

MEMORIES OF PWD BUTCHERS, THE SQUARE, BIRCHINGTON

By Roger Palmer (Frank Palmer's Son) - Nov 2019

Wally Wanstall, Frank Palmer and Arthur Dobson formed a partnership 2-3 years after being demobbed in 1946. They had all worked for Dewhurst Butchers, a big national company, by whom they were employed before the war. They purchased a shop in Garlinge High Street and, not too many years later, the shop in Birchington Square. Wally ran this shop and lived above it while Frank remained at Garlinge, later moving to their third acquisition, a shop in Margate High St. Arthur left the business in the 50s but it kept the same name because it was, by now, quite well established.

The Birchington shop had its own abattoir to the rear of the premises, accessed by a lane wide enough for a horse and cart. It was never used by PWD for its intended purpose but doubled-up as a storehouse. It was a large barn-type building with wooden ladders and a hay loft, stalls, blocks and tackle and ship's timber beams. Behind it was a large garden dominated by a magnificent walnut tree. The shop's living accommodation was on the same level and on the Margate side with bedrooms above, so overall this was/is a very big property.

Wally and his wife Kay soon became part of Birchington involving themselves in many community activities over the years. Two big projects spring to mind: the establishment and building of a community centre and the organisation and implementation of funding for the task. The latter resulted in one of Thanet's biggest attractions in its day, the Quexpo Weekend Fair. This was a huge success and Wally was a very happy man when successive Quexpos finally generated enough income for the first bricks of Birchington Village Centre to be laid. Later he was to become the proud mayor of Birchington, a responsibility he took very seriously and to which he devoted much time and energy for the village he loved.

Businesswise, a fourth shop in The Parade, Minnis Bay was added to the PWD portfolio but time and events were catching up with the two old friends. With the arrival of Thanet's first hypermarket at Westwood it became clear that shopping habits would alter considerably. This coincided with Wally and Frank's retirement intentions so the Garlinge, Minnis Bay and Margate shops were sold, the latter in 1979. Wally and Frank resumed their working partnership together for their twilight years, still trading in Birchington Square, and the shop was sold around 1984 with planning permission to change the abattoir into living accommodation.

The attached pictures show Wally, on the right, receiving his retirement gift from Frank, and Frank outside the shop in the saga of the Square's Public Toilets which was to make national headlines, but that's another story.