



Preserving the Past for the Future

Newsletter

www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk & on facebook

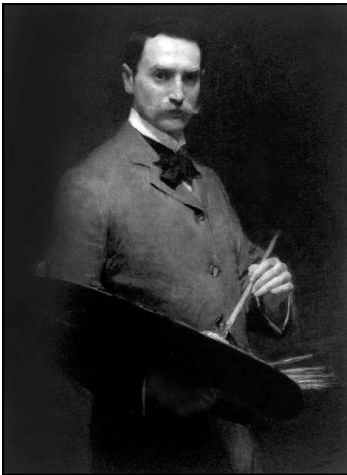
February 2018

Charity No. 1099250

ISSUE 63

SOLOMON JOSEPH SOLOMON, RA

1860-1927



Solomon Joseph Solomon
A Self Portrait c. 1896



Solomon Joseph Solomon-1917

Solomon (SJS) was a leading portrait painter of his day, his commissions included prominent politicians, members of the Royal family and military leaders. He was also acclaimed for his classical and biblical works amongst which were the studies of 'Ajax & Cassandra' and 'Samson'.

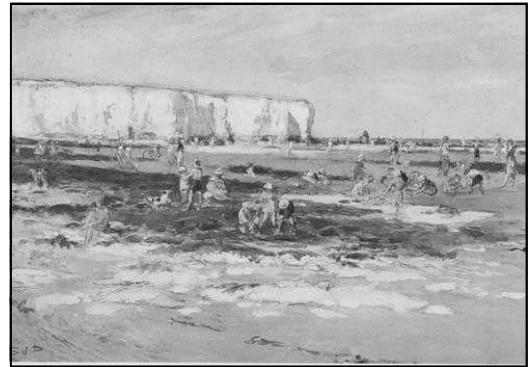
In 1897 SJS married Ella Montagu and in 1918 with their three children Mary, Iris and Dorian were living at 18 Hyde Park Gate which was also SJS's studio. However, it was Birchington where the family spent several months each year in 'White Cliffe', one of the Tower Bungalows in Spencer Road, which they bought in 1905. SJS used to ride on Minnis Bay sands as did the children on their Shetland ponies and were taught to jump over the breakwaters!

A studio was built into the north facing chalk cliffs overlooking the sea which gave the perfect light for painting. His daughter Iris recalls that both Lord Asquith and Ramsay MacDonald travelled to Birchington for sittings. He painted many family portraits including one of his daughter, Mary from the roof of his studio.

During WW1 Solomon was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Royal Engineers and pioneered camouflage techniques supervising the Special Works Park in France. He interpreted photographs and where armaments were concealed by the way shadows fell. In 1916 he established a camouflage school in Kensington Gardens and wrote 'Strategic Camouflage' detailing this work.

Solomon Joseph Solomon was a founding Member of the Society of Portrait Painters, President of the Royal Society of British Artists and a Member of the Royal Academy. He wrote 'The Practice of Oil Painting & Drawing' which explains the principles of figure drawing.

Solomon died in Birchington in 1927 and is buried in Willesden Jewish Cemetery, although Ella continued to live in Birchington until 1936.



The Beach at Birchington c. 1920



From My Studio Roof
c. 1920
Dundee Art Galleries
and Museum



Solomon Family Group in
Birchington c. 1906

BHT have produced a coloured booklet on SJS. It contains images of a number of his paintings and is available from the Museum.

Janet Denyer

In this Issue: **Page 1** - Solomon Joseph Solomon
Page 2 - Birchington in the 1840s + Some Photos of Grenham gaps
Page 3 - Gaps in Birchington's Cliffs
Page 4 - Noticeboard:- Future Events + Summary of BHT Talks and Events + Birchington's Alphabet

The Kentish Gazette of 5th June 1849 announced:-

"On Wednesday last a mourning peal was rung at the Waterloo Tower, Quex Park, on the demise of the late J.P. Powell, Esq., by the United members of the Quex Institution and the Amateur Society of St. Stephens, near Canterbury; after which the members were kindly invited to partake of an excellent repast provided for them at the Powell Arms, by Captain Cotton, the present proprietor of the estate."

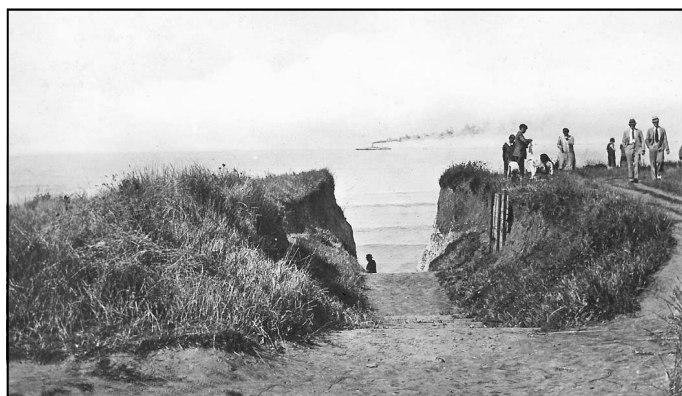


Quex Park and Waterloo Tower c. 1840s

In his memoirs Thomas Pointer writes about the occasion. "It was a very grand funeral, there were a great number of people. The street was crowded, in fact it was more like a fair than a funeral. There were oyster barrows, barrows with nuts and oranges, ginger beer, at different parts of the street. It was a very large procession. All the working men from the different farms had a half day off to come and see it. In the front of the procession came a man carrying on his head a board covered with large black plumes. Behind him walked a number of men belonging to the Philanthropic Society. Then came the hearse, drawn by six black horses (the top of the hearse was covered with black plumes), and then followed nine or eleven (I forget) of the old-fashioned mourning coaches, some with four horses and some with two. Every horse had a black cloth on its back, and a plume on its head. All the black horses from the farms were hired for the occasion, and whatever horse had a white mark about its body the mark was covered with some black composition. Then followed the esquires carriages, then came the private carriages of the gentry round about the island. When they took the coffin out of the drawing room window at Quex Park, a cannon fired as many times as he was old (eighty-four)."

In the parish records are several entries for burials of unknown people washed up on the sea shore. One of them in September 1846 was for this poor woman, there was no grand procession for her. I have included the newspaper report as it gives such a good description of the costume at this time:-

"The body of an elderly woman, five feet two inches in height, of stout build, and who apparently moved in humble life, was on the 4th instant, cast up by the sea at Birchington. She had on when discovered a light drab mousseline-de-laine gown, spotted with black and pink, a flannel petticoat, a thick plaid petticoat, stays, white cotton stockings marked I.N., and thick boot-shoes, much worn. In the pockets of her dress were found three keys, one of them five inches long, having attached to it a small oblong copper label, marked "N. Tower", a light brown silk purse with plated clasp, containing 9s.6p, a dark bone handled knife with two long stout blades and a tooth packed up in a brass thimble. On her wedding finger was a thin gold ring. The clothes and other matters have been preserved by the deputy of Birchington, as likely to lead to her identity."



Grenham Gap



Grenham Bay Avenue Gap c. 1959



Beach Avenue Gap - c. 1919

Birchington has 7 access gaps in the cliffs, initially cut by farmers to harvest the seaweed they needed for fertilising their land. One of the gaps goes back to at least 1350, as the Church land registry or 'Terrier' of that date shows, and two others are listed in the 1526 Terrier. They later made excellent routes for the smugglers, when they landed their booty and needed a quick exit from the beaches!

One of the gaps has an interesting name – Coleman's Stairs. When I first went down to the bottom of it, I expected to find some stairs – but there was no sign of them. It wasn't until I was given a photo showing the gap in 1919, long before the lower promenade was constructed after the 1953 storm, that I realised the stairs had now been swallowed up in the concrete apron built as part of the cliff defences.



Coleman Stairs Gap - c.1919

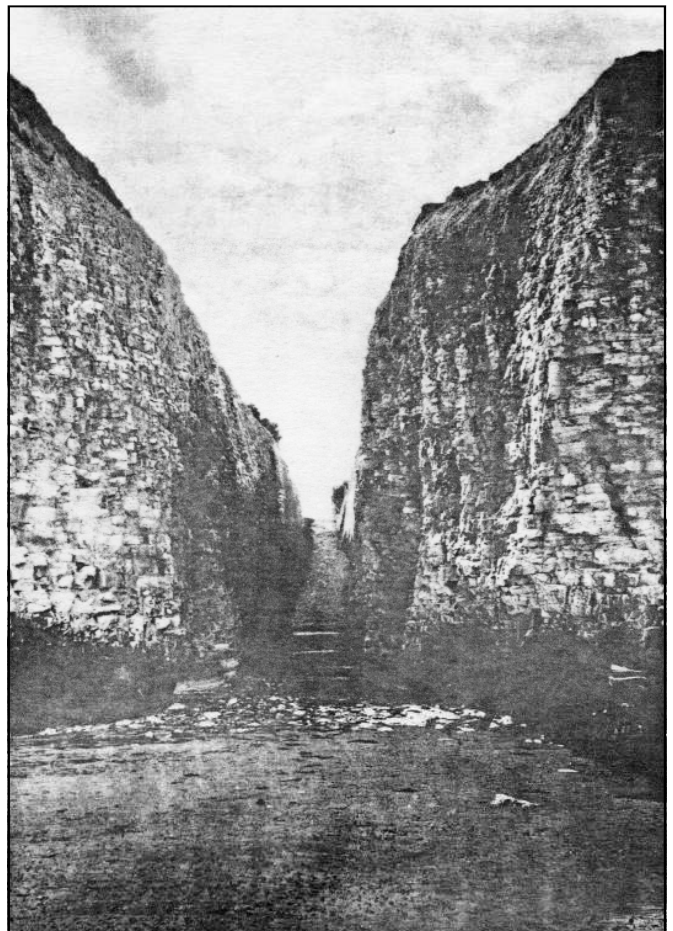
But who was this Coleman? John Coleman was a man of some substance, who owned several acres of land in the Epple Bay area during the late 16th and early 17th centuries. In one of the earliest maps of the village it gives the name of the road we now call 'Albion Road' (leading from Station Road to the sea & Gap) as "Colman's' Road". Whether it was he who had the gap cut in the cliffs to help fertilise his farmland with seaweed, we do not know, but the Gap has always been known as Coleman's Stairs.

When John Colman died during a Plague epidemic in 1619, his Will indicated that he was a wealthy man. The fact that his name has remained attached to this area for over 400 years tells us quite a lot about the high esteem in which he and his family was held by his fellow villagers at that time.

The Coleman family was highly respected in the community and at different times members held the post of Overseer of the Poor – a very responsible job, elected by the Annual Vestry – and as Churchwarden.

There are several views of the Gap taken from the top looking down towards the sea and the area is still seen as an area where fairly high status properties were (and still are) built.

Other names of the Gaps include Grenham Bay Avenue Gap, Green Road Gap, Beresford Gap, an unnamed Gap in Epple Bay Avenue (between 'Smugglers Gap' and 'The Moorings') and finally Epple Gap. There is also a gap slightly nearer to Epple Bay in a private garden, but it only reaches half way up the garden, never quite reaching the road. Epple Bay itself used to have two gaps very close together, but by the time the Powell-Cotton brickfield was closed at the top of the cliffs in the 1930s, this had been filled in.



Colman's Stairs from Beach

Noticeboard

BHT Dates For your Diary

Events for 2018

- 22nd March Talk on 'A Stroll Down Alpha Road'
by Janet & John Robinson
Talk on 'The Shelters'
by Birchington Sea-shelters
& Amenities Group
- 26th April 'Quiz Night' with Ann & Doug Holmes
- 31st May AGM + Short Talks
'Pugilism in Birchington' - Colin Winstone
'Washed Up Birchington' - Luke Warburton
'Post Boxes' - Chris Wyer
- 28th June Talk on 'Earlier Village Centres'
by Jennie Burgess
Talk on 'The Present Village Centre'
by Neville Hudson
- 26th July Horse Racing
- 27th Sept Talk on 'Doodlebugs & Rockets'
by Bob Ogley
- 25th Oct 'Quiz Night'
with Ann & Doug Holmes
- 29th Nov Talk on 'Bover on the Hover'
by Brian Laverick Smith

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

BHT Talks and Activities

Events 2017

We have to thank Ann & Doug Holmes for their expertise in producing another successful Quiz Night on 26 October. It was so popular that we have booked them again for 2018.

The finale to 2017 was on 23 November with a very interesting and amusing talk from Imogen Corrigan on 'The Goose is Getting Fat'. It covered the history and origins of many Christmas traditions from around the world. Surprisingly many are pagan and linked to the Winter Solstice. This was a great social evening for our Members and made even more enjoyable with a glass of wine and mince pie - a good start to festivities.

Forthcoming Events 2018

We start our 2018 Events Programme on Thursday 22 March with two talks. Firstly, 'A Stroll Down Alpha Road' by Janet & John Robinson on how the road developed and with interesting facts about the houses and who has occupied them. The second talk on 'The Shelters' by Birchington Sea-Shelters Amenities Group gives us the background to and the current situation with regard to the shelters.

Birchington's Alphabet

FIRE BRIGADE - Birchington had its own fire brigade as early as the 1880s. Captain Ashton was captain here and at Westgate. At one period he kept the horse-drawn pump at 'The Anchorage' in Alpha Road. The Brigade was later based at Walker's Garage near the Railway Station, where it remained until it was amalgamated into the Margate Brigade at the start of the second World War.

FORGES - Buddles Forge was on the Canterbury Road, opposite All Saints church, and probably dated from c.1850. From the 1950s to the late 70s it was used as a meeting place for Birchington's Toc H branch.

Another forge stood in front of Grove House, dating from the mid 1600s.

In 1890 Mr. Knott was a wheelwright in the village, his forge was on the site which later became Jenner's Garage and is now a new block of flats, next to Lloyds Bank.

FOUNTAIN - The idea of a drinking fountain and horse trough in Birchington Square was first proposed in 1886, to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, but was rejected. In 1909 Alderman Grant offered a fountain in memory of his wife, and this time it was accepted. The fountain's Lantern was lit by a gas mantle, and water connected to the trough. It was originally positioned in the centre of the square, but was moved nearer to the Powell Arms in about 1914-15. It was moved to its present position in 1925. The fountain was adopted by Birchington Residents Association as a millennium 2000 project and restored, and is now a Listed Building.

GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE - In approximately 1953 'Highfield' in Alpha Road changed its name to Gainsborough House School. Its grounds stretched as far as the level crossing - now the footbridge over the railway lines. The private Anglo-American school was operated by Major and Mrs. Morton, flourished until about 1958, when it reverted to its original name and became a residential home. There are some interesting photographs of the school in our files at the museum.

GARDEN ESTATE - The estate was laid out in 1930 by G.B.Farrar, a London builder who later moved to live at Minnis Bay. All the roads were in a regular grid system and named after the counties of England. The bungalows were built from 1955, by the highly regarded local builder, N.Miles (Birchington) Ltd.

GASOMETER - It is not known exactly when the Birchington gasometer was erected, but it was sometime in the early 1800s. It was built at the end of Gas Alley opposite All Saints Church, and the gas was piped here from the Westgate and Birchington Gasworks, at Westgate.

Janet Robinson