



Preserving the Past for the Future

## Newsletter

[www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk](http://www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk)

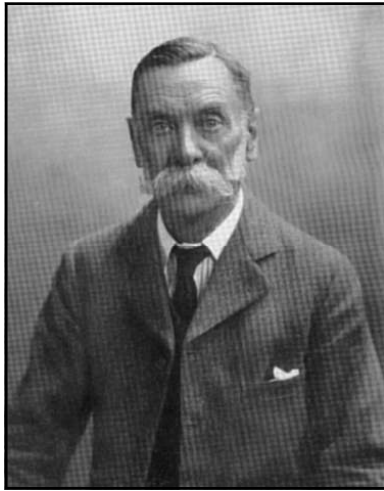
November 2007

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ISSUE 22

### ERLEBACH VISIT to Birchington

As a result of an article in Stuart Horner's *AROUNDABOUT* publication, Vivian Erlebach, a great nephew of H. Arthur Erlebach, founder of Woodford House School, wrote to Stuart. He made a generous offer of help to anyone interested in his family's history, so the BHT Archivist contacted him. After several phone calls, he and his wife offered to come down to Birchington from their home in Richmond, Surrey, to show Jennie some of the photos and other archives he held in trust for the family.



*Henry Arthur Erlebach - 1925*

Vivian and Elsie came armed with a heavy briefcase full of fascinating material and generously let the photos be scanned and much of the text was photocopied. Vivian looked carefully through our



*Arthur Erlebach Speaks at Pavilion, Annie seated - 1920s*

collection from the Woodford House File and corrected a few items for us. He also asked for copies of three pieces concerning his uncles who were killed in WW 1. It was in their memory that Arthur Erlebach gave Birchington its Memorial Recreation Ground between Park Road and Park Lane.

There are a few more pieces to come, but Vivian has had to have an operation on his hands, so we will wait patiently till he is well enough to deal with this for us. One of the pictures that has most delighted us all from the family's collection, is a photograph of H. Arthur Erlebach, shortly before he died. We had no images of him at all and this provides a much needed item in our collection.



*Arthur Erlebach, the youngest boy - c. 1865*

### A Classical Musical Evening

On Friday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2007 the Trust will be hosting a musical evening, featuring David Ruddock and Friends.

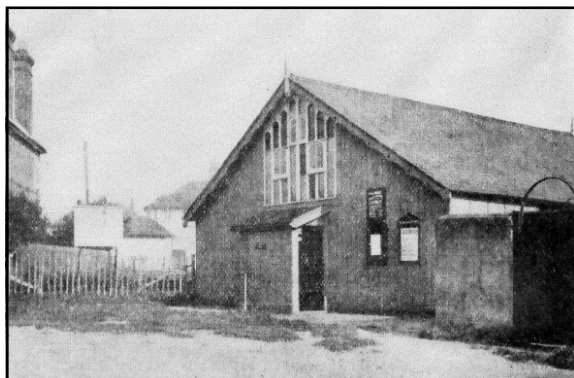
Some of you will remember the Mozart concert which they performed for us last December, which was greatly enjoyed by all who attended.

This year there will be a variety of classical pieces, some with a Christmas theme. The bar will be open and mince pies will be served during the interval.

The tickets are £5.50 each which will take the form of the programme for the evening's performance. These tickets are now available from Jennie Burgess or the Museum on Monday or Saturday mornings.



The little church in Ethelbert Road, Minnis Bay began life as an Inter-denominational Church founded by Charles Robert Haig of Minnis Bay in 1885. It became known as "The Bay Church" and provided a focal point for the growing and thriving community of Birchington Bay, as it was then called. The Coast Guards in the cottages next door to the church built it in two weeks from wood left over from the Exhibition Building. "The ladies of the church used to visit the cottages with soup and baby-food, advice and comfort, in the best Victorian Tradition". (According to Margaret Haig, daughter of the founder). In 1908 the church was affiliated to the Congregational Church Union.



*The Bay Church*

It was through the support of Charles Haig that the "Sand Services" were begun at Minnis Bay in the mid 1880s. These have been well supported through all the changes of their name - from Beach Mission, to CSSM, to their present title of Scripture Union Mission, with over 600 participants this summer.

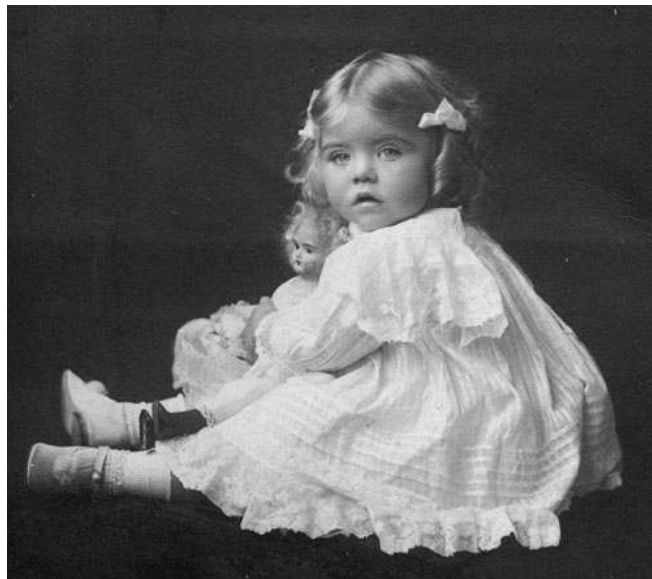
In 1931 Mrs Annie Erlebach, widow of the founder of Woodford House School, told the congregation that there was some money in a building fund started by her husband (and added to by herself) for a new Church, amounting to £600. It was decided to demolish the building and replace it with a new brick-built church with a hall behind. Work was begun on the hall in 1933 and when complete, the old wooden building was demolished and services transferred to the hall, while a new church was being built. All this involved a lot of fundraising, but was eventually achieved. On May 5<sup>th</sup> 1934, nearly fifty years since it began, the new Congregational Church was dedicated and opened, with great rejoicing.

Over the ensuing years the Church has joined the United Reformed Union of free churches and is now affectionately known locally as The URC Church. It is still a wonderful force for good in the Bay and further afield. May it long continue in its service and dedication.



*The Bay Congregational Church c 1937*

We have, in our midst, an incredible lady called Vida Bates. Vida was 99 this year and is still living in her own home, doing much of her own shopping and managing, "with a little help from her friends", as the song goes, to live independently. Her life began as the second youngest in a family of 4 boys and 4 girls, who lived in a lovely old house called "Macklands" near Rainham in Kent. Her father ran "Bates" Stores in Chatham High Street. One set of grandparents lived at Alksford Farm at Groombridge, which Vida recalls visiting. When we paid a return visit there recently, she was delighted to recognise features that can still be found in the old building, despite many alterations over the last 90 years.



*Vida aged 2 - c. 1910*

Vida trained as a children's carer and worked for homes in mid-Kent for a number of years. After her parents retired to "Stella Maris" in Semaphore Road, Birchington, she used to come and visit them whenever she could, eventually coming to care for them full time.

After their deaths, she moved firstly into a bungalow of her own, in Essex Gardens, then moved again to be nearer the village and also give to her a smaller garden to look after. She has help in the garden, but is still very involved with its care and planning. She is very interested in history, particularly her old home area and now also with Birchington's heritage. She belongs to several organisations and actively supports each one, whenever she is able.



*The Bates Family - 1912*

She drove her little car until not many years ago, travelling all over the southern part of Britain, but now has to depend on public transport and kindly lifts from friends. Last year she travelled to Sweden to visit some of her far-flung relatives. Many of them call on her in her own home, which always delights her. She has one sister, Phyllis, still living and travelled by coach to Wisbech in Cambridgeshire this summer, to visit her and help her celebrate her 102<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

Her interests are varied and she still reads widely without glasses. She grumbles sometimes about how she forgets words, but she never forgets a kindness and her sense of humour is delightful. Is that perhaps where her secret of long life lies?



*Vida with some of her Family - 2003*

*(The editor has fond memories of Miss Bates, as a kind teacher at Gainsborough House School, Alpha Road, during the early 1950s where he was a pupil.)*

## **HERBIE FLOWER**

**H**erbert Flower was born in Ramsgate in 1924. During the Second World War, he joined the RAF as an air gunner. He met his future wife Jane Rankin during the war. They had two sons, Kenneth, born in 1947, who now lives in Herne Bay and John who was born in 1950 and now lives in Margate.

Herbie joined the local Police Force in 1951 and was posted originally to Tonbridge. However, the authorities were unable to find him accommodation for his wife and two sons, so he was moved back to Thanet and was given a house in the Margate area. He was on duty in Margate on the night of the great storm of 1953, when miles of Kent's coastline was inundated by the sea. In an article in the Thanet Gazette in February 2004, he described his experiences that night in some detail. Soon after the flood he was moved over to Birchington, where he became our own Police Constable staying here 14 years. His home in those early days was in Stone Barn Avenue, and he was still living there in 1974, not long before he eventually retired.

At the start of his service with us, his reporting point was at the Police Box in the Square, which was still functioning in 1959-60. This type of box was made world famous by becoming the 'Tardis' for the "Dr Who" series. In about 1964 the new Police Sub-Station was built at the entrance to Birchington Railway Station. When it was closed in the early 1970s it was bought by the Masonic Lodge of Birchington, who built an extension behind it for their meetings.

In about 1968 the Police Force was reorganised in the Kent Division and the local community discovered that Herbie was due to be moved to Margate, after spending 14 years serving us here. Birchington people were so upset about this that, under the leadership of Mr D. A. P. Hampshire, they organised a petition asking Thanet's Police chief (Chief Superintendent Clifford Greenwood) to let Herbie Flower remain with us. Despite the fact that there were around 1,000 names on the petition, it failed to prevent the move taking place. His next job was based in Margate, but he continued to live in Stone Barn Avenue, Birchington.

In 1971 they had a wonderful trip to the United States for a month. They stayed with Jane's Father and his second wife, who had moved to the States in c. 1950. While they were in the USA together, Herbie visited a Police Depot in California, where he shadowed one of the officers in their force. He and the US officer exchanged badges at the end of the day. Herbie and Jane also went to see the Queen Mary while they were in the States.

During his fifties Herbie began to suffer joint problems and eventually in 1978, at the age of 54, he took early retirement from the Force. He joined the civilian part of the organisation for another ten years. When he finally retired in 1988, Herbie and Jane moved to Sewell Close until earlier this year.

Jane coped with Herbie increasing physical difficulties for three years with help from the medical services, but it became obvious that Herbie needed to live on just one floor. So in 2007 Herbie and Jane moved into a pleasant top floor flat in Taplin Court. On being asked what the views were like from her elevated position, with her usual humour, Jane's reply was "We've got a lovely view of Albion Road Car Park!"

Notes by Jennie Burgess, with help from Jane Flower - September 2007



*Herbie Flower*

# Noticeboard

## Birchington Heritage Trust Museum

### Opening Hours

**Monday and Saturday**

**9.30 am to Noon**

Anyone who is interested in volunteering to help in the museum on these days - please contact

Shirley Gibbons - 843344  
Jennie Burgess - 842988

## November Quarterly Meeting

### "THANET LINKS 1"

**A Talk**

**by**

**John Robinson**

**Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007**

**7.00 for 7.30pm**

**at**

**The Centre**

### "LETS BE 'AVING YOU!"



*P. C. Horace Fieldhouse and a new recruit*

Horace Fieldhouse took over Herbie Flower's manor in Birchington.

What ever became of Horace's new recruit?

**A Musical Evening  
with a  
Christmas Theme**

By  
**David Ruddock & Friends**  
at  
The Centre

Friday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2007

7.00 for 7.30pm

Tickets/Programme £5.50

Mince Pies at interval  
+++++++  
Bar open