



BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST

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Preserving the past for the future

Newsletter

Autumn 2022

Issue 78

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

Future Events: Thursday 24 November 2022: Quiz Night Doug and Ann Holmes
Thursday 23 February 2023: Riding the Wall of Death Felicity Stafford

YOUR NEWSLETTER – 20 YEARS ON

Twenty years have passed since the Trust published its first Newsletter for members, following the inaugural general meeting that was held in May 2002.

2022 has, in several ways, mirrored the events of 2002. The Commonwealth Games were held that year in Manchester. Fast forward to Birmingham 2022 where Team England won 176 medals. England have participated in every tournament since the first was held in 1930 and have topped the medals table seven times. In 2002, HM The Queen celebrated her Golden Jubilee and this year we witnessed the unique and joyous occasion of The Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

Both years have been marked with great sadness too. In 2002, HRH Princess Margaret died; only six weeks later HM The Queen Mother also passed away. The death in September this year of HM Queen Elizabeth II marked a profound and sad moment in the history of our nation, but the beginning of a new era with King Charles III becoming Monarch and Head of State.

In this – our 78th regular issue - we pay tribute to John and Janet Robinson as they move to pastures new, continue our series on the Birchington alphabet, include a fascinating feature on the "dangerous coastline" and a snippet about the local postal services in 1938.

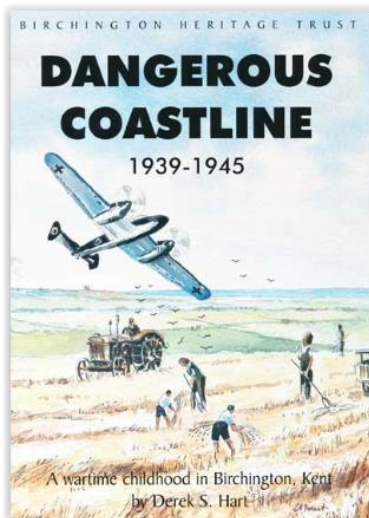
Thank you for your continued support. On behalf of the Trustees, we wish you all the best for the festive season and for the year ahead.

Rod Giddins, Editor and Publicity Officer

JANET & JOHN ROBINSON LEAVING

Janet & John are off to pastures new to the historic city of Chester where they will find plenty of fresh and interesting history to enthral them. They both joined our Committee in 2012 with John becoming Chairman in 2017.

During their tenure they have produced many interesting articles for our Newsletter with John then taking over as Editor to produce the Lockdown News Sheet during Covid which was distributed by email. Notable articles have been Sea Defences, the Rifle Range and researching the many old newspaper cuttings they found on line relating to Birchington. Combined with this John/Janet have given talks for our scheduled events, as well as booking outside speakers. We are indebted to John for his guidance as our Chairman and to both of them for ensuring the smooth running of the Trust and we wish them well in their future endeavours in Chester.



DANGEROUS COASTLINE

One of the best-selling books in the Trust's museum is '*Dangerous Coastline*' by Derek Hart. Derek was only five when war was declared. His family stayed in Birchington for all the war years, and this book is full of his reminiscences of life for the locals, school children and service personnel.

These particular entries for 1944 caught my interest. They read: - *One day the news got round that Winston Churchill was to visit the area – we even knew the time he would pass through Birchington Square. We stood outside the Post Office to see him, as he approached from the direction of Minnis Bay. We waved to him as he sat in the back of a big black car. He returned our wave with his huge*

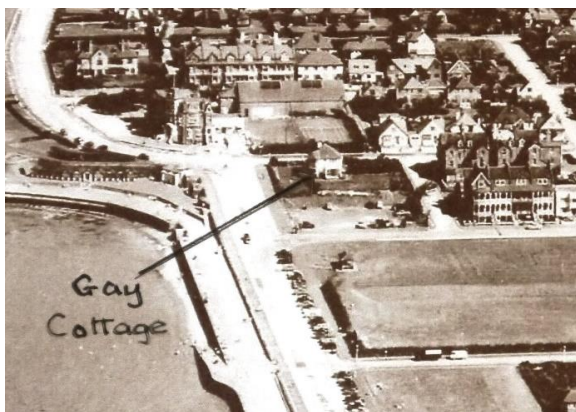
cigar in his hand, and a broad smile on his face. He continues: - As I made my way home, I kept wondering why he had visited this small dot on the map What was there so vital and important that he had to see it for himself.

My father often spoke of "Gay Cottage" at the end of our road. Civilians whom we suspected were scientists visited it at times. 'A lot goes on underground there' I would often hear in his conversations with mother..... There was also Plum Pudding Island, consisting of marshes and sewage works. Why was it so heavily guarded by our troops, with civilians not allowed within three-quarters of a mile of the area? There appeared to be something of vital importance and our parents had definite ideas of their own about the region.

Later Derek realised that this incident was related to 'Operation Fortitude' and the D Day landings. In May 1944 two separate operations were set in motion. 'Operation Overlord' was the official one; 'Fortitude' based in Kent, with its huge build-up of tanks and equipment in the Thanet area was a subterfuge designed to fool the enemy. Even Churchill's visit to Birchington was part of this deception.

In one of his speeches Churchill said: "*In wartime truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies.*" It's good to know that Birchington played its part in this operation.

Derek Hart's fascinating book is available in the Birchington Heritage Trust Museum and costs £7.



GAY COTTAGE This was a large house and garden at Minnis Bay, opposite today's children's play area. During WW2, the house was used as a mini headquarters by the military, and the cellar was reinforced with concrete. It was built in the 1920s and demolished in the 1950s. The Bay View flats now occupy the plot.

Janet Robinson

BIRCHINGTON ALPHABET

LIME KILNS. There were two lime kilns in Birchington. Records from 1688 show that one stood in Canterbury Road, just west of the advertising hoardings. The second kiln was at the rear of the two big houses on the corner of Park Road. This is shown on a 19th century map. The lime extracted from the kilns was used in mixing mortar for building, and also in lime-wash, which was the only form of paint in earliest times.

LITTLE GORE END. This thatched cottage stands on the corner of Gallwey Avenue and Minnis Road. It was originally the farmhouse attached to Little Gore End Farm. The original house was built in the mid to late 1500s and remained unaltered until the 19th century when it was enlarged slightly. A completely new wing was added in the 20th century.

LYCH GATE. The lych gate we see at the entrance to All Saints Church originally stood at the entrance to Woodford House School playing fields. It was paid for by old boys of the school in 1929 in memory of its founder Henry Arthur Erlebach. When the school moved to Margate in December 1960 it had been planned to re-erect it at the new premises. When this was found to be impossible the suggestion was made that the gate should be presented to the Church. The dedication took place in February 1961.

MALT HOUSES. These used to stand on land in Minnis Road, behind today's Catholic Church. There were two of them, and they were used to dry the barley after it had been soaked and allowed to begin to sprout. The kilns were needed to dry the malt before it could be used in the manufacture of malted whisky, and malt for food and drinks. Also on the site were two cottages. By 1955 the site was occupied by S. Steenhuis and Sons Ltd, fruit and vegetable preservers and caterers' suppliers. They used the old building, but also built some new housing for their storage and freight transport. Local women used to work from home peeling the onions!! The new developments built on the site in early 2000 are called 'The Maltings' and 'Upper Maltings Close'.

MANSFORD HOUSE. This house was built on the corner of Spencer Road and Gainsborough Road in 1915 and financed by Ronald Jones. He was a generous benefactor to the Mansford Street Church and Mission in Bethnal Green Road. When finished this property was presented to the Church to use as a children's convalescent and holiday home. During WW1 the house was used for convalescent soldiers. By 1959 the Children's Home was no longer functioning, and the house was sold as two homes. The western half became Sacketts House and the other half remained as Mansford Lodge. It was eventually reunited by Dr Hayden around 1985 when it was run as a home for old people. It closed in the year 2000. There was always a link with St Mary's Home in Beach Avenue and after WW2 the Matron managed both homes together.

MOUNT LAVINA COURT. This plot, at 195 Canterbury Road, first had a house on it in the late 1800s, called The Lodge. In 1931, its name changed to Malvern House and, by 1935, it was Mount Lavinia Private Hotel. It was used by the army during WW2 and by 1961 it was Westgate on Sea Working Men's Social Club. The old house was demolished and, in about 1988, a block of flats was built and named Mount Lavinia.

POSTAL FACILITIES

This was the heading of an entry I found in a 1938 copy of a holiday guide, with the title 'Birchington-on-Sea. A Holiday Haven for Particular People.' The history of the Post Office in Birchington has been written about before, so I will just say that in 1938 it was housed in the purpose-built property at the junction of The Square and Albion Road. It was here from c1903 until March 1994.

The holiday guide listed the collection and delivery times of mail from this post office and makes interesting reading.

Collection – 5.30 a.m. 8.45 a.m. 10.15 a.m.

2 p.m. 4 p.m. 7 p.m. 8.30 p.m.

Deliveries - 6.45 a.m. 10.15 a.m. 5.15 p.m.

Anything posted in Birchington up to 2 p.m. is delivered in London the same day, and letters in the last collection reach London by the first post next morning.

How things have changed!!



Janet Robinson

DISPLAYS AT THE MUSEUM

A reminder that the Museum houses an astonishing archive as well as publications for sale and displays of memorabilia from Birchington and the local area.

A recent addition to our collection is a beautiful silk wedding dress made in the 1940's by Phyllis Wood of Birchington.

This rare item was made using parachute silk. Young and resourceful brides-to-be made their wedding gowns long before the end of WW2. Determined women, who used parachutes that their future husbands had used, ensured nothing was wasted. The act became a symbol of resourcefulness and respect to honour servicemen.

Phyllis Wood's beautiful dress was worn on her wedding day when she married Brian Peakall at All Saint's Church in 1948.

Please pay us a visit to see this exquisite dress any time during normal Library opening hours.

Twenty years ago, the newly formed Trust called for volunteers and Trustees. Today, our stalwart band of volunteers man the Museum on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays between 0930 and 1230 hours. They – along with other volunteers – help to organize events, manage our archives and carry out research to answer questions from people in the UK and overseas. We would welcome new volunteers and Trustees to assist in managing the charity into the future. If you can help in any role, please get in touch. You will be made most welcome.