BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST

Preserving the Past for the Future

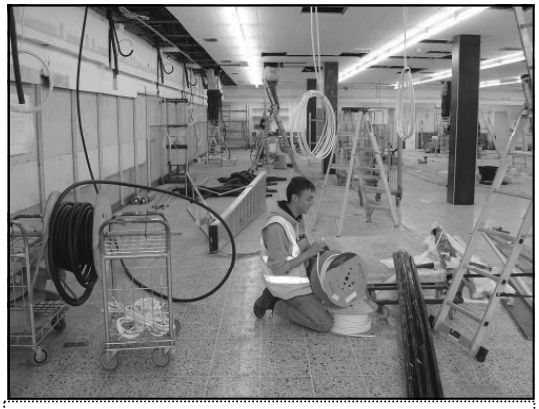
Newsletter

www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk

August 2010 Charity No. 1099250 **ISSUE 33**

SOMERFIELD BECOMES CO-OP

During a frantic few days in the middle of May, Somerfield's Supermarket was transformed into a new and larger Co-op Store at the end of Station Road in Birchington. For those of us who remember our first Co-op shops in the village, which stood where Ali's Pet Shop and the Kitchen and Bathroom business now stands, this has been quite a transformation. The second Co-op, in what was previously Woolworth's, is still in business, but the main focus of their trade is now in the new premises.



Somerfield - Co-op - 12 May 2010

It is well laid out in some areas, with lower shelving and clearer views through the store. The layout of the milk area means that the containers all have to be handled much more, as they can no longer be wheeled through into position straight from the fridges.

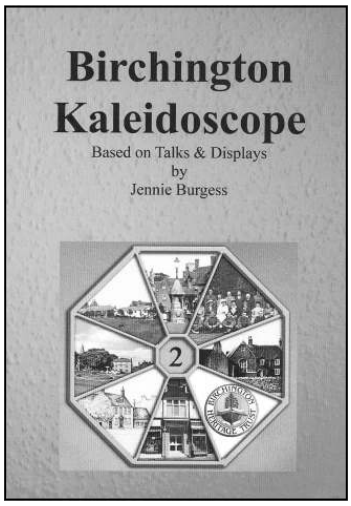
The other disadvantage for those not used to almost entirely Co-op products, is the lack of choice. Some well-known, and long used brands have completely disappeared, much to the sorrow of some of the original Somerfield customers.

However, the members of staff are just as helpful and pleasant as before and the arrangements at the check-outs are working much more efficiently, with only the rare hold-up when the store is extra busy. Those without private transport need this facility, so let us hope that requests for some of the old favourites will eventually bear fruit.

BIRCHINGTON KALEIDOSCOPE'

VOLUME 2

We are in the process of producing the second volume of our books – **"Birchington Kaleidoscope 2"**. We originally planned to have it out in October this year, but the poor financial climate has affected even such a small unit as the Birchington Heritage Trust. We shall not be able to fund the initial printing outlay from our reserves (as we did last year). For this reason we will need to fund it **'by subscription'** – that is, we are asking those of you who are interested in obtaining a copy, to pay the Trust in advance for the book. We have done this before, but this time, we need to try and sell about 260 books before we go to press. We are negotiating for grant-money to ease the situation, but we cannot rely on this source at the moment.



This second book will contain chapters on: - The Square & Fountain – Schools and Education in Birchington – The First Bungalows – 17th Century Buildings in the Village – The Catholic Church in Birchington – "Lost" Buildings in the Village – Smuggling in Birchington & 18th Century Buildings in the Village. There will also be short chapters on – 'The Birth of the Birchington Heritage Trust' – 'Thanet Earth' and the discoveries found under its site & finally Our Three 'Village Centres', if there is space. The book will have plenty of photos and look very similar to Volume 1, but with a green cover.

Unfortunately, we will have to raise the price to £12 a copy, as the cost of printing has increased. We have included a slip for advance bookings in this newsletter. We are now planning to publish the book in November, providing we have enough advance bookings by the end of September.

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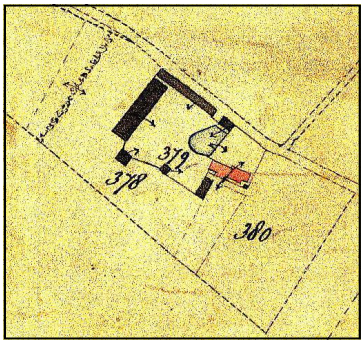
The Bay Church - Celebrating its 125th Anniversary 1885-2010

In the 1880s Minnis Bay was known as Birchington Bay and development was just beginning, with the building of four blocks of terraced houses. A farm stood where our two rows of shops are, complete with forge and pond, as well as a large barn on the corner of Minnis Road and Dane Road. A scattering of black weatherboard cottages stood off Old Farm Road, housing farm workers and men working on the newly established brickfield in the Ingoldsby Road area, lying between Minnis Road and the railway.



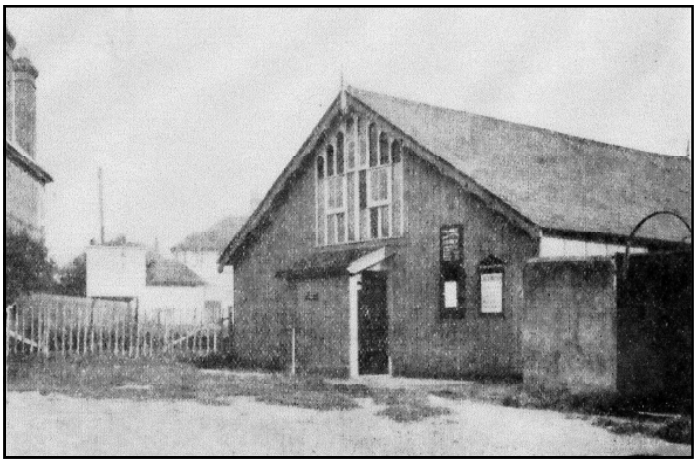
Lower Gore End - c. 1840

Old Bay Cottage and Elder Cottage looked much as they do today, but were known as Lower Gore End Farmhouse. On the other side of Old Farm Road were market gardens and strawberry fields. The rest of Birchington Bay was green fields, except for the Minnis Coastguards, who patrolled from here to Reculver.

It was to this rural, seaside community that Charles Robert Haig and his family came to live in 1885. In that same year, Mr Arthur Rayden, a London Stockbroker and Parish Councillor in Birchington, organised a very successful Exhibition in his purpose-built exhibition building in the grassy hollow we know today as 'The Dip' – a children's play area.

Old Bay Cottage - c. 1939

Charles Haig, walking and talking to all, recognised the need for a Church for the people of Birchington Bay. He bought the odd shaped piece of land next to the Coastguard Station and acquired timber left over from the Exhibition Building. He engaged the workmen who had been employed to put up the building and in about a fortnight, they had built the first Bay Church in Ethelbert Road – and the first service was held.


Bay Church - c. 1900

The local community formed a good-sized congregation – families from the farm cottages, the brick-workers, the foreman of the railway maintenance and his family along the line, plus the Coastguards and their wives and children (50 youngsters at one point!). The congregation numbers were swollen in the summer by many of the visitors to Birchington Bay. In addition to Sunday services they held prayer meetings, hymn practice, sewing meetings, lantern shows in winter time (precursor to slide shows!) telling about the mission work or stories telling the life of Christ and his saints (with or without a capital letter).

In the 1880s and 1890s the life of Birchington Bay revolved around the Bay Church. It was founded as an interdenominational church and as the text on the wall outside reads, we are: ***"All one in Christ Jesus"***

URC Church - 2007

In the 1930s, the little wooden church was rebuilt with much help from the Coastguard crew – in both funding and labour – and has gone from strength to strength over the last 125 years.

(Most of this information has come from 'The History of the Bay Church (URC, Minnis Bay) 1885 to 2000' compiled by Margaret Haig & Elinor Isard)

SNUG LITTLE 'BUG-HUTCH' Memories of the Cinema in Birchington

Adrian Jackson looks back at the 'Flicks' East Kent Critic – June 1985 - Part 1

My parents were always inveterate picture-goers. It took something pretty earth-shattering to make them miss a Saturday night at the 'Flicks', whatever was on offer, as it was their main weekly treat.

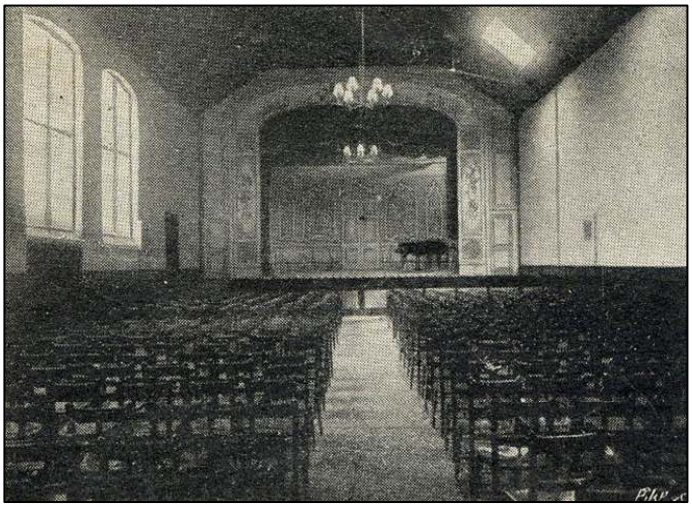
'Select' Cinema c. 1925

Our local was the Birchington Picture House, now long gone, sad to say. As kids, we spent a lot of our pocket money there. I can recall the excitement when it started to change over from silent to sound pictures, at the end of the 1920s. If I remember rightly, Vitaphone were the first makers of 'talkies' to be screen there, but it wasn't sound-on-film yet, only sound-on-disc – these were giant 18 inch records – with no attempt at lip sync, just choral singing in the background and very general sound effects. My first talkie seen there was an undistinguished piece called "Under the Greenwood Tree", only remembered because of the thrill of the new dimension.

The Picture House had a tiny frontage on Station Road, hemmed in by shops to the right and left, living quarters above and a broad flight of stairs leading to the box office and entrance. At the left side was a yard, into which the side exit debouched. It was much too modest to boast a commissionaire so at the entrance the manager presided – quietly, but firmly, controlling everything.

Always immaculate in evening dress, with a polite smile to greet his customers and exchange a word or two with his regulars. Continuous performance had yet to come into vogue, and 'houses' were the order of the day, first house and second house for grown-ups, and matinees for children. The prices were 3d, 5d, 7d and 1/- for the very best seats right at the back - and these prices remained for years. The box office sold sweets and cigarettes – there were no 'tray ladies' in the hall (there wasn't room!) and my father always bought my mother a small box of chocolates and a packet of Black Cat for himself.

Being surrounded on all sides by other properties, there was no space for the projection room above and behind the audience, or even, as was common in those days, behind the screen (for back projection), as there was not sufficient 'throw', or distance, to fill the screen. A visit to the side yard revealed all. Here a brick box stood on steel stilts, with a flight of steps up to the door in the side, which in the summer was often left open, revealing all the wonders inside, and keeping the place cool. A metal chimney from each projector poked out of the top. The projectionist's viewing windows let into the hall side wall were angled to lessen his awkward view of the screen. Each projector was fitted with a special prism to bend its beam and correct the picture distortion.



Public Hall c. 1915

The building is still there, opposite the junction with Paddock Road, but it has had a number of different uses since it ceased to be the venue for the cinema in November 1961.

BIRCHINGTON HAS TALENT

Since our last Newsletter, Bernard L Roche has kindly presented the Birchington Heritage Trust with a cheque of £250, which was the profit he made from the event. He had hoped it would be a little more, but as he was not at all well afterwards, and spent some time in hospital, he was unable to chase up his advertisers etc. who owned him money. In the end he decided to cut his losses and round the event off.

The Trust is deeply grateful for every penny he raised for us, especially as he did it entirely under his own steam. He said from the beginning that he did not expect the other members to get involved, as it was his way of coping with the loss of his son.

Thank you very much Bernard – we appreciate all the time and effort it involved - and hope that your health continues to improve.

MINNIS MEMORY in WINTER – February 1949

by Dr Robert Preston

[Robert first came to Birchington in 1949 with his parents, and returned on several successive summers, including 1953, after the great flood. This is the account of his very first visit.]

"I went to Birchington only once during the winter – February 1949, I think it was. My mother took me with her on the train from London to 'scope out' our prospective accommodation and take stock of the place generally. We were also to meet the landlady of the guest house (in Ethelbert Road) where we would be staying during July and August.

After looking over the guest house, I remember walking with my mother to the seafront at Minnis Bay. It was a leaden, overcast day with a vicious, icy cold wind, and driving sleet blowing directly from the North Sea. Huge grey waves were thumping into the cliffs and exploding in clouds of white spray. Hundreds of wet stones lay scattered on top of the sea wall and huge frozen puddles of solid ice covered large areas of it. When we finally returned to Birchington Station, my mother revealed that she had been distressed by the thudding of waves, as they were reminiscent of the bombs exploding around us during the Blitz and its aftermath.

I, on the other hand, had found the visit most exhilarating, but remember being shocked when we came back in July, to clear blue skies, gently lapping waves and warm sunshine. The tide was out, as I recall, and there, stretched out before me, full of promise, was an expanse of beautiful sandy beach curving away towards what I later discovered to be Reculver Towers in the distance."

Minnis Rough sea - c. 1950

Birchington Heritage Trust

Thursday 30 September 2010
7.30 pm

Thanet's Moonlighting Inns

The second in a series of smuggling talks presented by
John Graham
The Centre, Alpha Road

Non-members welcome

Noticeboard

Social Committee Report

On Friday 25th June members of BHT enjoyed a Bingo evening, with a "bring and share" supper at the Centre. Although no fortunes were made it was great fun. A super selection of food was brought along so everyone certainly had a good supper. We made a profit of £ 172 from the evening.

At this point I must thank Howard Willicome who always has things running so smoothly.

The raffle gave us another welcome £62. We hold a raffle at each event, meetings and socials, which is sometimes enough to cover the hall hire, leaving the door profit to go into BHT funds.

I would like to thank all those who attended our events for not only supporting the raffle but who are kind enough to donate prizes. We are always extremely grateful for these donations.

Our next planned social event will be on:-

Friday 29th October "A Race Night"
with a bring and share supper.
Tickets will be £2 each, starting at 7.30 pm.

Dot Raven

BHT DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 30th September
General Meeting
Speaker:- John Graham
Thanet's Moonlighting Inns
1510 - 1830
Starting at 7.30 pm

Friday 29th October
"A Race Night"
With a bring & share supper
Tickets £2 each,
Starting at 7.30 pm

Thursday 25th November
General Meeting
Speaker:- Mike Bundock
Public Time Keeping
in East Kent
Starting at 7.30 pm

Thursday 2nd December
David Ruddock & Friends
Christmas Concert