

BIRCHINGTON 1900 -1910

By 1900, the population had grown to about 1300-1400, from only just over 800 before the advent of the railway in 1863. By 1911 the numbers had risen to 2275 and the resort ranked 102nd in the 'Seaside Resorts Table' on the East and West coasts.

The newly formed Parish Council had finally arranged for a lamp to lighten up the Square just before the turn of the century. There was next much discussion about the installation of a fountain and horse troughs to be fitted in the Square. Many people approved, but there were two men, Pointer and Pemble, who were sure it would cause problems with the traffic flow. It was eventually installed in 1909 by Alderman Grant, in memory of his wife - and from its original position in the centre of the Square it has been moved twice since then, proving how right those two farsighted men were!

A Public Hall was built and opened in Station Road in 1902. Mrs Gray of Birchington Hall performed the opening ceremony. This building was the second 'Village Centre' of its time, the first one being the Institute, which lay at the rear of the shops on the north side of the Square. The Public Hall became a cinema after the First World War and a private Club in the 1960s-1980s. It is now an independent church.

The Bungalow Hotel, next door to the station had been built in the early 1870s, but in 1905 the Minnis Bay Hotel was erected at the eastern end of the bay. All the old farmland belonging to Lower Gore End Farm was sold off for building plots, with a brickworks being established just north of the railway bridge over the Minnis Road. There were two other brickworks, one in Park Lane and one at Epple Bay.

All the activity at the Bay generated enough people for the Wilshire family, who lived in one end of old Lower Gore End farmhouse, to build a small Post Office and General Store with a Bakery underneath. This opened in 1903.

Up in the village, the first Telegraph Office opened in c. 1900 at Ivy House, in Church Street just below the Square.

The Roman Catholic community had been served by a priest who took services in the Village Institute on a Sunday, but by 1908, they had acquired an old cart shed in land beside the Malt Houses in Minnis Road. They converted this into a small church, which served them for many years, until the American airmen from Manston helped them rebuild it between 1950-60.

Woodford House School in Station Road had been in the village since 1892, but in 1910, Grenham House School was built next to the Bungalow Hotel. It had begun at Minnis Bay in some of the newly built three-storey terraced houses in c. 1900, but the new building was purpose built with its own playing fields.