



Newsletter

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THE EXHIBITION BUILDING

Alfred Walker

In 1885 it stood in the hollow (now known as The Dip) at Minnis Bay and was built by Mr Arthur Rayden, a London stockbroker and great friend of Mr Haig - the father of Miss Margaret Haig.

He built it to house an Exhibition to help cover the costs of running the Institute in Birchington - founded by Major Bell and Rev. J.P. Alcock etc. The Exhibition was a great success and made a profit of £240.



Storm damaged Exhibition building in the Minnis Bay Dip, c. 1897

Next to the Exhibition building was a conservatory where Mr Rayden kept rare tropical birds.

He was also the chairman of the old Birchington Bay Estate Co. He chartered special trains and subsidised the fares for the public to visit the Exhibition. He also promoted the sale of his plots of land in the Bay. The Thanet Gazette had a whole page advertisement.

With the timber left over from the Exhibition building, along with the labour from the Minnis Bay Coast Guard crew members, Mr Haig organised the building of a little wooden Church (called Bay Church). Coastguards helped to keep this church clean and holy-stoned the wooden boards. (A soft sandstone used for scrubbing decks)

There was a great storm of 1897 when the surf boat at Margate was sunk with the loss of 9 lives in an attempted rescue. The sea wall at Minnis Bay was broken down and the Hollow (Dip) was flooded. The Exhibition building was repaired after the flood of November 1897 and Anglican services were held there until at least 1908. Much valuable property belonging to Mr Rayden in the Exhibition building was very badly damaged. Unfortunately it was not insured.

A historical notice for the Birchington Bay Exhibition, including details about the Loan Exhibition, Fancy Fair, and Horticultural Show, along with dates and location information.

Archaeologia Cantiana XLIV p. 172

When the Wantsum Channel was in existence, most of the villages on the Thanet shore were situated on creeks – called “fleets” – meaning port or dock – which were made by a spring of water finding its way through the chalk and causing a deep channel to be formed at its place of exit, so each village was constituted a little sea port and could carry on its trade with ease.

Ebbfleet – important from its geographical position – near here landed St. Augustine, Saxons and Hengist and Horsa.

Minster – associated with the monastery and had a shipbuilding yard – at Durlock.

Sarre – situated at a point in the channel where its course was charged from due south to that of almost east. Anciently much larger and more populous than at present on account of its being the most frequented passage into the island of Thanet and a place where shipping often anchored in their passage to and from the north mouth – had church of St. Giles and a Saxon settlement here.

Arch Cant XII

Up to Elizabethan times a waterway, the Wantsum separated the Isle of Thanet from the mainland of Kent.

The North Mouth between Reculver and Birchington had the name of Genlade – or Yenlade or Yenlet, or Northmouth. Genlade means a discharging of a river into the sea or of a smaller river into a larger one – it is an Anglo Saxon expression.

Bede mentions this waterway in his History and Chronicle.

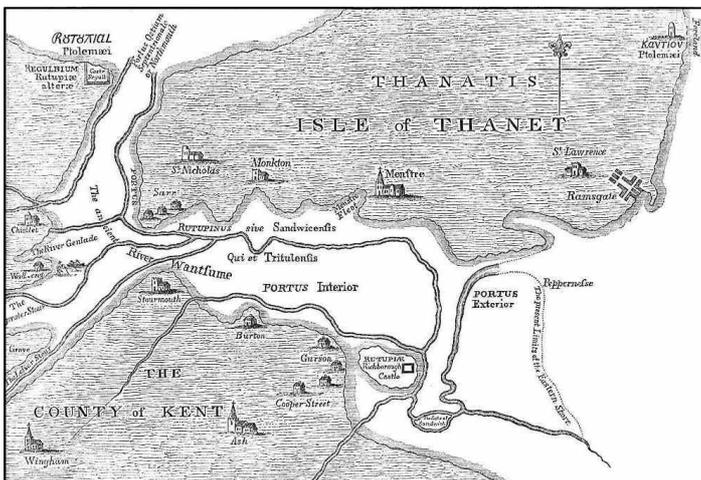
The Anglo Saxon Chronicle says Harold [1052] went with his fleet from Dover to Sandwich and then to Northmouth and on to London. This route to London was customarily used up to at least from Edward III’s reign in 1374.

The Wantsum is a tidal estuary bed - to a great extent flat and not shelving until the mid-channel was approached – a vast expanse between the high water mark and low water mark dry for many hours in the day.

Ferry at Sarre - Marked in Thomas of Elmham’s map of Thanet 1414 – showing the ferry boat.

The Wantsum was probably tolerably navigable up to the reign of King Henry VI - 1460.

Leland says in the reign of Henry VIII the sea ran more than a mile from North-mouth to Sarre.



The Wantsum Channel once navigable for ships, now silted up

Arch Cant LIII p.68

Thanet is, or rather was, an island at the southern corner of the Thames estuary and was known from a very early period. It is mentioned by c. AD 280, Bede c. 730, Asser (893) and frequently in the Saxon charters from 675.

Asser says it was called Tenet in the Saxon tongue, but by the British. The British name of Thanet seems to mean march and it implies that the side adjoining the mainland of Kent was best known to the early inhabitants.

Thanet was separated from Kent by the Wantsum sea channel. The latter is first mentioned by Bede who says – “On the East of Kent is the large isle of Thanet containing according to the English way of reckoning, six hundred families divided from the other land by the river Wantsum, which is about three furlongs over and fordable only in two places, for both ends of it run into the sea”.

It is obvious that great changes have taken place in the Wantsum since Bede wrote twelve hundred years ago. It was then a sea channel of a moderate width – 660yds or 3/8 of a mile. But today the Wantsum has become a mere name.

The state of the Wantsum in Bede’s day was very far from having its original condition. Changes had been taking place for centuries before he wrote and were still in operation in his time. The evidence seems to justify the assumption that the original depth of the Wantsum was about 40 feet. The scour of the tides would tend to maintain this depth at a more or less uniform level.

The Wantsum was a natural arc shaped stream of tidal water cutting off Thanet from the mainland to a breadth of about 2 miles and a depth of about 40 feet, and with wide open ends. It formed a safe roadstead for ships and a sheltered line of communication with the Thames. But its days were numbered.

Arch Cant LVI p.23

Earliest description of the channel is in the Ecclesiastical History of the Ven. Bede, Book 1. – That the Wantsum river was about three furlongs wide and because it emptied into the sea at each end had to be forded which was only possible in two places. One of the fords was at Sarre – probably south of Sarre Court.

The channel could be used by the small cargo ships of those days (Saxon). Bede also refers to the Wantsum as the fenlade – use of fenlade in reference to the northern part of the Wantsum suggests that this was wider and perhaps shallower than the other end. 10th century references to the Wantsum are numerous – the term north mouth is used in these references.

There may have been a third ford in the 10th century, Sarre was the middle ford. North ford may have been on the road which runs from St. Nicholas Court to Belle Isle and so along to the river.

Anglo Saxon Chronicle has references to the Wantsum.

1049 some ships of Edward the Confessor were at anchorage here – at a spot which is now no doubt some way out beyond the present coastline.

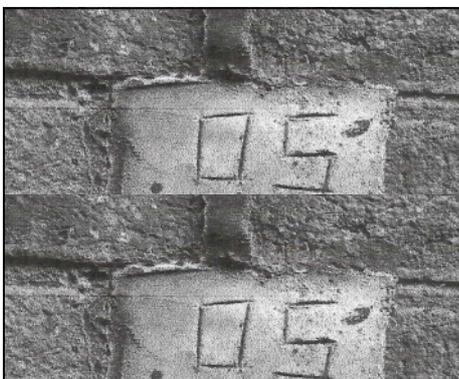
1052 – Earl Godwin went up the channel to the north mouth.

Past events are preserved by our memories, the written word, photographs and pictures. Nothing stays the same forever, hence this article. I was totally unaware of the existence of Ordinance Survey benchmarks until I was told of a recently published booklet on the subject.



Benchmark found on the wall of All Saints Church

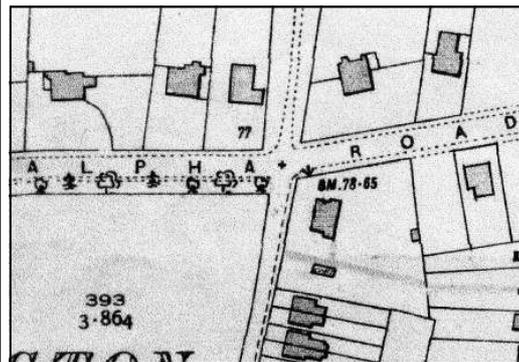
Ramsgate resident Steve Moore has produced a 32 page booklet that explains their purpose. Benchmarks come in several forms. The most common is cut or chiselled into brick or stone walls, often found near road junctions. This type has a horizontal line about 100mm (4") with an arrowhead underneath pointing to the line, see figure A. Other types are a metal plate called a flush bracket, which has a unique serial number embossed on it. Such a type is found on All Saints Church on the side that faces the entrance to Park Lane, see figure above. Other types have a metal bolt head or steel ball instead of the horizontal line. The railway bridge in Minnis Road has a reinstated benchmark written in wet cement.



Reinstated Benchmark Seen on brickwork of Minnis Bay Railway Bridge

Benchmarks are also found on schools, stone boundary markers, stone steps as well as private houses. It has been estimated that 4 in 5 owners who have a benchmark on their property are unaware of it. Only a fraction of those who have noticed, have an idea what it means.

A benchmark's purpose is to show a local altitude reference point. These reference points are used in conjunction with surveying instruments to measure the height above sea level of any feature in the area. Figure D shows the Alpha Road Benchmark is 78.65 feet above sea level. The sea level point is known as 'Ordinance Datum'. This was established at Newlyn in Cornwall. This information is vital when local topographical surveys are undertaken for engineering projects such as when drains or road constructions are carried out. These marks were then plotted onto Ordinance Survey maps. There "were between 500,000 & 600,000 benchmarks all over the country. The aim was to have at least one mark per square kilometre in rural areas, more in built up places. The benchmarks were maintained properly until the 1970s. A few were added into the early 1980s, but technology was overtaking the need for them. In 2000 Ordinance Survey announced that the better practice based on Global Positioning would be the system to take over."



Benchmark on former Vicarage outside wall in Alpha Road

As time passes, walls, buildings and road layouts change, taking the benchmarks with them. The diagram above shows the 1936 map position of the benchmark in Alpha Road at the junction with Albion Road. The arrowhead is pointing to the outside wall near Albion Road. The map information says BM.78.65. This means the height above sea level at this point is 78.65 feet. Later maps gave the measurement in metres. Another benchmark can be found in Reculver Avenue near the junction with Minnis Road. If this article has aroused your curiosity, see if you can find any benchmarks where you live. All the benchmarks I have seen are approximately 375mm (15") from ground level.



Benchmark in Reculver Avenue

Steve Moore's booklet can be obtained from Michaels Bookshop Ramsgate, price is £3.99.

BHT Dates For your Diary

Thursday, 23rd February 2017

Talk by the Kent, Surrey & Sussex
Air Ambulance

Thursday, 23rd March 2017

Event - To be arranged

Wednesday, 26th April 2017

Coach Trip to Hever Castle
Castle, Gardens & Tulip Gardens
£23 pp, guided tour of Castle £10 extra
Further details please contact museum

Thursday, 25th May 2017

Talk by Peter Ewart -
'Some Mother's Son'

Thursday, 15th June 2017

AGM

Thursday, 27th July 2017

Event - To be arranged

Thursday, 21st September 2017

Talk by Susan Johnson
'Ladies of Quex'

Thursday, 26th October 2017

Event - To be arranged

Thursday 23rd November 2017

Talk by Imogen Corrigan -
'The Goose is Getting Fat'

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

MUSEUM VOLUNTEERS ROTA

Maureen Davis has given up doing the museum rota after several years of sterling service. She has kindly organised it up until the end of March, to give us time to find someone to take over from her. If any member is interested in taking on the role, please contact our secretary, Janet Denyer, for more details.

In the meantime may I remind the volunteers on the rota that if they cannot attend for their duty they should contact the relevant steward. Heather Letley (Mondays), David Graves (Thursdays), Gillian Lodge (Saturdays).

Gillian Lodge

Birchington's Alphabet

BROOKSEND - The oldest place name in the village of Birchington is the manor of Brooksend, which is mentioned in the Court Rolls records of 1148. There are still two farms in the manor - Great and Little Brooksend Farms.

BRUNSWICK PLACE - This terrace of houses on the south side of Park Lane were built in 1831-32, and were rated at £3 a year. Some of the houses still retain the original decorations over the front doors.

BULLET CASES - In the late 1950's local children made extra pocket money by collecting Second World War bullet cases from the rock pools between Minnis Bay and Beresford Gap. These had been fired by the soldiers on the firing range at Minnis Bay. About a carrier bag full was collected every week and sold to the scrap metal merchant.

BUTTS - This was a piece of land used by the villagers for practising archery. It was at the end of what is now Station Road, more or less opposite Dog Acre.

CAGE - The cage or lock-up was built to house offenders overnight before they appeared before the Magistrate. The Birchington cage was situated in The Square at the side of the Powell Arms.

CARMEL COURT - The original house in Beach Avenue called Carmel Court was built around 1900 and stood in two acres of grounds. It was supposed to be a replica of a villa on or near Mount Carmel. It contained a large indoor pool in the style of a Roman Bath, with steps leading down to it, and a central tower which was designated as the synagogue. It later became an annex for the Beresford Hotel, then after the second World War it was run as a small private school with about twelve pupils. From 1957 - 1960 it is listed in directories as a nursing home. It was then purchased by developers who demolished it to build the Carmel Court flats. In 1985 Sandpiper Court was added on the site of the old orchard.

CENTRAL GARAGE - The Central Garage was built on the corner of Station Road and Paddock Road sometime between 1926 and 1933 by Thomas Read. It was demolished in 1987 and replaced with the new block of shops which today are occupied by the Sue Ryder charity shop and Glen Patrick estate agents.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE - Formed in 1926 the Birchington Chamber of Commerce produced a visitors guide until the early 1970s, and many of these can be seen in the museum. It represented the interests of the traders and residents until the Residents Association became a separate group. It organised Birchington's first carnival in 1932. The organisation closed in 2001 due to lack of members and committee members.