

## Notes on talk with Miss Phillips to Mr R Winter – 23/3/65



N.B. These notes are in no particular order. Our talk covered anything Miss Phillips could remember about the Birchington she knew as a child. In those days Col. Phillips had a summer house here, and the family came down for holidays.

Kathleen Phillips – 2years old



Kathleen & Guy with their parents by their rented villa in Alfred Rd 1908

There was a long cave underneath the Minnis Bay Hotel, with a passage reputed to lead to the cellar at Little Gore End. The children used to play in this cave, and explored the passage, but didn't get very far. (I have been down Little Gore End cellar, and there is certainly a bricked up entrance in the north wall, which could be the other end of this passage.)

“Little Gore End – or part of it – is old, and reputed to have been a smugglers cottage, and Miss Phillips said there was another passage leading from it to the cottage next door to the primary school. (There is no trace of this down in the cellar. I have also heard from another source that the cottage was once occupied by a clergyman, who was the head of a smuggling gang!)”



Little Gore End - 1900

Miss Phillips referred to the two wrecks, remains of which can still be seen on the sands at Minnis Bay. The one in the centre of the bay happened about 80 years ago, and the other one, on “The Point” occurred in 1919. This ship was actually wrecked on the Goodwins, but floated off and drifted round to Minnis Bay. It was a Norwegian ship carrying a cargo of cork and sardines. Many residents stocked their larders with the latter. The crew were saved, and came round to salvage their belongings. Miss Phillips remembers the captain wandering around with a boot in his hand, looking for its fellow. He also salvaged a box of crystallised fruits which he handed round to the children. There were 8 crew saved with the captain.



The Valkyr soon after it arrived at Minnis Bay 1919

“There were at one time 3 tennis courts on the sunken lawn at Minnis Bay, [the Dip] these belonging to the houses in Ethelbert Road and adjacent.



The Exhibition Buildings were later erected on this site in 1885. After the Exhibition was over, the building was used as a Chapel on Sundays and a Theatre during the week.”

The Exhibition Building after the 1897 storm

Captain’s house, and the lifeboat shed can be seen inside the garden wall.”

“A whale was washed up sometime in the 1880’s, and Col. Phillips had a walking stick handle carved from one of its teeth. The second one was washed up in 1910 (about) at Christmas time.” (This is presumably the one you have a picture of.)



Kent House – c. 1948

Miss Phillips mentioned the old altar in the cellar of Kent House opposite the Smugglers, and thought this was very old indeed – even older than the Church. I have heard tell of this from several sources, but have not yet investigated it. However I should think it is more likely to date back to the persecution of the Catholics in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

When Col. Phillips decided to live permanently in Birchington he bought ‘Orion’, which had previously belonged to Lord Carson, before the latter moved to Cleve.

Orion - 1930



“On moonlight nights the ghost of a coach and four can be seen crossing the railway lines at Coleman’s Stairs Road, where the new footbridge now is. (I have also heard of another ‘ghost’ at this spot. This was another clergyman who used to drape a sheet over him and jump out of the hedge to frighten

passers-by. Subsequently 'laid' by two Coast Guards who were passing, and were not taken in.)”



Alms Houses with Mrs Sayer - c. 1920

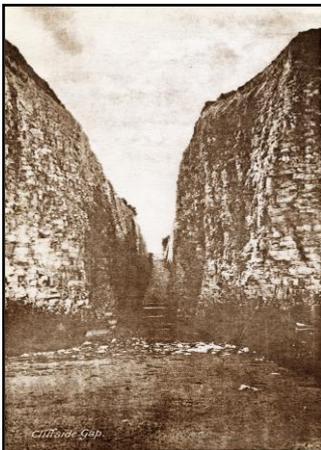
“The old alms houses in Gas Alley had as an inmate a Mrs. Williamson who had only one arm. She proudly announced that she had lost this at the battle of Balaclava, where she had been a camp follower.”

Miss Phillips remembers seeing the Vicar, Mr. Serres, skating on the pond in Canterbury Road, and being very impressed with his white hair and white moustache. She also recollects one Sunday evening when the Vicar was playing his Curate at tennis, and having a ding-dong battle, and Col. Phillips had to dash up to the Church to start evensong while the Vicar finished his match!



Rev. H A Serres 1920s

When the Institute closed down a party was held to entertain all the people who had helped run it as an army canteen during the war. Old Mr. Barrows supplied the crockery for this, and in his valedictory speech gave each helper her cup and saucer as a memento. Miss Phillips said she served so many plates of sausage, beans, and mash to soldiers during the war that she never wants to see it again.



There is a cave under 'Orion', which they came across by accident when living there. It was covered with railway sleepers and was about 20 feet deep. Jim Piper knows of this one too, as he once broke into it when laying drains. It would appear that this is part of the tunnel reputed to run from Coleman's Stairs Gap up to The Smugglers.

Coleman Stairs Gap - 1919