

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

NEWSLETTER No. 96 – Winter 2023

Chairman's report.

At the September meeting we welcomed member speaker Tony Hill who presented his talk entitled 'Over 300 Years Of Freemasonry In Folkestone'.

The first Lodge was formed way back in 1776 but according to some records was not a formal Lodge. Record keeping in these times was rather spasmodic but there were quite a few new lodges formed in Kent around this time those being in Dover, Rochester, Chatham, Sittingbourne and Ramsgate.

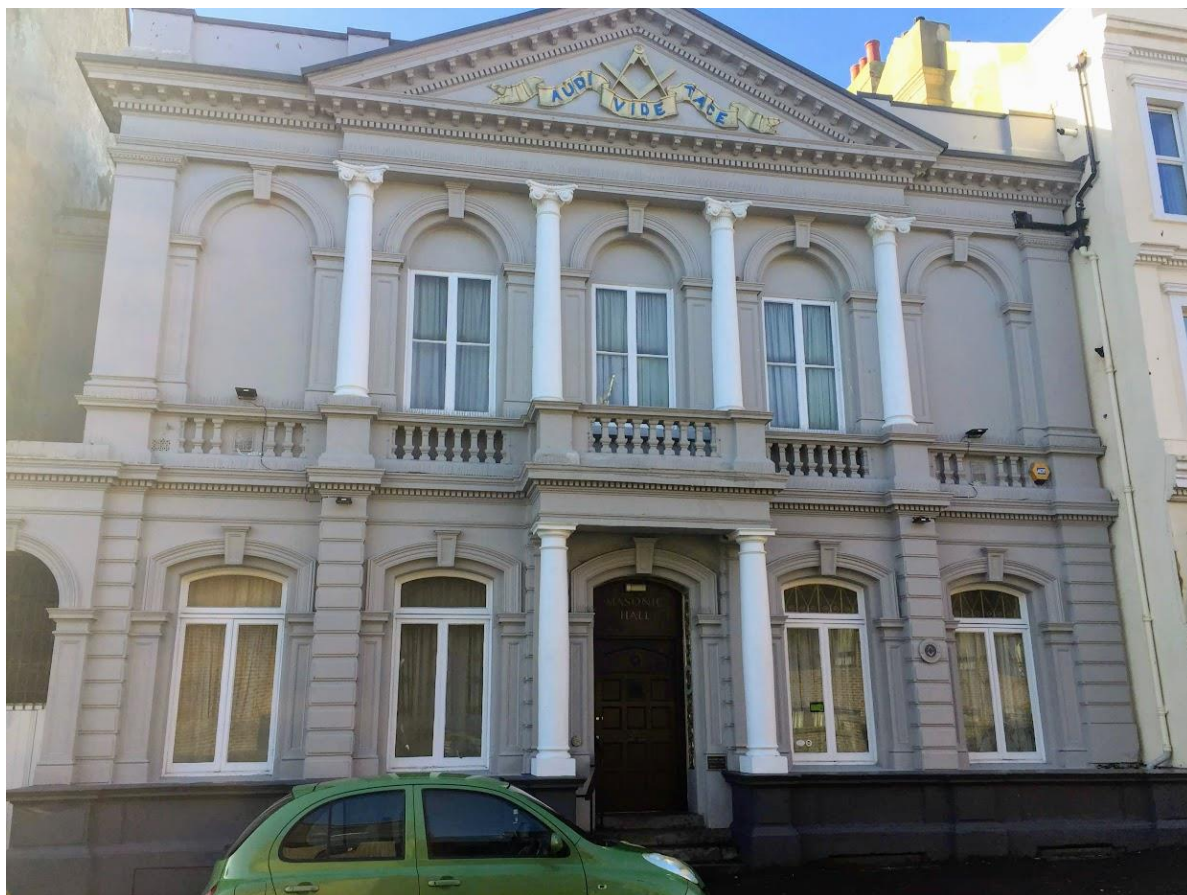
By 1778 most had disappeared as records say but I speculate that meetings still went on with little or no records being kept. Folkestone's Lodge met at the White Hart Hotel that stood at the junction of Bayle Street and the High Street (Old High Street) - this establishment later became known as the Folkestone Arms.

In 1802 records now show the name of the Lodge as Temple Lodge and there is a seal in existence with the name and date of the lodge, interestingly the date on the seal is 1784 which predates the official formation of the lodge.



The Lodge met in the Marquis of Granby near the bottom of the Old High Street until 1830 they then moved to the Royal George down near the Stade and had a strong link to the sea faring community. In 1848 a "petition" was presented to Grand Lodge (the governing body for Freemasonry the world over) and with the granting of the application, a consecration ceremony was held in the Sessions House (Town Hall) in 1849, after which the assembled Brethren retired to the Rose Inn for a celebratory meal. The Rose Inn stood where the Art Deco building that was Burtons now stands. With the date of official meetings set for the Monday nearest the Full Moon, this was changed to the first Tuesday of the months October through to May and the Lodge still meets on this date today. Meetings have moved around the town and the Lodge met in the Royal George 1830, The Old

Guildhall 1848, The Rose Hotel 1850, The Clarendon 1856 (back down near the Harbour), the Old Guildhall again for some time and eventually ending up in the Town Hall 1862. Having had enough of moving around, the Brethren of Temple Lodge voted to find a suitable site on which to build a permanent home. This they did and purchased from the Town Corporation a plot of land on Grace Hill. So on the 22nd December 1885 to the laying of the foundation stone on the 7th July 1886 things moved fast.



Freemasons still meet here and it at present is undergoing modernisation internally.

Thirty-two people attended the meeting, eleven of whom were visitors

The November meeting was the **Annual General Meeting**. Standing for election were: Chairman Alan F Taylor, Hon. Treasurer Terry Begent, Hon. Secretary Vince 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 Martin Easdown & Tony Hill presented their talk on '**The Victoria Pier**', Martin started by talking about The Brighton Chain Pier which was built in 1823 as a landing stage but quickly attained the status of fashionable promenade, and amusements were provided, thus making it the first 'Pleasure Pier.' He went on to talk about Shanklin Pier which opened in 1890, and was partially designed by M.N. Ridley, the designer of Folkestone Pier. He followed by talking about Deal's three piers.

He talked about Folkestone Pier saying the foundation stone was laid on Saturday May 7, 1887 by The Viscountess Folkestone and the pier opened on 21st July 1888. It was 680 feet in length with embayed recesses and a Concert Pavilion at the end. An additional feature was the ornamental gardens at the main entrance, with shrubs, flowers, parterres and ornamental kiosks illuminated at night. The pier proved very popular with over 7,000 people passing through the turnstiles during the first day.

Martin said that due to The Folkestone Pier & Lift Company having financial problems they leased the pier's Pavilion for the summer season of 1894 to the large entertainment company, Keith Prowse.

Some of the attractions have included; Dan Leno concerts, The Blue Viennese Band, Dog shows from 1919, Lillie Langtry, Alan Green dance band in 1928, and The Keeley's orchestra in 1934. Captain Lawson Smith also demonstrated diving from the pier in a standard diving suite.

He also talked about Robert Forsyth taking over as manager in 1907 and that he built an Olympia Skating Rink c.1911 at the land by the entrance to the pier and that there were 7 skating instructors.

At the start on WW11 the pier was breached to stop the Germans using it for landing, but in 1943 a narrow metal bridge was positioned across the breach and a pipe line laid along the pier which then went up the Leas Lift into the town centre. The other end of the pipe was connected onto a pump in the Pavilion which could extract water from the sea.

On Whitsun Sunday 1945 there was a fire gutting the pavilion. It was thought to be arson and due to the pier never making any money for the share holders, it was eventually demolished, starting in May 1952 and finishing on 18th November 1954.

Another attraction Martin spoke about was the Avro aircraft which ran from the beach in the 1920s after a failed plan in 1919, to fly it from a new landing stage on the Pier.

Martin also spoke briefly about the Switchback Railway which was constructed by Thompson's Patent Gravity Switchback Co. Ltd and opened on Friday 17th August 1888 with free rides for the first hour and closed just after the end of WW1. Martin said he was surprised that Lord Radnor allowed it to be built because Folkestone was such a fashionable seaside resort and it would be more suited in places like Blackpool!

Tony Hill then gave an update on the recently discovered foundation stone which he wrote about in the last newsletter saying that they had managed to identify all inscriptions on the stone and that two masons had cut them in the stone which has cost £900. He went on to say the exact position where the stone was had been found and that was on the ground between the two kiosks at the entrance to the pier which people walking over it could read it. He went on to say Go Folkestone are hoping to position the stone in the same place.

Fifty-nine people attended the meeting, seventeen of whom were visitors.



At the November meeting we welcomed guest speaker Dr Geoff Doel who presented his talk entitled **'Legendary And Ghostly Kent'**.

The first part of Geoff's talk was about Kentish legends and myths, some of which had been attributed to the locations of older sites, such as ancient barrows (e.g. Julliberrie's Grave, near Chilham). Geoff covered the stories of Hengist & Horsa, and Vortigern & Rowena.

Kent does not have any legends of dragons but legends of spectral black dogs exist, such as on the Pilgrims Way near Wrotham. And on the subject of 'monsters', St Dunstan, who is celebrated in Canterbury, is said to have fought with the Devil at his forge in Mayfield in Sussex, grasping the Devils nose with his hot tongs.

Geoff also covered some of the saints associated with Kent and their miracles and the Wells that still exist that are dedicated to these saints (and one to The Black Prince). The most famous local saint, is Thomas A Becket, whose many miracles included healing... but apparently for a price! Geoff expanded with one tale of one of Thomas' miracles when he cured a man's sick son; but when he wasn't paid for his efforts, had his other son killed!

Geoff then moved on to tell us about locations of reputed ghostly hauntings. The ghostly locations included: Charles Dickens' ghost in Rochester High Street, Anne Boleyn's ghost at Hever Castle, Nan Cook's ghost in Canterbury Cathedral's precincts, the murder of Simon Sudbury and the subsequent haunting of Sudbury's Tower in Canterbury, and other haunted locations such as The Black Horse pub in Pluckley, and the Shipwright's Arms in Faversham, and Black Robin Lane in Kingston in the Elham Valley.

Geoff finished by singing us a folk song called Grey Cock (a.k.a. "Lovers Ghost") that he used to sing with others in his former local pub "The Cardinals Error".

Thirty-three people attended the meeting of whom three were visitors.



Notices by Alan Taylor

We would like to welcome new member Robert Wilson.

On a rather sad note I would like to announce the sudden death of Marion Chapman.

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.