

# Birchington Heritage Trust



## NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 5

September, 2003

### CORONATION WEEK A GREAT SUCCESS

The events of our June Coronation Week left the committee delighted, if a little exhausted. During the week we arranged a fair, an exhibition, a talk, a schools' competition and a best-dressed shop window competition. Nearly 500 people attended the Fifties Exhibition in The Burley Gallery and we were told it had been the library's most successful exhibition to date. We are hoping to hold further exhibitions in the future. Any ideas will be very welcome.

Having set up the exhibition on the Saturday, we began with a rather rain-sodden fair at Minnis Bay on the Sunday. There were not too many stalls, but we had a display of vintage cars and a number of new members enrolled at the BHT gazebo including several local councillors. After attending the fair, Roger Gale opened the exhibition first thing on Monday morning and presented prizes to pupils from Birchington Primary and King Ethelbert Schools. We remained open for the rest of the week and were rarely quiet. The Chiropodist's in Minnis Bay won the Best Dressed Shop competition and Jennie Burgess gave an excellent and very well-attended talk on Birchington in the Fifties.



A corner of the Coronation and Fifties exhibition

BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST

#### General Meeting

7.30, Friday 26th September

The Village Centre

Speaker: David White

on Woodchurch  
(by popular request)

BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

THE HARBOUR JAZZ CLUB

PRESENT

#### A JAZZ NIGHT

THE VILLAGE CENTRE

8P.M. 4TH OCTOBER



#### WHERE AM I?



A prize of £5 will be going to the first person out of the hat, giving us the correct answer.

#### Derek Raven

Members will be sorry to hear that our Chairman, Derek is very ill at the moment and unable to take part in our activities at present.

We all send him, Dot and the family our good wishes for the future and hope to see hm again before long.



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# SEPTEMBER HERITAGE NOTICEBOARD

## MEMBERSHIP REMINDER

We are delighted that nearly all our members have renewed their subscriptions. We are delivering newsletters to those who have not yet done so, with a membership form, as a reminder. Membership fees for the year 2003-2004 remain at £5 per person. Cheques should be made payable to: **The Birchington Heritage Trust** direct to our Membership Secretary:  
**Colin Gordine at 36, Grenham Road, CT7 9JG.**

## PRESS COVERAGE

We received plenty of coverage last month with two items on Radio Kent and reports and photographs of our coronation week activities in The Kent Messenger Extra, Thanet Times and Thanet Gazette. We hope you all saw the particularly lovely photograph of Gillian at the exhibition! Look out for information in the Clubs and

## TRANSPORT TO MEETINGS

Remember, if you find it difficult to get to General Meetings and would like a lift there and back, please contact Pat Orpwood on 847843 before the meeting and she will try

## FRIENDS OF ALL SAINTS

The Friends are organising three talks by Mr. J. Graham of Broadstairs on Smuggling in Thanet:  
Wednesday 1st. October: Contraband Corner  
Wednesday 29th. October: Moonlighting Inns  
Wednesday 26th. November: Preventive Service

There is a modest entrance fee on the door and refreshments are included.

## NEW MEMBERS

We now have 111 fully paid -up members. A special welcome to new members this quarter:

Mr and Mrs H. Million	Dawn Prosser
Dr and Mrs J. Cohen	Mary Foster
Mr and Mrs R. Smith	Mrs C. Kilbourn
Mr and Mrs A Hudson	Mr P. Churchill
Mr and Mrs H.J. Arnold	Mr V. Abbott
Cllr. and Mrs Latchford	Julian Baker
Mr and Mrs Sheldrick	Mrs G. Wilcox
Mr and Mrs D. Wagland	Mr B. LaRoche
Mr and Mrs J.O'Sullivan	Mrs J. Fordham

## MEMBERSHIP CARDS

All members for 2003-2004 should have received membership cards on payment of their subscriptions. If you have not had yours, please contact Colin (843279)

## HERITAGE TRUST TRIPS

We are hoping to organise afternoon trips to Kent heritage sites or local museums, if there is sufficient interest. Would anyone who would like further information or has any ideas about venues, please contact:

## ROYAL PRAISE

Committee member, George Teasdale, mentioned our Coronation week events in a letter to The Queen and has received a letter from her Lady in Waiting expressing her pleasure in all our efforts.

# A Personal View of a Time of Innocence

by Alan Jeppard

Girls! Smiling and smart in Ranger Guide uniforms.

I had not been particularly keen to go to Birchington. To my mind girls tended to be disruptive of manly pursuits such as sailing but more and more of my fellow Venture Scouts had been making their way there after our Thursday evening meetings. On this particular evening I walked to Margate Clock Tower with Frank Ready and John Verral, unsure whether to join them, but they lifted me onto the open platform by my elbows just as the bus was moving off!

Miss Phillips, Tubby and his wife, Jean, ran the Twenty Ninth Margate Venture Scouts and the 2nd Birchington Rangers as a combined unit, a revolutionary concept at the time. Much of its success was due to Miss Phillips. Scouting and Guiding were essentially outdoor occupations and she generously used her house throughout the winter months for "Combined Ops" weekends. Perhaps the military expression is to be deplored, but the war still rumbled on in places.

Saturday evenings were spent in the old Church House where we helped run the Saturday club, for youngsters of the village of any persuasion who had nothing to do (there was little TV in those days). When the club closed, we would make our way to Gwynant, Miss Phillips' house. Attached to one side was a small building, one time school house, which the boys used as a bedroom. Come bed time she would ceremoniously lock the door between there and the main house. I am told that a key on the other side of that also fitted, but cannot confirm it was ever used nefariously.

Come the morning, cups of tea all round, then, if it was fine, down to the beach to play rounders, French cricket or some such game, then back for breakfast cooked mainly by the Rangers, before going to the morning service conducted by the Reverend Granville Sharpe, hugely popular with young people, not just



Miss Kathleen Phillips (centre) and friends at the door of Gwynant, Shakespeare Road

because it was his influence that had overcome the objections of many adults, not only to the idea of just having a Club for children, but particularly for his inclusion of "youngsters of any persuasion". He also played the Dame in pantomimes.

After dinner, activities were many and varied. Training, perhaps in first aid etc, play reading, singing maybe and there was the day we "transmitted" a radio play to the main room. Incidentally, another survivor from that era found a copy of the script recently.

Soon it would be time to go home, with school or work to face the following day, but there was the next weekend to look forward to. Because of this we were lucky, I think. The drabness left behind by the war years did not affect us, but maybe the reason that 1946 was a good time to live was that one was eighteen years old.

Once winter was declared over, it was back to camp fires and wide games, but the fun and companionship, with its world-wide connotations remained.

## SOME OF OUR CORONATION WEEK MEMORIES



Mrs. Settefield with her fifties picture



Birchington Carnival Court and vintage bus



The winner in the shop window competition



Roger Gale, M.P. with winning K.E.S. pupils

# GREAT GRANDPA GEORGE

by Colin Gordine

**I would like to tell you about my Great-grandfather George, a man of many talents, a village character and one whose legacy is to be found in Minnis Bay today.**

George Willshire was born the second child of George and Selina Willshire on Christmas Day 1861, near Chartham. Father George was employed as a gardener and general labourer. In the early 1870's the family, now increased to four children, moved to York House, Birchington, the building at the Epple Road end of York Terrace. Three more children, two boys and a girl were born in quick succession, though one boy died in infancy.

George junior was apprenticed as a blacksmith and also trained as a cobbler. He joined, with his brothers Charles and Leon, the All Saint's Bellringers and regularly performed at the Church and the Waterloo Tower in Quex Park.

Christmas Day 1885 was an eventful birthday for George. On this day he married a local girl, Emily Ann Gardner and moved into Lower Gore End Farm. This is now the thatched cottage with the wood-framed annexe next to the shops in Minnis Road. The farm, with its surrounding land had been taken over by the Birchington Bay Estate to develop the area as a residential resort which we now call Minnis Bay. George had been appointed bailiff and one of his duties was to keep an eye on the gate which closed off the road (now Minnis Road) to the Estate. Other duties included collecting rents, acting as a 'security guard' for the properties and the brickfield to the rear of the farm between Minnis Road and the railway line (now the site of Ingoldsby Road).

His skills as a blacksmith and cobbler proved to be an asset to the new residents of the Estate.

George and Emily had two daughters, Rosie born 1886 and Florrie born 1888. Tragically, Rosie died at the age of eight. Florrie, who was to become my grandmother was educated at Park Lane Church of England School, a lengthy round trip in the days before the school bus. Whilst at the school and, no doubt, encouraged by her mother, Florrie became an accomplished needleworker and dress-maker. As such she gained an apprenticeship in a large London fashion store. George and Emily were not keen on the idea so soon after the loss of their precious Rosie. They proposed an alternative.

*(If any readers have photographs or memories of the Willshires, the cottage or the shops in Minnis Bay, I would be most grateful if I could share them with you)*

In 1903, they had built a general store in the grounds of the cottage (now the office building at the front of the cottage). Florrie was asked to manage the shop with her parents instead of moving away to London. This she agreed to do thus making the Willshire family the proprietors of the first Minnis Bay Stores. Later, the Post Office established a sub-office on the premises and George became the first sub-postmaster.

In 1913, Florrie married Harry Johnson, son of a local coastguard, and a qualified master baker. He moved into the cottage and with George set about converting the property into the two adjoining

premises we see in Minnis Road today. Harry became joint owner of the business and established a bakery in the basement. With Emily's death in 1920 and because of his advancing chronic arthritis, George withdrew from the practical side of the business leaving it to Harry and Florrie Johnson.

The growth of Minnis Bay in the twenties and thirties increased the demand for shopping facilities and a parade of shops was built in Minnis Road. George and Harry needed to expand their own business and a brand new store was built on land next to the cottage. This new shop became known as 'H.C. Johnson' and is still the Post Office Stores to this day. Harry sold the business to his son-in-law, Laurie Gordine, my father, in 1946 and it remained in the family until his retirement in 1975.

George lived in the cottage with the Johnson family, now enlarged with the addition of his three granddaughters. Many of his activities

had been curtailed by the crippling arthritis. He spent much of his time in the garden and sitting at the door of his shed perhaps thinking of the days and loved ones long gone. He did manage one last peel of the Parish Church bells for the wedding of his eldest grand-daughter, Gwynneth, my mother, in 1939, just before the onset of War prohibited the ringing of church bells.

George Willshire died just before his 90th birthday in 1951 at Hill House, Minster. He is buried with Emily and Rosie in All Saints' churchyard, close by the west door of the church, where the bells peel just as they did when he and his brothers were young men.



Colin Gordine aged 4 and his great-grandfather, George Wiltshire, aged 85

**This month's two articles were written by members of The Trust. If you have something you would like included or any topics you would like us to cover in future editions, please contact :  
The Secretary, 77, Alpha Road, Birchington, CT7 9ED. Phone 847843**