

The Bowhays of Dartmouth

Albert Bowhay was the first member of the family to live in Dartmouth. He came from Torcross with his wife Eliza Sanders in 1885 or thereabouts to live in Warfleet Cottage (since demolished) and work the steam-driven machinery in the Brewery in the building that now houses the Pottery. Another family connected with the Brewery in those days who still live in the town is that of Charlie Evens, whose grandfather was brought from Wales as an experienced brewer. The Bowhay family, along with the other Warfleet children, would make their way to school in Higher Street, the only school in the town in those days.

In 1903 the chance came to own a house of their own and the family moved to Rock Cottage in Crowthers or Crowthers Hill. This was one of the early main roads into Dartmouth and at one time was poised on the edge of a ravine overlooking the old millpond. It is said too that the name Crowthers came from the parts of a violin that were made as a home industry in the cottages along that steep road. Rock Cottage came onto the market when Albert Bowhay could just afford to buy the house and a piece of agricultural land at Jawbones and to rent some other fields at Waterpool. The family started a market garden, selling vegetables to the town and soon adding cows for a milk round. He was able to obtain the spent hops and grain from his old employers at the Brewery for cattle feed. In those days milk, delivered twice a day, would cost the customer less than a penny a pint and cabbages might be two for a penny.

Of course the whole family would help on the farm from the time they could walk, as did the next generation, though moving into the town made greater opportunities for the older children to start out on their own. The eldest son Fred, became a butcher, and it was not long before he owned the shop that is now Cutmores in Duke Street. Pigs would be specially fattened for sale in the shop on the family farm. So the connection with the land remained. He married but had no children. Much later when he retired in the 1940s, one of his employees Jack Kelland took over the shop.

The next Bowhay son was William John, known as Jack, and he helped his father from childhood and never changed his profession, taking over the business in the 1920s. This well loved Dartmouthian lived to be 94 and died at Rock Cottage in 1980. He had married Amy Thorne at St Clements Church in 1911, having first walked out" with her at the previous Regatta. They started their married life in Breeze Cottage the opposite side of Crowthers Hill.

The two younger brothers were Arthur and Harry. Arthur had inherited a feeling for the land and took up gardening in addition to helping his father on the farm. When only 18 he was winning prizes at his employer the Rev. Simpson in the vegetable classes at the Dartmouth Kingswear & District Agricultural and Cottage Garden Society Annual Exhibition, in October 1913.

The three Bowhay Sisters were Maud who later married a soldier and went to live in Canada, Mary who married George Putt, and Marjorie or May who married Charlie Sanders. George Putt was a Dartmouth postman and one of their sons, Bernard, lives in Plymouth. the other son died abroad in the merchant service but his widow Joan is still in



Dartmouth. The Sanders also had two Sons.
Wedding of Jack and Amy Bowhay 1911



Albert Bowhay and his granddaughter Joyce 1930

Back in 1914 the calamity of the 1st World War meant that families who might never have left their native towns and villages became! Spilt hp · through war service, and those who were left behind had to run the Farms and businesses as best they could, Albert Bowhay by then in his 50s must have just been able to get along with the help of his wife and daughters tot all his sons went to the war. Jack, as an experienced farm hand was sent as a soldier to look after German prisoners who were working the land in the Landrake area of Cornwall. He was fortunate in being able to take his family down there with him, for his eldest son Bert had been born in 1912 at Breeze Cottage and his eldest daughter Cicely two years later. Arthur and Harry joined the Devon regiment and after home service were sent out to the German Front. The first tragedy came to the family in 1916 when the mother Eiiiza died. Arthur and Harry were able to return to Dartmouth for the funeral but that was their last visit for first Harry, in 1917, and then Arthur in 1918, were killed in France. Arthur left a widow, Norah Adams. When Jack Bowhay brought his family back to Dartmouth after the war no doubt some readjusting was needed but they felt able and willing to take on the family farm and milk and vegetable business. They were stalwart christians and actively involved in the life of St Saviours Church. He was later churchwarden for many years and treasurer for over 40. Up to the end of his long life he never failed to look in to the Church for some quiet reflection whenever he came down into the town. Mrs Amy Bowhay was a founder of the Mothers Union, a Sunday School teacher and a member of the sewing guild. All this had to be fitted into a very active life in the family business and in the 1920s it soon seemed the right thing to rent what the family called the "old shop" at 2 Southford beside Globe steps. Into this was moved the vegetable business. The house was said to be of tudor origin, its ancient deeds being then in the possession of its owner.

Life between the wars had its ups and downs. Jack and Amy's family was completed with a younger son Arthur, born in 1922, and Joyce (now Mrs Morris) six years later. These must have been early ecumenical days in Dartmouth for the children attended St John's Roman Catholic school, then in the present Episcopalian Church building. The Bowhays were a close and happy family that worked hard like all connected with livestock, seven days a week and during daylight hours. However on Sundays everything stopped for the 11 o'clock service at St Saviours. Bert was already helping his father Jack at Horticultural Shows. They planted an orchard on Jawbones and grew Early Victorias, Lanes Prince Albert, Bramleys, Beauty of Bath and Charles Ross apples. In addition there was a spread of rhubarb and soft fruits such as raspberries, loganberries and gooseberries. There were good seasons and bad seasons and there was the shop to look after and the milk to deliver as well as the land and the stock to tend. Shops nearby to them in those days were Widdicombe the baker, Mr Wotton the cabinet maker and Foale the Stoke Fleming butcher who only opened one day a week in Dartmouth. They rented Foale's field at Waterpool at one time, and a stone-deaf aid cattle drover lived in a cattle barn known as Maddo's Mansion near where they grazed the farm horse. During the 1926/27 blizzard, Bert was sent up with Gerry Rehburg, who worked for them at the time, to see how they were faring. They struggled up the hill to be met by "Maddo" covered in frozen snow and then went on to find the horse "Lion", not sheltering in the barn but waiting for them by the gate up to its belly in snow.

"Maddo", said to have been the Atlantic Fleet's boxing champion during the war, was always invited to the Bowhay family's Christmas dinner. Also at Christmas in the 1920s a Parochial Church Tea was held for St Saviours in the then Subscription Rooms (now the Guildhall). Families would book a table, or half a table, and take along their best china and a selection of food for a social get-together. After tea there were children's fancy dress competitions and dances.

By this time the Bowhays had purchased the "old shop" but the building was deteriorating and it was said that a customer drinking in the Globe Inn next door had given the alarm that he could see the walls bulging dangerously. The house eventually had to be rebuilt and this task was carried out in the 1930s by Mr Gill. This became the "new shop" with good living accommodation for Jack and Amy and their family who were growing up. There were two memorable incidents not very long after it was rebuilt. The first was when Hannaford the butcher was delivering his meat on horse back; someone shook a mat up the road, the horse was startled and bolted with its rider and load into the shop window. Cecily; the eldest daughter (now Mrs Efford) remembers being in the shop at the time. Their eldest son Bert, now Dartmouth's best-known gardener remembers only too well the occasion in 1938 when the fire engine that had been attending a fire higher up the street, careered down the hill and into the shop front - for he was having a bath in the kitchen at the time.

During the 1950s the Bibby line troopships on the India run were laid up in Dartmouth during the summer. Their lascar crews would come ashore to buy milk and chickens from the Bowhay shop and Joyce well remembers as a little girl her first sight of a black man.



St John R.C. School playground c.1918



Rock Cottage Dairy c.1905
Arthur, May and Eliza Bowhay

Modern methods had come to Dartmouth and the local sanitary inspector would come to test the cows for TB. Meanwhile, since Bert had never been so interested in the animal side of farming, he had gone as a lad to learn horticulture at the Devon Rosery in Torquay. He worked under Arthur Ash, who had at one time been Head Gardener at the Redoubt at Kingswear. They did greenhouse work looking after tropical plants, ferns, arum lilies etc, propagating special geraniums and fuchsias, and also doing floral displays for receptions and fruit arrangements for dinners at the big Torquay hotels.

During the Depression, on his return to Dartmouth. Bert did jobbing gardening as the family business could not support them all. But Bert had progressed to the committee of the Horticultural Society, having won his first prizes in 1933 for vegetables grown on his allotment. And he had fun in other ways for he and some friends started a small band "The Cliftonians" all of them learning to play the music by ear. There was Bert on the banjo, John Williams and Les Prout on the mandolin, Frank Lawes on the drums - who also sang - and Leonard "Cupsy" Hoskins at the piano. Leonard, who now lives in Canada, would listen to a tune on the gramophone, work it out on the piano and the rest would pick it up from there. Miss Walker of the Henley Museum gave them a few lessons and they went around giving concerts. Mrs Rowe, the Mayoress at the time, started a Girls Club in Mayors Avenue. Along came Kathleen Lawes, the drummer's' sister, an expert dancer, and soon she and Bert were "walking out". But the 2nd World War came to bring more changes to their lives, and to alter the face of Dartmouth and the surrounding district so that it never again returned to its earlier quiet existence. Bert and Kathleen were married in January 1940 and first rented and later bought the house in Highland Terrace, Above Town, where they still live happily. And Bert remembers how as a boy he delivered milk to the previous occupant, a Mr Brown who was Head Gardener at the Naval College. And when on duty with the Home Guard at the outbreak of war he manned the road barrier on the Warfleet Road. He spent the night in (the very cottage where his father had been born 53 years before. But Bert was called up into the RAF in November 1940 and was not de-mobbed until 1945. Arthur Married and went into the Navy. After the war Arthur returned for a time to help his father on the farm but later moved away from Dartmouth to a horticultural firm near Cheltenham specialising in tomatoes growing. During the war Cicely and Joyce took their share of helping on the farm and remember riding home from Stoke Fleming on the farm wagon having delivered tea to the men by bus. The end of an era had come in 1942 when old Albert Bowhay died aged 82: At the end of the war Cicely now Mrs Efford and her husband took over the shop. Her sister Joyce had also married a Dartmouth man during the war and was now Mrs Morris. The parents Jack and Amy retired to Rock Cottage where they

remained until the end of their lives. In 1950 Jack decided to give up farming and sold the Jawbones land for £500 to a Dr and Mrs Siriet, who wished to build a house there. They changed their minds and after a long saga of changing hands over the ensuing years a developer finally built 8 houses on the land in 1972, The year after Jack and Amy celebrated their diamond wedding.



Jack and Amy Bowhay' Ruby wedding group 1951

When Bert first returned to Dartmouth he was self-employed as a gardener and did not join the Borough Council until 1953. He was second gardener for ten years before becoming Head Gardener in 1963 until his retirement in 1977. Meanwhile he was of course very active in the Horticultural Society and Chairman for twelve years. In 1973 the Devon County Show included a class Town exhibits exhibits for which Dartmouth won the Gold Medal. Bert designed the display together with Mrs Webb, the well-known flower arranger, and they incorporated a model of the "Charlotte Rhodes", an enlarged photograph from BRNC and a description by Scribe Melvyn Stone. In 1974 Bert staged an Exhibit in the same class as Dartmouth, Cradle of the Royal Navy, for which he won a Silver Medal for the town. On retiring from gardening in the public sector he was soon involved in Dartmouth's prize winning entries in the Britain in Bloom competition, always ready to give help and advice and encouragement. It was fitting that Bert and Kathleen Bowhay were present in 1987 in London when Dartmouth was awarded not only the cup for the best decorated town of its size in England, but also another prize for its community effort. And in the next generation of Bowhays Bert's daughter Peggy Holt is fond of her garden and Joyce Morris's young son Barry is working at the Kimberley Nurseries Slapton. So Dartmouth can say thank you to the Bowhay family, and look to the future.



St Saviours Southford Sunday School play c. 1919