



John Frederic Matthias Harris Stone MA, FLS, FCS (1853 – 1939)

Honorary Secretary (1907 – 1935) and Vice President (1935 – 1939) of The Caravan Club

John, or J. Harris Stone, as he liked to be known, was a barrister, journalist, traveller, a great enthusiast for the countryside and rural pursuits and founder of The Caravan Club. He had a privileged upbringing in Bath, where his father, also John, became Town Clerk in 1860 and served the city for 38 years. John senior was also a barrister by profession, joining a firm in 1855 that still exists as Stone King.

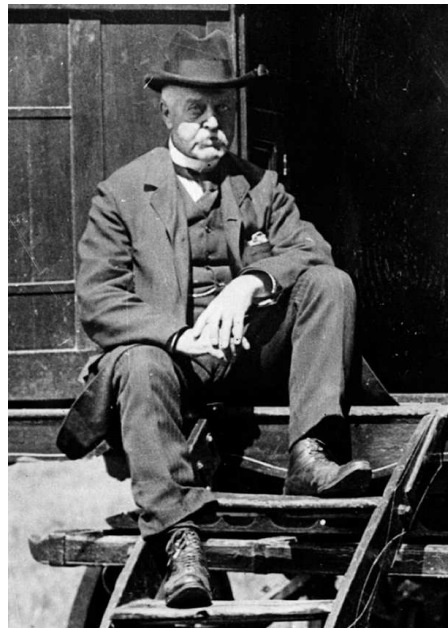


Figure 1: J Harris Stone seated in the doorway of his caravan.

J. Harris Stone was one of seven children, with three older sisters (Louisa, Deborah and Mary), two younger brothers (Henry and William) and a younger sister (Ethell). Being the eldest son, it seems his string of names were in honour of a number of family members, including his maternal grandfather, Matthias Harris. Although little information can be found on his early years,

one must assume they mirrored those of his youngest brother William (born 1857), who recalls in his memoirs a nurse who had to carry him around, as 'perambulators' had yet to be invented. When naughty, William was threatened with 'Boney' (Napoleon Bonaparte) because the nurse's father had fought at Waterloo.

His education started at a Dame's school, run by two old Quaker sisters by the name of Hart, who taught manners as well as a rudimentary education. They were apparently well loved by all their charges, never losing their tempers or raising their voices.

The nearby public school, Clifton College, followed for all three brothers, which now has a science library called the Stone Library. Middle brother Henry became a solicitor in his father's firm in 1882, while John and William went on to study Natural Sciences at Peterhouse, Cambridge, where both were awarded scholarships.

J. Harris toured Ireland in his caravan, and was a great hit with the fishing community on Achill Island. His niece, Mrs Tennent, recalled that when she visited Achill Island in the 1950s, he was still well remembered there for his kindness. On seeing the local fishing community's poverty, he wrote to The Times detailing their plight, asking for people to donate clothes.

During World War I, being too old for active service, J. Harris entered the Civil Service as a temporary clerk in the Petrol Control Department of the Board of Trade. He was one of two interviewing clerks who assessed applications for petrol. He recalled that during his time there he conducted over 25,000 interviews and had his life threatened only once!

It was he who organised the dispatch of caravans abroad in response to General Haig's request. In his own words:
'When the Germans were on the run, Haig sent over hurriedly for caravans in order that officers pursuing the flying foe might retain maps and plans on the table and not leave the work day or night. The War Office applied to me and

said they wanted the caravans. I worked night and day and telegraphed all over the country and was able to despatch a large number to the front in the required time. I did this with very great pleasure not only for the sake of my country, but also to oblige a brother Old Cliftonian. Some members of The Caravan Club gave their caravans for war purposes, gratuitously, notably the late Miss E.F. Hamilton, who gave her two dainty horse-drawn caravans for the use of nurses. They went to the front and, like many others, never returned.'

As well as editing Health Resort and English Illustrated magazines, J. Harris Stone was a prolific author with a number of books to his name, including Caravanning and Camping Out. He also co-authored A Practical Ready Reference Guide to Parish Councils and Parish Meetings.

J. Harris Stone was the Honorary Secretary of The Caravan Club for 28 years, except for one small, enforced break, and kept it going through war, financial difficulties and when all others had lost interest. He was apparently happy for the 'new' club to form in 1933 and was made Vice President, although by 1938 the Club had lost contact with him. However, Bill Whiteman, the then Club Secretary, tracked him down to a house in East Finchley called Caravan Cottage, where he had a caravan of his own design at the end of the garden. J. Harris Stone gladly handed over many important historical documents that he had kept safely for years, which are now ensconced in East Grinstead House. It was a timely visit, as J. Harris died in 1939.

Extract taken from:

Ellis, C., 2006. *The history of The Caravan Club*. East Grinstead: The Caravan Club.

Further Reading:

Stone, J.H., 1931. *Caravanning and camping Out*. London: Herbert Jenkins.

Whiteman, W.M., 1973. *The history of the caravan*. London: Blandford Press Limited.

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