



THE BIRCHINGTON BUNGALOWS

Written by Florence Lumley in c. 1910 – edited by Jennie Burgess (2016)

Birchington-on-Sea is surely unique in the possession of some twenty houses lying mainly on the east side of the village – their gardens running to the edge of the cliff. These owners or occupiers are all well-known London folk and, in many cases, celebrities. Art, music, drama, the Law, literature, poetry, the Church, the City and commerce all have their representatives in this quite unusual seaside resort, where bathing machines are dispensed with and there is no esplanade, no promenade, and no band.

A bungalow, nowadays, is built on one floor, and should have a veranda round it – but the Birchington ones have many variations, their chief point in common being the absence of stairs, yet a few of these ‘bungalows’ have an upper floor, yet still can claim the title.



Rossetti's grave



'Westcliff' - the bungalow loaned to Rossetti in 1882

Not very far from the rather unattractive railway station and the wooden Bungalow Hotel, which bears the bungalow motto **“NO STAIRS”** on one side, lies the famous bungalow, the most correct of all, named after its former occupant, the late Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and now the property of Mr O'Hagan. Rossetti lies buried in the village churchyard around All Saints, quite close to the church door.

Beyond the Rossetti Bungalow, at the end of the road, stands Carmel Court, reported to be a replica of a villa on or near Mount Carmel in Israel, and this is owned by the Bentwich family, all clever and notably musical (one daughter is engaged to Mischa Elman, the marvellous young violinist) and great friends of the wonderful boy, Max Darewski, and his family.

Opposite to Carmel Court (a comparatively recent erection in 1900), stands the first of the remarkable row of houses to which the place first owed its fast growing reputation and popularity. This is a fairly large house, formed of two bungalows connected by a very fine glass-roofed room, in which a full-sized billiard table seems quite a small affair – and this house, lately the property of Lord and Lady Decies, of “cattery” fame, was formerly owned by one of the best and kindest of men, Major William Morrison Bell, whose name will long be remembered in the village. Until recently, its old names **“THOR”** and **“HAUN”** were carved on the stone gate-posts, but the place was known as Beresford

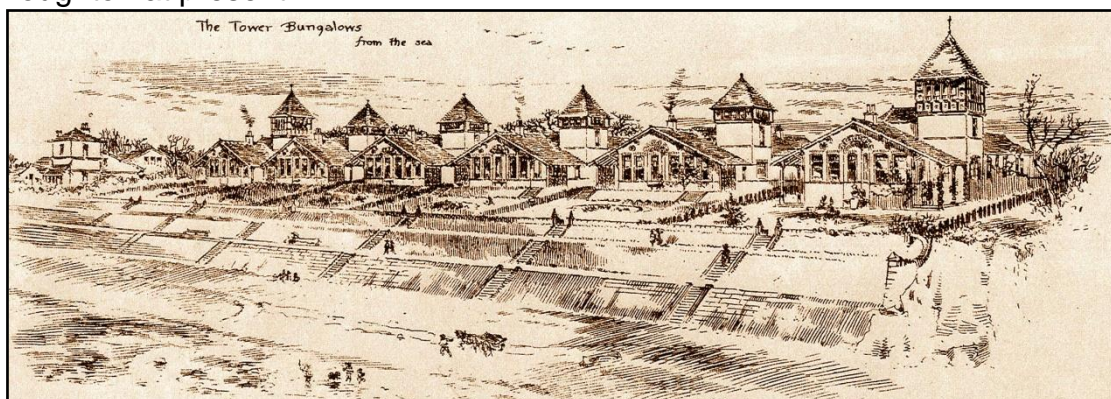
Lodge during Lord Decies fairly short tenure. Fortunately, recent negotiations for the conversion of this property into a hotel came to nothing, but a libel case arose out of them.

“**Mirimar**”, the next house in the row, has just been purchased by a member of the Trafford family. “**Ingoldsby**”, next door, belongs to one of the oldest residents in the place – Mr Matthews – a highly successful merchant in former days and builder of many of these new properties. Then comes “**The Hut**”, [later renamed “**Fair Outlook**”] and “**Dilkoosha**”, sister bungalows, two of the earliest built here, and occupied respectively by the Master of the Supreme Court and Mrs John Wood, the celebrated comedienne and former owner of the Court Theatre, whose garden is her pride and the joy of all beholders.

A well known figure in the commercial world is now the proprietor of the next house to “**Dilkoosha**”. The next property was given the name of “**Llanedern**” which has now been altered to “**Grenham Court**” and the house considerably enlarged. It was here in former days that the late J. L. Toole so astonished the then owner, who was rather a recluse. Upon hearing that the gentleman received no one, the irrepressible comedian immediately presented himself as ‘in quest of apartments’ - to be told, of course, that the house was not to let. ‘Oh never mind, sir,’ airily answered Toole, ‘When you know me better, I daresay you will give me this bungalow.’

Next we come a set of three known collectively as the “**Tower Bungalows**”. (**Note**: this was incorrect) These are built nearer the sea, and have each a stable or annex between a private drive and the main roadway of Spenser Road. These stables are noticeable by a curious set of panels running round them, decorated with sgraffiti, designed by the sculptor, Sir George Frampton. The largest of the four houses “**Sea Tower Bungalow**” has frequently been occupied during recent summers by Mr and Mrs John Gatti and their family.

The second, “**Tresco**”, belongs to the widow of the late Bishop of Gloucester, who died here in 1905 and whose grave lies not far from that of Rossetti’s. Here again is a strong musical element, Mrs Ellicott’s daughter being a singer and composer of considerable merit. “**White Cliff**”, the third bungalow, is owned by the famous London artist Solomon J. Solomon, who has a wonderfully situated studio built into the cliff at the end of his garden, designed by his brother-in-law, Delissa Joseph [who was also the architect of Carmel Court]. A better light no artist could desire, for it is stated that the bungalows directly face the North Pole, which could be distinctly seen, were it not quite so far away. The last of the four, “**Delmonte**”, is occupied by Boydell Houghton at present.

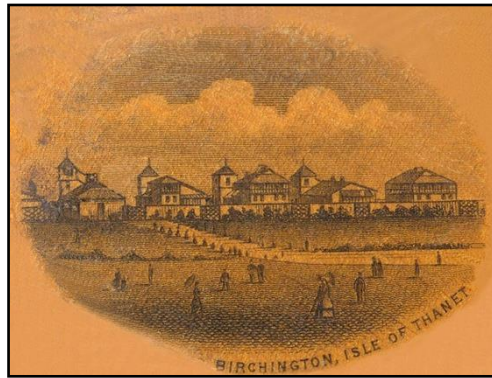


Raffles idea of the Tower Bungalow development in c. 1875

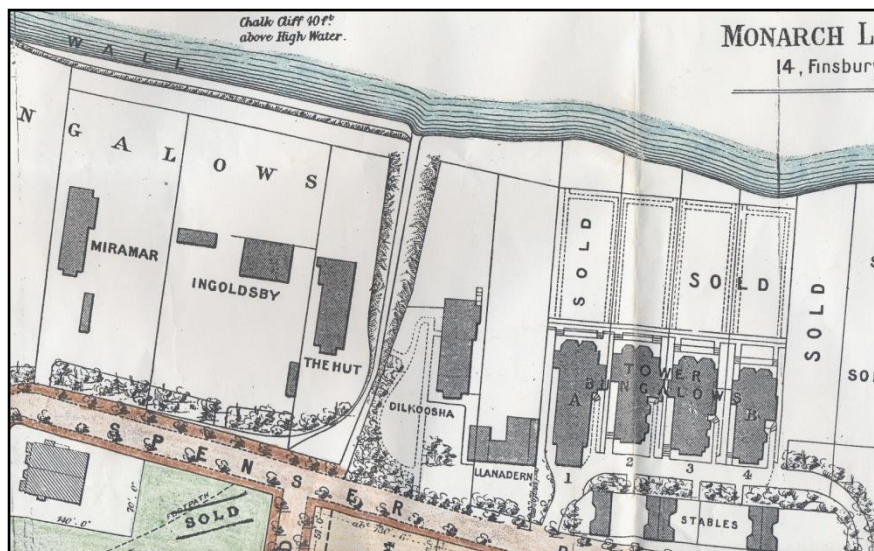
[A fifth Tower Bungalow was planned and its stable built, but the bungalow was never erected.] There is one last and very small bungalow, called “**Cliff-side**”, which abuts the gap known as Colman’s Stairs, leading down to the shore. This property also belongs to London folk, and at one time was occupied by Mr C. Haddon Chambers, the dramatist. Facing this is “**Orion**”, formerly owned by Sir Charles Gill Q.C, and close by is the “**Wigwam**”, recently built by J. B. Mulholland, of the King’s Theatre, Hammersmith.

The nearest house to these has just been named Berse, which is thought to be an early form of the word Birchington. [NB: This property was demolished in the late 1950s and a new bungalow built on the site, under the same name].

The nomenclature of these charming houses deserves a chapter to itself; each has its special significance, and the Birchington ‘bungalows’ are almost as famous as the ‘Reculvers’, which Ingoldsby called ‘The Birchington Brothers’.



From a paper knife (1880)



Tower Bungalows - 1925