

Meaning of BIRCHINGTON :

There is a suggestion that the root of Birchington, - Birch – is based on a largish copse of Birch Trees that supposedly once grew in the area. This seems highly unlikely, as birches prefer sandy soil, but all the soil around the village is either heavy clay, or chalk or a combination of the two – not ideal ground in which to find birches. There were Saxons living here and it would be far more likely that an early Saxon landowner left his mark in his farmstead, in the same way that Quex is named after one of its early owners.

BRONZE AGE SITE:**Minnis Bay**

From the evidence found at Minnis Bay in the early part of the 20th century, it appears that man has lived in this area for the last 2,600 years.

The site became newly exposed in the Easter time gales of 1938.

James Beck, a young boy (died in 1941), saw a rusty piece of what later proved to be a Bronze Age sword.

Plan of the pits

Later investigations by F.H. Worsfold and Miss Antonia Powell-Cotton uncovered pits filled with bones, bronze knives and celts (stone or metal axe-like implements with a bevelled edge).

There were two stages of occupation -

i) a large hollow + 23 pits, some of which were rush lined, dug into the chalk, but abandoned after flooding.

ii) The site was later protected by a timber and gravel bank. 73 bronzes were found under the gravel bank. Evidence of substantial buildings constructed with tree trunks. Sadly, the site was eroded with every tide, as there were insufficient funds to protect the excavations.

Cambridge University analysed the silts from the site and came to the conclusion that there was a harvesting floor with its adjacent pits for storage of the crops. The bones that had been found were identified as deer and ox bones. They were also fairly certain that the site had been occupied right through the Roman period as well.

SAXON

There is no consecutive documentary evidence about Birchington until Saxon times. The earliest evidence is sometimes by inference, rather than by direct reference,

eg. The wording on the portrait of Queen Ediva states that the parish of Monkton was gifted to the monks at Christ Church Canterbury. The gift was made in **961**, although the portrait was not painted until about 1460. She gave the Manor of Monkton, together with a number of other manors, as a thank offering for some lands that had been unjustly stolen from her and had since

been returned. At this period, the Manor of Monkton consisted of marshland, pasturage, arable and forest (the Woodchurch [Acholt] area), with fishing and a safe have at Gore End at what we now call Minnis Bay. The portrait stands in North transept of Canterbury Cathedral. However, we know from elsewhere that the parish of Monkton also included the chapelries of Birchington and Vill of Wode (Woodchurch and Acol or Acholt, as it is written in some early documents). At Epple Bay, the construction of the railway in 1863 cut through a Saxon burial site.

10th - 11th century - Chapels of Ease

These chapels were built at Birchington and Woodchurch, both of similar sizes. They were under the jurisdiction of Monkton, who owed its allegiance to Christ Church Cathedral in Canterbury. In 1367 Henry de Wootten was appointed Vicar of Monkton, with the Chapels of Birchington and Wode (Woodchurch) by Archbishop Stephen Langham. He was required to provide a priest or chaplain for Birchington to celebrate Mass every day "if he conveniently can" and to pay him £6 annually. This was a longstanding custom and there was an additional clause that stated a priest was to celebrate Mass at Wode on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays and any Holy Days as was convenient. He was to be paid £3 a year.

NORMANS

1087 Domesday Book

The Domesday Book records the existence of a Chapel at either Woodchurch or Birchington and also mentions 'a new fishery and salt beds', very probably at Minnis Bay.

1148 Brokesend

Land at "Brokesend" is mentioned in the Cathedral Archives at this date.

1272 – Cinque Ports

Cinque Port connections were already established by this date, with Gore End and Birchington coming under Dover. The original date for the creation of the Cinque Ports is lost in the mists of time, but it would appear that even from the time of Edward the Confessor, the Cinque Ports had come into being. However, in 1042 the first Warden was listed as the "Earl Godwine", later written as "Goodwin". It is from his name that the Goodwin Sands are named. There was never any original written authority for their existence and also, without any written authority from above the original ports eventually brought smaller communities nearby into association with themselves as "Limbs". Some were small port or had been in earlier times, as with Gore End at Minnis Bay, and some were even a little way inland, as Birchington village was.

Birchington's connection with the **Cinque Ports**, as a "**Limb of the Port and Town of Dover**", possibly dates back to about the 12th century and definitely to the 13th C. From earliest records, two quite separate communities

are listed – Gore End and Birchington. Birchington village was chiefly agricultural, while Gore end mainly connected with making a living from the sea. Some of this was almost certainly from shrimping and some from fishing in small boats. Gore End Creek consisted of a sheltered landing point for the Saxons, who came as colonisers, followed by the later Jutish and Viking invaders. The creek was ‘V’ shaped, as in the gore of a skirt, which can be clearly seen in the Tithe Map of 1840.

As a Limb of Dover, in 1272 the two communities had to provide 15 days service to the King and transport the Court to the Continent. This situation lasted until about 1348, when the ‘sea wall’ broke down and 60 people lost land from as far as Brooksend. Their straitened circumstances probably meant that the amount of money required, in lieu of service, was reduced as well. It is suggested in some writings that Gore End was dropped from the Dover assessment by **1485**, but Birchington and Gore End were still paying their Composition Money in **1610**. The earliest receipt in the church archives is for Composition Money paid in **1489**. Composition Money was so called, because a group of communities were set a joint amount of money they were in duty bound to pay for the outfitting of a ship in the Royal Service. Each community paid an agreed proportion, the whole amount making up the total Composition. Birchington was grouped with St Peter’s, St John’s and Vill of Wood (Woodchurch). The total Composition varied over the centuries, but in 1617 it was for £50 5s, with Birchington contributing £3 13s 8d. This had to be paid to “Mr Anthony Hill”, the newly appointed Muster Master of the Ports.

1278 Scotstone

“Scotstone” is referred to in an enquiry of 1278 and appears to have stood on the site of the later Birchington Hall.

1343 – All Saints Church Contract

A contract dated 1343 between John Steed, the Churchwarden of Birchington and William Goldwert of Herne, a stonemason, was drawn up for the enlarging of All Saints Church. A much-reduced plan was eventually used, evidence of which can still be seen today. (See also All Saints Church p. 7?)

1347 – 1348 : Black Death

The Black Death ravaged the country, killing roughly a third to a half of the population 4 years after the contract was signed. The alterations to the church were never completed as originally planned.

1348 – Sea Wall

The sea wall was broken down at Gore End and the land behind it flooded. 60 people lost large areas of land.

1414 Thomas of Elmham’s Map

This map was first drawn –as part of a history of St Augustine’s Abbey, in which Thomas regales the reader with the story of St Mildred and her hart (deer). He

shows the way the Isle of Thanet was divided almost equally into two parts, with the easterly section belonging to St Augustine's and having Minster as its main focal point. The western half came under the Priory of Christ Church Cathedral with Monkton as its focus.

On the 1414 map, Birchington is one of the few places that are given a name other than the local dedication name, or the descriptive name of the place's ecclesiastic connection, as in Minster and Monkton. The only other villages are Stanore near Sandwich, and Særre, which also includes the church of St Giles labelled separately.

The map is full of interesting features.

- . **Deer** – the story of St Mildred and her deer.
- . The map's orientation – **East** at the **top** instead of North, as we now have
- . **"Tene"** – meaning **beacon** – There were a number of beacons around the coast of Thanet and it became known as the Island of "Beacons" or "Tenet".

. The **windmill** belonged to Christ Church, Canterbury and was situated in the centre of the Monkton Parish area, which included Birchington and Woodchurch. It caused a lot of court cases and cost the Cathedral dearly to maintain. The problem was, the windmill was a guaranteed source of income for the monks, so anyone setting up in opposition to their mill would be draining off their daily bread – in more ways than one! It was for this reason that they defended their cause so diligently. One case in particular lasted for a number of years, as can be seen by the following quote from E. J. Kealey's *Harvesting the Air* 1987, pp.233-4.

"William de Wade (Wood of Acol) from Woodchurch built a windmill on land that apparently owed some obligation to the monks of Christ Church Canterbury. The prior contested its construction and sometime during the reign of King Richard (1189-1199) obtained a court decision ordering William to demolish his post-mill. However, in 1199 William delayed, Richard was killed and John became King. William then travelled to Poitou in an attempt to have the case reopened. He obtained three postponements of court action, two in Michaelmas 1199 and one in early 1200. On December 3rd 1199, John confirmed construction. In 1200 William was recorded as offering the King ten marks for a royal license (after the fact!) to erect his windmill. At the same time, the monks of Canterbury offered ten marks to have the case regarding William's windmill given a new hearing.

"In 1202/3 William Wade appeared in the Priory's court at Canterbury to attempt to settle the differences between himself and the monks. He promised in a charter not to build another mill in Monkton, or anywhere else on the Isle of Thanet. Not satisfied with this declaration and mindful of their earlier experiences with William, in October 1203 the monks obtained a date for the royal hearing of their case.

"Early in 1204, after paying 25 marks for a speedy judgment, the monks presented their formal complaint, alleging that William had obtained King John's permission to build a windmill in violation of an agreement concluded during

Richard's reign and that William had not obtained their consent, and that he deceived King John concerning the earlier agreement. The monarch ruled that the mill was to be destroyed and that no other should be erected.

"The mill may not have been destroyed and Christ Church may have preserved it after all. At about this time, the monks arranged with Gilbert Scot of Thanet got the use of an unspecified Monkton mill. Perhaps they reasoned that they needed to recoup their trial expenses. William Wade's reputation was evidently not affected by the controversy, for he was subsequently sought out to participate in legal inquests."

- . The **roads** or trackways are clearly marked with a single line.
- . The **churches** are all drawn larger than might be expected, because they were the reason for the communities' existence in the early days. They were owned by either Christ Church Canterbury or St Augustine's Canterbury, between whom there was great rivalry.
- . "**Parker's**" – later owned by the Quek family which therefore became known as the Quek's House
- . The **Ferry** – the Wantsum was at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile wide at this time. By the mid **1400s**, **Gore End** seems to have lost its importance – the silting up had begun and the reclaiming of the marshland had begun to alter the importance of the Wantsum Channel and the Gore.

1527 Minnis

The name of Minnis comes in the list of lands owned by the Church, which was made in 1527 and then bound into the front of the Churchwardens' accounts of 1531. It even lists its derivation as '**comon**' land.

1531 Churchwardens' Accounts

Although the name of Birchington frequently occurs in the account books of Christ Church Canterbury, there are no continuous records of the village until **1531**, when the Churchwardens' Accounts begin. These do, however, contain two sets of church land terriers, one dated about **1350** (very difficult to read) and the other **1527** mentioned above. Out of 13,000 parishes in England and Wales, only 812 have managed to preserve such extensive records as All Saints Birchington. There must have been a large body of records held in the Cinque Port Archives of Dover, but these early ones appear to have been lost. There are also no records of the licensing of inns and bakeries etc.

National Sources of Information

Some excellent information was collected by **J.P. Barrett** from a large number of different sources, for his book about Birchington in **1893**. Many of these records were from sources in London, including the Public Record Office.

1532 Sparrows

Every Parish had to provide itself with a **net** for catching sparrows and other birds. Sparrows and certain other species were seen as a menace to crops and

a price was put on their heads between 1350 and 1600. 4,137 sparrows were killed in Birchington in one year at ½ d a head. In another year 125 ½ dozen (1506 in all) sparrows 'and other birds' were killed.

1538 – Population

Birchington consisted of 325 persons, dwelling in 50 / 60 houses.

1530s – Bell ringing

About this time the priest paid someone 2d for **ringing the church bell** during **storms** – connected with a superstition that the ringing of the bells dispersed the “evil” in the air which caused the thunder and lightening.

1584- Fishing

There were 3 fishermen at Birchington but all were in the habit of landing their catches at “Meregaet” (Margate), probably because there was a better harbour there than landing in the muddy gore at Gore End. Before the Reformation, fishing had been a major industry, due to the very strict laws regarding fasting. With Canterbury so near, there was always a ready market for the huge number of fast days insisted upon by the Church. At that period there were seven religious houses in Canterbury as well as eleven Hospitals administered by the various brotherhoods. Hospitals in those days were places of hospitality, rather than the infirmaries they are today. There was also a large secular population in the City, all of whom had to adhere strictly to the fast days.

Once the Reformation had become fully established, the rules on fasting were no longer so carefully guarded, so the market for fish dropped dramatically over the next century.

1620, 1630, AND 1631 – Famines

These are recorded in the Churchwardens' Account books and there is also evidence of these disasters in the burial registers of All Saints Church. During this period, the Overseers of the Poor bought in grain (mainly barley, because it was the cheapest) and sold it off at lower than market price to the poor of the parish. The richer people in the village paid a tax or sess (assessment) to make up the difference.

1627 – Invasion threat

France and Spain signed a Treaty to invade England. There was no standing army at this period (this was not introduced until Charles I in 1638) so the national force lay with what was known as the Militia. In Domestic State Papers of James I there is a Militia Muster Roll for Birchington dated 12-13 October 1614 and another dated from January 22 to March 3 1627/8. The latter roll gives the names of 1 Lieutenant and 15 soldiers were billeted in Birchington and the names of the people who received them.

1600 – 1680 : Building boom and Dutch gables

Birchington had a huge building spree around the Square. Many of the houses dating from this period are grand town houses of substantial builds, still standing and flourishing today. One of the original properties in this group was demolished by George Gardner in 1930, when he built the large white building now standing on the corner of Station Road and Albion Road. The house that was demolished had Dutch gables exactly like those of its twin across the road, now 'Mulberry's'. The others in the group are the Three Legged Toad, the Thai Restaurant (Clovelly's), the Smugglers Restaurant and Grove House opposite it.

1650-70 - Smugglers' Restaurant

The date of the house is between these two dates. A branch of the Neame family lived at **Evergreen House** – now called the "**Smugglers Restaurant**" (since 1931). Attached to the east end of the "Smugglers" were Ivy Cottages, which stood on what is now the Smugglers' car park.

Late 1600s – Plague

There were several severe visitations of the plague – one caused this note to appear in the Registers: - "brought by a 'traveller' from Canterbury". This type of situation could affect as many as a ¼ or ½ the population and severely disrupt the working life of the community.

1673 - Hearth Tax

When the Hearth Tax of 1673 (lasted from 1662-1689) was instituted to help pay for the Wars with France, there were 230 hearths in Birchington paid by the owners of just 79 house owners. At this date, Quex had 23 hearths, the largest number in the village.

1678 – Blacksmith

There was a blacksmith forge attached to Grove House, just off the Square (the building is still there). Mary East owned it at this date, as a note in the Churchwardens' tells us.

1688 Estate Map for the Sale of Church Hill Farm

The map was drawn by Thomas Hill, a well known Canterbury Cartographer, who learnt his trade under the tutorage of William Boycot in Canterbury, whose business he eventually took over. His brother and son also joined the firm.

The nucleus of the village is grouped around the **Square** and the **Church**. There have been inns around this Square from Tudor times. The expression "Good wine needs no bush" refers to the practice of hanging a branch of a tree over the door of an alehouse or inn. The saying suggests that if the wine is good enough, it will not need to be advertised. There are certainly no inn signs to be seen on the 1688 map, though we know that at least three of them were there then. However, in an earlier map by Thomas Hill for a new lease of **Upper Gore**

End Farm, drawn up for St John's College Cambridge in 1679, in which he drew a less accurate map of the village, he clearly included three large properties with inn signs hanging outside. The farm had originally been gifted to St John's College in **1642** by Henry Robinson, an ex-student of the college.

As with most maps, up until the late 19th century, this one was drawn as part of a land sale deal. Maps were always produced as a result of people wanting to delineate what lands they were buying, leasing or selling, or what lands they were inheriting or passing on by will to a relative or friend. In this case, Church Hill Farm was being bought by John Bridges of Canterbury and St Nicholas. The bridges family were ancestors of Robert Bridges of Poet Laureate fame (1844-1930).

Interesting features on the 1688 map :-

- . Road leading to the **Beacon**
[Item in the churchwardens' Accounts for "pitch and brimstone for the "tenet" (beacon)]
- . The **Maypole** in the "Square" – triangle of grass in the centre of the space
- . The **Tithe Barn** – known as Parsonage Barn on Thomas Hill's earlier map for Upper Gore End, dated 1679 – now at Barnet in north London
- . The **Lime Kiln** along the Canterbury Rd near Hudson's Windmill – the dip where it stood is still there.
- . The **Pond** – opposite the two shops in Canterbury Rd just below All Saints Church
- . **Quekes** – the large manor house southeast of the village
- . **Gore End** – the farms of both Upper and Lower Gore End
- . **Epald Baye** – a separate community at this period
- . A large **whale** off Epple – these were still being washed ashore as late as 1919
- . Numerous "**ways to the Sea**" for farmers to obtain seaweed. These would later be used by local smugglers.

Gap in the Cliffs

These gaps are typical around the cliffs of Thanet's coastline. They were used by local farmers to collect seaweed from the sands during the summer months. They were sometimes called Mere Gaets or 'trackways to the sea'. The large brown seaweed called kelp was burnt in large pits near the edge of the cliffs. The ash from this was used to make medicinal commodities like iodine and also potash to put on the ground. One of the oldest Gaps is the one we call 'Coleman Stairs', which is very narrow, steep and roughly cobbled. On the 1688 map by Thomas Hill, there are three Gaps shown, the central one being what we now call Coleman Stairs. Each one on the map is linked to a 'Way to Sea' or 'Sea Way', or in the most easterly one ' Way to Epald Baye'.

1690-1699 – King William [Prince of Orange]

King William used Quex as his staging post while he waited for favourable winds to take him across to Holland. His boat would leave from 'King's Stairs' near Margate.

1704 Population

In the British Museum, there is a complete list of inhabitants of Birchington for this date. There were only 182 persons over the age of 25. This is less than there were in 1643-4, when Oliver Cromwell ordered all the men in each community to sign two documents called the Vow & Covenant and the Solemn League & Covenant, each promising allegiance to Parliamentary Forces during the Civil War. At that date there were 171 men over 18 in Birchington.

1708 Charity School

The first school was established in Birchington, under the generosity of Anna Gertruy Crispe, who left a farm at Acol in Trust, to provide an income for the Master. The school became known as the **Charity School** and was, at one time, held in 191 Canterbury Road, on the corner of Park Road. She also included 5 Widows in her bequest, the summary of which appears on her memorial on the north wall of Quex Chapel at All Saints Church. Anna was one of three Crispe sisters who were the last in this particular line of the Crispe family. The monument is probably unique in that it includes a reference to the char-lady who was to be paid to keep the chapel clean. This payment still continues to this day.

1799 Hasted's Map [The folio on Thanet was published at this date]

He began publishing in 1778 and completed his task in 1801. The map shows the road to the S.W., from the back of St John's to Sarre, as well as the road through to Birchington which appears on the 1688 map. By this date there were **3 Windmills** flourishing in Birchington, one on the Canterbury Road opposite the end of Mill Row, a second one at the southeast corner of Quex Park, known as Griggs' Mill and the third one stood where Rossetti Court now stands. It later became known as the Seed Mill and stones from this are laid out in the rear garden of a bungalow in Alpha Road.

Additional **Gaps** were cut in the cliffs during the **18th century**, partly to serve the smuggling industry, but also for the more legitimate use by farmers collecting seaweed for use as a fertiliser on their fields.

1723 - Print of the Church – brief description

This print is included in John Lewis's History of the Isle of Thanet, by which time Gore End had been considerably eroded. This left the farming community there totally dependent on the Church. It was many centuries before they found ways of securing the marshlands from the sea's constant invasion. Even as late as 1953, the sea reclaimed its own once again.

Borderers paid rent for their land by ploughing the Saxon conquerors' lands, and then later the Church lands. The villeins, who were bonded to the soil, were the ancient Celtic inhabitants of Thanet. They could not move from their communities without the permission of the Archbishop.

The **Church** was originally just a simple nave and chancel, without side chapels and very probably no tower. The chancel was rebuilt in about 1250, together with the south, St Margaret's Chapel and tower, plus the north chapel, which was funded by the owners of what later became Parkers and then Quex Park. In about **1343** a **contract** was drawn up for the building of a large south aisle "like the north aisle of St Nicholas-as-Wade" and the project was begun. However, the Black Death of **1347** intervened and altered the plans. You can still see the beginnings of the work at the S.W. corner in the nave. However, through lack of manpower and funds, the whole project was greatly reduced, so that we now only have a half-aisle on each side of the nave.

The Churchwardens' Accounts run from **1531** to the present day with only two very brief interruptions. They are full of fascinating details about the daily lives of the parishioners. They tell of festivals and business dealings, of repairs to the church and local buildings owned by the Church, including shops, houses and the "parsonage".

Out of 13,000 parishes in England and Wales, only 812 still exist. The chapelry of All Saints was separated from its mother parish of Monkton in **1871**, as a result of the huge increase in population after the coming of the railway to Birchington in **1863**. This year also marks the time when the Victorians undertook a massive Restoration of All Saints Church. Some of the work done was excellent, but certain elements have now been lost for ever, through the over-enthusiasm of the restorers. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Crispe family installed three huge monuments on the north wall of their chapel. These almost completely covered the two windows that had given extra light on that side since c. 1250. There was still clear evidence of their presence on the exterior north wall of the chapel, as two drawings, dated 1815 and 1828, clearly show. However these were completely covered when the Victorians refaced the exterior wall of the church in 1863-5. Internally, the top of the westerly north wall one can still be seen from a ladder and show that there is still some medieval paint left from an old wall painting.

In the exterior of the south wall of the south aisle, you can still see a number of very old stones, three of which have clearly been carved for an earlier purpose. Tim Tatton-Brown was certain these were quite probable early Norman work, or just possibly late Saxon.

1763 Map

The date on this map could just as easily have been 1063, because so little development had occurred in the intervening 700 years. There was almost no growth between the Domesday recordings of 1087 and the first national census of 1801. In Domesday the population count for Monkton (inc. Birchington and Woodchurch) was 700 souls – almost exactly the same as the 1801 census. Yet

during this time, the population of England and Wales had multiplied by 18 times. Taking that as a national average, by 1801, Birchington's population ought to have grown to 12,600!! One wonders what lay behind the reasons that this did not happen.

In the **Minnis Bay** area, the cartographer of this map has made an error in copying the name of Gore End. He has labelled it '**Grove End**'. He has also **omitted the windmill** at the end of what we now call Mill Row. This must have been in place by then, because just 9 years later it was moved back from the edge of the road to Canterbury.

Epple Bay

There was a small community of fishermen here. The evidence of pictures and maps shows that there have been dwellings on either and both sides of the bay since at least the 1600s. Some of these are connected with fishing, but their main purpose appears to have been to try and stop smuggling at the bay. There used to be a terrace of three cottages on the eastern side, until about 1948. They were called Point Cottages and there are several different photos showing them. By the time they were pulled down, they had been empty for a while and look very sad and unloved in the last picture of them.

The Coast Guards houses that used to stand where Hawkhurst Close is now sited were sold off in 1924, together with the Master's House on the end of Epple Road. This latter building is all that is left of that era. Until quite recently, there was the old boathouse beside the Master's House, with its lodging upstairs, but that too has now been demolished and a new house built on the site. For many years the community was listed separately under the census returns and in the late 1880s there were 26 people living there. The majority of these were Coast Guards, housed in the two terraces, the smaller one right on the Bay itself and the large terrace on the site of Hawkhurst Close.

At this date, the only inhabitants in the Westgate area lived at Westgate Farm, right on the cliff edge. There is an etching showing this farm dated 1817, which also shows a windmill. Judging by its location in relation to the coastline, it must be the Seed Mill that used to stand on the junction of Rossetti Road and Beach Avenue, where Rossetti Court now stands. In a map of the farm in the Whitfield collection near Dover, dated 1828, the farm stood very close to the cliff edge at this time. At the lower corner of that particular map is a vignette of All Saints Church Birchington, which clearly shows the windows on the north wall of Quex Chapel. It also shows a row of five trees around the N.E. corner. These are not shown on the 1815 print, so one of the drawings has evidence of "artistic Licence".

The open land towards Westgate is rather important, as this is the 'breathing space' between the two communities of Birchington and Westgate. Mr Read, who owned the Golf Course until his death in 1999, has instigated a Trust to preserve this open space for 'all time'. Let us hope he has succeeded. In the south-western corner of the Golf course are the last of Birchington's allotments. These are sited on one of the last three pieces of Church Land in the village.

There was a time when there were about 15 different pieces of Church-land to rent, some as complete fields, but many as allotments.

Epple Road - The two houses next to the railway embankment on the east side of the south facing bank, one of which was demolished in the summer of 2003, must have been built before the coming of the railway in 1863. The evidence for this claim lies in the fact that despite their nearness to the high embankment, both the front doors of the cottages faced due north, straight onto the embankment, only about ten feet away. No one in their right mind would have designed a house with this orientation if the railway were already in situ. There was also evidence of an early settlement in the Epple area on the East End Piece site, now accommodating "Epple Walk", which was excavated during 2000-2001, prior to the building of the chalet bungalows in 2003.

1788 Print of Quex House – brief history of the house

The **Mansion** and its **family** have always played an important part in village life. This particular picture of it shows it at its final decaying state. It appears on the earliest map of 1414 and is shown as "Parkers". An heiress of the Parker family married John Quek, who died there in 1449. The Quek family already held a considerable amount of land in Thanet by this date, having first appeared as landowners here in 1334. He is buried in All Saints Church and is commemorated on a brass memorial slab in Quex Chapel. No doubt the house became known as the house of the Quek family or "Quek's" house. In the chapel, there are 6 - 7 different spellings of the name for the family name. In about 1500, Agnes Quek married John Crispe, whose family remained in control of the house for the next 200 years. During the latter part of this time, they were hosts to King William III, Prince of Orange, while he waited for favourable winds to carry him to Holland, during the 1690s.

When the **Hearth Tax** of 1673 (lasted from 1662-1689) was instituted to help pay for the Wars with France, there were 230 hearths in Birchington paid by the owners of just 79 house owners. At this date, Quex had 23 hearths, the largest number in the village. (See also under Hearth Tax)

This particular house is also shown on Thomas Hill's map of Birchington in 1688 and clearly shows the interesting arcade of arches. From the beginning of the 18th century, it was no longer occupied by a resident single family, as the Crispe family died out in this area. This spelt disaster for the fabric of the building, because neglect and misuse by the three tenant farmers became very common. John Powell bought the mansion from Lord Holland in **1777**. He eventually decided to demolish it and start again. The old house was pulled down in **1806**, with the new mansion being completed by about **1813**.

1800 Birchington Hall

There is a painting of this house that later became known as Birchington Hall, dated "about 1800". It shows what is known as a "Court House", in other words,

a landowner's house that was used for local court hearings when the need arose. Many of these were owned by the Church and used to administer their lands around their dioceses. These all tend to mainly date from around **1400-1550**, which may be the build date of Birchington Hall. It certainly stands on an ancient site, known in earlier centuries as "Scotstone" and is mentioned as early as **c. 1250**.

In about **1830**, the old house was drastically altered, with the addition of two outside wings, plus a coating of stucco over the old warm red bricks. These may have become porous over time, needing to be made waterproof, but the white stucco made it look very dull and uninteresting. The central pointed doorway with the addition of a porch was retained, as were the large windows in the front façade. The huge roof of the old structure appears to have been slightly lowered and a parapet with three upper gabled attics built across the top of the house, instead of the two gabled dormer windows. Again, the roof timber may, by this date, have needed considerable attention, considering their age. We will look again at this house in the early 20th century. (See also under **Spurgeon's 1921**)

18th century to early 19th century

During this time, Birchington appears to be in decline. We find a picture of a poverty stricken community. In 1538 there were 325 persons over 25, but by **1704** there are only 182 over aged 25 years. (British Museum list) Some of the reasons for this were:-

- . Quex House was in very poor repair.
- . Absentee landlord and 3 tenant farmers in Quex
- . Non-resident and unpopular Vicar of Monkton
- . The land in the village was in the hands of just 3-4 families
- . No middle class
- . Pauperised and dependent body of cottagers – most men worked on the land for as little as 2/- a day (10p.)

Cobbett spoke with great heat about the appalling conditions under which the poor were being forced to exist. He blamed it entirely on the government of the iniquitous tax system, which affected the poor far more than the rich. In his *Rural Rides of 1828* (p 206), he speaks of his horror at what he saw as he passed through a "little hamlet", which was almost certainly Birchington.

"I got to a little hamlet where I breakfasted; but could get no corn for my horse, and no bacon for myself! All the corn was around me. Barns, I should think, two hundred feet long; ricks of enormous size and most numerous; crops of wheat five quarters to an acre, on the average; and public house without either bacon or corn! The labourers' houses, all along through this island, beggarly in the extreme. The people dirty, poor-looking; ragged, but particularly *dirty*. The men and boys with dirty faces and dirty smock-frocks and dirty shirts, and God, what a difference between the wife of a labouring man here and the wife of a labouring man in the forests and woodlands of Hampshire and Sussex!

“I have I observed that the richer the soil, and the more destitute of woods; that is to say, the more purely a corn country, the more miserable the labourers. The cause is this, the big “bull frog” grasps all.”

1832 Print of the Square

The church records show where the **Stocks** and **Whipping Post** were. They stood near the churchyard wall in the Square. If a culprit was under 16, he was whipped in the stocks. The barns on the right belonged to the Neame family, who lived at Evergreen House (now The Smugglers). The two houses on the left are 205 and 207 Canterbury Road.

1787 Birchington was ordered to repair its '**Cage**', which was used to “confine ill-behaved and riotous persons” and used to stand in the Square, possibly up against the churchyard wall, roughly where the single storey extension to the Powell Arms is now.

1800 - Roads

In **1800** – villagers petitioned for a **turnpike** road from Canterbury to St Johns. Up until then it was repaired with parish funds, but these were very low, so the road was in poor condition. Because of the poor road system and the bad state of the existing ones, the village remained a fairly isolated community. It was very little affected by the steam-packets and the railway, which were aiding other areas of Thanet already.

1807 – Workhouse & Roads

The Treasurer of Birchington Workhouse was paid £27 : 18 : 11 for the use of men from the Workhouse, who collected stones from nearby fields and spread them on the roads. Women and children were paid 1/- per load for picking up stones. Carts from Minster and Monkton were forbidden to carry beach stones through the village in wet weather, because of the damage it did to the road surfaces.

Because of the relative isolation of the village, activities like **prize fighting** (which was illegal) went on at Epple Bay.

1814 - Smuggling

Smuggling was also rife here, as elsewhere in the country. This was not condemned locally, and in 1814 Thomas Hollands was listed in the burial register under his trade as 'Smuggler', was buried in the churchyard. There are a number of other references to smuggling in the burial register of the early 1800s.

1818 – Coastguard Station

The first Coastguard Station near Plum Pudding Island was built and manned. It appears on the 1840 Tithe Map.

1801-1851 - Population of Birchington

There was a gradual increase in the population during the first half of the C. 19.

1801 – 537 persons living in Birchington

1811 – 614 persons

1821 – 700 persons

1832 – 843 persons

1841 – 874 persons

1851 – 885 persons

But the community was still badly disadvantaged by a very poor road system, often in appalling condition. The local inhabitants, under the supervision of the Waywardens, were responsible for the upkeep of the roads in the village and their own parish. However, with a large parish, which also included the sparsely populated and poor area of Woodchurch and Acol, where very few contributed to the sess for the roads, the burden was too heavy.

c. 1825 – Typical agricultural village

800 people lived in 150 houses, nearly all working on the land for very low wages

1830 – Agricultural riots

Over mechanisation and therefore a huge loss of jobs, particularly winter ones gave rise some major riots among the agricultural labourers in Thanet. 3 men from Birchington were hanged and 1 woman (Elizabeth Studdom) was transported to 'Van Dieman's Land' – Australia. The deportations took place on 28th December 1830, but the death penalty was not carried out until slightly later.

1849 – The National School

The National Society funded the first primary school in Birchington at this date, situated on the site of the present primary school in Park Lane.

1850s – The Charity School was still functioning, despite the advent of the National School, but in 1863, it was decided to close it down and diverted funds to the National School for a few years. In 1876, it provided funding for the little School held in the newly built School/Church at Acol, known initially as St Giles and renamed St Mildred a few years later.

1857 – Toby Philpott was the **BELLMAN** or Town Cryer in Margate. His duties were to read out the latest edicts from the authorities in Dover and any other local news that the public requested and paid him to read. (See notes on this on file). There was quite possibly an equivalent official in Birchington, though not employed on a permanent basis. He probably only had to turn out when there was a particularly pressing announcement that had to be made.

1859 – Cinque Port

There was a Meeting of the Parish Council to seek a separation from Dover – partly because of the distance the officers of Birchington had to travel when delivering the money and official returns.

1863 – Map of Thanet: & the Coming of the Railway

The railway line between Herne Bay and Ramsgate was finally completed on the 5th October of 1863 by the London, Chatham and Dover Railway Company. The advent of the railway changed everything in the village. The Station was at the far end of the street, with almost nothing between the cottages near what is now Mulberry's Tea Rooms and the Station itself. It stood halfway between the Square and the sea. The 1863 map shows:- Stones (or boundary markers) Seed Mill Malt House Dog Acre (quite isolated) Brickfield Coleman Stairs Road (now Albion road on its southern end) Minnis Bay (still often flooded at spring tides). When the station was opened in 1863 it was simply called Birchington, but when it was realised that Westgate had added “-on-Sea” the decision was made to add this to Birchington in 1878, and it still stands so named on the platforms of both the up and the down lines to this day.

The Station Master's House was possibly designed by Seddon, though his plans and drawings have yet to be traced. The original house was painted white, but in the 1980s the white paint was removed. At the same time, a new footbridge was added to the narrow single-track road bridge. One other improvement was the replacement of the old passenger shelter on the down side with a more modern version. All the metalwork on the station, plus door and window frames were all painted in the new livery colours of the railway running the system at that time.

The arrival of the railway had an enormous effect on the village. From being insular and self-sufficient, it suddenly found itself invaded by ‘foreigners’ who brought new ideas, new commodities, and ways of life. Its effect on the growth of population was huge, doubling the number of residents in about ten years. It also meant that local people could look well outside the village for employment for the first time. The new communities of Westgate and Minnis Bay were created when the railway arrived. The railway brought wealthy people from London to summer residences. First, Second and Third Class carriages were used in those early days. Eventually this was reduced to only First and Third Class and now the only carriages marked are the First Class ones, of which there are very few. The countryside was still completely open beyond the Bungalow Hotel at his time. There was still, however, very slow, though steady, growth throughout Birchington through 1870-1900

Station Approach

This was originally listed as part of Station Road. There was almost certainly some sort of track running straight down to the sea from here before the railway lines were laid down. This would have led to one of the cuts through the cliffs, with probably a set of steps carved into the chalk. The ramp that now leads down to the shore at Beresford was probably cut as the track above it was used more frequently, especially when the farmers needed to get carts and horses

down to the shore to pick up the seaweed, chalk for building or perhaps barrels of whisky etc in the days of smuggling.

1862 – Minnis Bay

Before the railway, the only houses in this area were Lower and Upper Gore End Farms, Little Gore End Cottage and the Coastguards Houses between Ethelbert Road and Grenham Bay Avenue. Very shortly after the opening of the railway, **1879-80**, a **stone embankment** was constructed along the length of the Bay. This meant that there was no longer the danger of the annual flooding, which in turn allowed the development in **1885** of A.R. **Rayden** (a London Stockbroker) and C.R. **Haig** (a recently arrived member of the congregational Church and businessman) to found the **Birchington Bay Estate Company**. Large tracts of farmland belonging to Lower Gore End Farm were bought up by these prospective developers and sold of at a profit to all comers. Many of these buyers did not build on their plots initially, but merely saw themselves as small investors in this new trade. The development at Minnis Bay was very slow to take off, despite special trains being chartered by the Company. There was a large marquee on the green at the Bay to house the officials and prospective buyers. The whole Estate was valued at £198,000, but the original purchase price was only £39,000. They hoped to pay a dividend of 15%.

The local trades still continued along the shore, including harvesting of the seaweed for fertilising the land and shrimping off the shallows along Minnis and Grenham Bays as far as Beresford Gap. Minnis Bay was definitely not the 'genteel' area of the village for some time. During the latter part of the 19th century, tents began to be introduced along the shoreline at each of the three bays, but there were very few bathing machines here. There are only a few tents shown in some of the early postcards of Minnis Bay and Epple Bay. On the drawing of Minnis Bay made after the great storm of 1897, when the Surf Boat was lost off Margate, Felicia Wain drew only one bathing machine wrecked on its side in the Dip behind the promenade.

1871 – Population Census

Birchington	-	1137 people living in 234 houses (in 1861 it had been 882)
Minster	-	1853 residents
St Peter's	-	3847 residents

1879 – The Institute

This was the first 'Village centre' and was situated in an old building at the rear of the north side of the Square. It was approached down an alley between what is now Forbuoys and the Oxford Diner.?? The whole project was funded by local people with the active support of the first Vicar of Birchington, Rev John Alcock, Major Morrison Bell and several other dignitaries, who stood surety for the loan of £500 that was needed to finalise the deal. There was a Hall with a stage, a reading room and a library. Visitors paid 1d per week. In 1891 the Clerk to the

Bank came over from Westgate on his bicycle with cash to pay any bills. This continued to run until the end of the 19th century, when it was decided to build a purpose built Public Hall in Station Road. (**See 1902**)

The Institute was later used by the Catholics and the Baptists for their place of worship until they had built or adapted their own premises. The village school also used it for the Infant Department, when parliament ordered all children from the age of five to be educated. There was not enough room in the original building, which was even having a job to house all the 7 – 14 year olds. The Infants remained here until Mrs Susan Gray bought the Primitive Methodist chapel in Albion Road and let it to the School for a peppercorn rent of 1/- a year.

1870s – Bungalows:

The beginning of a new breed of dwellings was conceived – introduced initially at Westgate. They became known as Bungalows, after the Indian name “Bengalo”. The name was first used in **1869** by John Taylor, when he built the first one at Westgate. It was to be the nucleus of the new private town of Westgate-on-Sea. He then built a second one for Erasmus Wilson, who had strong connections with the Royal Sea Bathing Hospital. This was followed by four other houses, situated at the Rowena Court site in **1869**. They were seen as a new type of leisure dwelling for the growing middle class market. In 1881, Wilson wrote this recommendation for Birchington:

“... calculate person will consume during any 24 hours twice as much air at Birchington as he will in the same time in London” !

He then began building in Birchington and at this stage, he and J.P. Seddon, who had bought a lot of land in the early railway boom, entered into an agreement over the development of land in Birchington, but by 1880, Taylor had relinquished his interest. The V. & A. Museum has 2,000 drawings by Seddon, one of which includes the “Westcliffe Estate”.

1881 – Bungalow Hotel

On the Westcliffe Estate can be seen the Bungalow Hotel as he envisaged it. It was built in 1881 and originally called the Westcliffe Hotel. The building came down from London in prefabricated form on the goods trains that made regular stops here until after the Second World War. The wooden framework sections were unloaded in the goods yard and carried up the slope to the site to be erected. There are interesting drawings of the estate as Seddon envisioned it, but it was not developed entirely as he planned. However, the essence of his ideas is still apparent. His designs were aimed at attracting “persons of refinement and artistic sympathies” to the area. Among these people was Solomon J. Solomon the painter, who had a studio carved into the cliff, with marvellous north-facing light, and the sculptor and artist Frampton, whose well-known sculptures of Peter Pan and the monument to Nurse Cavell brought him fame in his lifetime. Frampton was the artist behind the sgraffito on the panels of the coach houses in the Tower Bungalows development. Seddon’s estate in

Birchington ran parallel to the coast, on the land between the railway and the sea.

The earliest **bungalows** had the first damp proof courses ever invented. There was also a new method of fixing tiles and the properties all had bathrooms. This was through the influence of Erasmus Wilson, who was an early advocate of cleanliness being a promoter of health. In one of them, Orion, there were originally no baths, because the occupants were expected to go and bathe in the sea. Some of the visitors complained rather loudly about this, particularly in bad summer weather! In at least one of the bungalows, there was a cold store dug 60 feet down into the chalk, and the whole contents of the larder was lowered into it – presumably on some type of tray, for ease of extraction! The earliest bungalows were completely furnished, right down to the corkscrew! The properties were provided with croquet lawns and private access to the sea via wooden staircases or tunnels in the cliffs, or a combination of both these means of access. There were also private dressing places for the residents. Each house had its own coach house and living accommodation for the retinue of servants that accompanied the family's visits. The bungalows were sold at between 1000 to 1800 guineas each for an 11 roomed dwelling. (£1050 - £1090)

1881 – Haun & Thor / Beresford Hotel

In 1881, when a booklet was published giving details of many of the properties that now stand in Spencer Road, Birchington only had a population of 196 households, with Epple Bay listed as a separate entity and containing just 26 people in all. Haun and Thor were two bungalows built right next to the Gap, now called Beresford, (Sebastopol at the time). These were bought soon after completion by Major Morrison Bell when he retired from military service in India. He continued to live here until 1900. He joined the two houses together with a large conservatory. After his death on the Isle of Wight in 1900, the property was bought by 4th Baron Decies and renamed Beresford Lodge. Lord Decies lived in the house for about five years, entertaining lavishly whenever he was in residence. While he was there he had a very grand “cattery” built his new wife's beautiful pedigree cats. By 1905 he began planning its conversion into a hotel to vie with the Bungalow. He had already obtained the licence needed but the First World War intervened, so his plans were delayed. During that period, he loaned the property to the Red Cross as a Military Hospital, but kept his agent Mr E. Remnant in residence, to keep an eye on things. In 1920, it opened as the Beresford Lodge Hotel, but the “Lodge” was dropped fairly soon afterwards.

The Beresford Hotel thrived between the wars, earning a five-star rating and becoming even more famous than its rival the Bungalow Hotel. During the Second World War all the holiday trade shut down. Once the war ended things livened up again, but never to their pre-war capacity, and the sea-side holiday trade never fully recovered. The Beresford Hotel eventually lost its five-star status, which spelt disaster for the management. With the advent of cheaper continental holidays with the assurance of good weather into the bargain, Birchington suffered a steep decline in holiday visitors. The Beresford Hotel

eventually had to close in 1967 and the site was developed into Moray Avenue and St Magnus Close in 1971.

Other Bungalows:

Other bungalows along Spencer Road were Miramar, The Hut, **Fair Outlook**, Dilkoosha, Llanadern, **Tower Bungalow**, **Tresco**, **White Cliffe**, **Delmonte**, **Corby Tower**, **Basketts**, The Nest, Ingoldsby, **Swiss Cottage** and **Orion**.

[Those in bold type are still in existence.]

The four bungalows known as the 'Tower Bungalows' were built about 1881-2 and were designed and built by Seddon, but one of the other dwellings was created by W.E. Martin. There is an excellent map drawn up while this development was taking place and used frequently afterwards in land and property deals. At one point, in 1925 it was included in some deeds, but had not been updated since well before 1920. There was no local influence in any of this development, as the architect, agent and future occupants all came from London. Coutts Bank of Westgate financed some of the loans and had an interest in large tracts of land in the area. During 1870, in an advertisement in the Kentish Gazette, the agents Ventum, Bull and Cooper were offering 240 plots of freehold land for sale.

When the first properties were built someone described them as being "cut off from each other by a sea of mud and mire". Perfect privacy was assured, as there was no public access to the cliffs and beach to the north of the properties.

1880 – Rossetti Bungalow:

In Shakespeare Road, Seddon built "Westcliffe Bungalow", or "Cliffside Bungalow" (later, in 1890, renamed as "Rossetti Bungalow", because Dante Gabriel Rossetti died there on 9th April 1882). It was built in 1877 as a prefabricated, wooden-framed structure, brought down from London on the railway. This bungalow was owned by Seddon at the time, and he offered it to his friend Hall Caine, who suggested to Rossetti that the clean, fresh air of Birchington might help his condition. He came in early February – hardly an auspicious time, when one considers that there was nothing between that property and the cliff top at this period! So the North winds hurtled straight for the windows and doors. When Hall Caine borrowed the bungalow from Seddon for Rossetti, he wrote to a friend that "the bungalow we are going to live in stands alone in bare fields to the seaward side – a flat and featureless land".

From as early as 1896, the millionaire Henry Osborn O'Hagan had bought this bungalow and continued to embellish it with beautiful furnishings and ornaments until his death in the early 1930s. O'Hagan was a City millionaire who was behind a number of big businesses from 1869-1924. He only lived here in Birchington for about three months of each year and during his stays, his yacht could often be seen moored off Birchington. During his stays he was a great social entertainer and many rich and famous people visited him. While he was away from Birchington he travelled a lot and searched out for treasures to bring back to the village to adorn his seaside retreat. Places like Mecca were among

those that featured on his itinerary, where he bought some beautiful and rare tiles for his bungalow. His daughter continued to live there on her own until she died in the early 1950s. She continued to care for her father's collections and when she died, the bungalow and its contents were all auctioned at the bungalow in 1952.

For a short while the property was divided into three separate units, two of which were rented by personnel at Manston Aerodrome. It was eventually demolished in c. 1964-5. Two of the last occupants, a Mr and Mrs Tregear, who left the building in 1961, wrote a very good description of their unit in the bungalow for the Isle of Thanet Gazette in 1966, shortly after it was demolished. There was hardly a murmur of protest at its demise. Seven detached houses were erected on the site soon after this. During the First World War, O'Hagan had had a large "Dugout" constructed in the garden to the south of the bungalow. It was to be used as an air raid shelter and there is a good description of it in the W.W. 1 book about the village. As far as is known, this is still there beneath the rear gardens of the present properties.

1881 – "Classy" Birchington

In a town guide for this date the writer staked the village's reputation on being even more removed from its noisy neighbour of Margate than Westgate was. "There are no German Bands, no distressing niggers on the sands, no revolting donkey drivers on the roads, no touting for tradeWe offer absolutely nothing to lure the Cockney from Margate". As Westgate considered itself a private town and far superior to any other resort in Thanet, this was indeed a large sideswipe at our neighbours!

1883 – Cycle Factory

George Cousins was already established near the station – initially as a builder. He soon began to manufacture ladies cycles with a dropped cross bar, "to eliminate the unsightly cyclist hump" under the name of "Seabreezes Ladies' Cycles" in the large building nearest the station in Station Approach. Unfortunately, he did not take out a patent for the design in the correct format, so other more astute businessmen quickly copied the idea. He continued making bicycles but with the advent of the motorcar, he also turned his hand to making motorcycles. The copy of the photograph of he and his wife on the three-wheeled motorcycle, with George Walker, as a very young man, riding pillion as his employer's mechanic, is among the archives. In the floor of his old workshop the new owners discovered the inspection pit that he used to repair the motorcycle.

George Cousins was also quick to see another opening in the market – in the buying and selling of land and new properties. By **1897**, he was well established as an estate agent, in the addition he built onto the end of the cycle factory. This remained in the same kind of business for almost 100 years, owned by just three firms – George Cousins, Benefield and Cornford and latterly, just before it closed, Pharos.

1885 – Dog Acre

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1886 – Land Sales

In 1886, the Cliffe Estate Company sold 62 plots of land. Many of these sales were at auctions.

1895 – Alpha Road

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1891 – Bank in the Square

Lloyds took over **Cobb's Bank** in the Square. At this date, the bank only occupied half the building – a general store, and tea shop owned by Mr Brooks had the right side.

1890s – Square

This decade saw the Horse Brakes in the Square, as they waited while their passengers took a brief stroll down the few shops in Station Road and round the Square, before continuing their journey down to Minster Tea Gardens during the summer months. There would also be others that would collect people from Minster and Birchington to deliver them to the Theatre Royal in Cecil Square at Margate for the evening performances.

The Square remained an open space, devoid of its old grassy green by this time. It was periodically covered with fine grit and during the hot summer months the water-cart came round morning and evening to damp down the dust.

May Day 1897, children danced and Mr Sandwell, the local chimney sweep dressed up in a large cloak made of evergreens. From his top hat, a sweep's brush would whirl around, much to the children's delight. In the School logbook and registers, there are a number of references to the girls going "garlanding", (with or without permission). This entailed finding some supple hazel or willow wands and bending them into either a hoop or a deep crescent. Trails of ivy were then twisted around them and spring flowers from their gardens threaded between the leaves. The girls then went round to their friends, neighbours and relatives showing off their garlands and hoping to be rewarded for their efforts. Then they all ended up in the Square to join in the dancing.

A Mock Mayor was elected to stand in the centre of the square and honour the proceedings by his presence! Quite frequently, Sanger's Circus would come walking through the Square on its way from Margate to Canterbury. The red, black and gold of the vehicles and gaily, caparisoned animals and people added a great splash of colour to the village.

1892 – Primitive Methodist Chapel

Mrs Gray purchased the obsolete Primitive Methodist Chapel, which had only been built in 1875, but was already redundant, and then she let it to the Church as an Infant School until 1926 at a peppercorn rent of one shilling a year.

1892 – Woodford House School

This was the year that Woodford House School was moved to Birchington. A. & H. Erlebach came from Woodford in Essex and bought the new house halfway down Station Road called "The Lawns". It is shown in an advertisement dated 1883-4 in an early Kelly's Directory as "Quex Collegiate School" at "Birchington-on Sea, near Margate". The drawing looks as if the school was purpose built. When the Woodford House School first came, it merged with what by then was known as The Kent County School.

1892 – Typical English village

At this date, Birchington was a typical English village, comprising a central square, (or triangle in our case), with the church, pubs and but no longer a village green and several roads leading off. There were the two 'big houses' – Quex Park and Birchington Hall. The latter was the scene of many fetes and treats for both the children (including Sunday School outings) and for the elderly of the community (Christmas teas, etc.). Visiting groups would come in Horse Brakes and later in charabancs from Margate on their way to Minster and sometimes stop off in the village for a short while.

1902 – Public Hall

The Public Hall was opened by Mrs Susan Gray of Birchington Hall in June 1902.

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c. 1900 – Terraces of Houses with three and four storeys at Minnis Bay

These were built in two separate blocks at Minnis Bay at the end of the 1800s and beginning of 1900. They were catering for the Colonial style of visitor, who was used to packing up and travelling to cooler climes in the hot Indian summers, taking all there servants and equipment with them. Most of them were retired by the time they came here and expected the same kind of service from their servants as they had received in India etc.

1905 – Bay Hotel

The Bay Hotel was built in 1905 and at that time was surrounded by open fields. Many of these had already been sold, but the new owners had done nothing with them, merely seeing their new acquisitions as investments for the future.

1906 – Map of Brickfields

Shows how little had been developed in the first 20 years after the railway came.

There were three Brickfields:-

Epple Bay, owned by the Powell-Cotton family from Quex Park
with Charles Millgate

On the site of Ocean Close and Epple green

Park Lane, owned by Jesse Last and co. Ltd.

On the site of Stringer drive and Holton Close

Gore End, owned by James Holtum & later Lewis Shrubsole,

On the site of Ingoldsby Road and land that once belonged to

Lower Gore End Farm (Old Bay and Elder Cottage)

There were at least two Lime Kilns in the village at this period. The one was very old and stood in the low-lying plot of land along the Canterbury Road, almost opposite the entrance to Quex View Road. The second one was on the land behind No 191 Canterbury Road, on the corner of Park Road and appears on the 1688 map.

There was only a footpath along the cliff edge and there was only a track between Lyell Road and the north end of St Mildred's Bay Avenue.

1896 – Lamp in the Square

In 1896, the Parish Council proposed that the villagers invested in a new lamp in the centre of the Square, to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. This was eventually voted out as too expensive.

1900 – More Land Sales

New Century Land Company offered 84 plots for sale with a frontage onto Epple Road and Station Approach.

1903 – Minnis Bay Shop

The first purpose-built shop at Minnis Bay was erected on the garden in front of Elder Cottage. It was run by the daughter of George Willshire and her husband, who ran it as a general store, Post Office and bakery in the cellar below.

1900 – Telegraph

There were rumours about the new telegraph service being developed by Marconi (1874 – 1937) to send messages across the Atlantic. This eventually happened in 1901 and Marconi was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1907.

1908 – Catholic Church

In the early 1900's, the Catholics who had moved into the area sought a place of worship for themselves. Initially they used the Institute behind the north side of the Square, but by 1908 they had found a cart shed in Minnis Road. It was a wooden framed structure with corrugated iron and wood between the panels and a corrugated iron roof. The members had the fourth side filled in and the inside floored over. Later a small porch was built to shelter the entrance and a Presbytery was added to the front of the building. It stood beside the old Malt Houses and during WW 1 it was used to billet local soldiers. One young man wrote on the back of a postcard of the Presbytery, "It looks alright in the picture, but is no what is like now it's a rotten place windows all broke the windows is all broke ..."

Local supporters from Manston aerodrome got panelling put all round the inner walls and made the very best of the building they possibly could. Then in 1956, it was decided to make a more permanent church, as the cart shed was showing signs of serious wear. They kept to the original shape, and added a

tower in 1961. Then a little later, the new presbytery was built and the car park laid out as we see it today.

1909 – Fountain

The fountain was given to the village in June 1909 by Alderman Grant, who lived at Fernleigh, later to become part of Queen Bertha's school and now the site of Queen Bertha's Avenue. Grant gave the fountain in memory of his wife, but the acceptance of the gift had to ride over some very rocky ground before it was finalised.

There had been an early offer of a fountain several years earlier, but this had been rejected on the grounds of the cost of maintaining it once it was received. By the time Grant offered his gift, the amount of traffic through the Square was considerably more, much of it being quite large vehicles like Horse Brakes, omnibuses and the large old cars, as well as the old fashioned horses pulling wagon loads of hay, straw etc and sacks of potatoes to be loaded onto the trains for the London markets. A number of people voted against the acceptance, on the grounds of safety, but they were eventually outvoted. The fountain was placed right in the centre and stayed there for about six years, by which time the traffic problems were all too obvious.

Its next move was in front of the Powell Arms, where it remained for another 5-6 years. In the end, it was re-sited nearer to the Queen's Head, where it stands today. During its long history, it lost its gas lamp on the top and one of the horse troughs has been removed. It has now had the lamp restored – without a bulb inside it, sad to say – and together with the two little gardens each side it has been enclosed in some neat railings, making a very attractive feature in the Square.

1910 – Grenham House School

A second new boys' school was started at Minnis Bay. It began in the long terrace of houses with the verandas and was run by Mr B. Ransome and Mr H. Jeston. By 1910, the two men had invested in a new purpose built school just below the Station, past the newly built Bungalow Hotel. Because of its proximity to Grenham Bay, of which they had uninterrupted views at this date, they called the school Grenham House School. A new road had to be made to connect the school to the station and the village, so it was named after the school.

1911 – Population, Seaside Resorts & Telephone Exchange

By 1911, the population was 2,275 and Birchington ranked as 102nd in Seaside Resorts on the East and West coasts. We had already got a telephone exchange in Ivy House, just below the Square and opposite the Church, which remained in this property for some while. At this time, there were quite a number of aristocrats from London, as well as stage personalities staying at the Bungalow Hotel or renting properties.

1910-12 – Prospect Road

In the early photo of this road, there are fields on its northern side. The photo was taken in c. 1910-12 and shows a goat in front of Ada and Thomas Reed's house. A copy of this card was sent to her son Ben in Chicago at this time, commenting on the goat! The north side of the road stretches away into fields down towards Gordon Square and Minnis Bay.

1912-14 – Transport

More public transport meant that people had greater mobility both on the roads and the railways. Very few private cars at this date. Communication with neighbours much better, with very cheap and quick postal service as well. This was definitely the era of the Postcard. Local resistance to change made progress quite slow in this area however. TRAMS from Margate stopped at Garlinge – the old tram shed is still there, beside the old Westbrook Hospital.

Fishermen & Shrimpers

Local fishermen used to bring round hot shrimps to peoples homes on a Sunday, a custom that continued for a very long time, though not necessarily hot ones.

1913 – Wayside Café

This was built in **1913**, according to the granddaughter of the original owner, now in the USA. It is already listed in Kelly's Directory as the Wayside Café by 1915. It stood on the corner of Eastfield and Station Road in quite a large plot of land, with ample garden around three sides. There was a garage on the right hand side in Station Road. The café was built like the bungalows that had been erected in Spencer Road and later down at Minnis Bay. It soon became a focal point for local people and visitors alike to meet for a cup of coffee or tea. They sat inside the café, or on the veranda or out in the gardens, which contained two, large, brightly-painted wooden parrots. These used to fascinate the children, and there are a number of people in the village today who still recall these from their childhood.

The café flourished between the wars and again after WW 2 up until **1960**. A small separate building had been added to the left of it, which sold cakes etc. The café eventually gave way to the new development of the early 1960s in Station Road, but the small cake shop remained, later becoming a dress shop by 1963 and now houses the jewellers, Stuart Bartlett. By **1963** Woolworth's had built a new store on the Wayside and garage plots, where the Co-op now stands, while Ward's Estate Agents had taken over the Dress Shop.

1925 – Baptist Church

The original chapel (built in 1860s?) stood in Canterbury Road, opposite the village pond. It is now owned by Mullaney's roofing and it still contains its original wrought iron rafters, probably forged in Buddle's blacksmiths, just up the road opposite the church.

In the early 1900s, the Baptists gave up the chapel and met at the Institute behind the north side of the Square. Eventually by 1925 they managed to raise enough money to afford a new brick-built chapel in Crescent Road. This land had been open fields up till then, with just a small fisherman's cottage on the corner.

1919-1930 – Roads

With exception of Station Road, Canterbury Road and Minnis Road, very few other roads were made up at this period. In the local press coverage of the Parish Council deliberations, there are a number of complaints from local residents about the appalling condition of their roads. Promises of improvement were always made, but nothing seemed to get done. There is a post card of the Square of about 1924, showing the piles of shingle laid out ready to be spread over the surface – probably at the end of the day, when the traffic was less dense.

1917-1928 – Railway Line to Manston

This line came off at a branch just west of Birchington Station and crossed the fields to the point where the Sea View Garage now stands on the Canterbury Road at the top of Brooksend Hill. It then continued across the farmland to the corner of Quex Park, just south of the two cottages of Acol Hill Farm, then ran parallel with the Manston Road. Its terminus was just southwest of the crossroads formed by Old Minster Road and Manston Road.

The line was mooted in 1915, but due to delays and procrastination by the War Office, it was not opened until December 1917. Its chief purpose was to act as a supply line for materials for the construction of the new subterranean hangers being built at the airfield. Due to all the delays, the line ended up carrying personnel and general supplies for the feeding and maintenance of the camp. It was eventually closed in 1928, as the airfield was requiring fewer and fewer personnel and supplies, and no longer warranted such an expensive form of transport. The terminus remained there long after the Second World War, with the two platforms acting as an unloading bay for a coal depot and was still functioning in the first half of the 1960s.

1921 – Spurgeon's Homes

The Spurgeon's Orphanages from Stockwell bought Birchington Hall, when the Gray family put it up for sale. The Trustees were looking for a second seaside home for the children, having acquired a property in Northdown Road, Margate in 1917, now Martell Press. Soon after they bought the Hall, they sold the Margate property. From then until 1939, children from the Stockwell Homes were brought down to Birchington to holiday or recuperate from illness.

When the Second World War broke out, the children were evacuated from London down to large houses in Dorking and Reigate, where they remained until 1946. When the Trustees had viewed the London premises, they realised that with the troops using them during the war, the buildings had deteriorated even

more. It was eventually decided to sell the London Homes, which brought in a very worthwhile sum, as the value of land in that area was at a premium.

With the capital, the trustees began to build new modern Homes behind the old Hall at Birchington. By 1951, the first of the boys were able to move down and by June 1954, with the rest of the children re-housed, they were able to stage the grand opening of the Homes by the Duchess of Gloucester. Up until this point, the Homes had only taken in children from the age of seven, but it was now decided to have them from infancy and housed the “babies” in the old Hall. The venture continued to flourish and in 1961 a new purpose-built Baby Home was opened on the east side of the site behind the Hall. The old house was only used for offices and storage, and so it was decided by 1966 to vacate it with the view to demolishing it. At this point, the Trustees were probably unaware of how old the original building hidden under layers of alterations really was. With no objections, the old Hall was raised to the ground in 1967. The Homes continued to flourish until 1978. It was then decided to close the Homes down, as new ideas in child management were being formulated, with the certainty that grouping large numbers of deprived children together was definitely not a good idea. (For the next part of the Hall’s story see **1978 - Birch Hill Estate**)

1930 – Slow Growth

There was very slow growth in the village until the 1930s, with the exception of Canterbury Road, Station Road and Minnis Bay. Many of the unmade roads were not finally made up until this time. Until then they simply had a covering of fine shingle laid over them at intervals, which the huge steam-rollers would then flatten, much to the delight of Birchington’s small boys. The drainage was often very primitive still in the 1920s and very early 1930s. However the coming of the motorcar changed everything. Before W.W, 1 the Parish Council agreed that the speed limit through the Square must be limited to 8 m.p.h.

1932 - Birchington and the Borough of Margate.

Birchington, along with its neighbour Westgate, was incorporated into the Borough of Margate in 1932. This was supposed to be to the advantage of the village, based on the now much doubted surmise that “bigger is better”. Birchington’s Parish Council was disbanded and all local decisions were now made in Margate. The increased motor and coach traffic on the roads changed the quiet little village to a constant stream of noise and petrol smells. Margate insisted on reducing the size of the pond at the bottom of Church Street, altering it into a narrow strip in 1931. In one of the early brochures about the village that was produced soon after being incorporated into Margate Borough, the Borough officers promised not to change the character of its newly acquired communities, but this seems to have been put down into the dark recesses of the Councils vaults!

In 1933, Margate decided to widen Church Street, to make progress though the village easier for the traffic heading for Margate. How this was supposed to help Birchington was never satisfactorily explained. This led to an increase in the amount of traffic coming through the Square. In making these

alterations, the village pond that stood near Court Mount was filled in. It was the last of the nine village ponds that appeared on the 1840 Tithe Map. This point in the road has often been flooded since, because it was the natural point in village in which the water had collected for centuries.

In 1930, the beginning of the new Thanet Way was being constructed. This road change the village as dramatically as the railway's arrival had nearly a hundred years before. The final phase was completed by 1936. In All Saints Church, there is a memorial to a young engaged couple who were the first fatalities on this road in 1931. They were on the boyfriend's motorbike on their way to spend the weekend with the girl's parents in Birchington when the accident happened.

The new road brought another increase in visitors and prospective buyers to Birchington. Many of the private houses in Station Road were converted in full-blown shops, having initially managed with just converting the front room into one. The new shops were described in a brochure of this period as "Prosperous looking". The terrace of new shops was built at Minnis Bay and did a roaring trade from late spring to early autumn. The winter months were usually quite quiet, but the traders still managed to make a decent living.

One of the dramatic changes that took place after the 'change over' from Parish to part of a Borough status was the introduction of huge advertising boards along Birchington's roads, to advertise the 'attractions' of Margate, eg. the Palm Bay Estates and Dreamland. At the St Nicholas roundabout, the signposts pointing towards Birchington all said 'MARGATE' and the notice for Birchington did not appear until you were at the top of Brooksend Hill – like a very neglected afterthought. It has taken years of campaigning to get this state of affairs to be improved in even the smallest degree. The villagers were assured in 1932 that there would be huge advantages in becoming part of the larger community. We have yet to discover them!

1934 – The Welcome Café

"The Welcome Café" has stood here since 1934, although it was listed as simply "The Tea Rooms" in that year, and was run by Frank Manchip. He changed the name to "The Welcome Café" by 1936 and it has traded under this name ever since. It has seen its trade fluctuate over the years, but still does a good trade with drivers who need a quick and easily accessible place to get refreshment, without all the parking problems we experience in the centre of the village.

1936 - Population

In 1936 Birchington had 5081 residents, which always swelled to hundreds more during the summer months. There were the two big hotels, The Bungalow and Beresford, as well as a large number of Guest Houses and private houses offering accommodation. Quite a number of wealthy people still had second homes in the village, which were only occupied during the summer months.

1938 – King Ethelbert School

This increase in the population gave rise to the building of the first new state school in the village since **1849**, when Park Lane was built. In **1938**, King Ethelbert School was opened, a secondary school shared between Westgate and Birchington and situated on the border between the two communities. It was closed down for two years during the War between 1940 and 1942, but reopened with a skeleton staff in the beginning of 1943.

1939-1940 – Outbreak of War

The numbers of residents had fallen to 1374 by the end of 1940. Almost all the children of school-age were evacuated in June 1940, while all the men and women of military age had been called up into the services or some other form of war-work. Anyone who was of working age remaining in the village was sent to work on the land or into local industries.

1939-1945 – War-time

1945-1960

1960-1980

1978 – Birch Hill Estate

Between 1978 and 1980, there were a number of options put forward for the development of the large Spurgeon's site, but in the end it was sold for a housing estate in 1980. And so Birch Hill was born, with the first residents moving in during 1985-6. The single field across the Canterbury Road opposite the old house was bought by Thanet Council and has since become Crispe Park, for the benefit of children and young people in Birchington.

The last part of the Birch Hill estate, which had once contained the old Hall, was not developed until 2000. Two old wells were discovered in the grounds as the contractors were working on the site.

1980 – 2000

2000 and after