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ISSUE 31

Birchington on Ice

This winter's edition of the BHT Newsletter has a somewhat different content, since our main contributor, Jennie Burgess is temporarily incapacitated following a fall on our icy pavements this January. We all wish her a full and speedy recovery. In the mean time the show must go on.

Although we have become accustomed to much milder winters in the last few years, many of us can remember some considerably more severe winters only a decade or so ago.

In those less sophisticated times life was able to continue very much as normal, trains still ran, roads were gritted and were mainly kept clear. Newspapers, milk, bread, meat, groceries, greengroceries and coal all were delivered with little delay to our doors by local shops and tradesmen. We all seemed to manage to get to school or work, using that outdated mode of transport, our feet. Four wheel drive was reserved for a horse or dog not a fair weather fashion accessory for the school run. With the introduction of double glazing, the "Jack Frost's fingers" on the inside of windows are now only a memory best forgotten.

The cold snaps in the 1970's and 1980's encouraged predictions that we were entering yet another ice age by climate change pundits.



Snow in Birchington Square 1912

the drinking fountain was then situated in the centre the square

Wine and Wisdom

Birchington Heritage Trust welcomed members and friends to a friendly battle of brainpowers.

Howard Willcome was once again our question master.

The evening was arranged by the Social Committee and I would like to thank them all for their hard work.

During the interval the raffle was drawn, grateful thanks to those who provided the prizes.

The BHT funds were increased by £195.55 of which £137.55 was taken on the door, and the raffle raised £58.00.

Dot Raven, Chairman

Social Committee Chairman's Report Christmas Concert

What a very pleasing way to start Christmas, our music evening at the Centre performed by David Ruddock and Friends was a great success. 65 members and friends came along to enjoy his varied choice of music and songs.

As always David explained each piece before playing with all of his usual enthusiasm. We all joined in with the final 3 Christmas songs.

During the break mince pies, tea and coffee were provided, the raffle was drawn and I'm very pleased to say that the £63 raised covered the costs of the evening. The door takings were split 50 - 50 between the performers and the BHT, our share being £227, a very welcome boost to our funds.

Thank you to all who attended and helped on the evening. Our thanks to David Ruddock and Friends and we look forward to our next joint music evening.

Get Well Jennie - Please

The editor apologises that this newsletter lacks the usual contributions from Jennie Burgess. Hopefully her usual high standard articles will again be seen in our next edition. Pete Bateman

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The recent few mild winters we have experienced has spoilt us into thinking that snow and ice were scenes from the past. Birchington is generally blessed with warmer winters and cooler summers than other inland areas, although this year we have had our fair share of snow.

In our archives there are several snow scene photographs, some showing exceptional times when even the sea was frozen over as far as the eye could see.



Minnis Bay 1891



*Bungalow Hotel Lyell Road - c. 1910
Shortly after the hotel was opened*



Beach Ave in snow - c. 1910

In about 1940 the frozen sea was captured on film. In the background the Bay Hotel is visible with its Uncle Tom's Cabin bar, much remembered by locals and visitors alike. The hotel has made way to the three blocks of flats which are now a prominent feature of the Minnis Bay skyline.



Minnis Bay frozen sea c 1940

So cold was the winter of 1963 the sea around the Isle of Thanet became frozen, forming ice flows. When the tide was out, large blocks of tightly packed ice were left resting on the beach at Minnis Bay, in places up to four or five feet high. The Margate lifeboat was unable to launch since over nine inches of solid ice blocked the slipway, fortunately there were no calls to launch. The sea remained flat calm for several days.



Minnis Bay - Looking towards Reculver - 14th Jan 1963

Late afternoon and evening of Friday 7th of February 1969 a heavy snow storm blanketed the area. By ten o'clock most roads became impassable with deep snow drifts, some up to ten feet high, blocking most roads. Many hundreds of travellers were stranded either at work, sporting events or weekend revellers were unable to get home. There were reports from that night of many heroic deeds, acts of kindness and shelter being offered to complete strangers. All public and private transport ground to a halt, some districts lost power supplies and telephones.

Seaboard engineers had to walk three miles to restore power to Minster. Over eighty guests including Mr. Ted Heath attending the Broadstairs Sailing Club annual dinner were stranded at the Walpole Bay Hotel. A stranded bus near Brooksend Hill, Birchington was used as sanctuary for numerous motorists stranded in that area.

Snow Scenes Around Birchington cont.

Some motorists tried to use the adjacent field to avoid the snowbound Brooksend Hill however they soon became stuck.



Aerial view of Snowbound Brooksend Hill - Feb. 1969



Snowbound Brooksend 8th February 1969

The last time Birchington experienced a White Christmas was 1970. Snow began to fall from 7pm on Christmas eve and only stopped after midnight leaving a "magic" carpet of snow for Christmas Day.

The last time the editor has been credited arranging anything romantic. We got engaged!



Neame Woods 25th December 1970

GUY FAWKES NIGHT in BIRCHINGTON – 1950s

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Continued from last edition

Since our last edition, we have been fortunate to have been given some photographs of the "Guy Fawkes Trial" held in the early nineteen fifties. During those austere times of post war Britain the community of Birchington made its own fun, this event being one example. The editor can remember these evenings clearly, although only through the eyes of a child. When following the procession the most difficult part was attempting to avoid all the potholes, along Albion Road which then was unmade and poorly lit by a few gas lights. The bonfires were first held on the hedge enclosed cliff top area where previously there was a pig sty and is now a grass area. A bonfire was built in the field where the Ocean Close Estate is now built and finally along the western side of Epple Bay Avenue where there were some partly built bungalows.



Guy Fawkes receiving finishing touches



Guy Fawkes trial in Birchington Square car park outside the All Saints Church and the Powell Arms Public house

If the cold snow pages has left our readers chilled, hopefully this short article will give our readers some warmer thoughts of summer holidays of yesteryear.

Birchington had a thriving holiday trade up to the sixties. With many hotels or guest houses offering bed and breakfast, holidays to suit most pockets. We were fortunate to have beaches with large expanses of sand. Although sometimes the enjoyment was spoilt with washed-in seaweed, which was swiftly removed by the local council and taken to farms for improving the soil.



Minnis Bay - Summer c.1960



Grenham Bay - c. 1960

Grenham Bay now has a promenade, built in the late 1970s. In the background the houses in Green Road can be seen. The open space then, a cabbage field, was built upon in the mid 1960s to form the Grenham Bay Estate.

A request to our readership

We would be pleased if you could let us copy any interesting photographs of Birchington, you may have, especially involving snow scenes or other events held in the Village.

Sometimes images, captured in the background, can be of interest by recording how our village has changed over the years.

Noticeboard



Birchington Heritage Trust
Registered Charity No. 1099250

Thursday 25 March 2010
7.30 pm



Thanet Links II

A slide show of the Isle presented by
John Robinson
The Centre, Alpha Road

Non-members welcome

BHT DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 25th March 2010

Thanet Links II

Talk by John Robinson

Friday 30th April 2010

Event to be arranged

Please watch BHT Noticeboard

TEA for TWO in Birchington

