



**FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**
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Chairman's report.

NEWSLETTER No. 83 – Summer 2020

At the March meeting we welcomed guest Gordon Wise who presented his talk entitled '**Fan Bay Deep Shelter & the Hidden History of Dover's Tunnels**'.

Gordon went on to talk about the Fan Bay Deep Shelter which is a series of tunnels constructed during World War II as accommodation for Fan Bay Battery artillery battery, 23 metres down in the White Cliffs of Dover at Fan Bay near the Port of Dover. The tunnels and gun battery were built by the Royal Engineers between 20th November 1940 and 28th February 1941.

The tunnels are lined with corrugated steel arching and the complex originally included five large tunnels with storage space for bunk beds, rifles, a hospital and a secure store, a generator, toilets and washrooms. The gun battery was intended to attack enemy shipping moving through the English Channel.

The tunnels were abandoned in the 1950s and filled in with debris in the 1970s. In 2012 the tunnels were rediscovered by the National Trust after purchasing this section of the cliffs. The restoration work, carried over 18 months, included removal of 100 tonnes of rubble. The tunnels were opened to the public on 20th July 2015.

The Tunnels are near the site of two World War One sound mirrors, which the National Trust have also dug out, restored and can be seen on the tour.

Tickets for the tunnels tours are sold at the Fan Bay tunnel entrance on a first-come, first-served basis. Tours leave every 30 minutes through the day with a maximum of 12 people on each tour. National Trust Members can visit for free, but must show a valid membership card at the tunnel entrance. The only down side is the tunnels are only accessible by 125 steep steps to get into the shelter and back out again

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

Dover Straits Disaster, 1971 by Alan Taylor

On 11th January 1971 the Panamanian tanker *Texaco Caribbean* had delivered a cargo of petroleum spirit to Canvey Island, and was making her way down the English Channel, outward bound in the westbound lane of the separation zone, nearing the Mid-Varne buoy. About seven miles off Folkestone, she was in collision with Peruvian vessel *Paracas*, which was eastbound on voyage from Pisco in Peru to Rotterdam carrying a cargo of fish oil and fishmeal.

There was an enormous explosion which tore the tanker in half and rocked homes from Dungeness to Margate. Within five minutes the bridge and bow section had sunk. The stern section remained afloat, listing at an acute angle. The crew of the *Paracas* were shocked and dazed by the impact, but

none was badly injured. The ship's bow suffered severe damage and the Master called for tugs to assist her. By 7.20 a.m. next morning the German tug *Heros* took the *Paracas* in tow, having put portable pumps aboard to reduce the water entering the leaking forward holds. The *Heros* towed the vessel away stern first, being joined by another tug, the *Hermes*, which helped tow the vessel to Hamburg.

Numerous ships were on the scene including the *Dover* and *Dungeness* lifeboats. Fortunately the sea was calm, and the first ship to arrive was the Norwegian *Bravour*. She picked up twenty-one of the crew of the *Texaco Caribbean*, transferring them to the *Dover* lifeboat. The fishing vessel *Viking Warrior* (skipper Val Noakes) found the injured Bo's'n in the water. Twenty-two in all were saved, leaving eight Italian seamen, including the Master, unaccounted for.

Trinity House tender *Siren* arrived at the scene close to darkness by the time she reached the Varne, and unfortunately the after part of the *Texaco Caribbean* had sunk by this time. Her crew could not locate the parts of the wreck in the dark, so her Master anchored the *Siren* upstream of the wreck position, placing it between his vessel and the sandbank. Wreck-marking signals were hoisted directing ships to pass to the westwards and into clear water.

The *Viking Warrior* was out again early on the 12th, the next morning, keeping a sharp lookout. When passing the wreck area at about 8.15 a.m. her crew spotted people in the sea. They got the men aboard, who turned out to be German and they came from the Hamburg-Amerika Line ship *Brandenburg* (2,695 tons) which had struck the wreckage before 8.00 a.m. and sank within about five minutes. A total of eleven of her crew were recovered, seven bodies were also found, which left four missing. The *Brandenburg* was following in the wake of the *Texaco Caribbean*, and was outward bound to Kingston, Jamaica from Bremen and Antwerp.



The *Texaco Caribbean*

By darkness on 14th January the perimeter of the wreck zone had been marked by six green-painted buoys laid in a diamond pattern. The motor tanker *Hebris* said she had seen a ship sinking in the region of the Varne Bank, but could no longer see her, the time was 8.16 p.m.

The Greek vessel *Niki* (2,371 tons gross) had sailed from Dunkirk at about 4.00 p.m. for Alexandria with a cargo of rails in her lower hold. After adjusting her compass, she preceded westwards until shortly after 8.00 p.m. when she struck the wreckage and sank very quickly. The *Niki* had a crew of twenty-one and also the wife of the Chief Engineer. The *Viking Warrior* reported 'A yellow mast was sticking out of the water amongst sunken wreckage'.

The final accident brought the total number of lives lost to fifty-one, and great concern was felt by the Government and emergency services.

The English Channel separation zone had been monitored with increasing effectiveness over the years, reducing the number of 'rogue' ships using the wrong lane. Observance of the separation scheme became mandatory when it became the subject of a new rule in the 1972 Collision Regulation, which came into force in 1977.

The Fireplace at the Pilot Inn, Dungeness by Hilary Tolputt

One of my favourite outings is a bus or train ride on the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway to Dungeness for a circuitous walk from the Railway Station to the Pilot Inn. The endless beach with the fishing boats, the lighthouses and the lifeboat station are a constant reminder of the dangers of the coast. This remote area so reminiscent of the past is also dominated by the modern in the shape of the nuclear power stations. After a bracing walk, the Pilot Inn is my refuge with its welcome fish and chips.



Imagine my surprise when I looked closely at the fireplace on a cold day and saw Christian symbols carved in stone.

There was a somewhat complicated explanation of the symbols in a note above the fireplace. However, there is a much simpler explanation. Traditionally, the four Gospel writers are often depicted in Christian Art as the four creatures carved in the stone.

Starting at the top left, the A and O stand for the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, - Alpha and Omega - Jesus Christ First and Last.

Under the A and O, the winged figure of a man represents St Matthew.

To the right of the A and O, the winged figure of a lion depicts St Mark, and next to St Mark, the winged figure of an ox, symbolises St Luke.

The X and P (the Chi Ro symbol) on the top right represent the first two letters in Greek of the word Christ and beneath the Chi Ro symbol, an eagle depicts St. John. (If you are interested in the biblical references to these four creatures they are to be found in Ezekiel 1:5-14 and the Book of Revelation 4:6-8.)

Why would a pub in Dungeness have a beautifully carved fireplace with symbolic images of St Matthew, St Mark, St Luke and St John? The explanation above the fireplace states that the carvings came from the redundant church of St Catherine, Abergele Road, Old Colwyn in North Wales, and a photo of the stone carving shows it above a wooden altar before the church was deconsecrated. Originally, it was the backdrop or reredos of the altar. If you look closely, you can see the stone is in two parts and there was a central section with a carved cross on it. The four Evangelists therefore were to left and right of the central cross. The carvings of the heads of the man, lion, ox, and eagle are beautifully executed. If I recall correctly, the owner of the Pilot Inn informed me he had found the stone in a reclamation yard in Liverpool.

The Church, a Grade 2 listed building, was on the market for sometime after its de-consecration in 2012 but according to an Old Colwyn resident has recently been sold. It is unclear what its future use will be. However, the reredos has a good home as a fireplace in Dungeness and it is recommended that you go and admire it.



The redundant Church of St Catherine, Abergele Road, Old Colwyn

Meetings during the COVID-19 outbreak

Due to the current guidance from the Government the committee has decided to cancel the following meetings: June, July, August and September. Subject to the lockdown being lifted and it being safe to do so, we are hoping to start with the AGM. Followed by a talk 'Lost Buildings of the Harbour Area', by Alan F.Taylor on Wednesday 7th October usual time 7.30 p.m. for 8 p.m. start. Whilst we understand some will be disappointed the welfare and safety of our members is our top priority and we look forward to seeing you all again. For those of you who have already paid their subscription for the 2019/2020 season will not have to pay subscriptions for 2020/2021.

We would like to welcome new member Joan Sheppard.

On a rather sad note, former member Joyce Thorogood passed away on 28th February 2020, aged 89 years.