

## THE FIRST - & SECOND - FOUNTAIN OFFER

In 1900 the brother of Major Morrison Bell offered to pay for the installation of a fountain in the square in honour of his brother, who had recently died. The gift was also to include a drinking trough for horses who often had to wait in the Square for their masters in one of the three inns. It was to be surmounted by an ornamental lamp. When the newly formed Parish Council was told of the offer, Bill Pointer and Thomas Pemble both raised doubts, pointing out how difficult it would be for the horse brakes to turn around in the Square with the fountain taking up space in the centre.

The Chairman decided to ask the people of the village what they thought, so he arranged for 511 voting cards to be delivered to each adult male. The result of Birchington's first referendum was 330 in favour of the fountain, with only 15 against. 166 cards were not returned. At the next meeting the result of the vote was announced, but another acrimonious exchange of views, particularly from Pemble and Pointer then followed. Eventually it was decided to accept the offer, subject to their approval of the final design. The design was submitted and all except our two dissenters agreed it would be a handsome addition to the Square.

Mr Bell was told of their decision and the Kent County Council and Eastry Rural District Council (under which Birchington came at this period) were asked for their permission to install it. On October 20<sup>th</sup> 1900 the Kent County Council surveyor met members of the Parish Council for a site inspection. At the November meeting the Parish Council was read a letter from the District Council stating that they considered the fountain at the place suggested would be a danger to vehicular traffic and that they had informed the County council accordingly. The County Council, however, did not reply until the following February 1901, when a letter was received by the Parish council, which stated:-

".... the Roads Committee have decided to recommend the Council not to oppose such an erection, provided that your Council will let me have their undertaking that the fountain will be kept well lighted at night, otherwise there will be danger to road traffic. Your Council will understand that the County Council have no power to sanction the obstruction, but merely decided to take no action to prevent it. This will not prevent any member of the public who may be aggrieved, from taking steps for its removal."

Councillor's Pointer and Pemble were delighted and promised that if it were put up they would soon have it down. A copy of the Council's letter was sent to Mr Bell, who, needless to say, was very angry. Mr Bell's letter to the Parish council said, "As it appears from the letter from the County Council that if the fountain were to be put up, it is in the power of a cantankerous person to take steps to have it removed, I have no option but to withdraw my offer, as I do not wish to be the cause of a village wrangle. I regret the trouble I have caused your Council in suggesting the matter, which I hoped might have been considered to the public use and benefit. .... I shall give the money that this fountain would have cost

to the Margate Sea Bathing Infirmary, which my brother always took a great interest in ..."

This caused uproar - angry letters appeared in the Isle of Thanet Gazette and many blamed Pemble and Pointer of depriving the village of a useful amenity. But the two men were unrepentant and boasted that one would never appear in their lifetime.

Eight years later in 1909, Alderman Grant, who lived in one of the properties which later became part of Queen Bertha's School, made the gift of a fountain to the village in memory of his wife. By now, Pemble and pointer were no longer with us and the fountain was accepted without any fuss or bother. It was opened with due ceremony on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, when the Rev. H.A, Serres, Vicar of Birchington, conducted a service in the Square. At least two post cards later went on sale commemorating the occasion.

The inscription on the fountain reads:-

"Gratefully accepted by the inhabitants of Birchington from Alderman Grant."

There is nothing recorded in the minutes of the Parish Council concerning Mr Bell, Major Morrison Bell's brother. Whether anyone ever told him about the later fountain or not, we shall never know.



One of the post cards recording the dedication of the second fountain in June 1909