



Preserving the Past for the Future

Newsletter

www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk

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GIFT from MINSTER MUSEUM TRUST

Owing to the closure of the Minster Rural Life Museum, their Trustees had to distribute the remainder of the funds to similar types of trusts. The major beneficiary was the Monkton Nature Reserve, but Birchington Heritage Trust also received a generous donation of just over £1,500 to go into our Building Fund. The Chairman, Karen Brazil, and the Vice Chairman, Danny Day, came to our Museum to present the cheque to our Archivist, Jennie Burgess. Accompanying them was Ray Owen of "Minster Matters" and his photographer.



We were very sad to hear of the closure of Minster's Museum but we are deeply grateful for the thoughtfulness and generosity of their Trustees in thinking of Birchington's Heritage Trust and Museum.

Social Committee Update

Gillian Lodge stood down as Social Secretary at the A.G.M. in May. Dot Raven has taken on the role for the moment, but the Social Committee could do with some more members to help to arrange the various events that take place each year. If you would like to join them please contact Dot or Jennie Burgess.

The committee and members have appreciated all Gillian's hard work and efforts during her time as Social Secretary. - Editor

EARLY COASTAL SETTLEMENT NEAR BIRCHINGTON

At a time when the archaeological dig at Thanet Earth was still in progress, it was most interesting to have Emma Boast, Director of Thanet Archaeological Trust, give the illustrated talk at the Annual General Meeting on May 29th. Emma gave a fascinating account of the archaeology of the coast from Reculver to St Mildred's Bay and explained how they were able to form a picture of what was happening from the earliest times.

The coastline of Thanet has changed somewhat since the earliest settlement when Thanet was still an island and Sarre was a port on the Wantsum (wandering) River. The Wantsum silted up from the south and the monks of St Augustine and Christ Church practised land reclamation and drainage in the seventeenth century; Abbots Wall and Monks Wall are still visible from Minster marshes. Coupled with that there has been coastal erosion at the rate of some 27.5 metres a century so that some ancient sites are now under the sea.

Over 993 ancient sites have been found on the Isle of Thanet and a number of these are in the Birchington area. Some of these sites have been identified by aerial photographs such as the ring ditch at Belle Isle. The photographs are then overlaid onto maps of the area to define them. Others have emerged through finds made on the site, with the earliest of these being the discovery of the Motherswick Hoard at Westgate in 1736 when Bronze Age axes were found.

In 1853, 600 Iron Age potin (tin alloy cast in strips) coins were found in the gardens of Quex and Bronze Age axes were found on the site of Birchington Primary School where they also located a Roman cremation. Further Roman burial sites were found in Westgate Bay in the eroding chalk cliffs.



Bronze Age sword and axe heads discovered by Jimmy Beck

(Early Coastal Settlement - Continued on page 2)



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EARLY COASTAL SETTLEMENT NEAR BIRCHINGTON

(Continued from page 1)

Probably the most exciting discovery in Birchington was the Beck find of 1938, when James Beck, a pupil at King's School, Canterbury noticed what appeared to be holes silted up with rocks and clay. With the help of Antoinette Powell-Cotton and others, he excavated these holes and discovered a variety of ancient fragments, dating from the Bronze Age and Iron Age through to the Roman era. The greatest find was an intact hoard of late Bronze Age implements, cast in bronze and iron and comprising numerous axe, spear and arrow heads, part of a dagger, knife blades, tools and jewellery. The silt surrounding these objects suggested they came from a freshwater environment (i.e. inland) and it has been suggested by archaeologists that it was what is known as a "finder's hoard", a collection of buried goods, perhaps waiting to be melted down.

Other finds were also made in the thirties along the foreshore and late Iron Age artefacts were retrieved during work on the coastal defences. In addition there was an Anglo-Saxon burial site discovered in Cunningham Close and a Roman burial in Howard Avenue, whilst pits and tip lines can still be picked out along the cliffs between Minnis Bay and Westgate.

Emma finished by showing slides of some of the more recent discoveries including the Roman pits and shafts at Sea Point where the quantity of finds in this area suggests that it was part of a large settlement. Deep grain storage pits were found going down some six feet and containing wheat and spelt (a poor early type of wheat) grains and chaff.

Just along the coast at St Mildred's Bay there have been a number of recent finds including Bronze Age axe heads and Iron Age and Roman pots whilst a Roman building was found when a new hotel was being built. There were also some well-preserved wattle-lined pits, probably from the mid-Saxon period, the only period of Saxon occupation discovered so far in Thanet. Another find from this period was in Sussex Gardens where a number of pits and ditches were located. Some contained shellfish and had indications of salt processing while in others produced artefacts including pottery, knives, daub, and bones. Some pits were cut into the brick earth and lined with chalk, probably for grain storage.

The Birchington area is certainly rich in archaeology, showing that there have been settlements here for the last 4,000 years. We are grateful to Emma for taking us on a wonderful whistle stop tour of some of the fascinating discoveries made by the archaeologists.

Pat Orpwood

ARCHAEOLOGY MEETS THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Following on from the excellent article contributed by Pat Orpwood, above, anyone interested in the archaeology of this area can visit these internet sites:-

The Isle of Thanet Archaeological Society

<http://www.thanetarch.co.uk/>

The Canterbury Archaeological Trust

<http://www.canterburytrust.co.uk/home.html>

<http://www.canterburytrust.co.uk/thanearth.html>

Not forgetting our own B H T site

www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk

ST MILDRED'S CHURCH, ACOL



ST MILDRED'S CHURCH, ACOL

By the time the parish of Birchington with Acol received its new 'Curate' in 1871, the population of the two villages had increased from 850 to over 1,000 since the arrival of the railway in 1863. Even before Domesday, we had always been under the care of our 'Mother' Church at Monkton, (less than 300 souls by 1871). The Rev. John Alcock MA, with the support of his Churchwardens and parishioners, set about getting our parish separated from Monkton and made a parish in its own right.

Once this was achieved by the end of 1871, he then suggested that Acol needed its own church to save them the long walk up the hill to All Saints and began to collect for such a venture. Mrs Charlotte Rogers had already given two plots of land to be used for a church in the village, which she thought could double as a school, with a dwelling to be built on the smaller plot for the teacher. The two plots had been sold to Charlotte's husband in 1866.

The money for the building came from several sources but much of it was locally raised. The church was finally built in the lower and larger plot in 1876, as the rain-hods on the guttering of the little church testify. It was built as a 'School/Church' and contained a fireplace (now blocked up) and two toilets for the children in the grounds. The house for the teacher was never built and the plot on the higher land was used for a playing field for the children for the years the school functioned. The Crispe Charity helped to fund the school, but it was not a success and was closed in 1886, but the little church continued to flourish.

When it was first consecrated, the Dean & Chapter of Canterbury named it 'St Giles', after the church at Sarre that has now vanished, but most local people wanted it to be called 'St Mildred', after our local saint. We do not have an official note of its change of name, but by 1886, by public demand, it had been changed to 'St Mildred'.

The parishioners take great care of their little church and the atmosphere within is always one of great friendship and joy.



Interior
view of
St
Mildred's
Church

Soon after the railway was brought to Birchington, the population began to increase rapidly. This meant new properties were needed to house them, which meant bricks were needed in huge numbers. Transporting bricks from outside the area was very expensive because roads were still unsurfaced and horses and wagons found it difficult to cope with the huge weight involved. The easiest way was to send them down from London by Thames barges, but the cost was prohibitive.

Remembering that our fairly thin top-soil in Thanet is a good smooth clay, it is not surprising that within a very short while the first of our brickworks appeared in Minnis Road, followed by two more soon after. Stephen Holness had opened up the brickworks in the area around Ingoldsby Road by 1885, having bought this section of the Lower Gore End's Farm land. It is clear from the way the land dips away from the road that excavations have taken place here. When the area came up for sale in about 1913, the plans state 'Brickworks' and show the site of the various huts on the site. If anyone finds an old brick in their garden in this area, could they check if there is a distinctive marking in the frog (the hollow of the brick) and let us know what it is. It might be 'SH', but might also be a symbol.

The second brickfield to open up was in Epple Bay about 1900. It stretched from the cliff edge to the railway line and once again, the undulations in the site around Ocean Close and the green at the cliff edge give clues as to its former use. This site was owned by Quex Park and is listed in Kelly's as 'Cotton's' Brickworks. The bricks have a distinctive 'PC' (Powell Cotton) indented into the frog. We have been given a part of one of these bricks, found in the Epple allotments by one of our members. If anyone comes across a complete one, we would be delighted to see it so that we can photograph it. Numerous photos were taken of the brickworks when they were in full production by the owner's agents, which are held at Quex Park. We are grateful for the loan of these images shown with this article.



Brick Field at Epple Bay



Close-up of brick showing "PC" clearly embossed in the frog

The third site to be opened up was in Park Lane where Stringer Drive and Holton Close now stand. The owner of this site began to trade just before and during the First World War, but it appears to have been a very short-lived venture. Jesse Last & Co is no longer listed in Kelly's Directory from 1920 onwards.

The demise of the brickfields was almost certainly because mass production in the larger fields (eg. at Faversham) reduced the overall price and transport was much easier with motor transport and greatly improved roads. It was therefore no longer economical to run the small sites, so each of our three closed down. Added to this our sites were all fairly small, so the clay supplies were getting too low to be useful to the owners.

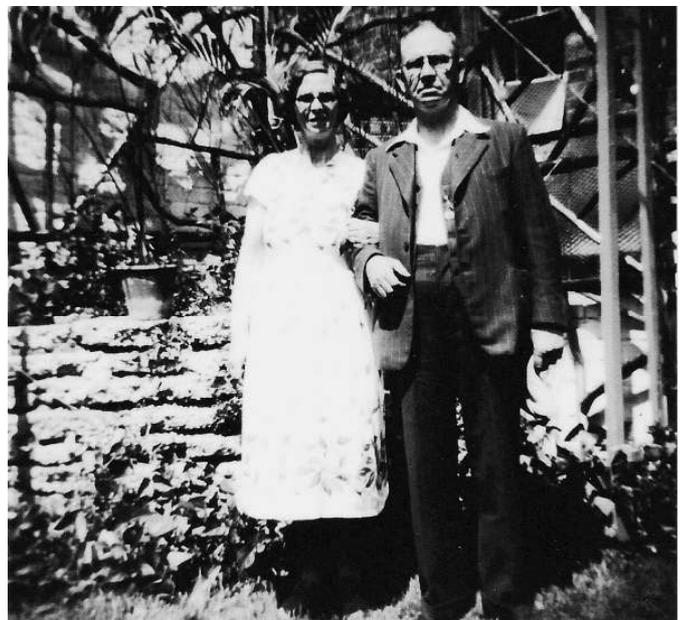


Brickfield diggers c. 1910 - At Epple Bay

ELIZABETH KELL MARTIN (née Howes)

Does anyone know anything about the above named person (see photo below)?

We have a request from one of her daughters trying to trace any memories of 'Lizzie', as she was known. She was born in 1901 and may not have been known under the above surname while she lived here.

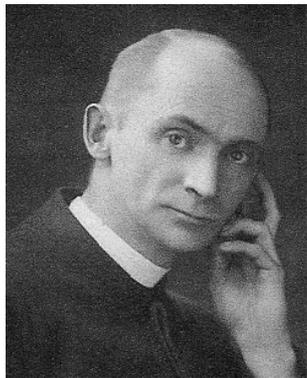


4 Noticeboard

"The CURATE and the QUEEN"



Queen Sophie - 1928



The Rev. Royston at
his ordination 1920

On Friday October 24th we are being given a new PowerPoint talk by Jennie Burgess called "The Curate & the Queen". The story concerns a local Curate of All Saints, who had an interesting correspondence with Queen Sophia of Greece, who came and stayed here in Birchington in the late 1920's. It has taken over a year to research, but has uncovered a fascinating story. It will last about an hour, so there will be a short interval at about 8pm.

Entrance to the talk will cost £3.50, as this is a Social Committee fund raising event, not a Quarterly meeting. It will be held in the hall at the Village Centre at 7.30pm as usual and the bar will be open. There will also be light nibbles provided by the Trust.

BHT Forth Coming Events

Held at Birchington Village Centre

"Sheppey" First Home of Aviation

7.30pm - Thursday 25th September 2008

Talk by A/CDR Bill Croydon

General Card Sale

7.30 - 9.00pm Wednesday 15th October 2008

In Room 4

The Curate and the Queen

Talk by Jennie Burgess

7.30 to 9.00pm - Friday 24th October 2008

£3.50

"All the Rage"

A light hearted look at cloths and attitudes of the 1920's and 30's

Talk by Lee Ault

7.30pm - Thursday 27th November 2008

Music and Songs from the Movies

Dave Ruddock and Friends

7.30 to 10.00pm - Thursday 11th December 2008

Ticket £6.00

Bar Open

Museum Matters

FUTURE OF THE MUSEUM

We have been asked to think seriously about opening the Museum for almost the same hours as the Library. This would mean daily cover of one person (or two if people preferred) for 4 hourly shifts Monday to Friday 9am-5pm and Saturday from 10am-2pm. This would be on a ground floor site, so access would no longer be a problem.

To do this we would need a minimum of 11 people a week. If we could find 44 volunteers, it would mean only a monthly commitment, but some people enjoy coming more often anyway, so we would not necessarily need the full number. At this stage, the ideas are very much in the 'melting pot', but if you feel you can help in this way, please let Jennie Burgess (842988) or Dot Raven (842633) know.

NEW ITEMS BOUGHT for MUSEUM

When we were offered a grant from Birchington Parish Council and another from the Kent County Council, we had to state what we intended to use the money for. Since receiving these generous grants, the Trustees of the Museum have now bought all the requested items. These include a large map and document cabinet which is on casters, a printer/scanner/photocopier and appropriate ink, two small DVD players for use in the Museum and at exhibitions, additional shelving for storage, files and clear sleeves for the archives we hold and large sheets of card for our displays in the middle newsagent (Martin's) window.

Photographs were taken prior to the new acquisitions and we shall have follow-up ones on display shortly. The Birchington Heritage Trust is very grateful for the benefits those two grants have made possible.

BIRCHINGTON HAS TALENT

Bernard La Roche is organizing a wonderful 'Birchington has Talent' Show at King Ethelbert School on 28th September 2008.

For information phone: **01843 847986**

or e-mail: **bernard.laroche@btinternet.com**

More on this next issue.

The Trust wishes to thank Kevin Doyle, of KD Insurance Brokers, for kindly agreeing to sponsor the insurance for the Museum & Trust activities this year.



This is one example of the saying "Every little helps", which applies to all aspects of helping us to run successfully The Birchington Heritage Trust. We need and appreciate volunteers, donations and more members to help us to grow and become even better.