



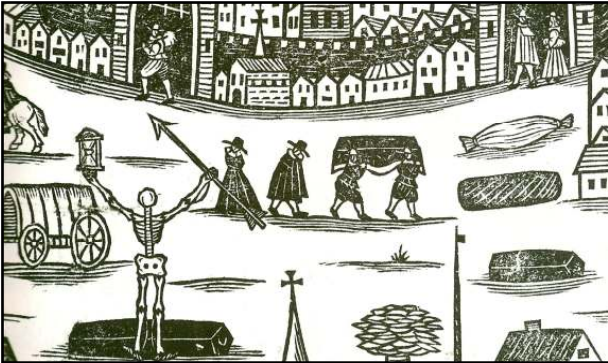
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**THE PLAGUE IN BIRCHINGTON**

A T Walker – Parish Archivist



Birchington during its history has suffered on several occasions from visits of the Plague. Several outbreaks of this dreadful pestilence can be traced in our Churchwardens Account Books, the Parish Registers and in the Poor Books. The earliest recorded visitation was in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and caused the second book of the Register to be called the "black boke", and in 1603 in the Churchwardens Account Book we find this entry,

*"for II [2] prayer bookes in the time of the Plague XVI<sup>d</sup>"*

The first book of the Registers ends in 1553 and then follows this entry,

*"Here endethe the first boke of the Register of Birchington. The second boke called the blacke boke was spoiled by an ignorant woman".*

The second book was probably called the black book because of the many deaths recorded in it due to the plague. There is no doubt that Birchington had many attacks of plague before records were kept here, and no doubt Birchington was severely attacked by the Black Death in the mid 13 hundreds.

The plague was probably bubonic plague, caused by fleas carried by rats, and seems to have carried off more men and boys than women.

Birchington, like all other places had no main drainage, only earth closets, and no proper water supply as we have now. All our water came from wells and of course there was no collection of rubbish. Hence disease spread quickly. The year 1544, the time of Henry VIII, was a bad year when there were 50 burials, when the average was about 12 only, and the population of Birchington was only about 350 to 400.

The visitation lasted from the June to the following March, September and October being the worst months when there were 13 burials in the September and 15 in the October.

The third book commences 1564.

In the years 1625 and 1626, the time of James I and Charles I, there was an outbreak of the epidemic which may have been brought to Birchington by a "traveller" or beggar from Canterbury, who died here and was buried in the Churchyard. His burial is recorded in the Burial Register.

In 1625 there were 31 deaths and in 1626, 41, when the average death rate was about 12 a year in Birchington. Of these 72 burials, 14 were the breadwinners of the family, so the widows and orphans had to be provided for by the 40 ratepayers of the parish.

The year 1637 was a year when Birchington was again "visited" by "God's heavy hand" when there were 64 burials. This year is the blackest in Birchington and Acol's history. The Minister at the time was George Stancombe who remained at his post and buried the 64. Of these, in the Burial Register, he marked the word "plague" against the names of 35. Of the 64, 15 were the breadwinners so again the 41 ratepayers of Birchington had to pay.

During that year there were no less than 5 "cesses" or rates levied for "the necessary relief of the poor and visited sick people".

The Overseers of the Poor and the Churchwardens raised nearly £70 by these 5 cesses, a considerable sum of money in those days, and this sum was spent in various ways to help the poor and sick. These accounts, though, simply contain the items of expenditure from one of the most striking histories of the visitation.

They tell us of the efforts made to cure the disease, of its infectious nature carrying off almost whole families, of the method of burial, of help given to widows, orphans and the sick.

The Plague and Fire of London left an indelible mark on England's psyche.



Drawing of the Great Fire of London - 1666

**In this Issue:** Page 1 - The Plague in Birchington

Page 2 - The Plague in Birchington (continued)

Page 3 - Gore-End and Dover + Saxon Name of Birchington + The Name Gore

Page 4 - Noticeboard:- Future Events + Past Talks and Events

Here are a few extracts for 1637 from the Birchington Poor Book.

"Item - to Dr Randolfe at 2 sevall tymes, 5s and to Mr Watson ye Apothecary at 2 sevall tymes, 27s for phisicke for ye visited people and one jorney to Canterbury about ye same business 4s in toto 01/16/00

Item - to Jo Penny for ye use of his wheel barrow to carry ye visited dead people for burying 00/02/00

Item - to Roberts his wife for burning old raggs yt lay about 00/00/06

Item - to Will Twiman & his wife during ye tyme of their restraint for necessaryes from Aug 2 1637 unto ye 14 following 00/19/06

Item - to Jo Thorpe, his wife & children from Sept 6 1637 unto Sept 28 following ye tyme of their restraint 01/19/00

Item - to Edw Smith his wife & children from Sept 28 1637 to No 26 following ye tyme of their restraint 04/04/06

Item - for ½ chauldron of coales ye poore visited people and fetching ym from Margate 00/11/06"

These extracts are from the Acol Poor Book.

"Item - to Will Derricke from May 7 1637 unto June 11 following 5 weekes at 6d ye weeke 00/02/06

Item - to him from thence unto Sept 3 following 12 weekes at 1s ye weeke 00/12/00

It. to his wife in ye tyme of her sickness extraordinary 00/03/00

It. to ye widd Twiman for looking to her one weeke then 00/02/00

It. to Nic Hoskins wife for looking to her one other weeke then 00/01/00

It. for coales for them 00/00/09

It. for burying her first child 6 Aug (Sarah Derricke aged 4 months) 00/02/06

It. for burying her second child Aug 23 (Joyce Derricke aged 4 months) 00/02/06

It. for burying herself Aug 31 (Alice Derricke) 00/02/06

It. to ye women for watching with her, laying her forth, socking her & washing her cloathes 00/04/03

It. for beere to ye men yt brought to ye church 00/01/00

It. for Cloath to make Derrickes other children cloathes 00/08/00"

Then follows a number of items - for making the clothes, for gloves, stockings, aprons, bodices, neckcloathes, scarves etc. and for keeping the other children.

This gives some idea of what was done in those days to help the sick and distressed.

1669, the time of Charles II was another bad year when there were 57 deaths in a population of less than 400.

The year of the Great Plague of London was 1665 but this was a good year in Birchington, as there were only 11 burials, (and only 8 burials in 1666), so it seems as if the Great Plague did not reach here until nearly 4 years later in 1669.

But the people of Birchington did think of the sufferers in London as there were 5 collections to help these sufferers and it appeared that the people gave generously.

These extracts below, from the Churchwardens Account Books, show this:-

1. 'Made August ye 2 1665 being ye fast for ye averting of Gods heavy visitation of ye Pestilence there was collected in ye parish Church of Birchington ye sume of Twenty five shillings.'

This is signed by J. Ayling Vic ibid  
William Drayton,  
John Turner Churchwardens.'

2. October ye 4<sup>th</sup> 1665.

'Collected in ye Parish Church of Birchington for ye releife of ye poor visited people the summe of 1£ 03s 00d.

J. Ayling Vic ibid  
William Drayton  
John Turner Churchwardens.'

3. Nov 8 1665.

'Collected yn ye Parish of Birchington being ye Publick fast for ye averting of ye pestilence ye summe of Twelve shillings.

J. Ayling Vic ibid  
William Drayton  
John Turner Churchwardens'

4. Dec 6 1665.

'Re for ye visited of ye Plague nine shillings and sixpence in ye pish of Birchington.

William Drayton  
John Turner.'

5. 'Re the 7<sup>th</sup> day January 1665/6 Collected for the visited of the Plague five shillings in the pish of Birchington.

J. Ayling Vic ibid  
William Drayton.'

There does not appear to be any further large number of deaths in Birchington, from an examination of the Registers.

In 1637 in Birchington most of the deaths occurred during the late summer and early autumn. July 6, Oct 15, Jan 2, Aug 11, Nov 4, Sept 13, Dec 2.

Doctors during that time had no idea of the true cause of the plague, bites from infected fleas carried on rats. The recommended eradication of cats and dogs only helped the rat population to increase.

Treatments included lancing the buboes (swelling in the lymph nodes), bloodletting either by lancing a vein or applying leeches to re-balance the humours. Plague doctors were commissioned by some towns to



**A Plague Doctor** care for the victims and keep records. They wore a dark broad rimmed hat, a neck to ankle waxed leather gown, leggings, boots and gloves also a distinctive bird-beak mask with glass spectacles. The bird beak was filled with aromatic herbs, spices or a vinegar impregnated sponge to remove the bad vapours thought to be the cause of the disease.

Charlatans would sell plague "cures" at high prices comprising of powdered "unicorn horn" and frogs legs, even smoking tobacco was recommend.

## GORE-END AND DOVER

Notes by Alfred T. Walker c. 1975

## SAXON NAME of BIRCHINGTON?

Alfred T Walker

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**G**ore-end was probably a Non corporate Limb of the Cinque Port of Dover as early as the time of Edward I, 1272-1307.

Archaeologia Cantiana (A.C.) Vol XXV. The following appears in the Dover Chamberlain's Accounts.

*"XIs received from the men of Goreshende in full receipt until the feast of Easter."*

This appeared to be the earliest mention of being a non corporate limb of Dover. John Harris in his History of Kent 1719 says *"Gore-end is the first place as is supposed that ever was united to Dover and hath been so ever since the time of Edward I."* There is no doubt that in those early times Gore-end was a small port where ships sheltered etc, and there was a small village here.

In early documents sometimes Gore-end is included with Birchington and sometimes Birchington is included with Gore-end. From the White and Black Books of the Cinque Ports, 1521, King Henry VIII - At the General Brotheryeld held at Romney on 23 July 1521 representatives from Birchington and Goresdon attended - but unable to check the names.

At the General Brotheryeld held at Romney 25 July 1525, John Holmar Deputy attended for Goresend and Birchington. At this Brotheryeld *"William Hendy of Birchington is to be seized and imprisoned wherever he lands within the ports until the Deputy of Birchington sends for him for punishment, he hath been disobedient and wyll nott obey the Mayor of Dover."*

From the Burial Register. *"1538 Willus Hendie paterfamilias sepult erat 13 Aprilis."*

From J. P. Barrett p 25: *"In a document in the Public Records Office jurors from Gore-end and Birchington were summoned to Dover 1st June 1523."*

*"From Goresend and Byrchynton were*

*Thomas Holden - Ricus Cantes - Johes Cantes*

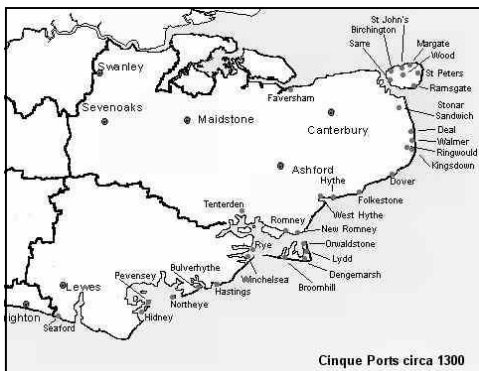
*A name erased - Johes Johnson - Henry Thorne"*

Thomas Holden was Church Warden in 1553 and also in 1580, but this may have been a son. John Cantis the elder was Church Warden in 1537, 1555, if the same person John Jonson was Church Warden in 1546, 1587. These four names appear in a document in the P.R.O. relating to the subsidy known as the Xth and XVth of 1541-2.

A.C. Vol XII. *"1526 The Corporation of Dover received from various Limbs contributions towards the cost of its suit for the discharge of a subsidy."*

*"The Deputy of Birchington and Goresend 16s 8d"*

*"Dover appointed a Deputy to manage the affairs of the Limbs, usually one of the most influential men of the place. Commonly, the Deputy acted for Goresend, Birchington and Birchington Wood (Woodchurch)".*



**O**ver the years Birchington has had many varied spellings and roots.

From Archaeologia Cantiana XII p.402

Birchington is the only parish in Thanet that could be supposed to derive its name from a Saxon family which settled here. Even so it may be doubted whether there was a family of Birchingas or descendants of Bircha.

"migas" - originally means of people.

"tun" - means a village which grew up round a farm, estate or manor.

"ington" - probably the "tun of so and so's people".

From The Place names of Kent by Wallenberg - Uppsala, Sweden 1934:-

De Birchilton

De Birchenton 1240 Assize Rolls for Kent.

De Bruchinton

Bircheton

De Berchington 1254

Berchelton 1264 - Patent Rolls of the reign of Henry III

Byrchelton 1274 - Feet of Fines.

Birchinton

De Berchin

De Berchyton 1270 - Assize Rolls of Kent.

Bircheton 1275 - Rotuli hundredorum temptlen III

Bircheton

De Berchel

De Berchilton 1278 - Assize Rolls of Kent.

Birchelton 1292 - Feet of fines.

Byrche(I)ton

Byrchynton 1292

## THE NAME - GORE by Alfred T. Walker

**G**ore-end, now known as Minnis Bay, is at the seaward end of the road leading to the coast at the 'Minnis' or common.

From the Oxford Dictionary: "Gore" a gore is a wedge shaped piece of cloth adjusting the width of a garment. Also it is Old English from gara - a triangular piece of land. Perhaps it is derived directly from the Saxon word "Gara" meaning a projecting point of land which in turn comes from "gar" meaning a spear.

As a place name it appears frequently in Kent.

There is Gore Court at Tunstall

Gorestrete in Monkton parish

Gore Manor in Upchurch.

Although the present appearance of Minnis Bay or Gore-end seems so unlike a triangular piece of land, yet in earlier times that interpretation would have been quite appropriate. The oldest maps all show a triangular projection of land which helped form the little Haven into which ships could find shelter and wait before venturing out into the teeth of a storm in the Thames Estuary.

The Gore-end or Minnis headland stretched much further seaward than at present, so that "the end of a projecting point of land" would have described the area well.

## BHT Dates For your Diary

**Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017**

Talk by Peter Ewart -  
'Some Mother's Son'

**Thursday, 15<sup>th</sup> June 2017**

AGM followed by  
Three Short Talks

**Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2017**

Event - Summer Variety  
Nigel Archer

**Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> September 2017**

Talk by Susan Johnson  
'Ladies of Quex'

**Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2017**

Event - Quiz Night presented by  
Ann & Doug Holmes

**Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017**

Talk by Imogen Corrigan -  
'The Goose is Getting Fat'

Quarterly meetings 7.00 for 7.30pm at  
The Centre, Birchington.  
The Bar will be available

## Past Talks and Events

**Kent, Surrey & Sussex Air Ambulance  
Talk on 23 February 2017**

This was a very informative talk by David Fagg from the Air Ambulance which is a Charity that constantly needs to raise funds. Based at Marden, Kent and Redhill, Surrey they operate two MD902 Explorer helicopters, one equipped with night vision which can also treat casualties on board. From receiving a call they can be airborne within 11 minutes with a doctor/paramedic on board. Interestingly, if a mobile phone is used they can pinpoint exactly where the call came from, which is not possible from a landline.

**Race Night - 23 March 2017**

Almost 50 people attended and as always this was good fun. We placed our bets on the 6 horses and there were some winners and some losers! It was just the luck of how the dice fell and how far the horses travelled on the track - in some races jumps were introduced. The losers have the consolation of knowing that they have raised funds for BHT, for which we thank them.

*Janet Denyer*

## Birchington's Alphabet

**CHARLES FIELD** - This was the early name for what is now called Minnis Bay Green, which is the area behind The Dip, bounded by Dane Road, Canute Road, Minnis Road and the Parade, and bisected by Arthur Road.

**CHURCH HILL FARM** - The farm used to stand on Canterbury Road in the plot opposite Kent Gardens. Our records show it in existence as far back as 1688. It was demolished in about 1970 and Ferndale Court retirements flats were built on the site. Part of the old wall of the farm with its original gateway still stand.

**CHURCH HOUSE** - The site for the Church House was purchased in 1924 for £300. The building was completed in 1929 at the cost of £1,923 and was used constantly for over forty years. An anonymous donor provided the funds for a new replacement building which opened in 1971.

**CINEMA** - The Public Hall was opened in Station Road in 1902 and was used for concerts and meetings. After the First World War the main hall was converted into a cinema. It traded under various names, in 1927 it was the 'Select Cinema' 1928 'Picture House', 1957 'The Ritz', 1959 'The Royal'. It closed as a cinema in 1961 and became a bingo hall and discotheque. It is now used by Birchington Baptist Church.

**COLEMAN'S STAIRS** - The land on either side of Coleman's Stairs Road and Gap belonged to John Coleman of Birchington during the later 1500's and early 1600's. He may have been the person who ordered the stairs to be cut in the cliffs, or he may simply have been the owner of the land around them and his name became permanently associated with them. When the cutting was first made there were five steps at the end where the opening met the shore. This was later changed to a slope.

**COURT MOUNT** - was previously part of South End Farm, which dates from at least 1600. In the Kelly's directory of 1938 Court Mount is shown as being Tea Rooms. It has been used as a caravan site since 1948 and we have advertisements for this in our museum files. In 1955 it was being run as a Hotel and Club, but by 1972 it was just a hotel which closed shortly after this date. A grade II listed building it is now used as offices for Court Mount Park Homes.

**CRESCENT ROAD** - The first terrace of houses to be built in Crescent Road in approx 1896 was Dartford Villas, a block of nine properties. By 1898-9 Telford Terrace, Dartford Villas and Manchester Terrace had been added. Separately named houses were later added to these terraces. In 1938 Margate Borough Council decided to ignore the separate terraces and villas and number the houses consecutively. *Janet Robinson*