

James Drake

ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY PRESS 1 June 1940

NEWPORT

PASSING OF "PUNCH" DRAKE

Few Newportonians will not regret the passing on Sunday, at the age of 67, of James Drake, of 16 Crocker-street, familiar not only in the town, but also at Island seaside resorts as a street musician and vocalist, and a popular local character. Known invariably as Punch Drake, he was always cheerful and smiling, and he and his banjo were particularly well known to football crowds at the Newport ground. Few, particularly those of the younger generation, knew that his nickname was derived from his former prowess in the boxing ring, or that he was the writer of many songs, one of which entitled "Smile and forget" was published by a London firm. A native of Paddington, London, he was for 10 years with the 1st Battalion the Scottish Rifles and served throughout the South African War. On leaving the Service he settled at Newport, established a boxing and physical training school in St. Thomas's-square, and was active in promoting many boxing matches which were very popular at the time, and in which he made personal appearances. Later he was in business as an antique dealer and during the last war he served in the Home Defence Corps of the National Reserve. In recent years he had earned his living as a street and beach musician. Always a welcomed entertainer, his repertoire included many songs extolling the virtues of the Isle of Wight, delivered with a merry twinkle of the eye which brought a ready response when he passed his hat around. Only the day before his death he was out with his banjo on his usual rounds. He leaves four sons, two of whom are in the Army, one being in France, and two daughters.

The funeral was at Carisbrooke Cemetery on Wednesday, the Rev H.J. Franklin officiating. The mourners were Mesdames McComb and Hall (daughters), Messrs. G., A., and P. Drake (sons), Mr. H. McComb (son-in-law), Mesdames J. and A. Drake (daughters-in-law), Mrs. Dare (sister-in-law), Mr. T. Arnold (brother-in-law), and Mesdames Fryer and Warne (nieces).

Mrs. McComb and the members of the family wish to express their appreciation of the kindness shown by Mrs. Hillier, Dr. C. K. Sylvester, and Nurse Kirkham and her colleagues at the War Memorial Nursing Home.

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