



S.O. to the De La Warr Estate, Sunday 22nd June at 2:00pm

Welcome to the Stepping Out walk looking at part of what was known as the De La Warr Estate. I'm Alex, one of the museum's volunteers and today I'll be assisted by Paul.

Today we'll take a journey through the former estate of the 8th Earl De La Warr, situated east of Sea Road and south of the railway line. From its beginnings in 1882 to the present day, we'll explore its forgotten architectural features, early plans, and evolving societal roles. The walk is about a mile and half distance, looking to finish at Shelter No.2.

It's all on pavement but as usual please be careful when crossing roads and be aware of other users on the busy promenade. There will be chances to rest our legs once we get back onto the prom.

Walk to Coronation Bandstand

Introduction

It would be best to set the scene of how a small Saxon settlement became the large town we now know as Bexhill-on-Sea.

The village started as an agricultural community sitting on an outcrop of Tunbridge Wells Sand with pockets of Wadhurst Clay (you'll know about this if you've tried digging half a metre down in your garden), this clay allowed water to be trapped and wells to be bored - many being rich in iron which contributed to the health-giving properties of the area.

Sea Lane (now Sea Road) was the only connection to the Old Town, coal had to be brought in by vessels and collected by horse and cart. Can you imagine the journey of an unpaved track, stormy weather and heavy load being dragged up the hill?

Local agriculture declined after the Napoleonic period with Europe now extensively developing its own grain-lands. This, and the construction of the railway in 1846 factored into the commencement of new urban growth.

Construction of East Parade's sea wall began in 1882, together with the necessary drainage works for private building. This was done by John Webb who was given the land west of Sea Road as payment by the 7th Earl De La Warr. You can see on the 1887 map Webb's land was substantially further developed at that time. This was mainly due to the Ashdown Road Gas Works being slap-bang in the middle of the De La Warr Estate which we'll talk about later.

After the death of the 7th Earl, his son Viscount Cantelupe, Gilbert George Reginald Sackville, 8th Earl De La Warr took it upon himself to develop this area into the next 'health resort'. Bexhill was decades behind Hastings and Eastbourne at this point (as they had direct railway links to London), so focus was put on catering towards the middle-classes.

Let's go and take a look at the Estate itself now, beginning in Brassey Road, named after the family the 8th Earl married into in 1891.

Route

East Parade – Brassey Road (1895) ❶

The Normanhurst [\[PHOTO 1\]](#) 1927

This was the Normanhurst Hotel from 1918 to 1968, named after the country house Normanhurst Court at Catsfield owned by the famous Brassey family. Thomas Brassey senior born 1805 was a railway contractor who was reputed to have built almost a quarter of the world's railway lines, he left behind 5 million pounds to his three sons when he died in 1870. His eldest son, Thomas Brassey, 1st Earl Brassey, became MP for Hastings, he had 5 children the third daughter being Muriel Agnes Brassey who married the 8th Earl.

Today the building is a residential care home with 75 bedrooms with a nursing home at the north end, in 2021 the business was for sale for 6 million pounds.

You can see some notable changes around the building since this photo was taken – the loss of the canopies and chimneys, and the pitched roofs below the triangular pediments have now all been filled in.

Brassey Road – Knole Road ❷

Knole Road & Marine Mansions [\[PHOTO 2\]](#) 1904, 1951

This was once the Earl De La Warr's park known as Cantelupe Gardens later used for croquet and tennis. Charles Gulliver acquired the land and founded Gullivers Bowls Club in the 1950s. Charles was prominent in the theatre world, being at one time Chairman of the Theatre Royal on Drury Lane and had been the first secretary of the AA (Automobile Association). He also was a benefactor of the Sidley Cricket Club, the ground on which is currently looking to be part developed for housing.

Knole near Sevenoaks in Kent is the ancestral home of the Sackville Family and there is a striking similarity in the design of that country house and these 6 Victorian apartment blocks known collectively as Marine Mansions. They were constructed between 1893 - 1896 and designed by architects Christopher Dawes Hicks and William Herbert Alton.

A German bomb destroyed one of the gables and severely damaged the two entrances in 1940. The gable wasn't restored until the 1960s with the two entrances replaced in a style that broke the symmetry of the northern elevation; these were restored to the original style in 2016.

Knole Road – Middlesex Road 3

Victoria House [\[PHOTO 3\]](#) 1965

The house was erected to commemorate the 60th year of the reign of Queen Victoria in 1897, see plaque. The private residence was known as The Queen's Cottage when it was built for a Marshall Jay, a leading London chuchman and philanthropist.

From 1934 to 1938 it served as a nursing home, then became Victoria Hotel from 1939, it is now once again a private residence called Victoria House.

Sackville Mews & Garages [\[PHOTO 4\]](#) 1930

These garages once served The Sackville Hotel built in 1890. It acted as stables for high-class carriages and horses. Seating up to ten people you could take trips in up into the countryside, which wouldn't be far to go in Victorian times. Lessons were also given in riding, jumping and later, driving. The mews later became a motor garage as seen here in the 1930's. You can just about make out the pitched roof on the right hidden behind the modern façade. This was another victim of WWII when the garage was completely destroyed in 1942 by a high-explosive bomb.

The newer houses to the south were tennis courts, again linked to the Sackville Hotel.

Overbury Hotel [\[PHOTO 5\]](#) 1920

This building was advertised as the Overbury Private Hotel in 1920. Described as "pleasantly and centrally situated, one minute from the sea-front", its amenities included a croquet lawn, central heating and a smoking room. A bedroom and breakfast would set you back 5 and half shillings and if you wanted your meal in the bedroom that would be an extra 6 pence. Dogs were 2 and half shillings a week.

Middlesex Road – Cantelupe Road 4

Street scenes [\[PHOTO 6\]](#) 1902

We arrive at Cantelupe Road, named of course after the man himself Viscount Cantelupe, 8th Earl De La Warr. The Earl was a war correspondent during the Second Boer War and returned to Bexhill in 1900 after being injured rescuing a wounded soldier. The Earl has been managing this estate with his father until his marriage in 1891 when he assumed full control. He lived with his wife Muriel Brassey (Viscountess Cantelupe) at the Old Town Manor House which had been richly refurbished for them.

Take note of the tree lined roads some of which have disappeared over the last century. Bexhill Heritage the local conservation charity has recently formed a group to investigate and hopefully reinstate some of the now missing trees. If this is something you may be interested in helping with, do let me know at the end of the walk.

Christian Science Church [\[PHOTO 7\]](#) 1931

St. George's Court was once the location of the handsome Christian Science Church, opened in 1931, closed 1995 and demolished 2001. I feel it's a shame the building wasn't repurposed into apartments.

Despite its name Christian Science is not related the practice of the scientific method. It emphasises mind over matter, where illness can be healed through prayer and understanding of divine law.

Looking opposite, does anyone know who Denis Morgan is?

Cantelupe Road – Bedford Avenue 5

Bedford House School [\[PHOTO 8\]](#) 1904

This road is likely named after Francis Russell, 9th Duke of Bedford (1819-1891), who married daughter Elizabeth Sackville-West of the 5th Earl De La Warr.

On the north-east corner we have Bedford House School seen here in the 1904 Bexhill guidebook. This school was founded in 1898 and catered for boys from 7 to 15 years of age. From the guidebook - "Special arrangements are made for boys whose parents reside in India or the Colonies", "Young and delicate boys receive the greatest of care, and a most liberal table is provided", "All outdoor games are played under supervision of the headmaster" and "Physical drills are with certified Army instructor". The school relocated to Berkshire in 1909.

Bedford Avenue – Dorset Road South

Ashdown Road Gas Works [\[PHOTO 9\]](#) 1932

One of the biggest handicaps with developing the 8th Earl's Estate was the Bexhill Water and Gas Company in Ashdown Road built 1887, which added very little attraction to the area. The Earl attempted to have the works moved, but this was never implemented. It was only relatively recently St. Richard's Catholic College and housing have been built on the industrial site. You might be able to see the sidings used by locomotives to drop off the coal and a crossing linking up Dorset Road to its South counterpart.

Great Staughton and Bowness Court

The comparative initial unpopularity of the De La Warr Estate was to prove advantageous in at least one respect. The relatively slow and piecemeal development has left a legacy of interestingly diverse building styles including mock-Tudor, Victorian Gothic, early 20th Century 'Arts and Crafts' and even some Art Deco examples. Some self-builders such as the Reverend Thomas Gibson designed homes that are both unique and fanciful like this example of a gothic home with its castellated bays, towers and turrets – still with original drainpipes.

Dorset Road South – Magistrates 6

Magistrates Court [\[PHOTO 10\]](#) 1967

The Magistrates Court was opened on the 10th January 1903. The new police station and the courthouse were built as a single unit in an aristocratic, private residential part of the town, which, as one can imagine, originally raised objections from those in the neighbourhood. The building's main block was of dark red brick, relieved here and there with white stones. It consisted of the Sessions House with Superintendent's dwelling and Sergeant's house on either side. The roof was tiled the same dark, red colour and had symmetrical chimneys.

The other buildings, consisting of three cottages and the coach-house and stable, were of uniform design. The whole establishment was enclosed with a tall iron railing and substantial brick piers. The entrance to the Sessions House was under an imposing stone archway, in which the arms of the County Council had been skilfully worked.

Quote from Bexhill Observer 1903 - "On entering one finds himself in the corridor, on the left side of which of the doors leading into the court house, and on the other side of the waiting-rooms and apartments for solicitors. The public entrance to the Court is immediately on the left, solicitors and others use the second door further along the hall. Oak-ceiling, oak-panelled, oak-benched, oak dock, and oak witness-box with a large stained glass window at either end, that behind the magistrates bench being both beautifully impressive, bearing the County Arms and the words on either side below, 'Virtus, Honor, Justitia (justisha)', the Hall of Justice represents an appearance which must command the respect of the most hardened offender."

Magistrates – Lionel Road 7

United Reformed Church [\[PHOTO 11\]](#) 1901

This is Bexhill's only Presbyterian Church, previously known as St. George's Church and now named Bexhill United Reformed Church. Construction was completed in 1901 and was designed by George Herbert Gray, agent for the De La Warr Estate. Gray had a lot of involvement in the creation of this area of Bexhill-on-Sea, being responsible for laying out Dorset, Magdalen and Manor roads. Taking a look at the architects drawing, do you notice something missing? Indeed only the hall and minister's house was ever built. The aerial photo of 1926 shows a tennis court here on the green, hinting at perhaps the minister had other priorities.

Motcombe Court

Built on the site of a previous dwelling called Baskerville, this 1930s apartment building was designed by architect Henry Tanner. Some of Tanner's best known work can be found in London, which includes the Dickens & Jones Department Store, Strand Palace Hotel and The Park Lane Hotel.

Motcombe Court was completed in 1938 and built by Walter Lawrence and Son, a company known for building the Masonic Hall at Great Queens Street, London; Surrey County Hall at Kingston-upon-Thames; and the Odeon Cinema at Muswell Hill.

According to the Bexhill Observer in 1937, the building was skilfully arranged, both internally and externally in the form of a T, so all 22 flats faced the sea. Most have access to two bathrooms, electric lifts, central heating and special attention was paid to the provision of fitted cupboards.

[PHOTO 12] 1943

On the morning of Saturday, 2nd January 1943, a 500kg bomb demolished three upper floors of the east wing. The building was unoccupied apart from the caretaker who suffered superficial injuries. It was rebuilt 3 years later which altered the layout of many of the flats.

Let us walk the length of Lionel Road, named in memory of Lionel Charles Cranford Sackville born 1868, eldest brother of 8th Earl, who drowned aged 21 whilst yachting on Belfast Lough in 1890.

1-6 Lionel Road - These terraces were built in 2003 as this land used to belong to the Magistrates and Police Station.

7-13 Lionel Road - In contrast we have two pairs of semi-detached late-Victorian houses. Really good condition with many of their original features intact.

Lionel Road – Brookfield Road 1937 8

Arthur Montagu Brookfield (1853 to 1940) was a British army officer before he became the Conservative Member of Parliament for the Rye division, which at that time included Bexhill from 1885 to 1903. He was also an honorary colonel of the 1st (Cinque Ports) Rifle Volunteers.

Brookfield Court [PHOTO 13] 1987

Designed by the Eastbourne based architectural firm Hugh Hubbard Ford this apartment building was completed in 1934. Ford was a pupil of Sir Albert Richardson and was responsible for much post-war planning and reconstruction in Brighton, and mid-20th Century Modern style buildings such as Barclays Bank in Eastbourne. He also worked to complete the bays at St. Augustine's Church.

This building boasts interesting external curvature and a recessed centre. Notice the loss of the Crittall windows, which would have added to its original character.

Grosvenor Park

Originally the Alf Evans Memorial Home from 1958 to 1963, built as a convalescence home for the National Union of Printing, Bookbinders and Paper Workers. Opened in October 1958 by the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Denis Truscot - a leading figure in the printing industry. It was named after Alf Evans, an important trade union leader in the Edwardian era who was a strong advocate of women's trade unionism, actively encouraging the growth of female membership.

A bust to the union leader stood in the gardens facing the sea but has since been lost. The union closed the home after only 5 years after which it became a care home. Homewarr House was attached to the east in 1986.

Currently unoccupied, there was a banner on the balcony last month advertising it was to return to a care home once again.

The Links Golf Course

The 8th Earl catered for even the small populace in this area with music, hotels, gardens, and various sporting activities. This area was part of the Earl's Golf Links from 1896, its clubhouse, although mostly demolished now, is the Bexhill Amateur Boxing Club venue. The Golf Links became inadequate as time progressed and became slowly reduced in size as the Earl made the move to develop the Cooden estates as a larger centre for the sport and it never reopened after WWII.

Brookfield Road – East Parade 9

Shelter No.4

Explore superimposed photos.

Bethune Road, named after Bethune's Mounted Infantry, a regiment the Earl belonged in the aforementioned South African war.

Shelter No.3

If you were standing in this position between 1896 and 1913 and looking towards The Sackville, you would have seen the 8th Earl's Cycling Chalet, this would get you a ticket to use his 1km private cycling track which went alongside the prom to Galley Hill. Admission was 2 pence a day or 10 shillings and 6 pence annually. The Chalet also catered for cycling hires, sales, repairs, cleaning and lessons.

In May 1902, the 8th Earl converted his Cycle Boulevard to host Britain's 1st Motor Car races. Made possible with funds from the RAC, it really put Bexhill on the map. Over 200 international drivers competed in the time-trials to a 30,000 crowd. Star of the show was Leon Serpollet's steam-powered Easter Egg, getting top speeds of 55mph. Serpollet was both driver and manufacturer and had beat the land-speed record one month before in France at a speed of 75mph.

Explore motor heritage information boards.

Unfortunately the Earl's good standing came to an end in July 1902 when everyone found out about him having an affair with an actress at the Kursaal. Subsequently Muriel divorced him, and she was granted custody of the children bringing up the next generation of the De La Warr's as socialists.

Shelter No.2

Constructed in 1896, architect William Herbert Alton (of Marine Mansions) and manufacturer Henry Young created two identical shelters one of which was demolished during WWII. You can see the wood and iron supports are looking a little worse for wear today. Bexhill Heritage has applied for funding from the Neighbourhood Board in the hope we can restore this shelter to its former glory.

I hope now you have a clearer idea of how this part of Bexhill came into fruition, its remarkable diversity of buildings, architectural elements and history. I feel these special qualities make the Estate unique and worthy of future preservation.

There is currently a draft proposal by Bexhill Heritage to create a new Conservation Area here which would help to protect, conserve and enhance the Estate respecting the original vision of the De La Warr family.

The next walk will be Stepping Out to Spike Milligan on the 9th July at Galley Hill Coastguard Station.

Finish

Author: Alexis Markwick, 2025

Published: A copy of this file can be obtained at <https://bexhill-osm.org.uk/?T=walking>

Licensing: This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en>

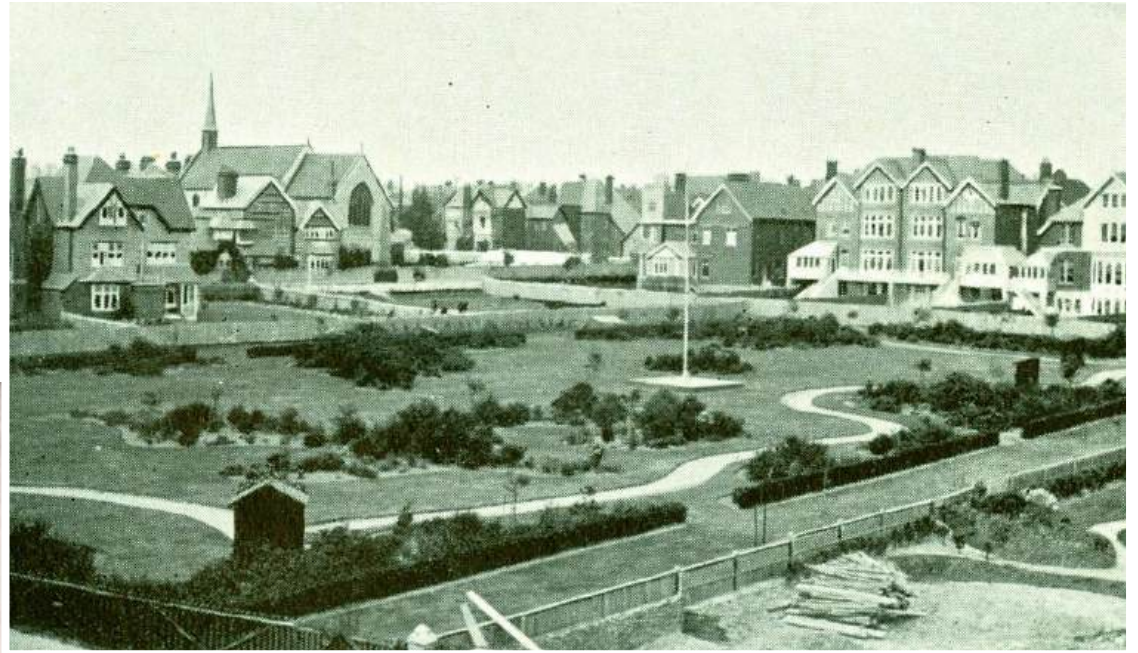
Note: The tour was put together to raise funds for Bexhill Museum, so if you enjoyed it please consider sending them donation at <https://bexhillmuseum.org.uk>

#1: Normanhurst Hotel, 1927



#2: Knole Road & Marine Mansions

1904



1950s



#3: Victoria House, 1965



#4: Sackville Mews & Garages, 1930



#5: Overbury Hotel, 1920



#6: Cantelupe Road, 1902



CANTELUPE ROAD BEXHILL

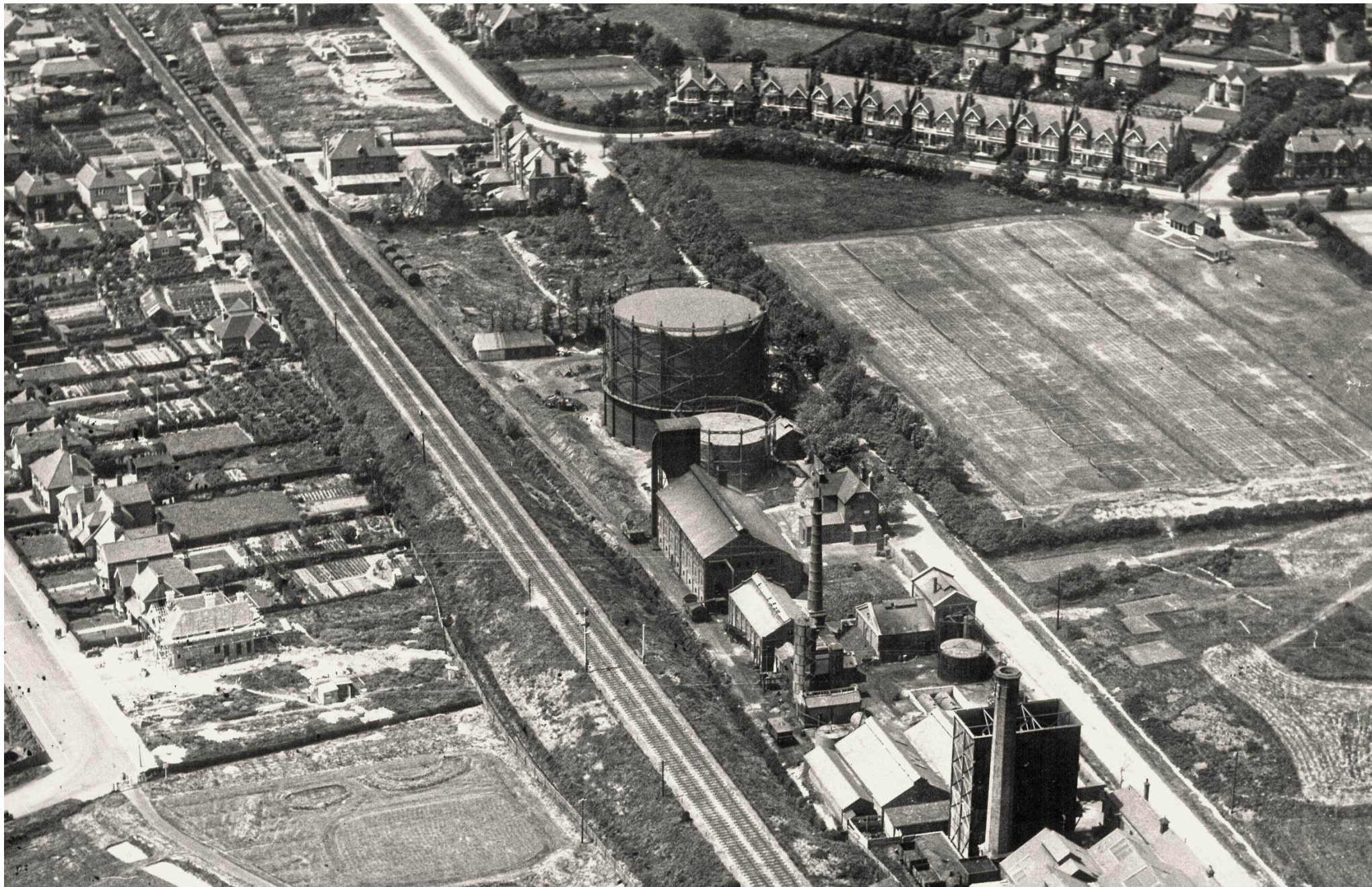
#7: Christian Science Church, 1931



#8: Bedford House School, 1904



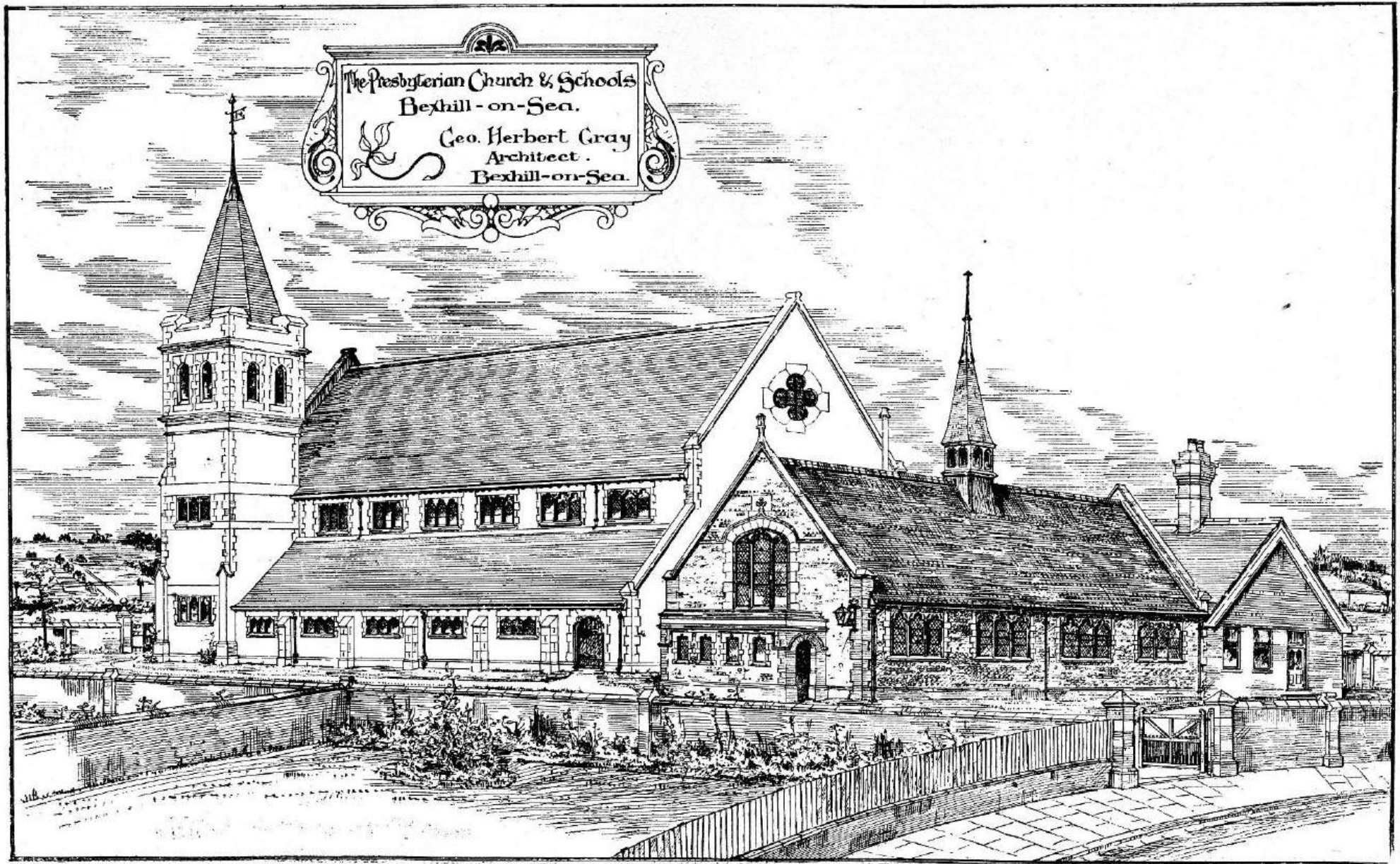
#9: Ashdown Road Gas Works, 1932



#10: Magistrates Court, 1967



#11: St. George's Church, 1901



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, SCHOOLS, AND HALL, WHEN COMPLETED.

#12: Motcombe Court, 1943



#13: Brookfield Court, 1987



#14: Cycling Chalet, 1900



**VISIT THE
DE LA WARR CYCLING BOULEVARD,
BEXHILL-ON-SEA.**

SOLE AGENCY FOR
**HUMBERS, NELSONS, OSMONDS,
ROYAL PSYCHOS, SIMPSON LEVERS,
CHAINLESS, TRIUMPHS,** And other Machines of
Reliable Manufacture.
Illustrated Catalogues, with Best Discount, on Application.

UP-TO-DATE ACCESSORIES and COMFORTABLE SADDLES in Stock.
NEW TYRES or PARTS Supplied and Fitted,
MACHINES thoroughly Overhauled and Cleaned.
HIGH-CLASS INSTRUCTION.

GALLOP HILL.

GOLF LINKS.

BEXVILLER HOTEL.

ADMISSION :
Daily, 2d.
Sunday, 3d.
Weekly, 1/-
Monthly, 3/-
12 Months, 10/6.

Cycles for Hire.
Cycles for Sale.
Cycles Repaired.
Cycles Cleaned.
Cycles Overhauled.
Cycles Warehoused.
Cycling Taught.
Cycling by the Sea.

A PROSPECTUS giving FULL PARTICULARS may be obtained of Mr. PERCY L. YOUNG at the Chalet.

Printed and Published by the Bexhill Publishing and Printing Co., and issued at the 'Vestmax' Leaf Office, opposite Town Hall, Buxton Place, Buxton, September 21st 1897.

