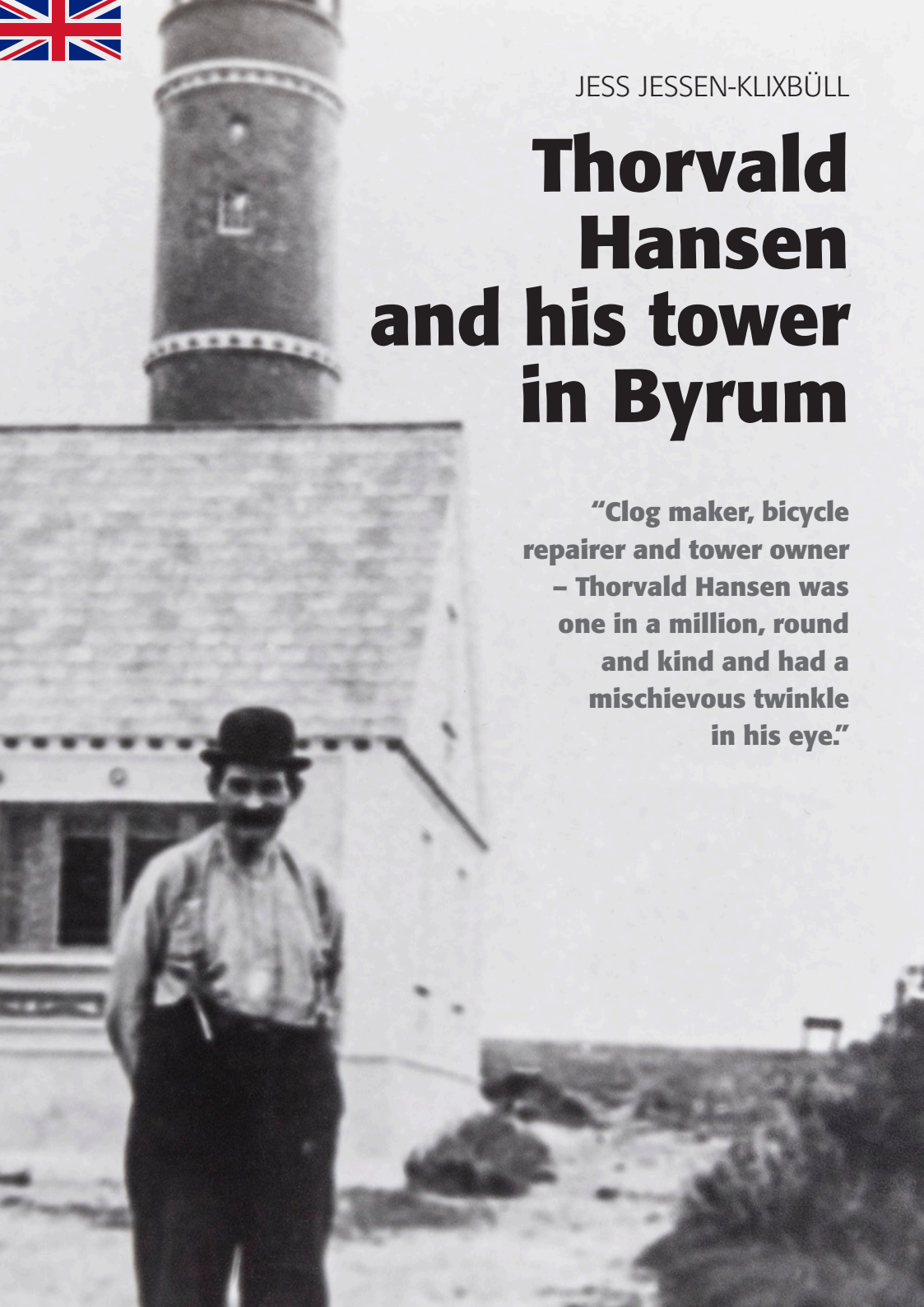


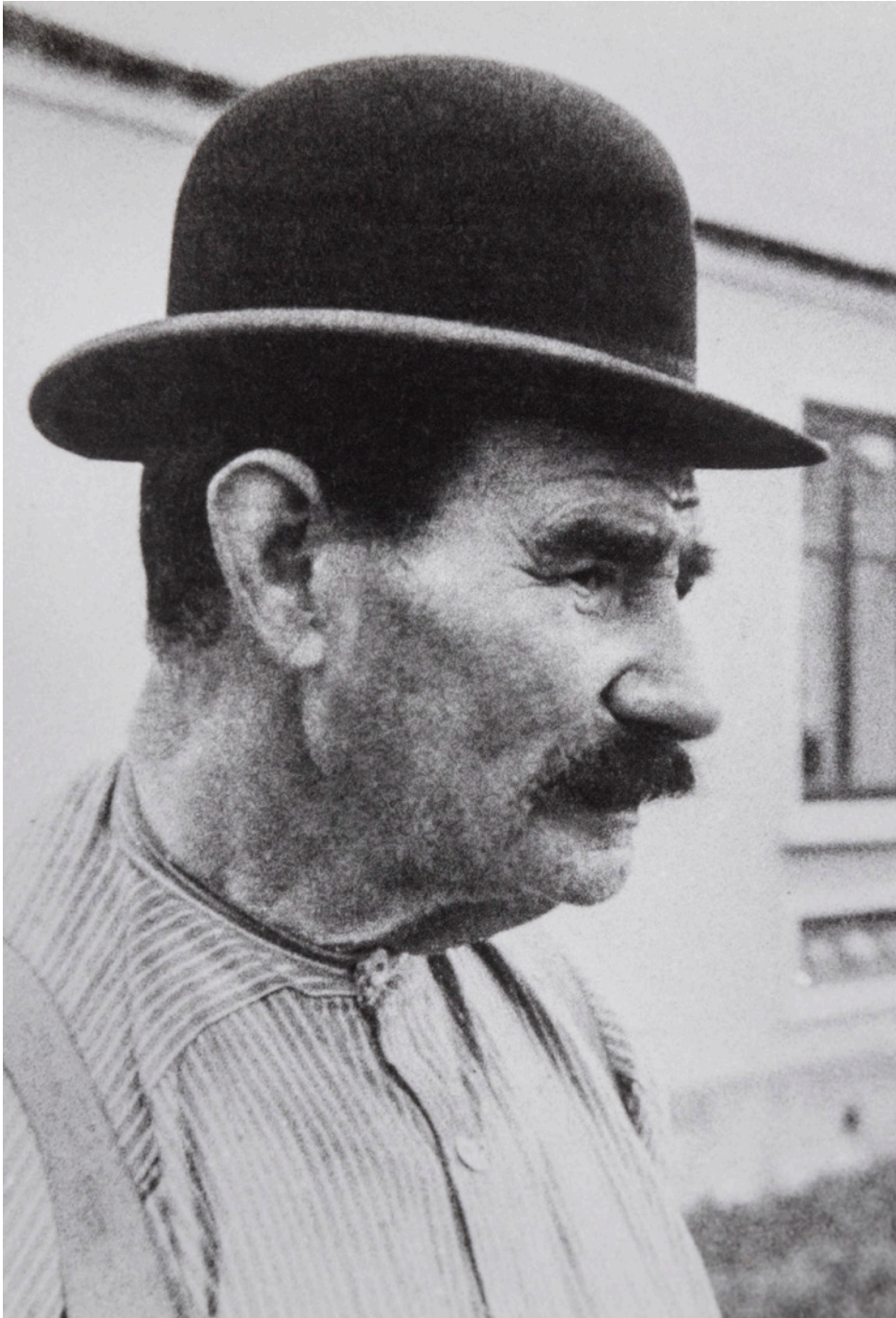


JESS JESSEN-KLIXBÜLL

Thorvald Hansen and his tower in Byrum

**"Clog maker, bicycle
repairer and tower owner
– Thorvald Hansen was
one in a million, round
and kind and had a
mischievous twinkle
in his eye."**





Thorvald Hansen and his tower in Byrum

By Jess Jessen-Klixbüll, tower caretaker

Introductory anecdote

One day in 1926, when Thorvald Hansen is lying on his hill in Byrum, he realises that he can no longer see the entire island like he could when he was a child but only the rooftops in Byrum and some scattered trees.

Thorvald wants to get a better view over Læsø and decides to build his own tower. First step is a trip to Skagen to explore their fine lighthouse. Thorvald brings along a line and a rock, and upon arrival in Skagen he climbs the lighthouse and lowers down the rock attached to the end of the line from the top of the lighthouse. When the line hits the ground, Thorvald ties a knot on it. Now he knows how tall a real tower is. And he knows how high his own tower should be.

Introduction

Thorvald Hansen was a person you would remember. As an adult, he lived from 1904 until November 1946 in Byrum, Læsø, and made a living as a clog maker, bicycle repairer, plumber, tower and house builder. His background as a sailor gave him edge and wit, and he was also known and loved for his dancing skills – even though the women had to live with the marks that his oily hands left on their white shirts.

Thorvald is well-known for his achievement when we built the tall tower in

Byrum – 17 metres and the highest building on Læsø which became the town landmark. It turned out that Thorvald was much more than this industrious entrepreneur when we took a closer look into his history and discovered the many anecdotes with his name on.

“Clog maker, bicycle repairer and tower owner Thorvald Hansen was one in a million, round and kind and with a mischievous twinkle in his eye.”

N. Birch Nielsen

History

Thorvald Hansen was born in Svendborg on 8 August 1868, and his full name was Hans Thorvald Albert Johannes Hansen. His father was Poul Bjørn Hansen, born in the parish of Vesterø on 10 June 1846, and his mother was Camilla Jørgine Lauenborg, born on 23 July 1846 in Svendborg. She was the daughter of the Svendborg ship’s carpenter Jørgen Lauenborg.

Thorvald’s grandparents lived on the farm ‘Rimmen’ in Vesterø. It is still there, in the south west corner of Læsø. A big, beautiful courtyard farm, thatched and painted yellow. Thorvald’s grandfather on his father’s side was Hans Jensen Thorsen, and his grandmother was Marianne Poulsdatter Bech.

In 1870, when he is two, Thorvald moves with his parents and big brother Carl Julius Thor Hansen back to Læsø.

Thorvald's father Poul Bjørn spends the following years on the Icelandic schooner Ægir as the shipmaster. In the winter-time, he is at home on Læsø. This brings a new sister in 1870, Mariane Catharine Hansen, the sister Juliane Albertine Hansen in 1872, the brother Hans Jørgen Hansen in 1874, the brother Edvard Theodor Hansen in 1875 and the brother Adolph Emil Christian Hansen in 1877.

In 1878, Thorvald loses his father, when the schooner Ægir with Thorvald's father Poul Bjørn Hansen and the rest of the crew disappears. It was not a large ship; only 35 register tons, built in 1859 in Tønsberg, Norway, and owned by the Icelandic shipowner S. Gudmundsson. The crew probably only counted 3-4 men, and the cargo was primarily fish products from Iceland and groceries as return goods for Iceland. In the winter-time, the vessel was laid-up in Denmark, typically in Copenhagen.

On 13 June 1879, the widow Camilla applies for a division settlement after the expected death of her husband, since they had heard no news of him or the ship for over a year. It must have been an awful situation for her, alone with 7 children under the age of 12. And as could be expected, the children were sent to live in other homes.

Carl, the eldest, moves in with ferryman Lars Møller in Svendborg. Thorvald moves to his grandfather Hans Jensen Thorsen.

Mariane is taken care of by steamship engineer Rudolf Johansen in Svendborg. It is unknown where Juliane is fostered. Hans is sent to schoolteacher Niels Christian Remmer in Vesterø. Edvard and his brother Adolph stay with their mother who moves to Vesterø.

In 1890, when Thorvald is 22, he lives with his brother Hans Jørgen and the Mads Strøm family in Byrum. They are both registered on the away-list as seamen. Mads Strøm works with the customs authorities.

We have not been able to trace Thorvald's whereabouts for the following 14 years. But in 1904, he is back on Læsø at the age of 36, married to the very young 18-year-old Kirsten Hansen from Svendborg. And soon they have a daughter who is baptised in Byrum by the name of Karen.

Homes

In 1904, when the married Thorvald returns to Læsø after working at sea, he starts up a small bicycle and shoe repair shop. He and his wife make a good living. For in Byrum, there was a great need for this kind of shop – and people grew very fond of this proud returned sailor.

However, at some point in his life, all the bicycle repairs were getting on Thorvald's nerves. Once he got so upset that he started growling at his customers. But he soon learned that this was not a good way to do business. Therefore, he advertised in the local newspaper with this short text: 'Bicycle repair offered without protest!'

In 1906, they live at title no. 114c in Byrum, at the same spot as the Læsø Museum parking lot. There was a long, old seaweed house with several apartments; it was named Bente-stræde. Their son Hans Parker Hansen was born there in 1908. Thorvald establishes a workshop and possibly also a small shop. Already in 1901, the Læsø photographer Bernt Christensen's grandfather (whose name was indeed also Bernt Christensen) ran a business there



and also worked as a watchmaker. The clog workshop was close to what we know today as 'Mejeripladsen'. And everyone knew the sound of his footsteps when he came out from his alley in the morning, when the milk wagons arrived to deliver milk from the surrounding farms. Here, he received and delivered clogs for repair.

He did quite some conversation with the drivers; they laughed at his humorous talk. One day, when one of the coachmen brought to Thorvald's attention

Thorvald and his wife Kirsten, their daughter Karen and dog outside his shop with kettles, pots and pans in the window – in the house we know today as 'Pusterummet'.

Photo: private.

that indeed, Thorvald also needed a new pair of clogs, Thorvald returned the joke and said bluntly, looking up and down the man's not quite clean clothes and clogs that indeed: 'The ones you're wearing will do for now. So they can match the rest

of you' – and then there was no more talk of clogs that day.

During the census in 1911, the Thorvald Hansen family lives at title no. 213c. What we know today as 'Pusterummet', Byrum Hovedgade. It looks like Thorvald is the only tenant in the house which, in 1921, is owned by Lyngse who ran a temperance cafe in the building next door (Tatol). We do not know who built Pusterummet, but it could have been Peder Bjørn Hansen who ran a cafe in Tatol before Lyngse. Already in 1915, Thorvald's wife Kirsten dies, only 29 years old. Karen was 11 and their son Hans 7 years old.

Building the tower

Thorvald Hansen's preparations in 1926 for the tower construction triggered many curious comments. It was planned to be 10 metres tall. He would be in need of many a cart of sand and lots of cement. Had it been anyone else's project the material would be driven to the site. But Thorvald Hansen was a fine example of what a man can do with lots of patience and perseverance. With a bucket in each hand he climbed the hill, up and down to the nearest gravel pit some 2-300 metres away, filled his buckets with sand and gravel and carried them home.

In the simple forms that he made himself, he started to cast bricks for the tower and minding his shop at the same time. He had three forms and cast three bricks in the morning, three at noon and three at night; they were 8 x 12 inches equal to 20.3 x 30.5 cm. His stock of bricks grew from day to day. And when it was large enough to start the construction, he hired a good friend, Kristian 'Puh Skie' (never mind

Østergaard to build the tower. Bricklayer 'Puh Skie' was not afraid of heights and worked on the tower without any fuss or safety gear. The bricklayer started each sentence with a 'Puh Skie' as if building a tower was nothing special. This was how he got this nickname.

Like a giant cigar holder the tower rose from the hilltop at great speed, and one day it was complete and the flag waving from the top. By then it was 11 metres tall. But already the year after, Thorvald added 3.5 metres to the tower, corresponding to an extra meter above the second white brick decoration. On top of that, he later added 2.5 metres; from the start of the viewing holes to the present top, 17 metres in total.

Thorvald Hansen liked his tower and enjoyed the view over the ocean which brought back many memories of his days at sea. He also wanted to share the view with others and invited everybody to climb the tower.

"The story goes that one day, Thorvald Hansen got so tired of the flies disturbing him during his nap that he established a small basement under his workshop where he could sleep in cool and undisturbed surroundings. But one day when the door to the workshop was shut closed by the wind, he could not get out of his hiding place underground and had to wait patiently for a client to pass by so he could get out again. It costs ten Danish kroner to climb the tower.

The staircase is very steep and there are two viewing platforms on top. One platform where you can enjoy the view through round openings and another platform one storey up with a free view



all the way around, 17 metres above the ground.

And now we touch upon one of the soft spots of the tower: 17 metres is not a lot even though the tower rests on one of only very few hilltops on the island. This means that you cannot see the whole world from up there. You'll have a view over the town of Byrum. And I'm probably not upsetting a whole lot of people when I write that Byrum belongs to the least boring half of Læsø's towns when it comes to the view.

But okay, you can see all the way to the salt meadows of 'Rønnerne'. The rest is just village, fields and forests. And you cannot really see that far. So the view to the tower from the ground is much better. For it is indeed a cosy tower to look at. It could have played a role in the story of 'Kardemomme By', had it only been a bit chubbier. It could also lighten up any amusement park. And if ever there should be a tower in a small village, then it would look like this. It is a very village-likeable tower. A tiny-town tower. And this makes it so much cosier. And since Læsø is all village – the Thorvald Hansen Tower is a great attraction. You can also ask yourself if you'd like to come back one day?

Without doubt, I would say. And this is my deep-felt recommendation."

A review of the tower in the Danish newspaper Nordjyske: Thorvald Hansen was the entrepreneur behind more than just the tower in Byrum. For in the years that followed, he built no less than three houses in front of the tower. When he made the foundation to the third and last house, he was 73 years old. This is where he sat, alone, making clogs to the end of his

days. But he never felt lonely. For he was very open to all that took place around him and took a great interest in many small things in everyday life.

Looking up the narrow side road with the decorative houses and the tower you'll know that this is the work of Thorvald Hansen. And he cast every brick and carried all material in his buckets to the construction site, all by himself.

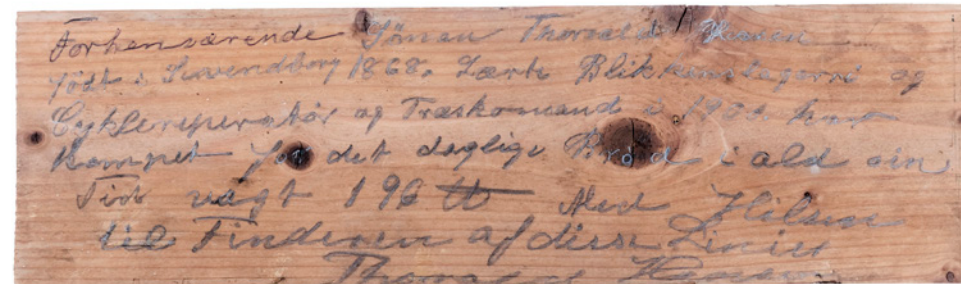
Thorvald was ...

... a 'strange' man? Some considered him an eccentric and quite odd, a 'fool' who preferred the company of people younger than himself. The truth could be that he possessed something that others did not have to fully enjoy life.

Physically, Thorvald Hansen was like a giant with an extraordinarily strong body that made him capable of doing what he achieved. At the same time, he had the patience of a saint as he made time – and money – decide when to start on his large project. For his tower he saved a lot of 10-øre, 25-øre and 1-kroner coins from his earnings as a bicycle and clog repairer. The coins were saved separately in small containers on a shelf above his workshop table.

If you happened to get a private moment with Hansen – which could happen in a confidential conversation – you'd probably guess that he carried a burden that he never came to terms with. Maybe his dream was to be and give something to others. His idea of building the tower could, after all, be the result of his desire to 'leave something behind, something to remember him by and to please the generations to come'.

And he truly succeeded. Everyone else is



almost forgotten, but Thorvald's tower is still rising, 92 years old.

In connection with a repair in 1984, the carpenters John and Erik Andreasen found, between layers of plaster and beams, wrapped in newspaper, a piece of wood with the below inscription by Thorvald Hansen:

'Former sailor, Thorvald Hansen, born in Svendborg in 1868. Learned the plumber trade, bicycle repair and clog making in 1900. Every day I worked hard for a living. Weight: 195 pounds. Greetings to the finder of these lines'. Thorvald Hansen

In 1930, Thorvald makes a house at title no. 212b, Thorvald Hansensvej 2.

In 1939, Thorvald makes another house at title no. 212h, Thorvald Hansensvej 3.

In 1940, Thorvald makes yet another house at title no. 216a, Thorvald Hansensvej 5.

He also saw the beauty in his surroundings when he occasionally sat on his hilltop south of his houses. From there, he could enjoy the beautiful scenery on a summer day to the south and over the ocean. When a steamship passed over the horizon – it could be bound for foreign shores – his thoughts drifted back

"Former sailor, Thorvald Hansen, born in Svendborg in 1868. Learned the plumber trade, bicycle repair and clog making in 1900. Every day I worked hard for a living. Weight: 195 pounds. Greetings to the finder of these lines".

Thorvald Hansen

to his own time as a sailor. It could be one of these moments and great views that ignited his dream of building a tower – to get a better view of the world.

Being a former sailor, Hansen paid attention to the development in the shipping trade, and he had great admiration for the large and modern transatlantic liners. When he heard of a vessel's length, he wanted to see it with his own eyes and therefore marked the length of the vessel on the ground – using the same primitive method as for the Skagen lighthouse. Now he measured the length in footsteps.

One early summer morning – even before the milk delivery had arrived with the milk for the dairy, you would see a man walking around in Byrum. He walked with determined and measured steps, looking straight ahead. Those who saw him and happened to shout 'Good morning' only heard: '47, 48, 49 ...'



Photo arrangement with a portrait of a young Thorvald added to a picture of the tower and his three houses as background. Photo: Private

The funny thing was that nobody took any notice; for he was known by everyone, and surprised nobody with his funny ideas. One of Thorvald Hansen's ideas was, for instance, that he wanted to see how much space the America steamer 'Frederik VIII' would take up if it was anchored in downtown Byrum. That explains this particular morning walk. He calculated that the length of the ship must be one hundred and 68 long footsteps. He started measuring from his own shop door to the power house, where the school lies today.

Sayings about Thorvald ...

"Those who knew and saw Thorvald Hansen every day would remember him as the odd personality that he was: an eccentric and, to some extent, very strange. He had his own odd life philosophy, his own thoughts and odd ideas around matters. And he did not hide anything under the carpet. His immediate and open opinion, however, never gave him any trouble with the people around him who cared a lot for him and respected him."

Extract from an article in Læsøposten on 12 December 1953 by BC (Bernd Christensen).

It was obvious to see which of the women that Thorvald had danced with. He would leave a large mark on the back of their white blouses. After all, he was a bicycle repairer and often had oily hands that were very difficult to clean – combined with the fact that he probably wiped the sweat from his face and hair which would also leave marks. Nevertheless, he was a popular dancer when he was leading the girls on the dance floor, wrapped in his big arms, waltzing tirelessly around.

Karl Stoklund

"Important people arrived at the site. The clog maker, bicycle repairer and tower owner Thorvald Hansen was one in a million, round and kind, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. He often sent clogs on a carriage or two, clogs with black varnish. To him, varnish was an all-rounder. His hair and beard, greying with age, were dyed black with varnish; so was his clay pipe. Sometimes he carried his black bowler hat on top of all the bicycle grease. He had sailed many an ocean as a young man and had great wits and whereabouts. His treasures – the observation tower and the three self-made houses – still stand as landmarks of his town.

He was very fond of children and very good at listing to them and find out what interested them. Therefore, we always talked about doves, rabbits, horses and other creatures."

Extract from an article by N. Birch Nielsen from the Læsø Museum Yearbook 2002 'On the dairy square and the town of Byrum in the 1930s.

Thorvald Hansen was a very special man. When we were children we would give him our used ice-cream sticks - a certain number of them gave access to the tower. I can't remember what he used them for.

Erland Erlandsen

Sometimes he added that they must put 10 of them in a bucket by the tower entrance before they could climb the tower. Thorvald used them as kindling. When they came down again they would snatch a handful whenever possible, so they could enter again. He is not proud of this today, but at the age of 80 you are probably forgiven.

Erland's story retold by Even Thøgersen

It is said that he was very popular on the dance floor even though he arrived in clogs or danced with only his socks on – and in his not very clean working clothes. He could entertain the girls on the dance floor. They almost lined up just to dance with him. And he has a waltz named after him because he always asked for that particular one. The Thorvald Hansen Waltz. The audio file can be found on YouTube.

Judy Ryslander

Thorvald Hansen was so much more than the man who built a lighthouse, which is not a real lighthouse but a tower. He was a great dancer, and the story goes that whenever he entered the dance room, people clapped their hands. As a skilled and eager dancer, he could of course not dance in his wooden clogs. They were left in a corner, and he danced away in his bare socks.

Thorvald Hansen was a handsome man - tall, elegant and had a large black hair and a black moustache. When the years passed by, both his hair and beard turned grey, and he obviously did not like that – for he coloured both with varnish, the same he used to colour clogs.

The fiddler Ole Christian Pedersen composed a waltz he wanted to name 'Læsøvalsen'. Since it became the favourite waltz of Thorvald Hansen and the one he preferred to dance to, it was named after the man who built the red 'lighthouse' in Byrum.

He got so happy every time they played the Thorvald Hansen Waltz, and he sang with the full power of his voice: "Well, there she is, only in her shift, touching her softer parts!" "He was indeed a naughty one, that Thorvald Hansen!"

Unknown

From an old movie that I fixed I know that Thorvald was said to be a little vain. So he dyed his great hair, once pitch-black, with cart grease. When he was dancing and sweating, the colour would run down his face. At that point, he did not care – and just carried on dancing.

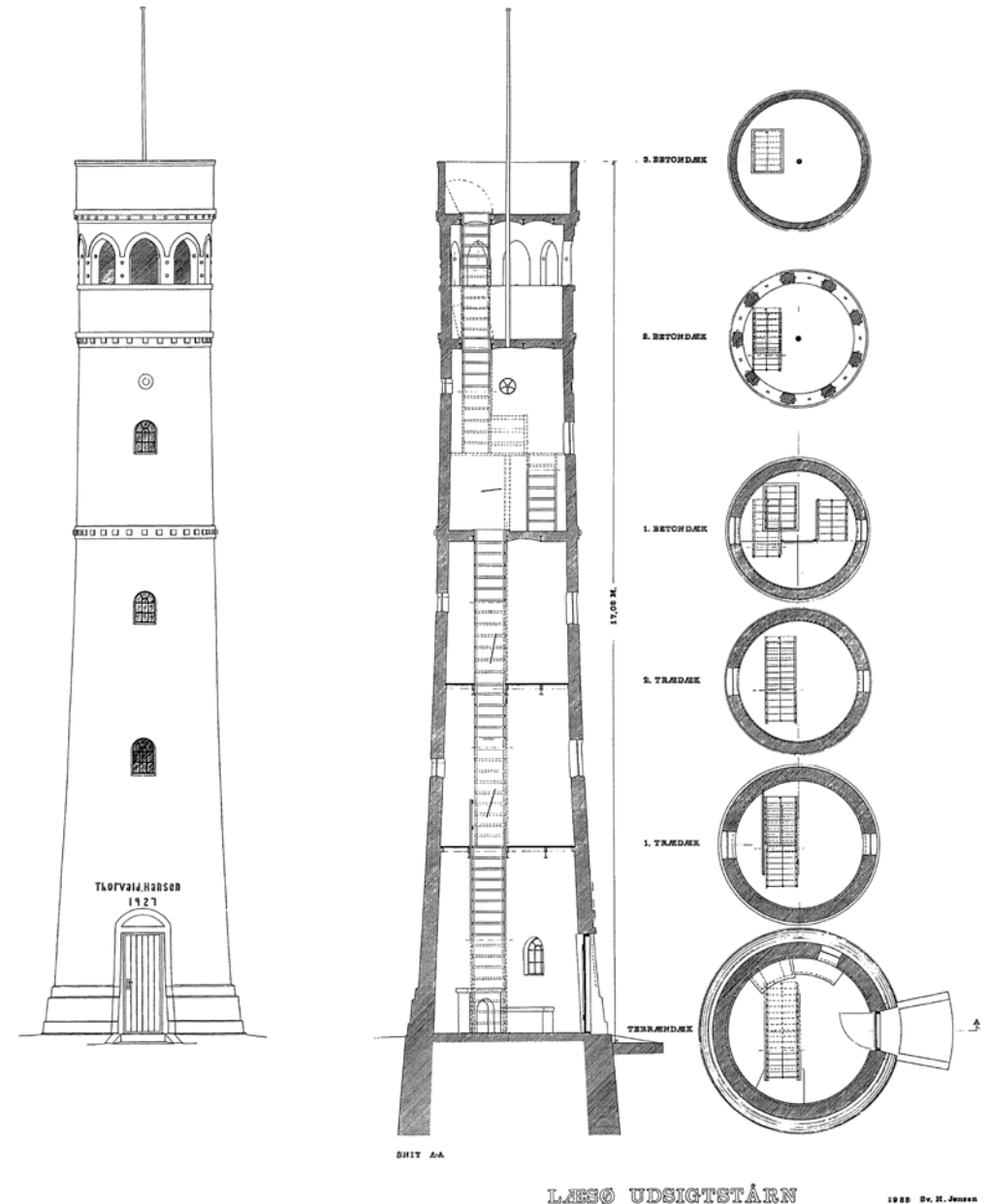
Louis Drewes

When Thorvald was an elderly man, he had a small dog. A terrier or small watchdog that he was very fond of. But he did not care much for walking it when it needed to. So he placed a number of plumber pipes from his house and out into the open. Then the dog could walk itself and do its business. Maybe the pipes are still there ... Digging out could verify this story about Thorvald.

Erik Malmose

I remember that as a child at 10 I had to pick up some clogs at Thorvald's workshop which was on the way up to the tower. I was a little afraid of the big, dark man with the rough looks. Apart from repairing and selling clogs, he also sold skates. Primitive skates with a nail at the back of the heel that we could hammer into our rubber boots and tie in front with a tight rope. The best thing I knew: to go skating on 'Floden'. After half an hour your feet would be numb. But I could skate all day long if I was allowed to. Already at the age of 4, we children took part in running the farms and doing jobs. Spare time was not an issue back then, but both young and old went skating whenever we could, during the long ice winters of the 1940s.

Erik Malmose



Detailed drawing of the tower from 1985 displaying stairs and landings, decorations and proportions. 17 metres high. Signed by Sv. H. Jensen.

At Gydensgaard, when I was a child, we always had housemaids. Usually from Northern Jutland (Vendsyssel). I remember one in particular who was like a mother to me. One day when she bent over the wash tub to clean her fine white blouse, she grumbled over Thorvald for having placed his black fingers on it during a dance.

Erik Malmose

When she was a little girl, Hilda climbed the thin, unstable wooden stairs during construction of the tower – high up to Thorvald where he was laying bricks. He got startled, but lowered her carefully down in the mortar tub that he used for moving his bricks and mortar up along the tower wall. She was told never to do that again. A story that runs in the family and has been told over and over again. Thomas and Larni Birch Johansen have, independently, told this family story about their mother Hilda Johansen (born in 1919). She was the child of Birch Nielsen from the merchant's house next to the tower – today the museum.

Roger Rafn recalls:

I was born in 1935 and was probably around 6-7 years old when I joined my father Kingo Rafn for a visit to Thorvald Hansen to get new soles for my small clogs. Thorvald finds a couple of adult soles, looks at me with teasing eyes and says: 'Don't you think these will fit if we cut them a bit?'

Thorvald was a big and talkative man, and my father, who was the mailman, often came by. One day as he sat at his kitchen table with his small, black dog, he cut out small blocks of bread, chewed them and gave them to the dog: 'She lost all her teeth', he said. And the dog died. A couple of years later, when Thor-

vald had a new dog he said to my father: 'Now the dog must chew the bread for me; soon I can't do it myself'. He died shortly after. After Thorvald's death and at the funeral, his son Hans Parker took the dog with him to Copenhagen. At some point, the grandfather of Poul Zink offered to get a load of gravel for the tower construction. But Thorvald declined: 'Then I won't be the one who built the tower'. Instead, he collected sand and gravel in his two buckets.

My father Kingo came around with mail during the war for the Germans who lived in the barracks behind the tower. He used to just knock on the door and enter – until one day, when he was met by a man pointing at him with his gun from the bunk bed. The man had just arrived from the frontline, but the others calmed him down. After that day, Kingo always waited to be 'invited' in. During the war, Danes were not allowed to climb the tower.

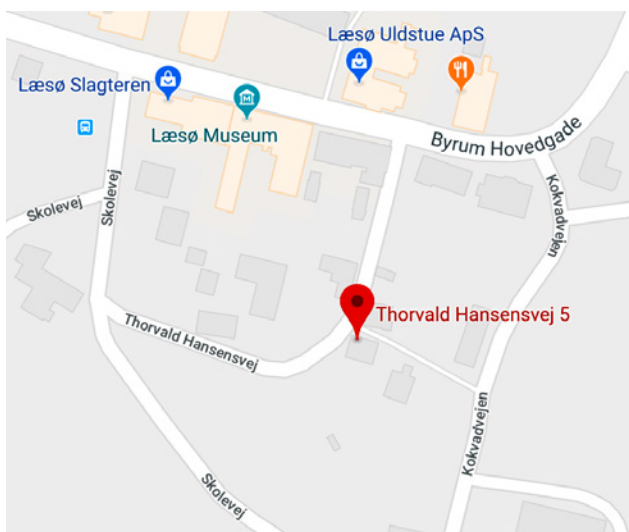
Erik Kristensen (Kamilla's grandfather) recalls: I was born in 1931 and was one of the boys who gained access to the tower in exchange for ice-cream sticks. Back then, an ice-cream would cost 15 øre, and I remember that we had to give 30 of them to enter. What he used them for, I do not know.

By that time, 'The Old Inn' in Byrum was surrounded by fields. Today, there are houses, and the street is Kromarksvej. Bjørn Hansen was the owner, and his son ran an ice-cream bar inside the inn. After harvest, Thorvald rented a haystack for his siesta. He always wore a bowler hat, and when the hat brim was in the way for a pleasant nap he simply cut it off. Instead of just taking the hat off. It looked very funny.

One day, when I was a big boy, he invited me down into his basement in the house by the tower. He wanted to show me his couch down there. And it was quite true that he had built a bed in the basement with hay on top of it. At one end of the bed, facing the outer wall, he had placed a plumbing pipe leading out into the open. Thorvald told me that his little brown dachsdog could then run out and do its business alone. He had tied a leash to it so it did not run 'other errands'. (The 'bed' is still there, in the basement of the tower house. It will also be renovated).



Finding your way to the Thorvald Tower



You will find the Thorvald Tower in Byrum, close to Byrum Hovedgade:

**Thorvald Hansens Vej 5,
Byrum, Læsø**

**The Thorvald Hansen
Tower is open all year
round.**

Admission fee:
Adults kr. 20,-
Children kr. 10,-
(Læsø children no fee)

Contact info on events, storytelling and presentations etc.:

Tower caretaker Klíx, Thorvald Hansens Tårn, Thorvald Hansens Vej 5, 9940 Læsø
Phone: 40 42 05 05 05 · www.thorvaldhansenstaarn.dk · Mail: jjk@han-mar.dk

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