

## **INSTITUTE**

They say that there is nothing new under the sun. Birchington, believe it or not, had a village centre way back in 1879.

In response to the Editor's request we are indebted to Mr. Alfred T. Walker for the following interesting and intriguing insight into Birchington history.

### **Birchington Institute Trust**

In the June issue of the Birchington Residents' Association Quarterly Magazine it was reported that the Thanet District Council had consented to the Birchington Institute Trustees' nomination to fill a vacancy, and the Editor asked for information about this charity. I have no doubt that the following will interest the readers.

The Charity originated nearly 100 years ago, in 1879, when the Vicar (the first Vicar of Birchington as until 1871 Birchington was part of the ecclesiastical parish of Monkton). Major Morrison Bell and a few other prominent gentlemen of Birchington agreed that the village needed a community centre. As a result, the Rev. Alcock, Major Bell and A Mr. C. Moore (who was the peoples' Churchwarden) borrowed the sum of £500 on a mortgage from a Mr. R. White, and purchased the property which became known as the Institute, to be a village centre – the first community centre in Birchington.

This Institute was situated in the Square behind what is now Colin Beckley's Sweetmarket. The sweetshop originally was the caretaker's house, but later became the Church Verger's house. Access to the Institute from the Square was by a narrow passage way by the side of the caretaker's house.

### **The Institute**

The Institute consisted of a hall with a stage and a gallery, an upstairs room and outhouses. It became the centre for public meetings, concerts, lectures, entertainments, social gatherings etc. It had a Reading Room where newspapers and periodicals could be seen, and a Library. In time it became licensed for stage plays. Technical classes were held there and the Knott Lodge of Oddfellows formed in 1881 and the Good Intent Benefit Society held their meetings there – also the Parish Council.

The Institute appeared to have had a struggling existence. The Trustees, the Rev. Alcock, Major Bell and Mr. C. Moore had hoped that the centre would pay its way and in due time pay off the mortgage. It is of interest to note that the caretaker paid two shillings a week rent for his house. Early in the 1900's, the Trustees' offered the property to the Parish Council on the condition that the Council would take over the mortgage – then £250 – but there appear to have been obstacles in the way and there was also difficulty whether a Parish Council could hold property under a charitable trust, most important the Council was unable to raise the loan. In 1907, the Rev. Serres, Vicar and Mr. Honeyball, Churchwarden were appointed Trustees by the Charity Commissioners.

It is interesting to note that in the 1890's, the Infants' School was held at the Institute – before Mrs. Gray of Birchington Hall, now Spurgeons, bought the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Albion Road and let it to the National School

Managers of Park Lane School for a pepper corn rent of one shilling per year for use as an Infants' School. A wood carving class was held at the Institute and some of the oak wood carving now in Birchington Church was done by this class. In the early 1900's the girls and boys from Park Lane School had cookery and woodwork classes there. It became the meeting place of the Birchington Cricket Club and of the village band. During the last World War it was used by the W.R.V.S. for meals.

### Institute Charity

In the 1920's there was much correspondence between the then Trustees and the Parish Council regarding the Institute. Eventually, early in the 1950's, the Charity Commissioners sold the property, paid off the remaining mortgage, invested the balance, and established a scheme to regulate what became known as the Birchington Institute Charity or Fund.

The Scheme was sealed by the Commissioners on April 25<sup>th</sup> 1952. The first Trustees appointed were Frederick Wm. Mellanby, J.P., William R. Curtis of Station Road (these two appointed for life), Kathleen E. Phillips of Shakespeare Road, Hannah B. Powell Cotton of Quex and Denys H. E. Jeston of Grenham House (these three appointed for four years but could not be reappointed). The Trustees must be persons residing in Birchington and shall be appointed from time to time by the Thanet District Council. The income of the Charity is obtained from – as stated in the Schedule to the Scheme - £452.4 per cent Consolidated Stock standing in the name of the Charitable Funds. According to the Scheme, after certain payments, the Trustees shall apply the income of the Charity for any charitable purposes for the benefit of the inhabitants of Birchington not provided out of rates, taxes or other public funds.

I understand that the present income is about £18 per year derived from £397.49, 4% Consolidated Stock. The immediate Trustees are Mr. D. H. E. Jeston, Hon. Secretary, Mr. Esdale, Mr. C. Barrows and Mrs. M. Maple.