



FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

www.folkestonehistory.org

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Alan F Taylor

The Society had a gazebo on the Leas for the Air Show on Saturday 2nd June. We set up a photograph display in which I had about seventy five photographs of street views and shop fronts in Sandgate Road, Vince Williams had similar on Cheriton. We also set up our bookstall which along with the photographs proved very popular.

At the June meeting we welcomed guest speaker Dr Andrew Richardson who gave us a power-point presentation on 'Folkestone A Town Unearthed.' Andrew started by telling us that Dr Lesley Hardy and himself were two years planning and getting funding for the Roman Villa dig on East Cliff. He said they also had a programme digging in peoples back gardens. A big focus was on East Wear Bay partly because of the things found on the beach.

He went on to say Museum staff had been digging on the East Cliff in 1919 and 1920 and made some finds. In 1923 Mr S E Winbolt, a visitor to Folkestone, found a Roman drain and several walls exposed by a recent fall of cliff. The Folkestone Town Council thought this could be a major tourist attraction so they commissioned S E Winbolt to do a dig. Preliminary excavations by him in April, 1924 and large scale work in August cleared most of the site the work being carried out by a team of unemployed men and volunteers. In just eight weeks this revealed a major Roman villa, one of the largest known in Kent. The Corporation of Folkestone provided a wooden cover-building over the Roman mosaic and the site was open to the public for many years. It was closed during WWII and the cover-building damaged and removed. The site was filled in with ash from the East Cliff Corporation Works in about 1957 and forgotten.

In 1989 a programme of work was carried out by Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit for Shepway District Council to ascertain how much of block 'C', (the bath house) had gone over the cliff.

Before the main dig started in 2010 they dug some trenches north of the villa site and found Iron Age archaeology, one of the finds was a late Iron Age Gallo-Belgic gold coin. The main dig concentrated on the north east corner of block 'A' the villa's court-yard. A fourth century surface dating back to 350AD was uncovered, under which was found another earlier court-yard from about 200AD. Andrew finished his talk telling us about some of the finds which included a brooch in the shape of a hare, a signet gem stone, wine jars possibly linked to importing wine, quern stones used for grinding corn and lots of pottery and tiles.

Fifty-seven people attended the meeting one of whom was a visitor.

At the July meeting, one of our members, Hilary Tolputt gave a talk entitled "A Journey in time down Cooling Lane". Hilary described her enjoyment as a teenager in the variety of properties, the farm, the riding school and stables, the fields and the fine school buildings with their extensive grounds which had awakened her interest in the history of Cooling Lane.

She began her illustrated talk by displaying a map of Coolinge Lane in the middle of the nineteenth century, showing a narrow, rural track with a Martello Tower on the escarpment and the buildings and fields of Coolinge farm. Pictures were shown of Coolinge farmhouse mostly built at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, and the next door property, the eighteenth century Coolinge House, a listed building like Coolinge farmhouse, which was originally three cottages. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Heritage family farmed Coolinge farm and the Kennetts were running a dairy at Coolinge House for the Metropole Hotel. After the coming of the railway, the Shorncliffe Inn (now the Nailbox pub), the station master's house (now called the Wilderness) and a terrace of Victorian houses were built at the Shorncliffe Road end of the lane.

At the Sandgate Hill end of Coolinge Lane, private schools, located in the west end of Folkestone began to re-locate to Coolinge Lane. Hilary showed 1892 plans of Pelham House school (now known as St Stephens and on the site of the Folkestone School for Girls) kindly loaned by Alan Taylor which appeared in the "Builders' News". This exclusive boys' preparatory school had a commanding situation overlooking Sandgate. With the sale of the Catchpool Estate, other schools moved to Coolinge Lane, including Praetoria House school (now called Penfold House), Bayham House School (later called Clewer House), Eversley College, an exclusive girls' school and Westbourne House School, originally a pre-preparatory school. Pictures were shown of these schools before 1914. All of the schools were closed in the First World War and tents were pitched in one of the fields in Coolinge Lane and used as accommodation for soldiers before they left for the Western front.

The later history of the school buildings was discussed. Pelham House School and Bayham House (renamed Clewer) became St Stephens College, a girls' school run in the inter war years by the Clewer nuns, an Anglican order of nuns, while Folkestone County school for Girls moved into Praetoria House renaming it Penfold House after their first Chairman. Kent County Council acquired all the Coolinge Lane school buildings and grounds after the Second World War, and used these buildings in a variety of ways for educational purposes from 1946, including the education of girls, 2 school boarding houses, initial teacher training, and in-service teacher training. The sale of Westbourne House in 1985 led firstly to the building of Blenheim Place and very recently to the demolition of the House and building of Westbourne Heights. Eversley College, which from 1993 had been a Japanese Language School, had recently been bought by a property company.

Hilary explained how the character of the lane had been changed by the sale of Coolinge farm in 1961 showing pictures of the farm buildings in the 1950's and the properties now on the site, namely Churchill and Spencer House. Furthermore, Sandgate Primary had been unable to accommodate all the pupils from the Golden Valley in their buildings on Sandgate Hill and a new school was built in 1972 on the tennis courts of the Folkestone Girls' Grammar School.

Hilary concluded by showing an aerial picture of Coolinge Lane in 2010 and shots of the demolition of Clewer House and the houses being built on the site in 2012. She observed that the rural nature of the lane was fast receding and concluded by thanking Peter and Annie Bamford and Alan Taylor for allowing her to include their pictures in her power point presentation. Seventy-nine people attended the meeting six of whom were visitors.

At the August meeting we welcomed guest speaker Alan Stockwell who gave us his talk on 'Ellen Terry', Darling of the Gods.

Ellen Terry was born 27 February 1847 to Benjamin (1818-96) of Irish descent and Sarah nee Ballard (1819-92) of Scottish ancestry, both were comic actors in a touring company. They had eleven children and at least five of them became actors.

Terry began acting as a child in Shakespeare plays and continued as a teen, in London and on tour. At sixteen she married the much older artist George Frederick Watts, but they separated

within a year. She briefly returned to acting but then began a relationship with the architect Edward William Godwin and retired from the stage for six years. She returned to acting in 1874 and was immediately acclaimed for her portrayal of roles in Shakespeare and other classics.

In 1878 she joined Henry Irving's company as his leading lady, and for more than the next two decades she was considered the leading Shakespearean and comic actress in Britain. Two of her most famous roles were Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* and Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing*. She and Irving also toured with great success in America and Britain.

In 1903 Terry took over management of London Imperial Theatre, focusing on plays of George Bernard Shaw and Henrik Ibsen. Her career lasted nearly seven decades and in 1925 she became a Dame.

After her death, the Ellen Memorial Museum was founded in her memory at Smallhythe Place, an early 16th century house that she bought at the turn of the 20th century. The museum was taken over by the National Trust in 1939. Also following her death, Terry's correspondence with Shaw was published. Over three thousand letters survived.

Sixty-two people attended the meeting two of whom were visitors.

As you know the Folkestone and District local History Society is a very successful and forward looking Society, both with its monthly meetings, talks and social events. However, in order to continue in this vein we would like to take this opportunity to invite more members to participate in the management of the society by becoming committee members/officers. The involvement required would be attendance at six committee meetings through the year and occasional assistance at monthly meetings. I know of your continued interest and support, therefore I hope you will consider the above. The A.G.M is on October 3rd at 8pm at the Holy Trinity Church Hall. I look forward to hearing from you shortly.

Kind regards,
Alan F Taylor.

Date for your diary:

Annual Dinner: Friday 26th October at the Bowls Club, Cheriton Road. For details contact Alan Taylor- Tel: 01303 252567.

We would like to welcome new members: Mrs Haining, Mrs Newby, Miss Edwards and Ms McNeill

On a rather sad note I would like to announce the deaths of Dick Hignett aged 87 years and Mrs J. Burke.

THE WARREN 'SLIP'

Sometime about the turn of the twentieth century, Frederick Weston brought a piece of the Warren cliffs, just below where his sister-in-law and her husband Dr Norton lived at 'Capel Lodge.' In about 1911 he thought he would like to build a house on the land. He designed a timber-framed house, to be built of oak and elm, which was erected on a solid outcrop about 30 feet below the cliff top. In 1912 they left 'Hockley' and moved into the newly built house. It was called 'The Eagle's Nest.' Emma Weston was not very happy after the move, and said that while living there she often heard rumblings in the chalk cliffs, which made her nervous.

On the night of December 19th 1915, at 6.15 p.m. the entire rock outcrop, on which the house was built, slid 60 feet down the cliff face. The house, and everything in it, remained intact, except that they were unable to open the front door. They climbed out of a window, and, there now being no path up to 'Capel Lodge', but a sheer wall of chalk instead, they made their way down to the railway line and walked along the now buckled track to Folkestone, arriving on my parents doorstep at 12 Sandgate Road, (T.G. Heron, Grocers and Provision Merchants), about midnight. My mother was expecting her second baby at the time!

The 'slip' extended all the way from the 'Martello' Railway Tunnel to the 'Royal Oak' public house, and was probably caused by a very wet summer or autumn. This causes water to build up behind the dense clay-gault footings underneath the chalk cliffs. There was one more fairly large cliff-slip near Martello Tunnel in about 1932. Since the Second World War the footings have been adequately drained with extra outlet pipes, and a vast programme of building of concrete 'aprons' along the shore as sea-defences; in the process an enormous quantity of fossils have been lost. 'Eagle's Nest' was subsequently dismantled and hauled up the cliff by Epps, the building firm from Ashford, and was re-erected at Little Chart near Ashford. They called the house 'The Sanctuary'. No wonder!!

For many years a stone step from outside the front door remained in place behind two Scots pines on the 'Eagle's Nest' path-re-cut after the War- but I think it has now disappeared in the undergrowth. The 'coal-hole', a cave in the chalk, can still be seen and sheltered in, on the zig-zag path, and was, before the slip, below the house. Now it is well above the pines, as that part did not move.

On a walk in the Warren with my parents in about 1938, we talked to a railwayman who told us a story of some prize white cockerels or turkeys of Mr Weston's that he found – still trapped in their shed – near the railway line some days later. On reflection, we did not ask if he had let them out! Below the house had been lawns and gardens, and the lawns, now sloping upwards and outwards at an angle, lasted for many years – kept mown by the rabbits. Now it has almost disappeared, becoming increasingly encroached by brambles. There are innumerable hearts-tongue ferns amongst the trees, and some cultivated shrubs.



The Eagle's Nest

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