

## **Mr. J. F. Etherden Leaves Minehead Suburban Retirement After a Varied Career**

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### **Adventures by Land and Sea**

Mr. John F. Etherden and Mrs. Etherden said 'Goodbye' to Minehead last Monday. Well, perhaps not 'Goodbye'. Rather 'Au Revoir' for they hope to see Minehead and their many friends here in the future, as visitors, at any rate. They have gone to live at Morton Park, near Wimbleton, and with them go the best wishes of all in West Somerset who know them, for many pleasant and healthful years of retirement. The Red Lion Hotel of which they have been host and hostess for something like twenty years is now 'under new management'. Their place there has been taken by Mr. and Mrs. L.D. Hooper who return to Minehead - they were formerly at the Pier Hotel - after some years at Lynton.

It is only a few months ago that Mr. Etherden was chairman of the Minehead Urban District Council, and mention of this fact will bring to mind the many years of service which he gave to the town as a member of that body. To mention his association with a few other local activities, such as the fire brigade, of which he was honorary captain, the British Legion, Freemasonry, the R.A.O.B., the Lifeboat Institution, the National Union of General Workers, the Minehead Regatta, etc., is to recall that his interests while he was at Minehead were wide and varied and advantageous to the community.

### **'Roughing It' at 8**

As many of his friends know, Mr. Etherden has had an interesting and roving career, and a 'Free Press' representative who went to bid him farewell managed to elicit from him some of the highlights of that career, which began when he had just entered his 'teens. He was one of a large family born at Faversham, Kent, and as his parents' circumstances were limited he, with the other youngsters, had soon to make contact with a hard world. "As a boy of eight," Mr. Etherden recalled, "I was sent on board a Thames barge and I roughed it there until I was fourteen. Then I joined a four-masted barque, the Blythwood, and sailed in her from West India Docks for Australia. The trip out took 92 days - a fairly smart voyage as things went in those days. This was in 1888. Homeward bound we were dismasted in a sudden squall off Durban, but we were towed into Durban and refitted and completed the voyage home."

In 1889 Mr. Etherden joined the Royal Navy, and while in that Service served on H.M.S. Impregnable, H.M.S. Thames, H.M.S. Vivid, H.M.S. Cleopatra, and H.M.S. Pigeon, rising to the rank of Chief Petty Officer. His first commission with the Navy was with H.M.S. Cleopatra, on the North American and West Indian stations. During this period they went as far north as Baffin's Bay in quest of any trace they could find of Lieut. Peary's North Pole expedition (1891-2), which was thought to be lost. Their search was unsuccessful, but on their return to St. John's Newfoundland, they found that Peary had returned safely, having passed the Cleopatra in thick fog, "While on this Northern trip," said Mr. Etherden, "we were frozen up in the Straits of Belle Isle. During that time we had all sorts of recreations on the ice. We played football there and we had field gun practice. We eventually forced our way through the strait and our ship was the first ship ever to get through."

### **A South American Experience**

"We had some exciting experiences on the West Indies station," Mr. Etherden recalled. "We landed to quell a rebellion of the Mosquito Indians against the Nicaraguans at Bluefields in Central America. The Mosquitos, who were under British suzerainty, had come down from the mountains and raided Bluefields and terrorized the inhabitants. There were no casualties on our side, but many of the rebels were killed or wounded. We were relieved on that job by two U.S. warships. Then we were at Bermuda when a big magazine near the docks caught fire and our crew was rushed ashore to empty the magazine of live shells and explosives while the fire was raging. It was considered a very risky job, but the bluejackets probably saved the island from a disastrous explosion."

On paying off the Cleopatra, Mr. Etherden was appointed signal-instructor to the training ship, H.M.S. Ganges, at Falmouth, in which capacity he served for two years. During that time he took part in the great Naval review at Spithead when Queen Victoria's Silver Jubilee was celebrated, his commission on that occasion being the five-masted iron-clad Agememnon, one of the last of the old masted ships in the Service. He was also in charge of a party of boys from the Ganges who formed a guard of honour at St. Paul's Cathedral when the Queen attended the thanksgiving service there.

"My next commission," he stated, "was in the Persian Gulf in H.M.S. Pigeon chasing slavers. Our most eventful happening on this ship was a trip from Colombo to the Seychelles on which we experienced such rough weather that we arrived ten days overdue with not a bit of coal and all the wood fittings gone; they had all been burned to keep up steam. And the ship's company was so exhausted that when they went ashore they forgot to return for five days. That caused a good deal of trouble at the time but afterwards we settled down into one of the best ships afloat."

The Boxer rebellion in 1899, when Mr. Etherden went to Hong Kong with the British Navy contingent, provided another chapter of interest in his career. This was the last of the navy for he purchased his discharge at the end of 1899.

### **Fire Brigade Service**

On leaving the Navy Mr. Etherden joined the London Fire-brigade, then under Commander Wells. "After two years of that I resigned," he continued, "to join Baden-Powell's South African Constabulary for the rest of the Boer War. When peace was declared and I was demobilized I joined the Durban Fire-brigade. I passed through all grades in that, including the fire-float to that of engineer-in-charge. We had some tidy fires to deal with there. One of the biggest was a blaze of prairie grass, something like half a million tons, on the docks. It lasted for about three weeks."

For about eight weeks Mr. Etherden was in the Durban Fire-brigade. Then he resigned and went to sea again, this time as fifth engineer on a vessel bound for New Zealand. This was in 1906. She carried as passengers - unwilling ones to a great extent - Australian men, women and children who were being repatriated from South Africa. "When we got to New Zealand," said Mr. Etherden, "I noticed a placard which stated 'Rebellion in Zululand'. I immediately made my way to the docks, discovered a ship sailing for Durban, and booked my passage. On arriving there I went to headquarters of the Durban Light Infantry and joined up, and I was promoted corporal and sent out recruiting. I picked up one of the roughest gangs in the world, I should think, and as they had all seen service of some sort or another they were very soon knocked into shape." Mr. Etherden took his 'recruits' to Bond's Drift, on the Tugola River, and joined up with another force, but the rebellion was practically over by then and all that they were required to do was to round up scattered Zulu warriors. The Zulus had 'kicked over the traces' on the question of poll tax and had killed two or three white inspectors. The rebellion only lasted about six weeks, and although he was only in at the end of it Mr. Etherden received the medal.

### **Back to England**

The Durban Light Infantry were disbanded after the rebellion, and now Mr. Etherden went to the Transvaal and secured a billet with the East Rand Fire-brigade. He was appointed fire-master with full power to reorganize a full-time and an auxiliary brigade, in which he succeeded in giving satisfaction. "Our biggest fire, while I was with the brigade, was in one of the principal gold mines on the Rand - the Cason Main Shaft. "The brigade with the mine shaft were engaged for several days on this fire."

In 1912 Mr. Etherden returned to England, though only with the intention of taking a holiday here. But he decided to remain and bought the Imperial Hotel, Leicester. The Great War stirred the adventurous spirit again, and early in 1915 he "sold out" with a view to rejoining the Navy. But in this he was unsuccessful and he then came West - to Minehead - to become tenant of the Red Lion Hotel, but it was not until after the War that he settled down in it, for, joining the R.N.A.S., he managed to "do his bit" on Channel patrol duty and also as kite balloon instructor at Roehampton.

After demobilization in 1919, Mr. Etherden soon demonstrated an inclination to civic service by allowing himself to be nominated as a candidate for the Council. He was among those returned, and except for a period of about two years, when he went to South Africa, he was on the Council up to April of this year [1936], being chairman for the last twelve months. His health has not been very satisfactory in recent years and he did not feel disposed to stand again at the last election. As a result of his going on to the Council the Minehead Fire-brigade had the full benefit of his years of practical experience and knowledge of fire-fighting services. Becoming chief officer he undertook the reorganization and training of the brigade, and exerted himself keenly in securing an up-to-date motor-engine and escape, and it is to his efforts that Minehead owes the very efficient fire-brigade and service of which the town is proud today. Mr. Etherden's later appointment as honorary captain was an acknowledgement of the services which he had thus rendered.

### **Mr. Etherden's Successor**

Mr. Hooper, who has succeeded Mr. Etherden at the Red Lion Hotel, has been, since he left the Pier Hotel, proprietor of the Queen's Hotel, Lynton. He, too, has been prominent in the life of that place. He was a member of the Urban Council there, chairman of the British Legion branch, a chorister at the parish church, hon. treasurer of the local rifle club, and a great supporter of football. Before he left Lynton for Minehead British Legion members presented him with a framed testimonial in recognition of his service as chairman of the Lynton branch.

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*John F. Etherden was born in Faversham, Kent in 1874, the son of Charles Etherden, born in Harwich in 1822, and Sarah Norris of Greenwich who Charles married in 1851. John F. Etherden's father, Charles, was one of ten children born to John Etherden of Harwich (1791-1865) and Mary Coker of Ipswich who married John in 1817.*

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