

VILLAGE ECHOES

FROM KILNDOWN TO CHRISTMAS ISLAND

The 1939 Register was taken at the start of World War II to collect key information about every civilian in England and Wales. This information was then used to produce everyone's National Identity Cards. At first, the Register was simply an overview of the population, but it was later used for rationing and tracking the movement of the population for decades after the war. Searching through the 1939 register for Kilndown, throws up interesting snippets of village life and the wider world.

At Gatehouse, Kilndown, the day the 1939 Register was taken, Mr G. H. Vinen, was living there. He is listed as Managing Director of Christmas Island Phosphates. He was also the Island Manager.



Gatehouse, Kilndown



TSS Islander II, the transport and supply ship from
Singapore to Christmas Island

The human settlement of Christmas Island had its origins in 1887, when a small party of British explorers made their way through dense jungle and collected rock specimens of almost pure phosphate of lime. The discovery of phosphate guided the island's destiny for the next century. Two rivals, George Clunies Ross and John Murray, formed the Christmas Island Phosphate company in 1897 and quickly built an imported workforce of Chinese, Malays and Sikhs, who often endured appalling conditions. The first phosphate shipment was exported in 1900. Mining continued until World War II, when many of the European residents were evacuated in anticipation of a Japanese invasion. The Japanese duly invaded in 1942 and the Island was occupied until 1945. During this time some phosphate was mined, but this was discontinued after the first two shiploads were torpedoed. Phosphate mining resumed in 1946. On 1 January 1958, Christmas Island, which had until then been administered as part of the Colony of Singapore became a separate colony. On 1 October 1958, sovereignty was transferred to Australia.

Geoffrey Hugh Vinen was born in London on 26 March 1899. He signed up for the duration of hostilities in 1917. In 1920 he was living with his mother in Colville Square, Kensington, London. In 1923 he sailed for Adelaide, Australia, profession given as a Civil Servant. His engagement to Winifred Alice Murray (daughter of Sir John Murray founder of the Christmas Island Phosphate Company) was announced on 2 October 1930 in the London and China Express, and the Singapore Free Press, his occupation given as North Borneo Civil Servant. They married on 18 December 1930. On 6 October 1933, Winifred, with James aged 1 year

and Andrew aged 5 months sailed from Southampton to Singapore to join Geoffrey who was on Christmas Island. That journey would have taken about 34 days via the Suez Canal. A second sailing of 800 miles had to be endured from Singapore to the Island.

The Vinens appear to have moved to Gatehouse on their return from Christmas Island and with them at the house were their children, his mother Gertrude, a Norland Nanny and couple of maids and no doubt village people were employed for other daily work, cooking and in the gardens. The Vinens left Gatehouse around 1946, moving to Woldingham, where Winifred's sister Rhoda lived. Winifred died in 1949 at a private hospital in Weymouth Street, London. Geoffrey returns to the area in 1960 when he moved into Swan Farm, Goudhurst with his second wife Joyce (1922- 1996). Geoffrey died on 21 May 1970 and his ashes are interred in St Mary's churchyard.



Swan farm, Goudhurst

Researched and written by Lynda Shepherd, one our members.

If you have an idea for a Village Echo we would love to hear from you even if you are not a member of Goudhurst and Kilndown Local History Society - <http://www.goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org>