



November 2009

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VISITORS TO THE MUSEUM

On Saturday September 12th, we had three fascinating visitors to the Birchington Heritage Museum. Two of them were expected that day, but the third just happened to be holidaying in the area and came to share some Birchington connections.

Dr Ann Mitchell came from Australia, especially to find out about two famous people who had lived in Birchington. She is studying **Solomon J. Solomon**, the important Victorian artist, who bought "White Cliff", one of the Tower Bungalows in Spencer Road in 1905. She had sent us a copy of a catalogue from a large retrospective exhibition of his work that had been staged in 1990 at the Ben Uri Art Gallery. The other person Dr Mitchell was studying was Solomon's brother-in-law, **Delissa Joseph**, a well known Victorian architect, who had designed and built Carmel Court, the old house that once stood where Carmel Court flats now stand. He then built and lived in North Sea Lodge in Darwin Road, very much in the style of the original Tower Bungalows. Both men were Jews, as were the owners of Carmel Court. Delissa also designed a large number of Synagogues in both London and the Provinces.

Our second visitor, **Naomi Walker**, and her partner Simon, came from New Zealand and had been in touch by email, offering to return an old book of the 1770s to Birchington removed from the village many years ago. We were delighted to be re-united with it and there will more about this volume in a later Newsletter.



Charles & Jessie Laming + Mollie - c1910

The co-incidence of both these visitors planning to come from the other side of the World and visit us on the same day was not lost on the Stewards and others present that day. However, we had a third amazing visitor that Saturday. **Mrs Barbara Ayers** is the granddaughter of **Charles Laming**, headmaster of Birchington CE Primary School from 1900-1932, when Alfred Walker took over. Laming Road was named after him and we have his swagger stick in the Museum from his days at school of running the senior boys Cadet Corps from about 1910 to the mid 1920s. Barbara brought in a large batch of family photographs, but unfortunately could not name or date all of them. We were able to identify some, among them a delightful one of her Grandparents, Charles & Jessie Laming with Mollie, Barbara's mother, on Jessie's knee.

**Our Archivist's Masterpiece
has now been printed and
available for £10**

See page 3 for details about the latest book by Jennie Burgess.

**Birchington
Kaleidoscope**

Based on Talks & Displays
by
Jennie Burgess



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GUY FAWKES NIGHT in BIRCHINGTON – 1950s

By Ann Rowe

Come the evening of the 5th of November in the 1950s, a much looked-forward-to celebration took place in Birchington Square in front of the Powell Arms.

As dusk descended a merry crowd gathered around and local dignitaries arrived, including, as far as we can remember, his worship the Mayor of Margate, to form the Judge and Jury at the trial of the much maligned 'Guy Fawkes' – some say the only one worthy to enter the Houses of Parliament!

With shouts and cries of "Burn him! Burn him!" and "Guilty! Guilty!", the crowd roared even before the open-backed lorry arrived, complete with an effigy of Guy Fawkes, strapped in a chair on the back.



Birchington Square - c. 1948

A goodly trade was enjoyed by the pub's landlord, Arthur Finch, as pint after pint - but not too many per person - were consumed by the local populace, including the visitors and said dignitaries. Amid further cries of "Guilty!" and "Burn him!" - to the delight of all assembled in the Square, the Judge, Jury and the crowd all got their "Guilty" verdict, with more rousing cheers all round.

A flaming torchlight procession made its way (or more likely wobbled its way) along Albion Road to Epple Bay cliff top, preceded by the Guy on his "hearse". As they processed along Alpha Road and Epple Road, small Jumping Jacks and Bangers were let off, causing much merriment.

A large bonfire had been built on the cliffs and as the effigy was placed a-top, the lighted torches were flung on the great pile of wood, which soon crackled and blazed away.

A good time was had by all as a firework display followed, while hot-dogs, jacket potatoes etc. were served to mark the death of the poor old Spaniard - GUY FAWKES!

PICKLE FACTORY



Pickle Factory

The Trust was recently given a large aerial photograph of what was locally known as "The Pickle Factory". It was based originally in the old Maltings and went under several names during its lifetime. For many years the two malt houses stood at the rear of the site, near the railway line. In the 1960s it was owned by S. Steenhuis & Sons Ltd (brother of Waut Steenhuis, the well-known guitarist of the same period) and was listed as "Fruit Preservers". By 1971 it was owned officially by "Vegetable Growers (Kent) Ltd." but local people all called it "Kent Veg" or "The Pickle Factory". Many local families were involved in work there and if this was part of your family life as a young person, we would love to hear about it.

The staff would deliver bags of onions (and possibly other vegetables) to local out-workers for them to prepare the vegetables at home. These were then picked up and processed in the factory. The going rate for this work was not great, but in the days when every penny counted, this was like gold to many families.

Many Villagers will remember the strong smell of vinegar fumes emanating from the factory. Editor



Guy Fawkes & his co-conspirators

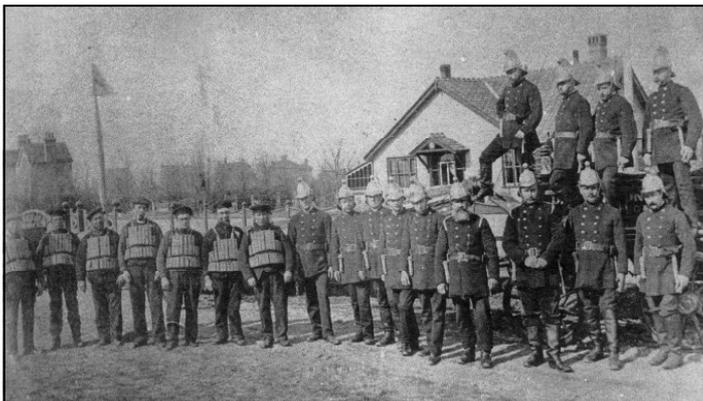
On November 5th we launched our new book "Birchington Kaleidoscope 1". The Village Centre committee were very generous in allowing the Heritage Trust to use the main hall of the Centre at no charge and during the morning, about 150 people came in to view and buy the book. The Trust had sold over sixty books before the launch and another 44 were sold that morning. At £10 at copy, we have now been able to bank well over £1000, but with a bill of almost £5000 for the printing (which arrived on the 6th) we need to sell almost another 400 to break even!



*Jennie - book signing
Photograph courtesy of
Pat Orpwood*

We have been lucky to find two businesses in Station Road who are kind enough to sell the books for us, one at only a small profit to their business and the other with all the profits going to the Trust. The two local outlets are Glen Patrick, the Estate Agent and Best Wishes, the card shop. We will also be selling them in the Museum and from 6, Alpha Road.

The book, by Jennie Burgess, is based on talks and displays she has done since about 1990. It has 140 pages and is half text and half pictures (over 250 of the latter). The book includes ten topics - All Saints Church, Buried Treasure (in its churchyard), Farms & Barns, Quex Park, Windmills, Birchington Hall, Law & Order, our Fire Brigade, Medieval & Tudor Buildings in Birchington and the Railway & the Seaside. These last two had to be taken together, because without the railway, the seaside and Minnis Bay would not have been developed into the delightful areas they now are.



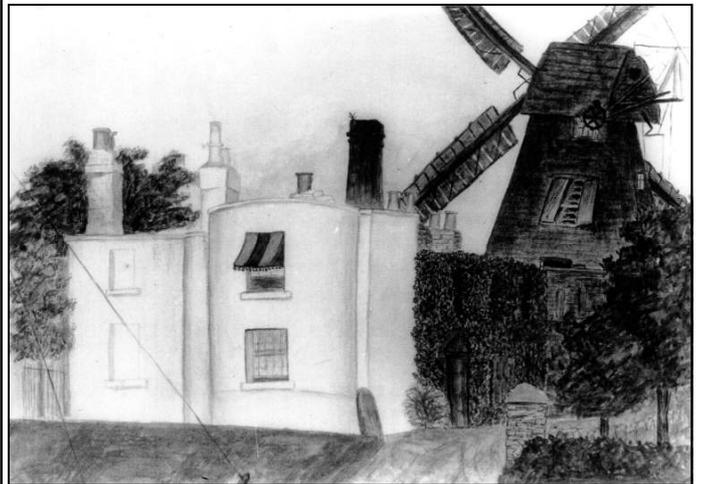
Anchorage Firemen c. 1902

Several people have queried about the significance of the name of the book. There was much discussion about this and a number of suggestions were tried. With such a medley of subjects, it needed something that gave a feeling of variety - and there is not much more varied than the delightful patterns that are seen in a kaleidoscope. The suggestion for this came from a neighbour of Jennie's, Val Wright. The clever interpretation of the idea on the front cover was the work of Colin Axon, who has helped in several items which Jennie was unable to cope with on the computer. The layout of the book was the brainchild of another of Jennie's friends, Gerald Colson - so all these people have added to the kaleidoscopic flavour of the finished volume.



Old Bay Cottage

Jennie feels she ought to warn the good people of Birchington that this is the first of at least two volumes, and could well have couple more added in time! Watch for Volume Two in October of 2010 - the subjects have already been chosen and are listed at the end of Volume 1, and the format will be very similar to the present one.



Windmill Painting c. 1850

Children's Homes in Birchington

Some time ago, I was asked to write something about the various Children's Homes we have had in Birchington from just before the beginning of the 1900s. There have been at least four major ones: Spurgeon's Homes, Morrison Bell Home, Mansford House Children's Home and the Gordon Homes. In this edition of the newsletter we will deal with the last named one.

THE GORDON HOMES

The first I was aware of these was via a query from Australia passed on to me by Cliff Cole of the Kent Family History Society in about 2000. Someone 'Down Under' had found a diary written in an exercise book by a grandfather, telling of his time in the 'Gordon Homes in Birchington' - Could we throw any light on this item? This was rapidly followed by some puzzling references in Park Lane's School log books about 'Gordon Fields' and batches of boys based there.

After some research, it was discovered that the eastern section of Gordon Square had been allocated to the Gordon Homes, whose headquarters were in London, but who also had a large establishment in Dover. This was also possibly used to accommodate the Smack boys - young lads who were orphaned or homeless and who were put to work on fishing smacks. Birchington's accommodation was used to provide a recuperative centre for those who fell ill. The homes and the square were both named after General Gordon of Khartoum (1833-85).

In the 1891 census there were 22 boys resident in Nos: 10-14 Gordon Square in Birchington. The boys who were well enough were sent to Park Lane School, while they were staying in the village during the years 1884 through to about 1900. One of the boys, 5½ Henry James, died while he was staying here in 1885 - very probably from TB. He was buried in an unmarked grave in All Saints churchyard. There were also a number of references to bad behaviour by the boys in the school log book, possibly rebelling against life in general, as much as the school's regime..

The home closed when the owner of the terrace either found buyers for his newly built houses or found people willing to rent at a higher price than the Gordon Homes were prepared to pay. So ended the first Children's Home in Birchington.



Gordon Square, Birchington-on-Sea.

Gordon Square, west side c. 1914

Noticeboard

Race Night on 16th October 2009 Social Committee's report:

Fifty five members and friends enjoyed the Race Night evening fun as a horse neared the winning post only to be pipped to first place by another.

During a break in the races we all enjoyed the "Bring and Share Supper" our thanks to all who came and supported the evening.

The tote was in the capable hands of Pat and Cliff. Once again Howard was the Race Master. The Trust's funds were swelled by around £100.

We would also like to thank all those who supported the card sale on 21st October 2009



Birchington Heritage Trust

Thursday 26 November 2009
7.30 pm

Dreamland & the Lido



A fascinating look at the 90 year history of Dreamland and the Lido, presented by author, Nick Evans

The Centre, Alpha Road

Non-members £1



BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST
Charity No. 1099250
presents:



a Musical Evening with:

DAVID RUDDOCK (piano)

and friends

HUGH SHEEHAN (bass-baritone, ex Covent Garden)
CHRISTINE CHAPPELL (flute)
JOHN CHAPPELL and COLIN BRIDGE (clarinets)
IMOGEN RUDDOCK (violin)



The Hippopotamus Song
Stranger on the Shore
Debussy's Clair de Lune
Chopin's Minute Waltz
The Holy City
O' Man River
Handel's Harmonious Blacksmith
Annie's Song
In a Monastery Garden
Boogie Woogie piano solos

BIRCHINGTON CENTRE, Alpha Road
Thursday December 3rd, 7.30
Admission by programme £7
Please Tel. Jennie Burgess on 842988. Also available from Museum and at door on night.