



*Preserving the past for the future*

# Newsletter

Autumn 2021  
Issue 74

www.birchingtonheritage.org.uk & Facebook. Charity No. 1099250

At last we were able to have a group meeting again in 'The Centre' on 30<sup>th</sup> September. We knew a few members were away on a late summer break, others were hampered by the petrol situation, some were unsure whether they should or should not wear masks. In spite of this 35 attended to hear our chairman John Robinson present an illustrated talk 'Our Island'.

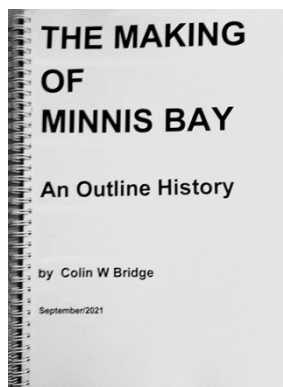
**Future Events Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2021. 'My House ThroughTime' Colin Bridge**

**Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2021. 'Quiz Night' Doug & Ann Holmes. £5 each  
(bring food for your table)**

*(tickets for the Quiz Night will be available at the October meeting)*

One of the problems we had during the long lockdown period, was to find a way of keeping in touch with our members. Those who have provided their email address were able to receive a monthly copy of 'Lockdown News'. Thirteen editions were produced. For those not on the list, copies are available to view in the museum. To see them, just ask those on duty.

**The museum manned opening hours are now back to normal, opening on Monday, Thursday and Saturday mornings. Opening hours: 9.30am – 12.30pm.**



Many of you would have seen the recent exhibition at The Bay Church in Ethelbert Road Minnis Bay. The exhibition was put together by one of our members, Colin Bridge. Colin has turned all this information, with photographs into an A4 size spiral bound booklet. It has 73 pages, many are in colour. We have copies available in the museum for sale at £7.50 each.

During the lockdown period, Janet Denyer has been busy with producing booklets for sale at the museum. In addition, two existing publications have been reformatted. These are 'Dangerous Coastline' and 'Record of War Work' by Major Holland. This rework will save us in reduced printing costs.

\*\*\*\*\*

Our secretary Janet Denyer has received a Minute Ledger and other documents relating to Birchington Cricket Club covering the years 1920-1929. These items have been donated by Mark Heptinstall from Ashford. He came across the items whilst clearing his father's house. He is unaware of any connection his family had with the club. The brown ledger is somewhat fragile, but is elegantly written although very formal. The following are some of the details from it:

*The club was formed on the 13<sup>th</sup> February 1920 at a meeting held at the Institute. Meetings were held in the Square at the New Inn. (now Strawberry Fields).*

*Subscriptions were 5 shillings, those under 18 years 3 shillings.*

*Mr W.H. Walker offered the use of his ground in Minnis Road to the Club.*

*Mr Edmunds said he and the team would make a 12 foot x 10 foot Pavilion.*



This photograph was taken around 1936, and shows Canterbury Road at the top of Brooksend Hill. The sign on the far left says 'Building Land for Sale'. The sign next to it advertises the 'Thanet School of Equitation', a riding academy and guest house. The central building is 'The Welcome Café' which was owned by Frank Young. The white slatted sign in front of this building invites us to sign up for a new house on the newly laid out Garden Estate. The price range starts from £450! As it turned out, WW2 got in the way of this project, as the actual building did not get underway until the mid 1950s. In the 20 year delay, the price for a bungalow on the Garden site shot up to £1665.



Today, the old Welcome café building has been replaced with the popular 'Fishbone Grill'. Houses built in the 1950s now fill the vacant spaces. Currently, the car dealers next to the café is the last business in this stretch of road, it is then open fields, but for how much longer?

Gordon Ward was born in Margate in 1927. In June 1940 he, and his parents, moved to Reading, and on leaving school in 1941 Gordon joined the Great Western Railway, in the goods department. Gordon longed to return to Thanet, and in 1944 managed to get a transfer to Southern Railway, and Birchington. Many years later he related some of his memories to Chris Sandwell, and these were printed in a Margate Historical Society newsletter in summer 2007, where I recently came across them, and obtained permission to reproduce some of them here.



“I started work at Birchington station in October 1944 as a junior porter. There was a staff of eight, the stationmaster, a booking clerk, two signalmen, two senior porters and two junior porters. Being wartime, the station was very busy, both with passengers and goods traffic. Because of petrol rationing farmers had to send their produce to London by train, and the goods yard was supervised by the senior porters.

I got off to a bad start. One morning an elderly lady asked me to help her board the train, which I agreed to do. Having made her comfortable, I was putting her suitcase on the luggage rack when I felt the train moving. I ran to the door, but found the train was moving too fast for me to get off. I had no option but to wait until the train reached Herne Bay, I knew there would be no train back to Birchington for an hour. On my return, as I stepped off the train, I saw the stationmaster waiting for me. I believe he thought I had just gone for a ride, but when I explained what had happened it took the wind out of his sails. In a voice full of frustration, he said “be more careful in future’.

We two junior porters worked different hours, one week I worked from 4.45am to 1pm, and my colleague would work from 3pm to 11pm, and we would alternate. The return fare to Victoria was 19s 11d (99p), but if you could get up in time to travel by the 5am train it was only 7s 6d (37d). This was because the train arrived at Victoria before 8am and was classed as the workmen’s train. Monday to Saturday we had six men that used to travel on this train. One morning I was ten minutes late for work, instead of opening the station at 4.45am I arrived at 4.55am. As I cycled down the slope to the station forecourt, I saw the six men climbing the wall that separated the forecourt from the platform. By the time I had opened the station and got out onto the platform, the train had gone, and so had the men.

One winter’s evening the signalmen phoned to inform me that the paraffin light had gone out on one of the signals. A northerly gale was blowing and it was difficult to stay on ones feet, even on the ground. The thought of climbing the signal ladder did not appeal to me. Having made my way along the trackside, to the exposed area just west of Minnis Bay, I began to ascend the ladder with the wind tearing into me. On reaching the top, I opened the lid of the container, and lifted the lamp out. Climbing up was bad enough, but descending carrying the lamp was even worse. Going up I had both hands free and could grip the ladder, but coming down I only had my left hand and the thumb of my right had to grip with. On reaching the ground, I knelt down and lit the wick. With the lamp burning I now had to ascend the ladder again to replace the lamp in the container. Having got to the top of the ladder the wind blew the flame out! This meant I had to descend again and repeat



the operation. This time I got half way up the ladder and the flame was blown out again. By this time I was becoming desperate, as it was essential that the signal showed its light. I returned to the ground again to relight the wick. I then remembered the old saying "third time lucky" and so it was.



At the western end of Birchington Station there was a side track which led to the goods yard and goods shed. Goods and produce that was outward bound to London was assembled in the goods yard, and incoming items were unloaded into the goods shed, ready to be delivered by a local lorry to the various shops. The goods shed had large double doors at each end and was large enough for a locomotive to enter, these doors opened outwards. Each evening, except Sundays, at 6.00pm a goods train would arrive to take away the wagons that had been loaded during the day. Mondays to Fridays it was a short train, and the goods shed was locked up as it was not needed. But on Saturdays it was always a much longer train of wagons and vans, so the goods shed was left unlocked to allow extra space, and would be locked again after the train had departed.

One particular Saturday I forgot it was a Saturday, and locked the shed at 6.00pm. The train arrived and reversed into the goods yard, and I coupled our waggons to the train. Using my lamp, I signalled to the driver to return to the main line. I can only think that the driver mistook my signal, and instead of moving forward the train moved further into the yard. Then there was an enormous bang. I looked over my shoulder and to my horror saw the waggons entering the shed, and taking the huge doors with them. A few seconds later there was another bang as the doors at the other end of the shed were demolished, and the train came to a stop at the buffers."

Shortly after this incident, in October 1946, Gordon had to leave his job at Birchington Station to do his two years national service, joining the army on the 5<sup>th</sup> December. He never returned to working for the railway, but spent the next 43 years in Margate as a postman, finally retiring in July 1992.

*(Picture of Gordon Ward in his S.R. days courtesy of his family. Picture of Birchington Station in the 1950s from the Birchington Heritage Trust Collection. Thanks to Chris Sandwell). Janet Robinson.*

#### BIRCHINGTON ALPHABET

**Library.** The new library, in Alpha Road, opened on the 19<sup>th</sup> July 1967, at the cost of £38,000, and containing 20,000 books. Before that the first publicly owned library in Birchington opened in 1938 in one of the large old semi-detached houses that stood in Station Road, next to what is now Tandoori Nites restaurant. The ground floor of the building was used by the rates office, and weights and measures departments. The first floor was the library for adults, and the top attic room was for children. The very first 'library' in the village was opened at The Institute' in the Square in 1879, and contained daily, weekly, and county newspapers, and a small collection of books.