

David Burley & The Village Centre 1902 - 1990

David Burley was born in 1902 and first came to Birchington in 1910, with his school's Army Cadet Force and practised marksmanship at Minnis Bay. David showed early promise in art and was encouraged by his family to go further. After studying at Goldsmith's College of Art, London, David joined Southern Railway as a staff artist. His paintings were used in hundreds of railway carriages and on railway platforms, to advertise the delights of resorts all over the country. Thousands of people became familiar with these images, which later evoked a lost era. For this reason, they have become collectable items of considerable value. His wife Lorna was a professional musician and used her talents wherever they lived.

David later also became a tutor for Galleon Holidays for over 30 years and in retirement he taught in a number of Adult Education institutions in the Thanet area as well. During his busy life he exhibited in the Royal Academy and the Royal Institute of Watercolour Painters. In his working life he and Lorna made their home in Blackheath, South London. When David took early retirement in 1948 at the age of 46, he remembered that delightful seaside resort from 1910 and he and Lorna came to live at Birchington. They bought the huge, rather run-down property of "Beaconsfield" in Alpha Road. It had been used early in the War by the Czech Government-in-Exile as their headquarters, and then by our troops for the rest of the duration. With its large garden it was later to be broken up into four separate dwellings, with part of the garden on the west side being used to house Birchington's new Library in 1967.

As soon as they moved here, the two of them both became involved in village life, forming a Youth Drama Group and working with the Guild of Players. David painted their scenery for them for many years, while Lorna often helped out at rehearsals by providing the accompaniment. She also taught piano to numerous students in Birchington and beyond. All those early productions were performed at the old Church House, at the corner of Kent Gardens. These were not ideal premises and even as early as 1953, David had the vision to imagine a more fitting place for such productions. He started a fund in that year for what he called "The Village Centre" and designed the building to house it. He encouraged the group who eventually set up the Quexpo Committee to provide the enormous capital that was going to be needed for such a large project. From the first Quexpo in 1970 to the final one in 1986, he was with them all the way.

When the Centre was eventually built and opened in 1974 on ground at the rear of the Library site, he became one of the Trustees and remained on the board until his death at the age of 88 in 1990.

In 1994, the large room at the entrance to the Library was renamed "The Burley Gallery" in his honour, much to the delight of his widow Lorna, who was still living next door in the end of the old house. The gallery was opened by John Brazier, Head of Arts Promotion for the K.C.C. and since then it has housed numerous exhibitions of local and not so local talent, covering many styles and a great variety of media.