

# THE OLD CHURCHYARD



This photo, taken in c. 1880, shows the limits of the Original churchyard, with its wooden gate. The old wall ran along the top of the high bank we see as we walk up from Church House. The gate stood where the path bends sharply to the left, as the south porch comes into view.

This part of the churchyard holds the bodies of the earliest worshipers in the church, from about 1100. Only the wealthy could afford a coffin, so most people were buried in a shroud made of wool or linen. Over the centuries these burials have slowly raised the level of this section of the churchyard as bodies were added on top of the earlier interments.



Eventually, however, Birchington's population began to increase and there was no longer enough room for any more in the old ground. This was when the Vicar and Churchwardens asked the farmer of the neighbouring farm – 'Street Farm' - if he would sell them one of his fields which abutted the wall and gate area of the old churchyard. A deal was agreed and the section of land between the gateway and about halfway down the lower path was bought in the 1840s. More pieces were added over the following 100 years until a total halt had to be called in 1951.



Now the only burials can be of ashes.