

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

Chairman's report.

NEWSLETTER No 106 – Summer 2026

At the March meeting we welcomed member speaker Debby Jones who presented her talk entitled **40 Royal Military Avenue – a Shop through Time**

Genealogist and writer Debby Jones told us about 40 Royal Military Avenue, Folkestone, on the corner of Alma Road. Many will remember it as the VG Stores. It began life in the early 1900s as a dairy, with a most unusual dairyman named William Batho, whose brother was Lord Mayor of London. William's life followed a somewhat different trajectory; after being caught up in an elaborate scheme involving posing at the Bank of England as Queen Victoria's solicitor, he served time at Portland Prison. The Church Army Society found him a home and a job in Folkestone.



In the Great War, the Midland Bank had a sub-branch at no. 40. The property also housed three former servicemen and their houses, who had all been invalided out of the forces with terrible injuries. All were out of work. One veteran, Walter Andrews, had grown up in Shorncliffe, where his father had been a groom at the stables.

In 1923, George Godden, who had grown up in Acrise, purchased no. 40 and moved in with his wife Edith and their daughters. He had served in the Australian army, having briefly emigrated before the war, and had sustained injuries and was slightly deaf as a result. No. 40 became a family enterprise. His sister Margaret and her husband John Collins moved in to help with the shop, as after a while, did his cousin Cecil and his wife Annie. George and family moved out to a farm near Dover leaving Annie to run the shop and Cecil to help with milk deliveries.

After Cecil died and Annie moved to Grantham with their daughter, new people came to run the shop although George Godden continued to own the premises.

We discussed the old shop sign, and the consensus was that it says 'Whites.' This is after Charles and Gladys White, who moved in during the late nineteen fifties with their daughter Linda. Charles had recently retired from the RAF. They ran the store as a VG. Again, the consensus was that VG stood for Value Grocers. Many people in Folkestone remembered buying a very local product – huffkins – from Whites!

Gladys bought no. 40 from George Godden in 1970. There were a few things looming on the horizon – changes in shopping habits due to the arrival of supermarkets and decimalisation. Then in her sixties, Gladys was probably glad to hand the shop over to experienced Folkestone shopkeepers, the Kemp family.

It was Hughie and Doris Diamond who closed the door on no. 40 as a shop, turning it into a home for themselves and their teenage children. Originally from Glasgow and discovered in the thirties by Canadian bandleader Ted Joyce, Hughie had had quite a career as a 'crooner,' and had entertained Princess Margaret at a London club. Doris, according to information she gave on the 1939 register, had been a theatre artiste and contortionist.

At this juncture, our secretary Vince Williams entertained us all with his memories of no. 40 and the Hughie Diamond's and his interesting connection singing for Ruth Ellis!

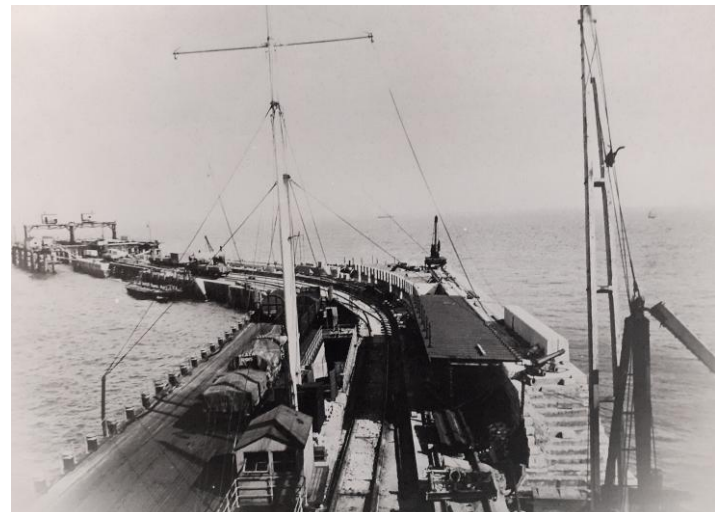
62 people attended the meeting eleven of whom were visitors.

At the April meeting we welcomed member speaker Tony Hill who presented his talk entitled **Rebuilding Of The Harbour Pier.** Tony started by showing us some early engravings on the harbour. The earliest one "A view of the Town and Port of Folkestone from the South East" was from the history and topographical Survey of the County of Kent by Edward Hasted 1790. He also showed us an early photograph of the outer harbour c1859 and one of the inner harbour full of sailing ships in 1897.



Tony went on to say William Cubitt designed the harbour and the 19 arch Viaduct, when the railway finally reached Folkestone in 1843. Building the harbour started in 1808 and by 1843 the harbour was silted up, with the Harbour Company having been declared bankrupt in 1842. So, in April 1843 the Folkestone harbour was purchased by Joseph Baxendale who was chairman the South Eastern Railway Company.

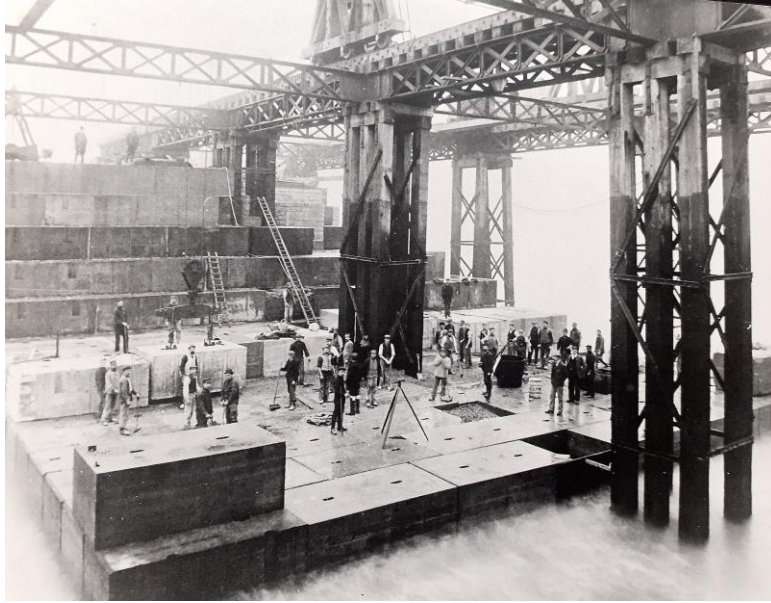
Tony then said the pier extension was designed by Messrs. Coode, Son and Matthews and that old pier, completed in 1884, had a length of 580 feet, and a width of 62 feet; it was built partly of rock-work, with a sea-facing of concrete blocks. There were two landing-places – one on the east side for normal conditions, and the other on the west side when there was an easterly gale. The



engineers discussed building a pier out from Copt-Point to provide a closed harbour this idea did not go ahead and the extension of the existing pier by 600 feet started in 1897 and was completed in 1904 by contractors William Rigby of London. The work started on the extension so the old inner berth could still be used.

Then Tony talked about temporary staging built for the goliath cranes to run on, for lifting the 20 and 17 ton concrete blocks which were granite faced. He told us the blocks were cast on site where the Little Rock café is today and the

cement and shingle came from Dungeness and the sand from Higham. He also told us about the two diving bells which were 13 feet by 10 feet 6 inches by 6 feet and weighed 26 tons out of the water. Four men descended in each bell, and worked for four hours, then having eight hours rest. Tony also said they sunk cylinders to protect the foundations of the west side of the inner end of the old pier. He finished up by talking about the Lighthouse Fog-Signal Station. The completed pier had three berths all with lower landings which were used on spring tides when there was a rise of 22 feet and a fall of 8 feet.



Tony also said before the work was completed in 1899 the South Eastern Railway Company and London, Chatham and Dover Railway Company formed a working union known as The South Eastern and Chatham Railway Companies Managing Committee (SE&CR).

The enlarged Pier was officially opened by the French Ambassador M. Roger Combon on 12th July 1904.

Did you know the Lighthouse is listed? Well, I was one of the people who provided information to get it Grade II listed. The

reasons it was listed were: elegant design featuring moulded cylindrical tower; quality of materials and craftsmanship, making prominent use of polished granite; largely intact exterior and setting, and the beacon of this important harbour; compares well with other listed examples of late c19 lighthouses

62 people attended the meeting nine of whom were visitors.

At the May meeting we welcome guest speaker Keith Parfitt who presented his talk entitled **The Dover Bronze Age Boat**. Keith started by saying he worked for Canterbury Archaeological Trust and that the manager called him to his office to say they were building a new sewer at Dover, the main contractors being Norwest Holst, the year being 1991, and I want you to go down there and keep your eye on it! At this point he showed us a map of Dover and where the new sewer was going. Nine meters of the boat were recovered and after much discussion it was decided the date of the boat was 1550 BC. There was evidence of missing upper planks but the boat was not a wreck, and had been deliberately discarded along with other items.



The boat was sitting on soft mud because there was water from the river Dour so the Archaeologists put wooden boards under the boat and the Dover harbour's crane lifted it out and they took it the Harbour Board's workshop where a tank had been built to put the boat in, immersed in water. The seams of the boat had been made watertight by pads of moss fixed by wedges and yew stitches.

Keith went on to say there built a replica boat half the length of the original one, because they could not get oak planks long enough to make it full size. But when they



put it in the water it sank, so they had to re-cork it. They paddled the boat around Dover Harbour and also Folkestone harbour where I saw it.

Keith said there was much discussion whether it was a coastal cargo vessel or used to cross the channel, they ruled out that it was a sailing boat, but are still discussing whether it was paddled or rowed.

This is the boat, now in Dover Museum.

52 people attended the meeting of whom thirteen were visitors.

Folkestone International Folklore Festival Exhibition at St. Martin's Church, 2nd May 2026

The Society put on a display for the May Day Celebrations at St. Martin's Church, which was well attended and the event raised over £400 for the church. Visitors enjoyed the Maypole Dancing and the display of local hooden beasts used for hoodening or wassailing. Thanks go to Strange Cargo, Doug Quinney, Ruth Dixon, Folkestone Museum and the Kent Wildlife Trust for lending or donating artifacts, photographs or programmes. Of the many visitors, some were members of the groups set up by Barnet and Olive Field in the 1950s and had hosted some of the international groups. I was also donated a miniature hooden horse collecting box, made by Barnet Field, more photographs, a



badge, festival programmes and a set of archives about the Nicolson Pipe Band, all of which will be added to next year's exhibition.

The intention is to get a hoodening group going for this Christmas and to hopefully start a Morris Dancing group, so do get in touch if you are interested.

Vince Williams

Other notices:

We would like to welcome new members: Mrs Charlier, John O'Hara, Dean Appleton & Sandra Williams.