

## SEABREEZE LADIES' CYCLE FACTORY to CHRISTIES WINE BAR

George Cousins built and opened his 'Seabreeze Ladies' Cycle Factory' here in Birchington in the early 1870s, soon after the railway was opened here in 1863. The building could well have been built by George himself, as he is listed in the 1883-4 Kelly's as a Builder at these premises.

In an advertisement for his new design of lady's cycle, it states that he was the 'patentee' of the design, but unfortunately, he did not get the official patent registered correctly. The description of his design reads:

'The Seebreeze Cycles are built on Hygienic lines.

The Spring Frame obviates the need of pneumatic tyres.

The Fairy Seabreeze (rigid frame) an Ideal Lady's Bicycle.

The Diamond Frame. Preventative of the hideous bicycle hump.'

Eventually, other manufacturers copied his design and had their brands fully patented. His trade was then too local to make it a viable business, although he continued to trade until the mid- 1890's. There are a number of photos of cyclists in and around Thanet during this period, including one of a group of ladies outside the Post Office at Upstreet. The one of the ladies cycling along Canterbury Road beside Yew Tree House is a classic of its time.

Another of George Cousins' ventures was building a three-wheeled motor-cycle. The photograph of this shows him in the driver's seat, **behind** his wife, who was riding as his passenger! On a seat at the rear sat his young mechanic, George Walker, who was needed to sorted out any problems when the vehicle broke down along the way – he was facing backwards. Walker later ran a thriving Cycle business in Station Road up until the after the 1970s.

In his earliest days in the village, Cousins built the first five 'observatory' houses in Minnis Road and lived in the first these for many years. During the late 1800s, Cousins' local trade had slackened off, so he decided to build the triangular extension onto the end of his factory premises and open up an Estate Agent's business. There was a thriving trade in selling and letting properties and land at this period, with the many visitors who came to spend holidays here and then liked it so much, they wanted to buy their own property. Cousins was still working in this capacity in 1906-7, but in August 1908 he died, aged 64 and the Estate Agency business was sold to Benefield and Cornford, who continued to run it for the next 80 years.

The 'factory' building was used for several businesses over the next 100 years – Fasham's ran it as a baker's and general store: Bob Hales ran a second hand furniture store in it: etc. etc. Later it was the first home of the Mobility Centre in Birchington and finally was a stationary shop run by John Mann jun.'s wife, before being incorporated into Christie's Wine Bar in 2001. In 2002, the owners of the Bar won the Birchington Heritage Trust's annual Award for its excellent and sympathetic conversion.