

# Birchington Heritage Trust



## NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 2

NOVEMBER 2002

The first edition of the Newsletter was well-received and we hope you will enjoy the current one. As well as our usual information and noticeboard, we have an article on the tower bungalows by Dr. Alan Kay and some personal reminiscences of Birchington in the 1950s. If you would like to contribute any thoughts, articles or letters for future

### SEPTEMBER MEETING

About fifty members of The Trust attended the last General Meeting held in the Village Centre at 7.30 on the 20th September. There was much discussion on the main item on the agenda which was the setting up of the Trust's constitution. A number of amendments were suggested which the Committee and Trustees have been working on. Copies of the new draft constitution will be available at our

### MEMBERSHIP REMINDER

We are again delivering newsletters to all those who expressed an interest in membership in the hope that you will join us. Membership fees for the year 2002-2003 are now due and we should be very grateful for £5 per person. Cheques should be made payable to **The Birchington Heritage Trust** and paid to our new Membership Secretary: Colin Gordine at 36, Grenham Road, Birchington, CT7 9JG, Telephone: 01843 843279

### BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST

Next General Meeting

7.30, Friday November 29th

The Village Centre

Guest Speaker: John Harrison

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“Quex, Our Hidden Treasure”

All Welcome

Non-members £1 admission

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# NOVEMBER HERITAGE NOTICEBOARD

## **The Fund Raising Committee**

The group met on the 2nd. October. Future plans include:

A Quiz Night on 21st March  
and

A walking Treasure Hunt on 11th May

Other ideas included A Jazz Night, a Candle Party, a 1920's Theme Night and raffles.

## **Heritage Awards**

We are planning to award certificates to acknowledge work done by people in the community to benefit the environment.

The first presentation will be at the next General Meeting, so

## **WORKING GROUPS**

These are now up and running. Alan Kay has met with the transport group and the oral history interviews are being arranged. All members are welcome to join in.

## **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Colin Gordine has taken on the rôle of Membership Secretary. The address for all correspondence regarding membership is:

36, Grenham Road  
Birchington  
CT7 9JG

Telephone: 01843 843279

Pat Orpwood remains as Secretary.

## **NEW MEMBERS**

We now have nearly 100 paid-up members, but we are asking all existing members to introduce 2 new ones for next year to enable the Trust to develop further.

## **CORONATION CELEBRATIONS**

Plans for the exhibition in June 2003 are underway. If you have any photographs or memorabilia you would be willing to lend us for the exhibition, we should be very grateful.

There will also be a carnival procession and a one night vintage show performed by The Guild of Players.

## **MONITORING**

A letter was sent to the Highways department at Canterbury regarding the machinery left on Dog Acre during the road hump adjustments. All is now

## **PLANNING**

BHT now holds current details of all listed buildings in Birchington and the Conservation Area. Planning

# THE FIRST BUNGALOW ESTATE

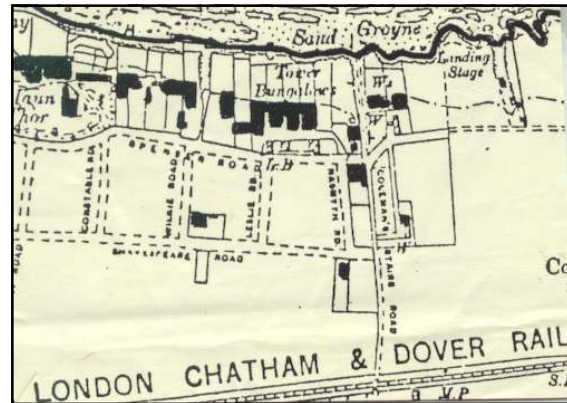
by Alan Kay

Many readers will know that England's first bungalow was built in Westgate in 1867. But Birchington may lay claim to having the first bungalow "estate". This was mainly due to the restrictive covenants imposed by Edmund Davis, the autocratic developer of the new "private estate" at Westgate. Consequently only two bungalows were ever built there.

The original builder, John Taylor, then moved along the coast to where John Pollard Seddon, a well-known London architect, had bought land along the cliffs at Birchington at the time of the great railway boom of the 1860s.

The Kentish Gazette of 1870 advertised "240 plots of freehold land for sale by Ventum, Bull and Cooper" in the "rural simplicity of Birchington". That year saw two small bungalows built each side of Coleman Stairs. Later named Fair Outlook and Poets Corner. In 1872 two more bungalows were built close by, Delmonte and White Cliffs, with Skyross added in 1873. These five bungalows were assured of "perfect privacy as there is no private right of way along the cliff". They were also cut off from each other "by a desert of mud and mire from all chance of Christian intercourse".

By 1880 this estate of bungalows had become fully established, benefiting from the pioneering efforts of a decade earlier. Between 1881 and 1882 four more bungalows were added to the line along the edge of the cliffs, as is shown by the contemporary map opposite.



By now Taylor appears to have relinquished his part in the bungalow development. He died some time between 1879 and 1885. J.P. Seddon then designed what became known as the Tower Bungalow Estate, ending with Haun and Thor on what was later to become the Beresford Hotel site.

Among the collection of some 2000 drawings by Seddon in the Victoria and Albert museum is one sheet titled the "Cliff Estate" showing how he planned to develop and expand the site to incorporate the recently-constructed railway station, renamed Birchington-on-Sea in 1878, with the present Station House also designed by Seddon. The site of the bungalows was some distance from the historic rural village of Birchington around the Parish Church and the development of the surrounding open fields did not come until much later. By 1891 some 13 bungalows had been established making the estate the first in this new form of building design.

To be concluded.

## A BIRCHINGTON CHILDHOOD

### Growing up in the 1950s

I was five years old in 1950 and so most of my childhood occurred during this decade. The 1950s began with the after-effects of war with ration books still in evidence; petrol rationing did not finish until September, 1950, but sweet rationing continued until February, 1953. Most of my friends were not too worried about the petrol, as few families at that time owned a car, but we were all pleased when we could pop down the Canterbury Road to Morris's and buy as many 1d or 2d purple and silver bars of Cadbury chocolate, 1d gobstoppers or sherbert fizzes as we wanted.

I remember being aware that there was still a war in Korea, but it did not really impinge upon my life, nor did the 1950 deaths of George Orwell and George Bernard Shaw, but I do remember the birth of Princess Anne later that year, closely followed by that of my sister, born in Quetta (Margate) and given the second name Anne in honour of the royal birth. We lived in Mill

Row and one day as we walked "up the street", as we called the trip up the Canterbury Road to the shops, my mother had asked me if I would like a new brother or sister. I was really pleased and, after crossing at the zebra, she told me she would organise it and went straight into the Post Office. For several years I thought that was where you ordered your new baby.

Before 1948, we had lived in Islington, although my grandparents lived in Birchington. I was a very sickly baby and the London smogs brought on bronchitis every year so that a move to the coast was recommended. With the post-war housing shortage, we were really lucky when my grandparents found some rooms and we were able to move to a small cottage opposite their house. However, we still made frequent trips to London to visit other relatives, usually by East Kent coach from Birchington Square, but occasionally by train. I was terrified by the great wheels and pistons of the steam train

which seemed to tower above the low-level platform and I would hide my face in the wall until it had passed.

On one of these visits in 1951, we went to Festival of Britain on what is now the South Bank. I remember the huge crowds and the main attractions of the silvery futuristic skylon, the tall shot tower from where lead was dropped to make cannon balls and, my father's favourite, the incredibly complicated Guinness Clock. It had been a hundred years since the Great Exhibition and the festival was intended to help the country look towards the future, now the war was over.

One of my earliest memories is recovering from the measles and lying in bed listening to the wireless one morning when I heard the announcer introduce a new programme describing the everyday life of country folk; it was my first introduction, leading to a life-long addiction to *The Archers*.

The following year we were keeping our royal diaries at All Saints School in Park Lane, logging Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip's commonwealth tour. I was a great admirer of the Princess, having waited at the end of the platform at Margate Station some time before. Then one morning I was unwell and unable to go

school, so I was listening to the school radio programmes which I was missing when they were interrupted by the news of the King's death. I am ashamed to say I was more disappointed at missing my programme than hearing the sad news, though my mother and grandmother both cried. My royal diary stopped short in Kenya and the new Queen returned to England.

It would be over a year until the Coronation and before that we had to endure the terrible floods at the beginning of February, 1953. My school diary of the time recalls my understanding of the situation. In one sentence I noted that a man had drowned in Margate and three pigs at Brooksend. The newspapers said that the railway would be out of action for 18 months, with Thanet again an island. With little concept of the true horror of the floods, we inspected the water-filled dip at Minnis Bay and were excited to find onions and pieces of deck chair, with the names of Dutch resorts clearly printed on them, washed up on the shore.

The year, 1952, ended gloomily too with the death of Queen Mary, the crash of the BOAC comet in India and the hunt for the mass murderer Christie whose picture on the front of the *Daily Mirror* I can still see. Perhaps all would be better after the Coronation. To be continued.

## Research at Margate Library

by Beth Thomson (Heritage Officer)

Margate Library holds the main Local Collection for the Thanet area. This is a reference collection which can be consulted on Tuesday and Friday 2.00 - 6.00 p.m., and on the first Saturday of each month 9.30 - 1.00 p.m. and 2.00 - 5.00 p.m.

The Collection includes printed books, manuscripts, trade directories, photographs, periodicals, maps and an interesting collection of ephemera. In addition the library holds other local records in microform such as census returns, parish registers, newspapers and churchwardens accounts. All items in the Local Collection relating to Birchington are indexed, and can be produced on request.

Those of you who use Birchington Library will no doubt be aware that it holds a small local studies collection, which includes guides, local histories and news-cuttings. Depending on the research topic, this collection may be a good starting point.

As research progresses it will be necessary to visit the Kent Archives Service. There are 3 record offices which hold Birchington records:

- East Kent Archives, which holds most of Thanet's records

- Canterbury Cathedral Archives, for diocesan records for the district
- The Centre for Kentish Studies, which holds the main county collections of archives and local history material.

Margate library has details of the record offices' opening hours and some lists of their holdings. In the Heritage Room at Ramsgate Library, we also have indexes to the Thanet records held by the East Kent Archives. These are supplemented by catalogues, which give additional details about the records and can help a researcher decide whether or not a visit to the Records Office would be useful. However, there are copies of some local archives already in the Local Collection at Margate Library. These can be located through the Collection's indexes.

When the Heritage Room is open to the public, specialist staff are available to give advice and to copy material on request, i.e. when copyright and condition permit. While it is not generally permissible to use the Collection outside of the Heritage Room opening hours, it may be possible on request, to consult published works from the Collection in the Reference Library.

**We look forward to seeing you all at the next meeting!**