

The Village Echo

The Journal of The Pavey Group
of The Village of Charmouth

Journal No 6

Autumn 2001

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The Village Echo

The Charmouth Historical Journal

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

This week's articles show four quite different facets of the village past. The first one, Ken Gollop's tale of his grandfather, a good Charmouth lad, provides a fascinating insight into a way of life and of a local industry that has long ceased to exist. The story tells of the dependence of the breadwinner upon a diversity of tasks in winter and bad weather and of the intensity of the labour that was considered the norm a century ago. Frank lived to nearly 100! These were the good old days?

Peter Childs' memoir tells of a day in the life of a boy about to take that first great step to adulthood. The long trousers symbolise that great transition. For the boy it was the moment of his conscious rejection of childish games and fancies. It was a critical moment. The fact that his nascent adulthood literally explodes upon him by the sudden confrontation with violent death gives a tragic emphasis to the boy's rite of passage. Peter gives a sensitive portrayal of his own first awarenesses. Well done Peter.

When I first saw Maggie Pratt's cartoon of the 'Great Charmouth Wind-Up' I was well pleased with her interpretation of the story line. The body language of the characters in the cartoon is excellent. Her depiction of Dennis' anguish as the constable towered over him was wonderfully done, as was the hysterical reaction of the two landlords. I did wonder though, at Maggie's depiction of all the characters in the cartoon – they all looked so positively juvenile. Then it occurred to me that this was as she actually saw the events of that day. Boys will be boys?

The Court, the place of Nick Stapleton's ghost story is a large 140-year-old building opposite the Royal Oak. In its day it has been a private dwelling, a hotel, a nursing home and is now the local headquarters of the National Trust. It looks as though it might be spooky. It was more so before it was painted. Nick's article was reassuring; I'm delighted to learn that there are at least two ghosts in the village. More Please!

The Editor

Frank Gollop – the Last of the Stoneboatmen

Frank Gollop was born in Charmouth on 17th July 1862. His grandfather Edward Gollop had come from Honiton in the early 1800's and although there were no Gollops in Charmouth at the time, there were many in surrounding West Dorset – both titled and of the working class. Needless to say we were of the working class! I believe Edward moved to Charmouth because he had relations nearby.

Edward married Sarah Clarke of Charmouth in 1836 – was that why he came to Charmouth? They had a son William James (b.1837) who married Frances Hunter in 1860. Another son followed, Francis William (my grandfather - Frank) in 1862. The Hunters were a fishing family on Charmouth beach, going back several generations; members of the family still live in the village.

So Frank was to grow up on Charmouth beach with all his mother's family to teach him the ways of the sea, including his uncle Isaac Hunter – a well-known fisherman whose adventurous life was described in *The Village Echo No. 4*. When Frank was thirteen his father moved the family to Lyme where they lived in Coombe Street.

The brothers William and Frank worked on the stoneboats. Their job was to quarry the lias stone from the cliff and ledges and ship it in small boats (about 24-28 foot long) rowing 5 tons at a time out to waiting ships. It would be taken to where it would be used as building stone or made into cement.

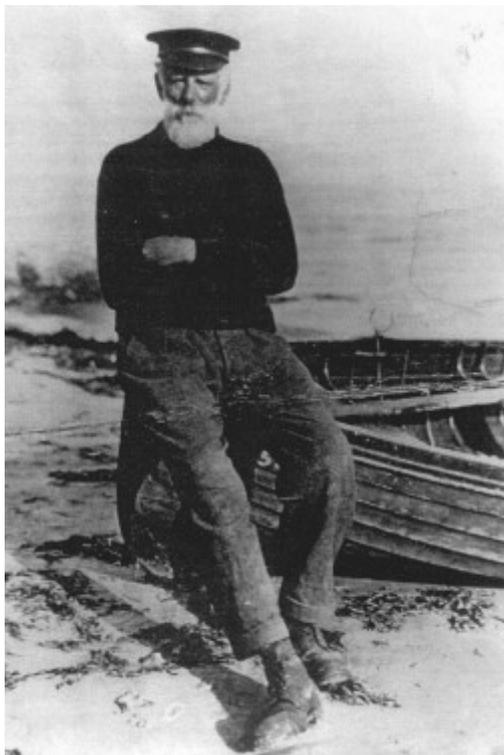


Stoneboats at the Pool at Lyme

Mary Anning in a letter to a customer said that Lyme Regis lias and cement was being used in building the Regent's Canal and much was used in Devonport Docks. Lyme Regis lias was rich in silica and the resulting cement would set in wet conditions – ideal for building docks and harbours. This trade was to continue until 1914 when modern methods of making cement brought about the end of the Lyme stone trade.

If there were no ships waiting for a cargo, they would stockpile the broken stone in the 'The Pool', between the outer arms of the Cobb harbour. You can still see the remaining stone around the Beacon Post Rocks. In 1893 a cliff fall after blasting killed Frank's father but that did not deter Frank from carrying on stoneboating until 1914.

In 1885 Frank married Elizabeth Gorge of Old Lyme Road in Charmouth. Her family had a long history that has been traced back to the 12th century, but in the 19th century they had been parish clerks in Charmouth for several years. They had also been Revenue Men at Stanton St Gabriel in the 18th century. Digory was a favourite family name for many generations.



The Stoneboatmen also fished for a living and as such, formed the backbone of the lifeboat crew. As strong quarrymen and rowers they formed the 'engine' of the lifeboat. Frank and his brother William followed their father as lifeboat men and Frank would often recall some of the rescue trips they made.

A favourite story of his involved going to help foreign ships on three separate occasions in trouble off Langton Herring, only to be beaten each time by the tug from Weymouth.

Frank Gollop

In 1907 they were nine hours rowing to a Greek ship. In 1910 they were at sea for twenty one hours in a strong gale standing by a German ship and in 1911, it took them eleven hours to row to Langton to help a Frenchman, but only a couple of hours to sail home!

Frank's son Tom, my father, took his father's place in the lifeboat crew until it was withdrawn from service in 1932 when large motor lifeboats were stationed at Weymouth and Exmouth. My brother and I joined the crew of the new lifeboat when the Lyme station was reopened in 1967.

During World War I Frank was a Coast Watcher in the Coastguards. The task was to patrol the cliffs and shores on the lookout for ships in distress. They took two sea scouts as messengers. Frank's beat was from Lyme Cobb to the top of Stonebarrow where he would meet his opposite number from Seatown before returning. Another beat was to the westward, half way to Axmouth through the Undercliff – this had to be done twice in each twelve-hour shift.

When the stoneboat trade stopped, Frank carried on fishing and went into the pleasure boat trade in the season, working rowing boats from Cobb Gate beach. During rough weather he occupied his time with odd jobs ashore. He had already worked on the railway and the viaduct at Cannington during rough weather in his stoneboat days.



Edward Gollop, Frank's Father

In the 1930's his son Tom, my father, bought a motorboat and ran pleasure trips from Cobb Gate, which he continued to do until the 1950's. Frank continued on the beach and was still rowing old ladies along the coast to Charmouth in 1946 aged 84! My brother Roy and I carried on the fishing and trip boat trade until five years ago when we sold our last boat. We have no working interest in Lyme harbour now, although one of Frank's great-grandsons runs the Aquarium on the Cobb, while another drives the lifeboat tractor and a great great grandson also serves with the crew.

Frank's wife died in 1936, so he moved to Marder's Bequest, a seamen's almshouse in Coombe Street, Lyme. He stayed there until about 1956 when he moved in with our family. He died in 1960, not quite making his 100.

He could tell stories galore as he lived through a rapidly changing age when technology made great bounds, from the horse and cart to the space rocket. My fondest memories of 'Granfer' as he was known by most of the town, were childhood ones during the last war, when he would take his grandchildren for an afternoon walk to Charmouth to see his relations, often via Charmouth tunnel, Westover and Wootton and then back across the cliff. Quite a walk for an 80 year old with half a dozen under 10-year olds. The best bit for us kids was the stop off at his cousin's sweet shop at the top of Charmouth!

Ken Gollop

Charlie's Back in Town

One of the most important events in the history of Charmouth was re-enacted on Saturday 21st October in front of the Queens Armes Hotel. The *Charmouth Companions* celebrated Charles II's overnight stay in the hotel exactly 350 years ago, after the battle of Worcester. He and his companions attempted to hire a boat to escape to France. The scheme failed because the wife of the escape boat's skipper hid his trousers in order to frustrate the plan. At least that was the interpretation the *Companions* put upon it. The production was in the best old English tradition of high farce; the costumes were stunning and the cast "hammed it up" gloriously. The Street was blocked, there were over two hundred onlookers and the collection totalled £120. This princely sum was immediately presented to the Pavey Group.

Our sincere thanks go to all those involved in the production, especially Mike and Barbara Whatmore, and to the committee of the *Companions* for the presentation of their most generous gift.

P.M.P.

BIRDS OF PREY.

A summer afternoon in 1940. The cloud cover, broken in a few patches where the sun filtered through onto a calm Lyme Bay, was becoming denser. Distant rumbling from over the horizon could have been naval guns which were often heard but it was more likely to have been a thunderstorm creeping up against a light prevailing wind as they sometimes do.

A young lad, proud in his first pair of long trousers, (in the days before the ubiquitous jeans this was a big event) sauntered along the path towards the coastguard lookout and the beach. At the old Round House he hesitated, undecided as yet which way to turn. He glanced upwards towards the clouds. The gulls were silent. A lone bird of prey hovered high over the cliffs, searching for the slightest movement in the undergrowth. He sniffed the air as he had seen animals do. It would rain, but, not just yet. With a decisive movement he turned right, walking with new purpose towards the cliffs he loved so well.

Charmouth at this time was an exciting village for the young. Possibly too exciting for the old. Before the Second World War, there was of course, the annual village fete with a band and a fancy dress parade to look forward to. Once in a while there was a great bonfire on the beach to mark the crowning of a monarch. But that was about it unless you counted the annual Empire Day address given to the school by Mr Pavey. His recital of all the magnificent virtues of the Empire upon which the sun never set, left the children feeling positively sorry for all foreigners; but apart from such stirring events nothing much ever happened. It is true that a few years earlier the Rev. Bennett returned from a spell in darkest Africa with a black boy, the like of whom had never been seen in the village. Alas, he departed before the limits of his blackness could be properly researched, preferring the offer of a more civilised atmosphere in a theological college. Now, the sun was already beginning to set for the mighty empire. Mr. Pavey had a tin hat, a service gas mask and a shining new whistle to warn the villagers to take cover when the need arose. There were troops everywhere, with tanks accidentally demolishing pubs to the great satisfaction of the righteous. There were battleships in Lyme Bay and an unofficial air display every week by a Spitfire pilot who had installed his wife in a local cottage.

The social order that had prevailed since Victorian times was cracking up. There was a triple-pronged invasion of underprivileged evacuees; the arrival of over-privileged upper middle class families who bought or rented property and the military under training, all believing that Charmouth was a safe wartime haven. The impact was to nibble away at the fabric of the village. They did not, could not, have known that nasty men in grey uniforms had already decided to risk their mighty Sixth Army against the coastal defences around Lyme Bay. Their plan was to strike for the Bristol Channel to cut off all the West Country. High level photographs revealed that although feverish work was in progress on makeshift defences along the coast, the German plan was that once their army had safely landed and the RAF wiped out, there was only the local defence volunteers (LDV later to become the Home Guard) to stop them. Thankfully that potentially heroic body was never tested.

Earlier, while walking down Higher Sea Lane our newly trousered lad had spotted a broken walking stick. After a few attempts at hitting loose stones into the numerous potholes he decided that the stick was useless for this purpose. At a pinch it could double as a Sten gun but he felt he was now too old for such “bang-bang you’re dead” games. It was too good a find to throw away. He searched his imagination, which was, according to his teachers, the only part of his brain, which could be relied upon to work. He tucked the stick under his arm and it felt good. In many of the military units located in the area he had seen army officers with canes tucked under their arms. So he stiffly saluted the next lamp-post as a rather surprised passing terrier had the impudence to bark at him. When he was old enough and with luck the war was still raging, he had no doubt he would be an officer, probably a brigadier. That, he admitted to himself would take a long war as the only brigadier he had ever seen was very old, but he might as well get some stick practice in until he was called to a top secret meeting with the prime minister to collect his sealed orders. Upon reflection he decided that the rank of captain was more realistic. A friend who came from London whose mother had taken a cottage for the duration of the war, said that his father who was ‘high up’ in a secret ministry was even now organising regiments of boys who would be given the task of holding the enemy at bay while the British Army invaded Germany. His friend knew many things though he was not yet wise. Boys whom he recruited could of course be assured of rapid promotion when “the balloon went up”. He was certain that machine guns and ammunition would arrive by registered post within the next few days. He spoke with such upper-class assurance that his word was not doubted. Stirred by such thoughts the lad’s walk became swifter. He must inspect his defences on the West cliff, unfortunately, ruthless concentration on the task in hand was not in his nature.

A Wellington bomber flew past. He did not look up to identify it, he knew many aircraft by sound. A long burst of fire from the tail gunner was worth a glance as the bullets made fountains in the sea. The bomber disappeared behind low clouds and the broken walking stick shot down a German fighter. What nonsense he thought. I must keep my imagination under control. He repeated this mantra several times frowning fiercely. The hovering bird plunged to earth. The kill was instant. He wished he were a bird. Life would be so much simpler

His walk, or patrol as he now thought of it, would end at his “defences” just past “Devils Bellows” on the Old Lyme Road before the rubbish dump was reached. Rubbish disposal was simple - everything was dumped over the cliff. There were flies and rats, broken bicycles, rabbits and sheets of old iron and canvas. In fact there was everything the nation needed to defend this section of the coast. With the machine guns due to arrive any time now, he could make the rubbish dump impregnable. Once again his imagination tugged away. Alas, his mantra had failed again.

Suddenly there was a great noise in the clouds. He looked up but could see nothing. A plane droned unseen. He knew the sound of eight Colt-Browning machine guns and from the throb of the engine knew it was a Hurricane fighter. He was scared - this was real. ‘Planes were only supposed to fire over the sea, what was the stupid pilot thinking about? There was another terrifying blast. Spent bullets rained over the dump. The sound changed ominously. He had never heard an engine screaming in agony as it destroyed itself. That Hurricane was done for he thought. Then, from a break in the clouds, he saw a shape he had never seen before, but recognised from his books, the dark outline of a Heinkel III bomber trailing smoke from one engine. It banked towards him. Was this to be his last day on earth? He never thought his short life would end like this. Then it turned over and dived straight into the sea.

Three parachutes drifted through the cloud. He knew the crew of the bomber was four. He looked for another ‘chute. It did not come. He had just seen a man go to certain death, trapped in the stricken bomber. Even though he was an enemy, he had saved his crew. His life, so precious to him, was lost. The boy, even in his long trousers, knew that was what he still was; he had however, gained a little self knowledge.. He realised that he was not as brave as he thought he was. Later when he told his story to those whom he loved, they did not believe him.

Peter Childs

Sundry Anecdote File

No 3 Dennis Menaced

This tale must date to at least eleven years ago now, certainly before the year BP. (Before the Bypass). It's a true story that happened on a fine, early summer day, prior to the great summer rush that used to occur in those distant times. The scene was set in the forecourt of the Coach and Horses Hotel, the time, just after midday.

The proprietors of the hotel, Kevin and Graham, had barely opened the bar and were standing at the front door, idling away the minutes in anticipation of a most improbable rush for that time of day and the year. Things were quiet; opposite, at the door of the village dairy, Forsey (Floyd) the proprietor, was similarly engaged leaning against his doorpost, watching the world go by. At Barr's Lane, opposite Bragg's the grocer, two policemen were setting up a trap for speeding traffic. Quiet though it was at that moment, it will be long remembered as one of the most elaborate "wind-ups" in the history of the village.

Around the corner from Lower Sea Lane, Dennis appeared; he was bent forward with the effort of pushing a large, four wheeled, petrol-driven Flymo lawnmower and sweating with the effort. It should be understood that the machine was not the type that could be driven from a seat on the machine, but was controlled by substantial handlebars. His morning's work as a gardener was done, the pub was open, his thirst had to be served and there were still many yards to go.

Dennis was not a tall man but broad across the shoulders and deep in chest. He was powerful, his features could be most kindly described as rugged and his expression was invariably stern. This gave the impression of surliness, a man not to be crossed. The truth was that he was, and happily still is, a most amiable soul, one of the village's best-known and well-liked characters. It was unfortunate that he was to become the butt of what was to transpire.

Dennis liked his cider. It was his unfailing custom to take a pint at lunchtime. One always knew where Dennis was around midday, the lawnmower or a wheelbarrow marked his progress. It was the presence of the lawnmower outside the Coach on that day that provided Kevin the landlord, with the germ of an idea for a "leg-pull" of great originality. While Dennis was dealing with his thirst, Kevin, who happened to know the policeman opposite quite well, suggested that the lawnmower, parked where it was outside the front of the hotel, might provide a laugh at Dennis' expense.

The constable entered into the conspiracy readily. He agreed to wait until Dennis had finished his pint. Dennis emptied his glass and left by the front door. The landlords and all the customers rushed to the front window to witness the action that was about to unfold. The scene was set.

On a signal from within the pub, Andy the policeman, strolled across the road in a manner that only officers of the law can assume. He was standing by the lawnmower with his left hand resting on his chin as Dennis emerged from the pub.

“Is this your lawnmower Sir?”

“Yes, Officer,” answered Dennis, nodding with a smile. He had parked the mower at that place so many times that the thought of a possible infraction never entered his head.

“Are you aware that this vehicle is parked with two wheels on a public footpath?”

Dennis, not quite knowing what to say, muttered that he was aware of the fact, but at the same time, wondered to himself what on earth the problem was.

“How long have you had this machine – I assume you are the registered owner? I can’t see your tax disc, would you mind showing me where is it?”

The officer circled the machine, examining it very carefully. He was an extremely tall man so the exaggeration of his movements in his visual search were quite perceptible to the gape-mouthed crowd inside the bar, whose faces by this time were pressed hard against the window - behind Dennis. Of course there was no tax disc, but by this time, the directness of the policeman’s questioning and the physical menace of him towering over Dennis had caused genuine confusion. His attempted responses to the officer’s questions made no sense whatsoever. The smile had long left his face - it was now ashen.

The constable continued; “ You know Sir, that under the law, four-wheeled, petrol driven vehicles such as yours are liable to exactly the same regulations as those of goods and passenger vehicles on the highways. When was your last M.O.T?” Dennis simply could not answer.

“ Well Sir, this matter is fast becoming more serious than I thought. You can provide no evidence of having the vehicle taxed. I can also see that your tyres are well worn, there are no lights on the vehicle and yet you cannot produce an M.O.T. certificate.”

It should be explained at this point that Dennis did not own a vehicle and was therefore completely unfamiliar with the conditions of ownership. In attempting to reply, Dennis issued strange croaking noises that were just as incomprehensible to him as they were to the policeman.

The policeman was by now feigning real concern. His voice dropped an octave and said menacingly, “Please show me your driving licence”. Of course he could not. “I don’t suppose there is any point in asking for your vehicle insurance either?” Dennis mumbled something about not knowing such requirements applied to mowers, but as he did so the officer cut him off sharp - “Did you drive to the Hotel?” Dennis nodded.“ And you’ve been drinking and actually intend driving this thing home?” Dennis nodded again, his chin on his chest, his misery total.

“This really won’t do Mr Bearpark! Not only have you failed to produce the necessary documentation, you have totally disregarded elements of the Highway Code and now you admit to drinking whilst in charge of a vehicle and of your intention to drive it home. I am certainly going to breathalyse you!” Upon which the constable called to the other officer from the other side of the road, asking him to bring the breathalyser kit.

M.Pratt



“I am going to ask you to blow into this tube.” He did so.

After Dennis had completed the test, Constable Andy rather over dramatized the act of reading the device but to great effect for the onlookers. He then said slowly with rising stress “ Well – it’s a shame it’s not positive. Anyway, it’s just as well, It is obvious that I would be much better employed if I were to arrest these two idiots before they succeed in their attempts to kill themselves with laughter!”

He then put his hand on Dennis’ shoulder and gently turned him about to face Kevin and Graham, who were literally crying with laughter as was the crowd at the window of the bar.”

Dennis turned around to realise the enormity of the joke that had been played upon him.

You “*****” he said as he landed an open-handed hearty thump on Andy’s upper arm.

Dennis, being the man he is, never bore resentment over this incident. He was soon able to laugh at the wonderfully contrived trick of which he had been butt. He still chuckles at the devilment of Kevin and Graham’s plot. To this day he marvels at the wonderful deadpan performance of Constable Andy, the man who for nearly a half an hour held him in near terror..... or so he says. You ask him.

As told to Peter Press by Kevin Perry and embellished by many others – and Dennis!

Ghosts at The Court?

In 1969 my parents bought The Court Hotel from the Kohrings. They had bought it a year previously from Mrs Buck. It had been run as a private hotel, a number of the guests being elderly people in permanent residence. At the time we took over the residents had gone, but there remained a feeling that nothing had changed for a long time.

The house was large, dark, and decorated in an old-fashioned style. Almost all the woodwork was painted dark brown and even the woodworm had difficulty finding their way around. Late at night, when all was still, strange creaks could be heard.

We inherited a number of long-serving staff when we took over the hotel who were a great help in showing us the ropes. They told us that at times, when the hotel was empty, singing could be heard from upstairs and sometimes also the sound of footsteps passing in the corridors above. It was certainly a spooky place. After redecoration the house was much brighter, but a certain atmosphere was still present.

In the depths of winter the hotel was closed. Late at night there was no traffic, even in those pre-bypass days. On one such evening everyone else had gone to bed, and I was alone in the bar, reading. All was silent. Getting up from my chair to get a drink, the hairs on the back of my neck rose as I heard the unmistakable sound of someone, whom I knew could not be there, settling into my seat behind me! Turning slowly, terrified at the apparition I was about to see, I realised with relief that the sound came from the cushion that I had been sitting on, rising after being released from my weight! With great relief, I went to bed.

Over the years I became somewhat sceptical despite the tale one guest related to my father. She came down to breakfast one morning somewhat flustered. During the night, for reasons never fully explained, she had come downstairs intent on entering the dining-room, only to have her way barred by “several of them, at least two or three...” Other than establishing that “they would not let me pass”, we never found out quite what she had seen .

I, meanwhile, was busying myself with what I thought was going to be a sensation to rival Conan Doyle's 'fairy' pictures. Having got hold of an old box brownie camera and a large quantity of papier-mache my sister and I set about taking ghost pictures. Wearing a hideous mask and an old sheet I posed while my sister took a doubly-exposed photo of the 'ghost' in the garden. Unfortunately they fooled no-one but brought a great deal of laughter into the lives of everyone who saw them.

There were however two less earthly occurrences while we were there. One day, my sister was alone in the garden. Glancing up, she saw a man standing at the other end of the lawn. Her first thought was that this was one of our guests, but even as she looked away it occurred to her that his appearance was a little strange. Wearing a gabardine raincoat, he was dressed as one from the Thirties or Forties. This caused her to look at him again, only to find that in the split-second since her first glimpse, he had vanished! He may have been the man that one of our guests saw...

The Court, The Street



Arriving at the hotel, one entered through a long hallway, into a bar/lounge area (the room with my haunted cushion!). Half of this room occupied the full height of the building. Stairs on the right side led up to the first floor, which formed an extended landing ahead and around the left-hand side. Bedrooms opened off this landing, which also ran on out of sight in both directions to the rest of the upstairs area.

One of our regular guests, who had stayed with us on several occasions, was sitting in the bar, waiting to be shown up to her room. My father walked along the landing, needing to attend to something in one of the rooms before greeting her. On coming downstairs, he apologised for leaving her waiting. She said that she quite understood, having seen that he was showing another guest to their room, and had been quite happy to wait. The only thing was that my father had been entirely alone!

The lady described a man in a brown suit, carrying a suitcase. He had followed my father around the landing. She had quite clearly seen him, and had noted nothing unusual about his appearance. They were in view for several seconds, and she was quite adamant about what she had seen, even when she was assured that no-one had been there.

In 1984 the Hotel was sold, to become an old peoples' home. This, in its turn, has now closed. I do wonder, though, if the man in the brown suit is still in residence?!

Nick Stapleton

Progress

Here we are at the sixth issue of *The Village Echo*. We are on our schedule for our goal of three issues a year and we hope, that you have seen an improvement in the range and quality of the production over the last two years. I am sure you know that the journal is written and produced by the Pavey Group by exclusively voluntary input. Our policy is to draw from as wide a range of village themes in the hope that they will be of interest to our readers. We will be very pleased to receive your suggestions on how you think the *Echo* might be improved. Once again, if you would like to submit an article, or if you have an idea for one, please come and tell us. We would be very pleased to help with the writing. It is your publication.

OUR DOC

His name was Doctor Chamberlain
Though we all called him Joe.
We never said it to his face
That wouldn't do you know

He was our Doc for years and years
We could call him any time.
He'd listen to our cares and woes
And soothe away our fears

He helped to bring us into this world
And also helped us out.
He was no saint by any means
Of that we will not shout.

He'd lance our boils and stitch us up
Stick needles in our arms.
He'd give us stuff that might not help
But at least would do no harm.

We sat in the cold waiting room
And shaking in our shoes.
We'd listen to what was being said
And picked up all the news.

He was often late, but we had to wait
Or come back another day.
Then he'd open his door, glare down at us all
And "come along next" he'd say.

He'd look into your eyes and ears
and tell you to hop on the couch.
He would poke you here and prod you there
Until he got an "Ouch".

So sorry Doc I'm here again
I really am in pain
But we always knew right down the years
He would be there to soothe our fears.

Rita Whatmore

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This list is of those people and organisations who have given most generously in support of the Village Echo and the Pavey Group

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Published by The Pavey Group

The Elms, The Street, Charmouth, BRIDPORT, Dorset, DT6 6LE

Tel:- 01297 561270

Editor - Peter M. Press

Editorial Board – Sarah Edwards, David Bettes, Michael Curnow

Design & Print by Jeff Prosser

Sponsored By Fortnam. Smith & Banwell