



Preserving the Past for the Future

Newsletter

www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk

May 2015

Charity No. 1099250

ISSUE 52

STREET PARTIES – MAY 1945

There were several street parties held in Birchington in the days after the end of WW 2 in Europe on May 8th 1945. We have a photo of the one held in Lincoln Gardens for the adjoining roads. It was kindly loaned to us by Neil Somerford – a treasured memento of a very memorable occasion in which he and all his friends shared. Several other visitors to the Museum have found themselves in the photo, much to their delight.



VE Day Parade May 1945 in Birchington

We were recently sent the photos of the VE Day parade in May 1945, which started in the station yard and paraded up to the Square. It came from our member, Harry Castle from Scotland – many thanks Harry! He has given us the names of several of the players, many of whom later became staunch members of Birchington’s Silver Band.



Street Party in York Terrace



Newspapers report the long awaited peace celebrations

We also now have two good photos of the Street Party celebrated in York Terrace, with the kind help of Les Birch – another great thank you, Les. During the weeks leading up to the 8th May, when it became apparent that the end of the war was perhaps in sight, the mothers had been trying to hold on to food items they thought would help celebrate such a wonderful day. It was quite amazing where all the wonderful goodies came from – and from the smiles on the children’s faces, they all thought it was great, too!

If anyone else has a photo of an event from this time, we would be delighted to scan it for our archives.



WW2 War Memorial of Birchington residents

The editor makes no excuse for printing this from a similar earlier article, but feels that those from this village and further a field, who selflessly gave so much, or who's lives were changed for ever, to free this country of tyranny. should be honoured.

Henry Jeston's only child, Denys, was born at Birchington in 1919 and spent his early years at Fleet House School Westgate. He then went to Sherborne Abbey College, Dorset and Merton College, Oxford, before spending some time at Sandhurst. At the outbreak of the 2nd World War he joined the East Kent Regiment (the Buffs). He was posted abroad in 1941 and fought with the Eighth Army in the Desert against Rommel, until he was captured nine months later.

During Denys's time in the prisoner of war camp in Germany, he met up with Michael Smith, who later owned and ran Monkton Court Farm at Monkton. Michael said of that time that Denys was always trying to make things easier for the rest of the prisoners, including Michael, and was constantly giving up his rations to help those in greater need.

After the war, when the two met up again in Civvy Street, Michael said he could never refuse any request from Denys, because he was only too glad to be able to return in some small measure all that he had done for himself and others during those dreadful years in Germany.

During his time as a POW, Denys made many daring escape attempts, tunnelling and escaping through gaps in the camp fencing, but he was always recaptured. In 1945 he was released from a POW camp in Brunswick, Germany. On returning to England, the War Office gave him the job of de-requisitioning properties in East Kent, including Grenham House. But a year later he left for Cairo as an Embarkation Officer, and there he met up with Jack Lidgate, eight years his senior.

Jack later became his partner in running Grenham House School.



R Yates (L) with Denys Jeston (R) presents a cricket trophy c.1971

This was the type of view which the people in Thanet would have looked out across, when they stood looking westwards at Gore End in the 13th and 14th centuries. The church of Chislet would have stood on the hill towards the left of the scene and Reculver Towers would have been clearly visible on the far right horizon.



A similar view across the 14th century Wantsum Channel

By the end of the 14th century, the channel between Reculver and Gore End had begun to silt up and the channel was becoming difficult to steer through safely by the mid-1400s. This problem was due in part to the monks from Monkton slowly reclaiming the land on the Thanet side, which was all owned by Christ Church Priory in Canterbury. The monks based at Minster were doing the same thing on the south side of the island beside their land, owned by St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury.



A view over the reclaimed land as seen today

In order to reclaim the land, they built substantial mud and brushwood banks outwards from the shore at Gore End and across the mouth of the Stour at Stonar. They also had to drain their reclaimed land by constructing dykes so that the scene looked something like the photo above. This is the reason for flatness of this area.

Jennie Burgess

"Birchington 40 years ago – c. 1924"

Article written by Mrs. Eleanor Chapman to Mr. Alfred Walker in May 1968

Dear Mr Walker,

You asked me to write a description of Birchington when I first came here forty odd years ago. Where shall I start? – at the station, I think.



Drawing of boarding houses near Sea View Hotel

Coming into the main street [Station Road] on the right side were nice boarding houses beginning with the Dr's house, next the Sea View pub. Where there is now the Midland Bank and Woolworth's [HSBC Bank & small Co-op 2014] was the charming café "The Wayside" with its garden going as far as the corner of Eastfield Rd. The Tudor and Co-Op [Present Days & Ali's Pet Shop} was a piece of ground, the Central Garage [plot on far side of Station Road and Paddock Rd] was not built. On the other side of the road, Barrows [on the east corner of Crescent Rd & Station Rd] was a piece of ground – his china shop was the shop on the corner at Crescent Road and his furniture shop was a tiny shop in the Square where is now the cleaner's [was a cobbler's].

The Westminster Bank was on the other side of the road where Hudson's [Gore's] undertakers now stands. The four cottages, now Hayward's, were all separate. Roy Cook (our sweep) lived in one – he wore a top hat and had a fish and chip bar at the back of this cottage.



Roy Cook standing outside his fish & chip bar



The "low", long house on Post office site

Gardner's was two old boarding houses. A picture shown me by a very old lady showed a low, long house on the side of the Square where is now the P.O. "The Smugglers" which had no connection with any smuggling – it was Neame's farmhouse called Evergreen House. The five shops are still called the Old Barn Site. Where the Yew Tree Site now stands was a charming house with a lovely paddock. On the other side of the road was the doctor's house (Dr Harry Worthington) and where the Methodist schoolroom is now were two matched cottages. I remember a very old lady lived in one – they said they would not demolish the cottages till she died. Where is now the betting shop and the next one, was "Vyes", an old shop where you walked down steps to enter.



Vye & Son in The Square

Down Park Lane behind Pantony's Garage were three thatched cottages which were the Alms Houses, down a lane called Gas Row or Gas Alley.



Going down Canterbury Road, were two farm cottages. Street Farm House is now very polished up and called the Old Cottage. Court Mount was a farmhouse called Southend Farm. In the land on the other side of the road [behind what is now Church House] was a beautiful Tudor Barn which I heard, when it was pulled down, the beams went to beautify a chapel for a school in North London [in Barnet]. There were no more houses along the main road after the Mill Site. I don't remember seeing the mill about, but I heard about it. At the corner of Essex Gardens on the right was the Vicarage with a beautiful garden behind. At the bottom of Essex Gardens on the left was a thatched cottage called Bedlam, inhabited by a gardener [Hooker and his family] who had a greengrocer's round. The Fire



Bedlam Farm Cottage

Service demolished it for practice at the start of the war – I heard that there were large cellars underneath used for smuggling. The church used to have Church Cottage next to The International on the North side of the Square and behind it was the Institute which we used for dances. The church hall (house) in Kent Gardens was not then built - it was just spare ground there. [The first Church House was built in 1926.]

From the same old lady I mentioned before, she told me about the Old Cottage in Park Lane next to the school. There was a well in the kitchen and when it was decided to close the well – when the water mains were laid down – the man called the 'guv'nor' told him to come down and see and there was a passage that went from the well presumably to the Park.



Village Pond by Court Mount



Woodford House School

The village pond was by Court Mount and went out into the road. [Half belonged to the farmer and half to the villagers]. There used to be an oil painting showing the view of the church from near this pond. It was a charming picture – where is it now?

Woodford House School - I forgot to mention the Woodford House School with its beautiful grounds where we went to prize givings. The flower bed in the front grounds always looked so nice and gave a charming welcome to Birchington.

Well now I have tried to remember everything and hope it will be of some use to you.

Yours,
Eleanor Chapman

Noticeboard

BHT DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 28th May 2015

A Talk by Steven Ware: "National Coastwatch"
Volunteer Eyes Along the Coast

Thursday 11th June 2015

AGM

Followed by:-

An Illustrated Quiz by Janet & John Robinson

August 2015

Birchington Quiz

Copies available from Museum £1 each

By Faye & Luke

Thursday 10th September 2015

Wine & Wisdom with Doug Holmes

Social event

Thursday 29th October 2015

A Talk by Pat Orpwood & John Hart

"Gallipoli"

Thursday 26th November 2015

A Talk by Dr. Frank Andrews

Richborough Port

Thursday 3rd December 2015

A Musical Evening with Colin Bridge

Social event

Meetings 7.00 for 7.30pm held at
The Centre, Birchington.
There is a small charge for social events
The Bar will be available

BHT 2016 Calendar

Janet and John Robinson are preparing next years - 2016 calendar with Birchington themes for our Trust.

For this to be financially successful, we are requesting donations from any of our kind members to help sponsor the printing costs.

Anyone wishing to make a contribution or have any enquiry please drop into the Museum or try contacting Janet or John by e-mail at:-

robinsons@the2jays.f2s.com

We thank you in advance

The David Burley Paintings

Addendum

Maurice Hewlitt has reminded the editor that a Burley watercolour of a pond surrounded by trees on Dartmoor, formally owned by his friend and neighbour, Dorrie Parkin, is on display in the Village Centre bar.

Sincerest apologies for the oversight: *editor*

Talk on Quex & Australian Link on 6th February 2015

Susan Johnson gave a very interesting talk to the Membership. Australian born Susan is a direct link to the Powell-Cotton family through her mother's side of the family, her Great Grandfather being Percy Powell-Cotton. Mary, Percy's daughter, was Susan's Grandmother. She came to know Quex from holidays spent there with her Great Aunt Toni and Uncle Kit and lived there for a time after University. On a visit in 2010, her first since Great Uncle Christopher Powell-Cotton died, the staff and volunteers enthusiastically encouraged Susan to move to Quex. With the blessing of her Uncle Michael, the Life Tennant, and the support of the Quex Board of Governors, she is here with her husband and two children, living in an apartment in the main house.

We were all captivated by her enthusiasm and saw many family photos and learned of the background to the Estate from a family point of view. We heard about the Three Towers - Clock, Bell and Lookout, around which Susan personally gives conducted tours. Susan's love of the house and her Powell-Cotton heritage shone through. and can only add to the enhancement of Quex.

Susan Johnson is an excellent ambassador for the Museum, the old family home and the Estate.

Janet Denyer

Wine & Wisdom by Ann & Doug Holmes on 26 March 2015

This proved to be a most enjoyable evening with questions on a variety of themes from history to general knowledge - and competition between the tables was keen. Doug expertly asked the questions adding an element of humour and Ann kept the scores. The 'numerical facts' of the Birchington section had us all 'at sea', the questions being from the 'number of concrete groins on the beach' to 'the bridges across/ under the railway' and 'how many shelters stand along the cliffs'. It was certainly a fun evening and we hope that Doug and Ann will help us put on more of such events in the future.

Janet Denyer

Birchington Postscript

ALMA COTTAGES - In Station Road, between The Village Bakery and Caroline's Face Place is a small alleyway which leads to Alma Cottages. They were built in 1855 and the name is associated with the Battle of Alma which took place during the Crimean War. The Alma is a small river of the Crimea and near its mouth into the Black Sea was the site of the defeat of the Russians by the combined forces of the British, French and Turkish armies in 1854.

Janet Robinson