



Newspaper reports featured in the Worthing Herald between 1960 and the late 1980's.

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40

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When the Vicar went tilting at windmills

REMEMBER the days before footballers hugged and kissed each other with sporting passion for broadcasting around the world on satellite television? Possibly not. So far as local people were concerned, the town's most exciting and eagerly awaited sporting highlight in those earlier days was the annual Worthing Regatta.

This week **FREDDIE FEEST** recalls the year when that seemingly innocent seaside event caused more controversy locally than all the television coverage of footballer Maradona's "hand of God" incident

THE annual Worthing Regatta was always held off Worthing beach between Splash Point and where the Lido is today. Back in 1859 they did things on a grand scale and together with splashing about in boats went horse races, dancing booths and making whoopee.

It was whoopee made with great Victorian zest. So much so that in 1859 it led to "a battle in which no prisoners were taken". Fortunately, the "weapons" were all paper and while these made a mess of the seashore, the combatants never had to be carted off to hospital - which was just as well, because at that time the town didn't have one!

In those days there was no Worthing Herald or Gazette editor to whom protagonists could complain but when verbal battle broke out between the vicar of Christ Church, a Rev P B Power, and the chairman of that year's Worthing Regatta committee, a Mr J H O'Beirne, the combatants resorted to battling with pamphlets — thousands of them!

The law of libel not being what it is today, they were able to sling insults back and forth and print things that would make a modern

leader-writer's hair curl.

It was not the boats in the regatta that caused the trouble but the horse-racing and dancing booths that accompanied the event nearly a century-and-a-half ago.

The Rev Power and his curate visited one of the dancing booths, not (you will be relieved to hear) for the purpose of enjoyment but to make a public protest.

Regardless of whether or not it was successful as a protest, the two men certainly caused a stir.

The Regatta chairman accused the pair of "provoking the passions of the inmates", which certainly left room for speculation.

The vicar threatened to print a pamphlet denouncing the whole affair. Scathingly, the Regatta chairman retorted that he "was making improper use of the time that should be devoted to the duties of his parish" and threatened, in retaliation, to "pillory him for causing an indecent riot."

Salvoes of letters were fired off by both parties, who then reprinted them in pamphlet form "for the edification of Worthing's respectable populace".

Mr O'Beirne declared that any subscribers to the Regatta who felt

aggrieved could have their money back.

At which point the true bone of contention was revealed. It was not the boats at all but the accompanying horse racing on the sands - plus that (according to the vicar) all the stakes had been won by strangers to Worthing.

"No they were not," retorted O'Beirne, "because Doctor Elliott, of Broadwater, won the Visitor's Plate, worth £25."

Firing off another verbal broadside the reverend gentleman challenged the Regatta committee to defend the horse races on scriptural grounds. The committee parried this by challenging the vicar to "defend school treats including kiss-in-the-ring and other amusements on the same grounds."

At this point the doughty vicar began losing the plot by condemning the growing (but totally unconnected) practice of Sunday bathing in the town.

O'Beirne was hardly any more convincing when he countered: "The vicar's pamphlet about horse-racing issued late on Saturday evening disturbed the minds of many people

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