

QUEX PARK, BIRCHINGTON

Quex derives its name from the Quek family, who came into possession of the property in the early fifteenth century. The old mansion house was already built by 1414 but not owned by John Quek until a few years later, when he married the Parker heiress, and his granddaughter, Agnes, brought it into the Crispe family by her marriage to John Crispe, who was High Sheriff of Kent in 1519.

Their son, Sir Henry Crispe, a man of notable character, became known as *Regulus Insulae* (King, or Ruler, of the Island) through his many services to Thanet and Kent. In 1546 he was High Sheriff of the County, and 12 years later, among numerous local responsibilities, he had charge of the coast of Thanet to Sandwich and Dover, and was surveyor of castles and forts within the custody of the Warden of the Cinque Ports.

A later Henry Crispe also acquired a distinctive title, and, although he fell far short of his more distinguished ancestor, "*Regulus Insulae*," fate ordained that he should go down to history at least as vividly. In 1643, at Birchington, he signed the Vow and Covenant of the Puritans - Kent having declared for Parliament against Charles I, and a year later he subscribed to the Solemn League and Covenant, yet it is probable that, at heart, the Crispes were for the King, and in 1650 he was charged as a Royalist 'delinquent'. On neither count was he to escape his fate. In 1657 some 40 armed men broke into his house at night and, having secured the servants and plundered the contents, throwing their booty into the family coach, were to be driven by an unwilling coachman. Henry Crispe, then a man of some 70+ years of age, was dragged from his bed, and was thrust into the vehicle, driven down to Gore End [Minnis Bay] and forced into an open boat, to be taken into captivity to Ostend and then Bruges. His son Nicholas was ordered to collect a ransom of £1,000 within one month and then a further £2,000, when his father would be freed.

Great difficulty was encountered by the family, for although they managed to raise the ransom, the Protector, Oliver Cromwell, and his Council refused to allow the money to be paid, as they suspected that this was a Royalist ruse to obtain money for the exiled Charles II. Sir Nicholas made every effort on his father's behalf: permission was sought to exchange four Spanish prisoners for the old man, then captive at Bruges, but this scheme, as also a separate attempt at a rescue, failed. Death put an end to the efforts of Sir Nicholas, but his widow was finally permitted to negotiate for her father-in-law's release, which was obtained with more funds raised by the sale of property at Stonar near Sandwich. He returned home in 1658, and was thereafter known as "Bonjour" Crispe, since "Bonjour" was said to be the only French he had acquired during his eight months captivity on foreign soil.

William III was accustomed to stay at Quex while waiting for a fair wind to take him on his frequent visits to Holland, and his chair and one or two other possessions are still in the house.

In 1777 John Powell, Paymaster General to the Forces, bought the property and from him, it passed to the builder of the present house, his nephew, John Powell-Powell. It was in such a state of decay that, in 1806, when he pulled it down, a self-sown tree some ten feet high was flourishing in the roof. This tree he carefully transplanted, and for years it bore a brass plate with the story of its one-time eminence.

John Powell-Powell, known in his time as "The Squire", was a man of many interests – High Sheriff of Kent, campanologist and composer, skilled and enthusiastic yachtsman, botanist and collector.

One of the landmarks of the locality is the Waterloo Tower, built by him to house the first peal of twelve bells in Kent, cast by Thomas Mears, Jnr., in 1818. He had intended to place this peal in a new tower at the west end of the Parish Church, but such was the clatter of opposing elements on the Church Council, with concerns that they would have to pay for the Tower, maintain the bells, and so forth, that the Squire is said to have lost patience, and the control of his adjectives, as he announced that he would keep the bells himself. They are still rung by the Birchington Band of Ringers and visiting enthusiasts, who consider them very sweet in tone for their size.

Another offer to the Church met with a similar fate: this was the clock that now stands in the stable yard at Quex and announces the hours and quarters to those who live in the Park. The hours are struck on a fine pre-Reformation bell from the Church of St. Mildred's at Canterbury, sold by the parishioners, to their dishonour, according to the Squire. It was the tenor of five bells and bears the inscription "The Lord have mares [mercy] on the sowles of Thomas Wood and Margaret his wife 1535." Bells from Squire Powell's yachts provide the bells for the quarters.

A round tower to the north of the house was also built by him to enable him to communicate with his friends at sea, who soon, and very naturally, became 'smuggling friends', in the telling, but, however romantic this tale, it cannot be substantiated, nor does it accord with the Squire's known standards. As a keen yachtsman, he had numerous sea-going acquaintances, but, as High Sheriff, he would have been a bold man to count smugglers among them. Around the Tower are [were] ranged some 50 or more historic cannon, collected by John Powell-Powell, including specimens taken at Quebec by Wolfe, parish "peeces," a battery of 17th century German guns bearing the blithe inscription "With God's help Ludovich Wichtendahl cast me," and a gun from the 12th year of the French Revolution.

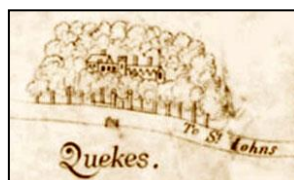
To the late Major Powell-Cotton, who died in 1940, Quex owes an outstanding museum of African and Asian zoological and ethnological exhibits, and here, scientists come from many countries to work on the fine study collections. The public are attracted by scenes of Indian and African wild life, with large and small animals mounted in their natural looking surroundings, and cases illustrating native life and skill. Among the animals exhibited is the largest elephant yet brought out of Africa and the heaviest pair of tusks shot by a European. Major Powell-Cotton added a large number of new species to zoological knowledge, and one of these, a buffalo, named after him, is mounted in a fight to the death with a lion from which the Major had received 17 wounds and only narrowly escaped with his life.

The most recent addition to the buildings is a lecture hall in which films, taken by the family, help towards a wider understanding of the exhibits and their place in African daily life. The museum also houses a collection of local archaeological material from Prehistoric, Roman, and Mediaeval times. Of special interest is a Bronze Age pot, in which was found a hoard of 14 palstaves of different moulds, probably a craftsman's samples.

During the 1914-18 War the museum and house were used for four and a quarter years as a hospital, and over 1,200 stretcher cases from overseas were nursed by local Red Cross and VAD Detachments.



1414



1688



1788