

The story of a village over half a century

Changes in Birchington from 50 years ago -1976

Most people are familiar with the Birchington of 1976, but how does it compare with the village that existed in the 1920's?

With the help of local historian Mr. Alfred Walker, of Epple Bay Road, Birchington, it has been possible to piece together a picture of the former Birchington which existed in the trader's early days.

Many of the roads were unmade – except for Station Road, Canterbury Road and Park Lane – and a large number of the houses at Minnis Bay were unoccupied during the winter.

Birchington had its own Parish Council and was a quiet village until it was taken over by Margate in 1935. The village council had few powers – such as house refuse collection, pleasure grounds and street lighting as it does now..

There were no public conveniences, except at “The Bay.” The Birchington Improvement Company ran the foreshore, which was owned by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Roads were not made up until a main drainage scheme was carried out. In the 1920-30s

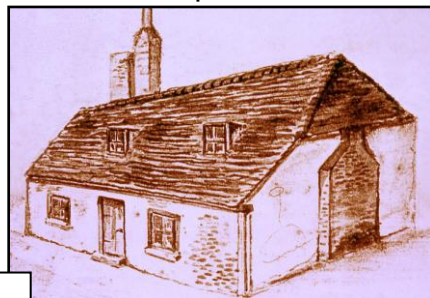
There was considerable unemployment in the country and some South Wales miners were employed to do the work of installing main drainage. Until then all the houses had cesspools often situated near their wells..

Postal services were extremely good and Birchington had its own post mark. The Beresford cliffs were arable until purchased by the parish. Station Road was very quiet. Where there are now supermarkets, there were boarding houses. A doctor lived next door to the Sea View Hotel. The Wayside Café was a charming place, known for the wooden gaily painted swinging parrots in the garden at the front. **Woolworth's** and the **Midland Bank** are now in its place. The Co-op and Central Garage were not built.

Barrows' shop site was occupied by a thatched cottage where a Birchington “shrimper” lived. There were cottages where now are Hayward's Shoe shop now stand, the Westminster Bank, and Sylvesters. One of the cottages was occupied by Roy Cook – the sweep – who wore a top hat and who also ran a fish and chip bar at the back of his cottage. The Post Office was also a fancy goods shop. The Smugglers had no connection with smuggling – it was the Neame family's Farmhouse and was called ‘Evergreen’.

Barns belonging to their farm occupied the land which now contains five shops on the Margate road – including the Fish and Chip shop, a pet shop and a cleaners. There were thatched cottages where the Methodist Schoolroom now stands. Almshouses were in Park Lane and in Gas Alley.

Court Mount was part of ‘Southend Farm’ and the first Vicarage was opposite this site on the Canterbury Road, not far from a pond which was filled in during 1933. In The Square was ‘Church Cottage’ where the verger lived, and behind his house was the old Institute, which was once used as an Infants' School. Along Station Road was Woodford House School – the only one in Thanet which remained open during both World Wars.



Shrimper's Cottage, Station Road