



BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST

Preserving the past for the future

Newsletter

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

NOTICEBOARD

Dates for your diary:

Thursday 27th November – Hark the Glad Sounds! A Merry Evening of Seasonal Music, Stories & Song. *Tickets just £10 each now available from the Museum (See page 4 for more information)*

Saturday 29th November - The great Birchington Christmas Event will be held on Dog Acre and at The Centre. We're having a sale of books, publications, postcards and pictures in the Museum so do pay us a visit between 09.45am and 1pm. You may find an unusual present!

2026 Programme – We're looking for speakers and topics for the second half of our 2026 Programme so please email me by the end of November with your ideas and suggestions.

November is often a time for remembrance and reflection. In this Newsletter you can read about The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment) and particularly their role in Burma (now Myanmar) in 1944-1945.



There's also an update about the Wax House in All Saints Churchyard and how this led volunteer researchers to make some different discoveries. Talking of research, read about Helen Mabel Trevor's connection to Birchington and our request for anyone with information to contact us.

Many of you will know that Minnis Bay Sailing Club celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2025 and we're pleased to include a short piece about the history of this thriving Club.

Thanks to everyone who either supported or took part in our unique Postcard Competition and those who were involved in our successful Heritage Open Days project to celebrate Station Road.

As this is the last Newsletter of 2025, Trustees send you sincere good wishes for a peaceful and joyous festive season and all the best for 2026. We look forward to seeing you at one of our events.

Rod Giddins (Editor)

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The Buffs - Royal East Kent Regiment



With origins dating back to 1572, The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment) was one of the oldest regiments in the British army. Originally known as the 3rd Regiment of Foot, it was renamed to reflect the creamy colour of the soldiers' buff uniform coats.

During the early days of WW2 The Buffs were sent to France to join the British Expeditionary Force. They fought in the short but fierce Battle of Dunkirk and were then evacuated back to Britain. The Buffs 2nd Battalion, with the 44th Division, was sent to fight in the North African Campaign despite the Division having just come under command of the 132nd Brigade. This Brigade was then disbanded and the 2nd Buffs transferred to the Far East with the 26th Indian Infantry Brigade and remained there for the war. In 1944, the Brigade was redesignated the 26th British Infantry Brigade, which itself became part of the 36th British Infantry Division and served with the British Fourteenth Army in the Burma Campaign.

Burma, 1944 to 1945

The 2nd Buffs were sent from North Africa to the Middle East to act as ceremonial guards at the summit conference in Tehran, and then on to India in the 26th Indian Brigade. From there they were flown to Burma (now Myanmar) to be part of Festing's 36th Division, fighting the Japanese. Under the command of Lt-Col. Parry they marched to Mandalay, crossing the Irrawaddy in January 1945. They advanced through jungle, eliminating several enemy groups until they reached the River Shweli - reported to be safe to cross although 300 yards wide and fast flowing. The first group, C company, was ferried over by Indian Sappers in safety, but A Company was fired upon and lost many. In one of the rubber boats the only unwounded man was Corporal Stevens who swam and towed the boat to the shore where he fought off Japanese attacks alone all day. C Company managed to form a small bridgehead under heavy fire from a large enemy force. Most boats were lost so patrols had to go downriver and bring them back. After dark, the operation of saving C Company was

carried out with the help of tracer bullets to guide the boats, and mortar fire to cover their progress. 50 wounded were brought back and other survivors swam across. Company Commander Major Hews ensured that no-one was left behind and was the last to leave.

A week later, further north, a bridgehead was established at Myitson. There The Buffs fought off a fierce counterattack and continued to Mandalay which they reached on 10th April. They then returned to India to prepare to fight the Japanese in Malaya. But the war ended and they could rest and remember the 215 comrades they had lost in just three months.

We know of two ex-Buffs buried in All Saints Churchyard. F Holmans served in WW1, died and is buried in grave F502. W Rowland served in WW2 and is buried in Plot H688.

(Thanks to Brian and Vera for this information – Ed.)

Helen Mabel Trevor

The Museum has recently been given a signed copy of a book entitled "Helen Mabel Trevor – an Irish Artist", written by Carmel Coyle and published by Gandon Editions, Kinsale, 2021.

Our former Archivist Jennie Burgess wrote about the artist in issue 61 of our Newsletter in 2017. Born in County Down, Ireland in 1831 to a large, wealthy family, Helen moved to Paris in 1880 to study with French artists. She travelled with her sister Rose to Normandy and Brittany. They also lived in Italy for six years between 1883 and 1889. In 1900, aged 68, she died suddenly of a heart attack. In her Will she asked to be buried in her mother's grave in All Saints Churchyard, Birchington. A plaque was placed in the church on the north wall of the north aisle in her memory, at the request of her sister Rose.

Despite much research, no-one has been able to find out her mother's name, why she was in Birchington when she died or what the family connection to the village may have been.

If anyone has any information please email us at: birchington.ht@gmail.com

One mystery solved whilst another continues!

In our February newsletter, we described how two volunteers at All Saints churchyard had cleared the overgrowth from what was thought to be the site of a late medieval Wax House. Instead, they discovered the remains of a small walled enclosure, together with the possible grave site of Mrs Phyllis Evelyn Marks. The volunteers have since carried out extensive research into archives in the Birchington Heritage Museum, Canterbury Cathedral and the Archive and History Centre in Maidstone. This is what they have found so far:



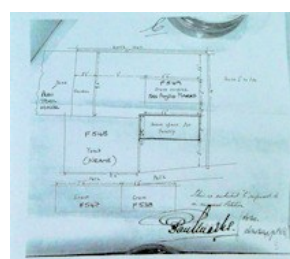
Mrs Marks was born in Bishops Stortford in April 1892. She married Paul Marks in October 1916. Up to 1934 the couple

lived at various addresses in the centre of London, before moving to 'Lone Gable', St Mildred's Avenue in Minnis Bay. Mrs Marks sadly died in August 1935, aged forty-three and was buried in All Saints. In December 1935 Mr Marks applied for a 'Faculty' (authorisation to carry out certain works in a graveyard) (See *adjoining panel*), to purchase and enclose the area around his wife's grave as a memorial to her and also reserve an adjoining plot for himself. Permission was granted by the Diocese of Canterbury in March 1936 for 'an enclosure and additional grave space'. This discovery has led the volunteers to carry out further research into the Wax House, which was historically thought to be in the same location.

They discovered that in medieval times the community of Birchington would have been based mainly around its church and village square. Some archives refer to a small building or shop called the 'Wax House', where the candles for the altars were made. This was located near to the Lych Gate entrance, along the wall by the Powell Arms. Unfortunately, with the passing of time, there is no longer any physical evidence of its existence in the churchyard. However, as the land further along the north wall adjoining the site of Mrs Marks' grave was not owned by the church until the

late 1800s, when a 'Tool House' was constructed, it is possible that the Wax House may indeed have been located near to the Powell Arms.

Sadly, Mr Marks was not buried beside his wife when he passed away in Windsor at the age of ninety-one. However, the volunteers are very pleased to have uncovered the memorial to his late wife. Even though they have not found any remains of the Wax House, they have discovered more about its possible location and their research continues.



Plan of the plot for which the Faculty was granted



The grave of Phyllis Marks (Plot F549) in 2025

(I am indebted to Carolyne and Vera for the information in this article. A copy of the comprehensive folio of all the plots in the graveyard is held in the Museum. – Ed.)

Minnis Bay Sailing Club

Congratulations on your 75th anniversary.

The Sailing Club was formally inaugurated in June 1950 as a result of the Margate Corporation's demand that boats should be removed from a piece of land between Kings Avenue and Canute Road. This land was rented at 5/- (25p) a year per boat plot by a number of boat owners; they and a number of friends formed the Minnis Bay Sailing Club to fight this demand.

They were successful in persuading the Corporation to lease them the current plot of land to replace the original boat park.

The first clubhouse cost £50 and was made of corrugated asbestos on a steel frame building. By 1958 an American-style prefabricated bungalow had been bought from the Ministry of Supply. By 1967, rebuilding started and in 1973 the new clubhouse was completed. Over the years improvements have continued.

In 1981 the land was purchased from Thanet District Council.

Today the Club is a friendly and inclusive dinghy and catamaran sailing club, welcoming sailors of all experience levels. The Club has advanced from the cruising club it once was, using an odd array of boats, usually converted to sail, to what it is today, racing in a range of "Class Boats". Cruising still takes place although racing forms the greater part of the Club's sailing activity these days. The Club is affiliated to the RYA and from time to time arranges RYA sail training courses with approved instructors.

To find out more visit:
www.minnisbaysailingclub.co.uk
email: enquiries@minnisbaysailingclub.co.uk

Postcard Competition

Thanks to everyone who took part in the postcard competition. It was great to see so many creative designs from age 4 to adult. All the postcards now join the Trust's archive of over 800, to be enjoyed by future generations. Some will also be selected for sale in due course.



Just some of the adult entries

Heritage Open Days – September

We took part again in Heritage Open Days, focusing on Station Road. For the first time we displayed QR codes in shop windows and inside the Museum which then linked to the history of individual properties. We could not have done this without the incredible amount of research carried out by Alexandra Gilbert and the support of the Parish Council and businesses. *Huge thanks to everyone.*

Now we need to start planning for 2026!

Hark the Glad Sounds! A Merry Evening of Seasonal Music, Stories & Song

Presented by Colin Bridge with the Thanet Clarinet Quartet. We're delighted that they are returning for our last event of 2025.

On Thursday, 27th November at 7.30pm in The Centre, Alpha Road.

The programme ranges over Christmases past and present, with a look at the Quartet's wealth of music from years of celebrating the annual festival – and stories of merrymaking and songs to bring back happy memories.

The Quartet is pleased to be led by Malcolm McMillan, an experienced professional musician contributing skilled arrangements, backed up by Ian Rogers, a member of the British Clarinet Ensemble and conductor of the Ionian Clarinet Choir, with Eduard Heyning, researcher, and veteran European recital player supplying the Bass Clarinet.

Tickets cost just £10 each, available from the Museum (Monday, Thursday and Saturday mornings). **The bar will be open.**

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

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