

THE VILL OF WOOD STORY including ACOL & WOODCHURCH

by Alfred Walker
1963

The Ville of Wood, now known as the parish of Acol, is, and has been for several centuries a part of the ecclesiastical parish of Birchington-with-Acol, the Minister of Birchington being also Minister of Acol since 1604. However, the parish is now separated from Birchington for civil matters, being a separate civil parish within the Thanet District Council area.

SIZE AND BOUNDARIES

At the time when the Acol Tithe map was made in 1832, the parish was nearly as large as Birchington, being over 1,400 acres in size, but when part of the parish was taken to go towards the formation of the new parish of Westgate in 1884 and again, when the Borough of Margate extended its boundaries in 1935 which took another large portion, Acol became one of the smallest parishes within the County of Kent.

Yet Acol has a very interesting and well documented history, and because it has been a part of the ecclesiastical parish of Birchington for so long, much of its history is interwoven with that of Birchington. Originally the parish of the Ville of Wood included the village of Acol, Woodchurch, and Cheeseman's Farm, and the parish even went down to the sea by Hundreds Farm and West Bay, at Westgate-on-Sea. It included the old Watch House with the Coast Guard Station houses on the cliff. Only a very small portion of Quex Park was within the parish, but the boundary between Acol and Birchington passed right through Quex Mansion, which caused difficulties between the two parishes in the 1700's over matters of assessment for poor relief.

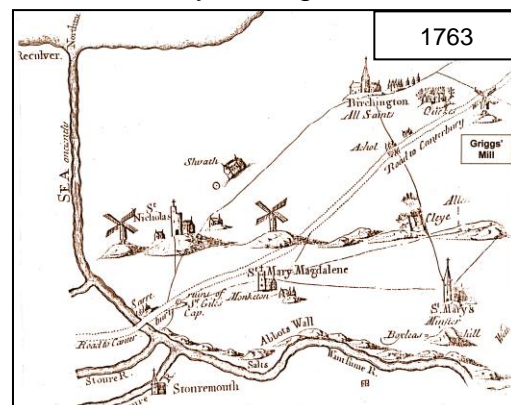
To the south, the boundary does not appear to have changed, zig-zagging across from Cheeseman's Farm to Plumstone Road and then to Crispe Farm. For hundreds of years these boundaries of the parish were processed annually at Easter time by the Churchwardens and other officials of the parish, and in the Churchwardens' Accounts of Birchington from 1531 up to 1863, there are many entries for "going the bounds of the parish" when money was spent on "meat and drink" –

e.g. "1531 Item to the p(ro)cession of Wodchurche in brayd and drynke - vi d."

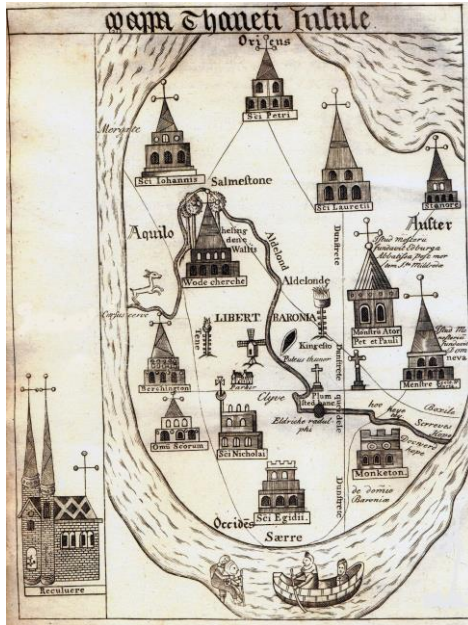
In 1711 over £4 was spent! On these "rombellashons", as they are sometimes called, it was customary to put a small boy through a window at Quex to mark the fact that the boundary ran through the house.

ROADS

The main highway from Margate to Canterbury, ran across the parish along Shottendane Lane, past where the Griggs Mill stood, to the "Crown and Sceptre", through "Acholt", along Church Street to near the Monkton sea-mark in Seamark Road. It was near this



spot that another Mill once stood, which was later replaced by the Seamark Tower. The boundary then ran down to Sarre to cross the marshes. This was the road used by horse drawn coaches and travellers on their way from Margate to Canterbury right up to comparatively recent times, especially in wintertime, because it avoided the snow and ice on Brooksend Hill. All early maps show this road passing through the village, so Acol then must have had a fair amount of traffic passing through it.



POPULATION

It is only during the last 100 years that the population of the parish has grown to above 200 people. When the census was taken in 1811 the population was only 163 and most of these, like their forebears, were cottagers who obtained their livelihood from the land. The number of people living in the parish liable to pay either the Church "sess" (rate) or the Poor "sess" never exceeded more than 20, and most of these belonged to families who had lived in the parish for many years.

THE NAMES

The names given to the parish in the old records, Wode, Wood, Woodchurch, Villa Wood, Vill of Wood, Willowood, all indicated that much of the parish, like the rest of the Isle of Thanet, was woodland, which has now almost all been grubbed up, and the name Acol, "the little place in the oak wood", shows that much of this woodland was oak. The name Acol may have come from the Old Norse words "At Holti" – a grove of oaks – which has been corrupted into Acholt, Acolte, Acole, and Acol. In 1876 the Bishop of Dover used the phrase in his sermon at the opening of St. Mildred's Church - that it was "Acolt – the oak wood". Lewis in his "History of Tenet" of 1723 states that Woodchurch or Wode is "a small town about a mile to the south and south-east of Birchington, but that there was but one house at the place, the rest of the houses being a mile from it at a Vill anciently called Millburgh and now Acholt". Millburgh was possibly a few habitations near a mill on the brow of the hill towards Birchington.

SAXON TIMES

There is no record of the Vill of Wood for Saxon times but it is known that the Isle of Thanet was at that time divided between the two Manors of Minster and Monkton. The Vill of Wood with Birchington was a part of the Manor of Monkton which belonged to the Archbishop of Canterbury. The legend of Domneva and her deer running across the Island and enclosing large swathes of land is the monks' account of how the division of the Island came about, and until quite recent times the 'lynch' or boundary between the two Manors, in the form of a low mound of earth, could still be seen in places.

In 1617 John Tomlin, Hamon Finch and William Barbett were before the Archdeacon at his Visitation for covering up the processional lynch or the boundary. A writer in the Kebles Gazette of 1876 states that the parish is

bounded, “for miles by the line once known as St. Mildred’s Lynch and two rods wide, a good distance of which was in existence forty years since (1836) and men now living assisted in its breaking up”.

NORMAN TIMES

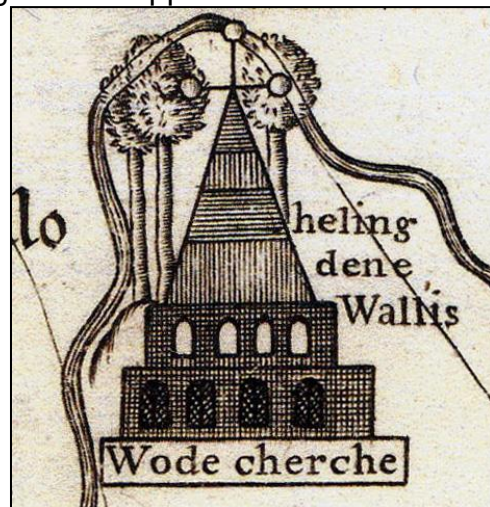
The Vill of Wood and Birchington is not actually mentioned in the Domesday Book of Norman times, except in so far as it was a part of the Manor of Monkton, held by the Archbishop. The entry in the Domesday Book for “Monocstune” says that there were two chapels. One of these was presumably Monkton Church and the other possibly the Church of St. Nicholas-at-Wode, or Birchington Church. There is no doubt from this entry that the district was agricultural and partly wooded.

THE CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS AT WODE

This Church was situated opposite Woodchurch Farmhouse and the foundations of the church could still be traced in the ground opposite to the farmhouse in the 1950s. In the middle of the area of the Church there was a mound of about eight feet high, which evidently appeared to be the ruins of the tower. The Church must have been of considerable size, measuring about 86 feet from east to west and nearly 80 feet from north to south. In fact it was nearly as long as Birchington Church and even wider.

Judging by the evidence from the digs at the site and the old photos, it was built mainly of flint with some worked stones on corners, and round doorways, arches and windows. Some of these worked stones from the Church can still be seen in the farm buildings on the opposite side of the road.

The earliest known map of Thanet made in 1414 by Thomas of Elmham, Monk and Treasurer of St. Augustine’s Abbey, Canterbury, depicts 13 Churches in Thanet and one of these Churches is “Wodechurche”. Wodechurche is represented by an oblong box in red with four windows picked out in blue, surmounted by a red oblong with blue windows possibly to represent the tower, with a steeple rising from it. It is possible that Elmham represented the Church as it was, with tower and steeple. The highway from St. Johns (Margate) to St. Giles (Sarre) ran near by. Near the Church, Elmham has marked a wood.



On nearly all early 16th century maps of Kent, Woodchurch is marked. Symonson’s map of Kent dated 1596, one of the earliest county maps and made when the Church was still standing, marks Woodchurch “St. Nych at Wood” with a small drawing of a Church with a tower and steeple. The road from St. Johns to Sarre passes close by.

This church had its churchyard. Lewis in his “History of Tenet” 1726, says “only parts of the walls are left and its yard is converted into a lay fee”.

Hasted in his famous “History of Kent”, 1799 also says, “only parts of the walls (are) left and its yard containing about half an acre surrounded by the original walls of it converted into a lay fee”.

The names of several people buried in this churchyard are known – obtained from Wills kept at Canterbury – names such as Thos. Holwarding 1497, Nicholas Palmer 1527, Michael Burforth, John Helling and Thos. Burges in 1535, and Nicholas Coleman 1544. The Church was dedicated to St. Nicholas. Inside the church was a Rood with an image of the Blessed Mary, and an altar dedicated to St. James, and at service time the church was quite brightly lit by candles on its altars. This is shown from Wills from which is learnt what was bequeathed by benefactors for the upkeep of lights (candles) and altars in the church.

In 1429 Cecilia Parker left 40d to the light of the Blessed Mary in the Church of Woode. The Parkers preceded the Quek family at Quex, and lived in a house labelled “Parker” near the present Quex mansion. The same Cecilia also left 40d to the light of the Torches of Woode. In 1472 Thos. Smyth Phillpott of St. Johns in Thanet left two bushels of barley to the light of St. Mary of Wode. In 1527 Nicholas Palmer, besides directing to be buried in the Churchyard of St. Nicholas at Wood, left a bushel of barley to the light of St. Mary. In 1523 John Pettit of Birchington left 2s. to the “reparation of the brass of St. Nicholas of Wodde”. In 1536 John Stretyn directed that he should be buried before the Altar of St. James in the Church of Wood.

One of the Vicars of St. John’s, John Bowman’ in his will of 1535 gave the residue of wax to Wodechurch in Thanet after giving one pound of wax to every light in St. John’s, of which he was a ‘Brother’. Several people left money to go towards the upkeep of the church. In 1412 John Parker of Parker’s left 10s. and Richard Quek in 1459 3s. 4d. A memorial brass to Richard Quek is on the wall of the Quex Chapel of Birchington Church.

A certain Kateryn Sheche bequeathed land for the fabric of the parish church of St. Nicholas at Wode, for the relief of the poor and for a yearly mass to be said for the repose of her soul. Nicholas Chesterfelde also bequeathed land to the church and for masses for the repose of his soul.



The stone font from this church is now at Quex. It has been dated about 1450-70. Its outside width at the top is 23 inches with an opening width of 13 inches and it is 10½ inches deep.

There is no record of when this church was built, but, as previously stated, a church was probably here in Norman times. A church must have been here in 1292 in the time of Edward

I for in that year the parish priest of Wode was cited with others concerning the vacancy of the church of Monkton. Woodchurch was a dependent chapel of Monkton – as was Birchington – and the Vicar of that place was bound by the endowment of his vicarage to find a priest to celebrate in the chapel at Wode on Sundays and every Wednesday and Friday. For his duty, the priest was paid £3. 14. 4d. yearly.

By the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, it seems as if the small hamlet of Woodchurch had so decayed that the Church was no longer used and **by about 1563 services in it were discontinued**. The Archdeacon’s Visitation Records of 1562 state that Woodchurch had no curate and no churchwarden and that the Church was falling to decay. At this time the parish church was annexed to Birchington Church. We learn from the

Visitation of the Archdeacon of Canterbury Records of 1602, preserved in the Cathedral Library at Canterbury, that **this church had a school house adjoining and it had been used for "education and teaching of the young of our parish"**. From these visitation records it is learnt that **the church and the adjoining school house were pulled down** and that a certain Thomas Rowe of Birchington was before the Canterbury Court for pulling down the building and taking away the stone. When Thomas Rowe was examined, he stated he did it "by the procurement of Mr. Henry Crispe" (of Quex), who put "workmen on the work". Rowe also stated that about 3 or 4 years previously Mr. Crispe **"then about to build a house near unto the Church of Woodchurch, the labourers which were used then to serve the masons, gathered up some good quantity of stones which fell from the walls of the said church and the masons employed the said stones on the aforesaid building"**.

Rowe also stated that "some of the lead of the church was pulled off and carried by his carts to Mr. Crispe's house called Quex and there left, and some two or three loads of old timber of the same church were carried unto the new built house of Mr. Crispe at Wodechurch". As previously stated stones from the old church may be seen at the present day in the farm buildings that are on the other side of the road opposite the site of the church. Some of these stone have been carved. Lewis in his "History of Tenet", 1726, said the Church was then quite demolished.



A section of one of the walls of the church in 1940

THE PARISH AS A LIMB OF DOVER

From the middle ages until comparatively recent times, Vill of Wood, Woodchurch or Birchington Wood was under the jurisdiction of the Cinque Port of Dover. Dover was the Head Port with Folkestone and Faversham as Corporate Limbs, and Birchington, Wood, 'Goresend', St. John's and others were Non-Corporate Limbs. All civil matters within the parish were governed by the Mayor and Jurats of Dover, who appointed a "Deputy" to act on their behalf and as Vill of Wood was rather a small place, the same Deputy acted for Birchington as well as for Vill of Wood.

The Deputy was an important official and in the early days was appointed annually. It was his duty to collect the Dover rate, attend the Court at Dover and the Sessions at Margate, to arrest all vagrants in the parish and to take all official documents to Dover for signature by the Mayor.

In later years the Deputy was elected annually at the Sessions held at Margate when the Mayor or Justices of the Peace came from Dover. At these Sessions the victuallers paid their 'fines' or licence fees annually. In 1623 William Coleman of Acol paid his 'fine' as a victualler – probably of the inn

where the Crown and Sceptre now stands. William Coleman was an Overseer in 1623 and also a sidesman.

No record has yet come to light stating when Wood first became a Limb of Dover, but in 1424 a group of parishes in Thanet - St. John's, St. Peter's, Birchington and Wood - were recognised by a charter as "members and advocants of the Port of Dover". It is known that Goresend was a member by 1373.

In 1563 during Queen Elizabeth I's reign, the "Town of Wood" was rated at £4. 7. 8d., more than paid by Monkton although the record states that there were no houses at Wood. This may have been because they had been included with those of Birchington.

In 1617 Vill of Wood, with St. John's, St. Peter's and Birchington were ordered to pay £3. 13. 4d., to the Muster Master of the Port, yearly. Every year, after 1601, the Overseers of the Poor for Vill of Wood journeyed to Dover to have the "sess" or rate approved and signed by the Mayor and in the Poor Books are many entries of expenses for the journey. In Volume 3 of the Poor Books of the Vill of Wood are many assessments signed and sealed by the Mayor of Dover.

This is a typical entry;

1672 "for his jurny (journey) to Dover 5s. 6d."

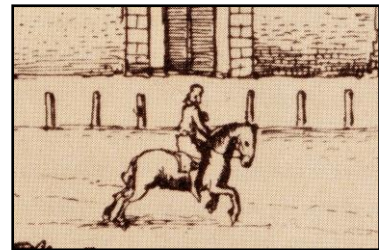
There are many entries of the Deputy being paid his "charges" such as; "1716 May 3 Paid to Jo. Neame Deputy our part of Composition to Dover as by agreement of ye 2 parishes £2. 4. 11d." (Composition was the joint amount to be paid.

It was the Mayor who sanctioned the payment of £2. 2s. 9d. when the census of Vill of Wood was taken in 1811. In the early part of the 19th century the Rates paid by the Vill of Wood to Dover were rather high. In 1816, £21 17s. and in 1820, £32. 15. 6d. It is not known when payment ceased to the Head Port of Dover. Now of course all civil matters are under the control of the Acol Parish Council and the Thanet District Council.

BIRCHINGTON AND WODE UNITED

The year 1604 is a very important year in the history of the Vill of Wood for it was in that year that the two parishes of Birchington and Vill of Wood were united. For some years since the Church of St. Nicholas at Wode had been disused and fallen into decay, no Churchwarden, a most important official in a parish in those days, had been appointed.

The Archdeacon at Canterbury gave this matter some consideration – perhaps after some representation had been made to him by the people of the Vill of Wood – and the Churchwardens of Birchington were summoned to Canterbury. In 1595 and again in 1602 the Churchwardens attended the Court about Woodchurch and paid the Court charges. We learn from the Churchwardens' Account Book that in 1595, 18d was spent when "I was cited to be examined for Woodchurch", and again in 1602, "when we were cited to the Courte aboute Woodechurch iiiis viiid". And "charges of ye Courte iis xd".



In 1604 orders were received for the uniting of the two parishes and the number of officials for each parish was fixed. The Churchwardens entered in their accounts for that year -

“for the orders between Woodchurch & Birchington - iiiis”.

These orders provided that one Churchwarden and two Sidesmen should be appointed for Birchington and the same number for Woodchurch and that the other officers should be collectors or Overseers, two for each parish, and one or two Surveyors of the Highways for each parish (locally known as ‘Waywardens’), making a total of twelve or fourteen officers. These officers were appointed annually at Easter time in a meeting of landowners and tenants held in the Church at Birchington. It was after 1604 that the Churchwardens occasionally kept separate accounts of the receipts and expenditure, which continued until nearly the middle of the 19th century.

The first Churchwarden for the Vill of Wood was appointed in 1605 was Robert Cavell. Churchwardens were then appointed every Easter Monday right up to 1861. Among the Churchwardens appear the names of Friend, Jordan, Bushell, Hatcher, Brazier, Neame, and Simmonds.

The first Overseers of the Poor, Hamon Fine and Thomas Rowe were appointed in 1612 and the first Surveyors of the Highways of whom we have a record were Edward Coleman and Jeffrey Reade, who were appointed in 1631.

THE CHURCHWARDENS ACCOUNTS

From the Churchwardens Accounts of receipts and expenditure an enormous amount is learnt about the parish. The main source of income of the Churchwarden was the rate or “sess”, which was levied on owners and tenants of land within the parish and this money was used “for the repairing of the Church of Birchington and other necessary charges thereunto belonging”. Prior to the Reformation, the repairs to the churches were often partly managed by the monasteries and abbeys to which the parish churches were attached. Once Henry VIII closed these down, the burden fell mainly on the local congregations. If, like Vill of Wood, these were too small to bear the burden, the churches were closed down and the villagers directed to their nearest parish church.

The first assessment recorded in the Churchwardens’ Account Book is dated 1576 and a sess was levied nearly every year after, but it is not until 1655 that there appears a separate list of those liable to pay for the Vill of Wood, together with the amount paid.

In that year the land was rated 2d the acre and the total raised was £10. 18. 2d. paid by 20 occupiers and 10 “outdwellers”. Birchington paid £13. 18. 0d. Much of this, £10. 18. 2d. was spent on the repair of the Birchington Church steeple. Occasionally the Churchwarden had difficulty in collecting the “sess” as in 1695, when Thomas Bushell went away and did not pay and as when Elias Hatcher, who was a Quaker, refused to pay. He could not see why he had to pay towards a church and minister that he did not recognise as part of his responsibility.

Elias Hatcher, the Quaker



THE QUAKERS

For several years Elias Hatcher, the Quaker refused to pay but in 1705 he paid £1. 12. 0 d, for back debts. It was this same Elias Hatcher who refused to have his child baptized in the church. There were several Quakers in the parish and

somewhere in Birchington they had their own burial ground. This appears to be in the area around the Methodist Church.

THE SESS

The last compulsory Church Sess was in 1851 when Acol (or the Vill of Wood) levied a rate of 1d. in the pound, to bring in £8. 19. 2½d. These sesses are very interesting as they give lists of land owners and occupiers in the parish of the Vill of Wood from 1655 up to 1851.

The sess for 1684 includes the following:-

Mr. Wiat Esqr. – for Queaks arable land
 John Turner for Cheeseman's Farm
 Robert Braysher for Woodchurch
 Elias Hatcher at Westgate
 John Muzered for Street (in Westgate)
 Mr. Robert Teddy for Dandelion
 Edward Cooper for Cleeve (Cleve)
 George Christian at Pouses (Pouces)
 Dockter Peters

For many years after the uniting of the Parishes of Birchington and the Vill of Wood in 1604, the two churchwardens kept joint annual accounts and from 1619 onwards the name of "Vill of Wood" appears with that of Birchington in the heading – when Hermon Finne was Churchwarden for "Acholl".

It was not until 1680 that the Churchwarden for "Acoll Division" kept his own separate "Disbursements Account" when John Creake was Churchwarden. The Churchwardens always spent the parish money in the Ale house quite freely – every Easter at the parish meeting, in choosing the parish officers, in "going the bounds" and on numerous other occasions, but the accounts for 1680, as kept by John Creake, appear to be a record, and these accounts were approved and signed by the Vicar, John Ayling (Vicar of Monkton 1662 – 1710) and three Parishioners!

Inn Birchington Square 1678 where they met



Here is a copy taken from the Churchwardens' Account Book.

'Disbursements of John Creake, Churchwarden for Acoll Division 1680'

For charges at ye Alehouse	00 02 06
For bread and wine June iii	00 05 09
Spent on ye Glazier	00 01 00
Cant. charges and journey	00 05 00
More for expenses	00 08 02
More to Dads for drink	00 02 08
More spent at the Alehouse	00 02 06
Canter – expenses more	00 12 06
More at Cant.	01 00 00
More spent in beer	00 01 00
Paid more to Wm. Dads	01 00 00
More for pr'sentm bills and journey	00 08 00

More for the glazier	02 08 05
More spent at ye Alehouse	00 02 08
More spent at Cant.	00 07 06
More for overseeing for Ch.Work	00 02 06
More for gathering in a breife	00 04 00
More paid for my pt. for ye Cup	02 14 09
More at Cant. spent	00 03 08
More for Easter p'sentmts 80	00 08 06
More for writing these accounts	00 01 00
TOTAL is 11 L. 2s. 1d.	

THE COMMUNION CUP

However, besides spending parish money on beer, the Churchwarden did pay Acol's share towards the purchase of the Communion Cup. This "Chalis of Birchington", as it is called, is still used occasionally in Birchington Church and probably cost £8. 16. 6d., and of this amount Acol paid £2. 14. 9d. This Chalice and Paten are now in Canterbury Cathedral. When this cup was purchased, money was spent at the Alehouse as shown by this entry;

"for drink when we agreed about the Cup .. 00 02 07" -

and moreover, John Creake's successor, the next year had to pay off an old ale score to Henry Sprackling, who kept one of the Birchington Inns.

The disbursements accounts also show that Acol always paid its share towards the maintaining of the Parish Church of Birchington. On one occasion in 1687, the church was in a bad state and



the Churchwardens had been ordered to repair it by order of "My Lord of Canterbury". The Acol Churchwarden was then William Jurden who paid Acol's share towards these repairs. The Jurden family lived in the Vill of Wood for many years – in fact from about 1580 to about 1840 - and members of this family held the offices of Churchwarden, Overseer, Surveyor and Sidesman. The famous New Zealand statesman, the Rt. Hon. Sir William Jordan, K.C.M.G., who was born at Ramsgate and died in 1959, was descended from this family.

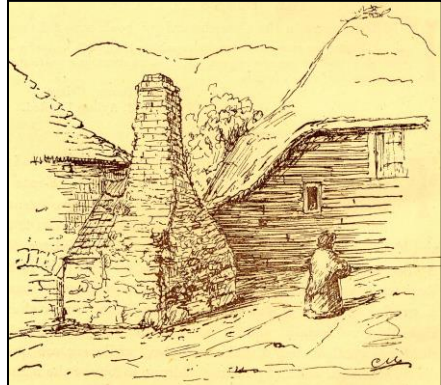
The Acol Churchwardens also joined with their partners of Birchington in collecting money for the relief of the sufferers of the Great Plague of London of 1665 and in helping to make a collection in 1666 for sufferers of the Great Fire of London.

Besides these and similar charitable collections, the Acol Churchwarden frequently gave financial help to poor and needy travellers passing through the village on their way from Margate to Canterbury and beyond. Strangers, seamen with passes, poor travellers, "poor men", "poor seamen that came slaves out of Turke", "a poor man was took by the Spanyard", seamen that had lost their ships, etc, all received help.

CIVIL DUTIES OF THE CHURCHWARDEN

Not only was the Churchwarden responsible for matters relating to the Church, but he had several civil duties for which he was responsible. One of these duties was the payment for the **destruction of vermin**. From about 1700 up to 1835, the Acol Churchwarden entered nearly every year in the "Disbursements Accounts" payments made for the killing of sparrows, hedgehogs, "poulcats", rooks, and "puttisis". For sparrows' heads 2d or 3d a dozen was paid and in some years over 100 dozen sparrows were paid for. For hedgehogs and pollcats 4d each was given.

Another duty was the supervision of the collection of the Chimney Tax. This tax was introduced in 1662 and a money raiser for the government – similar to our road tax today – mainly to increase its income. Parliament ordered that 2/- annually should be paid for "every fire, hearth and stove" in every house with certain exemptions. In the Churchwardens' Account Book for 1671 is a list of names of those excused from paying "theire chimney money by ye collector yt (that) gathered it last - viz at or (our) lady (day) 1671". 15 people including 6 widows were excused for Acol. The tax was abolished in 1689. Another important duty was responsibility for the care of the poor.



THE POOR BOOKS

In 1597 and in 1601 the two great Poor Laws of Queen Elizabeth I were passed, which formed the very foundation of local poor law administration for over two centuries. The most important sections of these Acts ordered the Churchwardens and two to four substantial householders of each parish to be nominated each year during Easter as Overseers of the Poor, and imposed on them the duty of maintaining and setting to work the poor, the funds being provided by levying a rate upon, "every inhabitant and every occupier for lands, houses, etc in the parish".

In Acol, as in nearly all parishes in the country, Overseers were appointed and the Poor Laws put into operation, and for over two hundred years the amount of time, attention and money spent upon matters relating to the poor seems to have been quite as great as that devoted to all other matters of local concern together.

As already stated. the first Overseers of the Poor for the Vill of Wood, Hamon Finne and Thomas Rowe were appointed in 1612 and in 1623 the Overseers began to keep their accounts in a book which they continued to keep for over 200 years. From 1623 to 1833 these annual accounts were kept, filling four books now held in Canterbury Cathedral Archives. From these books a great deal of information on the history of Acol can be obtained. In them are recorded year by year the names of those liable to pay the poor "sess" and the amounts they paid as well as how the money was spent.

The first assessment is headed;

"An Assessment made Feb. 22 1623 by ye Churchwardens and Overseers of ye Poore of the said Vill (of Wood) and other inhabitants there for the relief of

ye poore there, rating therein lands at 1d ye acre and each man by his hability as followeth viz”.

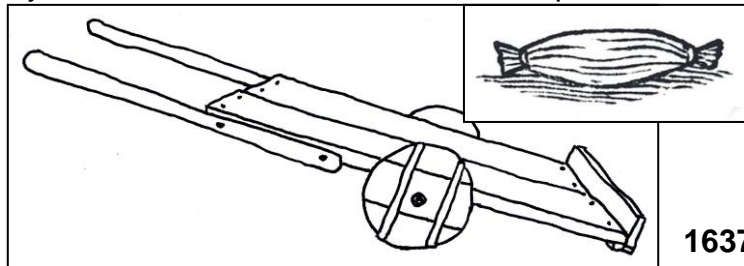
Then follows the list of those liable to pay with their acreage of land and the amount each was assessed for “his hability”.

The total amount collected by this sess came to £5. 19. 9d. from 24 rate payers, which was expended mainly on barley and oats for widows, the aged, sick and the ‘impotent’ poor (- those poor who could not work). A study of this Poor Book and the Registers of Births, Burials and Marriages throw much light on the history of Acol. From them we can tell when plague and death struck the village and when famine and scarcity occurred.

THE PLAGUE

There is no doubt that Acol was hit hard by the plague in the year 1637 for during that year five assessments for the relief of the poor were made, bringing in over £41, a very large sum in those days, and over £39 was expended in relief. During that year 65 people were buried in Birchington Churchyard and of these, 33 died of the plague and are so marked in the burial register. The average annual number of burials at this time was less than 20. Of these 33 some came from Acol including Hamon Finne and his son and daughter. This plague or “black death” was carried by a particular sort of flea which inhabited the black rat.

The following extract from the Overseers account book for the year 1637 speaks plainly of the infectious nature of the disease and of the efforts made by the Overseers to take care of the orphans.



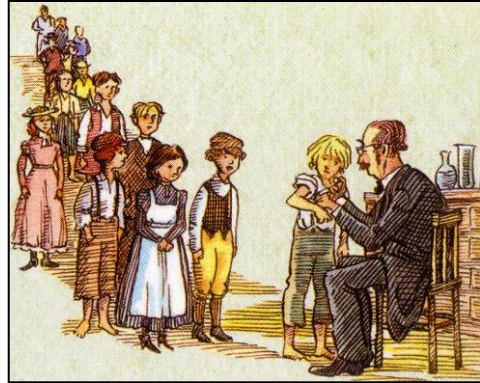
1637 From Acol Poor Book

It.	To Will Derrick, his wife in the time of her sickness extraordinary	00 03 00
It.	To ye Widd. Twiman for looking to her one week then	00 02 00
It.	To Nic. Hoskins wife for looking to her one other week then	00 02 00
It.	For Coales for her then	00 00 09
It.	For burying her last child Aug. 8	00 02 06
It.	For burying her second child Aug. 23	00 02 06
It.	For burying herself Aug. 24	00 02 06
It.	To ye women for watching with her laying her forth, socking her, and washing her clothes	00 04 00
It.	For beere to ye men th't brought her to the Church	00 01 00
It.	For cloath to make Derricks other three children cloathes	00 08 00

Then follows several items for making clothes, for purchasing shoes and for keeping the children.

Smallpox appeared to be quite common in the village and relief was given to sufferers of this disease until "inoculation" was practised when the disease appeared to have no longer occurred.

"Inoculation" is first mentioned in 1784 when 22 parishioners of Acol were inoculated and Mr. Simmons was paid 5s. 3d. a head after a parish meeting had discussed the matter and when 5s. was spent - probably on beer. There are numerous entries of payments to women for nursing sick people, and of payments made to the doctor. In 1767 a woman, Alice Long, was sent to London "to the hospital" at a cost of £1. 8. 5d.



In Acol relief of the poor was mainly given in money or in kind, but occasionally the able-bodied men were set to work repairing the roads, the tools being supplied by the Overseers. Coals, clothes, (shoes, gloves, shifts, bodes (bodices), stomachers, stockings etc), wheat, barley, oats, flour and gristing were some of the things given. Rents were paid, special grants given during sickness and help towards lying-in burial expenses paid, in addition to weekly money allowances.

Orphans were apprenticed or boarded out, land belonging to poor or sick people ploughed, disbanded soldiers were given relief, wool supplied for spinning and spinning wheels were mended. There is no doubt that the Churchwardens and Overseers of Acol cared for the widows, the poor, and the orphans of the parish as far as they were able, as the case of widow Hurst bears out.

Widow Hurst's husband, George Hurst died in 1712, in which year he was excused paying his rate but his widow and family of probably five children were not left in want. She was allowed several sums of money to help herself and family, she was given extra when the children were sick and the doctor was paid. She was supplied with coal and was excused paying her rate. Widow Hurst herself became ill and a woman was paid to look after her, but Mrs. Hurst died in 1714. The Churchwardens and Overseers paid the expenses of her funeral and took charge of the children. These were boarded out in the village and in the Poor Book there are the agreements made with "foster" parents to keep the children. There are many entries in the book for clothes supplied to these children. The Overseer did re-imburse himself of a very little of the money expended. Widow Hurst's goods were sold realizing £3. 7. 1d. which sum is entered on the receipts side of the Poor Book.

The Overseer at this time who arranged all this was Elias Hatcher, the Quaker who refused to pay the Church rate for the maintenance of the Birchington Parish Church. For nearly 20 years he resisted the Churchwarden of Birchington by refusing to pay this Church rate and more than once he was "presented" at Court at Canterbury.

The document recording the appointment of Elias Hatcher, the Quaker, to be an Overseer of the "Vill of Wood" signed and sealed by the Justices of the Peace for the Town and Port of Dover and dated 1712 is in the Church safe. On becoming Overseer, however, he paid the Church "sess"! He probably realised that the money was for charity as well as the Church.

THE SETTLEMENT ACT

The 1662 Poor Law contained the outrageous provision that any stranger settling in a parish may be removed forthwith by the Justices unless he rents a tenement of £10 a year and finds security to discharge the parish of his adoption, for all expenses it may incur upon his behalf. This Settlement Act, as it is known, was to prevent the influx of people into the towns. It certainly prevented the ordinary people of Acol from moving out of the parish. Most of the people were born, lived their lives, and died within the parish.

From this date on, the expenses attending the removal of paupers back to their parishes of settlement and the payment of fees for legal advice on the Settlement, form a considerable part of the expenditure recorded in the Poor Book. Several documents concerning Settlement are preserved in the Church safe (now [2014] in Canterbury Cathedral Archives).

There are two Certificates of Settlement dated 1717, duly signed by the Mayor of the Town and Port of Dover – one that John Read and his wife were legally settled in the Parish of St. Mary the Virgin in Dover, and the other that James Tuffeny and his family were legally settled in the Parish of Monkton – and were not a liability on the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Vill of Wood.

THE WORKHOUSE

By the Act of 1723, parish officers were authorised to buy or rent workhouses, but as Acol was too small to establish its own Workhouse, it contracted with Birchington to receive its poor. Birchington established its workhouse in 1794 in the



flint building on land now adjoining the Primary School in Park Lane. In 1795 the Overseers of the Vill of Wood paid “Stringer for Victualing the paupers, clothing, sallarys and interest for House” £49. 6. 11¾ d., and every year from this date until 1835, when the Union Workhouse at Minster was built, an entry is included in the accounts for Acol’s share of Birchington Workhouse expenses. When the Union Workhouse was built at Minster, Acol was one of the parishes in the Union.

It is possible that somewhere in Acol were “parish houses” where a few poor lived, as on several occasions during the 18th and early 19th centuries – up to 1835 – there are entries for expenses for straw for thatching of the parish houses.

FINAL ENTRIES – POOR BOOK

Some of the last entries in the Poor Book just before the old parochial system of each parish managing its own poor was wound up and “Unions” formed in 1834, interesting entries can be seen dealing with a wife sent to Gibraltar to join her husband. A certain Mr. Fox was a soldier in the army and in 1831 the Overseers allowed “Fox wife to go to the Ridgement (Regiment) £8. 10. 0d.” The following year it appears that the husband was posted to Gibraltar and the Overseers paid the fare of Mrs Fox and child £20, and her expenses £3. 16. 0d., to join him there. Just before this a Mrs. Collins of Acol had her fare paid to America £21. 18. 9d.!

So the Poor Books end in 1833 and never at any time in the 200 years they cover were there more than about 15 to 20 ratepayers living in the parish and about the same number of “outwellers” – owning land in the parish but living outside, and at no time was the population more than 200.

When the Census was taken in 1811 for which the Mayor of Dover allowed the Overseers £2. 2. 9d., for taking it, the population was only 163. By 1881 it has risen to 294, in a parish with an area of 1428 acres and a rateable value of £3363, but by 1901 the population had dropped to 225, living in 47 houses. In 1959 the population was 204. This reduction is mainly due to the reduction in the size of the parish, after Westgate parish (St Saviour’s) was formed.

WILLIAM COBBETT

When William Cobbett, M.P., the famous diarist and writer on politics and agriculture, came to Acol or Birchington (he doesn’t say which) in 1823, on one of his ‘Rural Rides’, he praised the crops, but deplored the condition of the labourers. If he breakfasted at Acol, probably at the Crown and Sceptre, he complained that he got “no corn for his horse and no bacon for himself”.



TITHE

In an agricultural parish like Acol, Tithe or the tax on the annual proceeds of land and of personal industry, originally payable in kind, and taken for the support of the clergy and the church, was a very important and no doubt disputable matter. Tithe dates back to early Saxon Times and as a rent charge it did not disappear until 1996. Tithes of corn, hay and wool were known as “Great Tithes” and were taken by the Rector, and all other tithes were known as “Small Tithes” and were taken by the Vicar.

Up to the time of the Reformation, much of the great or rectorial tithe was held by religious houses and that of the Ville of Wood by the Monastery of Christ Church Canterbury, now Canterbury Cathedral.

At the Reformation, when the monasteries were dissolved, these Great Tithes passed to the Crown and from thence were sold to laymen. However, the Great Tithes of the parish of the Vill of Wood passed into the hands of the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury, who leased out the tithe to laymen.

The Vicar of the Parish – that is of Monkton, who oversaw Birchington with Acol, was entitled to all the small tithes. There is no doubt that here, as elsewhere, Tithe was considered a hindrance to the improvement of agriculture and it was often a source of great irritation and bad feeling for both payer and recipient.

In 1836 a Tithe Act was passed which gave facilities for the commutation of the Tithe into a monetary rent charge, such commutation being confirmed by a body of Commissioners. The last Tithe Act of 1936 made provision for the final extinction of the tithe rent charge in 1996.

As a result of the 1836 Tithe Act, Thomas Fames Tatham, an assistant Tithe Commissioner, after holding several meetings in the Parish with land owners and Tithe owners, made the award of Rent-charge in lieu of Tithes in 1839. The certified copy of the award, “Instrument of Apportionment of Rent Charge in lieu of Tithes in the Parish of Acol”, is now in Canterbury Cathedral.

Land subject to payment of Tithe in 1839 amounted to 1399 acres, 0 rods 32 poles, and of this, 1370 acres 1r. 32 poles was arable and 28 acres, 3r. were meadow or pasture.

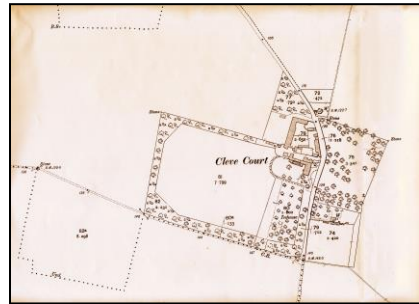
The Dean and Chapter of Canterbury owned all the Great Tithes and leased them to a Benjamin Bushell of Monkton on a 21 years lease, renewable every 7 years.

From the price of wheat, barley, and oats per bushel (7s. 0¼d, 3s. 11½d, and 2s. 9d.) at that time, the Commissioner awarded a total of £767, to the Vicar £132 per year, instead of the small tithes, and to the impropiator (Benjamin Bushell and then to the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury) £635 per year. The gross award for Birchington was £899. This money is now collected and paid over in due course by the Tithe Redemption Commission.

TITHE MAPS

With this "Instrument of Apportionment of Rent Charge" goes the Tithe Map which was made in 1832 by George Grist, a Surveyor of Canterbury. He was paid £20 by the Overseers for doing this work and a further £4. 9. 0d., for marker stones. This map is also in Canterbury Cathedral now.

It is on a very large scale of 5 chains (16 inches) to 1 mile. Every house and field in the parish is shown. From the "Instrument" and the Tithe Map a considerable amount of information about the "Parish of Acholt" (as it was called in 1839) can be obtained. The Chief landowners were John P. Powell, who owned Quex, Benjamin Bushell, Richard Foster, John Harnett, and Frances Neame. The chief occupiers were James Yeomans, Francis Simmonds, Gibbon Rammell, Michael Pett and Henry Sidders. There appeared to be less than 40 inhabited houses in the parish and a population of less than 200. The field names of 1839 are most interesting and enlightening. Probably most of the names today have disappeared - names such as;



Linch field of 34 acres

Street field of 85 acres near Sparrow Castle

Wells Close of 44 acres at Cheesemans Farm

Small Gains of 12 acres

Hundreds of 67 acres (at Hundreds Farm)

Mill Field of 15 acres – where the Mill stood, south of Shottendane

Road near Two Chimneys

Chalk Pit field of 27 acres near Woodchurch (beside the chalk pit)

Station House and field – the coastguard Watch House at West Bay,
Westgate

Hop Garden field of 5 acres – in the village where the only hops of Acol were grown. Hops paid 8/- per acre for the Tithe rent charge. As a result of the division and sale of land in the parish after 1839, certified copies of the Instruments of Altered Apportionment of Rent Charges in lieu of Tithes were drawn up. The earliest is dated 1844 and relates to arable and meadow land of Hundreds Farm, Westgate. The Vicar and Churchwardens have the custody of 11 such certificates, also 5 certificates of Redemption of Tithe Rent charge each with a large scale map attached.

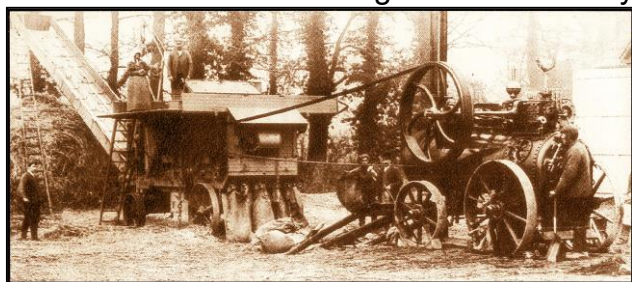
ACOL AND THE AGRICULTURAL RIOTS OF 1830

In 1830, three men of Acol, involved in the **Agricultural Riots**, sometimes known as the **Swing Riots**, were convicted and sentenced to transportation. Most of the men of Acol at this time worked on the land for a very low wage, little more than two shillings a day, (10p) and quite often during the winter months they were unemployed, as no work was available. The cost of food was high, especially wheat and bread, (mainly due to very poor harvests) and of course, there was no unemployment pay. Only a small allowance was made by the Overseers of the poor for the parish of Acol. This relief came out of the Poor Rate levied by the Overseers.

In 1830 there were three sesses or rates levied by the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor for Acol, which brought in about £280, a considerable sum in those days, and nearly all of this money was expended on weekly relief to the unemployed, widows, and children. In the parish of Acol at this time there were only 13 ratepayers living in the parish, and 9 outwellers – that is ratepayers owning or occupying property but living outside of the parish. The poor usually received just over one shilling a day, so the poor and unemployed suffered badly. Wages were low and food was dear and to aggravate matters, the winter of 1829-1830 was particularly severe.

The introduction of the Threshing Machine caused unemployment among the agricultural workers, as quite often the only work available to them during the winter was hand-threshing with flails. The threshing machine did away with the flail – and therefore their pay. As a result, there were outbreaks of sporadic rioting and incendiarism, especially in East Kent where threshing machines were smashed. There was also the burning of ricks. These became known as the Captain Swing Riots, but who Captain Swing was, is not known. The rioters demanded a wage of 2s 6d (12½p) a day but although many farmers were in sympathy with their demands, the high rents and the high cost of Tithe made the extra payment difficult.

As already stated, three men of Acol, and one from Birchington were involved in the riots. The three Acol men were William Brown, William Hughs, and Thomas Hepborn. The Birchington man was Richard Oliphant, a butcher. These four were tried, convicted, along with three others who joined them on the day they chose to break up Thomas Rowe's threshing machine. They were all sentenced to seven years transportation in December 1830. William Brown was born in Acol, and baptised in Birchington Church on 12 November 1797. He was married in Birchington Church in 1819.



Steam powered threshing machine

The entry in the Marriage Register is as follows;

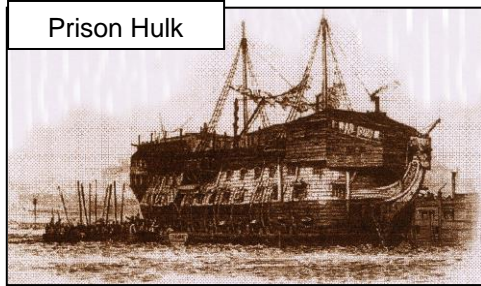
“July 31 1819 **William Brown** (M) and Sarah Miles (M)“

As he could neither read or write he signed the Marriage Register with a Mark. He had six children when convicted.

The second was **William Hughs** of Acol who was baptised in Birchington Church on March 25th 1810. He was not married and was only 21 when convicted.

The third was **Thomas Hepborn** who was baptised at St Lawrence, Ramsgate in 1800 and was married in Birchington Church to Elizabeth Emptage on 15th October 1825 and lived in Acol. He signed the Register with a mark but he could read. He had two children both of whom were baptised in Birchington Church.

These three, with others including **Richard Oliphant**, a butcher of Birchington were convicted at Dover for feloniously breaking a threshing machine belonging to a Mr. Rowe, a farmer of Margate, and sentenced to transportation to Van Diemens Land now known as Tasmania. They were reported as quiet and peaceable during the time they were in gaol at Dover and had not been in gaol before. They were sent to a prison hulk at Gosport and then transported on the convict ship "Eliza" which left Portsmouth on the 2nd February 1831 arriving at Hobart, Van Diemens Land, on 29th May 1831.



Thomas Hepborn's wife joined him in Van Diemens Land in 1836 when, having been well behaved, he was granted a free pardon. Three more children was born to them in Van Diemens

Land. Records tell us that many well-behaved transportees were permitted to have their families brought out to them. **Thomas and Elizabeth Hepborn's** descendants still live in Victoria, Australia. (*I have recently been in touch with one branch of the family – July 2014 - J.M.B.*)

The sentences given to these rioters seem very harsh but evidently those transported on the "Eliza" were relatively well treated. The gaol reports describe them as of a "peaceable nature" and as far as can be ascertained received no further charges or punishments.

The Hepborn family prospered, owned their own house and later moved to Victoria, where their descendants still live.

AGRICULTURE IN ACOL

Farming in the early days of the 17th and 18th centuries was very different from that of today. Wheat and barley were the two chief corn crops of Acol. Wheat of the common red sort was sown and produced about 3 quarters from an acre but sometimes 4 or 5 quarters. About 3½ bushels of seed, which was scattered by hand over the land, was used per acre. Sheep were used a great deal for the treading of the soil, often after the seed had been sown. Farmers often wet the seed with salt water and limed it to prevent the smut. Harvesting was done by the men using scythes making the bands to tie up the stooks as they went.



Barley produced 5 or 6 quarters an acre, Beans were introduced in the early 1700's. The bean seeds were dropped in the furrows by women who also did much of the weeding. Quite often a field was left fallow every third year.

CHURCH SESS

The last Church Sess (rate) for the maintenance and repair of the church at Birchington was made in 1851 when the rate was 1d in the pound, bringing in £8. 19. 2½. Birchington's Sess brought in £13. 1. 8½. This was the last occasion that the parish of Acol contributed directly to the repair of the church. From Elizabethan times until this date, Acol had taken its share in the cost of maintaining the parish church at Birchington. When the steeple was re-shingled in 1834, Acol made a sess of 7d in the pound bringing in £47. 5. 7d., a large sum for those days. But since the days of compulsory Church Rates, and the amalgamation of the two parishes, Acol has always accepted its responsibility for its share in the maintaining of the Birchington Church.

CHURCHWARDENS

J. P. Barrett, in his *History of the Vill of Birchington*, states that the two parishes of Birchington and Acol each selected its own Churchwarden down to 1855 when the Acol parishioners declined to nominate, but I can find no documentary evidence to support this.

At the Easter Vestry In 1861 the Acol parishioners declined to nominate a Churchwarden. The Vestry Minute Book states that the "Acol parishioners, including the Rev. Sicklemore, showed strong feeling to dispense with the Churchwarden altogether. The Vicar (Rev. H. F. Whish), acting on their objection and refusal to appoint, appointed E. Lendon, Esq., of Acol as Churchwarden. The parishioners present protested against the Vicar "having the right". Mr. Lendon afterwards withdrew, but from about this time Acol ceased to have its own Churchwarden.

ST. MILDRED'S CHURCH



Not many years after this in 1871, Birchington was made a parish distinct from Monkton and the Rev. John P. Alcock M.A., became the first Vicar of Birchington with Acol. It was during his incumbency, and mainly due to his efforts, that the little church of St. Mildred at Acol was built and dedicated. The coming of the railway in 1863, helped increase the population of Birchington from c. 800 to 1,100 by 1900.

In 1875, a piece of land containing 47 perches for the site of the School-Church was given to the Vicar and Churchwardens for the parish of Birchington with Acol united, by Mrs. Charlotte Rogers, a widow who once lived at Minster, but at that time had moved to Nice in the South of France. The land was given upon trust "for the purpose of holding divine service and also for a school for the education of children and adults, or children only, of the labouring, manufacturing and other poorer class in the parish of Acol, and as a residence for the teacher or teachers at the said school, for the promoting of education of the poor in the principles of the Established Church". The building was designed in the Gothic style of architecture, by Mr. C.N. Beazley of Westgate and built by Mr. L. Shrubsole of Faversham and Westgate, at a cost of about £790.

The amount was raised by means of donations and collections, mainly through the efforts of the Vicar, the Revd. John Alcock and of Mr. E. Lendon of Acol.

The Foundation Stone of the “St. Giles” Church, as it was first known, was laid on Tuesday, 18th April, 1876 – at Easter-tide – by the Very Revd. the Dean of Canterbury. Unfortunately the proceedings on this occasion were somewhat marred by a smart downpour of rain, but nevertheless the robed clergy and Birchington Church Choir walked in procession to the site singing, “Onward, Christian Soldiers”. The Stone was laid by the Dean and bears a small, carved Latin cross, with the date “Easter, A.D., 1876” which can still be seen on the east wall of the church.

The offertory, which went to the Building Fund, amounted to over £44. It is interesting to note that on this occasion the adjacent cottages were dressed with flags and the bells of Waterloo Tower in Quex Park, rang a merry peal. For their efforts the Quex Park Ringers were entertained to a substantial dinner at the Crown and Sceptre in Acol. The new School-Church was formally opened on Thursday the 5th October, 1876 by the Rt. Revd. The Bishop of Dover. There was a celebration of Holy Communion at 8.30 in the morning, and in the afternoon a special service – a form of evening prayer with prayers for the dedication of a church, followed by an address by the Bishop. Most of the “gentry and residents of the neighbourhood” were present. In his address the Bishop referred to the old ruined church at Woodchurch and to the new church “in Acol - the little place in the oak wood”. The collection on this occasion amounted to over £41, leaving a debt of about £55 on the building, but this debt was cleared within a week or two. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners made a grant of £120 per annum towards the stipend of a curate at Acol and the Archbishop licensed the Vicar, the Revd. John Alcock and his licensed Curate to officiate in the building in celebrating the Holy Sacrament. Every Baptism celebrated in the School-Church has to be duly registered in the Registry of Baptisms belonging to the Parish Church of Birchington.

The contractor who built the church said the job did not pay and so charged 5% interest on an outstanding account. The dedication of the church was changed fairly soon afterwards to St Mildred, when the parishioners at Acol, backed by the Birchington congregation, requested this. St Giles had a connection with Sarre, but not with Birchington. The patronal festival is now celebrated on July 13th, St. Mildred’s Day. St. Mildred was one of a family of Thanet saints. Mildred lived at Minster Abbey in Thanet and became Abbess of the Nunnery there in Saxon times, succeeding her mother, Domneva.

For ten years this School-Church was used as a school and until recently (1963) there were still a few people living in the village who remember going to school there. The old fireplace (now blocked up) can still be seen inside the building. The Crispe Charity at that time helped to support the school. In 1879 Acol School received £20 from the Charity and in 1883 it had £31. 19. 3d.

In 1960 a local resident gave the Vicar and Churchwardens £100 to be



invested, the interest from which is used towards the upkeep and maintenance of the churchyard of St. Mildred's.

The piece of land which Charlotte Rogers gave for the church and house was two small plots. The plot on which the church was built lies in an old chalk pit. To the west of this piece is a nine foot wall holding back the earth in the upper plot of land. This piece had a small building on it at first, but it was never used to build the proposed house for the teacher. It stood unattended until, in the 1980s, a Westgate man claimed possession of it. Unfortunately, after much protesting on the part of the church, he was given possession of it, although the church still holds all the deeds!

About 12 years after the opening of the church, on 13th August 1888 there was great excitement in the village for on that day "The Cosmo", at that time the largest balloon in the world, came to earth a few yards from the little church. Within a few minutes a crowd of about 500 had gathered! The balloon had come from the Irish Exhibition at South Kensington.

ACOL VESTRY MEETINGS & ANNUAL PARISH MEETINGS

Not many years after the Acol parishioners declined to nominate a Churchwarden at the Easter Vestry at Birchington, Acol parish held its own Vestry in the new School-Church.

For several years the first Vicar of Birchington-with-Acol, Rev. J.P. Alcock, was the Chairman and the minutes were written by him in his clear legible handwriting.

At the meeting held in the School-Church in 1878, Mr. Lendon was elected Waywarden. The Overseer of the Poor was elected but there was difficulty over the election of the Assistant Overseer at a salary of £5 per annum. Two were nominated - Mr. T. Hogbin and Mr. Catford - and on a show of hands Mr. Hogbin was elected by 6 votes to 5, but when the vote was again taken according to the rateable value of those present Mr. Catford was declared elected by 21 votes to 8 for Mr. Hogbin, although Mr. Hogbin protested. A short time after, the magistrates decided that the proceedings should be taken anew – on the grounds that sufficient time had not been given to the poll at the meeting, but at a later meeting Mr. Catford was again nominated and elected.

In 1889 the new Vicar, Rev. Kirkham Fox acted as Chairman of the Vestry held in the Church and it was during his chairmanship that some ancient bye-ways in Westgate were stopped to allow new roads to be made and also the Rural Sanitary Authority was requested to lend its assistance in supporting the new road via Plucks Gutter.

In 1894 the Local Government Act was passed. The first annual Parish Meeting held under this Act in Acol was held in the Crown and Sceptre Inn, on December 4th, 1894 when the Rev. Kirkham Fox, Vicar, was Chairman and when 12 parishioners were present. Mr. Chapman of Pouces Farm was elected Rural District Councillor. For some reason no other meetings were held at the Crown and Sceptre Inn, and for the next 10 years the Annual Meetings were held at St Mildred's Church, when the Overseers were elected. Later, for several years, the Annual Meetings were held at Acol Farm House by the kindness of Mr. T. Jarman, the then occupier.

THE PARISH COUNCIL

In 1959, by the Local Government Act of 1933, the Kent County Council established by order a Parish Council for the Rural Parish of Acol. At this date Acol had a population of 204 at the last census and a parish meeting was resolved. The number of parish councillors is 5. Mrs. M.W. Burton had the honour of being the first Chairman with Mr. A.G. Miller as first Clerk. Under the leadership of its Chairman this Council did much good for the parish (1963).

THE VILLAGE HALL

The land on which the Parish Hall stands was purchased in 1911. The Trustees are the Vicar and Churchwardens but the Hall is maintained by a Committee of representatives from organisations using the Hall. The land, 15 perches, on which the Hall stands was conveyed to the Rev. H.A. Serres, Vicar of Birchington and others to form a site for a mission room "to be erected forthwith", for the holding of services, meetings, classes and lectures in connection with the Church of England and for such other parochial purposes as the Vicar for the time being shall think proper.

THE METHODIST CHAPEL

The Methodist Chapel standing at the junction of the Minster Road and Church Street was built in 1866 on land purchased from the Rev. George Wilson Sicklemore of the parish of St. Lawrence, in Thanet, the same Rev. Sicklemore who led the opposition to the appointment of a Churchwarden in Acol in 1861. The building was registered for public worship in 1867. It is now a private chapel of rest for a firm of undertakers.

RECENT HISTORY OF ST. MILDRED'S CHURCH

Acol and St. Mildred's Church made history in 1950 when Arthur Ling was presented, admitted and received the Archbishop's Licence to perform the duties of **Lay Reader** in the parish of Birchington with Acol in the Church of St. Mildred's. Arthur Ling was the first Reader within the Canterbury Diocese to be admitted to the office other than at the Cathedral. It was thought that a Reader should be admitted in the place where he would serve and in the presence of those with whom he would minister. Mr. Ling was presented by the then Vicar of Birchington, Canon the Rev. N.M.G. Sharp M.A., to Canon A.O. Standon M.A., Vice Dean and Canon Residential of Canterbury Cathedral, the Archbishop's Deputy. For several years Mr. Ling assisted the Clergy in ministering to the people of Acol.

In 1962 heating by electricity was installed in the church.

MODERN HISTORY OF ACOL

During the First World War a single track railway line crossed the parish, running from the main railway line at Minnis Bay, crossing the Canterbury Road and passing through the fields of Acol to Manston aerodrome. It was used to carry munitions and fuel from the main railway to Manston. Although the railway has now disappeared parts of its course can still be traced. It was closed in 1925.

Towards the end of the First World War a German Zeppelin dropped a bomb on Acol but no damage was done.

THE CHARITIES OF ACOL

Acol being a part of the ecclesiastical parish of Birchington, the benefits of the Church Charities of Birchington also apply to Acol.

CRISPE CHARITY – for BIRCHINGTON and ACOL

From this Charity, 2 poor widows of the Ville of Acol each receive 20 shillings at Christmas, and young people over the age of 16 who are resident in the Ville of Acol can be given financial assistance to purchase tools, books etc to assist in their entry into a profession or trade, or help with further education. Organisations promoting the welfare of youth can also be helped. This Charity was instituted in 1708 when Mistress Anna Gertruy Crispe, in her will left the Crispe Farm in Trust, the income from which she directed should be used to improve the lot of poor widows and for education. Widows now get £50 each year (2014).

MRS. EMMA SIMMONDS CHARITY

In 1921 Mrs. Emma Simmonds of Ramsgate bequeathed to the Vicar and Churchwardens of Birchington with Acol, the sum of £100 to invest, and apply the income in the distribution of coal among the poor in the parish of Acol at Christmas. The annual income is £3. 10. 0d (1963).

SYBELLA PETLEY TRUST

In 1935 Miss Sybella Petley left to the Birchington Parochial Church Council £300 to be invested, the interest from which is to be devoted to the upkeep of the Petley Graves in Birchington Churchyard and Margate Cemetery, and the balance to be distributed each Christmas among deserving poor persons of good character residing in the parish of Birchington with Acol.

