

## Birchington Chamber of Commerce 1976

Birchington Chamber of Commerce celebrates its Golden Jubilee in 1976, having been formed in the year 1926. In those days the adult population of Birchington was less than 3000 souls and the number of traders probably a third of the present number; there were very few shops on the west side of Station Road, the main pedestrian shopping flow being on the east side.

The writer's knowledge of Birchington goes back 1930 and as far as is known the Chamber was formed on the winding up of the Birchington Improvement Company who were responsible for beach chairs and a Putting Green, which was sited near the present Minnis Bay café.

The Chamber devoted its attention to the attraction of seasonal visitors and issued its own Guide, a handsome booklet with attractive covers and numerous local photographs, and indeed publication continued until a few years ago, when the present hand-out folder was introduced.

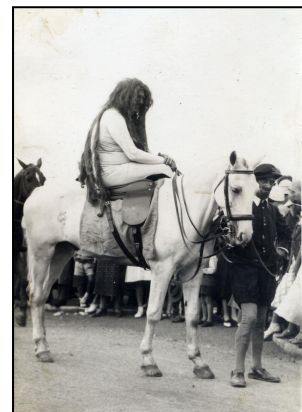
In the early days its activities were, and indeed still are, in the interest of both traders and residents, and at one time both traders and residents combined and the title became the Birchington Chamber of Commerce and Residents Association. Later, when the residents section became stronger it was weaned off and became what is now known as The Birchington Residents Association.

Undoubtedly the highlights of the Chamber's history were the two CARNIVALS held in the early 1930s in successive years. These were one day events yielding £800 each time in aid of Margate General Hospital. Mammoth processions terminating on the lawns at Grenham Bay, on which were erected large marquees, set pieces of Brocks fireworks and firework display in the late evening, to terminate the festival. Side shows were numerous, and a particular money spinner was Mr Dowling's (chocolate) Wheel of Fortune which he insisted he operated himself.

Notable figures who were responsible for these two carnivals were the late Alderman E G Barrows (President) and George Farrar, the latter having hired from Clarksons at his own expense the Old English Costumes, Crinolines etc. for the Committee members, and a stock for public hire. One of these carnivals was opened by the well known Margate Comedian of the day, LESLIE FULLER who approached Birchington Square from Margate enthroned on the top of an enormous floral float some twenty feet high. The crowds in the Square were so thick that traffic from Park Lane and Canterbury virtually stopped, and the police simply "gave up" for an hour. Yes, Birchington was certainly "en fete" in those days.

In the early days of the Chamber's existence, successive Presidents have had the privilege of entertaining celebrities among whom figured Merle Oberon, Tom Walls, the Carlisle Cousins, Neil Kenyon and others.

Presidents in the early days were not necessarily chosen from the ranks of traders, and one outstanding non-trader president was Mr Scott of "WILDAIR" on the Beresford Cliffs, an enormous gentleman who entered the sea before breakfast every morning winter and summer, and rode horseback in the 1933 Carnival procession dressed as Lady Godiva, complete with long flowing tresses and wearing a pink body-stocking, much to the delight of all present.



Mr A. H. Scott JP, of Wild Air, riding his white horse in the 1933 Carnival in a photo taken on the greens, near his home overlooking Grenham Bay

He wore a long brunette wig "to cover his modesty" and also a pink body stocking and being "a lady", he naturally rode side-saddle!

