



# BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST

*Preserving the past for the future*

## Newsletter

Autumn 2023

Issue 82

[www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk](http://www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk) & on Facebook Charity No. 1099250

### **Forthcoming Events:**

Thursday 30 November 2023 – Quiz Night with Doug and Ann Holmes, The Centre, Alpha Road

Thursday 29 February 2024 – Details will be announced in the next issue of the Newsletter

Welcome to the autumn edition of the Trust's Newsletter. See Noticeboard below for headline news.

## NOTICEBOARD

### **New Policies**

Trustees have been busy updating some of the policies that govern the way we operate. These include Safeguarding, Data Protection (or Privacy), Expenses and Volunteering.

We will review the Trust's Constitution as it has not been updated since it was approved in 2003. Any changes will need agreement at the AGM and approval by the Charity Commission.

### **Membership**

Trustees have reluctantly decided to increase subscriptions from 1 May 2024. The new annual rate for existing members will be £10 (single) and £15 (two adults at the same address). Anyone joining after 1 January 2024 will pay the new rates but, in line with current practice, their membership will continue until the end of the next financial year (30 April 2025). These increased rates still represent great value for money. It's even better for the Trust if members who are UK taxpayers also make a Gift Aid Declaration.

### **Calendars**

Our 2024 "heritage" calendars are on sale at the museum. Costing just £5 each, they make a lovely Christmas gift and help raise funds for the Trust.

In this edition we report on two successful heritage events. Luke Warburton tells us about "Benchmarks" in Birchington. We give a mention to our small band of volunteers who help run the Trust and museum. A local resident shares her memory of "Guy Fawkes" and his link to Carl Conway, who featured in Newsletter 79. Former chairman, John Robinson, provides us with a feature about Jenner's Garage in Canterbury Road, which was demolished in 1971.

Enjoy - and thanks for your continued support.

*Rod Giddins (Editor)*

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## **Out and About with the Trust in September**

This year, the Trust participated in the Heritage Open Days festival and hosted a Birchington Map Exhibition on 10 September in Church House. It proved to be an extremely popular event with almost 150 visitors through the doors. Over £200 was raised from donations and sales of publications and memberships. We were thrilled to share our feature 1840 Tithe map, as well as a number of original Ordnance Survey maps, dating back to 1872. It was interesting to see, through this collection of maps, how our beloved village of Birchington has grown over the years. Our “Benchmark” stand also attracted a lot of interest from visitors and many spoke of their plans to look out for them on their journey home.



*A Benchmark in Station Road*

Former Chairman, John Robinson, wrote an article about Benchmarks in Newsletter No. 59 in 2017. Vice-Chairman Luke Warburton has recently surveyed the Parish and identified 35 Benchmarks, some even unknown to the owners of properties that contain them. This is a fascinating and almost forgotten part of our history. Luke has produced a new booklet including photographs and descriptions of those remaining in the Parish. This is on sale at the museum for just £2.50.

We are grateful to the Powell-Cotton Museum at Quex House for hosting a Heritage Fair on 30 September, as part of their “Heritage Month”. 143 visitors were welcomed to the Fair which was held in the beautiful function room at the museum. The Trust raised over £130 from publications and membership sales. We were delighted to join other local heritage attractions to share information about the Trust, how people access our archives and to highlight the museum’s collection. Networking with those organisations and sharing experiences was very useful and we intend to establish more regular contact with them - and other - heritage attractions in future.



*BHT stand at the Heritage Fair*

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## **Volunteering with the Trust**

Volunteers play a very valuable role in managing the Trust, whether serving on the Executive Committee, helping with arrangements at talks, attending external events, archiving new material, recording donations to our collection, running the website, dealing with enquiries, selling publications and memberships, promotions and opening the museum to visitors three mornings a week.

Members of the Executive Committee held an informal coffee morning with volunteers on 11 October. This was an opportunity to update volunteers on the Trust’s new policies, including one specifically for Volunteers. We discussed a range of topics from the use of new technology such as QR codes to ideas for re-displaying our collections. It was generally agreed that the Trust should embrace new technology where appropriate and use it to make our archives and collections more accessible, rather than relying on our paper records. There was enthusiasm for re-displaying the museum and participating in more “off-site” promotional events.

*We are always looking for new volunteers so if you have an interest in Birchington’s history or relevant skills to help the Trust, do please get in touch.*

## Memories of “Guy Fawkes” and Carl Conway

Issue 31 of the Newsletter (February 2010), described the “Guy Fawkes Trial” held each year in the early 1950’s. During those austere times of post-war Britain the community of Birchington made its own fun, this event being one example. The image below shows the finishing touches being put to “Guy Fawkes”. When the article was published the man playing “Guy Fawkes” was not identified.



Fast forward to 2023 and “Guy Fawkes” has been identified as Tom Phillpot. He was recognised by his daughter, Elaine Belt, who lives in Birchington. The photograph was taken in 1954 or 1956 as Tom was known to have played the character then.

Tom was a friend of the actor, Carl Conway. In Newsletter No. 79 we asked if anyone had more information about Mr Conway. Well, Elaine has given us a glimpse of their friendship with him. Elaine writes:

*“Carl ran the Ritz Cinema and used to show films around the villages Preston way, and Dad sometimes went with him to help. I went with them and was shown how to look for the “changeover dot” – the signal to change the film reel over.*

*Carl had a big American car so that was a big thrill for me to ride in it. I remember us driving home in the dusk, in thick fog, around winding lanes – my mother was relieved to see us home safely! Carl started a Saturday Childrens Club as “Uncle Basil” at the Ritz. Later when my husband and I had our first baby (called Caroline) he played a record for us on Radio Caroline. We did manage to see him in the film “Nudist Paradise!”*

So that’s the connection between “Guy Fawkes” and Carl Conway!

Huge thanks to Elaine for sharing this with us – and don’t forget if you have a memory you would like to share with our members please get in touch.

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## From the archives: Thanet Advertiser: 100 years ago

### **ELECTRICITY FOR ALL.**

#### **THE THANET RURAL SCHEME.**

A further stage in the project to supply the rural district of Thanet with electricity—exclusively announced in the ADVERTISER & ECHO of 29th September—is marked by the statement this week that application is to be made to the Electricity Commissioners by Lieut.-Col. Harold Whiteman Woodall, C.I.E., of 146, Bishopsgate, London, for a special Order, under the Electricity (Supply) Acts, 1882 to 1922, for the supply of electricity to Westgate-on-Sea, Birchington, Garlinge, Minster and St. Lawrence Extra.

Permission is sought to break up roads and level crossings and to lay down electric lines within a period to be specified by the Order. It is proposed to introduce the electricity from Dover.

Any objections to the proposal of the undertakers have to be entered before November 19th.

*Left: Roads to be dug up for electricity to be supplied.*

*Right: The danger of the road junction at Park Lane/Canterbury Road.*

*Still digging and debating 100 years later?*

### **DANGER SPOT.**

#### **COLLISIONS AT BIRCHINGTON.**

Constantly evidence is forthcoming of the danger at Birchington-square, and particularly the Park-lane-Canterbury-road corner. This week two more accidents have occurred there, and it was fortunate that in one a young lady riding a motor cycle was not more seriously injured.

The question of the danger at this corner was brought up at a meeting of the Parochial Committee on Wednesday evening, when it was decided to write to the District Surveyor asking if he could have the position of the mirror at the corner altered so that the motorists could have a better view. The Clerk (Mr. F. J. Cornford) was also instructed to write to the Automobile Association asking them whether, in view of the frequent accidents that occur at that point, they could put up an additional sign or substitute the danger sign there for a more effective cross road sign.

## Jenner's Garages

by John Robinson

Before he came to Birchington, Tom Jenner had a grocery business in Maidstone. In 1919 he bought the 'Birchington Motor Engineering Works' which stood in The Square. Alfred Court flats are there now, built in 2005.

Tom set up the 'Jenner's Garages' business with four of his sons, Laurence, Ross, Norman and Donald. (He had ten children in all). In Sarre he also had a petrol station, which sold petrol in two gallon cans. In the early years of WW2 a garage at Westgate was acquired, near the bridge in St Mildreds Road. (This currently trades as 'Norman Motors'). Westonville Garage in Margate was added; this was to become their main showroom. Later this site traded as 'Westbrook Cars.' The site today stands empty next to a Tesco's Local and is boarded up waiting development. In later years, the Jenner business was run by just two of the brothers, Laurence and Ross plus the help of two of their sisters, as non-working Directors.

Jenner's also owned 'Kent House' a Grade II listed building. This stood opposite 'The Smugglers Restaurant' in Birchington next to the Methodist Church. By the mid-1960s the property was in a very dilapidated condition. Kelly's Directory lists the last occupant as Mrs D. Woodward in 1967. The property would have needed considerable expenditure to bring it back to standard. A detailed report said a sum of £6000 would be required. Jenner's clearly wanted to demolish the property, and sell the land, but needed the backing of the local council. An 'arrangement' between them was conceived, the property was demolished and the site cleared between the 15th-19th June 1971 by contractors Brown & Mason. The demolition was not advertised, which added fuel to the idea that the demolition was done 'without consent.' Walnut Tree Close now occupies the site, and consists of five properties, thus giving the council extra revenue.



This photograph was taken in 1919 shortly after Tom Jenner moved in, complete with new signage.

Tom is seen near the pump with two customers.



A close up of Kent House shows the poor state of the building which had woodworm in the main beams and a missing floor.

Brown & Mason charged £320 to demolish the building in 1971.

Jenners paid the last tenant Mrs D. Woodward to leave in 1967.