

## **Birchington Library – Memories from W.W. 2**

Gwen Wilcox used to help run Birchington Library during the Second World War. In 1942, she was 16 and everyone had to register at the age of 16 ½ if they were not still at school. Her private school, St Margaret's at Westgate, was evacuated to Wales, but she and her parents felt it was better if she remained with them. As soon as she was 16 ½ she had to see Miss Reiffer, who was in charge of Juvenile jobs in the Borough of Margate, which had incorporated Birchington and Westgate in 1935.

Miss Reiffer only died a few years ago. Gwen had done some secretarial training at Mr Banks' Secretarial School in Hawley Square. Her first job was in the office of a Jewish-run factory opposite the Nayland Rock Hotel, which made small machine parts. She did not enjoy the work at all, so she walked out and went back to Miss Reiffer at the Labour Exchange. Miss Reiffer asked her what she would really prefer to do. "I want to drive." I said, "or else go into the W.R.N.S." "I'm afraid you are not old enough", she said. "Do you like reading?" "Yes," replied Gwen, "I read all the time." "There's a vacancy at Margate Public Library," she said.

Gwen was sent for an interview before a Committee of Councilors and the chief Librarian, Mr G. E. Clarke F.L.A. – and was given the job, which she loved. There was a small group of about five girls under Miss Monkton, who later became Mrs Clarke and moved to Birchington to live, (in Shakespeare Road?) and had three children.

After a while, another of the young girls called Marian Field (who sadly died very young from throat cancer) and Gwen were sent off in the back of a Corporation van twice a week and asked to run Westgate and Birchington Libraries. The girls had to take over various books that the public had specially requested. Neither of the girls enjoyed Westgate Library as it was situated in Cuthbert Road. It was dark, cold and much smaller than Birchington's Library, which stood in one of the big old houses in Station Road (No: 62).

From its light and airy rooms and windows the girls could see people going about their daily business. Birchington Library was busier than Westgate and so much more interesting to work in. There were times when the two girls were rushed off their feet, with queues of people stretching right down the stairs. (The 'Tandori Nite' Restaurant is now in one of the pair of houses that stood next door to the Library.)