

THE BOOK OF BURNHAM-ON-SEA

*A Record of the Ebb and Flow of a
Somerset Seaside Town*

Winston & Bob Thomas

Lying at the mouth of the River Parrett on Bridgwater Bay, Burnham-on-Sea has been dominated by the sea. A small village until the late 1700s, the town grew as a seaside resort in Victorian times and today Burnham is a thriving town of some 18,000 people.

Local authors Winston and Robert Thomas recount the many rich incidents of Burnham's past, reaching right back to Arthurian legend. They tell of a major naval battle, smuggling, piracy, shipwreck and "murder most foul". Whilst they relate the stories of the good, the bad and the downright evil, most of this fascinating text is about ordinary folk who sometimes did extraordinary things. People like the fisherman who built a pub and ran a toy warehouse and the parson who built a lighthouse and a spa complex. Then there was the farmer who narrowly escaped being drowned as an infant, who went on to devise means of greatly improving the productivity of his land and that of his neighbours, as well as founding one of the first friendly and mutual benefit societies. We are reminded of the gardener who emigrated to America and established what has become a multi-million dollar business; the royal chef who had a retirement home in the town, and the local celebrity known for his 'three mile voice'.

Above all, Winston and Robert Thomas paint a picture (richly illustrated with over 300 images) of what it has been like to live in Burnham in the last century and a half: the schools, the clubs, the events, the societies, the churches, the shops – the warp and weft of everyday life in this fascinating community.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Winston Thomas was born in 1909. His father had his own business in Burnham, which Winston succeeded to. He married Una Clapp in 1938 and they had one son, Robert. He was a member of the Local Improvement Group for many years and a shareholder in the Burnham Institute. Both he and Una were active members of the Burnham Dramatic Society when it re-formed after the war.

Robert (Bob) was born in 1939. He took over and ran the family painting and decorating business, founded by his grandfather Frank Thomas back in the 1890s, for several years before changing direction and buying a restaurant (after training as a chef). Over the years he has also worked in a local nursing home, as a tutor in the F.E. Centre, and as a market research interviewer. In between whiles, he was a regular contributor to *Somerset Magazine*.

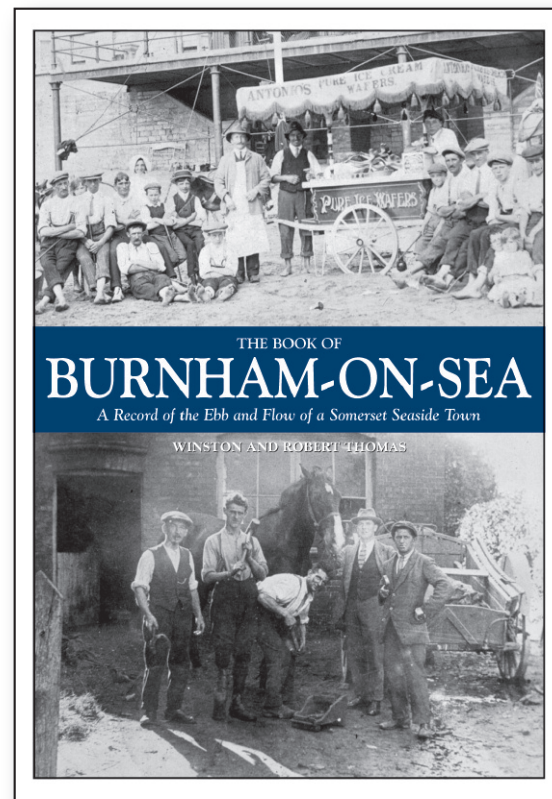
There were two things that Winston passed on to his son: a love of the town of their birth including a deep interest in its history, and perfectionism, which is why this book has taken so long to write.

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Above: Antonio's ice cream barrow at the top of Seaview Road.

Above left: William Welland's blacksmith's shop in Oxford Street. Joe Lynham, one of his men is filing the horse's hoof.

Left: Burnham Electric Theatre, the first custom-built cinema in the town.



Above: Vicarage Terrace – part of Rev. Davies's fenced-off promenade may be seen on the left.



Right: Hart House VAD hospital, recovering amputees and other patients.

Below: Women and children on decking in front of bandstand with National School in background.



◆ THE BOOK OF BURNHAM-ON-SEA ◆

High Light with chimney for original oil lamp – viewed from the Berron Road.

Road and Middle Burnham; the third being Stoddens Farm, the only one now remaining. Neighbouring Middle Burnham Farm dates from much the same period, as do most of the older farmhouses between Middle Burnham and the Turnpike (now the A35 Bressat Road). There is physical evidence that some, if not all, of these farms were largely committed to dairying, in the existence of a grove of Conker[®] trees at the eastern foot of the bridge over the railway line. Continuing southward from St Ann's Villa and

◆ EARLY YEARS ◆

When the property was re-occupied in the nineteenth century, the title came from the yard that was at the bottom of what is now Westfield Road. During the mid nineteenth century the Esdaile family who owned the yard also occupied the Colony. Their long disused clay pit, for many years known as Hunt's Pond, is now the lake from which Lakeside Holiday Park (2010) takes its name and is backed onto by some of the houses in Rectory Drive.

Opposite the Colony drive was that of Paradise House, also with its lodge (long since gone). The estate was bounded on the west by Paradise (Berron) Road and on the north by Stoddens Road and extended eastward beyond the double bend in Stoddens Road. At that time it was owned and occupied by Sophia Anne Blake and comprised two houses with gardens, two orchards and several fields and areas of parkland. Unlike the Colony which only had the one name change, Paradise House had four or five of which 'The Grove' was the most enduring. Long after the estate was broken up and the buildings demolished, the name lives on in the name of the road which follows the line of the original driveway from the Berron Road for around a hundred metres before turning northwards to Stoddens Road across the western part of the estate which was developed during the early part of the twentieth century after some of the land was sold off by the Rev. Ken Thompson.

After the Colony came a small estate extending from the roadway to the beach on which stood Poplar Villa or Cottage which name was later given to that particular road when development of the estate began in the closing years of the nineteenth century. The last occupier of Poplar Cottage was a Mrs Langman who was there until 1906 according to Kelly, by which time the Berron Road frontage and much of the north side of Poplar Road and Grove Road were built on and occupied. A little further south, on land leased from the diocese by Reverend David Davies are two groups of buildings described as 'house and stables and outhouses'. These buildings were in the vicinity of where Hall Terrace is currently located at the rear of Seaview Road and may well have been the stabling

Another group of happy late makers on another farm – note the barrel of cider. In those days a cider allowance was often part of labourer's wages.

Hay making; using real horse power at Middle Burnham Farm.

29 Horse Chestnut wood is very white and straight grained which made it ideal for the manufacture of milling pairs in the days before stainless steel.

30 On *Moore Springs of Dorsetville Burnham* written in 1886 Dr G. Hoare M.D. makes reference to Dodd's Cottage being recently built. Among a variety of drawings made in 1845 of views from the upper windows some show the garden which at that time extended to the Berron Road and upon part of which the present Driscoll Court flat now stand. When first laid out the semi-circular drive went right up to these houses with small gardens intervening and is now the cause.

Lodge at entrance to the Colony drive – very little altered.

Lodge at the entrance to the Grove – demolished when the road was laid out.

31 See Appendix 2.

Example of a double-page spread.