

## **MAJOR W. MORRISON BELL**

Major William Morrison Bell came to Birchington from the Woking area in the latter quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He became the owner of two of John Seddon's new 'bungalows' on the corner of Beach Avenue and Spencer Road in about 1878. The properties were called 'HAUN' and 'THOR'. He eventually joined them together with a large conservatory, facing towards the sea. All through his life-time they were simply known as 'Haun and Thor'.

He was a most generous benefactor to the people of Birchington and was greatly loved and respected by them. After his death on **12<sup>th</sup> April 1900**, aged **65**, there was a tribute to him in the parish magazine of May 1900. It reads:

### **'DEATH OF MAJOR BELL'**

'On April at the 'Lillies', Bonchurch, Isle of Wight, there passed away at the age of 65 one of Birchington's greatest benefactors and best-loved inhabitants, in the person of Major W. M. Bell. To all in Birchington he was known for his simple kindness and unbounded generosity. To the organisations connected with the Church he was a large contributor, his gifts being given in the unostentatious way which characterised him in all his actions. The news of his death was received in Birchington with the profoundest regret. On Sunday the bell-ringers at the Parish Church rang a half-muffled peel before both the morning and evening services. ....

'The body was cremated at Woking and contemporaneously a memorial service was held in our church .... and was well attended .....

Soon after he died, a convalescent home for boys was opened in Albion Road, and named in honour of him. (See separate note on this). It is just possible that he had already planned to invest in this project before he died, but there is nothing to prove this idea.

Recently his great-great nephew, another William, has contacted the Trust asking for information on his uncle's time in Birchington. Nephew William has been kind enough to send us a CD containing 32 images of his great-great uncle and his home at Haun and Thor, which also includes some of his brother and his family. Added to these there are images of the winter of 1891, which must equal, or even surpass, our own well-remembered one of 1963!