

The Thicket & Erin Dene



The Thicket stood at the west end of Cross Road on the south side and was built by Doctor Cross in 1900 in memory of his wife who had died from cancer. The Home was given to St Michael's Church in Chester Square, London as a Convalescent Home for the poor parishioners of that parish. Its official name was "St Michaels" but was always known locally as "The Thicket".

It was first used as a hospital during the Boer War by the Household Cavalry as Dr. Cross's brother was its Colonel. Miss Denning, an aunt of Miss Elizabeth Denning of St Mildred's Avenue (in 2008), was the first Matron and remained in that position for 31 years.

The Thicket was used again at the outset of the First World War, providing 30 beds for wounded soldiers. Its first patients were the troops of the Household Cavalry from 21st October 1914 until it closed on June 6th 1916. After a very short break for a thorough clean-up and short rest for the staff, it opened again on the 27th June, this time for the Imperials (the British Imperial Mounted Division). The Home finally closed its doors to the troops on 21st January 1919. After another short break it resumed its original function of providing rest and recuperation for the poor of St Michael's Church.

During W.W. 2 the house was used to billet our troops. At the end of the war it was in a poor state. After a refit it again received people needing some respite and care. By 1955, its superintendent was Mr A. E. Wiggins, with his wife working as his Matron. In 1961 the house is only listed under its name of St Michael's, with no resident staff.

The house was later sold and demolished in 1970 and three pairs of semi-detached houses have now been built on the site. They stand at the junction of Cross Road, Epple Road and Colman's Stairs Road. As might now be realised, "Cross" Road was named after Dr Cross.

The vicar of St Michael's Church, Chester Square was the Revd Canon James Fleming. He had bought a plot of land at the eastern

end of Shakespeare Road in 1895-6, on which he had the property '**Erin Dene**' built. This is now known as 38 Shakespeare Road. There was a large area of garden to the west of the house which was made into gardens and there was also a large vegetable garden. On the far western end of this part of the plot, Fleming had a coach house built for his chaise and pony, with accommodation over it for his groom.

From about 1896, Fleming used to bring his wife and family down to Birchington with their servants for the summer. He would come and join them when he was able and for his own holiday until 1908, when he died. At that point the house is listed under 'Mrs Fleming'. As his wife had died in 1903, this may have been the wife of one of his sons. Dr Cross was a member of Fleming's congregation, when the doctor was in Town. Dr Cross's medical practice was based in London not far from St Michael's Church in Chester Square. Queen Victoria asked The Rev Canon James Fleming to be one of her Chaplains and she would occasionally come to Chester Square to hear him preach there, if he was not on duty in Buckingham Palace.

By 1915 Erin Dene was owned by Major John Francis Cossey, whose granddaughter came to live in the village in the 1970s. She recalled visiting her grandfather in her young childhood, on holiday visits to Birchington, while he was living at Erin Dene.