



**FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT  
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**  
[www.folkestonehistory.org](http://www.folkestonehistory.org)

## **NEWSLETTER No. 71 - Summer 2017**

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

At the March meeting we welcomed member speaker Mike Umbers who presented his talk entitled 'Two Historic Buildings in Hythe'.

#### **Part one – St Leonard's Church Hythe.**

Why is this such a magnificent Church? It was for a pilgrim stop-off – on route to Becket's Tomb at Canterbury Cathedral.

Pre-Norman invasion – a tiny Saxon Chapel was built. c1080 which was a time of very active church building everywhere, a new church was built alongside the chapel. At the same time, the Jurat's of Hythe (i.e. Councillors) commissioned a grand doorway and made it their meeting place. (But the French stonemason was not impressed and carved a rude face in the arch!)

c1120 this new church was not big enough so it was widened and, as the Jurat's entrance was no longer needed as the two buildings became one, it was bricked up. (However in c1900 with the army stationed in Hythe barracks it was needed once more and so they opened it up for the soldiers' entrance)

c1220 streams of pilgrims came in after Becket's murder in 1170 and the church was extended again and the fine chancel was built, with a corridor beneath. This became a Chancel Chapel, furnished with skulls and bones. The crypt is open to the Public daily during the summer months.

There is also a book 'About St Leonard's' by Mike Umbers, telling the story which is available from the Amazon website on line.

#### **Part two – The Grand Redoubt.**

The Battle of Trafalgar destroyed Napoleon's Navy but he still planned to invade Britain. We could see the barges being built at Boulogne, so how were we going to defend the coast? Flooding the Marsh was one option, but not a good idea. Alternatives were to build a Canal or Towers; each option had its supporters and thanks to Pitt we got both.

The Redoubt was a military HQ and very formidable with 13 guns, that could fire case-shot (shrapnel) at exposed soldiers landing on the beach (who would be trying to land their heavy cannon) which would have been devastating.

The Redoubt Fort you see from the A259 is only the top bit and most of what you see was added on in 1940. The original profile was very low – a difficult target for guns firing at it a mile or so out at sea.

It is circular in shape comprising of a central space with 24 barrack rooms round it, a moat, and guns on top. Originally it had 25lb guns, capable of firing a mile out to sea, with round shot and case shot for close-up – in defence.

Rooms have doors and windows facing inwards with rectangular rooms between internal staircases and a grand exterior staircase to enable soldiers to race to their gun positions when the alarm sounds. The barrack rooms are not particularly 'homely' but until 1963 they were occupied by office/MOD employees.

The Cooper family lived here until 1940 when they were turned out so modern gun positions and an observation Tower could be added. Their youngest child was born here, and their eldest married here too.

In 1990 the five children revisited which was a very emotional occasion for them.

The accommodation was also used for visiting troops using the Range. We have pictures of Plaistow Cadets who stayed here in 1912 and it is sad to think these kids would have been in the Trenches a couple of years later, and part of 'the lost generation'.

Fifty-one people attended the meeting eleven of whom were visitors.

## **Folkestone's Churches– Part 2 (An Overview) by Vincent Williams**

Continuing on from last year's look at the history of some of Folkestone's churches, the first church covered in this talk was **St John's** or **Foord Church**. In a 1949 guide it is recorded that some older parishioners remembered the Foord Mission starting in a property that became cottages in Palmerston Street – however there may be some confusion over this fact since records do exist of the **Railway Mission** starting there and they relocated to St John's Street. Preparations for building the actual church started in 1877 with the church being consecrated in 1879. Since its beginnings, the church adopted an evangelical approach and aimed to be a 'working man's church.' It became independent from **Christ Church** in 1884 and was extended in 1886 and 1895. The original church hall was built on the opposite side of the street and opened in 1911. The main window in the chancel has twice suffered major damage, firstly in the 1917 air raid and more recently in the 2007 earthquake. The church since the 1980s has been gifted a property in Lucy Avenue, known as the **Grace Taylor Hall** which is used for services and youth work.

**St Peter's** was intended also as a working man's church, in particular to cater for the needs of the local poor mariners who were taking up the best seats in **St Mary & St Eanswythe's**! However once built in 1862, the fishermen were notable in their absence as the church was criticised for placing ritualism akin to Catholicism above the preaching of the Gospel. This led to the famous Folkestone Ritual Case where the vicar, Father Risdale, was the first to be successfully prosecuted under the 1875 Public Worship Regulation Act outlawing such practises. St Peter's was enlarged in 1870 and the spire added in 1874. It is also known for its Blessing of the Fisheries procession and service on the side of the harbour. And out of keeping with this 19<sup>th</sup> century building is the fact that it houses a 15<sup>th</sup> century font bought in Norwich in 1924 which originally came from a church lost to the North Sea.

**Holy Trinity** opened in June 1868 to cater for the development of the west end of the town. The spire was added late by 1888 and extensions enlarged the church in 1882, 1890, 1913 and 1929. With people evacuating the town during the Second World War it closed in September 1940, which was lucky as the following week a bomb damaged the north and east windows and roof. However furniture was brought back out of storage and the church reopened in 1942 after the bombing of **Christ Church**. These two parishes were formally combined in 1953 as Christ Church was never rebuilt.

A daughter church of **Holy Trinity** is **St George's** in Audley Road which opened in 1938. Initially the entrance was on the Shorncliffe Road side, but various extensions and changes in the late 1970s has resulted in the entrance now being in Audley Road and the sanctuary rotating 180 degrees so it is now where the old entrance was.

**Christ Church** also had a daughter church in Victoria Grove called the **Church of the Good Shepherd**. First mention of this church is in 1893 when the Huguenot's who had been worshiping in Canterbury Cathedral's crypt also started worshiping here under the name **Eglise Evangelique de Folkestone**. The original small building was replaced with a larger one in 1904 and after the bombing of **Christ Church**, formally became part of the parish of **Holy Trinity with Christ Church** in 1953. It suffered extensive fire damage in 1967 and was refurbished only to close in 1976.

Another small church was a daughter church of **St Mary & St Eanswythe's**, and between 1889 and 1890 the small iron church of **St Augustine** was built in Mill Bay to cater for the poor community in that area of town. It closed at Easter 1941.

**St Mary & St Eanswythe's** also were responsible for the chapel built in 1939 at the Royal Victoria Hospital. This chapel was dedicated to **St Eanswythe** and remained in use until 1970.

What we call the Parish Church has gone through several incarnations and an original convent and church was situated to the east of the present site and originally dedicated to **St Peter & St Paul**. Subsequent invasions by the French and the Danes, and coastal erosion has meant that the church has been raised and rebuilt several times, with the dedication to **St Mary** dating from the 927AD rebuilding (which was then destroyed by Earl Godwin in 1052AD). So, the church we see today is mainly the result of work from the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century with later additions. The Great Storm of 1705 blew down a section of the western end and serious attempts to restore and extend the church only really happened after Canon Woodward's arrival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The story of Folkestone's Baptists can be traced back to 1643 when local Baptists had to travel to Dover to worship there, however from 1667 a miller, Thomas Carr, used his own home so that **General Baptists** could worship in Folkestone. Various splits over doctrine have happened over the years, and a split in 1701 occurred when a cooper, William Kennett, set up an **Anabaptist** cause from his house near The Bayle and this group continued until the 1720s.

From one of these congregations came the next split and the miller, John Stace, first used his parlour as a meeting place for those following a more Calvinist doctrine. These **Particular Baptists** grew in numbers and in 1730 built their own house in **Mill Bay** on land given by John Stace.

Again a split occurred in 1783 and a third left to set up a **Strict Baptist** cause, building their **Zion Chapel** in St Michaels Street which opened in 1784. This congregation did convert over to the Countess of Huntingdon Connexion but after they moved out in 1857 another branch of **Strict Baptists**, which had c1885 set up in the **Good Templars' Hall** in Tontine Street, reopened the empty **Zion Chapel** c1887. This branch continued through to the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century but dwindling congregations required another relaunch in 1984. This successful relaunch meant that with growing numbers the Zion Chapel became too small and was sold off; and the old Technical College in **Grace Hill** was bought in 1993 and opened at Easter 1994. The **Strict Baptists** continue there to this day.

In the meantime, the **Particular Baptists** at **Mill Bay** had outgrown their small house and built a larger chapel in **Rendezvous Street** which opened in 1845. But this was still found to be wanting in size and it was enlarged and reopened in 1874. The building still remains to this day, although it is now a Wetherspoons pub.

John Stace had also given land for the **Baptist Burial Ground** in **Bradstone Road** which was used from c1747 to 1855; and in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the Baptists had started mission work in halls first in **North Street** and later **Harvey Street**.

When the latter was bombed in 1943, the War Department reparations allowed the Baptists to build a new mission hall at **Hill Road** in 1959 amongst the expanding housing developments there. With the **Rendezvous Street** church becoming too costly to maintain, a decision was made in the 1980s to close it and expand the **Hill Road** building and use it as the main church. The enlarged building was formally opened in 1989 and this is where the **Particular Baptists** can still be found today.

A little known denomination of Baptists also met in the town, starting from some time between 1878 and 1882 and continuing to c1915. These **Ebenezer Baptists** had their hall in **Rosendale Road**. They practised baptism by full immersion but were described more as of a group of Brethren. The building was afterwards converted into a garage before being bombed and destroyed in 1940.

Another chapel which is still in use today in the **Seventh Day Adventist Chapel**, on The Parade, which was built in 1939 following a series of well attended lectures at the Town Hall.

Also the **Assemblies of God**, better known as the **Pentecostal Church**, built their chapel in Harvey Street in 1927. Known as the **Full Gospel Tabernacle**, this church drew its congregation from local fishing families but split in 1934 due to doctrinal differences when some of the congregation left to worship in a furniture remover's warehouse in **45 Foord Road** (now the Sunflower House). These two groups were reconciled in 1985 and the Foord Road congregation re-joined the worship at Harvey Street under the new name of **Harbour Community Church**. This church has flourished since the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century requiring larger premises. They have had two spells using **St Mary's Primary School** in Warren Road and in 2015 briefly took over the **East Cliff Pavilion** and are thought to become the new occupiers of the empty **St Saviour's Church**.

Forty-five people attended the meeting five of whom were visitors.

At the May meeting we welcomed member speaker Chris Philips who gave his talk on the Pleasure Gardens Theatre. The Folkestone Art Treasures Exhibition Company built a building in Bouverie Road West for a National Art Treasures Exhibition. The building was designed to combine the pleasures of a picture gallery and art exhibition on the lines of a mini Crystal Palace. It opened on May 15<sup>th</sup> 1886 at a cost of £16,000. The centre galley was for British sculpture, pictures & antiques; the east gallery Ancient Masters; west gallery was the French gallery; south east & south west galleries were for pictures Ancient & Modern; north east & north west galleries for Industrial Art Exhibits, which could be viewed to the accompaniment of a string orchestra. A special railway line was laid from Shorncliffe Station to serve the exhibition. But the exhibition didn't attract many people and closed just five months after opening. In October 1887 The Folkestone Pleasure Gardens Company with the Earl of Radnor as Chairman acquired the building and grounds for £2,100. Work was put in hand to prepare it as a theatre in time for Christmas 1887. A re-construction of the Pleasure Gardens Theatre was carried out during the winter of 1890-91 to allow a full view of an enlarged stage with a new semi-circular gallery. Between February and April 1896 ten boxes and a dress circle were added to make room for 300 extra people. Sixteen acres of grounds provided tennis courts, croquet lawns and a show ground, popular for military tournaments. Falling attendances led to the cessation of live entertainment in 1956 and from November 1956 to May 1964 the building was used as a cinema, for wrestling and a jazz club before it was demolished to make way for offices for the Orion Insurance Company, later taken over by Guardian Health Insurance Company, which is now our Police Station.

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

This year Kent History Federation's One Day Conference was hosted by Sandwich Local History Society. Eight delegates from our Society attended giving us the highest number from any one Society.

Next year the Kent History Federation's One Day Conference will be hosted by Canterbury Christ Church University on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2018. They will be concentrating on Canterbury during the times of the Tudors and the Stuarts.

We would like to welcome new members Geoffrey and Elizabeth Darlington and Mrs P. Heron.

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