

## Memories of Birchington - early 1920s

Recalled by Eleanor Chapman in 1968

At the Station, I think, coming up the main street on the right side were nice boarding houses, beginning with the Doctor's house (St John's where Dr Brunton had a practice), with the Sea View Hotel just before them. Where there is now the Midland Bank and Woolworth's was the charming Wayside café, with its garden going down the side road as far as the corner. The land where the Tudor and the Co-op now stand was a piece of ground. The Central Garage was not yet built (that came in 1925-26). On either side of the road opposite (where Barrow's now stands) was piece of open ground. His China Shop was the shop on the corner of crescent Road and his Furniture Shop was a tiny shop in the Square, where there is now a Cleaner's.

The Westminster Bank was on the right hand side of the road, where Hudson's shop now stands. The four cottages which are now Hayward's Shoe Shops were all separate dwellings. Roy Cook (our sweep) lived in one of them - he wore a top hat and had a fish and chip bar at the back of his cottage. (From some photos lent me by his daughter Ada, the bar was reached from the front of the house.) Where Gardner's now stands were two boarding houses, (a Dutch-gabled pair, which Gardner demolished in 1930).

A picture shown me by a very old lady showed a long low house on the site of the Post Office etc.(We hold this in the Archives) "The Smugglers" had no connection with any smuggling - it was Mr Neame's farmhouse called "Evergreen House" The five shops next door were built on the site of Neame's old barns, and are still known as the Old Barn Site. Where Yew Tree Gardens now stands was a charming house with a lovely paddock called Yew Tree House. On the other side of the road was the Doctor's house (Dr Worthington) and where the Methodist schoolroom is now were two thatched cottages.

In the Smuggler's car park were three thatched cottages (known as Ivy Cottages). I remember a very old lady (Miss Brockman) lived in one and they said that they would not demolish the cottages till she died. In the Square, where there is a betting shop (near the Queen's Head) with the one next door used to be Vye's, an old shop where we walked down a step to enter. Down Park Lane, behind Pantony's Garage were four thatched cottages, which were the Alms Houses down a lane called Gas Row.

Going down Canterbury Road were two farm cottages on the right - Street Farm, which are now very polished up and called The Old Cottage. Court Mount was a farmhouse called South End Farm. In the grounds on the north side was a beautiful Tudor Barn. (Mrs Chapman thought it was this one that was taken down and re-sited in Barnet, but it was the one near the Church. That one was moved in 1925, but the Court Mount barn was still there in the early 1930s.)

There were no more houses along the Canterbury Road on this side at this time. On the other side, the last houses were those in Mill Row and Mill Lane. I don't remember the mill being there, but I heard about it. (The mill was demolished very soon after 1900.) At the corner of Essex Gardens was the vicarage with a beautiful garden behind it. At the bottom of Essex Gardens was a thatched cottage called "Bedlam", inhabited by a gardener who had a greengrocer's round. (His name was Mr Hooper and he worked his round with a horse and cart.) The Fire service demolished the house at the start of the Second World war (13<sup>th</sup> February 1939 - see Bedlam in the Files) I heard that there were cellars underneath the cottage which were used for smuggling.

The Church had a Church Cottage in the Square (for the Verger who also was caretaker of The Institute) next to the old International Stores. Behind it was The Institute which we used for dancing etc. The Church Hall (House) was not yet built (This was erected in 1926) and there was just spare ground there then. From the same old lady I mentioned before (Miss Brockman), told me about the old cottage in Park Lane next to the school. There was a well in the kitchen and when it was decided to close the well, the man called the governor and told him to come and look down and see. There was a passage leading off the well, presumably up to Quex Park. (This land had all belonged to Quex Park before the school was built)

The village pond was beside Court Mount and went out into the road. There used to be an oil painting showing the view of the church from near this pond. It was a charming picture. Where is it now?

I forgot to mention the charming Woodford House School in Station Road, with its beautiful grounds, where we went to Prize Givings. The round flower bed in the grounds always looked so nice and a charming welcome to Birchington.

Eleanor Chapman came to Birchington with her husband George Edward Chapman in the early 1920s and lived all her time here in "Zaria", 18 King's Road. She wrote this account for Mr Alfred Walker, who was Parish Archivist before me.