

End of an Era

Another Birchington institution bites the dust!

Christmas 2001

It is with deep regret that after 75 years of service to Birchington's businesses, the Chamber of Commerce has finally had to admit defeat. Lack of members and, more critically, lack of people willing to serve on the Executive Committee, means that the Chamber will cease to exist in the New Year. Only an influx of new supporters could save it at the last moment.

Up until the 1990s there was always a waiting list and applicants had to be nominated before becoming Members. As well as Traders, most of the Bank Managers, Building Societies, Hotels (yes, Birchington did have them), Estate Agents and Solicitors all considered it to be expedient to be Chamber members. Over the last few years organisations such as these have had to centralise their controls and local branches no longer have managers.

This leaves Birchington with just the smaller Shopkeeper as being eligible to keep the Chamber viable. It is most unfortunate that when invited to become members, the normal reply is to ask, "What will the Chamber do for me?" - rather than, "What can I do for the Chamber?"

However, looking back on my own experience with the Chamber, I now realise how much the Chamber has helped me in my own business. Just talking to like-minded people can create new thinking or confirm ideas.

Over the last three weeks Birchington has been almost cut off from parts of Thanet with road-works in the Square. With the Christmas months of November and December being the lifeblood for most Traders, this has caused a disastrous loss of trade. A strong Chamber would have had the power to demand compensation.

Many Birchington people remember the annual "Dinner and Dances" that the Chamber used to put on in the Winter Gardens each year. Tickets for these dances would all be sold out as soon as they became available.

The Chamber also provides the lights on "Dog Acre". We hope you enjoy them this year. No Chamber - no lights. They will be under offer in 2002. "New owner wanted - going cheap!"

Iris Bedwell (President)