

## Birchington-on-Sea

[from Herne Bay Illustrated Press 1889]

Birchington consists of two distinct parts, almost severed from each other by the railway. Old Birchington is a quiet country village clustering round its fine old church, built about 1414. There are several fine monuments here and some brasses marking the last resting places of the family of Queke. Modern Birchington, nearer the sea is thus referred to in the Ingoldsby Legends:

“You may see some half-way, ‘twixt the Pier at Herne Bay  
And Margate - the place where you’re going to stay:  
A village called Birchington, famed for its rolls  
As the fishing bank just in its front is for soles.”

Here, in one of the bungalows, which are quite a distinctive feature of the place, lived and died the poet-painter, D. G. Rossetti. The Daily News, in 1884, said of this resort, “smart as the bungalows are, the whole place has a pleasant country look, as if the houses had dropped down from the sky, or formed merely a temporary encampment. There is no road, only a grass path on the brink of the cliff beyond the gardens attached to each dwelling, around which grow geraniums, escalonias, and abundant tamarisk.”

A short distance south-east from the Church is Quex Manor (or Park), held in the time of Charles II, by Henry Crispe, Sheriff of the county, who was surprised in his bed by a sturdy Royalist, and carried off to Ostend and Bruges as a prisoner. In the Park is a bust of Democritus, which was formerly at Lord Holland’s mansion at Kingsgate, and given to that nobleman by Sir Charles Bunbury. The inscription is curious and runs thus:

“My dear Lord, as proof of my love and regard,  
Accept of the Bust that comes with this card;  
And may the old Grecian’s ridiculous phiz  
Inspire you with notions as cheerful as his;  
Persuade you with patience your griefs to endure,  
And laugh at those evils - no weeping - no cure.”

The Church, dedicated to All Saints, has within the last few years been thoroughly restored (1863-83), and affords accommodation for over 500 worshippers. Its spire serves as a landmark for vessels leaving the Thames and steering round the North Foreland. In the surrounding graveyard are a number of curious inscriptions, and on its north side there anciently stood a small building called the “Wax House,” where, in Pre-Reformation days the lights used on the altars in the church were prepared.

Quex Manor, referred to above, is a noble country seat, on a hill in the Park stands the Waterloo Tower, erected in 1818-20 and containing a peal of twelve sweet-toned bells. A small museum of curiosities is located in this tower; while in the park are quite a number of old cannons. Each of these are of historical interest, thus: two were recovered from the wreck of the “Royal George,” one is a Dutch piece, four are French, some are from America, while others are German and Spanish.

Birchington is pleasantly situated on high ground, and the views over land and sea are very extensive. In the direction of Canterbury, the prospect along the valley is terminated by the tower of the Cathedral, with glimpses of the hills and woods of Chilham and Godmersham Parks. [This final sentence is an oft-repeated fallacy – you can only see St Nicholas-at-Wade and the rise up to Sarre from Birchington’s Church spire.]