



## FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER No. 13 – Winter 2002/3

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

If you are wondering why you have received a newsletter so quickly after the last one it is because the committee has decided to bring it forward by one month. This is because we are not having a meeting in January, which meant all the Winter newsletters would have had to be distributed, and the Autumn newsletter that includes the subscription renewal can now be brought forward to September, enabling those members who wish to renew their membership at the AGM time to fill in their form beforehand.

All the officers were re-elected at the AGM and due to a change in her circumstances Shirley Gregory agreed to re-stand as treasurer. I would like to welcome Fiona McNeill and Linda Sage to the Committee and a full list of Society Officers and Committee members may be found on the back of your programmes.

Trevor Page and his wife Margaret have stood down from running the raffle, which they have successfully carried out for more years than I can remember. My grateful thanks go out to them both and I would like to thank Caroline Groombridge for stepping into their shoes.

The Chichester Hall in Sandgate was our venue for this year's photographic exhibition of the 'Leas Pavilion' and 'Folkestone Past and Present' held on 26<sup>th</sup> October. Visitors were also able to look at postcard albums of old Sandgate, various old artefacts and videos of old Folkestone. The day turned out to be quite a success; particularly for our bookstall run by David Fundrey which took a splendid £275. I would sincerely like to thank all members who helped on the day.

A photographic display was also assembled at St Peter's School on Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> November to celebrate their 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This included views of school groups, the First World War tank that stood on what is now the school playground, the church and the Blessing of the Fisheries. A letter of thanks was received from the school's head teacher Miss A. Blunt, which read '*Thank you for the exhibition of the photographs you arranged for us as part of our 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. Many, many people enjoyed looking at them and I was amazed at just how many 'found' relations, friends or themselves in one or other of the photographs. We had a splendid response to our opening and on behalf of all the children, staff and governors I would sincerely thank you for your contribution to a very successful weekend.*'

The Society extends a warm welcome to the following new members: Steve Walker, Eileen and Bryan Webb, Brian and Valerie Grant and family, Barbara Stephens, Ann Davey and Mr and Mrs Anslow.

May I join the Officers and Committee in wishing all our members a Happy Christmas and Prosperous New Year.

As most of you are probably aware, having already acquired your copies (and if not, why!) Alan has two new books on sale 'Folkestone Past and Present' (Breedon Books/KM £14.99) and 'Sandgate in Old Picture Postcards Volume 2' (European Library £9.99).

As its title suggests 'Folkestone Past and Present' is packed full of old photographs with a modern equivalent, showing you in most cases how much the town has changed (usually for the worse). There is an excellent introductory chapter by Alan's son Andrew and each section of photographs is supported by a full explanatory text.

The Sandgate title is a companion volume to Alan's earlier work on the village for the European Library, published in 1993. His excellent collection of postcards and photographs is displayed to good effect (transcending Sandgate from east to west, with a bit of Seabrook thrown in) with informative accompanying captions.

Members may be interested to know that a book on Hythe in the European Library series by Martin Easdown and Linda Sage is due to be published on 12<sup>th</sup> December, with a book on Folkestone following in the new year.

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## A CENTURY OF THE LEAS PAVILION THEATRE

Martin Easdown

The idea for the Leas Pavilion came from Frederick Ralph who had done much to beautify the town as a seaside resort. In 1901 he had eyed a rough piece of ground adjoining the Longford Hotel opposite the Leas Lift and upon it proposed to erect a high-class tea room. However, the hotels either side of the ground enjoyed long leases from the Earl of Radnor that included an 'Ancient Lights' clause, which meant that no building could be erected upon the rough ground that would 'block the daylight'. To get round the clause local architect Reginald Pope was engaged to design a building below ground level, which met the approval of the Radnor Estate who granted a lease on the land. Contractors Castle & Son were hired to prepare the ground by removing 5,000 loads of sand and soil and erecting strong brick retaining walls. By June 1902 the building was completed and on 1<sup>st</sup> July it was officially opened by Lord Radnor; though the public were not to be admitted for a further ten days.

The Leas Pavilion was a fine addition to the attractions of Folkestone with its striking terracotta frontage finished with art nouveau styled windows. Shops lined the entrance; initially occupied by a jeweller, florist, baker and tobacconist and two billiard tables were placed in the basement. The tea room itself was fully licensed and strictly adhered to a covenant in the lease that required lessees to 'use the room for the highest class tea and refreshment trade with a view to securing the best class of visitors only'. Up to 450 diners therefore were accommodated only on the best oak and walnut floor covered with fine Indian carpets, surrounded by wicker armchairs in

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delicate shades of pink and green and tall palms set in large brass containers. A ladies light orchestra, occasionally with vocalist, finished it all off in typical Edwardian style.

The entertainments in particular proved popular and in 1906 a small stage was placed below the gallery and concert parties were introduced to the newly styled 'Café Chanson'. The 'Gipsies' were amongst the earliest acts engaged and proved to be the most popular with their mixture of burlesque, song, comedy and music.

A new attraction, the cinematograph, was installed in 1911 and films were shown at the end of each live performance. However, many regulars disapproved of the venture, saying it lowered the tone, and often walked out before the films were shown. Yet this proved to be a short-lived venture for the films were soon scrapped after the machine caught alight one evening.

During World War One the Leas Pavilion became popular with the many soldiers based in the town, who could get in for half price, and concert parties, including the ever-popular 'Gipsies', were laid on for them. The concert parties were to remain the staple diet of the pavilion until 1928 when 'Jimmy' Grant Anderson erected a proper stage and introduced rows of seating to convert the building into a theatre. The popular afternoon tea matinees were introduced and three times a week every other row of seating would be removed and tables put in their place so patrons could enjoy their tea while watching the performance.

Jimmy Anderson stayed for just one year and in 1929 Arthur Brough and his wife Elizabeth Addyman were engaged, initially for six weeks but later extended to ten. Their 'Pioneer Players', soon to be re-christened the 'Arthur Brough Players', were an immediate success and their repertory company became a Folkestone institution staying for 40 years and usually performing a different play every week. Regulars from all over the country booked the same seats every year, with the tea matinees particularly popular, though in July and August concert parties were still a feature.

During World War Two the pavilion was closed on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1940 and was fortunate to escape from the conflict virtually unscathed. It was reopened on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1945, and in January 1951 Peter Walter joined the Broughs as their partner and co-director. Three years later the stage and lighting were improved and in 1963 the Arthur Brough Players celebrated their 1000<sup>th</sup> production. Amidst the celebrations however, falling audiences caused Arthur Brough to comment "I do not wish to make a celebration the occasion for an obituary, but the future is fraught with danger".

Arthur Brough performed his last regular season in 1969 before going on to make a household name for himself as Mr Grainger in the television series 'Are You Being Served'. The lease of the pavilion passed to Richard Burnett, of the 'Penguin Players' and Peggy Page between 1970-2 and then Robert and Sally Howard between 1973-6. Charles Vance, a familiar name in repertory and touring fields, then took over and in 1978 set up the charitable organisation the Folkestone Theatre Company with his wife Imogen, the Director of Productions.

Improvements continued to be carried out to the building, including a further enlargement of the stage, new seating and wiring (1979), a new red carpet, redecoration and bar (1982) and new café (1985). Unfortunately

falling attendance's ensured the theatre could not survive and at the end of the 1985 season, following the production of 'An Unexpected Guest' by Agatha Christie, it was closed. Yet happily the building was preserved and converted into a bowling alley and the Leas Club with bar, pool and snooker tables.

Some of the distinguished actors whose early stage appearances were at the Leas Pavilion Theatre include:

David Tomlinson (Walt Disney films)  
Michael Aldridge (Seymour in 'Last of the Summer Wine')  
Joan Hickson ('Miss Marple')  
Noel Howlett (The headmaster in 'Please Sir!')  
Peter Barkworth (distinguished thespian)  
June Brown (Dot Cotton in 'EastEnders')  
Juliette Kaplan (Pearl in 'Last of the Summer Wine')  
Treva Etienne ('London's Burning')

### *A brief biography of Arthur Brough*

*Arthur Brough was born Frederick Arthur Brown in Petersfield, Hampshire in 1905. His interest in amateur dramatics led him to meet Alastair Sim (with whom he was to appear with in the film 'The Green Man') before studying at RADA in the early 1920s. After graduating he worked in a Shakespearean Company where he met Elizabeth Addyman. They were married in 1929, the year he rented the Leas Pavilion; the wedding money was used as collateral. Arthur acted in the shows, as well as running the company, and soon branched out by managing reps at Leeds, Bradford, York (with Phyllis Calvert), Keighley, Southampton, Bristol, Oxford, Lincoln and Blackpool. During the Second World War he served in the navy and upon demobilisation returned to the Leas Pavilion. During the 1950s Arthur also managed reps at Southend and Eastbourne and Joanna Hutton commented "His whole life was dedicated to the theatre, and in the end he's known for playing one part in television!" He played the abrupt and irascible Grace Bros. senior salesman Ernest Grainger in 'Are You Being Served' from 1972 to his death in 1978.*

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