

First World War at Quex

A FEW NOTES ON QUEX AS A RED CROSS HOSPITAL DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The photograph of the spoons and the inscription under was taken at the Canberra War Memorial Museum, Australia, by Mr. F. A. Turner, of 329 Canterbury Road, Birchington, in March 1981, while on a visit. Mr. Turner lived in Birchington nearly all his life and as some of his relatives used to work at Quex he was very interested in the display and knowing my interest in Birchington he let me have a copy of the photograph.

The official number of raids on Thanet was 119.

War declared 4th August 1914

On the 11th a meeting was held in the town hall and £116-17-6 was subscribed in aid of the wives and children of those men who had been called up. On the 14th a second meeting took place and £65 was taken. On October 15th at 5am wounded Belgians arrived from the front very tired and dirty and were taken to the Homes.

A record of the War Work of the people of Birchington, which includes Quex, is beautifully set out in a volume, bound in red morocco and edged with gold. It is kept in the Birchington Parish Church and now stored in the Church Archives, but a scanned copy is also available in the BHT Museum.

The volume measures about 12 inches by 10 inches and was compiled by Major George F. Hollands and presented to the Church of All Saints as a record of the patriotic service by the inhabitants of Birchington. Mr. S. Sandle bound the book and Miss G. Smith made the drawings of the Homes. Mr. Charles Gambrill was Churchwarden in 1909.

Quex is one of the houses and homes opened for wounded and invalid soldiers. Quex was opened on 14th October 1914 and had 46 beds. Mrs. Hannah Powell Cotton was the V.A.D. Commandant. She had 37 ladies as helpers and nurses. The first patients were wounded Belgian soldiers and while I was on a visit to Belgium in 1923, I stayed with one of the Belgian soldiers who had been at Quex and had happy memories of his stay there.

The Winter Garden was the dining room and I have a photograph of the dining room with Nurse Matron. Nurse Matron lived at Treveddoe, 24 Epple Road, a house now demolished on the north side of the railway arch in Epple Road.

Later in the war, British soldiers were at Quex and also Australian. When the tree was planted at Quex to commemorate the Christening of Christopher Powell Cotton, it was an Australian soldier who was a proxy Godfather. In the photograph of the tree planting, the Australian is seen in the hole dug to take the tree. Quex closed as a hospital 31st January 1919.

Birchington and the First World War 1914-1918

The following houses and homes were opened for wounded and invalid soldiers.

Quex Park

Mrs Powell Cotton was V.A.D. Commandant.

It was opened 14th October 1914 and closed 31st January 1919.

46 beds

37 ladies as helpers or nurses

St. Michaels – also known as The Thicket

Miss Denning was the Matron

It was opened 21st October 1914 for Household Cavalry and closed 6th June 1916.

It was opened for Imperials 27th June 1916 and closed 4th January 1919.

30 beds

41 ladies and 2 doctors

St. Mary's Home – Beach Avenue

Miss Hill was Matron

Opened 10th October 1914 for Belgians only, and closed 31st December

26 beds

Mansford House.

Miss Worthington was Matron.

Opened 10th October 1914 for Belgians and after for Imperials and closed in March 1917. There were 45 beds

A hospital supply depot was opened and organised by Mrs. Tett and Mrs. Lloyd-Jones with Mr. W. S. Harvey as Hon. Sec. This was opened in November 1915 and closed in March 1919.

12,600 articles were made and sent to different homes and hospitals, and socks and woollen comforts to naval and military units, and to the central depot in London.

The funds – over £660 – were raised by local donations and subscriptions, entertainments and sales of flowers and waste paper.

The St. John's Ambulance Brigade had its headquarters in Station Yard and was under Dr. Brunton, Divisional Superintendent and surgeon, with Mr. A. Hodges as Sergt and Divisional Sec. and Treasurer

A soldiers canteen, recreation and writing room was opened October 1915 to Dec. 1918 – This was founded by a Miss Willett.

A special choir was formed of ladies, gentlemen and soldiers who sang at special Soldiers' Services from 1915 to 1917 and at special services of Harvest Thanksgiving at Acol etc.

A detachment of volunteers was formed under a Capt. B. M. Cushing for a gun emplacement

War Weapons Week - In May 1918 a special War Weapons club was held in order to raise a War Loan for the purpose of providing War Weapons.

An aeroplane was set up in The Square and Mrs Powell Cotton opened the proceedings. The total amount raised was £13,600, whereas the target was £5,000 **for the purpose of providing two aeroplanes.**

Many men were enrolled as **Special Constables** with Mr. D. Dallas as Head Constable – there were about 90 in all. Many continued on duty to the end of the war in Nov. 1918.

A branch of the **Soldiers and Sailors Family Association** [SSAFA] was formed to make financial advances to wives of men called up to serve in the fighting forces.

A “**dug-out**” was constructed in the garden of ‘Rossetti’ by Mr. O’Hagen – 30 feet below the surface. It could hold 150 persons. It was constructed in consequence of the frequent air-raids on the Isle of Thanet. It had 60 concrete steps down to its entrance and at the further end was a well with a concrete dome.

Frequent **flag days** were held to raise money for various war charities and for the sending of food parcels to Prisoners of War.

Isle of Thanet Gazette – 14.10.1916

Birchington firm’s record of War Service. – A highly creditable record of War Service has been achieved by a Birchington firm, that of Mr. G. H. Pettman, builder. No fewer than twenty-two of his employees, including several sons, are on active service, as follow:

W. J. Pettman, A. Pettman, H. C. Pettman, R. Pettman, F. Pettman, G. Adams, W. Foreman, G. Fleet, G. Ford, A. Pantony, P. Welch, F. Holmans, S. Holmans, W. Brooker, J. Hook, G. Hiscock, F. Hiscock, G. Hughes, G. Johnson, W. Mellanby, J. Pierce, and H. Wood. In addition the following members of the staff are doing duty as **Special Constables**:

G. H. Pettman, jun., F. W. Pettman, C. Pettman, and E. Tibble. This is easily a record for patriotic service in Birchington, and is an example which some firms in even larger places might be proud to follow.

Air Raids

On 22nd August 1917 a raid took place at 10am. One machine was hit, a wing shot off and fell in flames at Garlinge, and another was cut in half by shell fire and fell into the sea. It was a fine summer day with blue sky and the machines were plainly seen at Birchington. The official number of raids on Thanet was 119.

There were 43 raids by German “air-ships” in and over the Isle of Thanet. Many raiders simply passed by on their way to London and other places. One German report stated, “The fortified towns of Margate, Ramsgate and Broadstairs were bombed with success.”

Margate suffered badly while the two other towns less so. According to official reports, 13 people were killed, 24 injured and much material damage was inflicted.

On 6th Dec 1917 a raid began at 3.30 am and the anti-aircraft guns at Minnis Bay opened fire, with the result that one machine fell on its way to Canterbury and another fell in the sea on the return journey.

Bombs were dropped at Sarre, Plucks Gutter, Monkton, St. Nicholas and Westgate, broken glass being the result. The bombs dropped in fields between here and Reculver and in the sea opposite Beresford Lodge did no damage. Twenty German airships were destroyed in these raids.

The result of the raids was financial ruin to many boarding houses and lodging house keepers, as the season’s visitors did not arrive. Little business was being done; nearly all schools were moved inland away from the coast and several residents closed their houses for the duration of the war. In 1918 many visitors arrived at Margate, and Birchington was crowded.

All the gaps leading to the beach were barricaded with entanglements of barbed wire and a hut erected in each gap, and guards mounted each night. Nobody was allowed on the cliff after sunset. Two gun pits, a munition dump, a

machine gun pit and two rifle pits were dug on the front and two guns stationed there each winter. The men and horses were all quartered in the village. Many empty houses were taken for military headquarters, for the canteen and for soldiers' billets.

Trenches were dug and wire obstacles placed on the front, and trenches dug on the cliff overlooking Epple Bay.

Patrols of soldiers and coast guards were on duty day and night and special constables every night. There were strict regulations as to lights in houses and shops and no street lamps were allowed. Beresford Lodge (which used to be called "Haun & Thor") was lent by Lord Decies and was used as a hospital for wounded officers. At Minnis Bay, two 15 pounder guns were stationed and the Bay Hotel and empty houses were taken for soldiers' billets. Pits were dug for machine guns and the butts at the western end of the Minnis were enlarged. 4 anti-air craft guns and a search light were installed there for a short time. They were in action once, but removed soon after – probably to a more vulnerable site.

On the **11th November 1918** a message was received from the Manston aerodrome at the Bungalow Hotel at 10am saying –

"Armistice signed 5 this morning."

The news was confirmed by a message from London at 10.20 and the news was brought to the village by a soldier from Manston and at 11 flags were flying from several houses.

A Thanksgiving Service was held in the evening and the Parish Church was crowded. On Saturday 18th Jan 1919 the "thanksgiving" service for the sale of War Bonds terminated, **£22,022** being the result.

All the obstacles were removed from the seven gaps in the cliffs, the gun and rifle pits were filled up, and all the soldiers were gone, except for a fatigue party. Several of our men were demobilized and returned home to Birchington in January. The Peace Treaty was signed at Versailles on Saturday 29th June 1919 at 3.25pm and was on the news here at 5.45pm.

The 19th was a holiday to celebrate peace. Many houses were decorated; games for children were held at Quex Park, a parade of fancy dress costumes, decorated cycles etc and the fire engine were all in a procession through the village and a bonfire on the cliff was prepared and lit up.

Sunday afternoon **28th March 1920** the Birchington War Memorial was unveiled by the Lord Harris, Colonel of the Rifles. Those present included Rev. H. A. Serres, Vicar of Birchington, Mr. H. A. Erlebach, headmaster of Woodford House Boys' School, Rev. S. Wilkes, the Methodist Minister, Mr. A. Hodges, Deputy Head of Woodford House (and later its second headmaster), Mr. F. S. Oldham, Mr. C. Pemble, Chief Fire Brigade Officer, Mr. C. Lamming, Headmaster of Park Lane Church of England School and Mr. A. F. Lewis.

Music was provided by the band of the ? Rangers!

Keble's Gazette Sept 1st 1917

Birchington was reported to be full of visitors – furnished houses and apartments are practically unobtainable.