



Preserving the Past for the Future

Newsletter

www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk

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BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST GIFTING

A self-portrait of Birchington artist, David Burley, was put on the end wall of the Burley Gallery when it was opened. It had hung there until the Library had its refurbishment when, despite protests by members of the Birchington Library Users' Group, it was banished to a cupboard, as it was deemed not to fit in with the modern paintings to be put on display. It remained leaning against the wall just inside the cupboard, but in January last year went missing and was discovered underneath a pile of old Christmas decorations and other items on the floor. A B.H.T. member asked K.C.C. Councillor, Roger Latchford, if he could help in having it displayed once more and she was delighted when he encouraged K.C.C. to give it to the B.H.T. Museum for display to members of the public. There were two other Margate paintings by David Burley and a nineteenth century watercolour of Birchington Square gifted at the same time. The October hand-over was attended by members of B.H.T., Mike Hill, KCC Cabinet Member for Libraries, Gill Bromley from KCC Arts and Libraries, Sarah Bottle, Community Development Librarian, and Roger Latchford. Mike Hill stated that it was the policy of KCC to ensure the best possible access to works of art and he was confident that B.H.T. was the most appropriate body to take them over. He was thanked by the Chairman of BHT, Gerry Davis and then he and Mike Hill along with Parish Archivist, Jennie Burgess signed the agreement. The pictures were admired over tea and cakes and are already hanging in the BHT Museum, Room 4, The Centre, Alpha Road, Birchington. They can be viewed during opening hours: 9.30 -12.30 Monday, Thursday and Saturday.

Pat Orpwood



Presentation of Paintings to Birchington Heritage Trust

THE YEAR BOOK – DECEMBER 11th 1889 Birchington, Isle Of Thanet, Kent

Few Londoners have not, at some time or other "been to Margate", yet, I think I may venture to assert, there are few of its visitors who have visited the pretty village of Birchington, although it is situated at a very short distance from that town. The general gaiety and amusements of Margate usually keep the Cockney within its precincts. He has left London, and is at a "watering place", and that is enough for him who, when at home, scarce dreams of venturing forth from the city's precincts, beyond the extent that a shilling fare by the stage will carry him.

"Suburban villas, highway side retreats,
That dread th'incroachment of our growing streets,
Tight boxes, neatly sash'd, and in a blaze
With all a July sun's collected rays,
Delight the citizen, who gasping there,
Breathes clouds of dust and calls it country air".

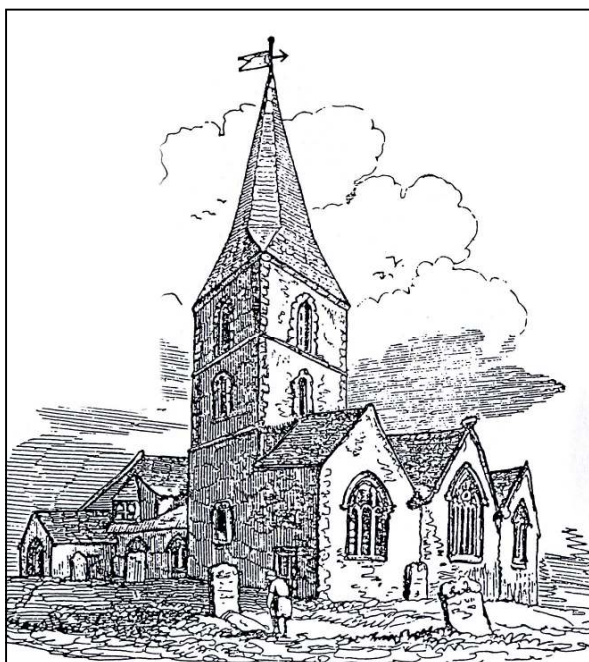
About four miles west of Margate, on the coast, is situated the little village of Birchington, remarkable, like most other places in the Isle of Thanet, for its antiquity. It is within the jurisdiction of the Cinque Ports, and is an adjunct to the town and port of Dover. The parish is bounded by high cliffs of chalk along its coast, in which are several large apertures (gaps), forming convenient passages to the seaside. They are generally presumed to have been worked for the purpose of smuggling (1), much of which "fair trade" has been, from time immemorial, carried on in that neighbourhood.

[(1) Actually the gaps were originally cut by farmers to harvest seaweed from the shore to fertilise their fields]



Painting of the Beach Beresford Gap, Birchington-on-Sea

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Sketch of All Saints Church Birchington c.1832

The village is on an eminence, and in the midst stands the above church, the summit of which commands delightful prospects of the surrounding country by sea and land, with a particularly fine view of Canterbury Cathedral, which forms a conspicuous object, although twelve miles distant (2). Birchington church is dedicated to All Saints.

It is a very handsome building, consisting of a nave and two aisles, with three chancels beyond, one of which formerly belonged to the ancient seat of Quexes in the same parish, and was kept in repair by the owners of the estate.

Near the south chancel is the tower of the church, on which is a spire of much service to ships at sea, as a land mark, on account of its raised situation. In the tower are five bells. In the windows are the remains of painted glass sufficient to show that formerly there was much more. The interior of the church contains several ancient and very fine monuments, belonging to the Quexes, the Neames, and the Crispes; and in the chancel of the Quexes are several grave-stones.

There are brass plates, and other memorials in good preservation, with effigies of numbers of the above families, and other ornaments. The Quex estate is now in the possession of Powell, Esq., who resides there, and has lately raised a park, in the centre of which he has built a handsome tower, commanding a distinct view of the French coast. The church of Birchington was anciently one of several chapels belonging to the monastery of Monkton, about three miles distant. It is now the only one remaining of that religious house; but to this day the vicar of Monkton, finds a curate to officiate in this church. The parsonage of Birchington, including that of Woodchurch, was many years ago let on a beneficial lease for a long term of years to the family of the Bushells, the living lessee is Benjamin Bushell, Esq., of Clare Court, Monkton.

[(2) The Church tower visible from Birchington was that of the Church at St. Nicholas, not Canterbury Cathedral.]



Station road, Birchington, showing the Cinema, c. 1925

Although there were shops all along Station Road during the 1920s and 30s, there were still some private houses, with their front gardens and with their walls still topped with iron railings, particularly between Eastfield Road and the Sea View Hotel. On the other side of the road, there was a large stand of trees where entrance to Woodford House School, where 'Alpha Carpets' shop etc. have since been built.

When you entered any of the shops, you went and stood in front of a counter, which always seemed very high up, and waited your turn to be served. Sometimes there were wooden chairs to sit on, with bent cane backs and perforated wood or plaited cane seats. Mostly old ladies used these, but occasionally children were allowed to perch on them, which often made it possible to see onto the counter, because the chairs had quite long legs. Many of the shopkeepers wore aprons, while some also wore caps or hats. The butchers all seemed to have a pencil permanently fixed behind an ear.

Commodities we now buy pre-packed, such as butter, were sold from giant slabs and the one or two pounds you asked for would be patted into shape and wrapped in greaseproof paper. Eggs were sold loose and were often stacked in quite high piles in a basket. It was amazing how few of them got cracked or broken. If there were any in this condition, you could buy them more cheaply.

Most of the stores were locally based, but there were a few of the newer 'chain' stores appearing by 1930, shops like, the Co-op, (which was originally where the 'Bandbox' now stands), Greensted's Butchers, D.T. Evans (the Chemists), Vye & Sons (the Grocers next door to the Queen's Head in the Square), and the International Tea Co.'s Stores where Martin's (again, in the Square) now stands. If you had an order made up in certain stores, the assistant would quite frequently wrap up your parcel neatly and tie it up with string. The string was kept in a large pot with the 'tail' hanging out and the scissors were often hung from the assistant's apron or overall belt. Banks like Westminster and Lloyd's had arrived by 1910, but Barclay's did not arrive until late in 1937 and the Midland Bank not until after the demolition of the Wayside Café in about 1962. This site had our first Woolworths store for about 10 years.

(Continued on page 3)



Macfisheries c. 1932 Later on became Cox

In grocery shops, sugar was sold from a large brown paper sack and shovelled into a strong, blue paper bag. Biscuits were also sold loose and stood in large square tins in front of the counter. Many of the tins had a glass 'window' in the lid, so that you could see which ones you wanted. Broken biscuits were often available at greatly reduced prices, but you didn't get much choice as to which pieces you got! This was probably just as well, because most children would have chosen the cream ones, and left the uninteresting ones for the grownups!

Green grocers were excellently stocked and there were always marvellous displays of colourful fruit and vegetables. The smell of fresh fruit and vegetables was a real treat as you stepped inside the door. We didn't realise it at the time, but they were also all strictly seasonal, so you only had strawberries between June and August, and oranges and tangerines only appeared in the wintertime. At Christmas, these shops were festooned with holly and mistletoe and would display dates in fancy 'paper lace' lined boxes, and as well as loose nuts of every kind. Dates, apart from those expensive ones in the boxes, were sold loose from huge blocks and were very cheap, especially considering how far they had travelled to reach our little Station Road shops. Most of the vegetables were locally grown and were always very reasonably priced.

There were about five butcher's shops and they frequently had large pork, beef and lamb carcasses, together with rabbits and chicken hanging in their open windows. At Christmastime, turkeys and other more exotic game birds joined these displays. The three fish shops, too, had open windows, displaying a huge selection of different types of fish. These were all sold off very cheaply on a Saturday evening, probably because they did not have refrigeration facilities in those days. The smell of the fish shops was one of my least favourite ones!

Baker's shops were a joy to visit, with a glorious aroma of new baked bread and doughnuts wafting into the street to tempt you inside. The selection to choose from was probably not as great as it is today. Some of them were on display on the open counter at what would now be considered knockdown prices. All these open displays of uncovered food were a great draw to wasps and flies, so to counteract these, almost all the shops had yellow sticky fly papers hanging from the window frames and the ceiling.

Another of the lovely smells that greeted you, particularly when you went into Vye's or The International Stores, was that of freshly roasted and ground coffee. There was also one part of the counter where your nose told you the spices were being stored. Tea was mostly bought loose from huge wooden tea chests, which had silver foil linings to them. These chests were much coveted when you were moving house!

In Thurgood's, where Peter Newman's Shoe Shop later stood for a long time, they had a most ingenious system for sending the money from the customer to the cashier. The assistant put the bill and your money into a small cylinder, which was suspended from a taut wire above her head. She then pulled a lever, which sent the cylinder speeding across the store, up to the first floor where the cashier had her office. She then took out your money and bill, receipted the latter and returned it to the cylinder, together with any change you required and with a quick pull on the lever her end, sent the cylinder speeding back to your assistant. Pure 'Magic' to a child!

One last smell that always seems to pervade the earlier end of the 1920s was horse manure. Looking at old photos of Station Road, taken during this time, the reason is all too clear. There were still quite a few horse-drawn carts going up and down during the day, and while the carter stopped to deliver his parcels, crates, or sacks of coal to his customers, the horses made equally good use of the stop! This evidence was all cleared by the following morning, some of it by the road sweeper, but local gardeners and allotment holders collected much of it.

One of the shops that arrived in 1931 was Gardner's Corn Merchant's, on the corner of Albion Road. This was another one with some very interesting smells within its fairly dark interior. Smells like oil and paraffin, paint and candles, were accompanied by the smell of newly chopped firewood and the slightly musty smells from the different sacks of grain and huge bulging bags of potatoes.

One last category of shops that we children all loved to frequent was the sweet shop. The long shelves that reached up to the ceiling, all lined with big square glass jars of boiled sweets made the mouth water just looking at them. You also got a crick in your neck as you tried to see where your favourite one was on the top shelf. Jelly babies, humbugs, liquorice, butterscotch, toffees, fudge, raspberry drops, and so much more! And many of these cost less than one old penny. Happy days!



Wm. Gardner c.1932 later became Wards, now a nail bar

BHT DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 26th February 2015

An Illustrated Talk by Susan Johnson
Quex and the Australian Link

Thursday 26th March 2015

Wine and Wisdom
£5 per person

Thursday 28th May 2015

A Talk by Steven Ware:- National Coastwatch
Volunteer Eyes Along the Coast

Thursday 11th June 2015

AGM
Followed by:-
An Illustrated Quiz by Janet & John Robinson

Thursday 26th November 2015

A Talk by Dr. Frank Andrews
Richborough Port

Quarterly meetings 7.00 for 7.30pm at
The Centre, Birchington.
The Bar will be available

BHT Talk at the Centre

On 20th November we enjoyed a double bill of speakers on the local defences of Thanet during the Second World War.

Ron Stilwell who has recently published an extremely interesting book "The Defence of Thanet and East Kent (1939-1945)" (price £12.99 order via e-mail stilwellr@yahoo.co.uk/FaceBook Ron Stilwell or 'phone 01843 825345) was concerned that his health would prevent him from speaking for the allotted time but his enthusiasm certainly overcame any problems and Ron gave an informative talk on his subject. He spoke about the large area of fortifications around St Nicholas and Sarre where an anticipated German invasion was expected to come from Canterbury rather than Thanet. Sarre was the Command Post with underground passageways and rooms, fortified houses and pillboxes constructed in such a way that they were undetectable to aerial reconnaissance. Much of his talk was made more interesting by the personal recollections of Thanetonians living here during those dark days.

Marcus Russell from The Manston Spitfire and Hurricane Museum then took over with a brief history of the Museum whose triple aims are: Education, Remembrance and Reconciliation. He Highlighted this by reflecting on the German air ace Adolf Galland who had visited the Museum and been photographed in the Hurricane. When Goering had asked him what he needed to beat the RAF Gallant had replied "A squadron of Spitfires". Marcus extended an invitation to the audience to visit the museum for a personal tour and close-up view of the two planes not usually available to the public...

Talk by James Brazier on 25th September 2014

WW1 Postcards - The Home Front 'Doing Their Bit'

Birchington Heritage Trust were delighted that James Brazier, a member of the Trust and well known locally for his many talks, gave us a talk on WW1 Home Front postcards illustrated with examples from his vast collection.

Initially these postcards promoted patriotism with uniformed soldiers, flags and slogans such as 'For King & Country'. As the War progressed however the tone on these postcards changed, the theme being to boost the morale of the people at home and to support the troops at war. Newspapers, posters and postcards were the only means of communication to the masses and postcards in particular were extremely popular and many thousands were posted.

Graphic artists were employed on postcard production including Donald McGill who produced in excess of 10,000 postcards. After the war Donald went on to become more famously known for his Saucy Seaside Postcards. It has only now been realised what a valuable source of information these WW1 postcards are, being an archive of social history.

The attendance of Trust members at the meeting reflected the huge interest currently being shown in WW1 and our sincere thanks to James for bringing the many aspects of Home Front postcards to our attention.

Janet Denyer



Postcard by Adrienne Nash shows a Land Girl, Conductor,
Nurse, Munitons Girl and Post Mistress

Find us on Facebook

Not only can the Birchington Heritage Trust be found on our own web site www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk but now also on Facebook. We owe our thanks to Faye & Luke, our two new Trustees, for their efforts in setting up this account.

Birchington Postscript

The Acorn Inn - An inn known by the name and sign of The Acorn was built in 1784, but incorporated into a much older dwelling which dates back to the late 1400s.