

Dog Acre

Dog Acre was originally a strip of land now occupied by the western half of Alpha Road, with a small frontage butting onto Station Road. It belonged to the Church of All Saints and had been given to the Church by a local donor, probably in 16th century. It was certainly a well-established piece of Church land by 1622.

During the Medieval and Tudor periods almost every householder owned a dog and there would always be a few stray ones around the villages and towns. If there was any trouble with the dogs fighting each other or attacking people, the local 'Dog Whipper' would be called to grab the offending animal around its neck with a large pair of wooden tongs, not unlike those that were used to lift washing from the boiler. Some communities still own their old wooden tongs.

The Dog Whipper was paid, sometimes in cash, sometimes in kind and in Birchington's case, by the use of about an acre of land or by a combination of these. He could cultivate this land, or use it for grazing an animal or even let it out to earn himself hard cash. The Dog Whipper first appears in the Church accounts in 1622.

1622 'Old Hayward' was the Dog Whipper – plus 8s.

1628 'Old Posier' took over the job until 1843 – still with the additional 8s.

1685 John Taylor – Dog Whipper – '1 accer of land'.

1687 'John Taylor – Dog Whipper, for his said office have 1 accer of the said land.'

1694 'On accer now lett out Thomas Penney Dogg Whipper. Abutting to the Butt Acer.' (The Butts were where men of the village practiced archery every week in Medieval and early Tudor times)

In 1811, at the Easter Vestry, it was agreed the 'James Knott walk round the Church twice every Sunday during service to keep good order and to be paid by the Churchwardens 6d every Sunday.' This continued until 1828, when Dog Acre was granted to the Parish Clerk in lieu of payment.

In the 1840 Tithe Map, Dog Acre is listed as containing 3 rods 31 perches (ie. only 9 perches short of an acre)

The land is listed on the 1872 Ordnance Survey map as 'Dog Acre', plot 54. In about 1880, it was decided to build the first new road in Birchington, running parallel with the south side of the railway line. The Church was asked to sell the main part of this piece, leaving just the triangle near the station in Church hands. "Beaconsfield" was, and for some time remained, the only house in the road, which ran from Station Road corner to the top of Albion Road, then known as Wilson's Road or Coleman Stairs Road. There is a photo of this last triangle of land with fencing and gates on it, indicating that it was being used for grazing land at this date.

In 1921 the Parish Council asked for the church to sell its last remaining corner, which it eventually did, once the Charity Commissioners had agreed, for £390 and the proceeds were invested in War Stock, clearly documented in the Church accounts.

In June 1975 Birchington Residents' Association won a fight to stop Thanet Planning Committee from granting permission for the building of a new Post Office on the site. It is said to have been purchased for £74,000 (see above paragraph!) as an open space. A petition containing 1,200 signatures was presented and the decision to reject the planning request was unanimous. In November and December of the same year a footpath was laid across Dog Acre. Birchington's Chamber of Commerce and Thanet

Council shared the cost between them. Its latest newsworthy event is the addition of a new lamp, installed, but not yet functioning, in April 2004!

Jennie Burgess - 2004