



FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Alan F. Taylor

At the September meeting, our guest speaker/author was Edward Carpenter talking about the 'Wrecks and Rescues off Romney Marsh'. The talk gave a fascinating insight into the work of the Coast Blockade formed in 1817, who were succeeded by the coast guards in 1831. Also the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, which was founded in 1824, and many of the ships that ran aground from Rye to Sandgate. It was a most interesting and informative illustrated talk attracting 50 people.

October was the Annual General Meeting. The officers standing for election were Chairman, Alan Taylor; Vice Chairman Don Gregory and Treasurer, Shirley Gregory. There being no other nominations, the officers were duly elected. Trevor Page was elected as Secretary, and joining the committee were Peter Bamford, Eileen Frankland and Rita Freitag. Martin Easdown stood down after completing his three years on the committee, and the remaining committee members from last year are Fiona McNeill, Linda Sage and Ronald Dutt. On completion of the official business and following refreshments, two video films were viewed by 44 members. The first was on the building and opening of the Civic Centre 1965-67, whilst the other, 'The Night We Almost Blew Away', featured the hurricane of 1987.

At the November meeting, we welcomed back local historian Eamonn Rooney who presented us with an illustrated talk on the Leas Lift and Seafront. It was a most interesting and entertaining talk giving an insight into the working of the water-balanced lift. Eamonn has worked on the lift for a number of years and has first hand knowledge of how it works.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to the following new members: Mr Ian Ward, Mr Wilf Ashburn and Miss Penni Bowler.

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

FOLKESTONE'S LOST SPA

By

Martin Easdown and Linda Sage

'At a place called Foord, a quarter mile distant west from Folkestone, is a fine salubrious spring of water, which has all the virtue and efficacy of the chalybeate, being impregnated with iron in a degree equal to Tunbridge water. If a subscription was opened by the inhabitants of Folkestone, and the gentlemen of the vicinity, to

make this place convenient for public resort, it would greatly contribute to the benefit of the town and its environs.'

This description came from Seymour's *Survey of Kent*, published in 1776 when the partaking of mineral waters for the benefit of health was at its height. Spa's sprung up across the country, and ranged from a trickling of water in a country field to the grand Roman/Greek-influenced pump rooms of Bath and Cheltenham. Unfortunately, the spring at Foord never graduated into the latter category as the people of Folkestone failed to grasp the mantle of opportunity. Today, the spring has vanished; its site totally obliterated behind the incongruous advertising boards that line the junction of Radnor Park Road, Black Bull Road and Foord Road.

The thermal springs of Bath, Bristol and Buxton can be traced back to Roman times, but the modern day spa dates from the late 16th century and takes its name from the famous health resort in the Ardennes region of Belgium. Mineral water was said to be good for health because of its high salt mineral content, often containing magnesium or iron salts. The three main types of mineral water were:

Saline – Contained dissolved salts such as magnesium sulphate (Epsom Salts) and chiefly used for its purgative effects.

Chalybeate – Characterised by the rust coloured iron oxide, formed when ferrous carbonate is exposed to air. Contained various iron salts, notably ferrous sulphate renowned for its tonic and restorative properties.

Sulphur – Characterised by the smell of hydrogen sulphide (bad eggs) containing sulphur compounds. The water was unpleasant to drink, though it was said to be good for soothing stomachs, and therefore was used more for bathing, which aided skin complaints.

The lack of medical science at the time ensured claims that the waters could cure virtually every ailment under the sun were unable to be seriously challenged until well into the 19th century. Additionally the springs often provided the only pure source of water before mains water began to be piped during the Victorian era.

The smaller spas remained simple affairs, consisting of just a plain building covering the well (though sometimes they did not even have this!) and occasionally an inn or hotel for accommodation. In the larger spas however, the initial purpose of the water's healing properties became rather overshadowed by the additional attractions they had to offer. It appears their rich and fashionable clients, who, whilst trying to cure the effects of an over-indulgent life, missed all the trappings that went with it! So in the heyday of the spa in the 18th and early 19th centuries the grander resorts such as Tunbridge Wells, Leamington, Matlock, Buxton and Harrogate acquired their classical-styled pump rooms, colonnades, ballrooms, promenades, winter gardens and pleasure gardens. Master of Ceremonies, such as the celebrated Beau Nash at Bath and Tunbridge Wells, ensured the public balls were conducted in an exemplary manner with everyone knowing what to wear and how to behave. A typical day at one of these larger spas would begin with a bathe in the hot spring waters between 6-9 am, followed by an internal dose of mineral water to the accompaniment of a small string orchestra. Breakfast would be followed by a trip to the shops, or church, before returning to their hostelry for dinner. An afternoon promenade and a further visit to the pump room would proceed the evening's entertainment of a ball, a trip to the theatre or card games.

Foord, of course, had none of this grandeur and remained a very small and little-known spa. Its obscurity even at the height of the craze can be borne out by the fact it was not mentioned in the spa 'bible' of the time *The Spas of England and Principal Sea Bathing Places* (1841) by Dr Augustus Granville, who travelled the length and breadth of the country looking for them. After the 1776 mention, little was heard of Foord Spa until it is mentioned in L. Fussell's *Journey Round the Coast of Kent* (1818): '*Such an accidental circumstance that which first brought Tunbridge Wells into repute is only wanting to give celebrity to the chalybeate water at Foord, and make the fortune of Mr Holmes, a very civil, attentive and intelligent master of the 'Red Cow' near the spot.*'

This reference implies that Mr Holmes also ran the spa as well as the nearby 'Red Cow' inn, which no doubt provided accommodation for the few health-seekers that visited Foord. Sadly, like everyone else involved with the spa, Mr Holmes failed to make his fortune and soon moved off to pastures new.

The spring at Foord was fed from the adjoining Pent Stream and was presumably collected into a well, brick-lined at the top. The water was described as 'uninviting', presumably because of the rust colour of the chalybeate. The best time to drink it was said to be first thing in the morning, with a further two or three glasses throughout the day. To make the water more palatable, it was sometimes mixed with milk, wine, rum or brandy. According to Dr John Hollings (1683? - 1739), Physician in Ordinary to their Majesty's, chalybeate waters such as Foord were said to '*quicken the whole circulation, attenuate the blood, dissolve viscid humours and open obstructions; after which, by its austere and stypick quality, it strengthens the relaxed fibres, recovers the lost tone of the solids and their due elasticity. From its salts, it incites, stimulates, dissolves, promotes the several sectors, and is, in particular very diuretic. Thus do these several principles conspire in forming a most useful composition, and from their union results this most excellent mineral water, whose singular virtues and efficacy will render it beneficial in many, if not in most chronic diseases, incident to mankind.*'

Among the 'most chronic diseases' that Foord's chalybeate water was said to aid were diarrhoea, gout, rheumatism, flatulence, scurvy, 'blood fluxes', dysentery, bleeding of piles, lowness of spirits, weakness of the nerves, want of appetite, indigestion, habitual colic, vomiting, obstructions of several kinds, jaundice, dropsy, nephritic disorders, asthma and 'scorbutick cases'. Yet the spa remained a well pure and simple; not even baths were added, let alone any entertainments or a physician employed to write a treatise on how wonderful the water was. The failure of the spa was presumably down to not attracting enough visitors, despite the fact that Kent and East Sussex were otherwise virtually devoid of commercial mineral springs (Tunbridge Wells, and a short-lived one at Canterbury, excepted) and so there was very little competition around.

By 1850 a mock castle building, masquerading as a pump room, had been erected over the well, apparently by Mr J.G. Breach of the Pavilion Hotel, but by then the little spas like Foord had had their day, killed off by the new craze for the sea. The dubious pleasure of drinking seawater was now preferable to braving the rust coloured chalybeate water, and Folkestone the seaside resort triumphed over Foord the spa, and soon grew out to envelop it once the railway arrived in 1843. The railway however did give Foord a new and imposing landmark in William Cubitt's towering nineteen arch viaduct, while ironically within its shadow sprung up a spa-like development known as Viaduct Villas. This high-class circus of German-like chalet houses would have been fit to grace the likes of Baden-Baden, yet they came

too late to save Foord Spa and were sadly removed from the 1860s to make way for the new gasworks. As the Victorian era progressed Foord became fully absorbed into Folkestone as housing spread around the Pent Stream.

The most visible reminder of the spa's existence (although you would have to be aware of its history to gauge the connection) is the 'Castle' public house that stands opposite the site. This was opened in 1864 and was named after the mock-castle building of the spa that was presumably still standing at the time. However the pump room was subsequently demolished and a row of late Victorian four-storey houses, known as 'Chalybeate Terrace' were erected at the front of the site. As for the spring itself there is no visible sign, although it is said still to be there, waiting once again to be rediscovered.

BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS

We have been truly spoilt for choice as regards local history books this Christmas with seven titles recently published. They are:

A Glint in the Sky by Martin Easdown with Thomas Genth - the heartrending story of the devastating air raid on Folkestone on 25th May 1917 and other enemy action on Kent during the First World War. Price £12.99

Images of England: Folkestone Volume II by Alan F. Taylor - another fine selection of fascinating old photographs of Folkestone. Price £12.99

Folkestone: A History & Celebration by Paul Harris. A general history of the town, featuring the photographs of the Frith Collection in an imaginative and colourful layout. Price £14.99

Coast of Conflict by Michael & Martin George. A military history of the south Kent coast from Napoleonic times to the First World War. Price £10.99

Hythe: A History by Martin Easdown and Linda Sage. A history of the Cinque Port of Hythe combined with a largely unpublished selection of old photographs of the town. Price £15.99

Dorothy from Hythe in Kent by Dorothy K. Thomas & Ruth I. Johns. The story of Dorothy's life, which began in Hythe. Price £12.00

More Tales from the Tap Room by Martin Easdown & Eamonn Rooney - the town's pub bible is back with a revamped Folkestone section and new chapters on Sandgate, Cheriton, Seabrook, Shorncliffe, Morehall and Newington. Price £12.99

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