



Newsletter

www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk

May 2008

Charity No. 1099250

ISSUE 24

NORMAN 'SONNY' MILES

We have recently lost one of our long-time residents, who made a large impact on Birchington's building scene for many years. 'Sonny', as he was familiarly known, was born in Garlinge in 1910 and then moved to Margate soon after. This was followed by a move to Minster, where his father, Archibald, ran the Bell Inn for some time. Sonny went to Chatham House School in Ramsgate and when he left school was apprenticed to W.W. Martin the well-known builder, under whose guidance he learnt carpentry and qualified as a master builder.



Sonny & Elaine Miles

By this date World War Two loomed over the horizon and Sonny was employed for the duration of the war by the Air Ministry on building and repairing Barrage Balloon sites around London. After the war, he set up in the building business in Birchington with his father, who also had skills in the building trade. His main output was in building bungalows that were known all over Thanet for their superior finish and quality. He used his skills in Kingsgate and around Northdown Park, Margate as well as Manor Drive, Albion Road and Minnis Bay, Birchington, besides other areas in Thanet. Even today, estate agents will advertise one of his bungalows with the proud description "This is a Miles' Bungalow".

He had a builder's yard in Minnis Road, which was always a hive of activity, as the writer of this note can vouch. In searching for rockery stones in 1963, visits to the yard were always a fascinating venture! People who lived in one of Sonny's bungalows would always proudly boast of who their builder was.

Sonny was Chairman of Margate Football Club for a number of years and was a long-standing member of Birchington & Westgate Golf Club, which he captained and was also their Chairman. His generous help to the younger members is still spoken of today. His tall figure was seen playing the greens with great skill and huge enjoyment, till age began to take its toll.

Sonny was married to his wife Elaine for 66 years. She was a great supporter of the Guild of Players for many years, but sadly died a few years ago. When Sonny died on the 9th April this year, aged 97, he left a daughter, Shirley, son-in-law Robert Cross, two grandsons - Matthew and Daniel - and four lovely great-grandchildren.

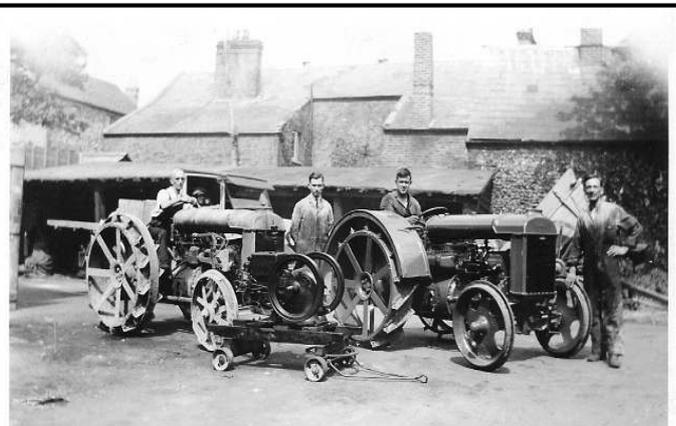
Long may we hear that boast -

"This is a Miles Built Bungalow!"

A Night at the Races

The race night on Friday 18th April 2008 was a great success. The races generated a lot of enthusiastic cheering from "the punters" who entered into the spirit of the event. The horses raced along the track with the help of four young jockeys who also seemed to be enjoying themselves. Howard Willicome's entertaining commentary was much appreciated by everyone and made the races even more exciting. With the help of all who attended we made a profit of £163.21 for the trust.

Our Display in Martin's Windows called Transport in Birchington One photograph to appear in June



Albert Pantony's Garage in Park Lane



THE THREE MAY GIRLS

Bernard La Roche

"In Loving Memory of our three Aunts"



The new bench on the corner of Epple Bay Avenue and Epple Road was placed there in memory of the three May sisters. One of their nieces, Linda, the daughter of Peter May, felt it would be right to have a memorial bench placed here, as all the May children spent most of their lives in and around the Epple Bay area.



In the 1929 photo of some of the family, taken on the corner of Cross Road and Epple Road, are (from L. to R.) Ben May, Amy, an unknown visitor, Peggy,

and Mary. The younger son Peter was not born until 1930.

The 1942 photo of Peggy and Amy shows them hoeing the field east of the slipway during the war, when they were in the Land Army. The field was then being used for growing vegetables.



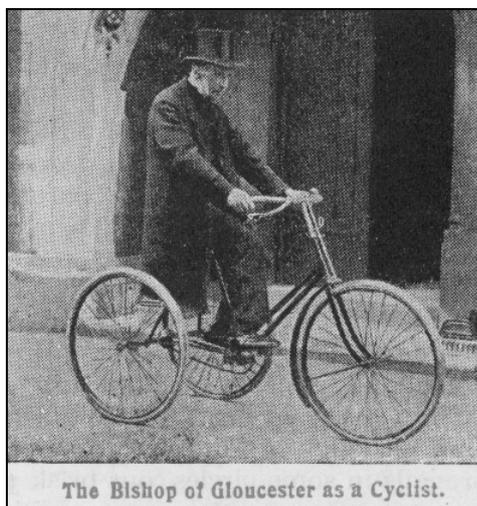
The photo of the three girls shows Amy on the left, Mary in her WRAF uniform and Peggy on the right. After the war, Amy was the first woman police officer in Kent and she died in 2007.

Rt Rev. Charles Ellicott Bishop of Gloucester

Article about the Bishop from a 1904 Parish Magazine

"Very few people know that we have a Bishop on the Episcopal Bench who was appointed by Lord Palmerston (died in 1865), and fewer still that he is an octogenarian cyclist, who learnt the ways of the wheel after he had passed three score years and ten. This wonderful record is held by Dr. Ellicott, the venerable Bishop of Gloucester (retired). "Some eight or nine years ago (1895-6)", writes the Bishop in his eighty-fourth year, "I had a light tricycle made, on which I have ridden with comfort and, as a supplemental form of exercise to walking, I can heartily recommend it." The Bishop rides as he always walked, strenuously, and can leave many younger men far behind. He is also an expert skater and mountaineer.

A few years ago I had occasion to refer to his Lordship's exploits in this magazine, and remarked that they must be over. Far from it - he wrote me a letter, telling me that he was still on the active list of the Alpine Club."



The Bishop of Gloucester as a Cyclist.

Charles John Ellicott DD, Bishop of Gloucester retired to Birchington in about 1899 and lived at "Tresco" one of the Tower Bungalows in Spencer Road with his wife and daughter. He died here in 1905 aged 86 and is buried in All Saints Churchyard. His wife and daughter continued to live at "Tresco" until each of their deaths. His wife Constantia died in 1914 aged 86 and their younger daughter Rosalind died in 1924 aged 66. So the Ellicott family occupied "Tresco" for a quarter of a century. Their elder daughter had married and used to visit her family here on occasion.

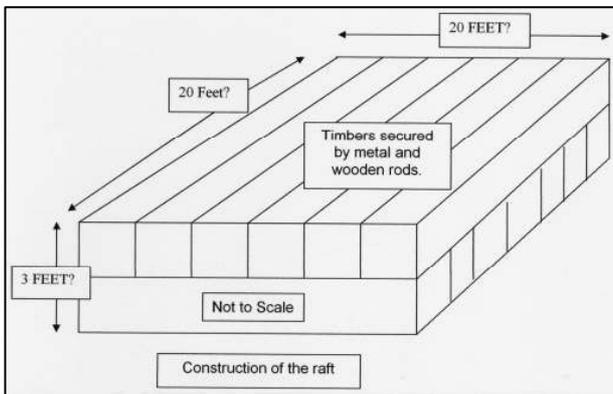
After the death of the Bishop, his many friends from Gloucester and Kent decided to honour his memory by the erection of the two vestries on the south-east corner of All Saints Church, Birchington. Prior to this, the clergy and choir used to use the east end of what is now St Margaret's Chapel, while the space under the tower was a store room. The new vestries were dedicated in 1910.

The photo of the Bishop looks as if he may be passing the entrance to St Thomas's Hospital in St Peter's Street, Canterbury. The tricycle must have caused quite a stir in Birchington when he first arrived. George Cousins, a local builder and entrepreneur, produced the first dropped-bar bicycles for ladies. Unfortunately he failed to get it correctly patented so gave up producing them when others copied his idea. He then built an estate agent's office onto his factory and quite possibly sold "Tresco" to the Bishop.

This is a true story written at the request of Jennie Burgess, from the Birchington Heritage Trust, following a recent conversation with her. It is taken from my fading memory, as I was about 12 at the time and am now 69 years of age.

As a child I lived with my parents, Denys, (known as Dan or Den) and Mary Cock at St Nicholas-at-Wade and my Grandfather, William Cock, (known as Bill) lived at "Burma" 8, Westfield Road, Birchington. Another son, Donald, lived, in Westgate at that time.

Granddad Bill, my Father and Donald, were well known locally as they all worked for the Gas Company, (the Westgate and Birchington which later became South Eastern Gas Board) . They were always on the beaches collecting shellfish to cook and sell around the local villages, wood, coal and any other items that were washed up, (for the fire, building sheds and for selling,) and any item that could be turned into money! Dad used to collect and cook his shellfish on a Saturday and deliver out as far as Preston on a Sunday morning, on a trade-bike!



Around the early 1950's, one of them came across a very large wooden raft that had washed up at Epple Bay. They reported this to the authorities who thought it had probably come from a dockyard and were told that they could have it if they could get it off the beach! What a challenge!

This raft was about three foot thick and about twenty foot square and was constructed of two layers of timber each about eighteen inches square. Metal rods held the timbers together, and I believe, there were also timber rods. It looked something like my drawing.

As the brothers were both working they could only get to the beach after work and at weekends. Granddad, being retired, kept the night watch to ensure the raft did not float away at the next high tide! They anchored the raft to the beach with ropes and then set about working out what to do next!



As locals will know, Epple Bay is reached from a very narrow cutting in the cliff and there were limited sea defences or promenade in those days, so there was obviously going to be a problem, not only with breaking up the raft, but also getting the timber off the beach.

I remember that a local farmer, (possibly a Mr. Linington?) offered them the use of a small lorry and driver to get the timbers up the slipway and to take them to I know not where! In return, his fee would be one length of timber!



Epple Gap 1 - 2008

The "gang" then set about breaking up the raft. They used oxy-acetylene to remove the iron rods, saws to cut through the timber rods and made huge wedges to split the layers apart. How long this took I cannot remember but I do know that I spent many long and enjoyable hours on that beach whilst Granddad and his two sons worked like Trojans.

I seem to remember another person helping them but this could of course have been the Oxy-cutting man, or the lorry driver. How they managed to get the timber up onto the lorry I do not know but I can remember seeing the lorry squeezing up the slipway. Eventually the raft was completely dismantled and removed from the beach and any local interest obviously waned.

I have memories of at least one length of timber lying on the allotment at the bottom of Granddad's garden, (where Kent Gardens was built) and of the "gang" digging a sawpit to enable them to saw up a piece lengthways! Why? You might ask! I remember seeing Granddad standing on the top of the timber over the pit with a "two man saw" whilst my Dad worked from below, each taking turns to pull the saw up or down! What workers they must have been in those days!

How long it took to dispose of all the timber, and where it went I do not know, but I do remember that my Father's told me many years later that his share of the proceeds from the sale was something like £120, a large sum in those days. To my knowledge there are no family photos of this event, and I have never seen any but maybe it caught the imagination of a local photographer or even a newspaper. This is a great pity as it would have been wonderful to have seen just what the conditions were like at that time.

I know that people who were adults at that time are fading away, but if any one has any knowledge, or better still photos, of this raft, I would love to hear from them.



*Tresco
Former Home of Rt. Rev. Charles Ellicott*

On 27th March 2008 we were given a fascinating illustrated talk by Felicity Stafford on Victorian Holidaying, supported by many humorous contemporary anecdotes. The talk opened with a quotation from Anthony Hern stating that "Half a dozen commuters make a pleasant change: a hundred make an event: a thousand requires more shops, hotels and wider streets: half a million becomes an industry". The talk answered the many questions which she proposed at the start.

Only aristocrats would visit the seaside during the 18th century, followed later by the middle classes at the start of the 19th century, then the excursionists by the middle of the 19th century.

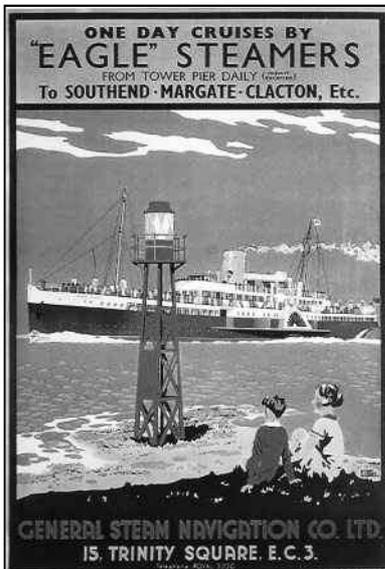
One factor which sowed the seeds of the holiday industry in the 17 Kentish sea side towns was improved affordability, reliability and speed of transport. In the 18th century a horse drawn carriage from London to Margate could take 16 hours and cost 19 shillings. Alternatively travel by sea on a hoy, a sailing barge, could take between a few hours and three days, weather permitting. The fare by in 1780 cost 2/6d and could



English_hoy

carry 60 to 70 passengers. In 1815 the introduction of paddle steamers greatly improved the journey in terms of comfort, luxury, and quicker service. The paddle steamers promoted many sea side towns to build better piers so passengers could alight from the vessel without getting their feet wet and that sailings would be less effected by the tides. The most significant change was in 1856, with the opening of the railway line to Margate. Another factor that assisted the Victorian holidaymaking industry was in 1871 when Sir John Lubbock introduced the Bank Holidays Act, Shop Hours Early Closing and Shops Sunday Closing Acts, which in turn gave additional free time to many more employees'.

Town and city dwellers, considered the sea side a healthy place to visit. A Dr William Russel in 1753 postulated in his book "The Uses of Sea Water" which suggested numerous health benefits when treating illnesses such as jaundice, gout and scurvy recommended taking internally sea water, with or without port! The Royal Sea Bathing Hospital was built in 1791 for treatment of consumption. The bathing machine, with a modesty hood, to protect ladies from public gaze whilst bathing, was introduced to Margate. Ladies and gentlemen had to bathe at least 60 feet apart.



Noticeboard

Reminder - Subscriptions Due

Our new Year starts in May, so your renewal subscriptions are now due.

Renewal and Gift Aid forms are enclosed.

Please complete the forms and return to us.



Birchington Heritage Trust

Annual General Meeting

Thursday 29th May 2008

7.30 pm

The Centre

& Talk by Emma Boast
Thanet Archaeology Trust

The Birchington bowl
(middle Bronze Age)
excavated in 1904 in
The Brickfields.



Archaeology of Reculver, Minnis to
St Mildred's Bay, Westgate.

New Members Welcome

The sea side towns were developed, with the building of piers, hotels, and guest houses, promenades, parks, theatres, assembly rooms and many other amenities to attract more visitors. Margate's estimated tourist income grew from £1 million to £3.25 million between 1885 and 1895. Margate Pier & Harbour Company records showed passengers landing grew from 38 thousand to 238 thousand between 1877 and 1900. It was said that you could have a pleasant week in Margate for £5 and have some change left.

A large hotel with 300 rooms and 7 bathrooms was built in Cliftonville, situated by the invigorating air from the "German Ocean". It also offered many facilities and services for its clientele.

The rich would stay in hotels, often accompanied by their servants. The middle classes stayed in apartments or in boarding houses and the working classes would find a room in a house in a backstreet. Frequently parents would stay in one hotel and the nannies and children would be put up in another. The great and the good would announce their arrival to the local newspaper office for publication.

For entertainment, Punch and Judy shows appeared, also various entertainers tailored their acts for the holiday makers. In 1918/19 John Henry Isles opened Dreamland which introduced rides, arcades and side shows.

Now most hotels and many shops have closed, piers collapsed and gone, also holidays are now taken in exotic locations far away from our shores.