

BIRCHINGTON HALL

Print of 1832 and photo of c. 1924

'Hall Avenue', or 'The Avenue', previously 'Margate Road' and now all part of the Canterbury Road, took its name from 'Birchington Hall'. The property, together with its 30 acres of adjoining farm and parkland, were sold in 1852 by John Friend.

By 1870, it was in the ownership of Thomas and Susan Gray. There were twelve bedrooms and two lodges beside the road, one for the gardener and one for the coachman.

After her husband's death, Mrs Gray became a most generous benefactor to the village, providing teas and lunches for both children and pensioners at various times. She also bought the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Albion Road in 1892 and promptly leased it to the Vicar for 1 shilling (5p) a year, to be used as an Infant School. It was she who laid the foundation stone of the village's Public Hall in 1902 (our second village Centre). This is now used by the Cornerstone Church in Station Road.

In 1921, the Spurgeon's Children's Orphanages, based at Stockwell in London, were looking for additional accommodation beside the sea, to augment their Margate Seaside Holiday Home in Cliftonville. Birchington Hall came on the market, so they bought the house and its land and used it until the outbreak of W.W. 2. During the war, the children were evacuated from Stockwell to Reigate and Dorking, leaving their London base for military use. After the war, the old buildings were in such a bad state that it was decided to sell the whole area for new development and concentrate their efforts on building new premises in the ground behind Birchington Hall. The boys were brought down in 1951 and the girls in 1952-3.

In the meantime, they began using the Hall as the Baby Home, a new venture on their part. This continued until 1961, when a new Baby Home was built alongside the other new 'cottages' at the rear of the old house. For the next few years, the Hall was used as office accommodation for all the administrative work the Homes entailed. By 1970, even this was no longer required and the old house was sadly demolished. The Homes eventually closed in 1978 and after their sale to Sterling Homes in 1980, Birch Hill estate was built there.

The development of the last area on the estate, which covered the part where the old house had stood, was delayed until 2000, when Ash Tree, Cedar and Pine Tree Close were built. The rest of the roads on the estate have perpetuated the link with the Homes by being named after some of the men associated with the Orphanages in their early days.