

Birchington & District Chamber of Commerce **The town that calls itself a village - 1976**

BIRCHINGTON-ON-SEA and District Chamber of Commerce began life 50 years ago as the Birchington Traders' Association and although the village population has more than trebled, the part of the constitution aiming "to preserve the amenities of Birchington" still remains.

Back in 1926, the adult population was less than 3,000, the traders numbered only a third of their successors today and most of the shops were to be found on the east side of Station Road.

Now the population is approaching 10,000 and the Chamber has in the **region of 140 members. Birchington is obviously a town and yet insists on** calling itself a village. The Traders' Association met to deal with business problems, which must seem small compared with many of today's pressures, and to help stimulate interest in local amenities and events. It assumed responsibility for attracting seasonal visitors and issued its own guide, a handsome booklet containing much information and many photographs.

CARNIVAL

In addition, the Association took a leading part in organizing the annual **carnivals** which had mammoth processions including many equestrian participants. The proceedings would be rounded off in the evening on the lawns at Grenham Bay, where marquees and many sideshows were put up. In 1930, the Traders' Association became Birchington Chamber of Commerce and followed the pattern of the period by becoming affiliated to the National Chamber of Trade.

In 1935 the village of Birchington (rather unwillingly) officially became part of Margate and the Chamber was extensively involved in the discussion meetings which surrounded that event. It was always to the fore in the fight to **preserve the amenities of the area for the mutual enjoyment of both residents and visitors.** Not unnaturally, a Ratepayers' Section was formed, primarily concerned with rates and representing the views of residents not involved with commerce.

From this sub-committee was born the present **Birchington Residents' Association** which came into being in 1957. At the same time, the Chamber's own title changed to the Birchington-on-Sea and District Chamber of Commerce with members from Birchington and surrounding villages. Its membership continued to flourish and the present Chamber has formed a special Jubilee Committee to celebrate its 500th anniversary.

In 1926 the Chamber talked of an Empire – and it made its mark

While present day traders celebrate their Jubilee Shopping Week, older residents of the village may remember June, 1926, when, by coincidence, the shopkeepers of the day were dressing up their premises to mark "Empire Shopping Week." Referring to the Birchington Empire celebrations the Isle of Thanet Gazette for 12 June, 1926, commented: "The erstwhile little village of Birchington, now almost universally recognized as a town, has long had a reputation of being sleepy and behind the times, but the inhabitants have awoken in a very short time to their responsibilities and the possibilities of the neighbourhood in which they reside. "This alertness has been particularly evident during the past week."

A Message from the Chamber

For every housewife, shopping is a “must,” just as advertising is for a trader. This week, we feel we have gone one better by making a joint effort on behalf of members of the Birchington-on-Sea and District Chamber of Commerce. Not only are we advertising as individuals, but we are drawing to the attention of the readers, the fact that Birchington is a shopping centre in its own right.

It may not be as large as other centres within the boroughs, although you may be surprised just how large it is and how much of the charm it has retained. We who live, work and trade in Birchington believe it to be a jewel of a place – and like any jewel it is best appreciated when displayed for all to see.

Well served by rail and bus services, it also offers good parking facilities for those visiting by car. Most of the shops are independently run, but all have earned a reputation for friendliness and an old-world courtesy so often looked for, but seldom found.