



BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST

Preserving the past for the future

Newsletter

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Welcome to the Spring Edition of the Trust's Newsletter.

NOTICEBOARD

Saturday 17 May 2025 - The Trust will take part in Birchington's "*Leisure Show*" which returns to The Centre after a very successful event last year. Look out for further information in the local press and the Parish Council's Community Ad magazine.



Thursday 29 May 2025 – As we commemorate the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE), join us for a fascinating talk on the topic of "Derrigdo, Decoys and Disasters", presented by Ian Blackman from the RAF Museum, Manston. Free to members; donations invited from guests. Venue: The Centre, Alpha Road. 7pm for 7.30pm. The bar will be open.

Subscriptions – Please don't forget to renew your annual subscription on 1 May 2025. Rates unchanged: £10 for single; £15 for two adults at the same address. Payment can be made by card or cash at the Museum or by bank transfer to Lloyds Bank (Sort Code 30-98-90, Account 15393060). Thanks for your continued support!

Annual General Meeting Thursday 26 June 2025 – See Notice on page 4 and enclosed Nomination Form.

In this edition we commemorate the 80th anniversary of "Victory in Europe" (VE Day) and show some images of the celebrations that took place in Birchington in 1945. I hope that many members and guests will join us for the talk by Ian Blackman on 29 May (details above) and visit the Museum in May to see our small, temporary display of wartime memorabilia.

I'm also delighted to share with you our plans for a summer exhibition and community project called "Greetings from Birchington" (see page 3 for details). In addition, on page 4, we celebrate the 130th anniversary of "Station Road" being designated as a main road.

Finally, formal notice of the Trust's Annual General Meeting is given on page 4. If you would like to submit an item for discussion please email me by 9 June. A Nomination Form for election to the Committee is enclosed with this Newsletter. *Please consider putting yourself forward for election as we really do need more people to help run the Trust and the Museum in the future.*

Rod Giddins (Editor)

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80 years since Victory in Europe (VE)

Peace came to a battered Europe at 2.41 a.m. on 7 May 1945 in a small red schoolhouse in Rheims where General Eisenhower, the Allied Supreme Commander, had his HQ. General Alfred Jodl, German Army Chief of Staff signed the instrument of unconditional surrender (which was ratified in Berlin on 8 May). Eisenhower's Chief of Staff, Bedell Smith, signed for the Western Allies, and General Ivan Suslapatov was witness for Russia.

Suddenly it was all over and Britain took to the streets to celebrate the victory. The drabness and privation of almost six wartime years were forgotten, at least temporarily, in a blaze of multi-coloured flags, fireworks and floodlights.

Birchington celebrated VE Day in great style. Celebrations began with bunting and flags on display and full public houses. The main events were street parties held around the village. The pictures show two of these in York Terrace and Lincoln Gardens.



Street Party, York Terrace

It is, of course, noticeable how few men are present. This was because demobilisation had not yet begun. The Government produced its framework for demobilisation in June with the

older members of the armed forces and those with longest service being demobbed first along with key workers. Up to 750,000 troops were due to be demobbed in 1945. The whole scheme lasted until the end of 1946.

There were quite a few children present. Evacuation had not been compulsory and some had remained in the village. Most of the children and those from the two local schools were evacuated to Staffordshire but as the war progressed more favourably for Allied forces, some parents brought their children home. It was also very easy to facilitate this, as there was little war damage in Birchington so that their homes were still here; also Stafford was a stop on the train service which in those days ran between Margate and Birkenhead.



A Street Party held in Lincoln Gardens near its corner with Rutland Gardens on 12th May 1945, kindly lent by Neil Somerford, who shared in the fun.

Weeks before VE Day mothers had been trying to hold on to food items to provide for the children, who enjoyed ice cream and lollies and wore paper hats made from newspaper. It was amazing where the food came from and it can be seen from the children's smiles how much they all enjoyed the parties.

Bonfires and fireworks had not been allowed during the war but, as the ban on bonfires had been lifted, on the evening of 8 May there was a bonfire in the Dip at Minnis Bay and everyone cheered when an effigy of Hitler was burned. Unfortunately, there were no fireworks. However, a group of soldiers still in the vicinity joined in with the celebrations, firing blank "303" cartridges and letting off thunder flashes.

The local band paraded through Station Road and there was a flypast of aircraft from RAF Manston.



Victory Parade in Birchington – May 1945

Local resident Derek Hart, who was born in Ethelbert Road, Birchington was almost five years old when war was declared in 1939. He was one of the few children who was not evacuated. After he retired in 1991, Derek wrote a book called “Dangerous Coastline 1939-1945 – A wartime childhood in Birchington, Kent”. It’s a fascinating read and vividly illustrates what life was like then. Copies are on sale at the Museum, where we hold wartime artefacts, documents and photographs in our archives.

We also pay tribute to the many soldiers still fighting in the Far East as the war there did not end until the Japanese surrendered on 14 August 1945.

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Greetings from Birchington: “Design your own Postcard” Competition

Twenty years ago, the study and collection of postcards (known as Deltiology, from the Greek “deltion”) was the third largest collectable hobby in the world. Almost any subject imaginable has been, at some time, portrayed on a postcard.

With the growth of the internet, social media and instant uploading of images, the act of buying a postcard, writing and posting it is dying out.

The first British postcard was produced in 1870. One side was for the message whilst the “front” was reserved solely for the postal

address and stamp – at the time this was for a halfpenny (less than 1p today).

Postcards were a quick and easy way to send a message. They grew in popularity with the advent of mass travel facilitated by the new and extensive railway system developing across the country.

The Trust’s archive contains over 800 postcards, acquired over many decades. They tell a revealing story of social history through the messages they contain, as well as some of the images portrayed. They were – and still are – a useful means of promoting a product or particular area.

We’re launching a “summer exhibition” at the Leisure Show on 17 May. The exhibition will be held at the Baptist Church Hall, Crescent Road, Birchington over the weekend of 5 and 6 July. We’ll display some of our historic postcards for the first time.



But we want these postcards to inspire local children and adults to design their own. So, it’s COMPETITION TIME! The Trust will make available 500 blank postcards. Individuals will be encouraged to get creative, portraying life (or holidays) in Birchington today. The name and address of each designer will be on the front. Postcards will be “posted” into a designated box in Station Road.

We won’t close the competition until the end of August, so that holidaymakers can also take part.

The competition will be judged in age groups (children/adults) and the winners from each category will have their entries printed as a postcard for sale locally and through the Trust, with proceeds going to the Museum.

We are indebted to one of our volunteers, Fran Mileman, for the concept, development and management of the “project”. Our aim is to make the collection more accessible but also to inspire local residents and holidaymakers to think about the way in which postcards have been a key means of communication for 155 years. For more information about postcards visit The Postal Museum in London. (<https://www.postalmuseum.org>)

The Imperial War Museum (<https://www.iwm.org.uk>) also contains an extensive archive of postcards.

We do hope that you will take part in our unique “postcard competition” and visit us at the Baptist Church Hall over the weekend of 5 and 6 July. More details will be available nearer the time but if you have any immediate questions please do visit us at the Leisure Show in The Centre on 17 May.

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Station Road is 130

The Trust publishes several booklets and pamphlets for sale, including a set of different self-guided walks around the village.

They're a bit out of date so we've embarked on a project to replace them. Alexandra Gilbert kindly volunteered to research the walks, adding new historical information and checking for accuracy. During this process it was discovered that Station Road was formally designated as a “main road” on 19 December 1895. It would be known officially as Station Road and “regulated and coated”. Footpaths would be made a uniform width and the road surface improved.

This anniversary provides an opportunity to focus on the changes that have occurred over the past 130 years. The theme of “Heritage Open Days” in September is “Architecture” so we'll be staging a small exhibition in the Museum showing some of our historic photographs of Station Road.

We hope to have copies of the revised walk(s) booklets available to buy at the time.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST

NOTICE IS GIVEN that the 2025 AGM will be held at The Centre, Alpha Road, Birchington on Thursday 26 June 2025 at 7.30pm. Doors open at 7.00pm.

The Agenda will be emailed to all paid-up Trust Members on 12 June 2025 (or delivered by hand if a member has previously requested a paper copy).

The Nomination Form for the appointment of Trustees and any proposed Resolution, is enclosed. It must be returned either by email to the address below or delivered to the Museum to be received by 5pm on 9 June 2025.

***Advisory note:** The Trust currently has six Trustees. We are actively seeking new Trustees and will also be proposing some changes to the Trust's Constitution. If you are interested in standing for election or would like more information, please get in touch. Please remember that the AGM is your opportunity to ask questions and submit ideas for the future.*

Any correspondence about the AGM etc. should be sent via email to birchingtonhtsec@gmail.com by 9 June 2025.

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And finally..... Many thanks to Linda McCann for her entertaining talk on the “Story of Pantomime” on 27 February. A very enjoyable and interesting evening for members and guests.

Some couldn't resist trying on a costume.....



[Editor's Note: No responsibility is accepted for errors or omissions in this Newsletter in respect of information derived from the Trust's archives.]