

Ferndown before the Bulldozers

Less than 60 years ago Ferndown was just a village, with gravel roads, a scattering of shops and not even a set of traffic lights. Then the bulldozers arrived and much of Ferndown's history disappeared forever. Part autobiography and part history, these articles are a fascinating glimpse of a village in transition.

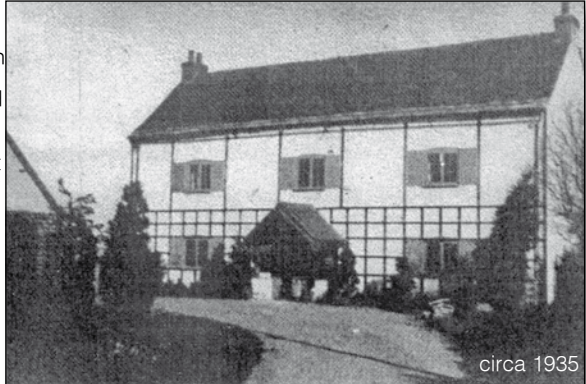
Ferndown's one and only 'Zoo'.

In 1947 a small zoo was opened by Mrs Dorothy Sadler from a house then called Sunnylands situated on the Ringwood Road almost opposite what is the current M&S Foodhall.

The animals she brought in gradually became bigger and more exotic until there were bears, leopards, a gorilla and the infamous Ajax the lion whose roars reached the national press, not only here, but as far as Australia! The Courier Mail in Brisbane reported: *"Mrs Sadler has been given permission to set up a permanent shelter for two lions in her backyard, despite protests from more than 80 neighbours. These neighbours claimed that the roaring of the lions, Ajax and Leonora, keeps them awake."* Mrs Sadler said that *"Ajax only roared when he was a little bit naughty!"* *"In addition to the lions, Mrs Sadler keeps pet monkeys, snakes, pheasants, bears and a wallaby and she soon hopes to take delivery of a Bengal Tiger. Last Easter she had 10,000 visitors to the zoo at one shilling (5p today) a head for adults and 6d for children."*

But Ajax frightened local residents who feared he might escape. Some of the other zoo inmates did get away, including two silver foxes and a python! Soon there was a chorus of opposition to the zoo, which was nevertheless visited by some 50,000 visitors in two years.

In August 1954 Dorset County Council ruled that it could only operate as a Pets Corner and any potentially



circa 1935

dangerous animal would have to go. A public enquiry was held in January 1955 when villagers' objections were heard and together with a subsequent appeal by the Parish Councillors, Mrs Sadler lost her case and the zoo closed down soon afterwards.

Today, a house is still there, although in recent years it has no doubt been extensively altered and is now barely recognisable from the original. The land occupied by Ajax and his fellow captives now provides homes for residents in Longacre Drive. The property is known now as 'The Old Stile House' and the entrance to the zoo turnstile can still be seen as a gap in the front garden wall but blocked by trees and shrubs.

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The zoo turnstile entrance.