

Birchington Heritage Trust



NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 3

February, 2003

Welcome to the third edition of our newsletter. As well as our usual information and noticeboard, we have the second part of the tower bungalows article by Dr. Alan Kay as well as some personal reminiscences of Birchington in the 1950s. We would really value any thoughts or contributions from members. If you would like to contribute, please send any items to: Pat Orpwood at 77, Alpha Road, Birchington,

NOVEMBER MEETING

We had an excellent audience for John Harrison's fascinating talk on Quex House and Museum at the Village Centre on 20th November. His main topic was the conservation aspect of the Powell-Cotton collection and its importance today. The meeting was introduced by Derek Raven with an account of the Trust's successes so far; there was a raffle for a designer clock and our first Heritage award was made to Clive Baker for the renovation of



Derek Raven presenting the trophy to Clive Baker

BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST

Next General Meeting

7.30, Friday 7th March

The Village Centre

Guest Speaker: Nick Dermott

TDC Conservation Officer

All Welcome

QUIZ, SIP AND NIBBLE

on

FRIDAY 21ST MARCH at 7.30

Birchington Village Centre

£3.50 per person

Phone: 847843 or 842633 for tickets



In this Issue: Newsboard - page 2, Alan Kay's Birchington Bungalows - page 3, A Birchington Childhood and Know Your Village - page 4



FEBRUARY HERITAGE NOTICEBOARD

The Social Committee

The group met on 22nd. January.
Don't forget to mark your diaries with:

The Quiz Night on 21st March
A Walking Treasure Hunt on 11th May
1920's Dance on 24th May

Gillian Lodge has been co-opted onto the main committee and will liaise with the Social group.

Special thanks to **Margaret Garrad** who has organised two "Candle Evenings" and

PRESS COVERAGE

Both the Thanet Gazette and The Kent Messenger Extra carried illustrated articles about our recent Heritage Award. A detailed account of the meeting was also carried by both papers in their Organizations and Clubs sections.

TRANSPORT TO MEETINGS

If you find it difficult to get to General Meetings and would like a lift there and back, please contact Pat Orpwood on 847843 before the meeting and she will

MEMBERSHIP REMINDER

We are again delivering newsletters to all those who expressed an interest in membership in the hope that you will join us. Membership fees for the year 2002-2003 are £5 per person. Cheques should be made payable to **The Birchington Heritage Trust** and paid to our Membership Secretary: Colin Gordine at 36, Grenham Road, Birchington, CT7 9JG. 01843 843279

NEW MEMBERS

We now have 96 fully paid -up members. A special welcome to new members this quarter:

Miss L Hartshorn	Mr G.M. Belt
Mrs G. Fernhough	Mrs P.M. Moys
Miss J Tyrrell	Mrs J. Wright
Miss R. Marchant	Miss E. Izzard
Mrs. J. Scott	

CORONATION CELEBRATIONS

The following events have been organised so far - more to follow:

Sunday June 1st: Coronation Parade
Monday June 2nd: Exhibition begins
Tuesday June 3rd: Birchington in the Fifties talk
Thursday June 5th: Guild of Players

COLLECTING

Jennie Burgess is always pleased to receive any photographs, documents or items to do with Birchington and for our exhibition we should be particularly glad of Coronation pictures and any

STORAGE SPACE

If anyone has a spare room or space to store any of the items we have received so far, Jennie would love to

THE FIRST BUNGALOW ESTATE - PART TWO

by Alan Kay

The first 13 bungalows built by John Pollard Seddon before 1891 were intended as second homes for "gentlemen of position and leisure", enjoying the class distinctions of Victorian times.

In 1881, Athol Mayhew wrote, "Here there are no German bands in the gardens, no distressing minstrels on the sands, no revolting donkey drivers on the roads. Birchington offers absolutely nothing, not even a solitary tea garden." Shorn of these attractions the cheap excursionists from London shunned the spot and travelled on to Margate.

The medical profession advertised that nowhere was to be found a cooler, healthier or more bracing spot by the sea. Sir Erasmus Wilson felt that Birchington air was unequalled anywhere along the whole of Britain's coastline. He calculated that "during a period of twenty-four hours a person would consume twice as much air at Birchington-on-Sea as he would given the same time in London."

The Birchington bungalows were well-built and incorporated novel features such as a lookout tower, a damp-proof course and patent interlocking roof tiles. The whole contents of the larder could be lowered sixty feet into the chalk - an early example of refrigeration.

Prohibitive financing was used to keep the area exclusive and select. Prices ranged from 1200 to 1800 guineas for 11 rooms. This was at a time when experienced clerks only received about £100 a year and most of the working class between £25 and £100.

In 1882 a young sculptor, George Frampton (later Sir) was brought from London to decorate the outside of "Ye Tower Bungalow". This decoration is still visible today. Frampton later made his reputation with statues of Peter Pan and Nurse Edith Cavell in London.

By this time Seddon had produced a plan of Birchington showing how he proposed to develop the site around the original bungalows. Seddon planned a cliff estate along what are now Berkeley and Cliff Roads of bungalows facing the sea with stables and servants' quarters behind.

He established the Monarch Estate Company, but unfortunately, many of his plans never came to fruition. He enjoyed many contacts with literary and artistic circles and his bungalow estate along the cliffs "attracted persons of refinement and artistic sympathies", although records show that many properties were unoccupied during the cold winter months.



These leanings towards literary and artistic circles are shown in the naming of the nearby grid of roads which were later built, although there is no connection with the bungalow estate. The names of Shakespeare, Spenser, Constable, Gainsborough, Wilkie, Leslie and Nasmyth show this, whilst the names Darwin, Lyell, Berkeley and Herschel honour scientists.

The 1885 Directory shows that the bungalow estate along what is now Spenser Road consisted of 16 properties. Thor and Haun, Roding, Ingoldsby, The Hut, Dilkoosha, Llanadern, 4 Tower bungalows, Orion, Cliffside, Swiss and two others un-named.

However, by the 1887 period Seddon was concentrating on building two and three storey houses which could be sold more easily. His Monarch Estate was developing very slowly, mainly due to competition from the newly-established Birchington Bay Freehold Land and Estate Company formed in 1885 to develop the land in Minnis Bay to the west.

Seddon did not actually give up on the Tower Bungalow area. In July 1887, he advertised 74 plots for sale on his "cliff or Bungalow Estate" and hired a special train to convey some 300 ladies and gentlemen from Holborn Viaduct to Birchington-on-Sea for the sale. It appears that even this innovation was not too successful.

However, for the next 20 years or so most building developments were of the more traditional kind and the seaside bungalow did not regain popularity until the turn of the century. By now the idea of living at ground level had moved inland from the seaside and bungalow developments were part of most residential towns. Over the last 50 years bungalow estates have moved back to the seaside, where they started in the 1880s, as more and more retired residents found them an ideal form of housing.

Later articles will deal in more detail as to how this affected Birchington.

Alan has a vast knowledge of Birchington and if there are any topics you would like him to cover in future editions, please contact

A BIRCHINGTON CHILDHOOD

Growing up in the 1950s with Sally Fosse

The new detached house in Canterbury Road, in the garden of what was Morris's general store, is almost finished, but looking at the site, reminded me of the three "corner shops" that used to serve the Canterbury Road in the 1950s.

Morris's was the first shop I was allowed to visit on my own because the only road I needed to cross was Essex Gardens and there was very little traffic in those days. My usual errand was to buy ten "Weights or Woodies" for my grandmother who had taken up smoking during the war and was still trying to give up. Nobody asked any questions about a youngster buying cigarettes in those days, but it was not an errand I enjoyed, despite the bribe of 6d to buy some sweets "for going".

And Morris's had an excellent selection of sweets to choose from. As you pushed down the brass door handle, the bell on its sprung brass coil pinged loudly to indicate your presence. On entering the shop, the counter on your left was devoted to sweets with the glass cigarette case on the wall behind. On the front of the counter were numerous boxes of every type of confectionery imaginable with the glass jars of sweets to be weighed arranged behind. Morris's was a very clean shop and the sweet bags always appeared crisp and pure white as if they had just been starched.

The other counter at right angles was for general groceries. The large silver tins of loose biscuits lined the floor in front of the counter whilst behind the counter the surface by the wall was used for cutting cheese and butter. Tins and dried goods climbed the creamy-white shelves to the ceiling. Everything about the shop from Mrs Morris to the goods on sale was clean and smart

It was some years before I was allowed to cross the Canterbury Road to visit Powell's which was marginally closer, just along the road from Park Avenue. The atmosphere here, as you stepped down, was very different. Where everything in Morris's was calm and ordered, everything in this shop appeared dark and jumbled, largely because it was much smaller. The sweets were mostly kept behind a glass cabinet and there was only a small patch of brown counter to put one's purchases on. The rest of the shop was filled with goods of all sorts from sacks of onions to bundles of firewood whilst the dusty brown shelves stuffed full of cans and bottles filled all the walls. Mr Powell was a large man who invariably wore a brown overall and he appeared very suspicious of children. For years I was really scared of him and if I was sent across to buy something would silently pray that it would be kindly white-haired Mrs Powell who was in the shop that afternoon.

The third of the shops was Bedingfield's, by far the largest, but also the farthest away, involving walking to the top of Mill Row, trying to avoid being seen by the lady in the Mill house who shouted terrifyingly at any children who passed, skirting the allotments and then crossing the Canterbury Road. There were, however, several items the other stores did not sell, primarily refills for soda syphons and replacement accumulators which were a vital source of energy for our wireless, so we had to go.

Now only Bedingfield's survives, re-named the Canterbury Road Stores, but looking much the same as I remember it from fifty years ago. Meanwhile the corrugated awnings remind us that Morris's was once a shop (with Matthews greengrocer's next door) and 317 Canterbury Road juts out with three new matching windows to replace the two large shop ones and the old door.

KNOW YOUR VILLAGE with JENNIE BURGESS

ACOL BRIDGE

Acol is a familiar word to bridge players in Britain and elsewhere. It is the standard system of bidding in Britain and the word has its origin in the village of Acol. In 1775 John Powell, Secretary and Paymaster General to George III bought a farm in London. Four years later he purchased Quex Park. His descendants, like other London owners, developed the land for housing. His first venture in 1866 was Quex Road, followed by many others including Acol Road. The last one was unusual among the Powell-Cotton developments, having detached houses instead of terraces. One of these became the home of "Acol Bridge Club" and it was here in 1933 that a small group of enthusiasts perfected a new form of bidding which was to captivate the attention of players worldwide.

ALBION ROAD

Albion Road is one of the oldest roads in the village. On the earliest map of Birchington (1688), Albion Road is labelled "Way to the Sea". By 1872, when the first 'modern' map was made, it was called Coleman's Lane and led from The Square right down to the sea. When the next review was made in 1898, it had been re-named Albion Road from The Square as far as Alpha Road. There was a house called Albion House - the first one on the right from The Square. Its first occupant was Thomas Pointer, who ran the Post Office on the corner of Albion Road, but the house does not appear until about 1900, so must have taken its name from the road.

We look forward to seeing you all