

'Fernleigh'



Fernleigh was the house owned by the joint founder of the Westgate-on-Sea Lawn Tennis Club, Robert Grant. The house was situated where Queen Bertha's Avenue is today (just off the Canterbury Road). On the census of 1881, Robert Grant gave his occupation as Ship Owner. In 1901 his occupation was JP and retired Ship Owner: in 1911 his income was from private means. Robert Grant died in 1919. This photograph was taken in 1929, when the

house was being sold. 'Fernleigh', together with 'Rosebank', a property close by, became Queen Bertha's School for Young Ladies after the sale.

There is a file on the school in the Heritage Centre, which was kindly donated by one of the former pupils.

Dr Dawn Crouch has added her own personal memories of Fernleigh:-

"After the Second World War, while I was in the sixth form at Simon Langton School in Canterbury – so it was probably 1947/48 – I went at least twice, possibly three times, to Fernleigh – the Diocese of Canterbury hired it for the month of August. For two weeks it was hired for Sunday School teachers' training – I was teaching in the Sunday School at Chilham.

"It was lovely – we "worked" in the mornings and had the afternoons free to go down to the beach at Epple Bay. I can't remember what else we did, because we didn't have much money! In the evenings there were concerts and entertainments that we put on ourselves. We had to sleep in dormitories, which were not at all comfortable – iron bedsteads and a locker – and queuing for the bathrooms, but we didn't mind. After all, we were the war generation! We had to take our ration books with us, but I can't remember anything about the food.

"The second fortnight was for families that needed to get away and we were encouraged to stay on, with free board, to look after them. My mother was very sceptical about my ability to do much housework properly; my parents had always encouraged me to concentrate on my schoolwork and, I'm afraid, that suited me. However, I did do my share, especially a lot of washing up – no dishwashers in those days. I think I preferred it to looking after the children. I had no experience – not having younger siblings. I just remember it being a very enjoyable time, when we met some really nice people in a very pleasant place.

"The two old houses were demolished and Queen Bertha Avenue is on the site. I do remember that the grounds were lovely, with tennis courts of their own."

[Alderman Robert Grant donated the fountain in Birchington Square in 1909, in memory of his late wife.]

THE FOUNTAIN IN BIRCHINGTON SQUARE

The fountain was first placed in the centre of the Square in 1909, when Alderman Robert Grant donated it to the village in memory of his wife. There was some controversy about this position, because two of the Parish Councilors were certain that the increase in volume and size of traffic through the Square was going to find the fountain an obstacle. What prophetic words those were. The whole structure was surmounted by a gas lamp – a very new innovation at the time. Besides the fountain in the centre, there were also two horse troughs.



By 1914-15 it needed to be moved much nearer to the Powell Arms, where it remained for about another 10-15 years. However, this position also began causing problems, so in about 1930 it was moved over to just outside the Queen's Head, where it has since remained. Sometime during one of these moves, the lamp on the top was removed. So, too, was one of the horse troughs.

It received a much-needed face-lift in 2000-2001, with the help of Alf Bedwell, Peter Francis, Roger Walford and several others. The Parish Council funded the cost of a new lamp – which, sadly, is only for cosmetic appearances this time.