



BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST

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Preserving the past for the future

Newsletter

Spring 2023

Issue 80

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

Forthcoming Events:

- Thursday 25 May 2023 – Talk by Pat Orpwood: *The Amazing Hall Caine - not just a friend of Rossetti*
- Thursday 29 June – Annual General Meeting and short talks on local heritage
- Thursday 27 July – Talk by Archaeologist Steve Tomkinson

NOTICEBOARD

- **NOTICE IS GIVEN THAT THE TRUST'S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING will be held on Thursday 29 June 2023 at 7.30 pm in The Centre, Alpha Road, Birchington.** This is an opportunity to discuss museum issues and to elect your committee for the following year. An agenda will be sent to members *by email* by 22 June so please contact us if you do not receive this.
- **Your Committee:** As a registered charity the Trust is governed by a Constitution and run by a Management Committee elected at the AGM. Current committee members are Colin Bridge, Jenny Burgess, Rod Giddins, Heather Letley, Bob Hinge, Neville Hudson, Mike Kite, Gillian Lodge and Luke Warburton. Nomination forms are enclosed with this Newsletter. If you would like to stand for election and need more information, please contact an existing Trustee or email birchington.ht@gmail.com
- **Fees:** Subscriptions were due on 1 May 2023. (£12.50 for couple at the same address, £7.50 for individual) payable by Standing Order, cheque or cash.
- **Membership:** includes 4 free talks and 4 free newsletters each year. Members are also very welcome to volunteer in the museum and to help with events and fund-raising.
- **Publications:** The Trust has an extensive range of publications for sale either through the website or at the museum, in addition to our archives, so if you are interested in a particular aspect of Birchington's history, do call in – we may have just what you are looking for!

In this edition John Robinson takes a look at how Canterbury Road has changed over time, Heather Letley illustrates the story of the Dambusters and their connection to Reculver and we've unearthed original documents regarding "Fernleigh" in Canterbury Road. I'm also asking for your stories and images from the Coronation of King Charles III so that we can include these in our archives for future generations. Until next time, enjoy all that Birchington has to offer and I look forward to seeing you at the AGM in June.

Rod Giddins
Editor & Publicity Officer

Canterbury Road – Then and Now



The image above (left) is from a postcard taken around 1915. Today we know it as Canterbury Road, taken from the junction of Epple Road, and looking in the direction of The Square. East End Villas are seen on the left, which still stand today. In 1915 the road was known as Hall Avenue. It was named after a prominent building “Birchington Hall,” which stood on the left hand side in the area where Charlesworth Drive is today, now part of the Birch Hill Housing Estate established in 1986. Prior to this the site had been Spurgeon's Childrens Home, which re-located to Birchington from London in 1952. The photo on the right shows the same scene today at the junction with Epple Road.



Moving a little further on towards Westgate-on-Sea, but looking in the direction of The Square, the photo on the left was taken around 1936. On the left by the roadside a board is advertising residential opportunities on the new Palm Bay Estate, Cliftonville. This project was originally laid out with wide avenues with both bungalows and detached houses on land that was previously fields. Delayed somewhat because of WW2, building continued in phases. The building occupying the central position was demolished in 1954. Behind the hoarding on the right advertising the delights of Dreamland, can be seen the end house of York Terrace. The same scene today (right) shows new housing built on both sides of Canterbury Road. The junction seen on the left is the junction with Edward Drive, which leads to other new roads - Marilyn Crescent, Anne Close and Rosewood Way.

Canterbury Road has been widened over the years, particularly from Birchington through to Garlinge, with a dual carriageway running from near King Ethelbert’s school to St. James Park Road, Garlinge.

Being a major road we have a good collection of photographs of Canterbury Road in our records, stretching from Brooks End to Queen Bertha’s Avenue. These date from around 1900 to the present day, in both black and white and colour. Some of them are postcards. To see the postcard albums, ask the volunteers on duty during the museum’s manned hours.

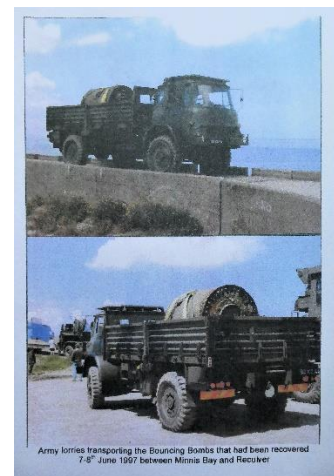
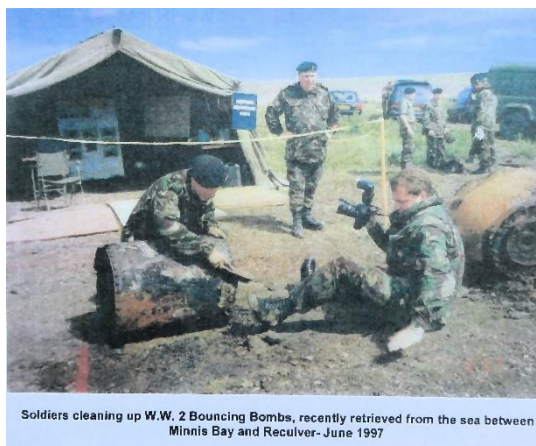
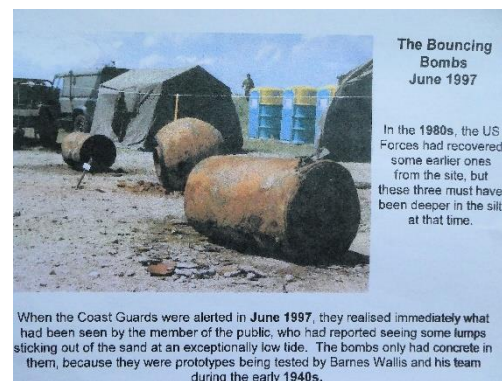
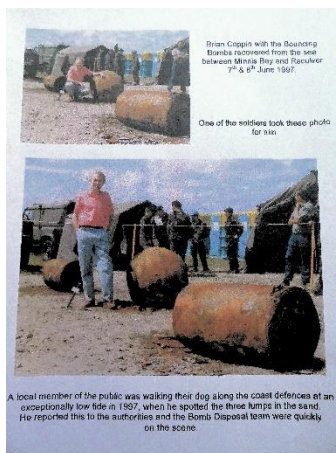
John Robinson

80 years ago – Operation Chastise (“the Dambusters”)

Operation Chastise, commonly known as the “Dambusters Raid”, was an attack on dams in Nazi Germany, carried out on the night of 16/17 May 1943 by 617 Squadron RAF Bomber Command, later called “the Dam Busters”. They used special “bouncing bombs” developed by Barnes Wallis, Assistant Chief Designer at Vickers.

The first air drop trials were at Chesil Beach in Dorset in December 1942; these used a spinning 4 ft 6 in (1.4m) sphere dropped from a modified Vickers Wellington bomber, which were used until the first modified Lancasters became available in April 1943. The tests continued at Chesil Beach and at Reculver, near Herne Bay, using revised designs of the mine and variations of speed and height. The story of the Dambusters is legendary, but less well known is the fact that some of the test bombs were discovered by local man Brian Coppin whilst walking his dog near Reculver in June 1997.

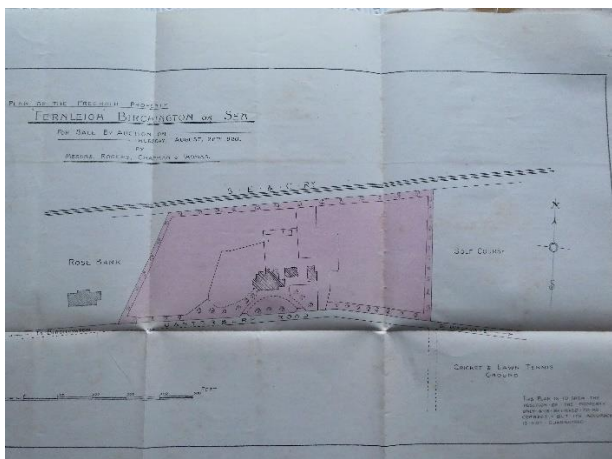
The pictures and narrative below (from our archives) show what occurred then:



After the war, Barnes Wallis worked at Brooklands in Surrey as Head of Vickers-Armstrong’s Research & Development Department. He and his staff worked on many futuristic aerospace projects including supersonic flight and "swing-wing" technology. Following the terrible death toll of the aircrews involved in the Dambusters raid, he made a conscious effort never again to endanger the lives of his test pilots. His designs were extensively tested in model form, and he became a pioneer in the remote control of aircraft. He died in 1979. There is a statue to Wallis, created by American sculptor Tom White in 2008, near the east cliff in Herne Bay.

Heather Letley/Rod Giddins

From the Archives: Queen Bertha's School



We recently displayed items from a uniform worn by the senior girls at the school after World War 2. The school opened in 1929, initially occupying a house called “Fernleigh”, situated along the Canterbury Road. In our archives, we have a copy of the original sale particulars when the property was auctioned in 1920 on behalf of the Executors of Robert Grant JP deceased. A plan and extract from the particulars are shown here.

Birchington, Isle of Thanet

PARTICULARS

THE WELL-DESIGNED AND
Substantially-built Freehold Detached Residence

STANDING IN ITS OWN ATTRACTIVE
— GROUNDS, AND KNOWN AS —

“FERNLEIGH,”

Canterbury Road, Birchington, Isle of Thanet, Kent,

On the main road between Margate and Canterbury, along which there is an excellent service of motor buses. Midway (one mile) between Westgate-on-Sea and Birchington Stations on the S.E. and C. Railway, from which there are good services of trains to the City and West End. Approached by a Carriage sweep with Lawn in front. On the South and West sides of the house is a well constructed Verandah.

The Accommodation is comfortably arranged on Three Floors, and comprises:

On the First Floor.

LARGE FRONT BEDROOM, measuring 29 ft. by 19 ft., with Bay and other windows, Register Stove and Central Heating.

NORTH BEDROOM, measuring 23 ft. by 17 ft., with Register Stove and Central Heating.

BATHROOM, fitted Enamelled Bath, having hot and cold services and shower bath, also brass rail steam heated towel drier.

On the Ground Floor.

ENTRANCE AND LOUNGE HALL, with parquet flooring, handsome stained glass window and radiator.

MORNING ROOM, measuring 20 ft. 6 in. by 15 ft. 6 in. (on the left of the Entrance Hall), fitted with Marble Mantel and Register Stove.

By Order of the Executors of Robert Grant, J.P., deceased.

ISLE OF THANET

MIDWAY BETWEEN WESTGATE-ON-SEA AND BIRCHINGTON STATIONS ON THE S. E. AND C. RAILWAY. ADJOINING EIGHTEEN-HOLE GOLF COURSE. ∴ CHALK SOIL. ∴ COMPANY'S GAS AND WATER.

Particulars, Plan, and Conditions of Sale
of the
Attractive Freehold Modern Residence
known as

“Fernleigh,” Birchington-on-Sea

SOUTH ASPECT. SURROUNDED BY TREES. ESPECIALLY SUITABLE FOR PRIVATE OCCUPATION, HOTEL OR SCHOLASTIC PURPOSES.

ELEVEN BEDROOMS. TWO BATHROOMS. FIVE GROUND FLOOR RECEPTION ROOMS. STABLING AND GARAGE, EACH WITH LIVING ROOMS OVER. FIVE CONSERVATORIES. DAIRY. PIGGERIES AND OUTBUILDINGS.

The beautifully laid out Pleasure Grounds comprise: Tennis Lawn. Flower Beds. Shrubberies and highly productive fruit and vegetable gardens. Two valuable Meadows on the East and West sides of the Residence, having frontages of about 500 feet to the Canterbury Road. The whole

Covering an area of nearly Seven Acres.

Which will be Sold by Auction by Messrs.

Rogers, Chapman & Thomas

(Partners, H. M. S., and V. B. ROGERS).

At The Sea View Hotel, Birchington-on-Sea,
on Thursday, 26th August, 1920, at 2.45 p.m.
(Unless previously disposed of).

Solicitors: Messrs. A. F. and R. W. TWEDDIE, 5, Lincoln's Inn Fields, W.C. 2.
Auctioneers: Messrs. ROGERS, CHAPMAN and THOMAS,
The Terrace Office, Westgate-on-Sea, Kent,
78, Gloucester Road, South Kensington, S.W. 7,
50, Belgrave Road, Westminster, S.W. 1.
Furniture Sale Rooms, 125, Gloucester Road, S.W. 7.

From whom Particulars, Plan and Conditions of Sale may be obtained.



The Coronation of a monarch is an event that has not been witnessed in the UK since Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was crowned in June 1953. 50 years later our Newsletter (No. 4, May 2003) included readers' memories of that occasion. Over the next few weeks, our museum display will include some memorabilia from the event.

As we continue to collect more contemporary articles and objects, we would welcome your stories and images from the Coronation of King Charles III. These will be added to our collection for future generations to refer to and enjoy. Please send them via our email: birchington.ht@gmail.com or bring them to the museum during the hours volunteers are on duty. Objects can be donated or loaned to the Trust.