

## **Percy Wadham, an Island Naturalist**

PERCY Wadham is one of the more interesting characters associated with the parish of Carisbrooke.

Born in 1874, he was the son of Charles Wadham who set up his Newport furniture business in St James' Square c1860. He was a lively child, attending Portland Academy, a private school between Carisbrooke and Newport. One day he tried to blow down the school door with a large firework, and was often punished, but he later claimed that "like the porcupine, he supposed he had his good points".

He was apprenticed as a furniture maker, but soon abandoned that idea and decided to take up taxidermy. His shop was in Holyrood Street, where his stuffed mammals and birds were much sought after, and he was to gain the title of Island Naturalist to Queen Victoria and Edward VII. He had a great interest in animals, above all fish and reptiles. He would advertise in the County Press offering good prices for live grass snakes, and kept a pet cobra in his conservatory. This was probably at Waltondale on Carisbrooke Road, but may have been at The Lindens, further along the Mall towards Newport where he moved on the death of his parents. At the back of Waltondale, Percy set up his business Percy Wadham Specialities Ltd. He was a great inventor, full of ideas for new angling equipment. This included Wander Tackle for use in flounder fishing, celluloid baits, and models of fish, including one of his 34 year old goldfish 'Jack'. Other inventions included an aquatic weed-cutter sold to Edward VII and the Egyptian government, a grenade thrower, and a life-saving collapsible armchair.

Percy was the deputy captain of the Newport Volunteer Fire Brigade, and was very outspoken when the brigade's fire hose became so old that it began to leak. He was also sought after as an entertainer. He would act as Master of Ceremonies for many parish entertainments, and was said to have a "well known genius .. in arranging amusing entertainments." He named his house, and one of his sons after the great 17th century angler Izaak Walton. Appropriately, in 1945, Percy Wadham was to die at the bus stop outside Whippingham Post Office, after a day's fishing at the Folly on the River Medina. He was described as having a courtesy rarely encountered, and as a man of infinite charm and kindness, who everyone loved.

Richard Smout, (reproduced with kind permission of Richard Smout, Originally published in Carisbrooke Parish News, March 2018)

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Percy Frank Wadham was buried in Carisbrooke Cemetery on 17 November 1945; where he was joined by the remains of his wife, Lila Fanny, in 1971.

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