

The Birchington Institute Trust

By Alfred Walker – c. 1968

This Charity originated nearly 100 years ago, in 1879, the then Vicar of Birchington, the Rev. J. P. Alcock, (who was the first Vicar of Birchington, as until 1871 Birchington was part of the ecclesiastical parish of Monkton), Major Morrison Bell, and a few other prominent gentlemen of Birchington agreed that the village needed a community centre. As a result the Rev. Alcock, Major Morrison Bell, and a Mr. C. Moore (who was the People's Churchwarden) borrowed the sum of £500 on mortgage from a Mr. R. White, and purchased the property which became known as the Institute, to be a village centre – the first community centre in Birchington.

This Institute was situated in the Square behind what is now Colin Beckley's Sweetmarket. The sweet shop originally was the Caretaker's house but later became the Church Verger's house. Access to the Institute was from the Square by a narrow passageway by the side of the Caretaker's house.

The Institute consisted of a hall with a stage and a gallery, an upstairs room and outhouses. It became the centre for public meetings, concerts, lectures, entertainments, social gatherings etc. It had a Reading Room where newspapers and periodicals could be seen, and a Library. In time it became licensed for stage plays. Technical Classes were held there, and the Knott Lodge of Oddfellows formed in 1881, and the Good Intent Benefit Society held their meetings there. Meetings of the Parish Council were also held there.

The Institute appeared to have a struggling existence. The Trustees, the Rev Alcock, Major Morrison Bell and Mr. C. Moore had hoped that the centre would pay its way and in due time pay off the mortgage. It is of interest to note that the Caretaker paid 2 shillings per week rent for his house.

Early in the 1900s the Trustees offered the property to the Parish Council on condition that the Council would take over the mortgage – then £250 – but there appear to have been obstacles in the way and there was also difficulty whether a Parish Council could hold property under a Charitable Trust – further, the Council was unable to raise the loan.

In 1907 the Rev Serres, Vicar, and Mr. Honeyball, Churchwarden were appointed Trustees by the Charity Commissioners. It is interesting to note that in the 1890s the Infants' School was held at the Institute – before Mrs. Gray of Birchington Hall, later "Spurgeons Orphanages", bought the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Albion Road and let it to the National School Managers of Park Lane School for a pepper-corn rent of one shilling per year for use as an Infants' School.

A wood carving class was held at the Institute and some of the oak wood carving now in Birchington Church was done by that class. In the early 1900s the girls and boys from Park Lane School had cookery and woodwork classes there. It became the meeting place of the Birchington Cricket Club and of the village band.

During the Second World War it was used by the W.V.S. for meals. In the 1920s there was much correspondence between the then Trustees and the Parish Council regarding the Institute. Eventually, early in the 1950s, the Charity Commissioners sold the property, paid off the remaining mortgage, and invested the balance, and established a Scheme to regulate what

became known as the Birchington Institute Charity or Fund. The Scheme was sealed by the Commissioners on 25th April 1952.

The first Trustees appointed by the Commissioners under this Scheme were:-

Frederick Wm. Mellanby, J.P., William R. Curtis of Station Road, (these two were appointed for life)

Kathleen E. Phillips, J.P., of Shakespeare Road.

Hannah B. Powell-Cotton of Quex

Denys H. E. Jeston of Grenham House.

(These three were appointed for four years but could be re-appointed.)

The Trustees must be persons residing in Birchington and were appointed from time to time by the Thanet District Council.

The income of the Charity was obtained from – as stated in the Schedule to the Scheme - £452 4% Consolidated Stock standing in the name of the Official Trustee of Charitable Funds.

According to the Scheme, the income was to be applied as follows – after certain payments – the Trustees ‘shall apply the income of the Charity for any charitable purposes for the benefit of the inhabitants of Birchington not provided out of rates, taxes or public funds’. In the latter years the income was about £18 per year derived from £397.49 4% Consolidated Stock.

The last Trustees were:-

Mr. D. E. Jeston, Hon. Secretary

Miss K. E. Phillips

Mr. Esdaile

Mr. C. Barrows

Mrs. M. Maple.

The Charity was closed in c. 2007, when the residue of the funds were granted to the Crispe Charity, who invested it and it now funds youngsters leaving school, youth groups and helps provide grants for 10 widows of Birchington and Acol.

Birchington Institute.

LECTURE-ENTERTAINMENT

Thursday, May 31st, 1888.

Chairman—Rev. J. P. ALCOCK, Rector of Crayford.

Mr. J. H. STORR, of Westgate-on-Sea, has kindly undertaken to light the room with the

ELECTRIC LIGHT.

A Selection of Vocal and Instrumental Music will be given and some remarkable Curiosities exhibited.

The Handbell Ringers of Birchington will give a performance, conducted by Mr. T. B. REED.

LECTURE I—

“ANNALS OF BIRCHINGTON”

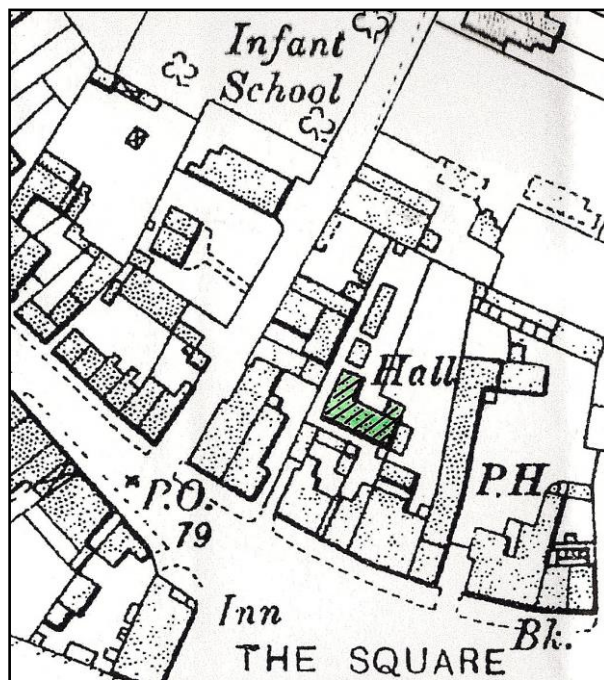
By Mr. J. P. BARRETT,
MEMBER OF THE KENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

PROGRAMME.

Pianoforte Solo - “March—Jolly” - Miss LYON
Lecture, Part 1—ANCIENT BIRCHINGTON - Major BELL
Song - “The Hardy Norseman” - Major BELL
Lecture, Part 2—THE CHURCH AND ITS HISTORY.
Song with Chorus - “Children’s Voices” - Miss GRAY
Lecture, Part 3—QUEX AND ITS OWNERS.
Handbell Ringers “The Bells of Birchington”
Lecture, Part 4—THE PARISH BOOKS.
Song - “The Arab’s Farewell” - Mr. A. E. RAYDEN
Lecture, Part 5—BIRCHINGTON AT THE REFORMATION.
Song - “Sing on Sweet Angelus” - Miss EDWARDS
Lecture, Part 6—AT THE COMMONWEALTH AND RESTORATION.
Song - “The valiant courage of Kentish men” - Major BELL
Lecture, Part 7—BIRCHINGTON IN TROUBLE.
Song - “The Roll Call” - *Finis* - Mr. PEACH
Lecture, Part 8—ITS REBUILDINGS
Handbell Ringers - “Course of Ginges” -
Lecture, Part 9—BIRCHINGTON UNDER THE GEORGES.
Song - “I have house and land in Kent” - Major BELL
GOD SAVE THE QUEEN.

DOORS OPEN AT 7.30; TO COMMENCE AT 8 P.M.
Proceeds to be divided between the Institute and a Fund for providing a New Parish Chest.
Reserved and Numbered Seats, 1s. Second Seats, 6d. Back Seats, 3d.
Tickets may be had of the Caretaker at the Institute.

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The Institute is labelled 'Hall' on the 1878 map