

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

NEWSLETTER No. 86 – Summer 2021.

Chairman's Report by Alan Taylor

Dear Member,

We have cancelled all meetings until October when we hope to resume meetings with the Annual General Meeting then with our monthly meetings from November.

On a rather sad note Ronald Dutt, affectionately known as *Ronnie*, passed away on April 6th at Wells House Care Home, aged 87 years.

The Bayle Pits by Terry Begent

Southern Water got a bit more than they bargained for when they cut through the tarmac on the Bayle to fix a blocked and broken pipe that was flooding the cellars of nearby houses, with the discovery of a number of skeletons.

It was clear to the water engineers that the remains had been there for a number of years but they called the police, as they are obliged to in such circumstances, who confirmed that this wasn't a crime scene that needed them to carry out an investigation, so the company engaged the services of an archaeologist to do the necessary research. He, in turn, sought the assistance of local go-to historian, Eamonn Rooney, who just happened to be on site looking into the mystery (as well as the hole that caused it).



As you might expect from any out-of-town academic, the archaeologist couldn't understand why there was a whole heap of bodies, buried in according to Christian tradition, in a location that was nowhere near a church. Eamonn, as would almost any local, put him wise to the history of the Eanswythe nunnery and a number of chapels that had occupied the site over the years. The archaeologist will be publishing a report in due time, which the company has said will be available to the public but has not given any details of how or when.

Anyway, back to the waterlogged reason they opened the ground in the first place.

Just under the tarmac there appeared to be a number of layers, as will be seen from the Figure 1 with the British Lion in the background This shows that the Bayle area was, at

some time in past, paved with red bricks on gravel. Regardless of when this was installed, the skeletons were underneath it, in the area shown in the picture, and therefore must have been buried a very long time ago.

The sewer was installed in comparatively modern times and would, as we will see later, have required a trench at least a yard wide. They seem to have missed the burials by inches. Was it pure chance they picked a body free area? Or did some labourer find some other bones and just



lose them somewhere else because they were on a deadline? I guess we will never know.

In their search for the cause of the problem, Southern Water eventually discovered the original sewer some 12-15 feet down, as indicated in Figure 2 which had collapsed and caused the blockage.

The on-site engineer identified it as a “Barrel Sewer”. These are

normally round, built of bricks and constructed without any mortar or cement bonding between the bricks. It was actually a slightly different shape, known as a “semi-elliptical” and example of which can be seen in the Figure 3.

Stoneware pipes have been used for drainage since Roman times but it was only after the introduction of machinery to mass-produce glazed, vitreous stoneware pipe sewers in the middle of the 19th century that their use became common, so this sewer must have been constructed sometime before then, probably at the same time as the adjacent houses, around 1840-1850.



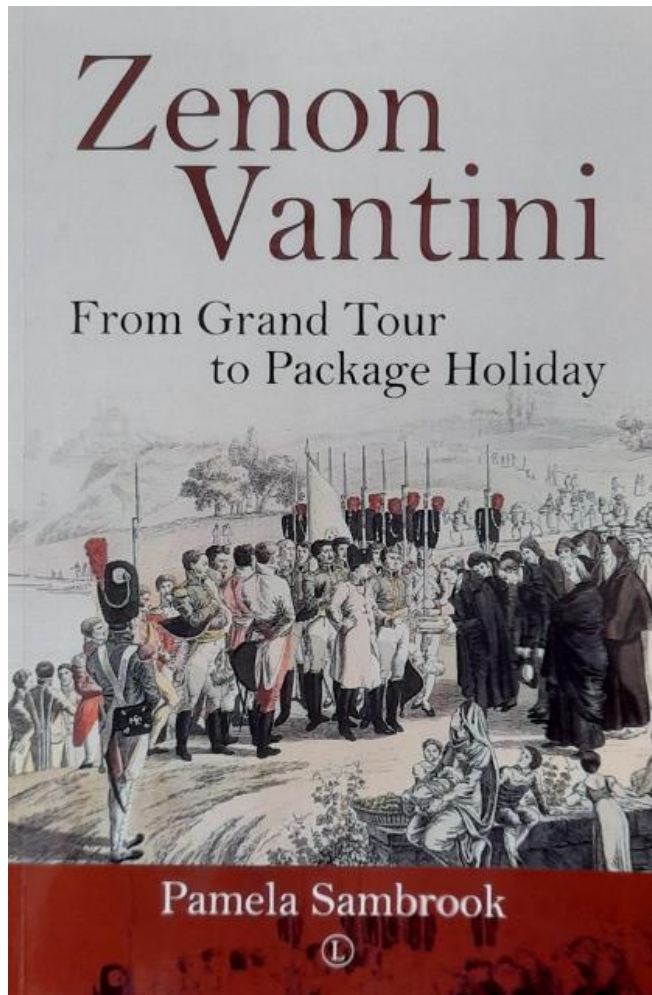
[Postscript by V. Williams: In proofreading the newsletter and above article I was drawn to one of the last conversations I had with a local collector postcard, Peter Hooper, who sadly passed away last year. Peter told me that when he had worked for the Gas Board he had been involved in the digging up of the same area of the Bayle as mentioned above. They too discovered bones

and went see Mr C.P. Davies of Folkestone Library's Reference Room. Apparently Mr Davies had a look at what had been dug up and told them to pop the bones back in, fill in the hole as soon as they were done and not to mention it! So Terry's question above may indeed have an answer!]

Zenon Vantini by Pamela Sambrook - A book review by Vincent Williams

So who was Zenon Vantini, and why are we hearing about him in Folkestone?

As a summary of his life, Zenon Vantini was born and educated on the island of Elba, off the coast of Italy, and was sent off to be a page for Napoleon's sister, Princess Elisa, in Tuscany. After Napoleon's retreat from Russia and Princess Elisa's abdication, Vantini returned to Elba in 1813 and joined the National Guard. The exiled Napoleon arrived on Elba in 1814 and within a



month had recruited Vantini as one of his orderly officers and he became trusted by Napoleon. When Napoleon left Elba in 1815, Vantini accompanied him and now becoming a 2nd lieutenant in the 'Red Lancers' fought at the Battle of Waterloo and was used for surveillance and communication. After the defeat and Napoleon's second exile to St Helena, Vantini by 1820 had ended up in England where he served as house steward to the Howard and then Sutherland families. His connection to these landed and titled families may have been picked up through contacts from English gentry on their Grand Tours when they visited Elba and had been received by Napoleon. Clearly the skills of house management across several estates and the organisation of travel and accommodation in England and Europe for his employers set him up for his next venture when in 1839 he and a partner had taken a lease out on the London & Railway Company's Euston & Victoria Hotels, the first Railway Hotels.

With the expansion of the railways, Vantini saw opportunity in the reduction in time taken to travel by horse and coach, with its need for a change of horses every 20-25 miles at a coaching inn and more overnight stays in inns. In

fact trains could now also convey private road coaches if it was needed at your destination. Vantini's Euston hotel became a first class hotel providing suites for short or longer stays for those who could afford it. Not content, Vantini then opened the North Euston Hotel at the other end of the line at Fleetwood in 1841; and in 1840 had also leased the first purpose built refreshment rooms at Wolverton, mid-point of the five hour London to Birmingham train journey. Probably the most successful of Vantini's hotels was Folkestone's Pavilion Hotel which opened in 1843; Vantini having taken over the running of the Folkestone station's refreshment rooms a month or so earlier. The Folkestone to Boulogne cross channel service opened in the same month as the hotel and the location of the Pavilion Hotel provided an excellent gateway to Europe and Vantini's catering management skills meant the hotel often catered for special events including for nobility.

Vantini's time in Folkestone dates from 1839 to c1846 but he was expanding his ventures further afield at Manchester in 1844 and from the middle of the decade his interests turned towards France. He acquired the lavish Hotel des Chemins De Fer in Paris in 1847 and a network of refreshment rooms running from Paris via Amiens, Abbeville, Boulogne, Folkestone, London and to the North of England.

With this infrastructure of hotels, meeting and catering facilities around the transport infrastructure and his previous organisational skills of arranging travel for the gentry, Vantini had started to advertise all-inclusive two-week holidays with paid French-speaking guides from 1844 starting from Folkestone to Paris. To put this into context, he was ten years ahead of Thomas Cook. Sadly the social, economic and political scenes in France put pay to further ambitions regarding tourism and he died in 1870 during the Siege of Paris.

So my brief synopsis of Vantini's life will hopefully give a flavour of the content of this new book, timely published to coincide with the bicentenary of Napoleon's death. Obviously the book gives a lot more detail including the fractious relationships Vantini faced whilst working in domestic service and problems faced in setting up such ventures as railway refreshment rooms and how to serve a whole train's passengers in very limited time! In offering to review the book, I had not heard of Zenon Vantini's ideas and exploits before, and would certainly recommend Pamela Sambrook's well researched book. It is an easily accessible and fascinating read too for those of our members who might not necessarily be interested in military or railway history. Zenon Vantini's length of time spent in Folkestone is only a few years of his life and the references to Folkestone in the book span across just a couple of chapters, however the whole book gives a context to what was happening in the mid-19th century and the vast changes that were affecting everyday life with the coming of the railways. This 200 page book is published by The Lutterworth Press and available from major booksellers and online for £20 and is a thoroughly enjoyable read.



**Folkestone's Fishing Heritage
and History Museum
is now open daily
from 10.30 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

**There are two entrances:
2 Radnor Street & Back Street
which is near Folkestone Trawlers
fish shop.**