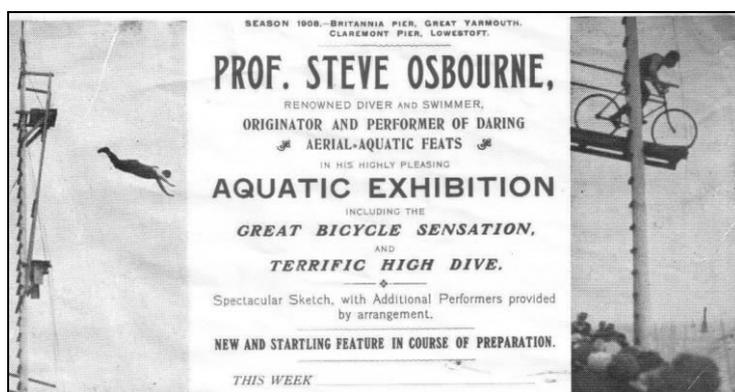


SAFFRON WALDEN HISTORICAL JOURNAL

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Prof. Steve Osbourne – renowned diver and swimmer

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Notice advertising Osbourne's seaside performances in 1908. ©Dave Twitchett

Dave Twitchett, a veteran cyclist, historian, essayist and collector of cycling memorabilia, has kindly shared with *Journal* readers some intriguing material. This relates to a performing diver and swimmer of his day, known as 'Professor' Steve Osbourne, who lived for a time in Saffron Walden. The *Daily Despatch* in July 1904 commented that 'Professor Osbourne has delighted the sightseers of several seaside towns in the North of England'.

He had been performing since 1903 and was also an accomplished swimmer/diver - the *Norwich Mercury* in 1908 described his high diving feats there when Osbourne was booked for a season of performances on the piers of Yarmouth and Lowestoft as a renowned 'originator and performer of daring aerial-aquatic feats'. This aquatic exhibition included 'the great bicycle sensation and terrific high dive'. The highlight came when he cycled off the end of the pier from a height of 80-90 feet into the sea. As Figure 2 shows, he was equally well-known as a daring diver – this postcard shows him about to dive off the Tea House roof at Southport, a feat he accomplished three times a day from a great height. In his promotional letters, he also offered himself for hire to 'aeroplane makers and inventors', claiming, 'Mr Osbourne, whose diving feats as given by himself, embody the first principles of aviation, is open to undertake initial

experiments in mechanical flight with inventors' own apparatus'. This fearless performer lived in Walden from at least 1901, as he appears on the census that year as a cycle mechanic, boarding at 160 High Street. In 1908 when his address was South Road, Osbourne married Deborah Mary Freestone, who was five years older. By 1911 they were living at 35 Victoria Avenue. Perhaps his wife persuaded him to give up such hazardous pursuits since, then aged 33, he was described as a collar machinist born in Walsall, Staffs, while his wife was a laundry manageress from Chelmsford. It would be interesting to find out more about Professor Steve Osbourne and his time in Saffron Walden.

**Osbourne (inset) about to dive off the pier at Southport in 1908.
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