



EASTWAY PLAYSCHOOL

The Buch family moved to Eastway, Wilbrough Road in 1963. For me it was coming to live in my holidaying village. For my Mother, Rene, it was returning to her childhood home as her parents health was deteriorating. She had left Birchington in the early 1930's to go to London to become a children's nurse. In 1930's she had met and married my Father and they had set up a home together in London.



Alice in Wonderland carnival float by Eastway Playschool 1970s

On returning to Birchington, Mum worked at a KCC Nursery, within the Clinic at King Ethelbert School. When the Nursery closed in 1968, Mum decided to open a "Playschool" herself. At first she and my sister Janet, who was her helper, were registered to take 8 children, the Playschool ran from 9 a.m. To 12 Noon Monday to Friday. Within a short while the demand became so great that an extension was built onto the house and with the help of an additional helper, Shelia Dawson, the number of children was increased to 20 daily.

Mum always ensured that the children had a fully structured morning. Activities ranged from drawing, letter, number, word recognition and writing games, also painting, singing, music and movement, play acting and weather permitting, play time in the garden.

Every year the Playschool entered the Carnival Parade. From the first year's entrance of 12 children as Peter Pan characters in a towed small boat, to latter years of hiring a huge flat-bed lorry, the themes ranged from Babes in the Wood, Alice in Wonderland, Nursery Rhyme Land and Robin Hood and his merry men, to name but a few. With the help of the parents and my Father's hard work in making the "sets", over the years Eastway Playschool won 18 first prizes and 1 second prize for Best Float in the carnival.

One other event that was tried was a "Hare and Tortoise Race". The children bringing in their own pets to take part. Dad had made a race track and plenty of lettuce bought to encourage the racing.



Band time at Eastway Playschool

Unfortunately the rabbits and tortoises had ideas other than racing to get the lettuce. The event ended in chaos and laughter and a need for parents to give their children an unexpected and early lesson in "The Bird's and Bee's". Needless to say the race was never held again.

Each Christmas there was always the end of term parties. Dad making an appearance as Father Christmas to hand out the presents. The children were always amazed that this Father Christmas actually knew not only them all by name, but would also know their brothers and or sisters. It always made it extra magical for them and the Mum's attending.

There was always a list of children awaiting a place at the Playschool and over the 19 years it was in operation, Mum even had children of the original children attending. Unfortunately the Playschool closed in 1987 following the death of my Mother.

I am very proud of the achievements of the Eastway Playschool and knowing that over the years it gave many children of Birchington an excellent head start to school, as most of the children left being able to read and write, having experienced the joy of learning.



Father Christmas visits Eastway Playschool

In the 1920s Prince Filippo Andrea Doria Pamphilj VI was a member of one of the wealthiest Italian families, owning the Palazzo Doria Pamphilj in Rome's Via del Corso. His mother, Lady Mary Talbot, was the daughter of the Duke of Newcastle. He met his wife Gesine Dykes when she was nursing him after a sailing accident in 1918.



*Doria family*

Mary (as she was known to her family) was the daughter of an engineer from the Newcastle area. For some time she refused the Prince's marriage proposals, eventually relenting and converting to Catholicism before their marriage at Brompton Oratory in London in about 1920.

When Prince Filippo was at Cambridge he was introduced through friends to the delights of Birchington's bracing air and delightful hotels, staying at the Beresford Hotel (where Moray Avenue and St Magnus close now stand) which was highly sought after by the rich and famous of that era.

In 1923 the Prince purchased three plots in Harold Road from Wilfred Philip Hudson, son of the last owner of the windmill in Birchington at the top of Mill Row. Hudson had built a chalet-type bungalow on one of the plots, calling it "Minnis Cot". In 1925 Kelly's Directory lists "Prince Doria" as the occupant of the house but by 1928 he is listed as living at "Minnis Cottage". This was the new, much larger house, which he had built well back on the plot next door. The siting of the house was in the normal Italian fashion, whereby you made the garden on the sunniest side of the house, regardless of whether it was at the front or the back of the property. By 1930 he had also built "Melfi" (named after one of his estates in Italy) on the last of the three pieces of land. It is similar in design, but placed much further forward on its plot.

There were also two other properties owned by the Prince during these years. One is called "Legopesole" in Grenham Bay Avenue; the other was known as "Dingley", which stands at the top end of the avenue in Sea View Road.

From about 1927 or 28 the couple brought their daughter Orietta (born in 1922) over to spend holidays in Birchington. They continued to do this until the late 1930s, spending a number of weeks at a time here, enjoying the sands and spending hours playing tennis on the superb courts that were located where Lyell Court now stands. Orietta did not think much of her father's delight in this tiny seaside town and his "little" houses. She was used to palaces with up to one thousand rooms! Princess Orietta was educated mainly in Italy but also attended Queen Bertha's School, a private school that used to stand on the ground now occupied by Queen Bertha's Avenue. She came over here partly to improve her English but also took Italian lessons.

Prince Filippo was very unconventional and liked the simple life for all his immense wealth. He much preferred to go about incognito in old casual clothes and enjoyed riding on buses and trams in both England and Italy.

Whilst here, the family were staunch supporters of the Catholic Church, which was still housed in its converted wagon shed in Minnis Road. Orietta was confirmed here on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 1931. On the 12<sup>th</sup> November 1933 Prince Filippo and Princess Gesine stood as sponsors for a number of children who were confirmed by Bishop William Brown that year. They made many friends during their stays here and Orietta still kept these friendships going right up to the end of her life in November 2000.

By 1935 Prince Doria was spending less time in England and consequently made his sister-in-law his Attorney in England with the power to sell Minnis Cottage. She already owned and lived in "Melfi" next door. The sale obviously did not go through, because Miss Dykes' brother John was listed as living in "Minnis Cottage" from 1933 until 1938. Eventually on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1939, just before the outbreak of the Second World War, Prince Doria conveyed the plot on which "Minnis Cottage" stood to Miss Dykes.

In the last quarter of the 1900s John Dykes' daughter, Gesbeth Dykes, a cousin of Orietta's inherited her aunt's property called "Melfi" and came to live there until her death.



*Minnis Cottage*

*Find out what happened to the Prince and his family in Mussolini's Italy, more will be in our next Newsletter or visit Birchington Heritage Museum for more information.*

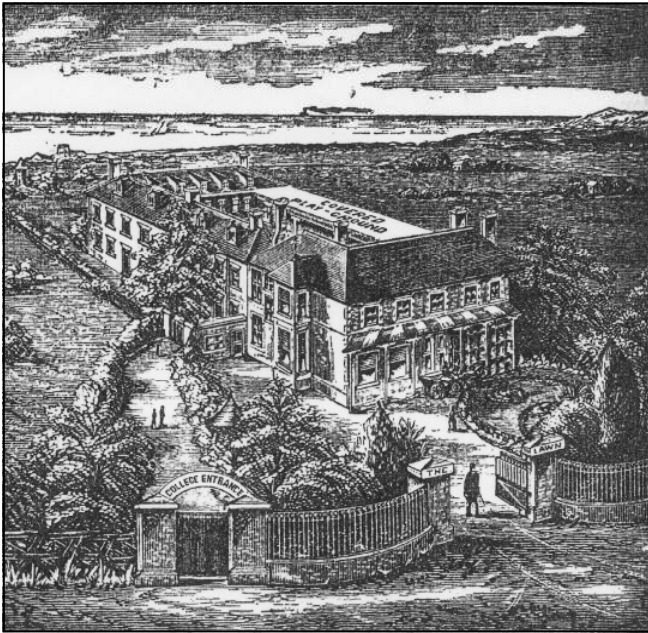
# Woodford House School "You will go far"

by Kevin Walker

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## PART 1

I had never wanted to leave the East End of London to move to Cliftonville but one day, not quite kicking and screaming, I was bundled into the car to undertake what was quite a long journey to the East Kent Coast. In London I had attended a prep school founded in 1824 but despite all the money my parents threw at my education, I had failed the eleven plus and my father was truly not happy. Apparently I had failed by a small margin and allowed to re-sit the examination a few months later whereupon I failed again – this time by a larger margin. Was this my punishment to ship us all to a place called Thanet where as far as I was concerned they didn't even have the wheel?



*Woodford House School - 1883-4*

My father had purchased a house in Foreland Avenue, Cliftonville and after a week he advised me I was to go to a new school in Birchington named Woodford House. I was not impressed and when taken to Vilette's in King Street, Margate to obtain my new school uniform, I was horrified to find a blazer being fitted that resembled a pyjama jacket with its maroon background and blue vertical stripes. If I had worn such a garment in the east end of London streets, I would have had to fight my way all the way there and all the way back. It was bad enough there when I went to a prep school and one had to learn to take care of oneself when encountering state school pupils, but that uniform was positively tame compared to what I was now about to be rigged out in.

My father accompanied me the first day of the new school. We waited for the bus, a number 49, I think, at the Wheatsheaf corner en-route to Birchington Square. At the stop for the Olde Charles pub, another boy boarded with the same uniform as mine and looking as ridiculous as I felt. "Hello my name is Andrew Hart. Are you a new boy?" he said. I said nothing. Such friendliness I was not used to and where I came from to act so friendly would have been a sign of weakness. My father dug me in the ribs and answered for me by introducing me as Kevin Walker whilst continuing to engage on my behalf with Andrew all the way to Birchington.



*Kevin Walker & Victor  
Ludorum Cup 1959*



*Humphrey Bickerstaff &  
Gillian Everall - 1958*

We disembarked in Birchington and walked the short distance to the school along Station Road and entered the gates of the school. In front of us was large Victorian House complete with verandah. There was a long imposing and sweeping drive where a smart -suited gent stood at its terminus. I remember he smoked a cigarette from a black and gold holder. "Good morning Kevin" he said also acknowledging my father as if of secondary importance. "Morning Sir" I said. "You will call me Mr. Bickerstaff always Kevin. To not have called a master at my previous school 'Sir' would have meant a punishment. "Now go with Andrew to the playground and be ready to line up after the bell". I duly complied and followed the path behind the house and into a courtyard or quadrangle where there was an open and a covered playground. I was welcomed by the other pupils but found the sight of boys my own age wearing short trousers strange, for I had come from a school where boys were expected to wear long trousers from the age of nine.

I was put into Mr. Bickerstaff's class from the outset and it was thankfully obvious to me that despite my failing the eleven plus twice, I was actually quite advanced academically when it came to mathematics, science and history although as expected for an East End boy I did not excel in the English language. Being a Londoner, many people were suspicious of me. I had not intended to be a know-all but in large cities you learn to be street-wise to everything at an early age. It was thus not long before I was 'sent to Coventry' for "knowing too much" by all the pupils in my class. I had to earn their respect in order to be included in anything they did. I had always been a good athlete and sportsman in London and winning all the races for my House group helped in that respect. Being sent to Coventry was one of life's lessons I never forgot.

*Part 2 to Follow*

## MUSEUM ALTERED OPENING TIMES

We are planning to make some changes to our Museum manning from March onwards.

We intend to open the Museum on a **THURSDAY** as well as the Mondays and Saturdays at present.

We are also going to ask stewards to help us by filling in the **DUTY DIARY** when they are next on duty, so please bring your own diary with you. This way, people will have more choice in the days they are able to help us.

The third change we are making is to remain open half an hour longer each session – **from 9.30 until 12.30**. We have found that the last half hour is so often our busiest and we don't like to hurry our visitors if we can help it.

The final alteration is that we have realised we need **three people** on duty at each opening. This will give another pair of hands for helping to sell the items on display. Gillian Lodge is usually able to help on a Saturday and Heather Letley is happy to be there most Mondays. This would mean that Jennie need then only come in regularly on a Thursday, instead of trying to be there at each opening, a commitment she finds quite tiring some days.

If you would like to add your name to our stalwart band of stewards, please phone Jennie on 842988, or Dot on 842633



*A view of our Museum*

## A New Member joins our team

We would like to extend a warm welcome to a new member of our trust's committee, Heather Letley. Heather will need little introduction to Birchington's residents or visitors to our Library, having served many years within the service and assisting the public. Without a doubt her research skills will be a valuable asset to our hard working archivist, Jennie and the Trust as a whole. Welcome aboard.

## Wine and Wisdom

On Friday 27<sup>th</sup> January we had a very rewarding evening at the Centre, where the little grey cells of about sixty contestants were put to the test. The questions were presented by Neville Hudson, who helped with the evening's enjoyment – many thanks, Neville. We would also like to thank Gillian Lodge for her efforts at running the raffle. By the end of the evening we had raised about £200, which will help to pay some of our Trust's rent.

We would also like to thank all of you who attended our event.

*Successful fundraising is the life blood to our Trust, so we can continue to collect, record and pass on to enquiring minds, the fascinating history of our Village.*

*Please try to support our events.*

*editor*

## BHT DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### BHT-Speakers for 2012

**Thursday 22 March**

A costumed talk on

**A Victorian Gentleman's Daytime Attire**

by

**Vernon Mee**

**Thursday 24 May**

Annual General Meeting

**Famous Thanet Folk**

by

**John Robinson**

**Thursday 27 September**

3rd talk in series on smuggling

**'The Preventive Service' (Royal Navy)**

by

**John Graham**

**Thursday 22 November**

an illustrated history

**Bricks & Brickwork**

by

**Richard Filmer**

All talks are 7.00 pm for 7.30 pm start

Held at The Birchington Village Centre

Non-members Welcome