

# BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST

Preserving the Past for the Future



## NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 7

February, 2004

A new newsletter and a new venture. This month sees the publication of Derek Hart's reminiscences of wartime Birchington, **Dangerous Coastline**. Jenny Burgess has edited the book which is produced under the auspices of Birchington Heritage Trust. It is a fascinating read and we hope you have all reserved your copies and that it will sell really well in local bookshops.

Our pre-Christmas programme had a distinctly twenties feel to it. For November and December we had an exhibition in Forbuoys of Gladys Cooper and the many celebrities who visited Birchington during the 1920s. Nearly 70 people attended the illustrated talk given about Gladys Cooper by Pat Orpwood on November 28th and about fifty attended the Twenties dance organised by Peter Draper on December 5th. We were delighted that so many turned up to the dance in twenties style—we hope you saw the photographs in the Gazette, but it was a pity there were not a few more to enjoy the excellent music of The Bay Jazz Band, even if they did not want to dance. As usual Gillian Lodge organised the raffle which raised nearly £100. The events prompted many enquiries and several new members.



Dressed for the part, Jennie Burgess with members at the Twenties

 BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST  
presents an evening of  
**WINE AND WISDOM**  
Friday February 20th  
8p.m.  
Birchington Village Centre  
Bar open to 11pm  
Tickets £3.50  
including wine and refreshments  
For tickets and information  
phone 842633 or 846713  
Doors open at 7.30

BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST  
Preserving the Past for the Future  
  
**GENERAL MEETING**  
To celebrate the launch of the book  
**Jennie Burgess**  
presents  
**Dangerous Coastline**  
The Birchington wartime memories of  
**Derek Hart**  
7.30, Friday March 5th  
The Birchington Centre  
All Welcome  
Non-members £1  
  
Registered charity No. 1099290 Secretary: Pat Orpwood - Telephone: 01843 847843



In this Issue: Twenties review and coming events - page 1, Newsboard and Dangerous Coastline- page 2, Old Birchington library, Derek Hart and Charlie Smart - page 3, The Minnis Bay Dip - page 4



# FEBRUARY HERITAGE NOTICEBOARD

## TRANSPORT TO MEETINGS

Remember, if you find it difficult to get to General Meetings and would like a lift there and back, please contact Pat Orpwood on 847843 before the meeting.

## CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Would all members please notify Colin Gordine of any change of address to ensure you receive your newsletter promptly.

Please contact Colin (843279)

## NEW MEMBERS

We now have 150 fully paid -up members. A special welcome to new members this quarter:

Mr G. Onion	Heather Gee	Julie Francis
Mrs E. Ogles	Sheila Robson	Mr B. Baker
Tom Williams	Graham and Sheila Hartley	
Jean Lavington	Miss Barbara Coleman	
Chris Porteous	Angela McKenna	

## MEMBERS' SUGGESTIONS

If you have any ideas about future speakers, social events, outings, or any other activities you would like The Trust to consider, please contact: The Secretary on 847843, speak to any committee member or fill in one of our forms, available at our meetings.

## FORBUOYS

Have you seen the new display based on **Dangerous Coastline**? We are all extremely grateful to Mo at Forbuoys for allowing us to use her side window.

## DATA PROTECTION ACT

Please could we ask all members to fill in one of our data protection forms to give us permission to hold a list of names and addresses on the Membership Secretary's computer. A copy of the form is enclosed with this newsletter.

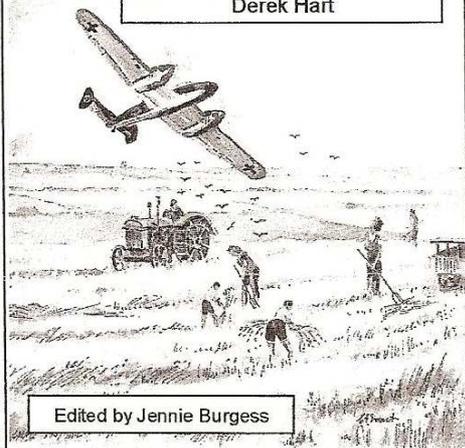
# DANGEROUS COASTLINE

## Dangerous Coastline

1939-1945

A Wartime Childhood  
In Birchington

Derek Hart



Derek Hart's book, **Dangerous Coastline**, will be on sale very shortly. We have decided to print 1,000 copies. It will cost £7.95 and any profits from the sale of the book will go the Birchington Heritage Trust. The book is in A4 format and contains numerous pictures and detailed maps.

Derek tells the story of his childhood here in Birchington during the war. This is unusual, because almost all the children of school-age were evacuated to Staffordshire in June 1940. None of the 40-45 children who remained (or any of the adults) has yet written of what happened here during the war and the local press rarely mentions this end of the island. So Derek's account is of immense importance, as well of great local interest.

We have already had firm requests for 65 copies, with members paying £5.00 to secure their copy. If you would like to make sure you get your copy, then please enclose a £5 deposit in an envelope, with your name, address and phone number and send it to:

Miss Jennie Burgess, 6, Alpha Road, Birchington, CT7 9EQ.

# Memories of The Old Birchington Library

by Sally Fosse

Before the new one was opened in 1967, Birchington Library was in Station Road, half of a pair of semi-detached houses next to and similar to those now owned by Tandoori Nite and County Financial Services.

I can't remember the first time I went there, but it seems now as if it was always the happiest part of my childhood in Birchington. I think my first visits were with my mother to collect the free orange juice and cod-liver oil in the utility style medicine bottles. These were dispensed from the little office in the front room by the door on the ground floor. I can see it all now - very dark with a heavy front door leading into dark-stained woodwork and a polished linoleum floor. A flight of stairs with a glossy wooden handrail disappeared upwards at the back of the hall and all around was this unique smell of institution polish and old books.

If there was time, we would venture up the stairs where my mother would go into one of the rooms off the top landing to choose some books for her and my father whilst I held on to the ones selected. Then, together we would climb the narrow twisting staircase to the attic room at the top of the house where the children's books were to be found and where I was helped to make my selection. Following that it was downstairs again to the librarian in her tiny area squeezed into the back of the landing. Waiting for my mother to have her books stamped, I would gaze up at the tall wooden counter where the books were checked in and out.

Eventually there came a time when I was allowed to visit the library on my own or was left there while my parents did their other shopping. It was so much more enjoyable to be alone particularly as I had much more time and could browse among the books for almost as long as I pleased. Firstly I would return the books from the previous week and then it was up the creaking stairs to the attic and, if I was lucky, I would have the room completely to myself.

How I explored those shelves, searching for new discoveries and taking down again my old favourites. One of these was an adventure story set in Holland called Jan, the Story of a Dutch Barge Dog. It was a rather tatty book with a distinctly

just post-war cover and some black and white illustrations, but I adored it. Week after week I would pray that no-one else had discovered it and would sit re-reading parts of it curled up on the floor under the rear attic window, glancing up every so often to peer out over the roofs at the back. Years later I discovered an abridged school edition of the book which I bought and which still sits on one of my shelves.

There were many other favourites: Jennings and Derbyshire, Captain W.E. Johns's Biggles books and of course the inevitable Enid Blytons, not so much frowned upon then as they were later. I read them all: The Famous Five, The Secret Seven, the rather-better developed single adventure stories and then later Mallory Towers and other series. I shared in their adventures in that idyllic world where all was so simple and goodness was rewarded whilst villains received their just dues, usually as a result of some enterprising youngsters. I was George; I sought friends like Julian and I longed to spend a holiday on an island with my dog, preferably a Dutch barge dog. Summers at Minnis Bay were not quite the same!



The old library just visible on the right behind the tree

As I grew older I spent more time on the first floor choosing books for my busy parents: a

Dennis Wheatley for my father and an Agatha Christie or romance for my mother whilst I developed very eclectic tastes ranging from Sherlock Holmes to the entire works of Baroness Orczy as well as books set in the second world war and adventure stories. I also ventured into the other attic room where the non-fiction was shelved and where, whilst looking down over Station Road, I would be transported to ages past and wonderful far-away places I dreamed one day of visiting.

Later, when I went to school in Ramsgate I discovered a larger and more modern library where I would loiter on my way home from school. I would also learn from friends and teachers about the books I should have read and had somehow missed, so that I embarked on various reading programmes to fill in the gaps. But, fifty years later, having attended college, lived in London, established and maintained my own libraries in schools and visited many of those places I once dreamed of, I still remember with great affection that old Victorian house in the middle of the village where my love of reading and interest in the world first started.

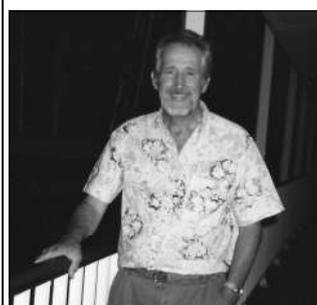
## DEREK'S LEGACY TO THE VILLAGE



Author, Derek Hart

Derek Hart spent from 1991 to 1995 writing the draft of **Dangerous Coastline** and then began looking for a publisher. Sadly, he died before it was published, but his wife offered it to The Trust and Jennie Burgess was happy to edit it and see it through to publication. We hope Derek would have approved.

## LOCAL ARTIST COMES UP TRUMPS



Local artist, Charlie Smart

When Jennie Burgess was planning the cover for **Dangerous Coastline**, the owner of the photograph she wanted asked £600 for us to use it. Fortunately, Charlie Smart offered to paint the cover to illustrate Derek's story and has produced a really superb cover.

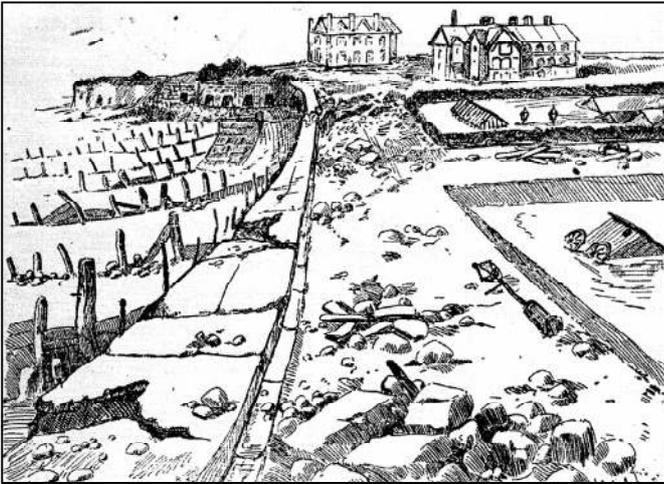
# The Minnis Bay 'Dip'

By Colin Gordine

The 'Dip', lying on the coast of Minnis Bay between Canute Road and Minnis Road, along with the surrounding low-lying areas of built up land, is a surviving remnant of the Gore Creek which once stretched inland as far as Upper Gore End Farm. The shelter from the northerly winds provided by the now eroded hook of cliffs provided a safe haven for boats and settlements dating from the the Bronze Age, through Roman and Anglo-Saxon times (ref: the Beck excavations 1938) until the mid 19th Century. Many older 'locals' will remember the old coastguard boathouse which was demolished to make way for the flats at the junction of Minnis and Ethelbert Roads.

The Creek gradually silted up over the centuries becoming little more than a tidal marsh by the mid-19th Century. In 1880, the Birchington Bay Estate Company finally sealed off the inlet with the construction of a sea wall, now known as 'The Parade'. The land to the south of the Dip (formerly known as Athelstan Gardens) as far as Dane Road, and the area to the east, now housing the children's play area, was reclaimed using spoil from local building work and refuse collected from the streets of Margate.

Tennis courts were to be provided in the Dip as well



The Dip flooded—Keble's Gazette, December, 1897

as a small exhibition hall, tea pavilion and greenhouses, within a sunken garden. The exhibition hall, a large barn-like structure, was funded by the Estate managing director, Mr Rayden, a London stockbroker, to display a 'loan exhibition, fancy, fair and horticultural show', no doubt with an eye to publicity for

the Estate. The perimeter was planted with hedges to provide protection from the winds. Unfortunately these hedges did little to prevent the destruction of the buildings in the great storm of 29th November 1897.

Rebuilding of the greenhouses followed and the gardens were restored to their former glory. A 'Tea Garden' was created amongst the plants. Run by the Johnson family (owners of the Minnis Bay Post Office), this proved to be a popular attraction between the Wars. Unfortunately the Second World War curtailed all these activities and by its end, all that remained of the sunken gardens were the perimeter hedges and a small concrete base which supported the Tea Garden kitchens. A part of this can still be seen today beneath the grassy slope into the Dip opposite Viking Close.

In the storm of January 31st 1953, the exceptionally



History repeats itself in the flooding of 1953

high spring tide, coupled with north westerly gales and heavy rain, flooded across the road and into the surrounding low-lying land, including the Dip, filling it to the level of the road surface. It took many weeks for the waters to subside and even longer for the grass to recover from its salty soaking.

The Dip has remained an open play area to this day, providing some shelter from the northerly gales for summer visitors and residents alike. However, from time to time, when there is heavy rain and when a storm force 10 is hurling its sea spray across The Parade, the former Gore Creek seems to be making an attempt to recover its lost route to the sea.

## Thanks for your Memories

The talk and exhibition on the twenties has encouraged a number of people to come forward with recollections of the era. Among others, we have heard from people who remember Gladys Cooper and her family at Kingsgate and a Birchington lady whose father, the owner of Ladbrooke's, employed Herbert Buckmaster and became friends with the family. Also the Administrator of The Buckmaster Homes in Broadstairs has recently contacted The Trust. Several people have suggested that the cottage Gladys rented was in the grounds of Carmel Court.

**We are grateful for all your contributions. Please keep them coming.**