



## BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST

*Preserving the past for the future*

### Newsletter

[www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk](http://www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk)

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

#### **NOTICEBOARD**

##### **New Trustees**

We welcome two new Trustees, Jacquie Prebble and Dave Alker, elected at the AGM. Both have lived in Birchington for many years and bring a wealth of business and charity experience to the Trust. More news about the AGM can be found on page 4.

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##### **Diary Dates**

**12<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> September** - The Trust will again participate in celebrating England's Heritage Open Days. The theme this year is "Architecture". We'll be focussing on Station Road as the commercial heart of the village. For more details see page 4.

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**25<sup>th</sup> September** – The next talk in our programme will be given by Alexandra Gilbert on "*Birchington's Victorian Heritage*". Please support what promises to be an entertaining and informative evening.

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**27<sup>th</sup> November** – Our annual music evening presented by Colin Bridge. Further details will be available to everyone nearer the time.

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**Subscriptions** – Please don't forget that annual subscriptions were due on 1<sup>st</sup> 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). We depend upon this income, so thanks for your continued support!

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When planning this edition, I discovered that 2025 marks several anniversaries relating to the village. The Baptist Church, Birchington Library and Station Road feature, but there will be more next time. There's an update on our successful "Postcard 500" exhibition and competition.

We also remember soldiers from the East Kent Regiment (the Buffs) who were still fighting in the Far East as World War II came to an end on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1945 (VJ Day).

Contributions for future Newsletters are welcome – please contact me if you'd like to submit an article.

*Rod Giddins (Editor)*

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## Birchington Baptist Church

### *The Centenary of the church opening in Crescent Road.*

The Baptists first arrived in Birchington in 1740 and worshipped in a wooden hut. This was replaced in 1850 by a more substantial building with a corrugated iron sheet roof supported by a wrought iron framework. The building, at 248 Canterbury Road, remains today and is occupied by Mullaney's Roofing Company.

That building was eventually too small for the Baptists and they moved to the Institute on the north side of The Square but this was not ideal as so many other people used the building. In 1924 fundraising began to build a new church. Mr Barrows, the owner of 57 and 59 Station Road, was a staunch Baptist. He gifted land at the rear of number 57 and on 3 March 1925 the foundation stone was laid for the new church.



Temporary meeting place and fundraising campaign

Whit-Sunday, 31 May 1925, witnessed the first Sunday Services, which were conducted by the Rev. Bryan Marshall (Minister of the South London Tabernacle). There were some 70 friends present at the morning service.

On Monday, the public opening of the church took place. The weather was everything that could be desired. Baptist stalwarts from the neighbouring towns of Ramsgate, Margate, Broadstairs, Herne Bay, Canterbury and Whitstable gathered for the opening.

The interior of the building was described in the Isle of Thanet Gazette & Times on 6 June 1925 as *"tastefully decorated in a colour scheme of green, and the platform and side vestries artistically arranged with a background of black and red curtains. The floor is covered with green linoleum, and all the woodwork is made of pitch*

*pine. The baptistry is provided beneath the platform. The whole interior gives the impression of comfort, utility, and a sense of restfulness suggestive of worship and prayer"*.

In September 2008, a local evangelical church closed and offered their premises to the Baptist Church – as a gift. This included the premises and all the contents. The photo below shows the entrance to this building in Station Road. Originally the premises opened in 1902 as a public hall used for concerts, talks and meetings.



Until 2000, it had various uses as a cinema, night club, bingo hall and discotheque. It was used by the Cornerstone Church between 2000 and 2008.

The hall, together with the one adjoining the Baptist Church in Crescent Road, continues to be used for a variety of community activities as well as church functions.

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## Birchington Library

### *Congratulations on at least 90 years of public library service in Birchington.*

The Libraries Act 1850 provided the legal framework for public libraries to be created. The first public library opened in 1857 but it wasn't until after the Public Libraries Act 1919 that Kent opened its first one in 1921.

Before publicly funded libraries were provided, they were often financed by wealthy industrialists, the best known being the Scottish-born American steel magnate Andrew Carnegie.

The first library in Birchington can be traced back to 1879 when the Institute in The Square loaned out books. It provided a much needed venue for meetings, Parish events, evening classes, entertainment and a reading-room. An article in the Birchington and Westgate Almanac of 1883 states: *"The Reading Room is well supplied with daily, weekly and county papers; the Library already boasts some 100 volumes of excellent books"*.

In 1902 this moved to the new public hall in Station Road. Between the 1920's and 1950's Nicholls shop at 10 Station Road loaned out books for a small fee and in the 1930's Lanes in Station Approach also provided a service. We know that from 1935 the first publicly funded library in Birchington was housed in 62 Station Road, so this year marks 90 years of service to the village.



Nos. 60/62 were demolished in the 1970's and replaced by a row of 4 shops and flats above but 64/66 still survive.

In an interview in 2004, Gwen Wilcox said that in 1942 she helped run the library from No. 62 Station Road. The rooms were light and airy, but it must have been a challenge for some users to climb up a narrow, twisting staircase to the first and second floors to borrow their books – although children loved scampering up and down the stairs!

Plans for a new library were discussed in 1946 but these didn't come to fruition until over 30 years later when, in 1967, the current building, which cost £38,000, was opened by the County Council.

From the early "reading rooms" to the bustling, multi-use 21<sup>st</sup> century library, this remains an important facility open to everyone in the village.

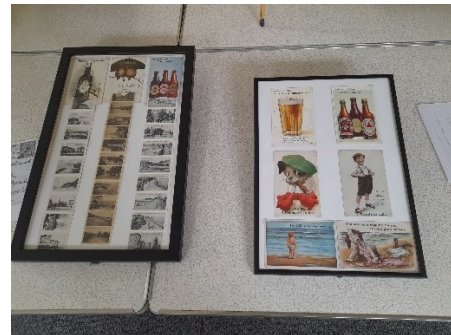
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### Postcard 500 Exhibition & Competition

The Trust's collection of over 800 historic postcards is rarely seen so (as reported in Newsletter 88) we decided to hold an exhibition on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> July at the Baptist Church Hall in Crescent Road. The event was very well supported with 135 people attending over the two days. We received some excellent feedback which will help us to plan future events.

Special thanks to Fran and Chris Mileman for the original idea and organising the event, supported by local author Nick Evans and our Trustees and Volunteers who helped out.

The donation made by the Birchington Together CIC lottery was essential and we are very grateful to them for their support.



Postcards on display at the exhibition

Our postcard collection can be viewed in the Museum during our published opening times.

Remember that our "Greetings from Birchington" postcard competition referred to in Newsletter 88 is open until 31 August. Winners will be announced in September and we'll display the best in the Museum.

For anyone who collects and sells postcards, the Postcard Traders Association was formed 50 years ago in 1975 by a group of pioneering dealers who felt that the rapidly expanding hobby required a more professional approach, with regard to its organization, regulation and direction.

It was decided, fairly soon after the inception, to organize an annual exhibition to help promote the Association and its aims.

In 2011 the Association took over the running of the successful Woking-based South of England Postcard Fair and has staged Spring and Autumn shows at the Surrey venue every year since.

For more information visit their website: [www.postcardcollecting.co.uk](http://www.postcardcollecting.co.uk)

Also of interest is the Postal Museum, London. Website: [www.postalmuseum.org](http://www.postalmuseum.org).

*[If you have any postcards specific to Birchington and would like to donate them to the Museum please get in touch – Ed]*

Heritage Open Week (12-21 September 2025)

The theme of Heritage Open Week is “Architecture”. This year the Trust will focus on Station Road as our archives contain a wealth of information about shops and businesses there since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Previously known just as The Street, “Station Road” first appears in the 1871 census. Almost 130 years ago, on 19<sup>th</sup> December 1895, the County Council decided to designate it as a “main road”, to upgrade it and improve the pavements following complaints from residents and the Parish Council.

There are still well-detailed two-and-a-half-storey Victorian and Edwardian shopping parades and some surviving historic shop fronts. A few buildings are listed as being of historic or architectural interest, whilst others contribute to the character of the area. Look closely. There are detailed features including art-deco style leaded light windows above shop fronts and the “W” mosaic floor tiles (below) outside the Co-op store at 52-54 Station Road, laid down by F W Woolworth & Co. over 60 years ago.



Look out for QR codes in some shop/business front windows. You will be able to click on those if you want to find out more about the property.

Our new “Station Road” heritage trail booklet will be on sale from 1<sup>st</sup> September. During Heritage Open Week, the Museum will be open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday (0930-1230) and 0930 to 1500 hours Saturdays to show some historic photos and film of Station Road.

Many thanks to local historian Alexandra Gilbert for her extensive research on Station Road which will be available and added to our archives.

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The 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of VJ Day 15 August

Soldiers in the East Kent Regiment (known as “The Buffs” due to the colour of their uniform) fought in the Burma Campaign with the British Fourteenth Army.

We remember all those who suffered or lost their lives fighting in the Far East in WWII.

Faced with certain defeat, the Japanese Emperor Hirohito took to the national airwaves on the 15 August to record the historic 'Jewel Voice Broadcast'. This became “Victory over Japan” day although the formal Japanese surrender was not until 2 September 1945.

*More about “The Buffs” and their role in the Far East will feature in the next Newsletter.*

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The 2025 Annual General Meeting

Before the official meeting started, Chairman Neville Hudson presented the “Raven Award” for Excellence in Conservation to Mr and Mrs Ricky Davies for their recent work to the Grade II Listed Gore End Farmhouse and Barns.

Members were advised that the Trust made a deficit of £1750 in 2024/25 but this was expected to reduce in the current year.

The new Constitution (the Trust’s governing document) was unanimously approved.

Colin Bridge, Rod Giddins and Mike Kite were re-elected and Dave Alker was elected as a new Trustee, all for three years. Jacquie Prebble was co-opted until the 2026 AGM.

Members agreed to keep the subscriptions the same for the year starting 1 May 2026.

After the meeting Colin Bridge gave an excellent short talk on “Birchington in the 1930’s – People and Places”.

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

