

JIMMY BECK – YOUNG ARCHAEOLOGIST

As a schoolboy of 14, Jimmy Beck discovered a Late Bronze Age settlement at Minnis Bay in 1938. He also found Roman artefacts and a horde of metal objects buried in the sand between the high and low tide area, which became known as 'The Beck Horde'.

His finds suddenly revealed a whole new era of life in Minnis Bay, Birchington from prehistoric through to Roman and Medieval times. He was very careful in his excavations and meticulously recorded his finds. He then shared the information about his finds with local and national authorities, including Quex Park and the British Museum, where his finds are now lodged. Hazel Basford wrote an article about Jimmy's discovery for the Isle of Thanet Gazette of the 5th April this year, in which she mentions that he was a pupil of King's School, Canterbury and that his parents had a holiday home in Birchington.

Unfortunately, Jimmy died just over a year later in January 1940 aged only 15. Each time the subject of Jimmy and his premature death has been raised, people have asked me what he died of, but I was unable to answer that question. Recently, Cliff Cole helped me obtain Jimmy's death certificate and it appears he died of kidney failure. His address at his death was given as 'Ellingham', St Clements Road, Westgate, although his 'home' address for both himself and his father is given as 'The Glade', Harold Road, Birchington. 'Ellingham' was where his grandmother, Mrs N. Beck, lived. It is a large, airy house with views straight across to the sea at Westgate and was probably more suitable to nurse a very sick young lad through his final weeks.

After his death, Antoinette Powell-Cotton and two local archaeologists, Roy Carr and Frederick Worsfold, continued to excavate in the same area and in 1947 discovered, among other things, a medieval well with pieces of pottery at its foot, along with wood from the lining and the well-head structure. It is sad to think that young Jimmy was not there to enjoy those new discoveries, to which his earlier work had pointed the way.