

THE CHURCH CLOCK

Alfred T Walker

Margate has its Clock Tower erected in 1887 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. Birchington, too, has its Jubilee Clock, the Clock in the Church Tower, installed in 1887 as part of the village celebrations of that great event. The people of Birchington had been anxious to have a Church Clock for many years. In 1812 an estimate was obtained for the supplying and fixing of a two dial clock, 5 feet in diameter, in the Church Tower, for £131 but probably because of what was considered the high cost, the estimate was not accepted.

Some 36 years later, in 1848, Squire Powell Powell of Quex, offered a clock to the Parish if the parishioners would pay for its erection. A meeting of Parishioners was held in October 1848 to consider placing a clock in the Church Tower and the "general expenses thereof". The Rev. Whish, the then Vicar of Monkton and Birchington, offered to contribute £20 towards the fixing of the Clock if the parishioners would "do" the remainder of their own expense and would also pay the expense of repair after the expiration of one year. The meeting accepted the gift and the Churchwardens were instructed to prepare a "respectful letter to Mr. Powell expressing to him their grateful thanks of the Parish for his gift."

Some three weeks later, on November 2nd 1848, another meeting of the parishioners was held "to take into consideration the propriety of a vote of thanks to J. Powell, Esq., for his liberal offer of a clock for the Church, and also to rescind a resolution passed at the last meeting.

At this meeting it was resolved "that this meeting is sensible that Mr Powell in making the offer of a clock for the Church is actuated purely by motives of liberality to the Parish and with a view of benefitting its inhabitants, resolved that this meeting taking into consideration the present high parochial rates chargeable upon this parish, think it would be imprudent on the part of the Parishioners to accept of any gift that would add to the present parochial burdens. Resolved that the Churchwardens be requested to convey to Mr Powell the sincere thanks of this meeting for his kind and liberal offer and although from the above motives they are induced to decline it, they are equally obliged to him for making the offer."

It is very curious that the offer was declined by the very same persons, mover and seconder excepted, who voted before for its acceptance, only some three weeks previously. All this is written in beautiful copper plate hand writing in the Churchwarden's Book. The thanks of the meeting were given to Mr John Wilson, Churchwarden, "for the satisfactory manner in which he had conducted the subject of the day's meeting."

Mr Powell Powell was duly notified of the decision of the meeting and he replied immediately. The copy of the letter received from his is beautifully written in the Churchwardens' Book.

This is it,

"Sir

I beg you will convey to the Inhabitants of Birchington my acknowledgement for the dutiful and grateful way in which they have tendered to me their thanks and to assure them I am truly aware from the statement

contained in their address, the propriety of their declining my offer of a clock for the Church.

And am Sir
 Quex Park Yours Truly J. P. Powell.
 3rd November 1848.

The loss of this clock to the Parish was probably owing to two opposing elements which existed in the Parish at that time, also, no doubt to the high Poor Rate at that time to maintain the many unemployed and poor.

It was not until nearly 40 years later, in 1887 was a Church Clock again discussed at a Vestry Meeting. In that year it was agreed at the Vestry Meeting to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee, (Queen Victoria) by,

1. Restoring the Church Spire and placing a Clock in the Tower, providing a Lightning Conductor to the Spire.
2. Re-hang the present 5 bells and adding a 6th together with a framework for 2 more.

A Church Tower Jubilee Fund was started and a list of Subscribers appeared in Keble's Gazette (now the Isle of Thanet Gazette) and this list is pasted in the Churchwardens' Book. Major Bell of Haun & Thor gave £110 15s 0d for the Clock. Mrs Gray of Birchington Hall (now Spurgeons) gave £100 for the Tower restoration.

The Church Tower was duly restored, the Bells recast and re-hung, the Spire re-shingled, and the Clock installed. The Clock was manufactured by Messrs Lund and Blockley. It is a fine piece of mechanism, being made of the best materials. The iron gilt dial facing East is 5 feet in diameter and chimes the Westminster quarters on the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 6th bells. It strikes the hours on the 6th or tenor bell which weighs about 13 cwt. All the bearings and hammerwork are of gun metal throughout, built powerfully to resist the great pressure occasionally received during storms on the exposed hands.

It was formally set going by Rev. J. P. Alcock, then Vicar of Birchington, in September 1887. The detailed specifications and receipts are still in our archives. In the 1958 Restoration of the Church when the Bells were taken down and recast, the Church Clock was overhauled and the face re-gilded at a cost of nearly £100.

In 1960 the Margate Borough Council agreed to take over the repair, maintenance, and winding of the Birchington Parish Church Clock, as it was a clock so much used by the people of this place.

In 1968 the clock was re-gilded, when the spire was re-shingled.

In 2012 the spire and clock were again repaired and the clock re-gilded. This photo was taken by Steve Mayes.

