



BIRCHINGTON HERITAGE TRUST

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Preserving the past for the future

Newsletter

Winter 2022/23

Issue 79

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

Forthcoming Events:

Thursday 23 February 2023 - Riding the Wall of Death with Felicity Stafford

Thursday 30 March 2023 - Quiz night with Ann and Doug Holmes

Welcome to the first Newsletter of 2023. In this issue, we read about the bells of All Saints Church and there's an amusing story about "the car in Whitcombe's garden" plus a piece about the late actor Carl Conway, who lived in Birchington in the 1950's and 1960's. Thanks to our contributors.

Looking ahead, the Coronation of King Charles III takes place in May, almost 70 years since his mother, the late Queen Elizabeth II was crowned. If anyone has any memories of that occasion do get in touch as I would like to include some in the next edition.

On a more general note, I'm thinking of including a regular item called "memorable moments" so if you have any relating to your life in Birchington that you would like to share please contact me. If I have enough, I'll include them in future editions.

Details of our next event are shown opposite (right). Please come along and support us.

Reminders:

- Subscriptions are due on 1 May 2023
- The Trust's Annual General Meeting is on 29 June 2023. This will be an opportunity to discuss museum issues and to elect your committee for the following year
- If you have any spare time and would like to join the committee, do research or volunteer at the museum (Mornings on Mondays, Thursdays or Saturdays) please call in and see us
- Ideas and articles for future editions of the newsletter welcome



Birchington Heritage Trust

Reg. Charity No.1099250



An illustrated talk by Felicity Stafford

Thursday 23rd February 2023
7.30pm

'The Centre' Alpha Road

Visitors are Welcome By
Suggested Donation

The Bar Will Be Open

Rod Giddins
Editor & Publicity Officer

The Bells of All Saints Church

All Saints Church dates from early Norman times. The stone one we see today was erected soon after William the Conqueror swept across southern England. This church stood until around 1250 when the Chancel was rebuilt. The south chapel & tower were then added. The owners of Quex Park built their own chapel on the north side and this still belongs to them. The Black Death did delay further work for a while, but the addition of a spire was added to the old tower and a weather vane was incorporated in 1679.

The bells were first recorded in 1532 when there were two bells, one big and one small (since replaced). In 1633 another was added, and in 1662 two more. A sixth was added to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887. The octave was completed in 1902 by Churchwarden Mr C.E. Mathews who provided two new treble bells in memory of his wife.

All eight bells were removed in November 1955 for recasting, thus enabling repairs to be carried out in the belfry. The oldest of the existing bells was cast in 1633 by a craftsman named Joseph Hatch. This bell is the second largest. Three more were added in 1728 and two years later Samuel Knight cast the tenor bell, which was the largest. These five bells have been recast before, but the three most recent editions, originally cast 1901/2 were being recast for the first time.

The photograph below shows the bells being loaded onto a lorry outside the Powell Arms for this work to be done at a London foundry. It would take three weeks to re-hang the bells on a new metal frame which would replace the rotting wooden frame. Parts of the belfry were infested with death watch beetle, so this would need to be addressed by spraying. The whole work of reconstruction in the tower was expected to cost £2500. The bells were ringing again nine months later, after a ceremony of re-dedication carried out by the Archdeacon of Canterbury, the Venerable A. Sargent. The service was conducted by the Vicar, the Rev. Christopher W. Donaldson. The other photograph appears to show the annual May Queen event, with the church appeal for the £2500 clearly visible behind the vicar.



Bells were rung in former times not only to summon folk to church, but on special occasions to mark historical events. In pre-Reformation times, bells were rung at the time of storms. Superstition said bells had the power to disperse tempests. They rang when Royalty landed or departed from Margate or lodged at Quex, and to mark the births of princes or princesses, victories and other celebrations. They were always rung on November 5th to celebrate the failure of the gunpowder plot.

Two of the bells weigh 4 cwt (448lbs or 203kg), two weigh 4.5 cwt (504lbs or 228kg), two weigh 5.5 cwt (616lbs or 279kg), one weighs 7 cwt (784lbs or 355kg) and one weighs 9 cwt (1008lbs or 457kg).

Bell information: from Alfred Walker's 'A Guide to the Parish Church of All Saints Birchington'. Church history: from Jennie Burgess.

John Robinson

The Car in Whitcombe's Garden

This story is based on an article written for the much-missed Margate Historical Society. Its author was Stan Reed, for many years a policeman with the Margate Borough Force.

If you walk from Epple Bay along Epple Bay Avenue in the direction of Colemans Stairs, the last house on the right as you get to the electric gates is Smugglers Top.



Its previous name was St. Audries, and at the time of this story, 1957, it was occupied by Phillip Whitcombe and his mother. A little research establishes that Phillip was born in 1900 in Kensington, and his father and grandfather were both physicians and surgeons. He was definitely living at this address by 1939 as it is mentioned in a report of a court case, where it stated that he had qualified as a chartered accountant, but being of independent means he was not working, and

had a drink problem which was being dealt with. This was why he was known to the local police.

Stan Reed wrote: - "I must now introduce the main character, Phillip Whitcombe, who was always known as 'Old Whitcombe'. He was a middle-aged bachelor of portly build and untidy appearance, although he invariably wore a MCC tie. He was obviously an educated man as he spoke with a cultured accent. During the summer months Whitcombe wore, in addition to his conspicuous tie, an old Panama hat, and always had with him his dog 'Bumbles', a nondescript, small white rough coated bitch, secured by a piece of string, never a lead. It was generally considered that he was a minor black sheep of his family, who received an allowance to remain well out of the way, domiciled in Birchington."

"The bungalow, St. Audries', in 1957 had a wide front garden screened from the road by a tall euonymus hedge, behind which several large shrubs and two mountain ash trees grew. The incident in question took place one night after midnight in the summer of 1957. I took an emergency call that night on the 999 system from 'Old Whitcombe' who said, as far as I can recall, "Whitcombe here, some b***** fool has driven his car into my front garden, tried to turn round, and has got himself bogged down in the middle of my shrubbery. He was making one hell of a noise, now he has given up and got into the back of the car with a woman, but I just couldn't tell you over this line what they are doing." He thought that the car must belong to an American judging by the size of it. He was told to stay indoors, and the police would attend directly."

When the police arrived, they found a large American car, a Dodge, with large cow horns attached to the ornate chromium front grill. Its front end was lodged against a tree and its rear end jammed tight into a large shrub. The headlamps were full on, lighting up the mess that had once been Whitcombe's garden, but the engine had been turned off. And there in the wide back seat, in a state of some undress lay a young woman, who, according to the police officers report, "appeared to be all legs and to have passed out, obviously through drink judging by the reek of liquor. And in the other corner of the long back seat was a young man minus his trousers, and also temporarily out of this world."

The USAF Air Police were contacted, and a jeep immediately dispatched to deal with the American (a Master Sergeant) in the car. The young woman, who shall remain nameless, was local and when she came to was shattered when she realised just what had happened, and the police now in attendance, and quickly made herself decent. The next morning personnel arrived from Manston with a mobile crane which lifted the Dodge from the shambles of the garden. In due course Whitcombe was recompensed, and his front garden was professionally reconstituted, and all at the Master Sergeant's expense.

Janet Robinson

The Actor, Carl Conway

We have recently received some material about the actor Carl Conway, whose real name was Basil Sisman. He lived in Alfred Road, Birchington for a time in the late 1950's and early 1960's.

Born in Ramsgate on 6 February 1922, he died in Dover four days after his 95th birthday, on 10 February 2017. Educated at St Lawrence College and, after finishing there, he became an actor, working in local repertory companies. He appeared in a number of television plays and films as well as advertisements.



Mr Conway played alongside Charlie Chaplin in *A King In New York* and appeared in many other films including *The Great Van Robbery*, *Idle on Parade*, *Nudist Paradise* and *The Safecracker*. Television work included *Doctor Who* in 1966 and 1970, *BBC Sunday-Night Theatre*, *Man from Interpol*, *The Saint* and *Z Cars*.

Mr Conway joined Radio Caroline at its launch in March 1964 but did not care for life at sea so was mainly heard on advertisements and interviews recorded on dry land. He continued voice-over work for documentaries after Radio Caroline closed. Closer to home, during the 1980's, he presented a programme of big band music on Kent's Invicta Radio. He continued to keep busy organising films in residential homes for the elderly and in community centres, until he could no longer do this due to ill health.

If anyone has additional material about Carl Conway and his time in Birchington please get in touch.
