



February 2019

Charity No. 1099250

ISSUE 67

PRINCESS MARY'S CHRISTMAS GIFT BOX 1914

Our thanks go to Mr & Mrs P Holmans who have kindly donated a 1914 Christmas box and pencil which had been sent to Frederick William Holmans. He unfortunately died in 1918 aged 40 and is commemorated on the War Memorial in The Square and buried in All Saints Churchyard.



Princess Mary's Box 1914

Princess Mary, the 17 year old daughter of King George V & Queen Mary wished every soldier at the front and sailor afloat, to receive a Christmas gift. The boxes were funded as a result of a public appeal and raised a staggering £162,500, equivalent to £18,395,814 in 2018.



Photograph of Princess Mary Card enclosed in the box

The embossed hinged brass box measures 5" x 3¼", cost 6¼d each and over 400,000 were sent in time for Christmas 1914. The contents were in two different forms. Tobacco, pipe, lighter and 20 cigarettes with a Christmas Card from King George V & Queen Mary and a photograph of Princess Mary. Non-smokers were sent a packet of acid drop sweets, a writing case containing paper, pencil and envelopes together with a card and photograph. The pencil was contained within a tube resembling a cartridge case.

Afterwards as the fund was in surplus, distribution was extended more widely to all those who were serving either at home or overseas, next of kin of casualties and prisoners of war. This extended distribution amounted to over 2.6 million being sent, the contents of these boxes varied and contained such items as chocolate, sugar candy, combs, scissors or shaving brushes.

The fact that quite a few boxes came home eventually, tells us how much this gift was valued by the men.

Janet Denyer

In this Issue: **Page 1** - My Favourite Thing by Jennie Burgess - Princess Mary's Christmas Gift Box 1914

Page 2 - The Actress and the Royal Obstetrician

Page 3 - 172 Year old Sampler + My Favourite Thing in the Museum, A Pocket Sweetheart + Spread the Word

Page 4 - Noticeboard:- Future Events + Birchington's "Summer" Road Puzzle + Birchington's Alphabet

While researching the history of Epple Bay for a talk in March, I came across a newspaper report from 1923 which I thought was interesting. It told that an accident had happened to Miss Lena Ashwell as she travelled by car from her home in Birchington to Canterbury. She had been struck by a stray bullet from a nearby shoot, but was not seriously injured.



*Miss.
Lena
Ashwell*

The article went on to state that "Miss Ashwell owns a row of coastguard cottages at Birchington, where she delights to entertain poor professional girls in need of a holiday."



*Coastguard
Cottages at
Epple Bay*

Further investigation found that Lena Ashwell was a retired actress who, in the early 1920s, lived with her husband at Cliff House, the old coastguard officers house, at the bottom of Epple Road. As we saw from the newspaper, she also owned the row of coastguard cottages. All these buildings are still there.



*Coastguard
House*

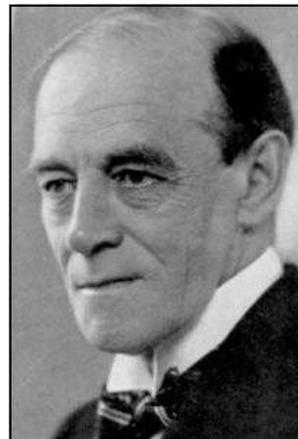
Born in 1872, Lena Pocock studied music at the Royal Academy of Music, London, before becoming an actress and changing her surname to Ashwell. She appeared on stage with Dame Ellen Terry and Sir Henry Irving. In 1906 she took up theatre management, initially at the Savoy Theatre, and a year later her own theatre known as The Kingsway. Lena was a great advocate of Women's rights and heavily involved with the suffrage movement.

At the outbreak of war in 1914 Lena was determined that soldiers should not be deprived of culture, but should be entertained by actors and musicians. The War Office was against the idea, but she persevered and with the help of the YMCA managed, in January 1915, to get concert parties sent to France and later Malta and Egypt. Violin solos, string quartets, operatic arias, drama and poetry, were all delivered behind the front lines, usually three concerts a day.



The Lena Ashwell YMCA Concert Party - Egypt

More than 600 artists, including nearly 350 women, travelled for four years giving impromptu performances at railway stations, on ships and in the desert. Tens of thousands came to their concerts. In one week in Ismailia on the Suez Canal, more than 13,000 men came for the music. By 1917 many of the concert parties were women-only, as younger men had been conscripted.



Sir. Henry Simson

In August 1917, Lena, now Mrs Lena Simson, was awarded the OBE for her work as organiser of entertainment for troops.

In 1908 Lena had married her second husband, Sir Henry Simson. Sir Henry was an eminent British physician, who became obstetrician to the royal family and delivered (amongst many others) the future Queen Elizabeth the Second and her sister Princess Margaret.

Lena and Sir Henry Simson sold their coastguard house and cottages at Epple Road in 1925.

Several books have been written about the artists who went to entertain the troops in WW1, including some by Lena Ashwell herself and one by Kate Adie the journalist and war correspondent. Some of these books are probably available through our local library. There is also a lot of information and pictures, available on the internet.

If you are interested in finding out more of the history of Epple Bay come along to the meeting of Birchington Heritage Trust on Thursday March 28th, at 7.30 in the Village Centre.

Janet Robinson

A life-size photo of a Victorian Sampler hangs on the Museum wall. The original came to us as a result of an email from Susan Blaxland, who is a descendant of the little girl who embroidered the sampler. Sue was bothered about its fate when she was no longer around to look after it, as nobody in her family wanted it.



Ann Hogbin's Sampler Masterpiece

When I asked why she had contacted me, I discovered several amazing facts about this sampler. The first one was it was completed by 12 year-old Ann Hogbin, who attended the Crispe Charity School in Birchington. We don't know when she began this masterpiece, but it was completed just before she left the School to start work in 1847.

The second fact was she lived at the Crispe Charity Farm in Acol and it was her father's rent which funded the School, set up by the Will of Anna Gertruy Crispe in 1708. The next surprise was to discover that Ann's father-in-law had been one of the blacksmiths in the community and is buried in All Saints churchyard. I was also told there was an anvil on his grave. On locating the ivy-covered stone, I hunted in vain for the anvil. On removing the ivy, a carving of a miniature anvil was uncovered.

The rest of Ann's story is in our Museum plus a number of great photos.

Jennie Burgess



Blacksmith's Anvil engraving on Gravestone

My Favourite Museum Item



Pocket Sweetheart

During World War One, the pocket sweetheart would have been kept in the soldier's breast pocket close to his heart, as a precious reminder of the one he loved and had left behind.

I find it sad that this item was found in a box of oddments in an antique shop. I hope that his story had a happy ending and he came home safely to the one he loved.

Gillian Lodge

We can only hope the young man returned home unharmed and he and the young lady in the picture, were able to live a long, healthy and happy life together.

[Editor]

SPREAD THE WORD

Don't keep Birchington's best kept secret to yourselves, spread the word about the Birchington Heritage Trust with your friends, family and neighbours. Perhaps bring them along to one of our events, they may even become members.

We have a fascinating collection of historical articles and pictures about our Village in our Museum. There is a quarterly Newsletter, we have guest speakers who give interesting talks on topics about our area. Also, last but not least we have social evenings.

You may be surprised what you may discover about where you live.

BHT Dates For your Diary

Events for 2019

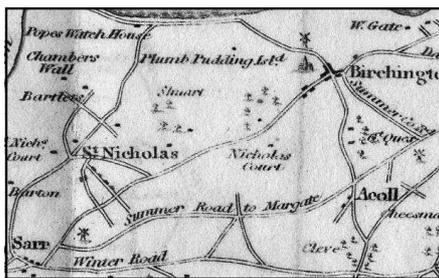
- 28 March Talk 'History of Epple Bay'
Janet & John Robinson
Talk 'History of "Priory Mews"'
Mike Kite
- 25 April 'Quiz Night' with
Ann & Doug Holmes
- 30 May AGM & Short Talks
- 27 June Talk 'Blue Sky Drifter'
Jennie Burgess
Talk 'Quexpo'
Neville Hudson
- 25 July Cockney Night with
Nigel Archer
- 26 September Talk 'Schoolgirl's War (WW2)'
Mary Smith
- 24 October Talk 'Magic Lantern Show'
Dr Jocelyn Marsh
- 28 November Musical Evening with
Colin Bridge

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

BIRCHINGTON'S "SUMMER" ROAD PUZZLE

Map of
Thanet
Roads

C. 1824



We have known for some time that there was a "summer" road from Birchington to Canterbury, because Brooksend Hill was too steep for horse-drawn vehicles to manage in the icy conditions of past winters.

For this reason, I presumed that Brooksend Hill would be known as the "Summer" Road. Yesterday, while searching for another map, I came across an 1824 version of Thanet roads, which clearly shows a "Summer Road". It appears to come from Sarre towards Margate, with a turning off along Park Road into Birchington Square.

For me, this version seems to add to the mystery, rather than clearing it up! Have our readers any ideas which may help to clear up the puzzle?

Jennie Burgess

Birchington's Alphabet

ICE CREAM PARLOUR - This building on the corner of Minnis Road and Surrey Gardens was probably built in about 1933-34. In Kelly's directory of 1935 it was known as 'Electra House'. The following year it had become 'Token House' and was a china and glass shop. The sign over the doorway 'Established 1946' refers to the date it became The Ice Cream Parlour, run originally by Mr. D. Collins. Many residents will remember Stavros Stavri who ran the business for twenty years before retiring in 2004. The building is now a coffee bar and restaurant called 'Smiths'.

ILES JOHN HENRY - Near the lych gate in All Saints churchyard is a memorial to John Henry Iles and his wife Eleanor. He is mainly remembered as the founder of Dreamland in Margate, which he started in 1919 having acquired Lord George Sanger's famous Hall-By-The-Sea. He also acquired the Clifton Baths at Cliftonville turning them into the Lido complex. He was also a great supporter of the brass band movement and instigated the brass band championships. John Iles came to live in Birchington in 1948, and died in May 1951. The memorial in our churchyard was originally a stone seat with an inscription on the backrest. Unfortunately it was damaged and now just the back remains with its emblem of the Worshipful Company of Musicians and is fixed to the churchyard wall.

INGLE CLOSE - The land on which Ingle Close (off Alpha Road) was built was part of a large plot owned by the Neame family. Initially this was connected with 'The Ingle' in Epple Road. The area was gradually divided into smaller plots and the bungalows in the close were built on the late 1950s.

INSTITUTE - The Birchington Institute was the first 'Village Centre'. It started in an existing building behind the shops in The Square, in the area which is now the Albion Road car park. It consisted of a hall with a stage and a gallery, an upstairs room and outhouses. It became the centre for public meetings, concerts, lectures, entertainment, social gathering etc. It had a reading room where newspapers and periodicals could be studied and a library. This hall was used from the early 1870s until 1902 when a new Public Hall was built in Station Road, in the building now used by the Baptist Church. For a while both buildings were used simultaneously, but eventually the old building was sold, the mortgage paid off and the surplus money invested to establish the Birchington Institute Charity Fund for the benefit of the inhabitants of Birchington. The charity was closed in 2002 when the remaining funds were granted to the Crispe Charity.

Janet Robinson