



Birchington Heritage Trust

Reg. Charity No. 1099250

LOCKDOWN NEWS SHEET

February 2021

IN TIMES OF STRESS

(I hope this makes you smile)

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change

The courage to change things I cannot accept

**And the wisdom to hide the bodies of those I had to kill today
because they got on my nerves**

**Also help me to be careful of the toes I step on today
as they may be connected to the feet I have to kiss tomorrow**

Help me always to give 100%

12% on Monday

23% on Tuesday

40% on Wednesday

20% on Thursday

5% on Friday

And help me to remember when I'm having a bad day

And it seems that people are trying to wind me up

That it takes 42 muscles to frown and only 28 to smile

(but using more muscles burns more calories)

LARKSCLIFF

A few months ago, one of our members, Richard Cobb, gave me some pages from an old copy of *The Architectural Review*. He thought they would be of interest as one of the houses included was in Birchington. I have finally found the time to research the property.

Larkscliff was built in about 1902 on the junction of The Parade and Alfred Road, at Minnis Bay. The house was designed by Arthur Thomas Bolton, architect and architectural historian 1864-1945.



Arthur Bolton and his family were the first occupants of the property. A newspaper report for the birth of a son in 1903 is the first mention of the house. In the 1911 census the family are still there, with three children, a cook and a housemaid.

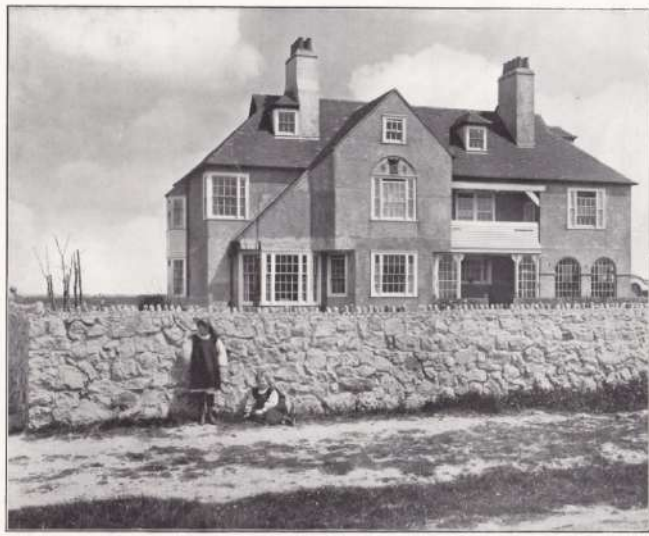
The illustrated article gives a clear description of Larkscliff. It states that it stood on a quarter-acre plot on the edge of a chalk pit, which formed a sunk valley garden, and gave shelter from the prevailing winds. The picture above illustrates those facts, and I think these could be Arthur's own children in the garden.



The drawing room and dining room had intercommunicating folding panel doors – in view of children's parties.

On the first floor there was a guest suite, and seven bedrooms, including the nursery which had a covered balcony which could be used for play, or sleeping in the open. In the attic were the servant's bedrooms, and a large play-room. The floors and partitions were specially packed to deaden the noise of children playing.

The garden at Larksciff was enclosed by a rough ragstone rubble wall, as seen in this picture.



The builder of the house was Mr. Pettman of Birchington, and all the work was done locally, the joinery, including mantelpieces being made in the builder's workshop from the architect's details.

Arthur lists where all the bricks, tiles, paving etc. had come from. He mentions that the timber was conveyed by sea to Ramsgate Harbour. The sundial and bronze initials (which can be seen over the main bedroom window in the pictures) were made by the Birmingham Guild of Handicraft, from the architects' drawings, and the cherubs head

over the sundial by Mr. Schacht of Woking. Arthur states that " the cost may be taken as 1,500 pounds inclusive, for a similar house in any ordinary locality."

Fortunately there is, only a few yards away, an excellent private hotel called Larksciff. This is a children's paradise, for the sands at the foot of the cliff are famous; and Mr. and Mrs. Lewis themselves understand children.

I don't know when the Bolton family left Larksciff, but by 1936 it was being run as a Guest House. In 1938 it is mentioned in a magazine article on The North Coast of Kent in Winter (the Sphere, 17th December 1938.

A local newspaper report of February 1950 mentions that a wedding reception for 100 guests was held at Larksciff Club, In April 1950 the owner of Larksciff, Mrs. Marion Campbell Webster, died and three months later the contents of the building were to be sold at auction. By 1960 it is listed in street directories as Larksciff Court.

The house is still there, with the original outside wall. The initials over the window remain, but not the sundial or cherub's head. The house has been extended and is divided into flats, and the garden levelled.



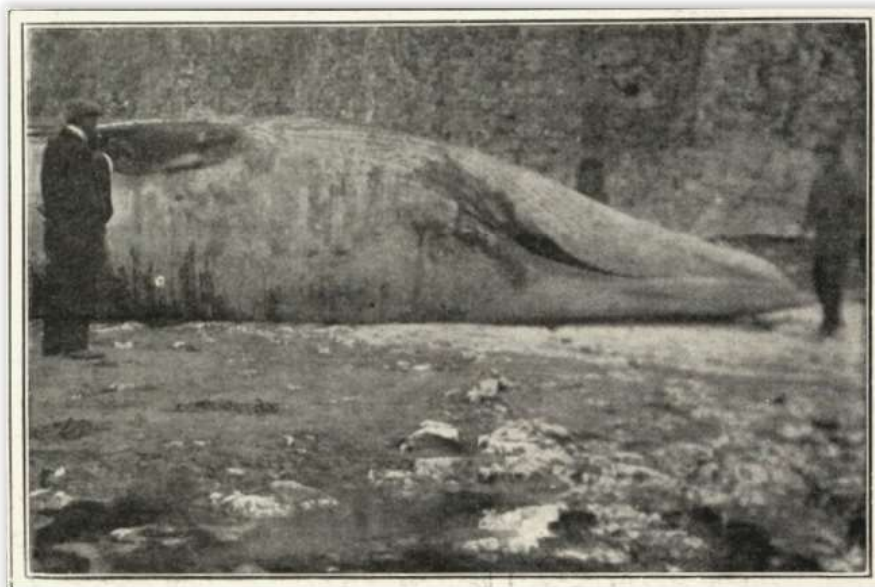
This is a condensed version of an article written by W. P. Pycraft for The Illustrated London News of November 14th 1914.

THE WHALE AS A MINE DESTROYER

The mine laying operations of our "most cultivated" enemy have so far wrought more destruction on nautical shipping than on the vessels they were designed to destroy. Every mine which thus fails of its purpose is, from the enemy point of view, a good mine wasted. It would now seem that there is yet another source of wastage, and this is a quite unexpected one, coming as it does from the inhabitants of the sea.

This much at any rate may be inferred from an event which took place about a month ago – on October 17th 1914, to be precise – when the life-boat of Margate put off to rescue the possible survivors of a sinking Zeppelin! Eager crowd awaited the return of the rescuers with their "prisoners of war", and great was the disappointment when they learned that the supposed Zeppelin was nothing more than a dead whale.

Having discovered their mistake the would-be rescuers, in disgust, turned homewards, sadder and wiser men. They left the body to its fate, and within a few hours after it was stranded at Birchington, a few miles further westward.



News of this fact was speedily telegraphed to the British Museum by the coastguard, whose duty it is to report all such occurrences to that institution. It was my good fortune to be dispatched to examine the body, and to secure such parts as might be of value to us.

When I arrived with an assistant to take over from the coastguard in charge, this to the inhabitants, objectionable mass of "Crown Property", I found the sea still in possession. But at low tide we were able to begin our work.

The task of identification was a simple one (a common rorqual) that of taking the measurements was not. To do this we had to sprinkle sand upon the slippery surface in order to obtain what was, at best, an insecure foothold. It proved to be a not quite adult female, sixty-one feet long.

After having taken all the necessary measurements, the next thing to be done was to seek for the cause of death. This was evidently due to the enormous rent in the hinder portion of the abdomen, a rent through which one might easily have dropped a large armchair had the space been entirely



unobstructed. Some idea of the position and extent of the wound may be gathered from the accompanying photograph. The size of the wound in the body is marked by the two white lines.

It would seem that the whale was killed by striking and exploding a mine. That the Birchington whale met its death in the English Channel is very possible, for though rarely seen here, there are numerous records of the stranding of this

species along the south coast. On the other hand, this huge carcass may have been carried down from the haunts of the species in Scottish waters.

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In the Birchington Heritage Trust archives there are quite a number of records of whales being washed up along our bays, dating back over the centuries. One is even included in the 1688 map of Birchington.

In 1919, when a whale was breached at Minnis Bay and the body was being dismembered for disposal, the ribs were obtained by Walter Baker, the landlord of the Sea View Hotel, and made into a feature in the pub garden.

I don't have access to the museum archives at the moment to find a good picture of the whale ribs, but found this one on-line.



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In the introduction to my January article "Descent of a Balloon Near Birchington" I wrote that it was a 'hot air balloon' which crash landed. Bob Hinge has pointed out that at this date (1888) it would have been a Hydrogen Balloon, and writes that even in the 1930s hydrogen was the gas of choice (Hindenburg, R101). Helium is now available (it's found in natural gas) and so is used in the few airships about now, as it is much safer than hydrogen – and of course you can also get it to talk funny!

Thank you, Bob, for this information. If you printed out my article you might like to make an alteration.