



## FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

### NEWSLETTER No. 24 – Autumn 2005

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

At the June meeting our guest speaker was Chris McCooney talking about Kent Characters. Chris was born and raised in Kent after which he spent ten years in Japan where he taught English. After teaching there for 10 years and marrying a Japanese girl he spent one year studying in California before coming home in 1986 to Southborough, Tunbridge Wells to fulfil his lifetime ambition to be a writer. He has written many books including *Kent Scandals – Sensational, Salacious and Sad*, *Kent Women – Famous Infamous and Unsung*, *Kent Characters – Wacky – Weird and Wonderful*, *Kent Heroes – Brave – Resourceful and True*, *Sussex Heroes* and *Sussex Characters*.

At the July meeting we welcomed back our old friend and speaker Eric Hart who gave us a most interesting and fascinating talk on the Astoria/Odeon Cinema. Eric then went on to give us a detailed account of how he installed the old Savoy Cinema Standaard Theatre Organ in his house at Chart Road, which took him ten years to complete.

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> July was the Society's annual outing. 49 members and friends boarded a coach and left Cheriton at 8 a.m. for a guided tour round East Anglia called "The Three Rivers Tour". After picking up our guide Prudence we made our way to East Bergholt where we had morning coffee. After which we walked around the village where we saw a plaque marking the birthplace of John Constable and East Bergholt Church where there is a stained glass window dedicated to him. One most unusual thing about the church is that the bells are not housed in a bell tower but in the churchyard. We then boarded the coach and followed the river Stour to where it meets the River Orwell and carried on to Old Harwich. At Old Harwich we saw an old lighthouse where at one time a lady of the night lived and she was known as *Lighthouse Lil*. The old Electric Theatre, which opened on 29th November 1911 after being closed for many years, has been sympathetically restored and reopened as a cinema claiming to be the oldest cinema operating in the country. We also saw a two man treadmill crane which reminded me of the two tread-wheels in our area, one on a farm at Martin and the other at St. Margaret's-At-Cliffe attached to the end of a house. A tread-wheel is rotated by a person or animal walking on the inside of its periphery, which-gave motion to the machinery to raise water from a well. Nether of these wheels are open to the public but I had the good fortune to visit them with the late C.P. Davies. However getting back to our outing after visiting Old Harwich we made our way to Manningtree famous for its swans, maltings and sailing barges; this was our lunch stop where we had time to look around the town. After lunch we drove across the Orwell Bridge to the quay at Waldringfield near Woodbridge in Suffolk where we boarded the M.V. *Jahan* for a two hour afternoon cruise down the River Deben towards Felixstowe. The boat trip included a very informative commentary by the skipper he said "that years ago Waldringfield had a cement works and that the cement was made with mud from the river and imported chalk from Kent", it's highly likely that some of the chalk was shipped out of Folkestone. Other places of note were Woodbridge Mill, Waldringfield beach, Ramsholt church and Bawdsey Manor. The boat trip included a very generous tea which prepared us for our drive home arriving at Folkestone bus station at 8.30 p.m.

At the August meeting our guest speaker was Graham Hoskins talking about Mountbatten of Burma. Mr Hoskins joined the Royal Marines at the age of 14 and trained at their musical college and finishing up as the Principal Director of Music. During his 40 years service he served eight years on board the Royal Yacht Britannia, which included the honeymoon of Prince Charles and Princess Diana. He also attended Lord Mountbatten's funeral, which was held at Portsmouth six weeks after his death.

Graham's talk covered the life of Mountbatten backed up with recordings of some of the man's great speeches and music of military marches which included; *Anchors Away*, the slow march *Sailing*, *Peter Rabbit* & *Tales of Beatrix Potter*, *Edinburgh Castle* and some of Vera Lynn's songs. The evening attracted 56 people 10 of which were visitors.

We are always looking for more articles for the newsletter, so please feel free to contribute on any local history topic or your memoirs of living in Folkestone. We desperately need articles to keep the newsletters going. I am

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rather saddened to see that some of our members have written for the Quarter magazine but not for their own Society's newsletters.

I would like to extend my sincere and grateful thanks to our member and friend Tom Leftley for arranging a magnificent annual outing.

On a rather sad note I would like to announce the death of member Miss E. Sparke who worked at Bletchley Park during WWII.

## **ELDRIDGE NEWMAN AND THE FOLKESTONE MUNICIPAL ORCHESTRA**

**By  
Martin Easdown**

Although the design for Folkestone's Leas Cliff Hall was first submitted by Norwegian architect J.S. Dahl in 1913, it was not until February 1925 that Messrs. J. Godden & Sons begun work on the town's new concert hall. Built into the side of the cliff on the site of the old Leas Shelter, the grand and rather attractive building cost £80,000 to construct and was officially opened by Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1927. Folkestone Corporation had hoped to christen the hall the 'Royal Cliff Pavilion', but the Home Secretary refused to pass on the request to King George V.

To grace its new pride and joy, Folkestone Corporation and its Entertainments Committee (formed on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1926) had decided the town should have its own Municipal Orchestra as already possessed by some of its rival seaside resorts. In addition, the hall was to have its own Entertainments Manager and a Dance Orchestra. In January 1927 the Committee interviewed three candidates for the post of Musical Director for the Municipal Orchestra - Paul Belinfante of the West Pier, Brighton; Captain F. Waterhouse of London and Captain Algernon Holland of London. Waterhouse made no impression, but both Belinfante and Holland received four votes from Committee members. However, on the casting vote, Captain Holland was appointed Musical Director of the Folkestone Municipal Orchestra for the yearly period 1<sup>st</sup> June 1927 to 31<sup>st</sup> May 1928. He was to be paid a weekly salary of £20 (paid monthly) and was expected to provide sixteen concerts a week throughout the year (with Wednesdays off during the winter). The orchestra was to consist of 25 members in the summer and 15 in the winter, who were directly employed by the Corporation at a salary of £15 a month. Instruments such as an organ, piano, celesta and tubular bells were acquired, and also an anvil (lent by the Parks Superintendent) to be employed in works by Wagner and Tchaikovsky! The full list of terms agreed by Holland upon taking up his position were:

- 1) To conduct an orchestra, the members of which will be paid directly by the Corporation.
- 2) To choose and engage the musicians at salaries to be approved by the Corporation (at not more than £175 per week for the whole orchestra, excluding the Musical Director).
- 3) To arrange special and extra concerts if and when desired by the Entertainments Committee.
- 4) To advise the Entertainments Committee and the Corporation generally on musical matters in the Borough.
- 5) To conduct all performances personally.
- 6) To provide, at his own cost, a sufficient and up-to-date library of music.
- 7) Not to accept himself or permit any member of the orchestra to accept any other engagement without the consent of the Entertainments Committee.
- 8) To have the power to discharge any member of the orchestra.
- 9) To give proper and sufficient time in instructing and rehearsing the orchestra.

Following the official opening by Prince Henry, who declared it to be 'the most palatial concert hall in England' the Municipal Orchestra, along with the Folkestone Male Voice Choir, performed Gounod's *Hymn to Apollo* and Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1*.

Season ticket prices for the hall were fixed at yearly £2 2s 0d; monthly £1 0s 0d and weekly 7s 6d. Morning concerts cost 6d and evening concerts during the week 1/6d, reserved 2/4d. At the weekend, reserved seats cost 3/6d.

Unfortunately, the new hall was soon losing money. In October 1927 the harpist and French horn players were discontinued and by January 1928 the financial loss amounted to around £9,000. The Corporation were already talking about reducing the size of the orchestra and therefore the wage bill. Captain Holland had expressed his dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the hall's operation and was further grieved by a few minor annoyances such as the serving of refreshments in the hall during concerts. The chairs for the audience were also said to be uncomfortable and made them fidget! A Dr Fulton, staying at the Carlton Hotel, complained that one of the chairs had collapsed

when his wife sat on it, causing injury. However the Corporation's Entertainments Committee refused to accept liability.

As Holland's yearly contract neared its completion, he expressed to the Corporation his wish to remain in the post. However the Corporation (perhaps unhappy with certain aspects of Holland's employment) decided to advertise the post and received 71 applications. Four were chosen for interview: Holland; J. Clifford; H.H. Hainton and J.E.W. Newman. The latter was chosen and in May 1928 took up his appointment with an annual salary of £750.

James William Eldridge Newman, a rather pale and reserved young man, was born in Wood Green, Essex in 1889 and became an accomplished orchestral violinist. During the First World War he joined the Inns of Court Regiment and was commissioned into the Buffs. Following his demobilisation in February 1919 he toured with a Beecham operatic production before acquiring in 1925 the summer post of conductor of the Weymouth Municipal Orchestra.

Newman took on around 30 musicians at Weymouth, which had been built up by his predecessor C. Fenn-Leyland into a 'full orchestra of first-class London musicians'. This was not strictly correct; nevertheless the orchestra had some celebrated players pass through its ranks, including William Valentine (flute), Frederick Thurston (clarinet), Ralph Clarke (clarinet) and Edwin Malkin (mustel organ). Newman introduced a Thursday morning symphony concert, with a verbal exposition of the music beforehand, and special concerts for children. However the orchestra lost money and in 1927 was reduced to an octet. This decision was a factor that induced Newman to leave Weymouth in 1928.

Upon his appointment, Newman was offered 15-20 players for orchestra during the summer and 10-15 (later increased to 17) in the winter at a cost not exceeding £122 per week. In addition there were allowances for outside soloists and money to set up a music library (which by 1936 ranged over a four-volume catalogue). A Municipal Choir of 200 (not run by the Corporation) would augment the orchestra. At that time, Folkestone Corporation expressed a determination to put their orchestra on par with the celebrated Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra, led by Dan Godfrey.

Thursday's were established as the symphony concert evenings and throughout that day the orchestra would rehearse that night's concert fare. Sometimes people would be allowed into the rehearsals and an afternoon concert would be given that mirrored the evening presentation. Soloists such as Myra Hess, Rubenstein, Kreisler, Thibaud, Fournier, Moiseiwitsch and Sammons were all guests with the orchestra on the symphony concert evenings.

In addition, during the winter on Friday afternoons, a presentation of 'concerts in times', largely consisting of chamber music, was provided. There were also light music concerts, tea time concerts and vaudeville evenings on Saturdays. Expository concerts for children were given on Saturday mornings. Joint performances were also arranged with the Hastings, Bournemouth, Brighton and Margate Municipal Orchestras and there was an exchange of Musical Directors with Bournemouth and Torquay.

Newman quickly proved to be popular both with his audience and his peers and his contract was renewed in 1929 and each subsequent year. In September 1928 the Corporation gave its approval for Newman and the orchestra to record gramophone records with the Edison Bell Recording Company. The BBC also frequently broadcast their concerts on radio.

In September 1930 Newman founded an annual music festival, when his orchestra was augmented to 60 players. Famous names attracted to the festival throughout the thirties included Elgar, Wood, Coates, Beecham, Harty, Barbirolli, Goossens, Dame Ethel Smyth and Susan Spain-Dunk, who conducted her *Kentish Downs Overture* and *The Water Lily Pool*. The orchestra was guested by well-known names such as Frederick Riddle, Douglas Cameron, George Stratton, Lawrence Leonard, Gilbert Winter, Alfred Cave and Tina Bonifacio.

Unfortunately, the music festivals, although popular, were not the big money-spinners hoped for and the 1931 event lost £138 13s 3d. In May 1931 the annual running cost of the orchestra was quoted at £6,840, which the Corporation could ill-afford. Newman offered to save £1,200 of the budget by reducing the size of the orchestra between the months of October and May, which was accepted. In September 1932, the salaries of the orchestra members were reduced and instruments such as the saxophone and French horn were augmented to the orchestra only when required.

For the 1933 Music Festival the following concerts were laid on: Friday, 29<sup>th</sup> September - orchestral concert conducted by Sir Hamilton Harty; Saturday, 30<sup>th</sup> September - choral concert; Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> October - chamber music concert (morning) and orchestral concert (evening). The event recorded a loss of £195 that year and within the next few years losses of £158 (1934), £169 (1935) and £142 (1936) were made. For the 1936 festival, Eric Coates composed his *Saxo Rhapsody*, which was played by Sigurd Rascher. Newman performed his own *Dorset Suite*, whose final movement *The Old Josses's Dance* became a firm audience favourite. His ballet suite *Les Lutins* was also very popular,

as was his organist Clifton Parkes' *Willow Pattern* ballet and rumba for piano and orchestra. The principal violin and sub-conductor for the 1936 season was Albert Voorsanger, with the pianist being Harold Ingram. For the 1937 festival, held between 28<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> August, Thomas Beecham was the guest conductor.

In addition to the Leas Cliff Hall, the Municipal Orchestra also occasionally performed in the Leas Bandstand when no military bands were available. There was also a proposal in 1935 for the orchestra to play in a proposed new bandstand at the bottom of the Zig-Zag path, but this was never built. In the following year there was a further proposal for the orchestra to perform in Kingsnorth Gardens.

In the late 1930s Newman made the select list for the conductorship of the BBC Northern Orchestra. However he was not appointed, and back in Folkestone, council cutbacks led them to refuse to underwrite any further augmentation of the orchestra. In September 1937 the contracts of four players were terminated and for the 1938 summer season it was proposed to have an orchestra of 20, reduced to 17 between September and January. In 1939 there were further reductions when, for 33 weeks of the year, the orchestra was reduced to just an octet with Newman a playing member. At other times, it was to consist of sixteen members. In line with these changes, Newman's annual salary was reduced from £750 to £550.

In December 1939, Newman was granted permission to volunteer for military service and in May 1940 he was called up. Proposals had been made in February 1940 for a summer orchestra of sixteen and a dance band of six, but on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1940 the Municipal Orchestra was wound up when the remaining six members had their contracts terminated.

Newman rejoined the Buffs in May 1940 as a Second Lieutenant and helped guard Folkestone Harbour during the retreat from Dunkirk. He was then posted to an establishment at the English Dunkirk, near Canterbury, but suffered injuries and shock from a bomb blast and was sent on sick leave. Some say he then spent time in a mental hospital, and sadly, on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1940, he was found shot dead in Vinters Park, Maidstone. Rumours abounded that he had been shot in the back of the head by enemy agents, yet the coroner returned a verdict of 'Suicide; balance of mind disturbed'. Nevertheless he was given a military funeral at Shorncliffe Military Cemetery, where he lies just inside the entrance gate.

The mysterious end of Eldridge Newman remains an enigma, but of course his was not the only death: his orchestra died with him and the days of Folkestone's own Municipal Orchestra were gone forever.

Principal sources:

Folkestone Corporation Entertainment Committee minutes 1926-40

*Music's Great Days in the Spas and Watering Places* by Kenneth Young (MacMillan 1968)

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