



H. de Vere Stacpoole – novelist and writer



Henry De Vere Stacpoole was a prolific novelist and writer who spent the latter years of his life in Bonchurch and is buried in the churchyard of St. Boniface Parish Church.

He was born on April 9th 1863 in Kingstown, Ireland. His father was William Stacpoole, a doctor of divinity at Trinity College, who later became the headmaster of Kingstown school. William died while Henry was still a child and he was brought up by his mother, Canadian-born Charlotte Augusta Mountjoy Stacpoole. When Henry was diagnosed with bronchitis, his mother and three sisters moved to Nice in the south of France in the hope that his health would improve. The young Henry enjoyed the life on the Mediterranean but it wasn't long before he decided to go travelling. On his return, he was sent to Portarlinton Boarding School in Queen's County, Ireland, now County Laois.

When he left school he enrolled at Malvern College, London, initially studying literature and writing. He later moved on to study medicine at St. George's Hospital, then finishing his degree at St. Mary's Hospital, graduating in 1891.

He obviously still had the travelling bug, for he obtained a post as a ship's doctor, and it was undoubtedly here that he found some of the characters for his many future stories. His writing career began with his first publication in 1894: *The Intended*, a tragic novel about two look-alikes.

He later took over a doctor's practice in Somerset and continued his writings in addition to his duties as a GP. It was at this time (in 1908) that he published the novel that he would become most famous for: *The Blue Lagoon*. It was followed in 1923 with *The Garden of God* and in 1925 with *The Gates of Morning*, each continuing the theme of *The Blue Lagoon*. (Three films were made of *The Blue Lagoon*: the first was a silent movie in 1923; the second – a 'talkie' -1949, starring Jean Simmons and Donald Houston; and thirdly an American remake in 1980, starring Brooke Shields and Christopher Atkins).

In the interim, he had moved to Cumbria for a time to assist another country doctor where he married Margaret (Maggie) Robson on December 7th 1907 – they never had children. They moved to the Isle of Wight in the 1920s, settling in Bonchurch.

Maggie died in 1934 and in 1938 he married his widow's sister, Florence Robson. He dedicated the pond in the village, which was part of his estate, to the memory of his first wife for the benefit of all the village residents *in perpetua* so that they could enjoy its beauty as, indeed, people do to this day. Contrary to popular belief, Henry did not build the pond which, as can be seen in the photograph from the 1870s, was already quite old by the 1930s.



In 1945 he revised his historical notes on the Old Church of St. Boniface, finding little to add to his original notes of 1931, in spite of the many local incidents resulting from the Second World War, which could well have obliterated this ancient place. The Old Church dates back to Norman times and was completed in its present form in 1070 – although the oldest recorded and marked grave - William Macket - only dates back to 1616. Henry's second wife, Florence, died in 1961, outliving Henry who died on April 12th 1951 aged 88.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Colin Beavis - Photograph from the author's personal collection.