



Preserving the Past for the Future

Newsletter

www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk

February 2013

Charity No. 1099250

ISSUE 43

Freedom of the Village bestowed upon Our Archivist



In recognition of all her hard work within our village, Birchington, over the years, our Archivist, Jennie Burgess, was awarded the Freedom of the Village of Birchington-on-Sea by Councillor Jack Cohen, representing our Parish Council, on Monday 28th January 2013.

Apart from all her tireless work for The Birchington Heritage Trust Museum, Jennie also wears various other hats, given numerous talks on many local subjects, involvement with All Saints Parish Church and The Crisp charity.



Jennie has now been presented with another puzzle to unfathom, the location of the lock which the key fits; doubtless we will see her testing the key in various locks to satisfy her curiosity.

Should you see a lady driving a flock of sheep over the hump-backed-bridge at the station, it may be Jennie exerting her right to do so arising from her Freedom of the Village.

Jennie, we all applaud you in receiving this award, congratulations.

AUSTRALIAN VISITORS to Birchington

or - "A day in the life of an archivist"

A couple of weeks ago, an Australian couple (Peter & Maree Mayne) were directed to my door, in their search for 'Park Farm'. It was a new name to me and even after two or three phone calls while they were with me, we were unable to locate it. Peter was trying to track it down in connection with his grandfather, Cyril Watson - a farmer in Birchington until his death here in 1943, but Peter was mistakenly convinced that Cyril had owned the farm, which put me off the scent for a time.

After Peter and Maree left, I continued phoning various farming friends and also looking through copies of the Kelly's Directories. I discovered that Cyril was listed under 'Park Farm' in the mid-1930s and had a Westgate phone number, so felt fairly sure the farm must have been on the east side of the village and near Somali Farm in Park Road. In the end, I caught up with David Linington of Somali Farm, who assured me that 'Park' and 'Somali' were one and the same place! We haven't yet got a definite date for when the name was changed, but it would seem to be in the mid-to-late 1940s. There is one resident in the village who still refers to 'Somali' as 'Park Farm' and was surprised I didn't know this!



Somali (Park) Farm Cottages

Peter Mayne was delighted with the batch of photos of the farm and its surroundings he received from us and also a photo of Quex Farmhouse, where Cyril Watson would have brought up his family, including Peter's mother, in the early years of the 20th century. The house was built in 1837 and is still used by whoever is renting Somali (Park) Farm.

Peter's grandfather won a number of cups and medals for producing World-class, top-grade Malting Barley for the Brewery trade in the 1930s.

After he died, the tenancy was taken over by the Linington family, who still hold it today.

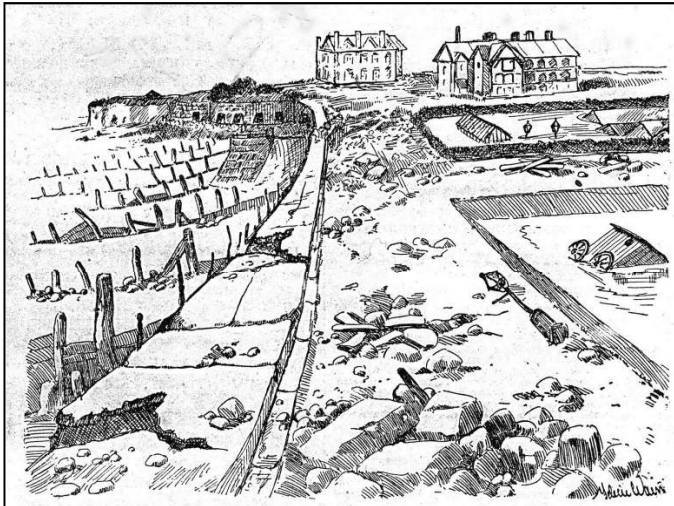
In this Issue: Page 1 - Freedom of the Village for our Archivist + Australian Visitors

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Remembering the devastating floods of 1953, along the east coast of England, I looked back at the great storm of 1897, when the Margate surfboat 'Friend of All Nations' was wrecked and the monument erected at Nayland Rock. We have a copy of the drawing of the devastation at Minnis Bay on the morning after.



BIRCHINGTON BAY FLOODED.—DESTRUCTIVE EFFECTS OF THE STORM. From a Sketch by Miss FELICIA WAIN

*Destructive Effects of the 1897 Storm At Minnis Bay
Sketch by Miss Felicia Wain*

In the Dip we can see the tops of the exhibition buildings and in a second large pool nearer the artist we can see one of the bathing machines lying on its side.



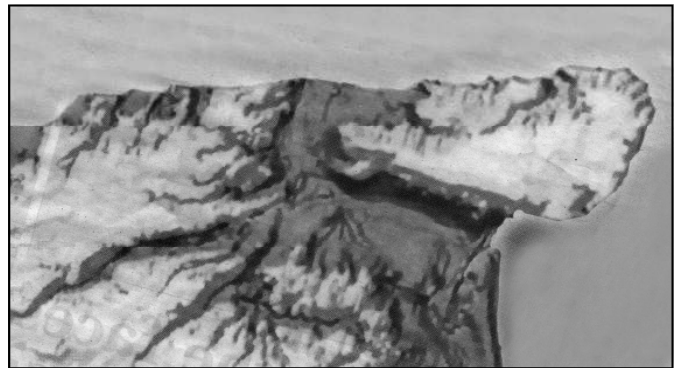
A flooded house in a low laying area of Minnis Bay 1953

Our own memories of the 1953 floods will still be vivid in the minds of those who experienced it. Two people now living in Birchington were residents in Herne Bay at the time, but the enormity of the damage was very similar. Our images of Minnis Bay give a glimpse of the 'morning after' experiences of local residents. There was also a large price paid by the farmers in the loss of their livestock and valuable farming land. On top of that was the severing of our rail links with the rest of Kent. The huge cost



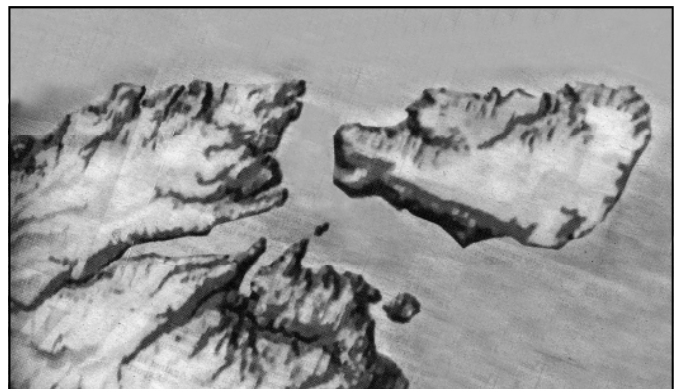
*View of Flooding from Minnis Rd. towards Canute Rd
The Dip filled with sea water*

of reinstating the embankments for the railway lines and also for replacing the broken sea walls along a large stretch of our coastline created numerous headaches in high places.



Thanet 2000 - before proposed flooding

One wonders what local people felt when they saw the two maps in our local Gazette, following the SERAS report in 2002. The proposed Airport at Cliffe, would destroy the salt-march floodplains also an internationally valued bird migration sanctuary, to offset this, a proposal to let 'nature take its course' by re-flooding the Wantsum was suggested. A large area of farmland would be lost, which was once claimed from the sea by the efforts of monks from Monkton. Our little island of Thanet, by 2200 could be isolated again. We will all be long gone by then, but it will almost certainly not happen in one event, so some of our descendents could be affected by such madness - hopefully not.



Thanet c. 2200 - after proposed flooding

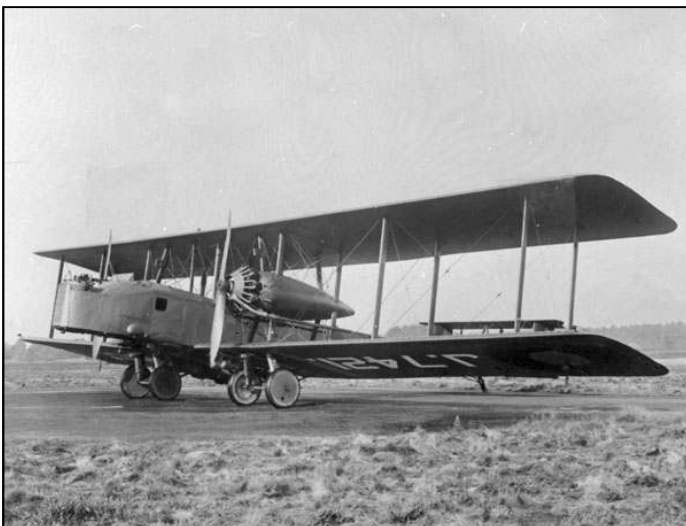
1925 AEROPLANE CRASH at BERESFORD GAP

[In checking the "A" files in our Museum recently, an item with the above label was missing. It turned up later with another piece with a similar label - now under "Minnis Bay" - but there were discrepancies in the two brief reports, so I went over to Margate library to get the correct version. From two very brief notes, we now have nine pages of transcript, gleaned from three newspaper reports. If the brief summary below interests you, come and read the whole story in Museum.]

On an April morning at 11 am on 7th April 1925, a Vickers Virginia bomber of No.9 Squadron, Manston, crashed into the sea, just off Beresford Gap, due to dense fog. A crowd of guests from the Beresford Hotel heard the impact as the plane hit the sea, but because of the fog, they were unable to detect how far out the plane had come down, nor had they any way of knowing what to do to help, even though the tide was fairly well out.

The manageress of the Hotel could hear shouts from the survivors and she and the other guests kept calling out that help was coming - "to keep up their spirits" - even though they themselves could do nothing. Several different forms of assistance were set in motion, but the best help had to come by a couple of rowing boats from Minnis Bay - which took time. It transpired that there were four men on board and all survived the initial crash, the pilot of the aircraft, Eric Alfred Claude Bushell, who was slightly injured and Horace Eustace Grellis was seriously injured, were eventually brought to safety. The two who died were Pilot Officer Neil Coull Walker and ACI Ernest Edward Mills aged, nineteen and twenty, one of whom came from Gunnislake near Tavistock. Reading the accounts from the two parts of the inquest, it is difficult to understand exactly why the other two did not survive - even the Coroner had to make a fairly broad judgement.

From the various accounts, one is struck by how far forward we have moved in every sphere of 'search & rescue' and also in diagnosis into the causes of death. The outcome of such a tragedy if it occurred in 2013 would almost certainly have been quite different.



Vickers Virginia - c.1922

WATER, WELLS & SANITATION

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From earliest times all Birchington's water supply came from wells. This provided an adequate, if not very clean, supply to households. Since most people drank small beer (a very light form of the ale) for centuries, the wells were acceptable. When tea became a popular beverage in the 18th century, boiling the water made it much safer to drink.

However, after the arrival of the railway in 1863, the population began to grow rapidly and each well had to be used by a much larger number of residents and many wells were shared by two or more families. This caused two main problems.

Firstly there was not always enough water in the wells by mid-summer. This then caused the second problem - the quality of the water at the lowest level of the well was often very poor. By 1878 the Westgate and Birchington Water Company had been formed. People were asked to sign up to the new system, but that was going to cost them money, so all the while their wells were there, they could see no reason for this extra expense. Most people refused to sign into the Water Company's new supply.

Alongside the water problem, dealing with sewage and drainage were also proving very tricky. The 'delicate' subject of 'privies' - mostly sited at the bottom of the garden or yard - also needed to be addressed, as the population increased. In places like Brunswick Place (the long terrace in Park Lane) 15 families had to share four or five privies between them. It was also becoming apparent that the soil from the privies was contaminating many of the wells.

George Butterworth, the parish surveyor, was then given the job of testing the quality of the water in the wells. In the Parish Council minutes from 1898, he gives lists of all the wells he has tested, road by road, and almost every one was condemned for human usage. Gradually more and more residents were forced to close their wells and join the Water Company's supply, much against their wishes.

The topic of sewage and drainage was frequently debated hotly in the Parish council meetings and the majority voted against doing anything that would add to the parish's budget. It took almost a year before they finally decided that they could no longer tolerate the situation and must finally act.



Arms House Resident with a Privy in Background



Well at Egerton Manor, Acol

New Inn - Pewter Pot now Carbeez



The New Inn Public House c.1900

The public house now called Carbeez was built in the 1600s. It was dated by the Brewers as 1646, though is more likely 1680-90. This date becomes apparent when we notice the Dutch gables at each end of the main roof. There were at least five such houses round the Square at the time. Its earliest name as an ale house and staging inn is unknown. Whatever it was, the owners decided to change it to the New Inn, after the first New Inn became the Powell Arms in 1823, to honour John Powell Powell when he became High Sheriff of Kent. Our second New Inn kept this name until in October 1961, when it became 'The Pewter Pot'. Since 2000 it has had several changes, but the outer façade is very similar to our earliest view of it in 1900.

Social Committee Report

(Wine & Wisdom)

We would like to thank all those brave souls who ventured out to attend our Wine & Wisdom held on 25th January. An enjoyable evening was had by all, even when the little grey cells were challenged with some of the questions presented on the night.

Your support is appreciated by the Trust.



Aerial view of Beresford Gap & Grenham Bay - c.1931

Museum Matters

MARTIN'S WINDOW DISPLAYS

The management of Martin's Newsagents at Crescent Road corner has granted us permission to re-start our displays in their side windows again. Watch out for our next one on Quex and its connections with the village.

DONATIONS TO OUR MUSEUM

Owing to shortage of space, we unfortunately need to restrict the items we can accept now, to those with a particular connection to Birchington

EMAIL ADDRESSES

If you don't receive the up-dates on the BHT events via email, please get in touch with Janet and John Robinson, so that they can include you in the mailing list. Their email address is: -

robinsons@the2jays.f2s.com

Volunteer Heritage Museum Stewards

If any one would like to be included on the Heritage Museum Stewards' rota list, please contact Maureen Davis on 843028.

Items are easily found using the Master Index

Our Museum can be found in Room 4, upstairs, in the Birchington Village Centre, behind the library.

Open times 9.30 am to 12.30pm

Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

BHT DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 21st March 2013

GENERAL MEETING & TALK

by Cliff Cole

"Carry on up the Graveyard"

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Thursday 23rd May 2013

AGM & TALK

by Major Reg Elson

"My Life"

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Friday 21st June 2013

DANCE See notice Board for Details

A selection of music for all tastes

7.30 pm to 10.00pm

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All talks are 7.00 pm for 7.30 pm start

At The Birchington Village Centre

Non-members Welcome