



Preserving the Past for the Future

Newsletter

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BIRCHINGTON KALEIDOSCOPE VOLUME 2



The second volume of our Birchington Kaleidoscope is due out in November. We have removed the chapter on 'Lost Buildings', as so many of these were included in both Volumes 1 and 2 already and the two separate chapters on the Square and the Fountain have been combined into one. We have added a full chapter on 'Smuggling in Birchington' and included two short ones on 'Thanet Earth' and the 'Birchington Heritage Trust' and its Museum.

The other chapters we planned - 'Education in Birchington', 'Seventeenth Century Birchington', 'The First Bungalows', 'The Catholic Church', 'The Curate & the Queen', 'The Three Village Centres' and 'World War One in Birchington' are all safely there. We have included 160 illustrations, including two full-colour ones, and the cover this time is green. We have had the usual problem of too much information needing to be reduced to a single chapter, but most of our readers will know that there will be more photos and maps to be enjoyed in our Museum in most cases.

The book will cost £12 (plus £2 if you needed it posted to you) as we have reduced the number of copies to be printed. This unfortunately increases the unit price per book, but reduces our overall expense.

We are already planning Volume 3 - and we would like your help in suggesting topics that you would like included. A selection of another ten has been provisionally made, but can easily be amended. It would be great to include any topics you are especially interested in. Let Jennie know either at her home address or via the Museum in the next 3-4 months.



Social Committee Report: Race Night

A Race Night was held at the Centre on 29th October. Sixty members and friends enjoyed the evening and a very welcome selection of food was offered midway. Here I must thank everyone for their contributions of food with something to everyone's taste.

Howard Willicome, the race steward kept the evening running smoothly. Pat and Cliff Cole once again ran the on-course tote on behalf of Birchington Heritage Trust. Mavis White had the raffle in hand with a profit of £77.00. Geof and Edwine Pegg and Kay Cowell ably sold tote tickets before each race. Here I mustn't forget Leon who kindly set up the course for the evening. Our thanks to them all for ensuring another successful evening.

Overall profit for the Race Night was £189.20.

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Keys Unearthed by Ted Powell in 1932 Are Possibly Late 19th century



Key about 6 cm high.



Key - 15th century?
Height 6.3 cm
Width at lower end 2.2 cm

TOWER IN THE GROUNDS OF BIRCHINGTON HALL MEADOW

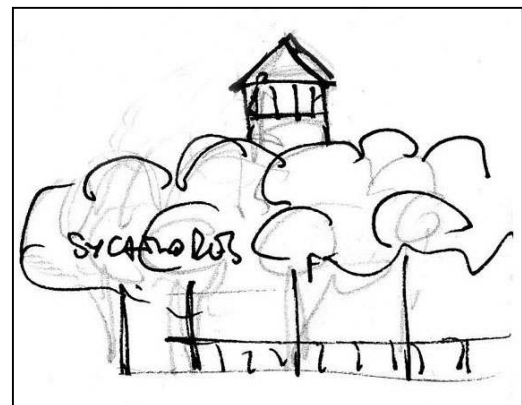
The tower once stood in the north corner of the meadow across the road from Birchington Hall. It was shown on the 1852 map that was drawn for the sale of the Hall and its 40 acres of farmland. At that point it was being sold by a member of the Friend family and was eventually bought by Thomas and Susan Gray, a wealthy couple from London.

The meadow was sold again along with the rest of the property to Spurgeon's Orphanages in 1919 and continued in their hands until the homes were finally closed in 1978. When it was sold this time, a development company bought the main site, but the small piece on the north side of the road, was bought by Thanet Council. The land had been let to local farmers and was used to grow brassica crops or potatoes. Thanet Council later allowed it to be landscaped for a park for Birchington. The tower base is still standing in the top corner of the plot, but it was enclosed into the garden of 'Trails', (132 Alpha Road) in the 1930s. This property stands at the top of a little track leading off the road between 118 on the left and 116 Alpha Road.

The drawings of the tower are by a man who lived at Trails as a child. These are the first sight most people have had of what it looked like and were lent to Nick Dermott by Kelly Marshall, the present owner of 'Trails'.

The tower was probably the 19th century owner's attempt to keep up with Quex Park owners, who already had a Look-out Tower in its northern meadow, built in about 1812. From the top of the Birchington Hall tower there was a clear view of the Thames Estuary and the shipping travelling up and down its length, as there were no trees or buildings in the way.

The drawing shows what it looked like - does it jog anyone's memory? If you have a photo with it in the background, we would be delighted to scan it - or if you can draw what you recall, please let us have a copy for the archives. It could be seen from Canterbury Road and also Albion Rd.



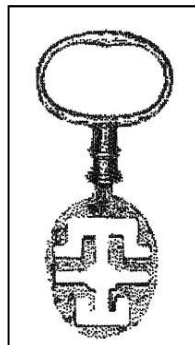
Artists impression of Look-out Tower

Ted's parents ran the general store on the Canterbury Road, near to Park Avenue corner. When his father bought the shop, he was advised to buy the piece of land beside it, although he did not particularly want it. He later discovered that the road was to be widened along this section and Margate Borough Council bought back quite a large piece of land from his frontage in 1933.

When, Ted's father first bought the shop and land several years prior to the widening, he decided to use the extra piece of land to make a pond and asked Ted (aged 10) to help dig out the soil. It was during these excavations that the two keys were unearthed. Ted's mother kept the keys in a small tin all her life and Ted eventually inherited them, together with a cutting from a national newspaper which his mother had collected very shortly after the key had been found. Towards the bottom of the cutting is a drawing of a very similar key to the second one Ted dug up, seen on the right, which the cutting states is 15th century.



Left & Above
Newspaper
Cuttings from
1932
Paper Unknown



Key - early 19th C.
(V & A opinion)

*'Select Cinema' c. 1926*

To brighten up this little hall, somebody had let loose an artist with floral compulsions, and every square inch was covered with bowers of massed azaleas and rhododendrons; huge banks of roses vied with climbing creepers right up to, and even onto, the ceiling. Funnily, the overall effect was not too overwhelming – just a general pinkish blur.¹

Ventilation in the auditorium was far from adequate, especially with a full

house on a Saturday night, in the summer. The heat and cigarette smoke even made viewing difficult. Therefore, during the interval preceding the main picture, a young lady would walk the gangways spraying all and sundry with powerful scent called 'June' in a vain attempt to freshen the place up a bit. Fortunately there was no balcony – any customers here would certainly have expired! The seating was all sloping stalls.

The evening's entertainment was usually split into the main picture 'feature', and a 'supporting' programme. With the house lights up and records playing, the audience drifted in by dribs and drabs and were shown to their correctly priced seats, where they looked around to spot and chat to neighbours and cronies. Lights dimmed, the curtains parted and the show began, with local adverts on still lantern slides, with records. Then the 'crowing cock' announced 'Pathé News', followed by a short cartoon or a sing-along, with a 'bouncing ball' picking out the words, and then the interval. As a main feature, a Laurel and Hardy film was still a crowd-puller.

From my Woodford House schooldays, I remember a silent 'Hell's Angels', with the young Ben Lyon as the intrepid fighter pilot. The very accurately modelled zeppelin dramatically emerging from the clouds (chemical smoke) was one high point, as was the fate of the crew manning the observation car of the zeppelin suspended below on a long cable, so soon to be cut loose to their deaths in the panic of the fighter's attack.

Such was the effect of 'The pictures' on me in my impressionable youth that the elation engendered by a gripping feature film would often last the whole of my bike ride home to Old Bay Cottage. Mostly free-wheeling down to the Bay in pitch darkness, the gentle summer air fanning a fevered mind still far away in the plot, could cause a situation highly dangerous to self and anybody else in my path!

ADDITIONAL NOTES (continued from last column)

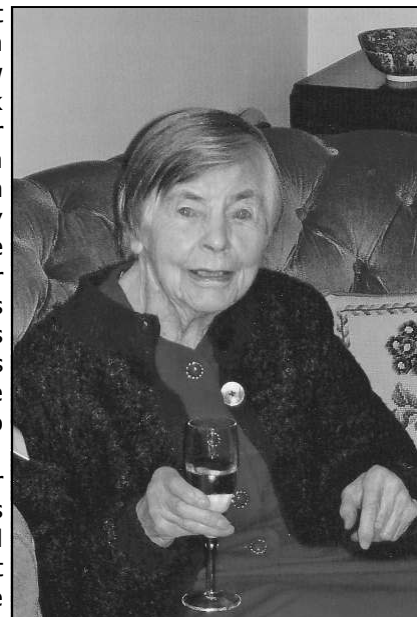
1) Two more murals were recently discovered in the foyer of the building, one on each side of the inner swing doors. They were rather damaged, but with a bit of computer wizardry, we can now see them in their original beauty. They were painted by W. Harlow in 1929

2) Few Cinemas have had so many names as the Public Hall Cinema in Birchington, which showed its first film on 24th October 1910 (just 8 years after it was built). It had six different names before it closed as a cinema in 1961. The problems with the projection room, which stood on stilts out in the side yard, were manifold. The handle for cranking the tabs and the dimmer switch were on opposite ends of the box, while the Kalee 7's had cardboard front shutters. Projectionists found the place memorable, especially one who fell through the roof void on to the 2/3d's – the hole was never properly mended. Later RH Field, proprietor from 1941-1961, rebuilt the box. The final film show was on 14th October 1961.

Vida Bates**1st October 1908 - 12th September 2010**

When Vida Bates died in mid September this year, she was only three weeks short of her 102nd birthday. She had been a part of Birchington since the late 1940s, initially as a visitor to her parents' home in at Stella Maris in Semaphore Road. She later came to look after them both until each of them died. She joined several local associations, including the Guild of Players, Friends of Quex and the Horticultural Society. From 2002 onwards, she also joined the Birchington Heritage Trust. She supported each group as much as she could and enjoyed any outings and talks, and always exhibited at the shows. Her very staunch friend Linda was able to get her to the Autumn Horticultural Show just over a week before she died. Her funeral was a wonderful celebration of her life, with many members of her large family from all over the world, as well as a host of local friends and representatives from the groups she had supported for so many years.

The editor remembers Miss Bates as a kind and caring teacher at Gainsborough House School.



Vida Bates at a party for her 100th birthday given by her family

I was sixteen and a half in the summer of 1940 and a pupil at the Ramsgate County School for Girls (now Clarendon House Grammar School for Girls). It was the year in which I was due to sit for the School Certificate Examination.

Our part of England was considered to be a safe area up until then, but after the evacuation of the British Army from Dunkirk, we found ourselves literally in the front line. The stream of casualties, tired and dishevelled men, streaming through ports like Ramsgate and Margate, which many schoolchildren witnessed, was traumatic enough, then the air attacks began. Many children had parents who had gone across in their small boats to take part in the evacuation, so it really was 'war on our doorstep'. The Government decided very quickly to move all school children away from the coast, even while the servicemen were still being moved out. I was old enough to realise how desperate the situation was and reluctant to leave my widowed mother alone to make her own plans to leave. However, with the School certificate coming up in two or three weeks time, it seemed more sensible to go with the school. Many did not come with us, but moved to places of safety with their families. I lost touch with many friends because of this.

We were collected at different points in the area by buses. We wore school uniforms, labels (even the seniors!), carried gas masks and suitcases, with raincoats or overcoats over our arms. It was a very hot day, I remember, and by the time we were put on a train we were very thirsty, tired and apprehensive. The younger ones were upset, some in tears, and we older ones were expected to 'mother' them a bit. The school staff worked like Trojans that day!

Our journey took us by a very round about route avoiding London

and the other big cities. The carriages were old and dirty with no corridors. Every available train had been commandeered for the evacuation of the troops from France. We were pulled over into sidings on several occasions to allow the hospital trains to speed past us.



Grace is on the right

Noticeboard

BHT DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 25th November 2010 - 7.30pm

**General Meeting with Talk
"Public Timekeeping in East Kent"**

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Thursday 2nd December 2010 - 7.30pm

"A Christmas Concert"
Presented by
David Ruddock and Friends
Tickets £6.50
At the Centre

A selection of music and song for everyone's taste.

We look forward to seeing you there at the start of the Christmas Celebrations

AN EVACUEE'S STORY - continued from last column

We had all brought sandwiches and a drink, even scarce chocolate which quickly melted. Soon we were all very thirsty, our lemonade gone. There were canteens set up by the W. V. S. on some station platforms for the soldiers - but not for us! Some motherly ladies took pity on us and filled our empty bottles with water when the train stopped long enough.

On arrival in Stafford (it must have been about ten hours later but I really don't know) we were taken by bus and deposited with our bags and gas masks in a large hall where billeting officers tried desperately to match us all up with hosts and hostesses. The little ones were tired and miserable and we did our best to cheer them up. The small children were the obvious favourites and we older girls were left to the last. It was a bit reminiscent of a market! After hours of waiting about a pleasant looking lady, slim, middle aged and well dressed, invited two of us to come home with her.

She took us to her home in Kingsley Road, number 15, I think it was, a large semi-detached house in what I judge was then a very good area. Our hostess was a widow, a lovely Yorkshire lady, Mrs Dean, with a daughter, Margery aged about 21 - not much older than we were. They both immediately made us feel welcome and surrounded us with sympathy and concern. It cannot have been easy for them to accept two strange teenagers into their placid routine. The two of us shared a bedroom and settled in at once.