



Preserving the past for the future

Newsletter

Spring 2022
Issue 76

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| Future Events | Thursday May 26 th 2022 | 'A Birchington Hero' | John & Janet Robinson |
| | Thursday June 30 th 2022 | 'AGM + 'The Art of Minnis Bay' | Colin Bridge |
| | Thursday July 28 th 2022 | 'Race Night' | Howard Willicome |
| | No Meeting in August | | |

Please Note

We hold our Annual General Meeting on 30th June. Because of Covid we have been operating without the normal procedure of an election of a committee, relying instead on a majority of members requesting us to continue in our present positions. Our last AGM held in the hall was in May 2019. I said then that I would stand as Chairman for one further year. All of the committee agreed to continue in their roles during the Covid crisis. I should add that I have also acted as Programme Secretary, and have produced the last 4 editions of our quarterly Newsletter. I would be willing if elected to continue with the Newsletter, but will stand down as Chairman & Programme Secretary. These positions must be filled for the Trust to continue to run smoothly. Ideally it would suit someone recently retired, wishing to 'give something back' to the community. Remember it's the membership that elects a new committee; it should not be left to the current committee to find their replacements. Help and advice would be given to anybody willing to take over these posts. Feel free to contact me for further information.

John Robinson

THEN & NOW

Janet Robinson

If you travel from Epple Bay, along Sea Road towards Westgate, the first building you come to, past the golf course, is this one, Bay View Manor. It was built in 1994 as two apartments with two bedrooms, and one larger one with five bedrooms.



Bay View Manor

Ray House



It was erected on the site of an older property, Ray House. Ray House was built in the international style in 1933, and had a very distinctive appearance, as can be seen in this photograph.

I don't know who the people in the picture are; they could be local councillors, or neighbours protesting about the proposed demolition. At the time Ray House was built the road in this area was called Sea Drive. It is now considered to be in Westgate, but as the old boundary stone between Westgate and

Birchington is a little further on in the West Bay direction, I think we can claim it as "ours".

The Birchington Medical Centre in Minnis Road opened on 15th March 2002, so has now been running for 20 years. It was built a little further down the road from the previous surgery which was at the junction with Surrey Gardens. (Now Beech Tree Total Care). The new building was erected to accommodate the increasing population, recorded as 9827 in 2001. This figure had risen to 10328 by 2020. Although the surgery has received its fair share of criticism, it's worth reflecting what was on offer in days gone by.

In the 1840s Birchington had no doctor; the nearest one was in Minster 3 miles away. Treatment back then consisted of leeches, used for blood-letting and reducing swellings. This went on until the late 19th century. Hot flannel poultices relieved inflammations and stout was given as a cure-all. Bed rest and 3 meals a day was the standard treatment offered.

In 1906 life expectancy was 45 years. Like to-day, the main cause of death was heart disease. Tuberculosis, diphtheria; typhoid and cholera were also rife among the huddled masses. Cancer back then was not a major cause of death. In the main, it strikes after the age of forty five. The situation improved when a vaccine to protect against Diphtheria was developed in 1913, and another against Whooping Cough a year later. In 1936 a Tetanus vaccine became available. Antibiotics came on the scene in 1928.

Receiving medical treatment had to be paid for. Before 1900 healthcare was mainly provided by charities which were Poor Law Welfare Committees, who operated the Workhouses. From 1900 – 1948 it moved to a mixed economy of Mutual Payment Schemes. Working class families had to pay for treatment, the poorest relied on charity. The emerging middle class struggled to afford treatment; many resorted to folk-law remedies instead.

The National Insurance Act of 1911 did improve the situation by providing access to doctors for general labourers and low paid workers. Further changes to the Act in 1936, meant that half the population were able to receive treatment. The system aimed at protecting the family breadwinner, wives and children were not covered by the scheme. They had to wait until the National Health Service was established in 1948.

Our museum records show we have had a succession of doctors since 1875. Dr Brunton was popular and served the village well, and he found time to administer a hospital for sick children in St. Nicholas. In the 1950s we had 3 excellent doctors, each with their own premises caring for 5000 people. They were Dr Denis Merritt, Dr Alan Bowie and Dr Wolsey Sloan. In the 1960s they decided to combine resources and set up in Surrey Gardens. Dr John Hayden relieved the pressure when he set up his own practice in Eastfield Road in 1987. He ran it for 13 years. His 1600 patients transferred to the Surrey Road Surgery before the new Birchington Medical Centre opened in 2002. Eagle Vets now occupy Dr Hayden's former Surgery.



The old surgery in Eastfield Road



The old surgery in Surrey Gardens

- Barrie & Alan Lawson have donated an oil painting by David Burley, which has a view of his back garden in ‘Beaconsfield’ Alpha Road.
- Sarah & Stuart Horner have kindly given us an early watercolour of a self-portrait by David Burley. The colours are vibrant, but it suffers from some ‘foxing’ due to its age.
- Colin Simmonds of East Sussex, a lifelong collector of Whitbread tokens, has given us copies of Whitbread Pub Insignia Maps. These were painted by David Burley and then reproduced for distribution within Whitbread’s pubs. Colin had these specially reproduced for us from the metal originals he holds, which are of East and West Kent. They are highly coloured and detailed, measuring 81cm x 71cm and were a form of advertising dating from 1947. Whitbread Pubs would display the relevant area map in each pub, and hold metal tokens (5cm x 8cm) of that particular pub sign, which would be given away. We have been given some original metal examples from Kentish pubs and also a card version for ‘The Queens Head’ which was in ‘The Square’.



WHITBREAD INN-SIGNIA MAP –EAST KENT



MINIATURE TOKEN ‘QUEENS HEAD’
BIRCHINGTON

- We are indebted to Zina Saunders for the continued supply of postcard images she has found for us, all named and dated. Although some may be duplicates, each has some distinction either in quality or of a more specific date from the postmark. Her deltiologist friend Jerry, has also discovered more Birchington images for us, and they all provide a huge amount of information which is an invaluable resource for our archives.
- Edward Kirk of Austin in Texas, contacted us about the Kindergarten at Queen Bertha’s School. His father was in the USAF at Manston and the family lived off base in Epple Bay Road. At the time he was six (1950) and there were three other boys in his class. He believes his interest in art stemmed from those early years from the guidance of the headmistress and his form teacher, as he followed a career as a sculptor and artist.

We sent him a group photo of the teachers, also inside views of the school, and put him in touch with the Queen Bertha’s Reunion Group. He intends to visit Birchington this year with his family to see the extent of information we hold in our archives.

- * Colin Hoare in Canada, whose family have many connections with Birchington, is kindly donating photographs in his possession that came from his father.

This was the headline in the *Daily Mirror* on 29th January 1948.

Eighteen year old Katherine Keefe set out to walk along the shore from Westgate to Birchington, but became trapped by the tide. As the water rose she climbed onto a high rock, took off her jacket, shoes, stockings and scarf and tucked them into a crevice in the cliff.

For the next hour she half swam and waded along the foot of the cliffs until by the time she approached Epple Bay she was marooned with icy waters up to her shoulders. With only her head visible, Katherine's cries for help were heard by two men working on a house on the opposite side of the cliff top road.

They knotted several pieces of rope together and lowered one end to Katherine who tied it round her waist. Gradually she and her rescuers edged round the cliff until they reached the safety of Epple Bay where she was carried from the water badly bruised and suffering from shock and exposure, so was taken to hospital.

Police later recovered Katherine's belongings from the crevice – a half mile from where she was rescued. Katherine, who lived in Romford, had been visiting her old school, Les Oiseaux Convent School Westgate.

Six Children Marooned by Tide

From The Thanet Advertiser April 1937.

Before Grenham Bay promenade was built in the late 1970s the sands and cliffs were a popular adventure playground, but a day on the beach in April 1937 ended in high drama for six local children, when they were cut off by the tide and marooned in a cave on the cliff face.

The five boys and a girl aged between 9 and 11 were playing on the sands when they spotted the cave above a ledge and climbed into it. It was sometime before they reappeared, only to discover the tide was lapping the base of the cliffs.

Their shouts for help were eventually heard by a passer-by who informed Mrs Brown, wife of police sergeant Brown of Birchington. Mrs Brown telephoned Margate Police Station, and Inspector Freeborn, two sergeants and a constable dashed to the scene in a police car.

In the meantime PC Collier of Birchington had been informed of the children's plight and rushing to the foreshore signalled to two men cruising of Minnis Bay in a motor boat. The constable and the men rescued the children from the ledge, wading ashore with them at Grenham Gap. There was three feet of water at the base of the cliff when the rescue was effected. *Luckily for both of these stories, cries for help were heard and acted upon. In another set of circumstances both could have ended in tragedy.*

I do like happy endings!



Epple Bay shown here with Point Cottages



Epple Bay before the promenade was built