burton Bradstock, but was finally scotched by Henry VIII confirming a monopoly on Bridport to ensure ropes for his navy. We all know about the "Bridport Dagger" followed by famous nets for fishing and I believe now more used for air freight transport and food drops.

The new harbour, much as it is now with the sluice gates of 40 ft. breadth was completed by John Reynolds, a Cheshire man, in 1744 at a cost £3,500. With 2 Piers leading out into the sea.

So enough of local history for which I am indebted to John Eastwood's delightful small book on West Bay, and so on to our estate.

If you had come here prior to 1914 you would have seen the bare hillside of the West Cliff of West Bay, land owned by the Earl of Ilchester which included all the present Camping Site.

In 1920 a Syndicate was formed in the names of Guppy, Glunning and Trevett, to purchase the land on which the original estate was subsequently built.

They built houses for themselves and then began to sell plots for others to come and build houses; but they retained the roads and the verges for themselves. They placed covenants on the plots designed to maintain a good standard and provide a basis for the future recovery of the costs of maintaining the roads and drains. These covenants were in perpetuity and remain in force to-day, consequently everyone who owns property on the old estate is a party to the covenants as a condition of purchase.

The estate slowly developed and by 1961 there were not many sites for sale.

The adjoining field was then up for sale but this could not be developed for building without permission to have access over the West Cliff Road.

The trustees of the old estate, after much consideration negotiated a financial agreement with the developers, Messrs. Calverley & Sons. In 1961 a deed was signed in which it was laid down exactly how the contribution should be paid to maintain the roads of the new development and the Feeder Road, West Cliff Road.

A covenant, corresponding to the old estate was to be included in the deeds of each house sold. Unfortunately Messrs. Calverley & Sons went bankrupt before the completion and the development was take over by another builder who claimed not to have been party to the agreement and therefore not liable.

However legal advice was taken at the time and the opinion was that he clearly had a moral obligation to fulfil the agreement, but this could be an expensive legal battle to enforce, and no proceedings were undertaken. The developer did however complete the reinstatement of the roads. West Walk was slowly completed.

Then about 1970 the building boon began and the site was acquired by Fishers, who developed and extended the estate to West Walk as it is to-day and Brit View Road. It was in 1970 that the roads on the estate were first named. (The name repeatedly used is 'West Walk' not 'West Walks.'

The problem of maintaining the roads was then becoming difficult and the Trustees of the **old estate** in 1974 sold all the roads and the verges to the Trustees of the West Cliff Residents and Ratepayers' Association for the cost of the legal fees £25 then.

In 1972 an approach was made for the local authority to take over the surface drainage and an official report revealed that the drains appeared to be incapable of accepting all the flood water after exceptionally heavy rain and it was the responsibility of the residents to maintain or replace these surface drains as necessary. Work was done on the surface drains about 1983 and this seems to have solved most of the potential problems.

In 1973 the possibility of the local authority taking over the roads was discussed but the estimated cost of £400 per house at the prices then, ruled this out. (This would be about £3,500 per house to-day, 2002.)

In 1974 the name was changed from 'West Cliff Residents and Ratepayers' Association' to 'West Cliff Houseowners Association'. (In the original agreement in the Ratepayers Association no one could vote unless they had paid their subscription.)

The position as it stands to-day is that every house owner has a covenant in his deeds which makes it an obligation for him to contribute on an equitable basis towards the cost of maintaining the roads and surface drainage.

Unfortunately these covenants are not identical. On the **old estate** the roads are owned by the trustees and the maintenance is based on rateable value. On the Lower end of West Walk the road is still owned by the residents, and the house owners in theory have to maintain their portion on a frontage basis. On the Upper portion of West Walk and Brit View Road, the road has never been transferred and is still owned by the builders Messrs, Fishers, in practice the house owners own the road and pavement, with each house owner having a maintenance covenant.

You can see that there is no satisfactory or easy method by which the estate maintenance can be enforced, except with the good will and co-operation of the 3 sections of the estate.

The whole estate is a private estate and maintained solely by the Residents. We pay no rates towards road or drainage upkeep and the importance of maintaining high standards rests entirely with the residents and is of importance to each section of that estate.

Generally speaking I have found an appreciation of the unique situation in which we find ourselves and a willingness to co-operate for our communal well being. The character of the estate reflects its short history. Almost everyone has come from somewhere else, to live here, because they appreciate the environment, many in retirement; this does not make for much communal spirit as for instance, is more usual in a village with a long history. My experience is that everyone is friendly when you speak to them, but simply do not know their neighbours well enough to reach out a little.

I do not know what we could do about, or whether anyone actually wants to do anything about it.

I have tried through my few General Letters to increase the awareness of ourselves as a community with common interests; personally I would appreciate a little more community spirit, but then I would, would I not ? I commend it as a good bye-product for the future committee's work.

Thank you for listening patiently, I hope it has been of some interest.

With major development about to begin at West Bay this is a particularly appropriate time to learn a little of the past history.

(A presentation to the Annual General Meeting of the Association 2002)
