



**FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**
www.folkestonehistory.org
Registered Charity No. 295994

NEWSLETTER No. 92 – Winter 2022

Chairman's Report by Alan Taylor

At the September meeting we welcomed guest speaker John Hendy who presented his talk entitled '**Romney Marsh Churches**'.

John started by saying the Romney Marsh covered 100 sq miles in 4 distinct areas (Romney, Walland, East Guldeford & Denge) and talked about the problems with building on reclaimed land. He followed on talking about the churches starting with:

St Mary's Church, East Guldeford, built at Sir Richard's Guldeford's own expense and on his own land. Guldeford was reclaimed the land in late 1400s and was good farmland. It was consecrated on 20th September 1505 and is the only one of the Marsh churches in Sussex. One of its main features is a late 19th century frieze showing the six days of creation.

St Thomas Becket, Fairfield. It was built on land reclaimed middle of the 12th century with a wooden frame and walls of wattle and daub. The church was built on a mound to protect it from flooding. The church was restored in the 18th century when the walls were replaced using bricks.

St Augustine, Brookland. The first church had a wooden frame and was a temporary church in case of inundation by the sea which was only 2 miles away. Building started on the current church c1250 and it too was built on an artificial mound. The bell tower is a separate structure.

St Dunstan, Snargate. The origin of the name Snargate is from a sluice gate to the 7 mile canal leading to New Romney harbour from Appledore. In 1254 a Royal Order by Henry III was issued on behalf of Romney Harbour directing that a new sluice gate should be made. During the great storms of 1287-8, the Rhee Wall helped protect the reclaimed marshes to the north which devastated much of Walland Marsh and the ports of Romney to the south.

St Eanswith, Brenzett. St Eanswith was the grand-daughter of King Ethelbert, the first Christian King in Kent and she became the founder Abbess of the first nunnery in Kent at Folkestone in 630. The church is mentioned in the Domesday Book to have Norman foundation, and there were plans to extend in the 14th century but due to the Black Death in 1348 this didn't happen.

St Clement, Old Romney. Very few churches of this dedication are usually near the sea. St Clement was Bishop of Rome and the 4th Pope and died c100 AD when he was thrown into the Black Sea with an anchor tied around his neck. The church was built in the mid-12th century and the interior has a complete set of 18th century fittings including a gallery, and box pews now painted pink, following a request from Disney when they made their film version of Dr Syn in the 1960s.

John went on to talk about the following churches: **St Augustine, Snave; St George, Ivychurch & St Peter & Paul, Newchurch**.

Forty-three people attended the meeting fifteen of whom were visitors

November was the **Annual General Meeting**. Standing for election were: Chairman Alan F Taylor, Hon. Treasurer Terry Begent, Hon. Secretary Vincent Williams. There being no other nominations these officers were duly elected. The committee members standing again were: Peter Bamford, Tony Hill, Brian Adams and Mark Hourahane.

After the AGM Terry Begent presented his talk entitled '**The Tontine Street Raid**'. Terry started by saying one of the first Gotha raids was on London and people were blaming one another for not giving any warning; bearing in mind this was the first time England had been raided by air how was anybody going to give out a warning? The powers that be came up with the idea of a policeman wearing a notice saying *Air Raid* and later they were provided with a bicycle!

Terry then spoke about the German Zeppelins which raided Kent towns, and Zeppelin LZ38 which raided Ramsgate on 16-17 May 1915. He went on to talk about Gotha aeroplanes, where they took off from and where they landed back in Germany, the formation they flew in and the number of planes used in the raids. He spoke about the type of machine guns and bombs that the Germans used.

Terry said the raid on Folkestone consisted of 21 Gotha planes which, after bombing inland Kent towns, approached Folkestone from Ashford following the railway and one plane dropped the bomb on Tontine Street on 25th May 1917 destroying Stokes greengrocers, killing many people who were queuing for potatoes, and damaging shops on the other side of Tontine Street.

Terry mentioned other properties in Folkestone which were damaged including the West Cliff Hotel, Sandgate Road; West Lodge, 21 Manor Road; Christ Church School, Bouverie Road East; 21 Bouverie Road East; and the Osborne Hotel on the corner of Bouverie Road West and Christ Church Road. He finished with an image of a mass burial in the Cheriton Road.

Forty-eight people attended the meeting fourteen of whom were visitors.

At the November meeting we welcomed our Secretary Vince Williams who presented us with his talk entitled "**From Bobby's To Folca: The Story of Folkestone's Favourite Department Store**".

Bobbys, started in Margate in 1887 and set up in various, mainly coastal, resorts. Frederick Bobby took over the established drapery business of C.J. Saunders in 1906 which was at 13-17 Rendezvous Street. By 1914 business was doing well and 7 houses in Sandgate Road were purchased with a view to demolishing them and building a new store, however the start of the First World War put these plans on hold. Then the subsequent problems with a lack of qualified labourers after the war meant that construction of the Sandgate Road store was delayed and it didn't open until 1931. The Rendezvous Street store then closed. With business booming, Bobbys also intended to also take over the neighbouring property on the corner of Bouverie Place and Sandgate Road, but were thwarted initially when rivals Lewis & Hyland took over this site. Their new store was, however, not that successful and the site was taken over by Bobbys in 1935.

As to when Bobbys actually became Debenhams – the company Bobbys was sold to the Drapery Trust which was then taken over by Debenhams as far back as 1927, but Debenhams allowed its independent chains to trade under their own names until the early 1970s, when the Debenhams branding started to appear in store and Folkestone's Bobbys was renamed in 1972.

Vince showed many rare images of both the Rendezvous Street and Sandgate Road stores, and was allowed access to local photographer Richard Taylor's archives from the 1960s showing many interior views of the store, window displays and staff modelling the latest fashions.

The talk brought the history of the store up to date with the various changes made over the decades until the store's closure in 2020 and the building's subsequent use as a COVID vaccination centre.



The story of Bobbys' Folkestone stores is available in a new fully illustrated book written by Vince Williams, which is for sale through our bookstall at meetings and through our website. (£10 for paperback copies and £15 for a limited edition hardback).

Seventy people attended the meeting, 19 of whom were visitors.

Remembering Samuel Plimsoll by Alan Taylor

The mural painted by local artist Shane Record was unveiled on Wednesday 25th August on the wall of Folkestone Fishing Heritage Museum attended by about 90 people. It was the idea of Nicolette Jones, author of the award-winning book *The Plimsoll Sensation: The Great Campaign to Save Lives at Sea*, first published in 2007.

Samuel Plimsoll came to live in Augusta Gardens, Folkestone when he retired and was later buried in St Martin's Churchyard. Nicolette discovered there was little to commemorate Plimsoll in Folkestone; her campaign group approached Go Folkestone, a community group, which was successful in raising funds for local projects. Go Folkestone agreed that they would add funds towards a memorial, and extra funds were also promised from local councillors.

Samuel Plimsoll (1824-1898) was an MP and social reformer, who is best known for the introduction of the Plimsoll line, the markings on ships indicating the safe level at which they can be loaded, in the late 19th century. This was after a hard-fought campaign against ship-owners who took no responsibility for the loss of life among crew when their overloaded "coffin-ships" went down.

The painting shows Samuel Plimsoll looking through a rain-spattered window, witnessing a sailing ship drifting ashore at Copt-Point, Folkestone in the 1820s being rescued by three local fishing boats. The adjoining plaque was produced by the trustees of the Fishing Museum.



Notices by Alan Taylor

We would like to welcome new members: Graham Ward, Cathy Goodwin, Michael Preston, Maurice Johnson, Jan & Graham Ardley & Sally Starbuck.

May I join the officers and committee in wishing all members a Happy Christmas and Prosperous New Year.

For anybody who has not yet paid their subscriptions – a reminder these are now due.