

MAJOR MORRISON BELL & 'The Institute'

Major Morrison Bell (Rtd.) was a Major in the 3rd King's Own Hussars, based in India with the Indian Army. He was later remembered in Birchington by the Morrison Bell Convalescent Home in Albion Road.

He was a great benefactor to the village. Born in Newcastle in 1835, after retirement in 1878, he lived in a pair of very early 'bungalows' on the cliff edge, on Spencer Road. He bought 'Haun' & 'Thor' in 1878 and joined them together with a large conservatory. He had this 'dressed' as an Indian tent and it housed his full sized billiard table.

He donated most of the money needed for the Church Clock in 1887, which the villagers decided to erect to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee. His wealth came to his family via a coalmine in the Newcastle area, owned by the father.

It was through William's perseverance and that of the Vicar, the Rev Alcock, that a barn behind the houses on the north side of the Square was converted into a 'village centre' in 1878 – and known as The Institute.

He died on the Isle of Wight on 6th April 1900, having been taken ill on his way to Italy – on his doctor's orders. His brother from Newcastle offered to install a Fountain in the Square as a Memorial to him, but the offer was not accepted by two of the villagers. His brother then gave that money to the Royal Sea Bathing Hospital. Soon afterwards the Morrison Bell Home in Albion Road was erected in his memory by the people of Birchington and used as a Convalescent Home for delicate boys from London.

It was owned by a London Church. During WW1 and WW2 it was occupied by the troops. It remained intact in the 1st War, but was seriously damaged by a bomb in the 2nd War on the night of the 6th August 1941, when the south end of the house was demolished. After the war it was repaired and made into flats.

Later the house was demolished and the site re-developed by Piper's construction company, using neo-Georgian style plans for the houses.

There is a memorial tablet in the Church on the North wall to Major Morrison Bell, paid for by subscriptions from his fellow worshippers at All Saints Church. The Memorial Tablet says -

"An esteemed resident of Birchington

This Tablet is erected by his fellow parishioners."

Morrison Bell Home



Major William Bell seated r. front
with his brother & his family behind