



Preserving the Past for the Future

## Newsletter

www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk

May 2011

Charity No. 1099250

ISSUE 36

### 'LORD' GEORGE SANGER

The Museum has been given some very interesting material concerning George Sanger and his family. His granddaughter and great grandson lived at Cleve Court Farm for many years, and although Cleve is not in the joint parish of Birchington with Acol, it is only just over the boundary. The story printed below comes from an old cutting in an envelope of material from the great grandson, Billy Sayer.

#### **ELEPHANT ESCAPE from Sanger's Circus**

*Letter from Mrs A. Alford, Shackleton Road, Slough  
Printed in Slough newspaper about 1925-30*

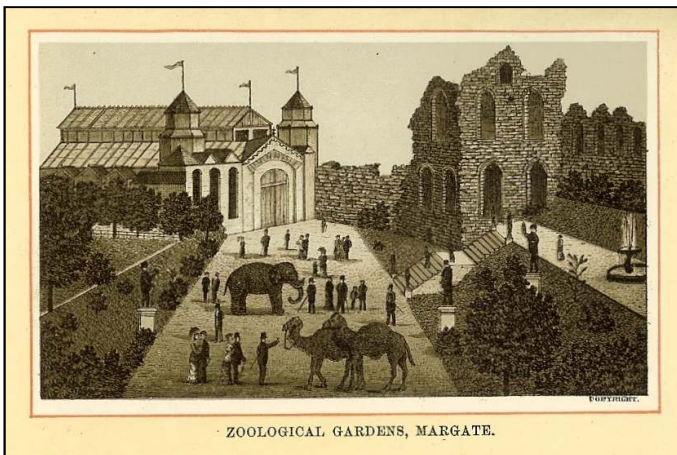
*When I was a girl Lord George Sanger's Circus paid a visit to our town and the elephants were put in a stable at the back of an hotel.*

*One Sunday afternoon, my mother had set the tea in the front room and as it was a very warm day, the front door, which opened straight into the room, was left open.*

*Then she heard a shout, "An elephant's broken loose!" But before mother could shut the front door the elephant had put its head inside the front room.*

*A plate of cakes stood near the front door, so mother fed them to the elephant until the keeper arrived. He spoke to his charge. It backed away from the door and stood on its hind legs and trumpeted loudly - and then went back to the stables.*

*Next day the keeper gave my mother six tickets for the circus and a large cake, in return for the way she had 'entertained the elephant to tea!'*



*Sanger's Zoological collection*

### Tom Tindle – Treasurer of BHT



*Tom Tindle 2nd April 1933 - 6th April 2011*

It is with great sadness that we have to report the death of our Treasurer on the 6<sup>th</sup> April. He had been battling with ill health for some months, but still managed to keep the job going. He has been with us since 2002, when we started the Trust, having had his 'arm twisted' by Jennie, to come and help us out. He has always done the job with quiet diligence and guarded our finances so well that we have always been in the black each year! He took part in so many of our activities, including Quiz Nights and the 1920s Dance. He will be greatly missed by us all.

Since Tom's death, John Hart, our long-time Auditor, has taken on the job of presenting the accounts for this year. Tom was very bothered at the end that he was not able to complete the year's accounts, as our financial year runs from May to April. As soon as they have been audited, John will revert to his original task as auditor. In the meantime, we have been lucky enough to find a new Treasurer to take over for this coming year. Michael Watts has lived in Birchington since 2009 and is a Chartered Accountant, now only working part time. We are very grateful for his help in taking over as Treasurer and also for agreeing to do the auditing for this April, as John obviously cannot audit his own work!

**In this Issue:** **Page 1** - 'Lord' George Sanger + Tim Tindle  
**Page 2** - Birchington's Maypole + April Fools Day  
**Page 3** - The Czechs based at Beaconsfield Birchington 1939-40  
**Page 4** - Noticeboard:- Birchington Broadcast goes (almost) Worldwide + AGM and Talk + Dates for your Diary

Birchington has erected a Maypole in the Square near to the churchyard gate for many years.

There is one shown on the map by Thomas Hill for the sale to John Bridges of Church Hill Farm in 1688. At this period it stood on the triangular green in the centre of the 'square'.

There are several references to the Maypole in the churchwardens' accounts referring to expenses incurred for taking it down and setting it up again. This occurred when the Puritans complained about 'pagan practices' in communities. When Oliver Cromwell came to power in the 1640s, the villagers were ordered to take it down again – but there is no reference in the accounts about it at this time, as book-keeping was sporadic and unchecked. By the time Thomas Hill drew his map, Charles II was on the throne – and we know how much he enjoyed a bit of fun!

From the Churchwarden's Account Book -  
 1606 - for taking down the Maypole                      viii d  
 1636 - towards ye setting up of ye Maypole              6s 8d

The Maypole was used at May Day celebrations, Whitsuntide and Hock-tide. But the Maypole was not the only thing in the Square. The stocks and whipping post also stood near the churchyard gate. From the Accounts of the Deputy of Birchington (our Law-enforcement Officer) 1648-1654 we read -

"Paid to Robert Covell (one of the village blacksmiths) for staples for the stocks and whipping post                      1s. 0d."

"Paid to old Coppin for whipping of three                      6d."

More recently, the local Brownies celebrated May Day by crowning one girl as "The Queen of the May". They also danced in weaving patterns around the Maypole holding on to the ribbons attached to the top of the pole, plaiting them and afterwards unplaiting them - if all went well!



*Birchington Brownies dancing around the Maypole - c. 1960s*

Following on from our last Newsletter regarding the April Fool's pranks, we have now more information.

A number of years ago, the mother of a local family of sons (and at least one daughter) had her birthday on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April. That particular year, the boys in the family decided to give Mum a surprise when she came up to the village to do her shopping and arranged an amusing display in the Square.

The following year they decided to repeat the fun, but with a different theme - and so it went on each year, until, sadly, the mother died. That year, they were in two minds about playing their tricks again - but eventually decided to do one, in memory of Mum. The first one began with a toilet displayed in the Square, which caused much merriment. Since then, each year saw a different 'April Fool's Joke' laid out in the Square.

[All these 'displays were carried out late at night by two young men who worked at the newspaper shop in the Square. We often discussed what their latest 'project' was. It all came to an end when the main instigator left employment at the shop, to go travelling round the world.]

Among the April Fool's displays in Birchington Square, we have been treated to were -

First one involved a toilet displayed in the Square

1996 "A Teddy Bears' Picnic"

1997 "Washing Day" (Including lots of 'big' knickers with notes attached!)

2001 "Penguins" - made from 33 traffic cones

2011 "Wills and Kate"

Others were:-

"The Simpson's have arrived"

"A swarm of "BBB's"

"The Monkeys' Tea Party"

"Treasure Island"

"The Birchington Gold Rush"

"Sinking Sands" A palm tree and sinking into quicksand on the mini roundabout.

"Pink Wellington Boots" were seen hanging over shop and other signs along Station Road

"Spacemen have landed" a space rocket landed outside the Powell Arms.

Many thanks to Shirley Kennett for some of the background information and Maurice Hewlett for the photograph below. Also to the pranksters and their wonderful humorous displays. *Editor*



*Birchington Welcomes The Royal Visitors - 1st April 2011*

The **Czechs** were based at Beaconsfield during the 1939-45 War.

There is a photo showing them raising their flag outside "their new Air Base" in "**World War II" Magazine No: 66 (1973)**



*Czech Flag at Beaconsfield 1939-40*

The people who were based in Birchington were politicians, academics and members of the government as well as ordinary citizens. A local resident who was here at the time (Bernard Beadle) commented that he cannot recall ever seeing any women among the personnel.

He remembered seeing them march down to Minnis Bay in military formation on several occasions – sometimes carrying a cauldron, for some strange reason. They occasionally came to church at All Saints (in the Square), but especially on Remembrance Sunday in 1939. At this service their national flag was laid up on the altar, along with the Union flag.



*Beaconsfield*

On one occasion they provided the entertainment at a parish party, singing their national songs. One of the songs they sang was very similar to our "Roll Out the Barrel", though the tune was just slightly different. At the chorus, everyone joined in, using either Czech or English as they chose – and made a really lusty sound.

In April 1940 the men left Birchington to join a Corps of the Czechoslovakian Army in France, leaving behind some very happy memories of friends made in Birchington. They again laid their flag on All Saints altar at a special service held just before their departure. They asked the editor of the Isle Of Thanet Gazette to publish a letter of thanks to their hosts, which was printed on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1940. A copy of this was passed to the Museum by Alan Kay in c. 2003.

Two or three of the children of the men who found a haven here 1939-40 have since visited Birchington and come to see 'Beaconsfield', Heinz Vogel among them.



*Heinz Vogel*

Heinz was surprised the large house his father had told him about was now 4 dwellings, which completely altered the look of the building. When he first saw it, he was quite puzzled, but once he saw an aerial photograph of it, he realised it was exactly as his father had described it.

## Birchington Radio Broadcast goes (almost) Worldwide

**B**irchington Heritage Trust Museum, on the top floor of the Village Centre and open Saturday and Monday mornings, can loan out copies of two local radio broadcasts. They are available on either cassette tapes or compact discs.

The first is "Have a go", a weekly half hour show which toured towns and villages while host, Wilfred Pickles, chatted to local people. The show came to Birchington in 1968 and was broadcast from the original Church House. The late Cllr. Bill Dawson was one of the people taking part and a copy of the recording has been sent to his son in Australia.

The second one is a similar set-up when "Radio Kent visits Birchington" came here in 1986.

**B**irchington Kaleidoscope I and II books written by our dedicated archivist, Jennie Burgess, are still on sale in the BHT Museum, as well as elsewhere in some local shops. The well researched books contain a wealth of local history, which will fascinate any curious minds. At this time of writing both books are still available, although only a limited number were printed. A third book, Kaleidoscope III, has been promised and is in the process of being written by Jennie.

We also have a number of other publications about Birchington's past for sale in the museum shop.

Our Museum, is in room 4 at The Birchington Centre, Alpha Road and is open on Saturday and Monday mornings between 9.30 to noon, except Bank Holidays. Our volunteers, who help run our museum, will be only too pleased to help answer any local history questions you may have.

If you have access to the internet we also have a website:- [www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk](http://www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk) which is regularly updated and has on offer pictures, articles and old newsletters in PDF format.

Our membership is now running at 278, many of whom attend our regular meetings followed by an interesting talk also social events organised by our hard working Social Committee are rewarding, fun filled evenings.

We look forward to seeing you soon either at our Museum or attending one of our future events, which will be advertised nearer the time on our posters on display in the village.



Birchington Heritage Trust  
Registered Charity No. 1099250

**A.G.M.**

**Thursday 26 May 2011  
at 7.30 pm**



followed by

'Thanet's Victorian Fire Brigades'  
presented by Robert Varnham

**The Centre, Alpha Road**

Non-members welcome

## ***BHT DATES FOR YOUR DIARY*** ***ALL IN THE MAIN HALL AT THE CENTRE***

Thursday 26th May 2011 - 7.30pm  
AGM and Talk by Robert Varnham  
Thanet's Victorian Fire Brigades

Thursday 23rd June 2011 - 7.30pm  
Bingo

Thursday 29th September 2011 - 7.30pm  
General Meeting & Talk

Thursday 27th October 2011 - 7.30pm  
Race Night

Thursday 24th November 2011 - 7.30pm  
General Meeting & Talk

Thursday 1st December 2011 - 7.30pm  
David Ruddock and Friends  
Christmas Concert