

A DIFFERENT WORLD

(Birchington Survey – by Arthur Bowers) (c. 1970)

Updated by J Burgess - 2018

In the coming reshuffle of local authorities, many boundaries will disappear and larger units emerge. Loss of identity is the fear in such reorganisation and while the new bodies may be more efficient (though that is yet to be proved) they will, inevitably, become less personal. However, as a community is built up on common interests rather than on lines on a map, local names with long associations will continue much as before.

Many former independent London Boroughs went through this integration process, when the Greater London Council came into being. They have succeeded in maintaining their individualities and, if anything, a better local spirit in some of them has been engendered.

In Thanet, as long ago as 1935, the former parish of Birchington was annexed, along with its neighbour Westgate, into the Borough of Margate. Since then, Birchington has staunchly defended its identity, with considerable and conspicuous ability.

Much of this is due to its active community life, overseen by a lively Residents' Association, which rates among its achievements, the prevention of a proposed by-pass in 1969, which would have cut Birchington in half.

After much hard work, the 'Village' was able to reform its Parish council, which Margate had shut down in 1935. The members of our present Parish council have also worked extremely hard to improve the lives of its residents and visitors.

Most people would agree that the 'village', as it is still referred to, has never really been reconciled to being 'absorbed' into Margate. Certainly, its background helps to keep it in a different mould. It was a favourite spot for pre-World War Two nobility and theatrical personalities, to have their second homes.

From the housing point of view, Birchington is probably the most favoured area in Thanet. Much of its popularity is due to the absence of guest houses on a large scale, which stamp many places with a 'sea and sand' image. The result is that houses in Birchington are the most expensive in the area.

In general, properties on the seaward side of the London-Canterbury Road, which runs through Birchington, command some of the highest local prices, and those having sea views are in some cases double the average value.

Surrounded by Prime Agricultural land to the south and west, by the sea to the north and Margate to the east, there is little room left for any large building projects. Most of the recent new housing has been concentrated on land freed-up when three large private schools closed and three large hotels were demolished. Another section became available when the Spurgeon's

Homes which covered about 40 acres, decided to close in the 1970s. When a Boys Convalescent and Holiday Home was demolished in Albion Road and another large private house and grounds in Canterbury Rd became available, the Yew Tree Gardens site was created.

Concreting over the prime agricultural land to the south and west for housing would be very short-sighted and criminal, in the light of all the extra mouths we are going to need to feed, with the large influx of new people trying to enter our country at the moment. It would also make us vulnerable to frequent food shortages and soaring and unaffordable prices to import large amounts of it.

Because the community still retains most of its original lanes and roads, these are not suited to large influxes of vehicles, which cause bottle-necks at busy times. Any large-scale building plans would need to incorporate much wider roads into their plans. They would also need to find some way bringing more water into a very dry area. The only source of water for the whole of Thanet is an Aquifer running diagonally across the island from NW to SE.

The other major areas where large problems will ensue are in Health Services, already running at beyond their capacity now, Education provision and Waste Disposal – all of which are almost at breaking point with our present numbers.

The other problem in Thanet has always been lack of jobs in the area. When major employers like Pfizer's and Manston Airport closed, no similar sized employers have come to fill the gaps adequately as yet.