

Sandown and Lake

My memories of Sandown and Lake come in several waves. Firstly, from when we stayed in Lake for two weeks in 1970, from subsequent holidays in the mid-1970s and my time in The Esplanade Hotel, Sandown in 1977. Then between 1978-1982 I lived in Sandown and finally, I spent twenty one years, from 1985-2006, living in Lake.

Sandown was a seaside town so had its fair share of hotels, guest houses and gift shops. The roads became noticeably busier each Easter and the seasonal shops would open up. The beach was close by and the best time of day was early evening, when the tourists had left the beach; the sand was nearly black in places but it was beautiful. We would walk along the cliff path and back along the revetment in one direction or another to create a circular route. In retrospect, I did not appreciate this proximity to the sea enough at the time, nor make as much use of it as I should; with the exception perhaps of when the girls were young and we made daily pilgrimages to United Beach Mission for a month every summer. It was months, or even years, after I moved to the island before I convinced myself that I actually lived there. Especially after a visit to West Wight, I still had to pinch myself to realise that I wasn't just on holiday!

In Avenue Road, near Cross Street, was a small parade of shops. These included the Spar, where I did my food shopping when I lived in Sandown, rushing in just before they closed each evening, on my way home from working at Temperature Ltd.. There was also a post office, a butcher's, an electrical shop and in the adjacent road, the fish and chip shop, 'The Chish and Fippery'. We used to buy chips there after evening United Beach Mission events. On one occasion when I was pregnant, I had to leave the butcher's hurriedly because the smell made me feel sick. There were three pubs in this immediate area and Fort Road caravan park,

where we stayed on holiday, whilst we lived in Buckinghamshire. There was also a corner shop round the back in St. John's Crescent, near St. John's Church.

The playground to St. John's School backed on to Cross Street, so you could hear the children playing. Our attached neighbour at Cross Street, on the right as you faced the house, was Miss ---, known as 'Miss Next Door', even after we moved away. She was a newly retired maiden lady and just the sort of neighbour one would want. If we were out and it began to rain you could be sure that Miss Next Door would rush out and get the washing in for you. She had led a very interesting life and her family had run butcher's shops. I always thought that someone should have written her life-story but they never did. She would sit in her back room with a tea tray by her side, the cup and milk jug covered with doilies weighted down by beads round the edges.

When we moved in, the other side was inhabited by a strange family with late teenaged sons. They once left a dead pigeon on the garden wall dividing us from them. Apparently, it was defrosting ready to be fed to their ferrets. They also used CB radio and by some quirk, one day my record player picked up and transmitted their CB messages, I have no idea of the science behind this but it did. The messages were something about a drugs transaction. On another occasion, they climbed into their loft and came down my loft hatch, as there was no firewall. We soon locked the loft hatch after this. They were later replaced by Miss ---.

Wednesday was early closing day in Sandown, whereas it was Thursday in Bembridge, Shanklin and Ryde. Sandown High Street shops came and went; Wray's grocers (Sandown branch) became the Rock Shop. I remember Daws Knighton the hardware shop, Bailey's women's clothing store and the jewellers where R fainted after she had her ears pierced. As she was prone to fainting, we had sat her down for the actual piercing; it

was when she was asked for the money that she passed out! Much later, just before I moved away, we gave a lift home to another family who had had a similar experience. There were several estate agent's in Sandown, including Pittis and Watson Bull & Porter; the latter always used to run Christmas quizzes. Until the 1980s, there was a cinema in Sandown but by this time my cinema going had waned. Opposite the cinema was a newsagent's and I remember the owner failing to get some very simple arithmetic correct when working out the cost of our purchases and M, who was probably about six, correcting him.



Sandown High Street 1970s

At the far end of Sandown High Street, on the corner of Avenue Road, was the Library, where R had a Saturday job. Over it was a small museum. Nearby was the paper shop where M briefly had a paper round, delivering to Yaverland and Sandown zoo. I think I did it more often than she did. Olive's was also near the library. Olive was a local councillor and dignitary. From memory, the shop was a hair-dressers that also sold

alcohol. There were always numerous miniature bottles in the window. Then there was the Fisherman's Snack Bar (later the Ocean Snack Bar), near the Nat West Bank. When John and I used to camp in Sandown in the late 1970s we always ate here; we called it the Fisherman's nack. When we weren't camping, we stayed at a lovely B & B at 5 New Street, Sandown.

Anton's, the converted church that sold second-hand furniture, was away from the main shops in Station Avenue. I remember buying a dining/office chair here for John for Christmas and carrying it back home. The Stag pub was at the Lake end of The Broadway, at the junction with Beachfield Road. I had my first legal drink here when we were staying in New Street. Opposite here was the Barracks that later became a swimming pool, 'The Heights'. On the other corner of Beachfield Road was a former church that had been converted to a pool hall. I particularly remember the walk up the hill from Ranelagh Road to Broadway School in October 1987, after the great hurricane. It was Harvest Festival and I had M in the buggy; there was debris everywhere.

My first memories of Sandown station were as a holiday maker. In the 1970s, children used to meet summer trains with old prams, offering to transport cases to hotels for a few pence. Lake station was opened as an additional halt whilst we lived there. Once again, from both Sandown and Lake, I could hear the trains and even catch a glimpse of them from Lake, as I looked down the alleyway opposite my house. When I holidayed in Lake, at the age of fourteen, I attended my first discos at Manor House Ballroom in Lake, dancing to such things as *Spirit in the Sky*. I had my first kiss in Brownlow Road after one of these discos.

As a resident and if we were on holiday at the time, we attended Sandown Carnival. There were two each year, always on a Wednesday. The main procession on the last Wednesday in July and the illuminated

carnival a month later. The children always entered these and also the carnivals of other island towns and the regatta fancy-dress parades. Initially they were part of school entries but later we went it alone, both as walking entries and as decorated cars. As they became teenagers, carnival entries took on a commercial turn, with people spending hundreds of hours and a considerable amount of money creating elaborate floats. I preferred the 'homemade' ethos, where everyone could join in but I suppose that was less appealing to the tourists. We had some success with our entries which included 101 Dalmations (but we lost 99), a jungle, the birds and the bees and a Medieval castle. I usually came up with the ideas and art work, mum would be involved in costume creation and Chris did the construction work. One year R did the entire parade on home-made stilts with the school's circus entry. When the school entry had a 'spooky' theme R went as a headless person, carrying the head and shoulders of a doll (intended for playing hairdressers) under her arm. The most significant carnival memory is 1993, when I was dressed as a cat. I believe the theme was Noah's Ark. I had driven the girls down in the car and cat costumes not being fanned for pockets, had given my car keys to Chris who had come down later with mum. They then went home forgetting that they had my keys. I was then faced with a mile's walk dressed as a cat. It was debatable whether or not I would look more conspicuous with or without the tail. I chose to keep the tail on, hoping people would realise it was fancy dress.



The Castle Carnival Float c. 1994

Over the years, I witnessed many changes in the shops in Lake and the closure of 'useful' shops, including the corner shop on the end of Brownlow Road and the demise of the strange but rarely open, shop on the hill under the railway bridge that I think was latterly a wallpaper shop before it was demolished and a house was built on the site. Lake shops included the Spar, run by the Harris family, a Nat West Bank, which later became the HQ of the local free newspaper and where I used to get my colour photocopying done. Prior to this, photocopying was done in the card shop on the other side of the road. Near the Spar was the greengrocers. I once bought a Christmas tree there, decided it was too small and took it back to exchange it for a larger one!



Lake High Street c. 1970s

There was a large toy shop and a carpet shop that was converted into a cinema, or was it the other way round? In either case, I saw both the coming and going of the cinema in Lake. There were several hairdressers. The one I used stood on its own and P cut my hair for years, as I watched the business go from employing four hairdressers to becoming a one man band. I was there when he got the call to say his wife was in labour. It was here that M had her waist length hair cut. It was so long that she had to stand to have it cut and then fainted. On one occasion I forgot my purse; P was quite happy to wait while I went home for the money. On another occasion a got caught in a downpour on the way home and was soaked through, as if I had sat in a bath.

There was a wool shop and the post office, outside which pensioners would queue for a good hour before it opened on pension day. Later on, the vets opened up in Lake, famed for agreeing to perform an 'impossible' removal of an abscess on the mouth of Silky the guinea pig, who survived

several more years; although it did cost £25, which seemed a small fortune at the time. The doctors' was in Sandown, although the clinic was in Lake and it was here that the girls went to the school dentist, although the regular dentist was in Sandown. Our doctor was always Dr S, both when we lived in Sandown and in Lake.

There was a small park and crazy golf on Lake Hill, although the crazy golf was later built on. Los Altos park ran from Lake Hill to Sandown Station. Latterly there was exercise equipment placed strategically in it, known as a 'Trim Trail'. I walked the girls through there to Playgroup and later Brownies at Beverley Hall in Grove Road. Bogey's nightclub was at the far end of town, next to the Monday market. Further towards Yaverland was Brown's Canoe Lake and then the zoo, which specialised in reptiles and tigers. You could often see a tiger being exercised on the beach. Once, John went there in his capacity as a VAT inspector and was invited to see inside a tiger's cage. I don't think he was too sure how to take this!



John on Brown's Canoe Lake c.1974

The 'big town' was Newport. Although many went to shop in Southampton or Portsmouth, not being a particular fan of shopping, I never did. When I

first visited the island in the early 1960s, the only traffic lights were those in Yarmouth and a set by Carisbrooke Castle. The latter only had and indeed still have, red and green, no amber, which I always thought was odd. I remember the lights being installed at the bottom of the Newport Road in Lake and on Coppins Bridge roundabout. These came whilst I was learning to drive and added to the confusion of how to cope with the only real roundabout on the island. Many of our purchases were by mail order. In the 1980s, Tesco's arrived near Ryde and later Safeways (subsequently called Morrisons) on the outskirts of Lake on the Newport Road. M worked here for a short while.