

**February 2008**

Charity No. 1099250

**ISSUE 23****David Ruddock and Friends' Concert**

**W**e were delighted when David Ruddock and Friends offered to arrange another musical evening for us on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> December last year. This was in response to the numerous requests we received from our members for yet another concert by these musicians, which had delighted them the previous Christmas 2006.

David Ruddock and Friends performance thrilled a full house with their programme of music and song with mostly a Christmas theme. The audience was swept along with David's infectious enthusiasm and passion about the music he had chosen. He gave interesting background anecdotes about the composers and their music throughout the evening.

Of particular note was how much further his daughter, Imogen, had progressed since her performance the previous Christmas.

We would like to thank all those who supported the evening which helped us to raise £262.50 for the Trust.

**Wine and Wisdom**

**O**ur Wine and Wisdom event which was held at The Birchington Village Centre on 25<sup>th</sup> January was another success story for our Social Committee which raised £232.77. The evening was enjoyed by ten tables of participants. The questions were set by Mrs. Dot Raven and the Quizmaster was Howard Willicombe. We extend our thanks to them for their time and effort in making the evening so challenging yet enjoyable.

The finale of the evening was the exhibition of true sportsman-like virtues, when two tables tied. During the tie-breaker session the table which had won a number of times in the past conceded to let the other table take the first place. Chivalry is alive and well and can be seen in Birchington.

**WHITFIELD "Nuggets of gold"**

**B**ecause Birchington was a Limb of the Cinque Port of Dover from at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century until Margate took us over in 1935, all our archives on Civil matters were stored there. This material has now been moved out to a new home in Whitfield, on the outskirts of Dover.

I try and visit these archives every two or three weeks, trawling through the Birchington sections. Recently, some of the archives from the Benefield and Cornford Estate Agents were opened to the public. In them are some wonderful "nuggets of gold", including a drawing of our second 'village centre', the Public Hall, now the Cornerstone Church. Dated 1901, the year before it was opened, the plans are in colour and show many details now lost to us.

Another gem is the plan for Gardner's new premises, later Ward's Estate Agents, on the corner of Albion Road. This, too, is in colour and shows each floor, with the top one devoted to a flat for the owner or caretaker to live. This plan is dated 1929 and is our only 1930s commercial design in the village. We have five good private 1930s dwellings, all down at Minnis Bay and built slightly later. The style was only introduced into England in 1925 by a German architect, Peter Behrens, who worked in the London area. Another similar property, just outside our parish is the Prospect Inn at the top of Minster hill, opened in 1939, and very recently extended and opened as an Express Holiday Inn this year.

Shortly before Christmas, I picked up excellent photos of two of the Erlebach brothers in whose memory our Memorial Recreation Ground was donated to the people of Birchington by their father, H. Arthur Erlebach.

Each time I visit the Whitfield Archives, I make new and interesting discoveries - all held there because of our historic connections from 800 years ago.

*Jennie Burgess,*

*Archivist to the Trust and Parish Archivist to All Saints Church*

**BUILDING FUND**

The Building Fund is growing by the month and we are seriously looking for ways of seeking grants for this in the near future. We have also received two generous grants recently, £400 from our own Parish Council and £700 from KCC, for which we extend very sincere thanks. Both these grants will be used to improve the Museum facilities.



This daughter church of All Saints in the Square was built in 1932. It was felt that the community at Minnis Bay deserved its own place of worship in the Anglican tradition. The earliest services for the Anglicans were held in Arthur Rayden's Pavilion in the Dip - "until such time as a small iron church can be built" (note from the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1904, when he granted the licence) - but this never happened.



*The Church of St Thomas, Minnis Bay*

In 1924 the new Archbishop accepted on behalf of the Diocese the generous gift of a site for a church at the Bay from Mrs Haidee Kearns in memory of her husband, Col Thomas J. Kearns. Col Kearns had died in 1920 as a result of war wounds, but prior to the war he had been Master of Ceremonies and Mace Bearer to the Mayor of London and a Freemason.

Col. George Phillips, one of the Churchwardens and trustees of the gift was also a Freemason. He worked diligently towards raising the money for the building. Mrs Kearns had also set aside a further £2,000 towards the building of the church. Many local people were extremely generous, as were the Colonel's friends in the Masonic movement and the church foundations began to be dug during 1931. The problem of what to do with the surplus chalk was solved when Mr Jackson, who owned Old Bay Cottage, just a stone's throw across the road, decided to fill in the old farm pond in front of his farmhouse. The trundling of wheelbarrow-loads of chalk over Minnis Road proved a fascinating site for the children in the area for the next few days.

The foundation stone was laid with full Masonic ceremonial in October 1932 and the first service was held on Christmas Day 1932. The little church has seen many changes over the ensuing 76 years, and we hope those early worshippers would be delighted with the comfortable new chairs and the beautiful stained glass windows, just two of the latest improvements. The congregation of in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are still as caring and devoted as their predecessors and are one of the most generous groups of people it is our privilege to know.

There were Quakers living in Birchington as early as 1690, but they found it difficult to conform to what the Overseers of the Poor and the Vicar required of them. It is for these reasons that we find them in the Overseers Account Books and the Baptism and Burial Registers.

The Quakers did not approve of paying for the poor of the parish through a tax, which had originated in the reign of Elizabeth I. Their most prominent member was Elias Hatcher. Between 1690 and 1707 Elias is reported for not paying his 'sess' (tax), but then, for some unknown reason, all was resolved because we find "Received from Elias Hatcher .... £1 12s 0d". Soon after this Elias was elected as an Overseer of the Poor himself!

The problem with the Baptisms was that their understanding of the Gospel did not allow for the Baptism of infants, so among the Quaker entries we find the registers record "Margaret Browne ... was brought to bed of a girle as yet unbaptised".

The Quakers did not approve of the form of service at funerals. In the Burial register there is mention of one of the Quakers being buried in the "new-made burying place", which has now been almost certainly established as on the site of the present Methodist Chapel, built there less than 30 years after Elias Hatcher finally found it in his heart to conform to at least some of the requirements of the established Church of the land. It is also thought that 'Southdown House', now 207 Canterbury Road, at the entrance to the Methodist Church yard, was used as the Meeting House - either in its present form or a slightly earlier version of the present building. The cellars of the house are very old indeed.



*Southdown House 2006*

## OPEN SPACES - a new series

In the next Quarterly newsletter, we shall begin a short series on Birchington's Open Spaces.

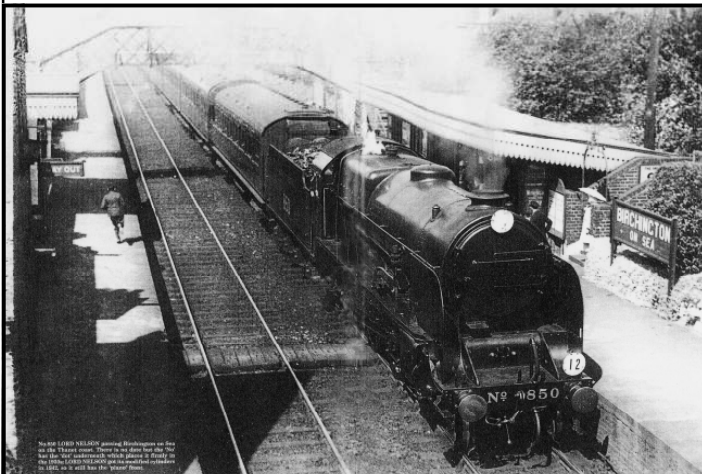
## Birchington-on-Sea Railway Station



*Birchington-on Sea Railway Station 1890*

The latest display in Martin's window in Crescent Road tells a little of the story of Birchington's 'love affair' with **the Railway**. The arrival of the station in 1863 was what changed Birchington from a tiny rural hamlet, like its Mother Church Monkton, into the thriving community we have today. There are some who heartily regret this, but the arrival of the railway also introduced some fascinating elements into our village, including the Tower Bungalows, three private schools and three good-class hotels. Sadly the second two elements have now gone, but their legacy is still with us.

The railway suddenly opened up the wider world to this rural community. Up until this point, many villagers had not moved beyond the parish boundaries, as travel to even Canterbury involved getting a ride on the carrier's cart - bumpy and not good in bad weather! You also might have to share your space with some rather iffy 'cargo', depending on what the carrier was officially going to the city for, e.g. transporting a pig to market?



*Lord Nelson Class Birchingon station - 1930s*

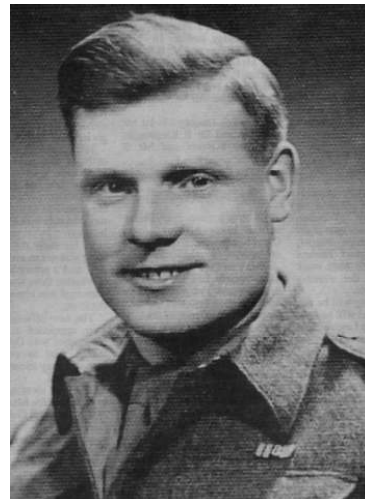
The advent of the railway also opened up the job market for the men folk of the village and brought that new breed of beings - 'the summer visitors' into our midst. It was not until the mid-1960s that this trade finally stopped - and that was due to cheap air-fares abroad.

Looking at the photos in Martin's window, transports one back to those heady days of long summers and the evocative smell of the exciting steam engines, as you stood on the railway bridge looking down on them in Birchington Station. What lovely memories!

## Death of Long-time Resident William Repsch

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With the death last month of William Repsch, Birchington has lost an interesting and heroic resident. He was captured during WW 2 while serving in the Army Catering Corps, aged just 22. He and several others became prisoners of Rommel's troops as they retreated across the desert. With William's name and knowledge of German, he was able to get their captors to photograph Rommel for them and then turn a blind eye while our lads escaped.



*William Repsch*

He was then involved in cooking for 'Monty' himself in North Africa, but when he heard him complaining about the food, William was overheard to say, "What the hell does he expect with bully beef - prime steak?" Monty apologised!

After the war he married Jill and they eventually came to Birchington in 1955, soon after their son John was born. He was in charge of the catering for the men at Manston RAF camp and often on 24-hour call-out. He served the station so well during his time with them that the Station decided to celebrate his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2006 at the Officers' Mess at the base - an honour indeed.

William's son John went to school at Woodford House in Birchington and he is remembered by many local people who have met him on his visits to Birchington from his home in London, where he is a writer.

The members of the Birchington Heritage Trust would like to convey their sympathy to Jill and her son John in their sad loss.



*The Thanet Belle - 1948*



Birchington Heritage Trust

## General Meeting

### 'Victorian Holidaymaking'

A Talk with Slides  
by  
Felicity Stafford



Thursday 27th March  
At 7.30 pm  
Village Centre

All Welcome. Non- Members £1.00

## OFFERS & REQUESTS

Offers of articles for inclusion in the newsletter will always be warmly welcomed, whether in final 'polished' form or simply in notes that need editing. Please send them to Peter Bateman, our Newsletter Editor at 1 Sea View Road, Birchington, CT7 9LB.

We would also greatly appreciate any requests for information you'd like to see in the newsletters. As it is your 'window' of what the Museum holds, we will happily dig out our own '*nuggets of gold*' for you. If we don't yet have anything on your chosen topic, it will add to the fun to see what we can find out for you. Such a request, back in March last year, will shortly end up being a full-blown talk, entitled "**The Curate and the Queen**" - all because someone asked "What do you know about ...?" The answer at that moment was "Nothing!" But since then, with dogged determination and plenty of patience, a treasure chest of information has been unearthed. There will be more on this topic in the next newsletter.

So keep the requests coming in - we love them. Send them either to Peter or to Bob Hinge on our website [www.BirchingtonHeritage.org.uk](http://www.BirchingtonHeritage.org.uk) - or to me, Jennie Burgess, 6 Alpha Road, Birchington CT7 9EQ.

Those who attended Felicity Stafford's previous talk will look forward to yet another successful evening presented by her. It will be an evening not to be missed.

## AGM

7.30pm Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> May

Speaker - **EMMA BOAST**  
Director of the Thanet Archaeological Group  
Now based at Quex Park

**Progress of latest digs in  
Thanet**

## Race Night

Friday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2008

7.30pm

Bring your own Food

Tickets £2.00  
available

Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> March

## MUSEUM

**T**he Museum continues to be well used on its Monday and Saturday openings. We recently had 27 visitors in one week and regularly have between 8 & 12 people call in.

The opening times are still 9.30 to noon both days.

## RAFFLE PRIZES

We would be very grateful for good Raffle Prizes - the kind of item you would enjoy winning!