



Preserving the past for the future

Newsletter

Summer 2022
Issue 77

www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk & on Facebook Charity No. 1099250

Future Events

No Meeting in August

Thursday September 29th 2022 'Pirate Radio' & Offshore Forts Bob Le Roi

Thursday October 27th 2022 'Bird Wise' Greg Bessant

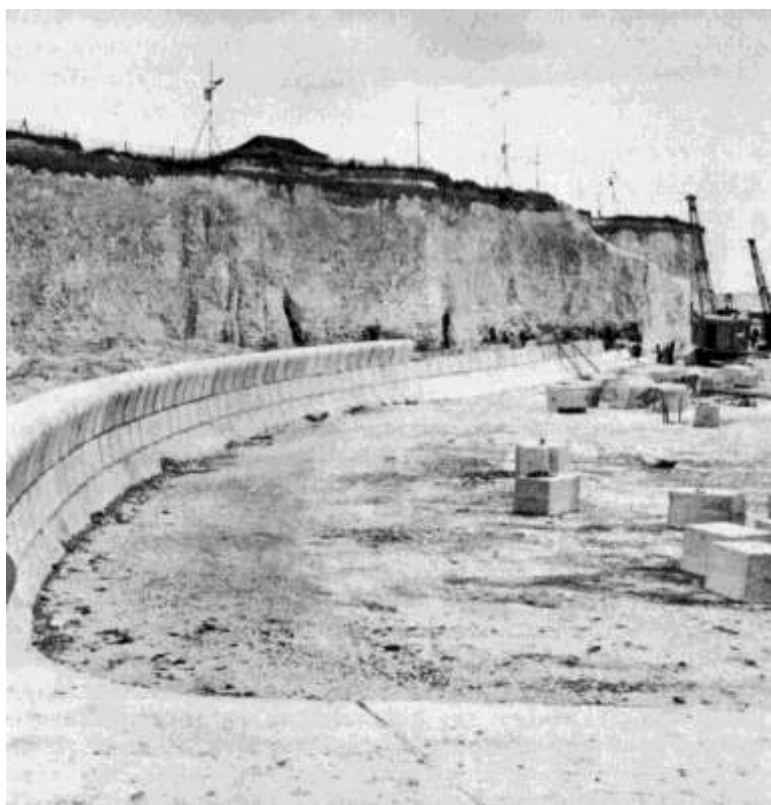
Thursday November 24th 2022 'Quiz Night' Doug & Ann Holmes

Sea Defences: New Promenade From Minnis Bay To Beresford Gap

John Robinson

The contract for this project was awarded to Holland & Hannen & Cubitts (Great Britain) Ltd. This was signed in September 1961. The first six months was spent preparing a block casting yard at nearby Plum Pudding Island, and then the actual casting of the facing blocks. 2000 had been made when work started on the beach in March 1962. A further 2000 were then made. The total length of the promenade wall was 930yards (850metres). The unprotected cliffs at the base erode in this area at around 12 inches per annum, (the cliffs at Forness Bay Cliftonville are harder, therefore don't erode as much).

The work was planned so that much of it would be done during the summer months. To keep to schedule more plant was used than would normally be the case of a project of this nature. As much of the work depended on the state of the tide, shift work had to be arranged to work during the hours of darkness. The site was therefore floodlit by a series of 1000watt lamps along the cliff top (see photo), this was essential to maintain accuracy in block setting at night.

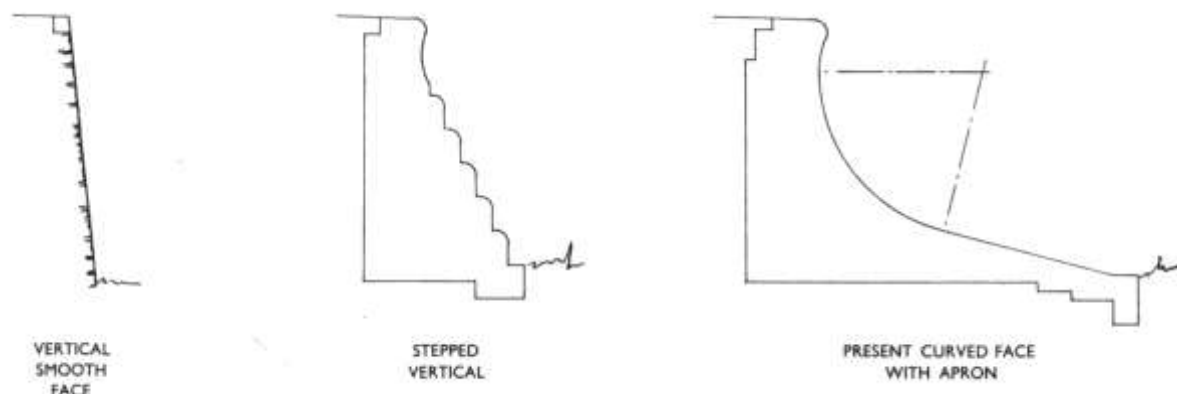


Once the sea walls were finished the promenade and rear wave wall, cave filling (there were twelve of these), and rampways could be constructed behind its protection and without the need for double tide shift on every operation.

At its peak the plant on the site included: five excavators, five cranes, one 16 ton bulldozer for spreading and compaction, two dumpers for carting chalk, two larger dumpers for carrying concrete mixers, two 20 ton silos, and five lorries for transporting the blocks to the beach.

The floodlights can be seen on large tripods along the cliff top at Beresford Gap. Photo shows the filling behind the new sea wall. Cont. on page 2.

This illustration shows the profiles of three designs, typical of the cast blocks used in our area.



Detailed contract planning of the site, including the casting yard and work on the beaches was an important feature of Cubitts operation. Onsite the organisation consisted of a general Foreman assisted by an Engineer Sub Agent on each beach site, plus a Foreman in the casting yard. One engineer was responsible for concrete control, and one or more for setting out each beach site.



This picture shows the construction of the sea wall at Minnis Bay with formwork erected for in situ backing with concrete.

Some General Data

Coping level	12.00 ft.
Total protected height	18.00 ft.
Total wall length	2790 ft.
Tender estimated	£137,865
Total precast units	5799
Caves protected	12

The lower promenade from Beresford Gap to Epple Bay finally received approval to be constructed in November 1979. Several houses along this stretch had parts of their back garden fall into the sea, so this was welcome news.

The information in this article was found in a 16 page booklet produced by George Sewell, who was the Borough Engineer, Surveyor and Town Planning Officer. This was printed for a meeting of the Institution of Municipal Engineers and Association of Kent Surveyors. This booklet will now be placed into the museums files.

I was recently contacted by Colin Coates, from Australia, to see if I could assist in finding a photograph of William Leslie Armstrong, who was Margate Borough Engineer from 1936-1957. Colin is writing biographies of ex pupils of The Salt Schools in Saltaire in West Yorkshire. Being a volunteer at Margate Museum, as well as B.H.T, he thought I might know of one, but unfortunately, I couldn't help, but he sent me details he had already found and they included an interesting Birchington link.

The Glasgow Express 12th April 1939. - *Keen interest is being taken in important work that is being carried out to prevent coastal erosion and serious damage to the chalk cliffs of South-east England. To preserve these cliffs, which have been a delight of visitors for centuries, Mr W.L. Armstrong, Margate's surveyor-engineer, has, I hear, invented an original method.*

Apparently the cliffs average 30 to 40 feet in height and are affected in two ways. Erosion at the cliff base is caused by the sea waves and also by the air in the fissures being compressed. At the top, winter frosts cause cracking of the chalk and subsequent landslips.

Mr Armstrong's aim is to consolidate the cliff face by high pressure injections of liquid cement, and this work is already underway at Grenham Bay, Birchington. If results are satisfactory, further sections will be so treated. These great white cliffs are well known to Londoners, who spend many week-ends on them in the summer, and the operations are welcome both as an engineering experiment in a novel use of cement and as a commendable effort to save one of England's characteristics.

Cliffs at Grenham Bay 1930s.



Following his retirement in 1957 William Armstrong and his wife lived in Cliftonville and was a keen supporter of Margate Sea Cadet Corps. In 1964 William and his wife were on board a ship, going to visit their daughters in Australia and New Zealand, when he died at sea. The report of his death in the Thanet Times states: *“Mr Armstrong was largely responsible for the reconstruction of the town as a result of 81 raids by German bombers. He was also in charge of clearing up operations after the*

disastrous floods of 1953.

I have been unable to find any further information on this experiment, but if any of you know anything I would like to hear from you.

RAY HOUSE: an update

In the last newsletter was a short ‘Then & Now’ article on Ray House, in Sea Road. I mentioned that I was unable to name the five people pictured outside the original building. One of our members Maureen Makepeace, has been in touch to give me names of two of them. On the extreme left is Basil Fanshawe Jagger (Joe), the father of Mick Jagger. Joe lived nearby and was involved in raising a petition against the demolition of Ray House. Next to him is local councillor Bert Tree, the other three people are still unidentified but are believed to be neighbours. *Thank you, Maureen.*

During the General Strike in May 1926 Birchington produced its own newspaper. The following account appeared in the Thanet Advertiser:

That there is initiative to be found in the quiet, unassuming little village of Birchington has often been proved, but the smartest illustration of the fact was given during the days of the strike, when it outshone many larger towns by publishing its own newspaper –“The Birchington Evening News”.

This innovation in the life of the village emanated from the action of the ‘Operative Building & Decorators Ltd’, by installing wireless apparatus on the first day of the strike and exhibiting the news bulletins in their windows as they were received. These were eagerly read.

Realising that many would prefer to read and digest the day’s news when at home in the evening, Mr H Palmer, of local dairy fame, and Mr B. Osmotherly, of the O.B.D.Ltd., conceived the idea of issuing for sale the complete bulletins.

Accordingly these gentlemen, with the help of others, produced on Wednesday morning – the 2nd day of the strike – “The Birchington Daily Mail” and in the evening the” Evening News”. Although the “Daily Mail” only saw two issues, the “Evening News” continued until the crisis was over.

During the first few days it consisted of several foolscap sheets of stencilled matter, but the demand became so great it was found necessary to engage the services of a printer, and a four page paper was published.

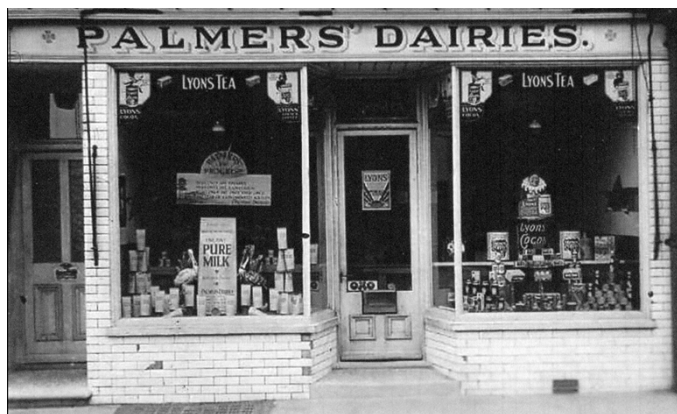
It was circulated in Westgate and even showed sufficient daring to go as far as Margate. The first day 400 copies were printed, but this number eventually doubled. Many copies were sent abroad.

The proceeds of the sale of this newspaper will be handed to the Mayor of Margate for the Cottage Hospital Building Fund.

The Thanet Advertiser reported that with the exception of the stationmaster and one of the two clerks, all the men at Birchington railway station acted upon the strike notices, but no other branches of industry in the village ceased work.

A number of special constables were sworn in, and some were called upon to do duty during the night at various places, including the petrol tanks in Minnis Road.

The General Strike was called by the Trades Union Congress to prevent wage reduction and worsening conditions for coal miners. It lasted for nine days, from 4th May until 12th May 1926.



Palmers Dairy in Station Road, where Tags Pet Rescue are today.



Operative Building & Decorators were in Park Lane, but moved to Station Approach where Chawner’s clock repairers are today.