



Preserving the Past for the Future

Newsletter

www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk

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BIRCHINGTON HAS TALENT

Bernard La Roche organised a wonderful event shortly before Christmas last year, with the aim of raising money for the Birchington Heritage Trust. It was a huge success and gave a large number of people a great deal of enjoyment, both in the preparation and the final evening of the contest. Bernard organised it in memory of his son André who died very suddenly last year, and which saddened us all.

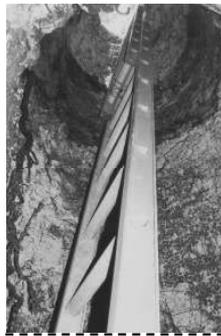
When the final total has been calculated we will put this into the next Newsletter, but in the meantime, Bernard was asked by a number of people to organise the same event for the end of this year. However, he is no longer in very good health and feels it would be more than he can manage, but he thoroughly enjoyed the experience - and says he has learnt a number of lessons.

If anyone else feels inclined to tackle such a project later this year, he is very willing to share his knowledge with them.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH BERNARD !

"There's a hole in my garden, dear Liza ..."

The Trust's archivist was recently approached by a gentleman from Albion Road, reporting a strange hole that had been discovered at the bottom left corner of a long garden next door to him. On investigating, it was found to be 22 feet deep and almost three feet wide at the top, widening out to over six feet at the base. The top few feet were brick-lined, but this gave way to bare chalk about a quarter of the way down the shaft.



Mysterious Hole

The first thought was a well, but its shape and location did not fit this idea. The next suggestion was a cesspit, as there were two or three large pipes opening into it, and its position - as far from the house as possible - seemed a sensible place to dig such a pit. However, it has only a small amount of debris at the base, so was almost certainly not used for such a purpose. This may have been because the occupants were put onto mains water soon after they took up residence (in about 1895).

If anyone has any other ideas - or definitely knows what it was, the neighbour and new owners would be delighted to hear. Send any information via the Museum or Jennie Burgess.

VISIT OF QUEEN BERTHA'S SCHOOL OLD GIRLS

On Saturday 25th April, a group of old students from Queen Bertha's School, Birchington, which used to stand on the site of Queen Bertha's Avenue, are having a reunion in Birchington. It will mark the 80th anniversary of the school's founding and the 50th anniversary since it was closed in 1959.

Many of the former students have generously shared their old photos and memories of their time there with the Birchington Heritage Trust.



We now have scanned all of the images and a written record of their fascinating memories and information.

On their day here they will almost certainly visit the site of their old school. They have asked the Rev. Don Witts to lead a service of Thanksgiving in All Saints Church at 11.30 am and will follow this with a luncheon at the Smuggler's Restaurant. They are hoping to come down to the Museum at the Village Centre at sometime during their visit to see the material we now hold on their school.

Although Queen Bertha's School was only in existence for 30 years, its impact on its students was such that, even after 50 years since its closure, they still enjoy meeting together each year, usually in London, and remembering those "good old days".

If any of our readers would like to join the girls at their Thanksgiving Service at 11.30 am in All Saints on April 25th, they will be very welcome.



The history of the old church building in the Square goes back at least to early Norman times. There was a building here prior to this but it was probably made of timber. The stone one we know today was built very soon after William the Conqueror swept across southern England. In the south wall, just west of the porch are two worked-stones which have been clearly dated to this time. The church those early Normans built stood untouched until c. 1250, when the Chancel was rebuilt. The south chapel and tower were also added and to complete the work, the owners of what we now call Quex Park built their own chapel on the north side of the Chancel. This still belongs to the owners of Quex Park.



All Saints Church Birchington - c 1812

The next piece of work was begun in 1343-4, when a large new south aisle was planned, with a new south-west tower.

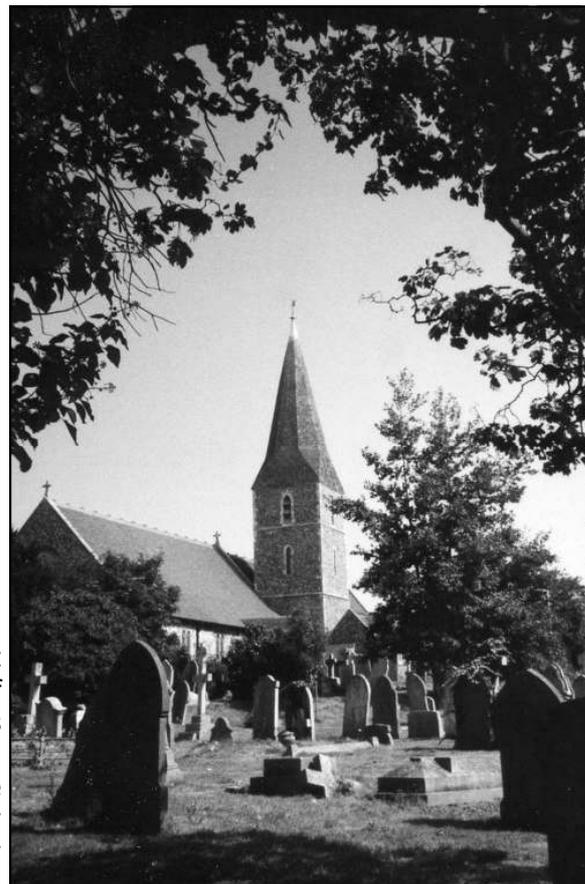
Work was begun in about 1345 but the Black Death intervened in 1347-8 and stopped everything for a while. When building was resumed, money was short and labour was scarce, so economies were ordered. Instead of the large south aisle, two small half-aisles were added, but the builders left behind clear evidence of their original plan. Instead of the new tower, the spire was added to the old tower, with a weather-vane added in 1699.



Rood Screen inside All Saints Church

The last medieval part of the old church can be seen in the 15th century porch, which still holds two very old pillars framing the south door as you enter. It was not until 1910 that the two vestries were added at the south-east corner, in memory of Rev. Charles Ellicott, retired Bishop of Gloucester, who is buried in the churchyard. Among its treasures are the two sections of the medieval rood screen.

The churchyard began on the high ground around the church and was gradually enlarged (four times in all) to try and accommodate our growing population. It eventually had to be closed in the 1950s, except for burials of ashes, which still continue to this day.



All Saints Church - c 2001

N.B. For those who are interested in the history of this, the oldest building in Birchington, there will be an illustrated talk about it in **All Saints Church on April 30th at 7.30 pm**. There will be wine and nibbles at the close of the talk, followed by time to have a closer look at some of the items that will be shown on the screen.

As a boy I lived at the eastern tip of Kent, at Birchington, less than three miles from Manston Aerodrome. As lads we would frequently cycle over there to wander round the completely unfenced RAF station, looking at all the 'kites' on the ground, sometimes seeing them take off and, if we were lucky, seeing them land. The mechanics were most indulgent, answering all our questions and, if an officer happened to be about, giving the OK for us to go into the cockpit, though with a severe admonition, "Don't touch any controls!"

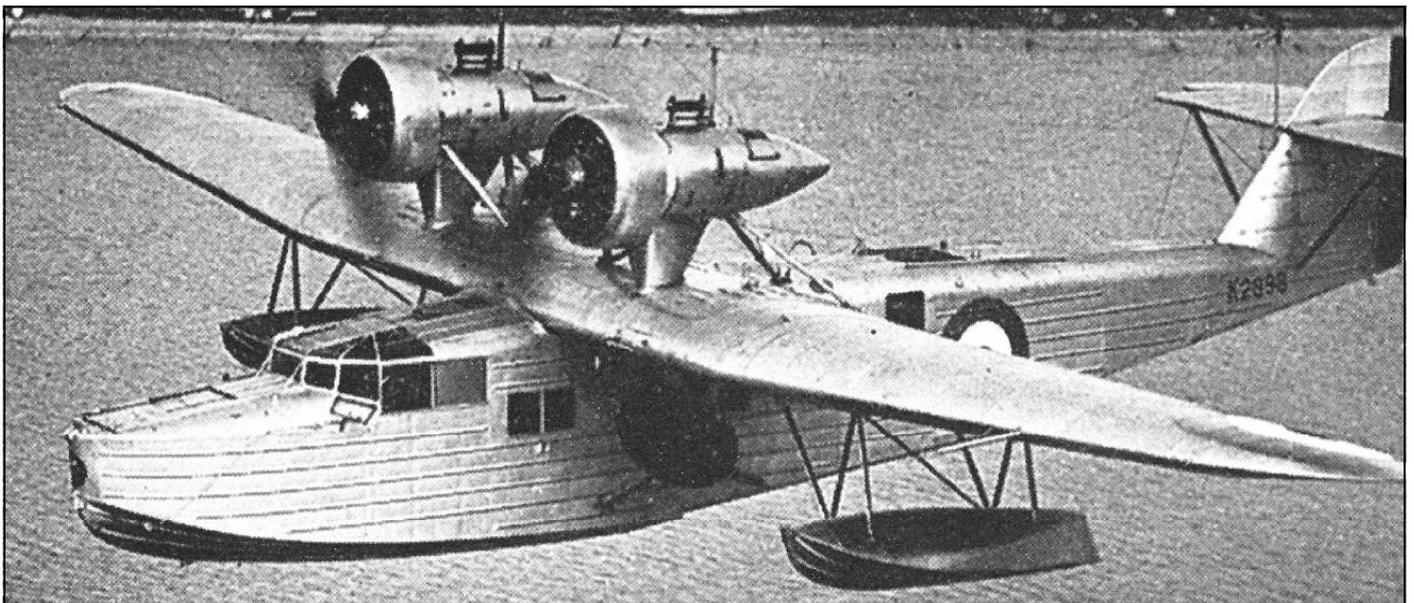
It was in February 1935 that 48 Squadron arrived, equipped with the Saro Cloud. As an amphibian (a flying boat with a retractable undercarriage) it was something of a novelty for the RAF. Developed from what had been intended as an airliner (with all of eight seats for passengers) it was used as a preliminary trainer for flying boat crews before they went on to larger aircraft. No 34 Squadron, however, was using them as flying classrooms for the training of navigators, the large cabin offering plenty of room for chart tables and the uninterrupted view of the ground, afforded by a high winged monoplane.

Hanging around throughout the summer holiday, we often saw them take off and land but that was small beer - they were *flying boats*. We wanted to see one do just that on the water.

Then one day, a wealthy friend (his parents had a telephone, quite a rare thing in the mid thirties) came banging on my door. He had had a call from a friend in Margate, just three miles away, to say there was a Saro Cloud on the water just off the shore. Out came our bikes and we peddled like mad to get there before it took off. It was still there when we arrived, sitting sedately on the calm sea just outside the harbour.

We stood, leaning on the railings of the promenade, quite oblivious of all that was going on down on the sands - the Punch and Judy show, the children building their sandcastles, the sunbathers, the swimmers - our eyes were on that *aircraft*. Surely it wasn't going to anchor for the night - it must be taking off sooner or later. We hoped sooner. So we watched, and watched and watched. After what seemed an interminable wait we came to a decision - in hindsight a most dreadful decision for us boys. The engines were not running. It wouldn't take off just yet - there was time for an ice cream from the vendor of the best ices along Margate front - so off we went.

As we left the shop we heard the roar of an aircraft's engines. At top speed, dodging the tramcars that ran along Margate front in those days, we returned to the railings. Alas, that Saro Cloud had disappeared; it was no longer anchored within sight. In a few moments we saw it, now airborne as it came out from behind the harbour wall. Consternation? Grief? Call it what you will - we suffered what, to these three lads, was the greatest disappointment of their young lives. After all that waiting, it had done the unforgivable - taken off without us witnessing it!



Saro Cloud

If any of our readership have any memories relating to events in and around Birchington, which you would like to share, please let us know at the museum and it could be included in a future edition of our Newsletter. We would like to hear from you - Editor.

Noticeboard

Membership & Subscriptions

We need your membership subscriptions to help the trust grow and become even better in the future. Membership and subscriptions are the life blood of all charities.

If you have overlooked letting us have your subscription for this year please, send us the £5 now.

Our present membership is currently 240 and growing.

If you have any friends who are interested in local history, please ask them become members our Trust.

QUARTERLY MEETING

**THURSDAY 26TH MARCH
2009**

7.00PM FOR 7.30PM

TALK BY MAL ARGENT

**THE BUTTS AND NO BUTTS
OF MEDIEVAL ARCHERY**



BARN DANCE

FRIDAY 17TH APRIL 2009 AT 7.30PM

AT

**BIRCHINGTON
VILLAGE CENTRE**

£5 each

**BRING YOUR OWN
FINGER FOOD**



David Ruddock and Friends' Christmas Concert

Once again David and his friends delighted the audience at their Christmas Concert on Thursday 13th December 2008. The choice of music chosen, which originated from both stage and screen, was greatly appreciated by the audience. The success of the evening can be measured by £140 being raised at the door and a further £63 from the raffle. All the profits will all go towards helping increase our funds for future projects.

We would like to express our appreciation to both David and his friends for devoting their time and giving us such an enjoyable evening.

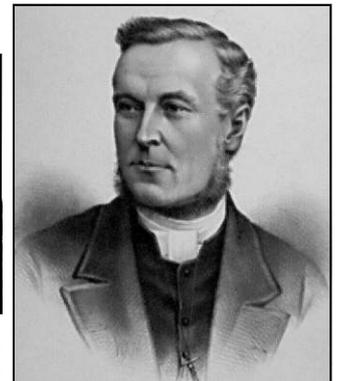
COACH HOUSE in SHAKESPEARE ROAD

Some weeks ago, a visitor to the Museum asked what we held about the "Coach House" in Shakespeare Road. At that stage there was nothing specific held in our files, but we promised to look further into the subject. On researching the old maps, it was discovered that the "Coach House" had been built for the Rev Canon James Fleming who owned "Erin Dene", 38 Shakespeare Road. He used to come to Birchington from his parish of St Michael's in Chester Square, London, to enjoy our clean air and lovely coastline. One of his parishioners, Dr Cross, gave him £25,500 to build a Convalescent Home, known to us locally as "The Thicket" in Cross Road. The road was named after the good Doctor.

The coach house was built some distance from Fleming's own house, as the presence of horses could have made it unsavoury at times! Canon Fleming was 'Chaplain in Ordinary' to King Edward VII, which meant that he frequently went to preach in the chapel at Buckingham Palace, just round the corner from his church and vicarage in Chester Square. He had also preached at Sandringham and Windsor for Queen Victoria and was a Residentiary Canon of York Minster at the same time. The family who at present now live in the "Coach House" can now savour the fact that the man whose coach once graced their living room belonged to a famous and much loved cleric a hundred years ago!



The Coach House



Rev Canon James Fleming

"ALL THE RAGE !"

On the 27th November, Lee Ault came to our Quarterly Meeting with a large trunk of clothes from the 1920s and 1930s. She was wearing a dress and shawl from that period and proceeded to pull out of her trunk, garment after garment, all made and bought during that time. It was almost like a magician's magic hat and her trunk seemed to be bottomless. Her anecdotes about the garments and era when they were first worn were fascinating and kept her audience enthralled for almost an hour. Never has time passed so quickly - and so enjoyably.

She had been lucky enough to inherit a good collection through her family, but has continued to add to them over the years. The joy for us was not just her collection of interesting garments, but also her knowledge about the era she was re-invoking for us.

Thank you, Lee!