Harry Mudd of Main Street, Grange-over-Sands

Rob David

In John Heywood’s Illustrated Guide to Grange, Arnside and Ulverston, published in 1891 there is an advertisement for Harry Mudd’s businesses on Main Street. He describes himself as a fish, game and poultry dealer, a greengrocer, the proprietor of Devonshire House (a combined Lodging House and Temperance Hotel), and Wenham Lake Ice Merchant. He was not alone in selling Wenham Lake ice in the Furness area but it was unusual. But where was Wenham Lake and why might a food retailer be selling it in late nineteenth century Grange?

Harry Mudd (1855-1931) was one of several sons of William and Mary Mudd who lived and worked in the Grimsby area of Lincolnshire. The family were involved in many aspects of the fish business and they were active in both England and Wales. William part owned a fleet of fishing smacks and was also a fish merchant. He was a pillar of Grimsby society taking an active part in municipal, religious and philanthropic work. He was a Primitive Methodist, a town councillor and a leader in the temperance movement.

He married Emma Ogilby in 1878 when he was aged 22, and the following year purchased the fishmonger, poulterer, game dealer and fruiterer’s business of Henry Strawson in Rhyl. Harry and Emma lived above the shop and remained in Rhyl until the autumn of 1886. While there they were both closely involved with Morley Road Wesleyan Sunday School, and on ‘the occasion of [their] leaving Rhyl’ Harry was presented with an ‘elegantly bound Sunday School Tune Book’, a silver-mounted baton and a pitch-pipe for his ‘faithful services as a teacher and leader of the school choir’, and Emma with a copy of a ‘beautiful Bible and Wesley’s Hymns combined’. In October Harry’s uncle, Joseph, advertised that he had taken over his nephew’s business in Rhyl.

It is possible that Harry and his uncle Joseph exchanged businesses as Harry moved to Stourbridge taking over the fish, game, poultry and greengrocer business of a Joseph Mudd who may have been his uncle. In the announcement of his opening the business Harry referred to his connection with the wholesale firm of W. Mudd and Sons of the Fish Dock in Grimsby. The couple only remained in Stourbridge for three years, selling the business in May 1889 to William Tansley of Birmingham who had interests in similar lines of business in Leamington and an ice manufactory in Birmingham.

From Stourbridge the Mudds moved to Grange-over-Sands where he established his various businesses. As an ice merchant it might be thought that he was acquiring ice from Wenham

---

1 Pat Rowland provided me with much of the information about Harry Mudd and his family’s trading activities around the United Kingdom.
2 *Rhyl Record and Advertiser*, 6 Dec. 1879.
3 *Rhyl Record and Advertiser*, 26 June 1886.
4 *Rhyl Record and Advertiser*, 2 Oct. 1886.
5 *Dudley Mercury*, Stourbridge, Brierley Hill Gazette, 5 Feb. 1887.
6 *Dudley Mercury*, Stourbridge, Brierley Hill Gazette, 8 June. 1889.
Lake which was in Massachusetts in the USA, and which during the early nineteenth century had become synonymous with the harvesting of the highest quality natural ice. As well as having a market in the growing cities of New England, it was increasingly exported around the world finding enthusiastic customers in places as far afield as the West Indies, Australia and India. There was also an export trade to England and ships full of Wenham Lake ice sailed into Liverpool where a purpose-built warehouse was constructed to store it ready for distribution across northern England. However by the time Harry Mudd opened his shop in Grange in 1889 American ice had been undercut by Norwegian ice in the European market and a farsighted entrepreneur had renamed Lake Oppegard, near Oslo, giving it the name Wenham Lake.\(^7\) No doubt Harry Mudd realised what was going on, but whether his customers knew they were getting Norwegian ice rather than American ice is less certain!

The Norwegian Wenham Lake ice reached Grange by rail from Grimsby which was the port through which most Norwegian ice entered Britain. Harry Mudd’s family connections with the fish trade in Grimsby ensured that it was not only Grimsby caught fish but also Norwegian ice that found its way to Grange. A contemporary advertisement for Harry’s brother Charles’s fish, game and poultry business in Chester referred to selling ‘Wenham lake and Rough Ice’. The latter may indicate British sourced ice as opposed to the crystal ice that came from Norway. In 1899 Joseph in Rhyl advertised ‘ice always in stock’, but by then it may well have been factory-made ice rather than natural ice.

The ice that he sold was of the highest quality. Unlike the thin filthy ice that was harvested by Cumbrian estate owners from the ponds and tarns on their estates, and in the Kendal area from the Lancaster canal, and which was stored in domestic ice houses in order to cool food and drinks (and a ‘fevered brow’) during the summer months, Norwegian ice came from unpolluted sources and could be two or more feet thick. Mudd would have sold it to the hotels and guest houses in Grange as well as the middle class owners of the recently built villas who aspired to the life style of the gentry but did not own their own estate with a pond and room to construct an icehouse. Small quantities were relatively expensive to purchase and some form of ice box would be needed in the kitchen or cellars in which to place it to reduce the rate of melt. In a town like Grange it was no doubt a profitable trade for Harry to be engaged in.

Harry Mudd clearly made a name for himself whilst in Grange. In June 1890 members of the Bowness Wesleyan Chapel had dinner and tea at ‘Mr Harry Mudd’s refreshment room’ on their outing to Grange. This may have been on the recommendation of his brother Charles who may have had a fishmonger’s business in Bowness or Ambleside at that time. Harry clearly continued his musical interests taking part in concerts at Flookburgh Village Hall where he was asked for an encore after his song with banjo accompaniment, at Cartmel Institute, and at the Harvest Festival at Lindale where he sang ‘The wild beast show’ and ‘Quite English’.

Emma and the children were recorded at Grange in the 1891 census. Harry was presumably away on census night. The children attended Grange National School until March 1893 when the family were again on the move, this time to take over a fish and poultry business at 72, Wyle Cop, Shrewsbury. Once again Harry advertised that he sold Wenham Lake Ice and Grimsby fish. The 1901 and 1911 censuses record the family at Wyle Cop in Shrewsbury. Emma died in 1923 and Harry in 1931. His son Gordon took over the business in Shrewsbury.

---

8 *Cheshire Observer*, 1 April 1882.
9 *Rhyl Record and Advertiser*, 4 Nov. 1899.
10 *Westmorland Gazette*, 14 June 1890.
12 *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 10 March 1893; 4 August 1893.