



Folkestone & District Local History Society

www.folkestonehistory.org

NEWSLETTER No. 69 – Winter 2016

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Alan F Taylor

At the September meeting, Roland and Hilary Tolputt, who visit Canterbury Cathedral each week to help with guiding, spoke about areas which illustrate important aspects of the history of the Cathedral and the places of which they are particularly fond. We were invited with the aid of a plan and photographs to imagine ourselves in these special places.

We were reminded of the mission of St Augustine in 597 to convert the Kentish pagans, the baptism of King Ethelbert and his generous gift of the royal palace for Archbishop Augustine's first Cathedral. A second Saxon Cathedral was completed in the tenth century and a slide was shown indicating the area which would have been occupied by the Saxon Cathedral.

Thomas Becket was murdered in the Cathedral in 1170 and his canonisation took place just over two years later following reports of miracles at his tomb. This resulted in thousands of pilgrims journeying to Canterbury Cathedral to his shrine. The murder was described and how the brutality of one of the blows had led to the point of the sword of one of the knights breaking. This was linked to Giles Blomfield's striking, modern sculpture of the martyrdom depicting a broken sword in the form of a cross in the centre and two swords each side with their shadows representing the swords of the 4 knights.

The spectacular Perpendicular Gothic nave with its lierne vaulting was completed by 1405 and it was decided to build a higher central tower, now known as Bell Harry. The project required much expensive and lengthy preparation. Slides were shown of the strainer arches which give support on three sides, the magnificent fan faulting of John Wastell, who subsequently went on to complete the ceiling at King's College Chapel, Cambridge, and of the trap door in the centre of the vaulting. Through this, four hundred and eighty thousand red bricks were lifted by means of a pulley powered by a great tread wheel, no longer used but still in working order. A picture of the outside of the tower showed how it is faced with Caen stone and how it is adorned with a Cardinal's hat and the rebus of Cardinal Archbishop Morton, a major donor to the project.

Although much of the medieval glass was taken out before the outbreak of the Second World War, when Canterbury was bombed in 1942, the Victorian windows on the south side of the Cathedral were destroyed and plain glass inserted in the south east transept. In the early 1950's it was decided to replace this with new stained glass, and the artist chosen was Ervin Bossanyi. The Archdeacon of Canterbury had received favorable reports of his work and even visited South Africa to inspect Bossanyi's stained glass in Natal.

Bossanyi, of Jewish parentage, was brought up in part of Hungary, now in Serbia, and trained in Budapest. After the First World War, he worked in Hamburg and Lubeck on stained glass in Churches, Town Halls and Universities and the Heligoland marine weather station. When Hitler came to power in Germany, Bossanyi came to England as a refugee. The two large windows are "Salvation" and "Peace" and the colour and detail are striking, particularly on a sunny day. The upper

two windows are of Christ walking on the water and St Christopher. Before Bossanyi died in 1975, he requested that his ashes and those of his wife be interred in the War Memorial Garden at the Cathedral.

Finally, slides were shown of the eastern end of the Cathedral. After a fire in the quire in 1174, the monks decided not only to rebuild the quire in the latest Gothic style but also to extend the Cathedral so the shrine of St Thomas could be moved from the crypt to the new Trinity Chapel and thereby the thousands of pilgrims could be more easily welcomed. The wonderful ceremony, led by the young King Henry III, when the bones of the saint were brought from the crypt to the new shrine in 1220 was described. Nowadays, a candle marks the spot where the shrine stood. Visited by Emperors and by every English monarch from Henry III to Henry VIII, it was swept away in 1538 as part of the Protestant Reformation.

Two monks, Benedict and William had kept a careful record of the miracles which were purported to have happened either at the tomb of Saint Thomas or by his intervention and these are recorded in the stained glass windows. One of these tells the story of Adam the Forester, who was shot in the neck by a poacher, miraculously cured by St Thomas and subsequently showed his gratitude by making an appropriate gift at the shrine.

Finally, the Chapel of Saints and Martyrs of our time at the easternmost end of the Cathedral contains a book of remembrance which recorded those who died for their faith in the twentieth century. Almost invariably one sees someone lighting a candle and saying a prayer – a reminder if one is needed, that this Cathedral has been a place for worship and pilgrimage for centuries.

The October meeting started with the Annual General Meeting. Standing for election was: Chairman Alan Taylor, Hon. Secretary Peter Bamford, and Hon. Treasurer Paul Tatt. There being no other nominations these officers were duly elected. The Committee members are: Hilary Tolputt, Vince Williams, and Brian Adams.

After a short break the screening of a DVD entitled 'Folkestone - History of a Town' took place.

Thirty-eight members attended the meeting.

At the November meeting we welcomed guest speaker Andy Orfila who gave us his talk on 'Folkestone's Catholic Church & School.' Andy said the Catholic Emancipation Act 1829 set the climate for the re-emergence of Catholicism in the British Isles. However, this had no immediate impact locally because in February 1836 the Town Clerk, in a reply to the Home Office, reported that in the Borough of Folkestone there were: four Licensed Dissenting Meeting Houses and no Roman Catholic Chapels.

The revival of the Catholic Faith in Folkestone began with the arrival of Irish Roman Catholic workers who worked on the new railway line from London to Folkestone in the 1840's. The problem of where they were to gather to celebrate the rite central to their faith, the Holy Mass, soon arose. The first solution was to gather at the home of one of their number. When the Jubilee of the Church of Our Lady, Help of Christians was being celebrated in 1939, one elderly parishioner, who remembered the early days, recalled that Mass was said at the home of a laborer who was born in Queen's County, Ireland.

It is probable that the priest who celebrated Mass at Mr. Delaney's home was Fr. Costigan who was born in 1788 and ordained Priest at the age of 29. Fr. Costigan was posted to Margate c1821. He was to enjoy a roving commission serving the coast between Margate and St Leonard's.

As the Catholic population of the town grew it soon became obvious that Mr. Delaney's house was inadequate for any number of people to attend Mass. Around 1860, this was realised with the purchase of a building which had earlier served as an office for one Mr. Hart, Lawyer. The building stood on the South side of Martello Road, was rectangular and measured about 40ft by 12ft.



The earliest and only known photograph of the Catholic Church in Martello Road, sadly during its demolition.

In 1860, another Irish priest, Fr. Sheridan, was appointed priest to the chapel which was dedicated to St John the Evangelist. The little chapel of St. John held about sixty persons and also served as the first Catholic school in Folkestone; the sanctuary being screened off from the body of the chapel for this purpose. The schooling was provided Fr. Sheridan, in his own words; - "under the direction of a non-certified teacher who is exemplary and efficient". With Fr. Sheridan's departure in 1864, Fr. Isaac Goddard came from Brighton to take his place until 1867.

In about 1867 a French religious community arrived in Folkestone known as the Sisters of the institution of The Faithful Virgin, or 'Virgo Fidelis.' They established a branch house in a premises in Dover Street (now Harbour Way). This Convent and its small Chapel remained there until 1922 when it moved to the Convent in Shorncliffe Road which had been opened in 1905.

Fr. Goddard left the parish in 1868 and was replaced by Fr. James Aloysius Reed. He took up residence at 17 London Street and set about acquiring a site for a more ambitious church and presbytery. He purchased a piece of land in Martello Road from Richard Hart. This piece of land adjoined the Mass House of St. John. Fr. Reed engaged Mr. John Bowley, a Folkestone builder, to begin construction on the plot of land at Windmill Field, the name by which this area was known. The architect was Mr. C A Buckler of London. The first service at St. Aloysius Church was held on Sunday 31st January 1870. Fr. Reed died on 8th December 1870 and he was succeeded by Fr. Thomas Morrisey. When Fr. Morrisey left the parish in 1875 his place was taken by Fr. W.B. Alexander. With the need for more school places, a new school was built between the Chapel and Presbytery to accommodate about 120 pupils. Fr. Morrisey only stayed for two years and he was replaced by Fr. Cumberlege who remained for eighteen months, leaving Folkestone in September 1878. Fr. Justin Mooney was appointed in 1879 and he engaged Mr. Dunk, a local builder, to extend the Church of Saint Aloysius, which nearly doubled the size of the Church by taking in the Presbytery. "The extension was screened off and used as a school room."

Fr. Mooney left Folkestone and was replaced by Fr. Cahill who entered into discussion with Bishop Coffin to purchase a plot of land to build a new and even bigger church. Potential sites included Kingsnorth Gardens, Lennard Road, and the site which was actually chosen, at Townsend which was re-named Guildhall Street. In 1885, after a short stay Fr. Cahill left Folkestone and was replaced by Fr. Frances Dennan. The three old cottages at Townsend on the Guildhall Street site were demolished; Architect Mr. Leonard Aloysius Scott Stokes was engaged to design the "Noble Church." In August 1888 work constructing the new church by the builder Mr. Moody began without the plans being submitted to the Folkestone Corporation for approval. The Surveyor, on making an inspection, found an irregularity and issued an order for the work to stop. The building had infringed the building line and had to be pulled back which resulted in the entrances being made to the side instead of to the front. Some assertions state that the Church of Our Lady, Help of Christians and St Aloysius opened on 21st June 1889 but no evidence supports this. All recorded reports agree on 17th July 1889.

In February 1888 a concert at the Roman Catholic School room in Cheriton Road was held to assist the church building fund. This was over a year before the opening of the new church. Some years later Mr. Walters was engaged to design and supervise the building of a new school room, later known as St George's Hall. The old school room was pulled down.

Andy went on to explain the opening ceremony, and the many changes made to the interior of the church – he also mentioned clubs and societies such as the Brownies, Girl Guides and Youth Group.

In December 1925, plans for a new school on a two acre site near Radnor Park took shape. By 1929, £1,000 had been raised, it being projected that £10,000 would be needed. A further £2,000 had been donated by a generous convert. The school was intended to provide accommodation for 200 children. Work began in October 1933, to plans drawn by Mr. E. J. Walters and six months later the school was completed. On April 18th 1934, his Eminence Cardinal Frances Bourne formerly opened the new school, dedicating it to Our Lady under the title of 'Stella Maris'. Andy told us about the changes made to the school and the extensions which were built over the years.

Despite the size of the Guildhall Street church there was still a problem in accommodating the large numbers attending Sunday Mass. When it became known that the Railway Social Club in Canterbury Road was not used on Sunday mornings, Fr. Turner conducted the relevant negotiations and arrangements were made in 1959 for its hire. Attendance was good from the beginning and a great meeting of friendship spread among those who worshipped there. The hall was nicknamed 'St Fremlins' in honor of the product dispensed there. The hall remained in use for the next twenty-two years. However when Fr. Nesbitt became parish priest on 1st October 1984 a decision was made to introduce a 9.30 Mass in the Guildhall Street church on Sundays to take the place of the 10am service at the Railway Club. With some regret and nostalgia, the hall ceased to serve as a Mass Centre after 25th November 1984.

Fifty-four people attended the meeting four of whom were visitors.

We would like to welcome new members Gordon Elliott, Thelma Wardell and Malcolm Robertson

On a rather sad note I would like to announce the deaths of Peter Searby who died on 25th August aged 82 years and former member Harold Francis who died on 14th September aged 86 years.

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.