

BIRCHINGTON SCHOOLS

There appears to have been a school in Birchington ever since 1709, and perhaps even before that, there may have been a small school or dame school for local children.

In her will of 1708, Mrs Anna Gertruy Crispe of Quex left 47 acres of farmland, now known as the Crispe Farm. She directed that the income from this should be used to improve the lot of poor widows and for education. After certain payments annually to widows and the church verger (or cleaner in the first instance, a lady called Ellen Window), the residue of the income was to be used to maintain a school "for 12 children under an able Dame or School Master". As a result, the Crispe Charity School came into existence and remained so for well over 100 years. The first "Schoolmaster" was Elinor Jarvis, who was paid £6 a year. Gilbert Stringer, who died in 1832, and whose tombstone is at the eastern end of the churchyard, was Master of the Charity School for 33 years. In 1827 he received £36 15s 0d for the teaching of "12 children agreeable to the will of Anna Gertruy Crispe."

In 1845, land in Park Lane Birchington was conveyed from John Powell Powell of Quex Park to the Vicar and Churchwardens for the building of a school. The school was built and the trustees appointed by the Charity Commissioners. This school was the oldest building that used to stand on the site in Park Lane. There is just one good photograph of this building now, but the archives still hold the plans of the old building.

In 1862, the Master of the Rolls approved a Scheme for the regulation of the Crispe Charity, so that the Trustees could pay up to £50 a year towards the maintenance of the National School now sited in Park Lane, and for a time, the Trustees also maintained their own school for the Infants only. The Crispe Charity School finally closed about 1868-9

With the passing of the Elementary Education Act of 1871, the School Managers considered that a few alterations would be sufficient to render the school efficient. The Vestry agreed to place the school in a proper state of efficiency to enable the Managers to meet the Government requirements and it was "agreed to make the present school equal to the school accommodation required by the Government. To obtain funds for that purpose a voluntary rate of 2 pence in the pound was to be levied on the owners and occupiers and be forthwith made and collected."

Later in the year (1872) the vestry Meeting in the Powell Arms agreed to the above, "provided the present Trustees (at that time) shall share their Trust with the representatives of the Parish."

The rate was never raised, but £250 was raised by voluntary subscriptions and the school was enlarged. At this time there was a mixed school on the site. [The building has now been demolished. It stood on the site of the present-day Staff Car Park. - Nov. 2005]. The present old school with its main room and the house adjoining was the Schoolmaster's residence. The Infant School was held in the Institute behind the shops on the north side of Birchington Square. This was financed by the Crispe Charity funds. A few other minor enlargements were made to the old building in Park Lane up to about 1890.

In 1892, the Infant School moved to the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Albion Road, which in c. 1948 was bought by Col. Taplin and used for his Birchington Engineering Works. The Chapel had been bought from the Primitive Methodists by Mrs Susan Gray of Birchington Hall (later to become Spurgeon's Homes and now the Birch Hill estate) and granted to the School Managers for a peppercorn rent of 1/- a year. The Crispe Charity still supported the two schools at this period.

In 1902, on land conveyed voluntarily by Mr Percy N Powell-Cotton of Quex to the Vicar and Churchwardens, a Girls' School was to be built. This building was directly behind the old school of 1845-9.

In 1913, plans were drawn up for the new Infant School, but because of the First World War, this was deferred until 1926. It followed much of the original plans, but was sited further back than the original plans stated. There were now three buildings on the site - three schools, with three Head Teachers - all Church Schools under the control of the K E C. [Mr A T Walker became Headmaster of the Boys' School here in 1932 and I think he remained here until just before the war.]

In 1935, when the Borough of Margate decided to extend its boundaries to include Westgate and Birchington (much to the opposition of both these communities) the schools were transferred to the Margate education Committee - a Part III Authority.

In 1938, the Borough Education Committee reorganised the schools of the borough in accordance with the Haddow (?) Report and Birchington C of E Schools became a C of E Junior Mixed and Infant School under one Head Teacher. During the period of evacuation from June 1940 to 1943-44 during WW 2, when there were no official schools in Margate, Birchington School was used as part of the Vicar's School, which began in Church House. This accommodated children whose parents had refused to let them be evacuated to Staffordshire, or who were too young to go in 1940.

With the 1944 Education Act, the Birchington C of E School went back into the care of the K E C, with the disappearance of the Part III Authorities.