

## FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

[www.folkestonehistory.org](http://www.folkestonehistory.org)

### NEWSLETTER No. 47 -Summer 2011

#### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Alan F. Taylor

At the March meeting we welcomed member and author Martin Easdown who gave us his illustrated talk on the 'Victoria Pier & Amusements.' Martin started by going round the coast talking about some of the early piers. Ryde on the Isle of White was the first pier constructed in 1813, followed by Brighton's Chain Pier in 1823. Despite the early success of the Chain Pier which was one of only three suspension type piers to be built, the construction of piers remained very spasmodic until the 1850s when in 1853 Margate saw the erection of the first cast iron pier, many more followed including; Southport Scarborough, Redcar, Hastings (which was the first pier to be built with a pavilion), Morecambe, Southend, (the longest pier in the world), Shanklin and so on. Martin then told us about the construction and destruction of Folkestone's Victoria Pier. The foundation stone was laid by Viscountess Folkestone on Saturday May 7<sup>th</sup> 1887, she also performed the opening of the pier on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> July 1888. Martin went on to tell us about the various types of entertainment held on the pier. Also about company's who leased the pier from the Folkestone Pier & Lift Company, including Keith Prowse 1903-1906, and Robert Forsyth 1907-1918 who was quite a controversial character. He then told us about many other seaside attractions including; The Switchback Railway, Fagg's Patent Bathing Machines, Cardow's Cadets, the Bathing Establishment, the Lifeboat station etc. Martin finished by showing the pier pavilion burning on Whit Sunday 1945 and its demolition, 1953-4. Seventy-nine people attended the meeting three of whom were visitors.

At the April meeting we welcomed guest speaker Melanie Rigley who gave us an illustrated talk on The White Cliffs Countryside which she manages. She told us the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership was formed in 1989 and that the Kent Downs is a nationally important landscape, legally protected to maintain its special character, for now and for future generations. The area of outstanding natural beauty covers about a quarter of Kent and includes the North Downs from Surrey to the White Cliffs, areas of the Greensand Ridge and Romney Marsh. The project cares for and manages the cliffs and countryside around Dover and Folkestone. She said they conserve the wildlife and the landscape, especially the ancient chalk grassland, helping people to understand, enjoy and get to the countryside. The project is a unique collaboration between local authorities, conservation organisations, Eurotunnel and other local businesses. She spoke about the Ice age and how

England was joined to France, the fossils in the Warren, erosion of the Cliff near Dover, the Western Heights and the Drop Redoubt. Melanie finished by tell us in great detail about the many plants and wildlife that can be see on the Downs. Eighty people attended the meeting five of whom were visitors.

At the May meeting we welcomed back guest speaker and author Bob Ogle who gave us his talk on 'The County of Kent in the Nineteenth Century.' He said most of his books had been written on peoples reminiscences, so writing about the nineteenth century caused a problem, he had to go to libraries and archives and do some serious research. Bob said in the nineteenth century there was no means of transport, so people didn't travel and that there was turnpikes at the entrances to the towns, so they just stayed where they were born. However, there was a lot of crime and those who were not hung were put on prison hulks and left to die or deported to countries like Australia. He said whenever King George III came to Dover, in the early 1800's, he could see little white dots on the French coast which were tents, which was a build up of troops preparing for an invasion by Napoleon. He then spoke about the defences which were constructed such as the Hythe Military Canal and Martello Towers and then, listed some of the famous people who had lived in Kent, such as William Pitt, Sir John Bligh and also many others such as famous artists who lived in Kent which included Vincent Van Gogh who lived at Ramsgate; J.M.W. Turner - Margate; Samuel Palmer - Sevenoaks; and William Morris. The first railway in Kent, The Canterbury & Whitstable was opened for the conveyance of merchandise and passengers on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1830. The steam engine 'Invicta', built by George Stephenson operated on the line known as the 'Winkle Line.' Bob went on to tell us about famous authors in Kent who included Charles Dickens, Charles Darwin, Benjamin Disraeli, and the Earl of Darnley. Bob concluded his talk by telling us about the Pleasure Gardens Theatre in Folkestone being the first town in Kent to show films on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1896. Seventy-five people attended the meeting four of whom were visitors.

A photographic exhibition on 'Royal Visits to Folkestone' to celebrate the Royal Wedding is currently on display in the Leas Lift Lower Station. If you haven't already seen the exhibition why not take a ride down on the lift to view it? The exhibition which follows this will illustrate the history of the Victoria Pier. Don't miss the opportunity to view these.

Six members of the Society attended the Kent History Federation Conference this year, which was held at Orpington on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> May. I thought it was an extremely good conference and I'm sure the other five would agree with me. Next year the conference will be on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> May, at Headcorn. The first conference I went to was held at Meopham on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1989 and I recall Eamonn Rooney came with me.

The Societies website is proving to be very rewarding we have had a number of donations including a quantity of photographs, Sandgate View Books and a Hymn book, (see article below).

Our Hon Treasurer, Shirley Gregory is retiring at the end of the financial year in July 2011. Shirley has been in office for eleven years and has also worked successfully to develop the social activities as well as being responsible for the excellent state of our present finances.

Therefore, we are looking for a new treasurer in order to enable us to continue our dedicated work with the history of Folkestone. Our grateful thanks to Shirley.

### **Dates for your diary:**

The annual outing this year will be to Eastbourne on Saturday 2nd July. The cost will be £18 per person which will include the cost of the coach and a cream tea. Any members wishing to go and who have not already booked can contact Shirley Gregory on 01303 246682 for more details and a brochure.

We would like to welcome new members: Joan North, Nigel North, Yvonne Hutchcraft, Mary Morrow, Joan Shrimpton , Mavis Taylor and John and Linda Mercer..

### **The History of a Hymn Book**

Recently a retired school teacher from Canada was trying to find a home for a hymn book when he came across what turned out to be an invaluable website – namely ours.

This teacher whose name is Gordon Selkirk, started teaching on an Indian (First Nations) Reservation in northern Canada 35 years ago at which time the schools were still administered by the department of Indian and Northern affairs (the Colonial Office).

Up until that time the schools had been very poor, relying on donations including books from England sent probably as far back as the thirties and while often not read, books were treasured.

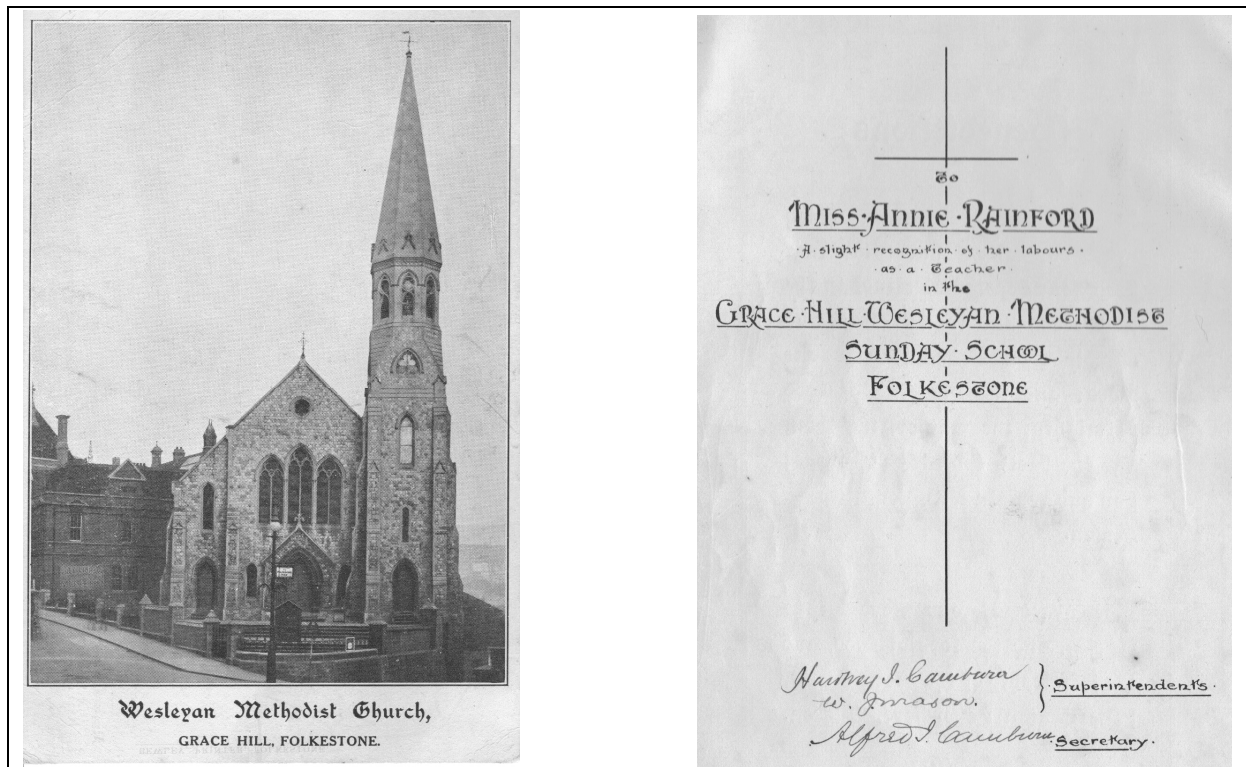
A year or two later it was decided to upgrade educational facilities and all the old books were thrown out. Having a love of books Gordon kept, among other books, a hymn book from Folkestone.

Some thirty years later while thinning out his own library, he came across this hymn book again. In the flyleaf it was noted that it had been presented to a Miss Annie Rainford in acknowledgement of her service as a Sunday School Teacher at Grace Hill Wesleyan Methodist church in Folkestone, Kent; signed by the Sunday School superintendents: H.J. Cawburu and W.J.Mason as well as the secretary: Alfred Cawburu.

The Wesleyan church in Grace Hill was built in 1866 and demolished in 1978 and the records indicate that the book was presented in 1901. The book will now be returned to the archives of the Methodist church for safe keeping.

In 1901, with the South African War just over and Queen Victoria still on the throne a young girl was presented with a book. In spite of all the social changes; various conflicts not to mention the two World Wars and the cry of 'if in doubt chuck it out', who would have thought that a mere hymn book could travel so far, for so long and still come back to its home relatively unscathed.

Chris Phillips



### On my travels... (By Vince Williams)

Whilst attending a lunchtime church service in London near Spittelfields market I met a retired clergyman who has retired to East London and was helping out at the church. His name is the Rev. David Stuart-Smith and he has connections with our town!

His great-grandfather was a watchmaker and watch mender called Joseph Smith and had the task of winding up all the clocks in the Grand Hotel on a daily basis during its heyday.

His grandfather was a local builder, although a carpenter by trade, and was conscripted by the government and sent away during World War I to build planes. William Smith died in 1934 and built many homes in Folkestone and had the opportunity even to name some of Folkestone's streets.

Stuart Road (off Dover Road) was named after one of his sons - William Stuart Smith (His son would later adopt his middle name hyphenated into his surname)

Archer Road was also named after the middle name of one of his sons - Arthur Archibald Smith who would emigrate to Australia in 1938.

Finally, he named Bolton Road, but not after any of his family, but his favourite football team - Bolton Wanderers!

Other cousins of the Rev. David Stuart-Smith still live locally: Julian Smith who until recently continued his father's dental surgery in Shorncliffe Road; and, Nelson Murray-Smith, now living in Hythe, but probably best remembered for being Cheriton's optician in the 1970s & 1980s. Small world!