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BOUNDARY STONES Detectives needed!

The Birchington Heritage Trust is trying to locate as many of the old boundary stones in the village as possible. So far we have located two. They are usually on the edge or corner of a plot and frequently have a letter incised into at least one side. They used to stand about one foot above ground, with the same amount buried below and are often about 4-5 inches wide and deep. They marked the corners of plots belonging to land-owners from time immemorial. Many of them are still marked on present day maps, but the most useful place to check up on ours is on the 1840 Tithe Map.

The first of the two so far identified is in Ingle Close, with a clear letter "N" engraved on it. The land here belonged to Edward Neame (we still have Neame Road from this connection). The stone was discovered in the hedge and was almost buried in earth and leaves. The second one was found in the garden of a property on the corner of Lincoln and Rutland Gardens and contains an "F". The land belonged to George Taddy Friend in 1840. This stone was only discovered when the present owner was digging in his garden. It has since been moved and is now in a garden nearby.

So - "Boundary Stone Detectives", can you please have a poke around your borders and hedges, just in case we can locate another one (or two) of our old stones!

Many Thanks to Rotary

Rotary Club of Westgate & Birchington hosted two of our BHT trustees, Gillian Lodge and Jennie Burgess who attended their Club Dinner meeting. Afterwards they were kindly presented with a cheque for £500. The money will help towards funding future projects by the Trust.

Public Information Films

Talk by Mr. Peter Steel

Mr. Peter Steel, formally of the Government Specialist Film Unit, gave an interesting talk on Thursday 29th March 2007 about films produced about 60 years ago. He explained that their purpose was to advise and educate the public about what was needed to be known also what must be done during the early days of the Second World War. Produced initially by the GPO they later became The Crown Film Unit. The films had been painstakingly restored to be preserved for future generations to see. Various famous stars of the time appeared in them including Tommy Trinder and Bob Hope.

Of the many films shown included were "Do It Now" which advised how to make houses light-tight, building bomb shelters, and how to respond to the various alarm calls and air-raid sirens.

"Food Flashes" shown during intermissions, gave up-to-the-minute advice about availability and prices of food in the shops and suggested eating alternatives foods such as replacing bread with potatoes.

A film showing a concert at the National Portrait Gallery, with portrait free walls, where the audience included many contemporary celebrities including the then Queen Elizabeth. One of our members, Miss Bates, recalled having been a member of the audience at such a concert which had been filmed at the time.

The many films shown brought back nostalgic memories of the difficult times experienced in this country to the audience.

Bingo News!

Fifty-two keen players attended the Bingo and American supper on Friday 4th May. Howard Willicome once again volunteered the Bingo equipment and also did the calling. The Social Committee much appreciated his efforts. An enjoyable evening was had by all and the event raised £148 for the Trust.

Gillian Lodge - Chairwoman of The Social Committee



2 Primitive Methodist Chapel



Primitive Methodist Chapel in 1967

The Primitive Methodist Movement began at Mal Cop in 1807 when William Clowse, an evangelist, and Hugh Bough, an intellectual, addressed a gathering of ardent Methodists who all felt that their present leaders had become far too formal and respectable.

They wanted to get back to the earliest form of Methodist values and principles. The meeting at Mal Cop was very successful and from it the movement spread countrywide. They were renowned for their cottage evangelism and open-air preaching. They made free use of the laity, especially of women, many of whom were quite young. Some were only in their mid-teens, one, Elizabeth Russell, as young as 14 when she began to preach.

There was a great call to perfection and to truly living their faith at work and in the home. They eventually did exactly what they most abhorred in their parent church of the Methodists – became more and more structured and included fewer and fewer of the laity. Women were no longer welcome in the chapel pulpits. The Primitive Methodist Chapel in Birchington was built in 1875 and the stalwart band of supporters did their best to keep their little ship afloat. However, they were dogged by financial difficulties from the outset. There were no really wealthy members of the sect who could bale them out. Oddly enough, the advent of their chapel also served to kick-start a greater enthusiasm among the established Methodist community, so there were no new converts into the Primitive Methodist cause. By 1898 the little group had ceased to function and the building was being used for other purposes in the community.

It was bought from the group by Mrs Susan Gray of Birchington Hall, who then let it to the National Schools in Park Lane as an Infant Department. The building was later bought by Col. Taplin in 1948 as his factory for Birchington Engineering, which thrived here until the 1980s.

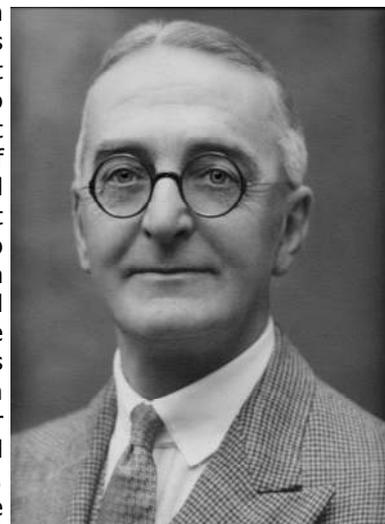
Grenham House School Story

Grenham House School was originally started in Minnis Bay in 1901 under the name of "The Bay School". It was housed in two of the large houses in the long terrace in Minnis Road. The numbers at that date were 24 and 26 and initially the school was under the ownership of Mr Bernard Vincent Charles Ransome M.A. Oxon. In 1904 Mr Henry Eto Eyre Jeston M.A. Oxon. joined him as joint owner.

Not long after his arrival in Birchington, a report appeared in the Parish Magazine of July 1907, which stated that "Mr Jeston, ably assisted by his sister", put on a Concert in the Drill Hall behind the Public Hall (now the Cornerstone Church). "The boys at the Bay School and other ladies and gentlemen gave an excellent Concert at 8pm, which was hugely enjoyed by a good sized audience." The occasion was a large fundraising day organised by All Saints Church parishioners. This was a new venture for them and they were greatly encouraged by the support from the joint headmaster of this newly formed local private school. The bazaar raised £105, of which £2 2s 9d came from "Mr Jeston's Concert".

The school remained at the Bay until 1910, when a new school began to be built for them in ten acres of land near the station, on the north side of the railway. The land was bought from St John's College Cambridge, which owned much of the land around the village (and still owns some today). At the time of purchase the land was open farmland, with only a footpath leading through it to the top of St Mildred's Avenue. The footpath remained for many years and was only made into a road in the early 1950s. The path was known locally as "the Tar Path". The school was built by Mr D. Dyke of Westgate at a cost of £3,860

The new premises were opened in 1911, and initially entered under Ransome's name only. It appears under Lyell Road at this date as Grenham Road did not exist until 1920. Henry Jeston is listed in the Old Comrades Members Register as a Lieutenant of the 3rd Voluntary Battalion of the Buffs from 1915 -1919. It would appear that Bernard Ransome remained in charge of the overall running of the school during this period, but Henry Jeston was probably serving locally, rather than in France. He was already 38 when war began in 1914. After the war, however, Henry Jeston played a major role in getting the new premises for the United Services Club built in Station Road and he was elected as their first President in 1924. To commemorate this event a large photograph of him was commissioned and the Club still holds it to this day. The Club had originally been formed as the "Old Comrades Club" at the end of 1919 and was fully functional by March 1920, when the War Memorial was dedicated in Birchington Square. At this date they were meeting in the Powell Arms or the Drill Hall



Henry E. Eyre Jeston 1924

Grenham House School Story

(continued)

(now the Middle Birchington Club) each week.

By 1924 Bernard Ransome was a J.P. and living on the premises of the school. Henry Jeston was living with his wife and young son Denys Henry Eyre, at 5 Beach Avenue, which acted not only as his home, but also as a dormitory for the younger boys at the school for a time. By 1928 he, too, had joined the Bench as a J.P. His son later recalled a humorous story concerning one of his father's cases. A young pilot and photographer flew very low over Birchington in about 1934 taking photos of the more interesting buildings. They then sold the one of Grenham House School to Henry Jeston who was delighted with the excellent image, which his son still had. Shortly after this, when Henry was Chairman of the Bench, the young pilot was brought before him for "flying dangerously low over a populated area". Needless to say, the young man got a small 'token' fine and a mild reprimand - "Well - what else could I do, having bought one of his photos?" he



Grenham House Drawing 1910

ruefully asked his colleagues afterwards!

Henry Jeston's only child, Denys, was born at Birchington in 1919 and spent his early years at Fleet House School Westgate. He then went to Sherborne Abbey College, Dorset and Merton College, Oxford, before spending some time at Sandhurst. At the outbreak of the 2nd World War he joined the East Kent Regiment (the Buffs). He was posted abroad in 1941 and fought with the Eighth Army in the Desert against Rommel, until he was captured nine months later.

Henry Jeston evacuated Grenham House School to Swanage in 1940 and later to Derbyshire. The R.A.F. used his old school as the base for sending propaganda balloons over to Occupied Europe, when the air currents were favourable. After Denys's capture, he was listed as "Missing, presumed killed". Bernard Ransome had died on the 25th January 1940, aged 77.

During his time as a POW, Denys made many daring escape attempts, tunnelling and escaping through gaps in the camp fencing, but he was always recaptured. In 1945 he was released from a POW camp in Brunswick, Germany.

On returning to England, the War Office gave him the job of de-requisitioning properties in East Kent, including Grenham House. But a year later he left for Cairo as an Embarkation Officer, and there he met up with Jack Lidgate, eight years his senior.

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Jack was already well known to the Jeston family. He had joined the school in 1935 teaching "everything apart from French", but specializing in mathematics.

Jack had joined the army in 1940 and served with the Nigerian Regiment in Nigeria and also in the Middle East. Both men returned to Birchington in 1946 to find the complete contents of the school stacked ceiling-high in the school chapel. Henry Jeston was by then in his late 60s and welcomed his son into a partnership, which was to last for eight years. In 1947 Denys followed in his father's footsteps by being elected onto the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools and served on their Council for 7 years. During that time, he also represented the Kent district of preparatory school headmasters and was active in this almost until he retired. Jack Lidgate was elected onto the I.A.P.S. in 1960.

Henry Jeston died on the 17th February 1953, aged 77 and Denys then took over the running of the school.

Denys Jeston married his first wife Eve after his return from the Second World War. She shared his life at Grenham House School and entered into its workings with zest. She acted as a 'House Mother' and part-time Matron, along with full-time people, including Staff Nurse Meg Stringer in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Eve died very suddenly in the early 1970s, much to the devastation of Denys and all at the School.

Denys soldiered on alone for a short while, until he met up with Mary Barkley, the Headteacher of Leeland School, Walmer, Deal. Her parents had died by this date. They married on 12th April 1977 and had many happy years together, with Mary sharing some of the burdens of managing the School with Denys, just as Eve had done.

The school limited its total number to 100 boys and class sizes averaged 16. The members of staff were all specialists who were responsible for their given subjects throughout the school. Although most of the boys were boarders, there were always a few day boys who lived locally. The school curriculum included Mathematics, English, French, Science, Latin, Scripture, Geography and History. Hobbies of various kinds were actively encouraged and additional classes were given in Art, Music, Judo and Carpentry. There was also a school Cub Pack and a limited number of the older boys joined the local Scout Troop. Boys in the senior forms were instructed in Shooting and took part in the Preparatory Schools Rifle Association's termly competitions.

A laboratory was built during this period of expansion, along with a new library. On a wall in this room a portrait of Denys Jeston was displayed. This painting is now in the Birchington Heritage Trust Museum. The classrooms were all on the ground floor with the assembly hall and dormitories up above. A heated swimming pool was built and later enclosed with a roof. There was a hard tennis court and the 8 acres of playing fields provided venues for Association and Rugby football in the Christmas term, Hockey during the Easter term and Cricket, Swimming and Tennis in the summer. As with so many schools from this era, both state and private, the boys were divided into "Houses", which all competed with one another in almost every sphere of school life. The four Houses at Grenham were Wellington, Nelson, Haig and Beatty.

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4 Grenham House Story

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During Denys's time, "Sheltwood", a house opposite the school in Grenham Road, was bought to serve in the same capacity as number 5 Beach Avenue had done in his father's time. Jack Lidgate and his wife moved in to this property and Mrs Lidgate acted as house-mother to the youngest boys when they first arrived at the school.

In 1961, the Old Boys of the school raised the money to present two beautiful wrought-iron gates in memory of Old Boys who had died during the Second World War. The gates were still there in 1984 when the school was finally closed.

In 1981, Denys Jeston sold Grenham House School to Mr Basil John, previously headmaster of a preparatory school in Bishop Stortford and at the leaving ceremony, when he and Jack Lidgate retired, Denys stated hopefully that he was sure it would go from strength to strength. His departure ended 80 years of family ownership of a school that had an excellent name both in Thanet and much further afield.

Within three years of buying it, Mr John closed the school and sold the land to developers. The site of the old gateway can still be seen in the high wall round Homebirch House, which now occupies the site and abuts Grenham Road. The gates were sold to an unknown buyer by the developers, without them realising their poignant significance. To their credit, they had replicas made, which now stand at the rear of the site. It was rumoured at the time that the land went for £400,000, but how true this was is not known.

By 1987 Homebirch House, built by McCarthy & Stone, was providing apartments for retired people. The playing fields are now occupied by Hunting Gate, a large development of detached houses and bungalows. The once well-used cricket pitch and playing fields, home to many school matches and also the local Birchington Cricket Club, and many a church and village fete, have disappeared under bricks and mortar for ever. One of the house owners has perpetuated some of those old associations by naming his new home "Out Of Bounds", as it stands in the far North West corner of the old playing fields.

Researched by Jennie Burgess

Noticeboard

WAR SHRINES - Anyone seen them lately?

Has anyone any idea where the War Shrine boards have disappeared to? They used to hang in the entrance to the United Services Club until one of the recent refurbishments of the club. In 1919, when they were finally removed from All Saints Church porch, the Old Comrades promised to take care of them and this they did for many years.

If the boards are tucked away in someone's loft, we would be delighted to give them 'safe lodging' at the Birchington Heritage Trust Museum, if the United Services Club can no longer accommodate them.

WHO, WHERE AND WHEN - RESPONSE

FOLLOWING THE ARTICLE IN ISSUE 19, WE HAVE HAD NUMEROUS RESPONSES TO OUR REQUEST TO IDENTIFY WHERE THE PHOTOGRAPH WAS TAKEN WHICH THE COX FAMILY GAVE US. IT SEEMS THAT THE LADY IS STANDING IN LINKSFIELD ROAD, WESTGATE. HOWEVER THE LADY'S IDENTITY STILL REMAINS A MYSTERY.

MANY THANKS TO ALL THOSE WHO RESPONDED

Birchington Heritage Trust

A.G.M.

7.30pm Thursday 24th May

followed by

"AVIATION in KENT"



presented by

Malcolm Finnis

Birchington Village Centre

**All Welcome
Non-members £1**



B H T

Needs

Your

Subscriptions

also

New Members

Membership renewal begins in May

Still a bargain at £5.00