

## Demolition of Almshouses

October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1933.

Old Birchington Buildings to Go

Some months ago the older residents of Birchington were loath to see the old pond and overhanging trees in Canterbury Road swallowed up by the relentless exigencies of modern transport. Now another ancient link with the parish is to disappear, by the demolition of the four almshouses adjoining Park Lane, which, with their heavily thatched roofs and brick walls, contain pages of history that the oldest records cannot trace.

The almshouses, which consist of one building divided into four single apartments, were condemned as unfit for habitation by the local authorities in 1925, but it was decided not to demolish them while they were occupied by the same people. Three of the four occupiers have since died, and Mrs. Sayer, the last of them, aged ninety years, who has lived there for the past thirty years, is leaving at the end of this month to reside with her daughter at Margate. The work of demolition will then proceed.

Considerable speculation exists as to the actual date of the building of the houses, and although one or two dates have been suggested, the history behind them still remains very vague. A plate on one of the doors bears the date 1310 in chalk, and, although some people maintain that they have existed since that time, their structure suggests that they are less than two hundred years old. They are not built round a wooden framework, which marked the architecture of the fourteenth century, but in a straightforward and comparatively modern style, typical of the early nineteenth century. In view of this, it would seem that an extract from "Barrett's History of the Ville of Birchington," which the Vicar (the Rev. A. O. Hayes) has discovered in the course of his investigations, is the most, and, in fact, the only, authentic reference to the houses. The extract is as follows:-

"1810. At a meeting of both parishes it was decided to pull down the row of Poor Houses by the Churchyard and rebuild them elsewhere. The Overseers to find flints and bricks to rebuild the Churchyard wall, and the Churchwardens to find mortar and labour."

Apparently the two parishes referred to were Birchington and Acol, since at that time Birchington was not a separate ecclesiastical parish. This reference shows that the houses were not built on their present site, but it is impossible to ascertain how long they had remained adjoining the Churchyard wall before it was decided to remove them.

Another paragraph in the History states that in 1811 "a lease was granted to Mr. John Friend, overseer, for 99 years, of 10 perches of Church land, where cottages were lately built for the poor. Dated May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1811, to commence from October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1810." There is no indication to show whether the land referred to was the site from which the houses were removed or the land on which the houses stand at present. All that can be gathered from the two paragraphs is that they were erected some time before 1810, and removed to their present site between 1810 and 1811.

Exhaustive inquiries have been made in other directions, but no further references to the houses have been found, and an examination of the earliest parish records, which date as far back as the year 1500, and the oldest guides to the town, shed no light on their history.

The houses are vested in the Vicar and Churchwardens, and are assessed for rating purposes at £3 per year. Arrangements for the work of demolishing them and the subsequent disposal of the land are to be considered shortly by the Parochial Church Council. The Vicar is of the opinion that the need for almshouses is greater today than in years gone by, but he doubts whether it would be worthwhile or advisable to re-erect them on the present site, which is now surrounded by other buildings.

*Birchington's Almshouses c. 1930*





Almshouses – c. 1900



Mrs Sayer - 1933



Probably c. 1932-3