



Echoes from The Hole in the Wall



The Hole in The Wall pub, first known as the Commercial Tap, was on the corner of Market Street and Pound Lane, where Clarendon Court flats have now been built. It dated from 1860 when a beer licence was granted to Charles Farrow as an extension of the licence for the Commercial Hotel (later the Central) and was housed in what had been coal storage buildings for the Hotel. Charles's eldest daughter Sarah and her husband Tom Reed helped to run the Tap, and when Sarah and her father both died in 1915, Tom ran it with Les, his 16-year-old son. Les took over in due course, followed by his own son Jack, so the pub stayed in the family until Jack Reed surrendered the tenancy in 1961.



There was a stable yard behind the wall extending down Market Street from the Commercial Hotel, and at the end of the stables was a tack room – this was the original 'Hole in The Wall' where beer and other refreshments would be passed out to the ostlers, and in time that became the name of the pub. On the right-hand side of the stable yard were coach houses for the four-in-hand coaches, and on the left were stables rented for his two horses by Barnabus 'Barney' Bull, who sold fresh fruit and vegetables to the townspeople from his cart. All in all, the stable yard was very much a feature of life in the pub.

Jack Reed now more than 90 years old, has many stories of the Hole in The Wall – often featuring horse dung! As a boy, he kept white mice in one of the stables along with straw for them. He was puzzled when his supply of straw gradually diminished, and he decided to set a trap. He carefully placed a bucket filled with horse manure on top of the stable door, so that when anyone entered the contents would empty on top of them. Well the trap worked! The hapless person that got well and truly covered was 'Curly' Raynor who had not realised that the straw was for Jack's mice; Jack's mum, Ethel, had the job of washing all Curly's clothes. Another of Jack's tales concerns the muckings-out from the stables. This was known as the dung mixon which was piled against the wall that divided the yard from Pound Lane. When the mound reached about six feet high, a lorry would park on Pound Lane and the muck would be loaded up and sent for use by the farmers.

The photograph here was taken outside the Hole in the Wall in 1943 and shows (left to right) Les Reed, Jill Wearing (then young Jill Green), Ethel (Les's wife) and her sister Nora (Jill's mother). Jill, sister Rae and their parents used to spend family Christmases



with Ethel and Les at the pub, but - unfortunately for the family - the turkey was always cooked in the black-leaded and polished iron range situated in the large main bar. This couldn't be accessed until after 3 o'clock when all the customers left - and the fun could begin!

When Jack and his wife Fay took over the pub, they turned the stables into the popular Barn Bar. On a Saturday night, coaches from all across the Island, including soldiers from Parkhurst, would stop in Albert Street and the revellers would go straight down to the Hole in the Wall until nearly closing time, which was around 10pm in those days, and then on to the Winter Gardens, where in its heyday more than 500 people would dance the night away.

Jill Wearing, [Ventnor & District Local History Society](#). If you want to know more about the old pubs and inns of Ventnor and the surrounding villages, our booklet *Inns and Ale, Bonchurch to Chale* is available from the Ventnor Heritage Centre.