



Birchington Heritage Trust

Reg. Charity No.1099250

LOCKDOWN NEWS SHEET

September

In the August edition of the news sheet I wrote a short article about houses in Station Road that had been converted into shops. After reading my article, BHT member James Brazier kindly sent me this image from a sales brochure of the area concerned. Numbers 34,36,38 & 40 were to be sold by auction in 1938. The auctioneers were A.J. Tanton & Company. How the area looks today is shown also.



The piece about Courts chemist as the oldest established business in Station Road, was picked up by BHT member Christine Wilkinson, who has kindly passed on this additional information.

Christine's late husband David took up the position of pharmacist at Courts in 1959, when Mr Court and his partner Mr Quarterman retired. Shortly after, he took over the business together with Ken Roberts who supervised the photographic section. The business expanded by taking over the barbers shop next door at No.67 when Vic Holton and his sister Vera retired. Christine and David's son Mark was also a qualified pharmacist, who worked with his father for many years. When David and Ken retired, Mark and his university friend Robert Forrest took over the business. Christine's family had connections with Courts for over 60 years, a remarkable achievement. Courts is now owned by Paydens Pharmacy.



FRANK HORVATH

Frank Horvath was born in Czechoslovakia in 1900. He arrived in England, via Belgium, in 1941, working for the Ministry of Social Welfare of the Benes Czech government, in London. This was the Czech government, with their President, Edvard Benes, in exile. If any of you heard my talk on Alpha Road a couple of years ago, you may remember that for a time Beaconsfield, in Alpha Road was used as a base by Czech politicians, academics, members of parliament, and soldiers. Frank Horvath seems to have been one of them.

Having managed to get out of Czechoslovakia with a considerable amount of cash, Frank settled in Birchington, purchasing number 16 Shakespeare Road, and another smaller house, 2 Gordon Villas Minster.

The first newspaper report I found for Frank was this one dated 29th July 1947.



An old, apparently valueless oil painting, which for months has stood unnoticed in a Birchington antique shop, has been identified as a precious work of Rubens, and is estimated to be worth thousands of pounds.

The painting, begrimed, in a gilt frame, has stood at the back of the shop owned by Mr. Robert Hewish, in Birchington Square, and was bought by his father for a few pounds. It formerly belonged to the art collection of the late Mr. F. Marsden Cobb, of Margate.

Several London dealers had rejected the work as worthless, but Dr. Frank Horvath, a Czech doctor living in Birchington, noticed it in the shop and has had it cleaned.

It is certain that the picture, depicting the death of Mary Magdalen, is a work of the Flemish painter Rubens, who died in 1640.

Prior to coming to England in 1941 Dr. Horvath was living in Belgium, where his art collection, valued at half a million francs, was destroyed by the Germans.

"I have bought some fine old paintings but I have never seen anything so beautiful as this one" he told a reporter.

I have been unable to find any further information on this painting, I would love to know if Frank was correct.

The second newspaper report I found on Frank was on the 24th October 1950. It concerns his house in Minster, which he had rented out, at one pound per week, to a Czechoslovakian artist Francis Besperato. It



seems that the rent had not been paid for nearly three years, and Frank had finally lost patience with his friend and taken him to court. The article is interesting because, during the hearing Frank explained that he was a Doctor of Political Science, a stateless person, an expert in art, and made part of his living by letting rooms.

If you google the name Francis Pablo de Besperato you will find that he is a known artist, some of his paintings were of the cliffs of Birchington, seascapes, and the countryside of Thanet. This is one of his works.

There is also a Pathe film, recorded in 1956 in Minster, with the title 'Pablo The Artist Lives in a Council House.'

I was lucky to come across a letter, written by Rory Hammond, which told Franks story, and led me to carry out further research. Rory, his sister, and their mother, moved into Franks house in Shakespeare Road in 1949, as lodgers. He wrote that Frank had been a Lawyer, which is different to the statement in the court case, and was usually referred to as Dr. Horvath. He remembers that the house had a large conservatory where Frank spent much time painting, and restoring pictures, often in the company of the latest batch of day-old chicks. He spoke about six languages, mostly very badly.



Frank was persuaded by two of his friends that the way to make a fortune was to invest in a mink farm. The mink were in cages at the bottom of the large garden, and were fed on ground meat and blood, prepared in an outbuilding. The mink were healthy but unhappy, they had no place to swim, and when they bred, they ate their young. The mink farm folded, and this, with bad debts, led to the house being sold. Frank's family (a wife and daughter) left him, and he became a 'tramp' in Margate.

He started his junk business selling old comics from a wrecked pram. He would buy sixpenny lots at auction, which he stored in the upstairs room of a failing dressmakers in the Market Place, Margate. As they failed further, he occupied more of the space, until he had the whole thing. (This was in the mid-1950s) It wasn't long before he also occupied the shop next door, and at one time, a third. The shop fronts were all painted blue, (which is how I remember them when growing up in Margate.)

In the 1967 Kelly's directory his business is listed as 'secondhand dealer, books, antiques, pictures, etc.'

After a few years he had made enough money to be able to buy a house in Margate. Rory, in his letter, thought it was in the Cecil Square area, but I haven't identified exactly where, and his family returned to him.



This picture shows Frank, on the left, with a few of his friends outside his shop.

I remember the piles of books. They were never in tidy rows, but stacked up on the shelves so that you couldn't read the titles – but he seemed to know where to find them. (see the picture above).

My family knew him as The Professor, others called him Doctor, and some of the children called him 'Popski.'

Frank Horvath died in April 1981, leaving an estate of £51,588 – worth nearly £200,000 today, He had an extraordinary life, from riches to rags and back again.

One of our members, Chris Sandwell, kindly traced the record of Frank's death in the indexes at Margate Cemetery.

No. 24047	Class C Section <u>LXV</u> Catholic	INDEXES	Frank Horvath Anna Horvath	81 87	27 April 1981 26 Sept 1988	7 ft 5 feet	43560 43291	89 72
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He found the grave in the Catholic section, and took a photograph for us.

It shows that Frank's full name was Frantisek. In the same plot is Frank's wife, Anna, who died on the 19th September 1988.

I know that Anna Marie died at Stella Maris, 15 Seaview Terrace, Westbrook, Margate.

I have enjoyed researching Frank Horvath's story, and would love to hear your memories if you remember him.

Janet Robinson.