

BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST

Preserving the Past for the Future



NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 10

November, 2004

The Trust looks to the Future

At the beginning of our third year and, as we celebrate our tenth newsletter, we feel it is time to think carefully about the future of The Trust. The Executive Committee have spent some time discussing the direction which they feel the Trust should take over the next few years and how we are going to fund these ideas. We should like to share our initial thoughts with the members and ask you all for your support and ideas.

The Committee felt that the current programme of The Trust was working well. We are producing four newsletters a year and our General Meetings have all been well-attended, as have our local walks. Many people have commented on our displays in Forbuoys, which we hope to re-locate when the shop is refurbished and we were delighted with the attendance at our major exhibition in June. The Social Committee have produced an interesting variety of events, all of which have received excellent support. We shall, therefore, continue in a similar way in the future. We do, however, hope to extend our research, both oral and written and hope to publish at least one research paper each year.

Our second constitutional remit was to establish a museum for Birchington in order to make our collection of material available to a wider audience. To this end, we have been looking at ways of making this possible. At the moment, we are in a fairly healthy state financially, but most of our money has come from sales of "Dangerous Coastline" and this income will shortly dwindle. We have made some profit from social events and raffles and were very grateful for the grant from Birchington Swimming Club of £750. At the moment, however, we do not have sufficient funds for an extended rental of premises, should suitable ones become available.

You may know that recently we had the opportunity to rent a small shop in The Square. We thought long and hard about it and finally decided that we did not have sufficient funds as yet to commit ourselves, not just for the rental, but also the cost of all the necessary services and insurance.

We are still looking at possibilities of acquiring premises and possible methods of raising the money. We have written to Roger Gale and local councillors and are actively seeking sponsors and possible grants.



Birchington Heritage Trust

General Meeting

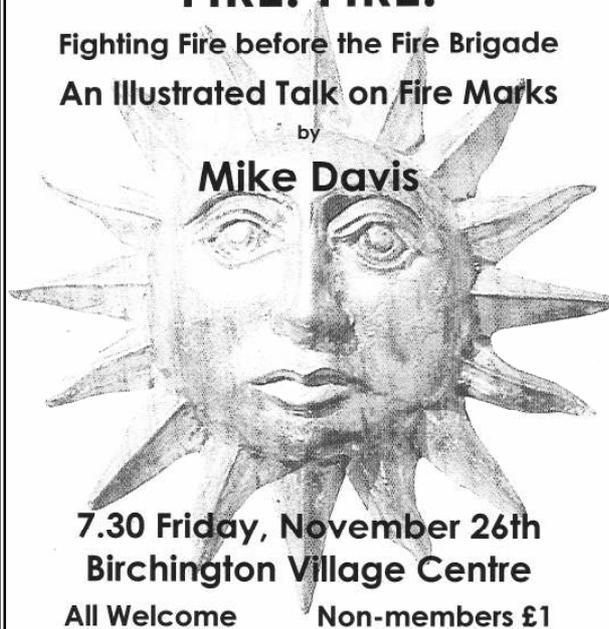
FIRE! FIRE!

Fighting Fire before the Fire Brigade

An Illustrated Talk on Fire Marks

by

Mike Davis



7.30 Friday, November 26th

Birchington Village Centre

All Welcome

Non-members £1

We should welcome any comments, help and suggestions from members about what they would like to see in the future and we hope you might like to share any views with us at the next General Meeting, before what looks to be a most interesting talk by Mike Davis on Fire Insurance Marks and their importance in fighting fires.



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The Shrimp Man of Birchington

by Bernard La Roche

In the late nineteenth century, the "Shrimp Man of Birchington" was one Frederick Joseph Letley. This likeable chap was a character of some repute, with regards to his ability, achievements and dashing looks. With his ginger curly hair and Dickensian attire, he was, to say the least, striking.

Frederick Letley was a principled man in his way and would, for reasons best known to himself, never launch his boat until one minute after midnight on a Sunday. During his active life as a fisherman, he would sell his whelks, shrimps, lobsters, winkles and the like from his stall on the pavement outside the Powell Arms. He earned his living by this means and brought up his family in what would be considered a reasonably good living for the day.

During his earlier years, he was brought up in the Medway area and, according to the archives of Rochester, was admitted in 1877 to the "Freedom of the Fisheries of the River Medway" and registered as a Dredgerman in the same year. On his marriage certificate, he was classified as a mariner.

He lived in a thatched cottage which was reached down steps on the corner of Station Road and Crescent Road, where Forbuoys now stands (and Birchington Heritage Trust have their photographic display).

He kept his boat at Epple Bay and when it was out of action for a few days or needed repair work carried out, he would have it pulled up and put on a spare bit of land at St James's Terrace.

He was also a great pipe smoker and actually very



Frederick Joseph Letley, "The Shrimpman of Birchington" with some of his fishing tackle

knowledgeable. He claimed he never stopped learning from when he was born in 1856 until he died in 1940, some 84 years old. His descendants still live in the village today.

The September General Meeting and Jazz Concert

Over 80 people, including fifteen visitors, attended the recent General Meeting of The Birchington Heritage Trust on Friday 24th September at Birchington Village Centre. Following our exhibition, *Birchington and the Sea*, Tony Child, of Thanet Coast Heritage, gave an illustrated talk on Birchington's Coastal Heritage. The gremlins of the council laptop again plagued the first half, leaving Tony to introduce the subject without pictures, but hard work during the interval by him and Thanet Coast Education Officer, Naomi Biggs, managed to make it serviceable for a most interesting account of the heritage of the local shoreline. The audience thoroughly enjoyed looking at the variety of the coastal wildlife and the session was followed by some thoughtful questions from the floor about protecting our coast. Gillian Lodge again organised the raffle which raised £74 for Trust funds. Members of The Trust joined Tony on Saturday 25th September to help clear the litter from a section of the beach near Plum Pudding Island. A photograph taken on the day with the group wearing the newly supplied Coastal Project clothing recently appeared in the Kent Messenger Extra. Fortunately, none of us can be recognised!

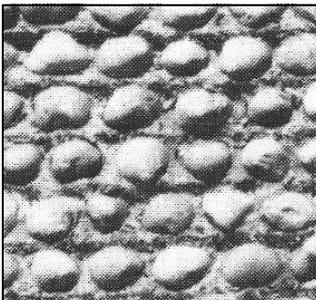
Over sixty attended an excellent jazz concert featuring the Dave Corsby Quartet held on Friday 29th October at the Centre. The quartet played a variety of standards as well as a new suite based on Thanet. A full account of the concert with pictures will appear in the next edition of the newsletter. Gillian and Margaret Garrad raise £80 with the raffle and over £6 in small change was put in our new Museum Fund bucket which will be in evidence at all future meetings as one way of raising funds.

BUILDING WITH FLINT

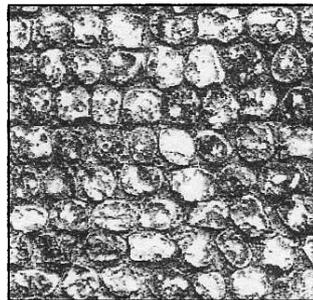
Researched by Jennie Burgess

Britain is the only country in the world where flint was frequently used in buildings. It is found in the upper and middle layers of chalk and began life as a liquid. It is harder than quartz and is one of the purest forms of silica. It was the first material to be mined in Britain and some 60,000 flint tools and weapons, some nearly 100,000 years old, have been found in Kent. The shore between just east of Reculver to Whitstable is rich in flint pebbles.

Flint has been used for building since Roman times, with Richborough Castle being a good example locally. The Romans used it for their roads, which is one of the reasons they stood up to the heavy wear of the Legions. When used in buildings, the unknapped (or natural) flints needed a lot of mortar to hold them together. To reduce this problem, men began knapping the flints, by chipping off the rounded edges.



Unknapped flints laid in courses



Knapped flints laid in courses

In Kent flint has always been readily available with very little effort and there are plenty of flints in local gardens. Many of the pebbles on the beaches of Birchington are flint and there are bands of flint visible in the cliff faces as you walk along the promenades. Farmers often encouraged the parishes to send flint-gatherers onto their land to help clear the pebbles, as they interfered with ploughing. These pebbles were then used in road repairs, a task which still came under the care of individual parishes until late in the 19th century.

FLINT MILLS

Flints were so abundant in Thanet, they became a vital export commodity. The counties of Kent and Sussex sent flints to Staffordshire by canal for grinding. The flint mills at Cheddleton in Staffordshire ground up the flint into a fine powder to be used in the nearby Potteries. The output from Cheddleton Mills was used in the Minton works at Stoke-on Trent.

The flints were unloaded straight into the mills, where they were heated in huge kilns for three days until they became brittle. They were then immersed in water, causing them to crack into small pieces, which were then crushed in the mill. This saved the workers' lungs from the lethal dust of the early years, when much of this work was done by hand in a process called dry-crushing. The creamy slurry in the grinding pan was mixed with water and put in a settling tank, where the flint powder sank to the bottom to form a thick sediment. When dried, it was cut into blocks and dispatched to the potteries, where it was used to strengthen certain clays and also in the glazing processes.

VILLAGE BUILDINGS

Looking round the village, we can still see a number of buildings which contain this mineral, notably All Saints Church in the Square. These walls were once covered with a rough lime rendering, which is visible in an old photograph of about 1860. The Victorians cleaned this off and repaired the walls in 1863 to what we see today. Some other examples of flint nearby are found in the churchyard walls, the cottages opposite and the cottages on the corner of Canterbury Road and Kent Gardens as well as the aptly named ones in Mill Row (see photograph below).

There is also a terrace in Epple Road with flint walls at the back of the properties and there used to be a flint cottage on the corner of Park Avenue and another by the village pond, until Margate Borough Council decided to widen the Canterbury Road in 1933.



"Flint Cottages", 3 -6, Mill Row