

TWE ROCHE

A couple of years ago, I was asked by someone at the South Devon Railway about a former resident of Dorney Reach – TWE Roche. Mr Roche had played a key part in the negotiations to buy the branch line which became the South Devon Railway from British Rail, after it closed in 1962; and his address was St Helier, Dorney Reach.

Some residents of Dorney will no doubt still remember TWE Roche, who seems to have been a remarkable and interesting man. Born Thomas William Edgar Roche in 1919, and known as Tom or “Twee”, he came originally from the Plymouth area. His work in the immigration service took him away from Devon, and in the mid-1950s he was based in Dover. Sometime after that, he moved with his wife and three daughters to the house in Dorney Reach known as St Helier – now 9 Harcourt Road. He became Assistant Chief Inspector in the immigration service, and wrote what is still regarded as the seminal history of immigration control in England.

TWE Roche was a prolific author, and his interests and publications ranged far beyond his work – local and medieval history, railways and shipping. In Dorney, he is best known for his book “A Pineapple for the King” about the Palmer family of Dorney Court. He wrote another local book, “The Precious Blood”, a history of Burnham Abbey. He was also clerk to Dorney parish council and edited the parish magazine. Reputedly, he started a railway club for local boys. He was actively involved in setting up the Great Western Society, which in its early days kept rolling stock in the old goods shed at Taplow station, before moving to its permanent home in Didcot. Not just books, articles and letters flowed from his pen – last autumn, a poem he wrote about the steam loco “*Lady Disdain*” was republished in the Great Western Society’s journal.

TWE Roche died in 1972, but his legacy lives on, in the 17 books he published, and in the steam trains which give pleasure to so many visitors on the South Devon Railway.

But does anyone know the truth of the tale that he put a railway signal in the front garden of his house in Harcourt Road, until asked to remove it....