

Old Folks Gathering – 1939

August 2012



With the help of an old newspaper cutting, the Museum's research team has ended the quest of Mrs Marlene Milne for information about this mug which her mother bought for her in a second-hand shop in Plymouth in 1973.

The newspaper article ⁽¹⁾ (summarised below) describes an Old Folks Dinner held in Lyme Regis in February 1939; an annual event since 1905, except for the war years. Not only does it provide the answer to Mrs Milne's quest, but perhaps a poignant reminder of a life soon to be threatened by another World War.

More than 80 old folk (over 60) and widows attended the Old Folks Dinner in the dining hall of the Royal Lion, Broad Street on Thursday evening. Many walked from their homes. The oldest guest was 86 year old Eliza Broomfield of Silver Street. She remembered attending the dinners before the war.

The hall was decorated with bunting with the borough arms displayed at the head of the table, where the Mayor, Alderman W J Emmett, presided. The mayor was wearing his robes of office and his maces were laid before him on the table. The Mayoress, Mrs Emmett, also attended wearing her chain of office. Town crier, Mr Walter Abbott, sitting on the right of the mayor, was in his full uniform.

Dinner was a choice of roast turkey, beef or pork, with a liberal allowance of greens and potatoes. Christmas pudding or apple pie came as sweet with biscuits & cheese to follow.

20 further dinners were sent out to aged and infirm folk who were unable to be brought from their homes.

After they had drunk the health of the King and Royal family, the Mayor read out:

Message from Mayor to His Majesty - *The old folks of the loyal and ancient borough of Lyme Regis assembled at dinner desire to wish your Majesty, the Queen and Princesses, all good wishes for 1939 and trust that your forthcoming visit overseas may be a safe and happy one.*

His Majesty's private secretary replied - *Please convey to all assembled at dinner the sincere thanks of the King and Queen for their kind and loyal message of good wishes which their Majesties much appreciated.*

An entertainment programme was arranged by H I Blanchard. Mrs Templeman played instrumental music during the dinner; Alderman Baker, Mr J Marks, Mrs Gordon Baker & J Searle (songs); Misses Greta Granger & Joy Britton (dancing numbers); Mr J Loveridge & Miss Betty Street (vocal interlude); Mr Clifford Bird (pianist); Mr W Froom (country parson); Mr Frank Chaffey (piano-accordion) and Mr Gerald Cheyne (xylophone).

On leaving each lady & gentleman received a souvenir in Honiton pottery, inscribed, Old Folks Gathering, W J Emmett, Mayor, 1939. The gifts, provided by subscribers, were handed to the recipients by the Mayor. Ladies also received ½ lb tea and men an ounce of baccy, the gifts of the Mayor.

Mrs Milne donated the mug to the Museum.



On the night of the 1939 Old Folks Dinner, mugs were given to the men, and the ladies received a jam pot, which the museum already has in its collection.

This annual event continues today in the form of an 'over 70s' lunch.

Charles Collard founded the Honiton Pottery in 1918 and remained there until his retirement in 1947.

Alderman William J Emmett served as Mayor of Lyme Regis, 1937-44.

Jam Pot - Museum Collection

(1) Pulman's Weekly News, Feb 7, 1939.