

From **Isle of Thanet Gazette**, April 1900

DEATH of MAJOR WILLIAM MORRISON BELL

1831 - 1900

(Major Bell died on the 12th April 1900)

Birchington has lost a generous, open-handed friend in Major William Morrison Bell, who died at midnight on Thursday in last week, at the "Lillies", Bonchurch, Isle of Wight in the 69th year of his age. He had been in failing health for some time, though the end came suddenly and unexpectedly, in fact the completion of some alterations to an estate in Bonchurch, Isle of Wight, was looked forward to with pleasurable anticipations by the deceased, and arrangements made for occupation in a few weeks time.

During a connection of some thirty years with Bonchurch, Major Bell, who was a bachelor, had made a large circle of friends and his death is deeply and sincerely mourned. He used to live with his aunt, Miss Morrison, at the house in which he died, that lady having pre-deceased him but a short while since.

He joined the 3rd King's Own Hussars in 1854 (aged 23), and though he had not seen active service, he was busily employed in Depots in England and Ireland, and in 1868 (aged 37) served in India and after two years retired with the rank of Major. He then travelled round the world and coming home, settled down, and taking up politics, fought two unsuccessful contests in the Conservative interest, Walsall and Rochester. He was a member of the Carlton, the Army and Navy, Authors, and United Services Clubs.

He was a considerable landowner in the Isle of Thanet and has resided at "Thor" (and "Haun")¹ Birchington, for nearly thirty years, and will always be remembered for his liberal support of the Birchington Institute². The Royal Sea Bathing Hospital also loses a liberal friend. The recent Volunteer movement at Birchington is also indebted to him for a liberal donation of £75.

The body was taken to Woking on Monday for cremation, and on that afternoon a memorial service was held at the Parish Church, Birchington, conducted by the Rev. H.A. Serres, vicar, and the Rev. Lake, curate. The choir attended, and the following hymns were sung - "When our heads are bowed with woe", "Christ will gather in his own" and "A few more years shall roll", the Dead March in Saul being played on the organ at the conclusion, while the large congregation remained standing.

Among those present were Mrs Gray (of Birchington Hall), Mrs. H.A. Serres, Mr B. Rayden, and the servants from Thor. The cremated remains were conveyed to Edinburgh on Wednesday, and deposited in the same vault as the deceased's father and mother³.

¹ He bought Thor and Haun, two adjoining bungalows on the cliff edge at what was then called "Sebastopol Gap" and is now known as Beresford Gap, in c. 1878 and linked them with a large conservatory facing the sea. These were two of the earliest to be built in Britain.

² He helped finance and set up this venture, which was Birchington's first 'Village Centre'. It stood behind the shops on the north side of the Square

³ The reason for going to Woking is still a mystery, unless this was the nearest place where cremations could take place?