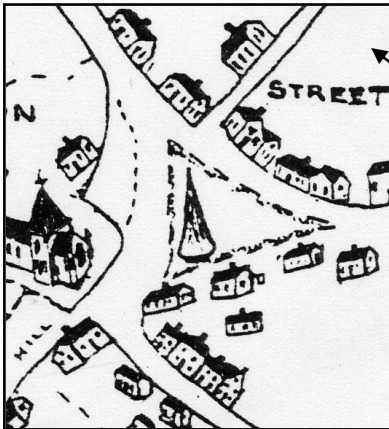


THE GRANT MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN, BIRCHINGTON



The Square 1688

The Square - 1880

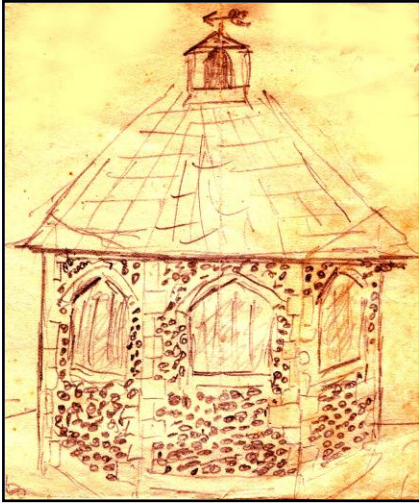


The fountain in the Square has a long and interesting story. The central area of The Square was originally a green where for years children played near the maypole and in the early 20th C. horse-brakes would passers to refresh themselves. The first proposal for a fountain at the Square was made in 1886 as a means to commemorate The Queen's Golden Jubilee, but this idea was rejected after heated debate. A further proposal was made in 1900 by Charles Morrison Bell in memory of his brother William, a much-loved, local philanthropist. But this too was abandoned, following strong opposition from Messrs Pointer and Pemble, on the grounds that it would become a hazard to traffic and parents and children crossing the Square to and from School (this, at a time when there were only about 10 petrol driven vehicles in the village!) The idea was also rejected by the Rural District Council. At this point Mr Bell withdrew his offer, and gave the money to the Sea Bathing Hospital instead.

In 1909 Alderman Grant offered a fountain in memory of his wife and on that occasion the offer was eagerly accepted, as the brass plate on the structure states. The fountain was dedicated that same year in the centre of the Square. A gas lantern was placed on top and water was connected to two horse troughs, as well as the fountain itself. At the same time, the Parish Committee agreed to a speed limit of 8 mph in The Square.

Enterprising tradesmen used the site to sell their wares from a barrow parked beside the fountain. It was not long before increasing traffic began to have problems negotiating the fountain, so it was moved nearer to The Powell Arms in about 1914-1915, when a new gas light was installed. The traffic problems continued, so it was then moved over to the Queen's Head in about 1925. As someone remarked later, "It should have been given casters!"





During World War II the lantern was removed and the fountain was encased in a concrete pill box. By 1947 when the fountain was uncovered the position of the lantern was marked by a spike. The water was not reconnected, so it became simply an 'ornament' in the Square. Health and safety concerns with public fountains have proved difficult to satisfy. Any additional lighting was also felt to be a potential distraction to motorists.

By this date it had also lost one of its horse troughs. Efforts to protect and maintain the fountain and its remaining horse trough continued over the years with the Birchington Residents' Association taking the lead,

with support and assistance from the Parish Council. Plans to renovate and restore the fountain to its original condition were adopted by the Residents' Association as a millennium project, with a view to obtaining "Listed Building" status after the work was completed. Water and electricity supplies were not part of the plan, but a restoration was begun in 2000 at the Association's expense. The plan was to install a lantern like the original, with the invaluable help of the late Alf Bedwell - but without any power source - and to repair and restore the oak pillars and missing shingles on the



Restoration in 2000-2001

fountain's roof.



At the same time the Parish Council, with help from the late Peter Francis, added other enhancements in The Square. The remaining horse trough was moved closer to the fountain and railings installed around the whole edifice, with horticultural displays within. All of this work was completed within the period 2000/2001, and the grant of "Listed Building" status was sought and obtained soon after.

Edited by Jennie Burgess

The fountain in 2005, with its summer display