



Birchington Heritage Trust

Reg. Charity No.1099250

LOCKDOWN NEWS SHEET

OCTOBER

All the images you see here are in the central area of Birchington. Can you pinpoint their exact locations?
Answers can be found in the other attached PDF file.



ANSWERS TO PICTURE QUIZ.

- 1 **Blue Mondays, 30 Station Road.**
- 2 **Phoenix Upholstery, 17 Station Road.** (the sign dates from the days this was a butcher's shop).
- 3 **First house on Minnis Road, after Minnis Bay Fish and Chips.**
- 4 **Rossetti monument in Sandals Road Gardens.** (by the wine bar)
- 5 **Plaque on the church wall, by pelican crossing, Canterbury Road.**
- 6 **On the wall of The Centre, to the right of the entrance doors.**

FRANK HORVATH continued.

Following my article in the September newsletter I received an email from one of our members, James Brazier. I have his permission to include it here, as long as I make it clear that his father did not intend to condemn Dr. Horvath's flat

"I remember Frank Horvath very well indeed. On one occasion, I was with my father in Market Street, (probably in the mid-1950s) when Dr. Horvath – as my father always called him – invited my father and me to go up into his flat above the shop to be shown some of his handiwork.

My father, at the time, was Margate Borough Council's Chief Sanitary Inspector and was responsible, *inter alia*, for condemning homes as being unfit for human habitation. I suspect that is how my father got to know Dr. Horvath.

Anyway, he took us up a flight of rickety stairs into the flat above, where he proudly showed my father the new floor he had installed, made of concrete reinforced by metal bedsteads. I shall never forget it. The floor was most uneven and must have weighed a ton. How the building took that weight - and presumably – still takes it, is beyond me."

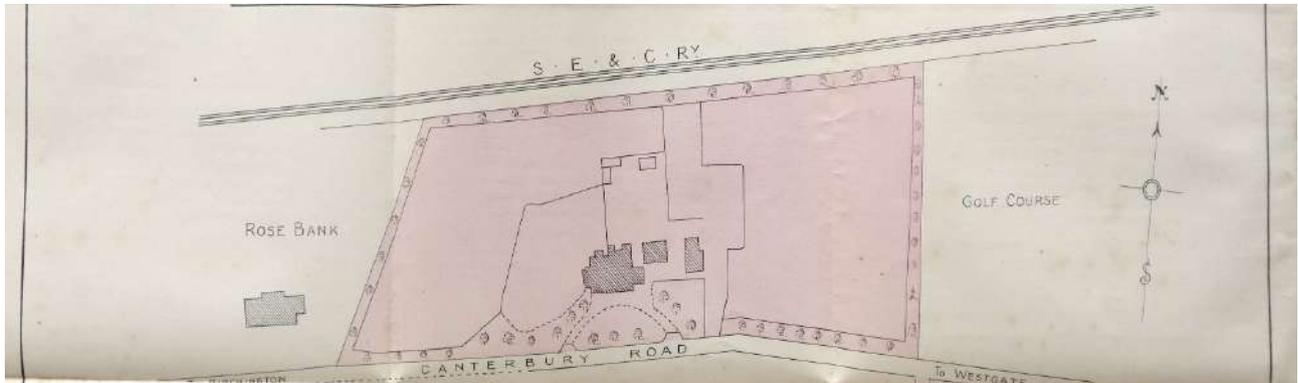
James also sent me an image of a cast bronze medal he purchased many years ago, awarded to Czechoslovakians in exile.



ROSE BANK AND FERNLEIGH

Rose Bank and Fernleigh were two large houses, built c1880 on the land now occupied by the Queen Bertha estate, on Canterbury Road.

The plot is shown on this plan from 1920. It was on the border of Westgate, next to the golf course, and stretched from the main road back to the railway line.



ROSE BANK.

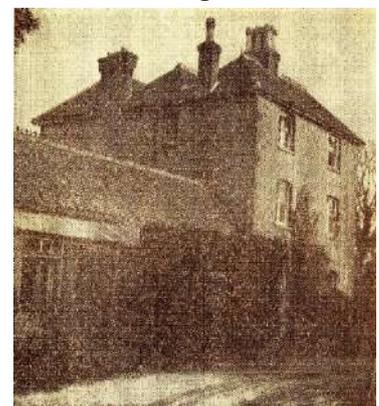
This was the smaller of the two properties, and was the home for many years of Cecil Theodore Weld-Forester, (1842-1917). As a young man he was a Lieutenant in the Royal Horse Guards. In 1874 he was elected to the House of Commons for Wenlock. In 1894 he succeeded his father as fifth Baron Forester, and entered the House of Lords. With the title came the peculiar privilege, granted by Henry V111, of having the right to wear his hat in the presence of the King. He became a Deputy Lieutenant and JP for Shropshire.

Rose Bank was one of at least four properties owned by the Baron. The 1891 census shows him at the property with his wife, six children, a cook, a maid, a housemaid, and a butler. He became a JP for Kent in 1890.



He died in November 1917, and his death announcement in the Pall Mall Gazette lists his homes as being Willey Park, Bresley; Dothill Park, Wellington, Salop; and Rose Bank, Birchington, Kent. He left an estate of £73,141 – worth over 5 million today. His wife, Lady Emma Georgina Forester died in 1922.

The family don't seem to have involved themselves in Birchington life. They preferred the more 'up-market' Westgate. In 1923 a stained-glass window in their memory was presented to St. Saviours, Westgate, and can be seen in the north aisle.



Queen Bertha's annexe (formerly Rosebank)

After the death of the Dowager Lady Forester, Rose Bank was sold, and by 1924 it had been renamed 'Birchington House' and was being run as a boy's preparatory school. This continued until c1935, when it is no longer mentioned. It is believed that it was at this time the building was purchased by Queen Bertha's girls' school, next door, to be used as an annex.

FERNLEIGH

Fernleigh was the home of Robert Grant and his family. Robert was born in Elgin, Scotland in 1834. He moved to London where he became a merchant shipowner. His wife, Elizabeth was born in Calcutta, East Indies. They had no children of their own, but adopted a nephew and three nieces when their parents both died, while the children were still very young.



Robert and his wife had a London home, Moss Grange, Sydenham Hill, and for forty years was the leaseholder of Muckerach Lodge and shootings, near Grantown in Scotland. After retiring from his business Fernleigh seemed to become his main home.

Robert was very interested in local education, and became a member of the Technical Education Committee of the KCC. He was also a County Councillor for Thanet, and a JP, a member of the Roads and Bridges Committee and president of Birchington and Minster Conservative Association.

Elizabeth Grant died in May 1905, and was buried at All Saints, Birchington. In her memory Robert presented the village with a drinking fountain. This stood in the centre of The Square, with a gas lamp on top, and a horse trough on either side. A dedication service took place in June 1909. Just as some of the locals had predicted, it was in the way of traffic, and four years later it was moved to the area in front of the Powell Arms. In the mid-1920s it was moved again to outside the Queen's Head Hotel, where it still stands today. The two flower beds on either side were added at a later date.



On the 8th December 1919, Robert Grant spent the morning at court, in his role as a JP, went home for his lunch, and dropped down dead. He was 86 years old. He left a personal estate worth nearly 7 million pounds in today's money. He was also buried at All Saints Birchington. Unfortunately, the Grant graves are buried under thick brambles, ivy and saplings and could not be photographed.



Fernleigh now came on the market, and I purchased a copy of the original sales brochure at a collector's fair in Margate. It contained the plan shown at the beginning of this article, and detailed particulars of the house. There were eleven bedrooms, two bathrooms, five ground floor reception rooms, stabling and garage (each with living rooms over), and five conservatories. There was also a dairy, piggeries and outbuildings.

The pleasure gardens were beautifully laid out and comprised – tennis lawns, flower beds, shrubberies, fruit and vegetable gardens, and two meadows. The whole estate covered an area of nearly seven acres. A copy of this brochure is in the museum if you wanted to see it.

The auction took place on Thursday 26th August, 1920, at The Sea View Hotel, Birchington. It was purchased by a Mr. Brice. I haven't been able to find out anything about this gentleman, but he didn't live at Fernleigh for long, as in 1929 it changed hands again.



Two ladies, Catherine Hunt L.R.A.M, and Gertrude Randall-Harris, B.A. went into partnership, purchasing the property and turning it into a school – Queen Bertha's Boarding And Day School For Girls. In 1935, Rose Bank was purchased as an extension to the school.

This picture shows Miss Hunt with some of the younger scholars.

The school closed in 1959. The two properties were demolished, and the new Queen Bertha Avenue estate was built. We have a lot of information on the school in the museum files. All that is left to remind us of Rose Bank

and Fernleigh is the grave of Robert Grant in our churchyard, and the water fountain in The Square. Have a good look at it the next time you are waiting for the Canterbury bus.

P.S. A last little bit of useless information for you. Miss Hunt had a sister, Martita Hunt, a theatre and film actress. She is best remembered for her performance as Miss Havisham in David Leans film version of Great Expectations.

Janet Robinson.

