



FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Alan F. Taylor

At the February meeting Brian Doorne's talk was about the watermills and waterways in south and east Kent. He started with a slide showing how Crabble mill operated, followed by a slide of the remains of a fourth century mill at Ickham where a quern stone was used as an early method of grinding corn. We were then taken on a pictorial tour round the watermills and waterways, following the Stour from Wickhambreaux to Hythe. This was a fascinating talk, supported by some very good slides, and was enjoyed by an audience of fifty-four people, three of whom were visitors.

June and Ken Paine have recently completed some sterling work on the history of the Garden House Hotel at 142 Sandgate Road. Formerly St. Nicholas's Private School for Young Ladies from 1885, this was closed in 1924 when the building was converted into the Garden House Hotel. McCarthy and Stone have recently completed a new building on the site called Garden House Court and the research which June and Ken undertook was for Linda Myers, the care manager of the new complex. In the 8 April edition of the Folkestone Herald there was a photograph of June and Ken at the official opening, presenting Linda Myers with a copy of their research. I was able to assist with a number of photographs of the school. Well done, June and Ken.

At the April meeting we welcomed back an old friend and guest speaker, Julia Page. On this occasion her talk was "Sandgate to Rye - Napoleon's Gateway". Julia said that France declared war on England in January 1793 and as early as October 1797 France's revolutionary ruling Directory had ordered the immediate assembly of an army to invade England. In command of the army was a young general named Bonaparte. In February 1798 he toured the channel coast, then indicated that he intended Boulogne to be his centre of operations and the South Kent coast would be the object of the planned invasion. Napoleon had 127,000 troops: we had 40,000. It was thought that Napoleon would come by sea though an aerial invasion using balloons was not ruled out. The newly-built Shorncliffe Camp was under the command of Sir John Moore. He was largely responsible for training the light infantry (who were beginning to replace the cavalry between 1803 and 1805) and was also responsible for preparing the coastal defences. It was not until William Pitt got into 10 Downing Street in 1804 that the order was given to build the Martello towers and Hythe Canal. This was an interesting talk, giving us insight into the preparations against the threat of an invasion by Napoleon. Sixty-two people attended, eight of whom were visitors.

Unfortunately at the May meeting our speaker, Patricia Gibb, didn't turn up. The subject of her talk was Higham Park and as we knew the house had been sold we had contacted Mrs Gibb. She had confirmed she would be giving the talk. In her absence we decided to show the video 'Memories of Folkestone (2) 1914-1939'. I think this was very well received and I trust that members were not too disappointed that they didn't get the advertised talk.

The Kent History Federation's One-Day Conference was held on Saturday 13 May. This was hosted by Farningham & Eynsford Local History Society, Otford & District Historical Society and Shoreham & District Historical Society - all three are in the Darent valley in the Weald of Kent. The morning talks were held at the Community Centre, Sevenoaks and there was a choice of seven afternoon visits. I chose the guided walk at Farningham which included a visit to the church. Farningham village consists of the main

high street with a few side streets. It has several listed buildings, mainly eighteenth century, including a corn mill built on the river Darent. Farningham is a most interesting village and well worth a visit. Our Society was well represented at the conference by seven members.

We would like to welcome new members: Mr and Mrs Ashton, Shirley Gee and Mrs J. Port.

Some dates for your diary:

A coffee morning to be held at the Pavilion on **Thursday 15 June** at 11 a.m.

Annual outing: **Saturday 1 July** a trip on the Tenterden Railway to Bodiam Castle. **(There are still places available)**

Trip to the Theatre Royal, Margate: **Wednesday 11 October** to see *My Fair Lady*.

Christmas Lunch: **Friday 15 December** at the Bowls Club.

A.F.T.

FOLKESTONE - SEPTEMBER 1886

(This article first appeared in the *Illustrated London News*)

'Our Artist of the "Rambling Sketches" has been most attentive to the human, personal, and social aspects of this pleasant seaside town, with its habitual promenading groups of well-dressed ladies and gentlemen; the passengers from Boulogne disembarking on arrival of the tidal boat; the Exhibition (Arts Treasurers Exhibition) of this year, which has been a great success; and several portraits, easy to be recognised, of well-known individuals held in esteem at Folkestone - amongst them, of course, the present worthy Mayor. It may not be amiss to give readers unacquainted with the place some little information concerning its peculiar attractions, both natural and enhanced by modern improvements, as a resort for marine summer habitation, in which respect it bears comparison with any of the bright and cheerful towns on the Kent and Sussex coasts. Its seaward view is one of the liveliest, owing to the fact that all the shipping which passes from the Downs to the Channel, or the other way, here approaches quite close to the shore, and the various classes of vessels can easily be inspected without the trouble of using a glass. It is so easy, too any fine afternoon, to run across to France, a trip of less than an hour and a half - eighty minutes is the proper time - and to escape from the sense of insular confinement that seems to appress the minds of many of our countrymen in this restless generation. Folkestone and its neighbourhood, however, to say nothing of Dover which has its own distinct characteristics, present much that is very interesting. An old town, with historical traditions of Roman and Saxon antiquity, and its association with Hythe and Sandgate, as forming one of the Cinque Ports; a new town, which is, with the new port, virtually the creation of the South-Eastern Railway Company; and a beautiful extension along western cliffs, affording handsome and agreeable residences to the settled inhabitants of the upper class. The country behind, for many miles round, has the charms of Kentish rural scenery, with noble downs, woods, parks, and quiet villages or sequestered hamlets, inviting to walks, rides, or drives, when one is tired of lounging by the sea.

'We can recommend "English's Guide," written by Mr. S. J. Mackie, which has reached its thirteenth edition, as a trustworthy local handbook. It is furnished with correct maps and other illustrations. It tells how this place is situated in the central section of the line of cretaceous rocks, which at Shakspear's Cliff, Dover, proceeding westward, change from the white or flinty chalk to the grey chalk, and rise at Folkestone to the magnificent height of 575 ft., with a beautiful undercliff, covered with short herbage, called the Warren. In East Wear Bay there is an outer rampart of rocks formed of greensand; while geologists, like Mr Mackie, find much to study in the fossils of the gault, and in those of the marl and gravel deposits, specimens of which he has collected for the town museum. The cliffs overlooking the sea extend nearly to Hythe, whence the line of chalk downs proceeds further westward along the north of Romney Marsh, with the Military Canal at the foot of this commanding range. The coast between Hythe and Folkestone, including Seabrook, Shorncliffe, and Sandgate, a stretch of more than five miles, is becoming, thanks to the South-Eastern Railway, and to the series of marine esplanades and terraces and connecting roads, an almost

continuous seaside promenade, with houses arising at many points of its length. Folkestone itself has gone far to join its western extremity to Sandgate, by the extension along the Lees to Clifton Gardens, Clifton Crescent, and Westbourne Gardens, and will probably not stop there. "The Lees," be it understood, are the grounds on the summit of the west cliff, from 100ft. to 170ft. above the sea, laid out in greensward and broad asphalted walks, protected by an iron railing at the edge of the cliff, and bordered on the other side by good houses in successive terraces, and squares, with railed gardens. Here it is that fashionable society, London visitors, or residents at Folkestone enjoy the fine sea air, in preference to the lower Marine Parade, which is, however, much frequented, as it leads to the commodious and attractive bathing establishment and Assembly Rooms, and to the amusements of the shore. The views from above, in clear weather embrace the French coast about Cape Grisnez, Shakspear's Cliff and the Admiralty Pier, at Dover, Romney Marsh to Dungeness, with several forts and Martello towers, and even the Fairlight hills near Hastings, in Sussex, with a vast expanse of sea, often with a multitude of ships.

'The older part of Folkestone, near the Pavilion Hotel and the harbour afford many entertaining sights and scenes, especially at the hours when a sudden throng of travellers, on their way to or fro between London and Paris, change the railway conveyance for the steam-boat. Both well managed by the South Eastern Railway Company. It was this Company, as we have remarked, that made Folkestone what it is; the harbour, which local enterprise had tried in vain to render useful, was purchased by the South Eastern Directors in 1842. The erection of the landing pier, to be available at low tide, was begun in 1861. Its construction, doubled in length and width, of more solid materials, dates from 1881, besides the subsidiary works, the pier railway and tramways, and buildings for the accommodation of passengers, for the reception of luggage and merchandise, at the harbour station. The Chairman of the company, Sir Edward Watkin, M.P. for Hythe, which Parliamentary borough includes Folkestone is naturally regarded as a local benefactor; nor are the merits of a former chairman, Mr Baxendale, who purchased the harbour and commenced these improvements, forgotten by the older townfolk. We do not know what they say to the projected Channel Tunnel, if ever it were likely to be constructed.

'The steam-boats now employed between Folkestone and Boulogne are vastly better than those in use twenty years ago, being vessels of nearly a thousand tons burden, with engines of 2800-horse power giving a speed of twenty miles an hour. So commodious that the quick passage is seldom attended with serious discomfort, while the luggage, being examined and registered at the Charing-cross terminus in London, occasions no delay or trouble. Many British travellers and tourists going to the Continent, or returning home, might be reluctant to exchange the present system with its enlivening change of sea and land, for a tedious underground railway transit of more than thirty miles, including the two approach tunnels, with no diminution, probably of the total length of time between London and Paris, which is now reduced to eight hours and a half. The advantage, we suppose, would be found in the saving of cost for heavy goods traffic, which is quite another consideration. Summer holiday passengers or visitors to Folkestone, have nothing to do with that, and may still enjoy the daily arrivals and departures of the fine steam-boats, with their motley crowd of travellers, whom Londoners can also see at Charing-cross or Cannon-street. We have no space left for the antiquities of Folkestone; indeed, few of its relics of the olden times are now to be seen; the former walls and gates of the little town, with the Castle (on the site called the Bayle); and the Benedictine Priory, which superseded a nunnery founded A.D. 640, by the sainted Saxon Princess Eanswitha, are no longer extant. Roman pottery, swords, urns, and coins have been picked up abundantly; and there is a refuted Roman camp. Some old-fashioned streets and alleys near the harbour recall the notorious smuggling port of the last century; and there is "an ancient and fish-like smell," where mackerel and herring are landed, on the quays of the Stade.'



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