

# Dog Acre

By Alfred Walker

Originally, with other land in Birchington, it belonged to the Church. "Dog Acre" was a strip of land along the south side of Alpha Road with a small frontage to Station Road. It was near "Butt Acre" where the men of the village practised shooting with bows and arrows, usually on Sunday afternoons after attending Church. We are not certain where "Butt Acre" was but it was probably between "Dog Acre" and the village.

It was called "Dog Acre" because the village official known as the "Dog Whipper" had this approximately one acre of Church land for his use, for which he paid no rent – it was one of his "perks".

## Dogs Went To Church.

In days long prior to a dog tax, dogs abounded in great numbers – even more so than now – and almost every cottager possessed one to aid in fetching the cow or sheep from the common land. These dogs were often in the habit of attending Church with their masters and sat under their masters' seats.

To regulate the behaviour of the dogs and to remove the unseemly from the Church or Churchyard most parishes possessed a modestly paid official known as the "Dog Whipper".

It was his job to remove the offenders usually by means of wooden tongs which he used for gripping the offending dogs by the neck and carrying them out of the Church.

Later on, in Birchington, it became the Dog Whipper's job not only to keep order among the dogs but also to keep order among the boys in church, in the Churchyard and sitting on the Churchyard Wall.

The earliest reference I can find to Dog Acre and to the 'Dog Whipper' is in the Birchington Churchwardens' Account Book for the year 1622 – the reign of James 1, when "Old Hayward" was the Dog Whipper and received eight shillings per year for this duty and was allowed the acre of Church land rent free.

## The Whipper's 8 shillings

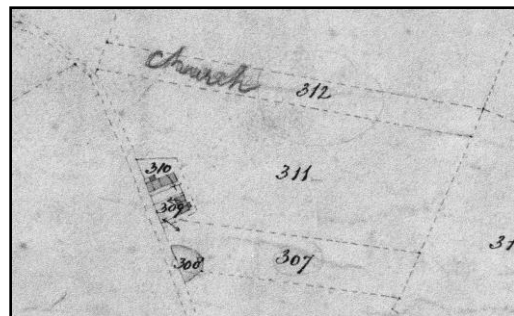
In 1623 we read, "To old Hayward for whipping ye dogges out of ye Church one whole yeare 8s-0d." Old Hayward was followed by "Old Posier" who was paid the same rate. Many such entries appear in the Accounts year after year. These Churchwardens' Accounts are the oldest in Thanet and date from 1531 – the time of Henry VIII. In 1687 we read "John Taylor, Dog Whipper, for his office hath one accer of the said (Church) land".

In 1694 we read, "One accer now lett out to Thomas Penny, Dog Whipper, Abutting to the butt accer".

Later on, the Dog Whipper walked around the Churchyard twice every Sunday during service to keep good order and was paid by the Churchwardens 6d each Sunday.



Dog acre when fenced in - 1971



Dog Acre was church land on this 1840 map