

From **Keble's Gazette**, 14th April 1900, p. 8

DEATH of MAJOR BELL

(Major Bell died on 12th April 1900.)

In the death of Major W M Bell of 'Thor Bungalow', Birchington has, without a doubt, lost one of its best benefactors, and this is a verdict that will be endorsed by every parishioner. The Major has been in indifferent health for some years and last autumn he was recommended to take a sea voyage. Upon reaching Ventnor, however, his health was such that it was not deemed wise to proceed further, and, therefore, for the past six months, he has been residing in the Isle of Wight, at 'The Lillies', Bonchurch. Latterly his illness took the form of a species of paralysis, and after a distressing illness, he passed away at midnight on the 12th Inst. The news was received at Birchington with profound regret. On Sunday the bell-ringers at the Parish Church rang a half-muffled peal before both the morning and evening services, and the 'Dead March' in *Saul* was played at the close of each service by the organist, Mr A. W. G. Score. The Vicar also alluded to the great and irreparable loss the parish had sustained. In accordance with the instructions of the deceased, the body was cremated at Woking on Monday afternoon, and contemporaneously, a memorial service was held at All Saints Church, Birchington, preceded by a half-muffled peal. There was a large congregation and the service was conducted by the Vicar, the Rev. H. A. Serres, assisted by the Rev. H. M. Lake. The Psalms were chanted by the choir. The hymns used were, 'When our heads are bowed with woe', 'Christ will gather in His own', and 'A few more years shall roll'. At the conclusion of the solemn and impressive service, the organist played 'Blest are the departed' (from Spor's *Last Judgement*) and the 'Dead March' in *Saul*.

The late Major Bell came to Birchington about 25 years ago, and his bungalow was one of the first built on the now numerous inhabited district known as 'The Bungalows'. Although a bachelor, he was a most hospitable one. Deceased's four nephews were particularly favourite guests of their uncle; they are all soldiers, and at the present moment, two of them are serving their country under Lord Roberts at Bloemfontein, South Africa.

To attempt to give an adequate idea of the extent to which the deceased gentleman benefited the town of his choice would be a difficult task indeed; for not only was he instant in season and out of season, to assist in any good work, but he was man who hated ostentation. Says a well-known Birchington man who has been brought into constant contact with the Major -: "His charity was unbounded and he was a great benefactor to the place. He was the mainstay of 'The Institute' [Birchington's first 'Village Centre'] and always came to its rescue in pecuniary difficulties." He was also vice-president of the Conservative Association. He has been one of the chief supporters of The Institute since it has been established [1878], was one of its trustees and for many years its president. He was also a liberal supporter of the National Schools [in Park Lane] and indeed the same remark would apply to every effort made for the betterment of Birchington, either collectively or individually.

Major William Morrison Bell was 68 years of age. He was formerly of the 3rd Hussars (King's Own), which he joined in 1854, and had served many years in India as well as at the home stations.

[Items enclosed with square brackets have been added by the typist.]

Miss Jennie Burgess M A
Parish Archivist
28th February 2003