



Newsletter

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IVY HOUSE : Church Street



Ivy House c 1910



Watson's - Church Street c.1903-4

By 1911 - 1912, Harry Stedman was running the Telephone Office from Ivy House and continued to do so until sometime between 1920 and 1924. By this date it is no longer listed under this address, although 'Henry Stedman' was still living there. It would seem that the Telephone Office had been moved over to the new Post Office site in the Square. The purpose built exchange was erected in Albion Road in the early 1930s.

Ivy House was later pulled down and the site remained empty until the 1970s, when the red brick terrace of five dwellings was built in Canterbury Road.



Ivy House site - as seen today

Ivy House (with a similar house attached to its left side which was never named) once stood in Canterbury Road opposite the Church and on the corner of what was known as Gas Row or Gas Alley. There is a terrace of new red-brick houses which now occupy the area and Nos: 227 and 229 Canterbury Road now fill the Ivy House and its partner's site.

The property was built in about 1896, first appearing in Kelly's Directory in 1897-8. The earliest occupant was William Edward Austin, a 'house decorator', but there was a shop in the front room from very early on. By 1902, there was a National Telephone Company base installed here with Mr William Walker in charge of the office. Until 1895, there had been a post office in the last shop in Park Lane, just round the corner from Ivy House, but in 1903, the new Post Office was built in the Square (now the site of a betting office).

Christmas Greetings

We thank all our readership for their past support and wish you a Happy Christmas also a healthy and prosperous New Year.

We also look forward to seeing you soon at our Museum and at our Talks, which we hold regularly.

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Some of you will be saying "Who was Jim Rainbow?" When you've read the following article, you will wish you had known him.

For those of us lucky enough to have worked with Jim in the Birchington Heritage Trust, we have always valued him for his wise and generous help in so many quiet ways, but none of us realised just what a gem we had in our midst. One of his colleagues from Monarch Aircraft Engineering (Mick Adams) painted a wonderful word-picture of 'our Jim'. While Jim was Managing Director of the firm, he set up and paid special attention to Apprenticeship Training. He was never too proud to roll up his sleeves – and this was demonstrated on the Friday before the new Training School was to open the following Monday. Watched by his wife Kay and young daughter Liz, he swept the floor of the large classroom, in readiness for the floor tiles to be laid the next day. He continued to support his latest apprentices even after his retirement, when he was very ill last year, paying them a personal visit during their apprenticeships at Luton.



Jim Rainbow

Jim was even known to have had some important discussions in the gent's loo in Hanger 7/8, - partly because Dave White was not only the cleaner there, but was also Chairman of the Works Committee!

At the end of his tribute, Mick Adams commented on Jim's OBE award – an order that very few of us knew about. The requirements for receiving this award are:

Only exceptional people are honoured.

Nominations are for only the highest possible standards of achievement.

Before nomination, the following questions should be asked :-

Has the person

- ◆ made a difference to his or her community or field of work
- ◆ brought distinction to British life and enhanced its reputation
- ◆ exemplified the best, sustained and selfless voluntary service
- ◆ demonstrated innovation and entrepreneurship
- ◆ carried the respect of his or her peers
- ◆ changed things with an emphasis on achievement
- ◆ improved the lot of those less able to help themselves
- ◆ displayed moral courage & vision in making & delivering tough choices?

Mick's final words following this list were :-

"This tribute is a reminder that Jim has done all of the above and has led a life of special interest and value."

We in the Trust say,
"Hear! Hear! And Thank You Jim"

[This is an abbreviated version of Mick Adams tribute of 13 pages. A copy of the complete document is held in the Museum.]



Ashton, Herbert (13) & Louisa Pemble - see page 3

Ashton Pemble, who lived in Paddock Road, was a well qualified carpenter and joined the Royal Flying Corps in 1914 or early 1915 as an Air Mechanic, specialising in building the wooden-framed aircraft of that period. He was based at Farnborough in Hampshire until February 1917, when he was informed he and a group of his colleagues would be going to Russia to help their airmen build and repair aircraft.

His diary begins on Feb. 15th when he was first given the news, but due to problems with getting his unit up into Russia via Murmansk, they did not actually arrive there until 11th April. His comments each day are short and to the point, often including shootings witnessed, shell damage, food rationing and shortages. His entries usually ended with how much he had spent on food etc, where he slept and what the weather was like. By the time he arrived in Moscow, the Russian 'February' Revolution had already taken place, but the sense of unrest and tension was still evident everywhere.

His unit was soon posted to the Front, which at that date was on the borders with Poland. On the 20th July he wrote, "Russians in full retreat" – and his unit was quickly pulled out and returned to Moscow and Petrograd.

Towards the end of the year, the Russian 'November' Revolution was at its height and Ashton's diary reports a day-by-day account of what he saw and was involved in. He leaves the reader almost breathless, due to the speed with which events took place in both Moscow and Petrograd. By the end of December 1917 the Russians had signed a peace treaty with Germany and the British units were pulled out of the country as quickly as possible. He landed back in Glasgow on 21st January 1918, and after a short leave, he continued his diary when his next draft took him to the outskirts of Vendôme in France.

During these last few months of the war, he learnt with great sorrow that his younger brother, Clarence, had been killed at Arras on August 1st, leaving behind a young wife and two year-old daughter. Ashton was granted six days compassionate leave to help his sister-in-law and parents in any way he could. On his return to Vendôme, it was back to assembling and repairing Sopwith 'Camels' and Avros until the great news came through that an Armistice with Germany had been signed. His description of November the 10th and 11th appears elsewhere in this newsletter. He even describes later on how the 'Top Brass' tried to keep the troops happy and occupied by organising outings and a singing competition!

He finally began his journey back to Britain via Boulogne to Folkestone on December 11th 1918 but was not demobbed until 28th February 1919.

His grandson, Derek Pemble, who has taken care of the diary for many years, has now generously given it to the Trust and we are planning to get it published eventually. Although the diary is small – just 4 x 6½ inches, it is packed full 242 pages of fascinating details, which bring to life this whole period nearly a century later.

P.S. It is with regret that we have to report the death of Derek Pemble on 25th Nov, after a brief spell in hospital. His gift of the Diary to the Trust will always be valued.

Charles Henry Fretter – served in the Royal Garrison Artillery in Communications / Signalling Section.

At the end of World War 1 he was based at Dover, receiving and forwarding messages from France and Belgium to Headquarters. Early in the morning of November 11th 1918, he received the message to say that the Armistice had just been signed at 5am that morning and was to come into effect at 11 am on the 11th November 1918. He passed the message on to headquarters, but said nothing to his colleagues, as this was against military protocol. It must have been so tempting to have leaked a whisper of it – apparently someone had done this in France where Ashton Pemble was serving with the Royal Flying Corps. On page 224 of his diary, the entry for Nov. 10th reads 'Great excitement in camp all day, about the Armistice and "some" rumours.'

Charles Fretter originally came from Horsham and came to Birchington in the latter end of his life, to live with his son and grandson in Linington Road. He had sailed in the Lusitania at some point during the war. He was the grandfather of Keith Garrison, whose own father was a confectioner for Frederick's Bakery in the village for many years.

Nov 10th (Sun)
Great excitement in camp all day, about the armistice, and "some" rumours. Work finished 11-45. Early day but cold.

Nov 11th (Mon)
Armistice signed at 5-30m this morning. We had the news here at 11-30. Everyone immediately downed tools, amid great excitement. At dinner time, the noise in the dining hall was terrific, but nobody wanted any dinner. The order came that all were to be ready at 1-30^{pm}, to march to Vendôme, and that we were to stand off for 24 hours.

(225)
We paraded at the time stated, with band, flags, banners, and effigy of the Kaiser (left arm deformed). The concert party were all in fancy costumes, as also were some of the bands. We marched round to the Ward Room, where the Colonel, and the Chaplain each made a short speech, and after cheers for the King, officers etc, left for Vendôme. On reaching the town, we marched through the principal streets, the effigy of the Kaiser causing great amusement to the people lining the streets, and it was jammed in the market square, which was packed with people. Bill, Frank and I had a walk through the town after, and then went to a cafe for tea. We started back to the camp, reaching there at 7-30^{pm}. From 9^{pm} onwards we were to rest and from the town, in all night if necessary. At 10^{pm} the bottles that had been got for this occasion, were produced, and then the fun commenced. I went to bed however at 11-30, having a splitting headache, which was not improved at all with the singing. Each hut was just the same as ours, all had got a little something in. Lights were not turned out until 12^{midnight}. But numerous candles had been provided for that emergency. They kept it up until about 4^{am} in our hut, when they started to put one another in their hammocks, but some gave it up, and slept on the floor, it was certainly safer.

IRIS EMIGRATES to the STATES



*Iris Bedwell
after her 90th Birthday*

In early September this year, Iris Bedwell left Birchington to go and live with her daughter and family in Redwood City, California. It was a gigantic decision for someone who was almost 90 years old, but the move appears to have suited her very well. The photo of her which we have included was taken on her 90th birthday, just two weeks after she arrived there.

Iris was born in Wales, but married Alf Bedwell from Birchington in 1941. She came here for a very short honeymoon, but without Alf (but that's another story!). She came to live in the village when Alf was demobbed in 1945 and had been here ever since. As soon as their daughter, Barbara was old enough, Iris worked in the Sea Bathing Hospital for a number of years. She then took on a small florist's shop in Station Road, upgrading to a double sized one a short while afterwards. When she retired aged 80, she then took on a small shop in the Square for about 3 more years.

Iris was a driving force in the Birchington Chamber of Commerce and later became a Parish Councillor when Birchington was allowed to have its own Parish Council once more. She was also very involved with the Red Cross for a number of years.

She is always delighted to hear news of Birchington and was greatly amused – and chuffed – at the recent letter in the Gazette, suggesting that all the Parish Council's troubles would be put right if only Iris Bedwell would come back.



Iris Bedwell's Shop in Station Road

Noticeboard

Social Committee Report

On 27th October we held a "Race Night". We had a friendly evening which raised approximately £200 for the Trust. Here we must thank Pat and Cliff Cole who organised the tote and paid out the lucky winners. Howard Willicome, as always, kept the evening and races moving along.

On the 1st of November, we held our last coffee morning due to lack of support. To those members who came along, I would like to thank you for your support and hope that you enjoyed your coffee and a chat.

At all of our events Mavis White always ensures there are a wide variety of prizes in the raffle. (Any prizes that you might be able to donate for future events will be gratefully received). Thank you, Mavis.

As we are almost in December, I must remind everyone of our annual Music Evening with David Ruddock and Friends, on 1st December, starting at 7.30 pm at a cost of £6.50 per person. The programme includes a mixed selection of music including Christmas favourites.

During the interval you might like to join us and enjoy a mince pie.

As usual a raffle will take place, plus we are holding a separate raffle for a huge Teddy which is looking for a new home for Christmas.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and to wish you all "A Happy Christmas"

Dot Raven

Help Needed

We are in need of at least two more stewards for the Museum. If you can spare a couple of hours about once a month (or two monthly) we will be very grateful. Phone 842988



BHT DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

A Christmas Concert

By

David Ruddock and

Friends

Thursday 1st December

2011

7.30 pm

Tickets £6.50 per person