

EAST END PIECE or EPPLE WALK

This piece of land has been known as East End Piece all the time it has been in the ownership of All Saints Church, Birchington. There is a list of the pieces of land donated to the Church, written in the first Churchwarden's Book of 1531. There is an even earlier list in the front of this book, but, sadly, it is almost unreadable. This earlier list has been given a possible date of between 1300-1400.

Each piece of land on the list was donated as part of a system that provided revenue for the Church and in return, prayers were promised for the souls of the departed. Most of these pieces of land were let out to tenants, who then either cultivated them or grazed animals on them. East End Piece is certainly in this category. From the results of the archaeological dig that was undertaken on the site by the Thanet Archaeological Trust, prior to the development, this was clearly confirmed. The only evidence of habitation went back to pre-Roman times. Although there was a small amount of Roman evidence, it was not suggestive of full-blown occupation – more of 'passing traffic'.

From 1835, this particular piece was let as allotments to the local community, rather than to a single tenant, and continued in constant use until 1976. There was one slight hitch in 1902, when the Parochial Church Council (the body that governs the Church's affairs locally) decided to sell all the church lands. There was uproar in the village, until it was pointed out how little money the allotments brought in. The rental had not been increased for a great many years. The allotment-holders promised to pay a more realistic rent and the problem was solved for the time being.

In 1976, Thanet Council asked the PCC if they could rent the allotment land on East End Piece to store material needed for improvements to the A 28 Canterbury Road in Birchington. They fenced the whole piece off (up till then it had mostly been hedged) and put gates on the Canterbury Road end. The Council continued to rent it for the next two and a half years. When they had finished their work, they cleared the site, and from then on, the area has remained unused. Periodical clearing sessions have been undertaken, when the undergrowth became too high.

On the 1840 Tithe Map of the village, it is clear that the village was still very small at this time and almost entirely clustered around the Church and the Square. There were several farmsteads on the outlying edges, including one at the corner of Epple Road, known as East End Farm. On the Tithe Map, East End Piece is listed as 'Plot 171, Church Land'. The Apportionment details state that the plot was owned by 'Birchington Churchwardens' and was occupied by 'Sundry poor persons'.

It is interesting to think that the dwellings now built on the site are the first ones to be placed there for perhaps three thousand years. The material that was unearthed during the dig last year has still to be thoroughly investigated, but hopefully this will soon be available for inspection. The group that did the work are based over in Crampton Tower Yard, Broadstairs.