

# Birchington

From Kelly's Kent Directory 1903

Birchington is a parish on the sea coast, with a station on the **South Eastern and Chatham Railway**, 69 miles from London, 1¼ west from Westgate and 3½ west from Margate, and is in the Isle of Thanet division of the county, the Lathe of St. Augustine, the Hundred of Ringslow, the Union of Thanet, Margate County Court district, Rural Deanery of Westbere, and Archdeaconry of Canterbury, being included in the **Cinque Ports liberty of Dover Ports**. The surface of the parish is elevated and is bounded on the sea-coast by bluff cliffs, indented by Westgate Bay and Epple Bay, and on the borders of the cliffs **detached sea-side residences or bungalows** have been erected. The village, lying along the old road from London and Canterbury to Margate, is about three-quarters of a mile in length.

The village is lighted with gas and supplied with water from works at Westgate, the property of the Westgate-on-Sea and Birchington Gas and Water Co. The Church of All Saints is of shingle and flint in the Perpendicular style, and has a tower of Transitional and Early English dates, with a spire, and containing a clock and 8 bells: there are several brasses and tombs to the Queke or Quex and Crispe families, and various memorial windows, one of which, in the south aisle, is to **Gabriel Charles Dante Rossetti**, the distinguished painter and poet, who resided in this parish, and dying at Birchington on Easter Sunday, 1882. He was buried in this churchyard, where there is a cruciform monument to his memory. The church was restored between 1863 and 1883.

The **registers date from the year 1538**. The living is a vicarage with the chapelry of Acol and was made an independent parish in 1871, with a net yearly value £250, with residence, in the gift of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and held since 1898 by the Rev. Henry Arthur Serres M.A. of Trinity College, Dublin. There are also Wesleyan and Baptist chapels, and a Free Church at the Bay.

The **Charities** include: (1) Crispe Charity: Mistress Ann Gertruy Crispe left a farm of 47 acres for the benefit of 12 local children, but which now benefits the National School. It also provides apprenticeships for the youths of the village. (2) Friend-Williamson Charity: the land forming this benefaction has been sold and the proceeds invested for the benefit of such poor of this parish as are not in receipt of parish relief. (3) Henry Robinson Charity, which is for the relief of 4 widows exceeding the age of 60 years, two of whom must reside in Birchington and two in Monkton.

**Quex Park**, the ancient residence of the Queke or Quex and Crispe families, is the seat of Percy Horace Gordon Powell-Cotton Esq.; in the Park stand two towers, one of which, called the "Waterloo Tower", contains peal of twelve bells. The second tower is known as the Gun Tower and has clear views to the Thames Estuary in the North.

'**Rose Bank**' is the residence of Lord Forester J.P. and has grounds of about two acres. (It was later bought by Queen Bertha's School for Girls.) **Birchington Hall**, the seat of Mrs. Gray, widow of Thomas Gray, stands in a park of about 30 acres, and commands a fine view of the sea; the whole estate comprises between 40 and 50 acres.

### **Land ownership, population etc**

Percy Horace Gordon Powell-Cotton Esq. who is Lord of the manor, the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury, St. John's College, Cambridge, the Birchington Bay Co. and the West Cliff Estate Co. are the principal landowners. The soil is marl and sand; subsoil, chalk. The chief crops are wheat, barley and oats. The area is 1,673 acres of land, 1 of water, and 312 of foreshore; rateable value, £15.015; the population in 1901 was 2,128. Quex is half a mile south.

Gore End was formerly a village, with a church, but through the encroachments of the sea,<sup>1</sup> it has been reduced to about 300 acres, the property of Mr. J. W. Rammel and the Birchington Bay Estate Co. and on which are three cottages and a coast guard station, but which is now (1902) mostly for sale as building plots. This was known as Pope's Coast Guard Station and was closed about two years ago.

### **Parish Clerk, Tom Sayer**

**Post**, M.O. & T.O., T.M.O., Express Delivery, parcel Post, S.B. & Annuity & Insurance Office (Railway Sub-office.) - (Letters should have R.S.O. Kent added). Thomas Pointer, sub-postmaster in the newly built Posta Office in Birchington Square. Letters arrive at 6am, 12.15 and 6.30pm.; deliveries go out at 7am. 12 noon & 6.45pm.; dispatched at 9 & 11.15am. & 1.25, 3.30 & 8.40pm.; & Sunday, 8.20pm

### **Coast Guard Stations**

Epple Bay, Robert Wall, chief officer & 6 men;

Lower Gore End, Edward Bush, chief officer & 8 men

### **Fire Brigade**

The Square, Gerald M. Powell-Cotton is Capt.; Victor Pemble is superintendent & 10 men.

### **Schools**

The National School, built in 1849, for 200 boys; average attendance, 130; Charles Laming, Headmaster

Girls National School (1902), for 260; average attendance, 150; Miss Elizabeth Davies, Headmistress

Infants School, opened in 1893 in the Institute and later the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Albion Road, for 100 children; average attendance, 90; Miss Rebecca C. Banks, Headmistress.

### **Railway Station, Geo. J. Sherwood, station master**

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<sup>1</sup> This is entirely fictional as there was never a church at Minnis Bay. This misunderstanding was a result of misreading the 1414 map of Thanet. In fact the old church stood at Shuart, in the marshes due north of St Nicholas-at-Wade from about 1100 until c. 1475. At this date the local parishioners were too few to make it viable any longer and it was closed. In 1979 the church was excavated and discovered to be a similar size to Birchington, but with its tower in the more usual site at the west end of the building.