

ROUND AND ABOUT IN THE PARISH...(or Elephants Have a Drink at the Red Lion).

No, let me assure you that I have not finally cracked up - it's the truth!

In June 2017 I was interviewing Ray Turner of Chelwood Gate about times gone by in the village and he was telling me about the time elephants came along and stopped for a drink from the well which was by the Red Lion. Ray, I am really, really, sorry, but I thought you were pulling my leg, but instead it was all true and I regret to say I didn't believe you. This story has now been corroborated by Gwen Smith who also witnessed the event. Sadly, the exact date is not known. Also, I cannot find out which circus it was, or where it came from or where it was going, but could the elephants have been en-route to Horsted Keynes Station? It's possible.

Certainly, circuses did parade their animals through villages and towns, and on 14th August 1899 Kenneth Loader (who was on holiday at Birch Grove) went down to see Sangster's Circus parade in Brighton. He reports that one lion cage door came open but was hurriedly shut.

On Wednesday 19th September 1923 school children at Twyford School were allowed time off to visit the circus in the afternoon. It's not known where this would have been but Roger Price from the Bluebell Railway has given me a photo of an elephant emerging from the Elephant van at Horsted Keynes Station. It's probable that the circus was near to Twyford School. Might it have been in the field adjacent to the Station?



Similarly, Danehill school children were given half an hour off to visit the circus in 1924 so the circuses must have been close by.

The following photos show an Elephant van awaiting restoration:



And an internal view of its conversion to a play carriage - this is on display at the Horsted Keynes Bluebell Railway Station. It certainly looks as if a trip to the Bluebell Railway might be interesting!



My thanks to Doreen Bowes-Crick, Penny Carter, Richard Loader, Roger Price of the Bluebell Railway, and of course to Ray Turner.
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