

FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER No. 33 – Winter 2007

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Alan F. Taylor

At the September meeting we welcomed Tony Farnham who gave us his illustrated talk on Barges of the Thames, Medway and Kent Coast. Tony said he grew up in Greenhithe village on the south bank of the London river into the sailing barge community of firms such as Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers and F.T Everard and Sons who had their barge and ship repair yard there. He said he spent his school holidays in the 1940's learning to swim, sail and scull large barge boats. He got to know Everard's shipyard staff and many of the barge skippers. He left school in 1949 at the age of fourteen and got a job on the sailing barge *Greenhithe* with captain Bob Roberts. Tony had two years coasting on various barges carrying cargoes of cattle cake, cement, peanuts, flour and wheat etc. He said 300 barges were built over two centuries and that there are only 32 left and the last barge to carry cargo was the *Cambria*, which ceased trading in 1970. Barge races started in 1893 and are still held today.

It was a fascinating talk giving an insight to the working sailing barges of yesteryear, their cargoes and crews.

Seventy-one people attended the meeting seven of whom were visitors.

At the October meeting 53 members came to our Annual General Meeting. Officers standing for election were: chairman Alan Taylor, vice-chairman Don Gregory, treasurer Shirley Gregory. They're being no other nominations the officers were elected. Our secretary Trevor Page has had to stand down due to ill health and as there were no nominations for the job Don Gregory has taken it on.

Ron Dutt and Fiona McNeill stood down from the committee after completing their three years. New committee members are Candida Wright and Des Cornell; the remaining committee members from last year are Peter Bamford and Eileen Frankland.

After refreshments there was an illustrated talk on Margate's Dreamland and Lido, by Nick Evans. It was a fascinating talk giving an insight to the history of Dreamland and the Lido.

The new DVD Memories of Folkestone III 1939 to 1970 was on sale for the first time and it is proving very popular!

Famous at last!! Belgium television are making a film about researching your family. I had the honour of being interviewed by the grandchild and great grandchild of a Belgium refugee family who arrived at Folkestone harbour in September 1914 and settled in Glasgow where a great grandson lives today.

I was asked questions about how the family would have got from Belgium to Folkestone and why I thought there was no record of them arriving? I told them the first contingent arrived on 20th August 1914 and that some days as many as three or four thousand arrived so its quite possible the family got missed due to the vast numbers arriving.

I showed them photographs of the refugees arriving at Folkestone in fishing boats also groups of refugees around the harbour area and in the town. I also told them that during the war 64,500

Belgium refugees came through Folkestone, of which 15,000 settled in the town and that this sudden influx stretched the local resources. On the 7th September 1914 the first issue of *Le Franco-Belge de Folkestone* was published. This newspaper printed in French gave refugees information about the war, lodgings available, services and the names of refugees arriving.

On the 13th October 2,000 Belgium troops fresh from the frontline arrived from Ostend. Many of them were injured and hotels were commandeered to provide temporary hospitals and local motorcars were called upon to collect the wounded.

I am now looking forward to seeing the film on DVD, but the only part I will understand is my interview, which will have sub-titles for the Belgium's.

At the November meeting we welcomed Hubert Pragnell who gave us his illustrated talk *The Paintings of Constable and Turner*. Hubert told us John Constable was born at East Bergholt, Suffolk, June 11th 1776; he studied in London at the R.A. schools. In 1819 he was elected A.R.A. and in 1829 R.A.. His reputation began in France and it was a few years before he was equally popular in England. He died in London, March 31st 1837. He is one of England's great landscape painters. Some of his best works reproduced scenes from his home country; *Dedham Vale* and *The Valley Farm*. Other masterpieces are *The Hay Wain*, *The Cornfield*, *Hampstead Heath* and *Salisbury Cathedral*. He also painted some portraits.

Joseph Turner was an English landscape painter. He had the good fortune to know Sir Joshua Reynolds, and studied under his roof. He first exhibited aged 15, at 21 his reputation was established and at 28 he was elected R.A. Turner painted in two distinct styles. His early pictures are sober in colouring; browns, blue and greys predominating. The works of his middle and late period are marked by the splendour of colour and brilliance of light of pictures such as *The Fighting Temeraire* and *The Sun of Venice Going to Sea*. Much of his most beautiful work is to be found in his watercolours. He died in London, December 19th 1851, having bequeathed a large collection of his works to the nation.

71 people of whom 5 were visitors attended the evening.

Date for your diary: Coffee morning at the Langhorne Hotel 22nd January 2008 11am.

For anybody who has not yet paid their subscriptions a reminder that these are now due.

We would like to welcome our new members: Mr Neville Bush, Mrs Joyce Barber, Sheila Davies, Mrs Enid Tucker, Eve Coward, Mr V. Dolton, Mrs Olga Lawson, Mrs Betty Welling, Mrs J. Burke, Beryl Rose, Mrs J. Pickering and Mrs M. Port.

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

A.F.T.

Who remembers a ship on the East Cliff Sands, Folkestone in 1945?

It all started on 24th June 1944 when a German shell fired from a long-range gun on the French coast hit the Steam ship 'Empire Lough.'

The Empire Lough was a collier built by William Gray & Co. Ltd., of West Hartlepool in 1940 for the Stanhope Steam Ship Company. Her tonnage was 2,824 tons; she was 310 feet long, 44 feet wide and had a draught of 11 feet.

The Stanhope Steam Ship Company never put the Empire Lough into service because on completion she was taken over by the Ministry of War Transport and on that fateful day 24th June 1944 whilst on passage between Folkestone and Dover she was hit by a German shell fired from a long-range gun on the French coast. She was carrying a cargo of cased petrol, and ammunition at the time, which immediately caught fire.

The Dover Harbour Board tug 'Lady Brassey' went to her assistance in fighting the fire, but explosions and flying bullets compelled her to leave. Later, she took the ship in tow, and although the fire became more, fierce and bullets and splinters from explosives fell on board the tug, she

managed to beach the ship. Outstanding bravery was, shown by Junior Ordinary Seaman Victor Derek Brockman, of 12 Crabble Close, Dover, who was only 16 years old. Although the flames reached the masthead and ammunition was continually exploding, he boarded the blazing ship on his own initiative and made fast the tug's towing wire. This deed was performed at great personal risk and undoubtedly enabled the ship to be beached at Abbott's Cliff.

For his bravery Vic Brockman was awarded Lloyd's War Medal, the British Empire Medal and the Shipwrecked Fishermen & Mariners' Royal Benevolent Society medal.

The Radio Officer, Mr W.H. Avery was awarded M.B.E. and crewmembers Mr Burville, Mr West, Mr Crake and Mr Crouch were also awarded the B.E.M.

At a later date the Empire Lough was re-floated and towed round to the East Cliff sands Folkestone and beached, where she was broken up.

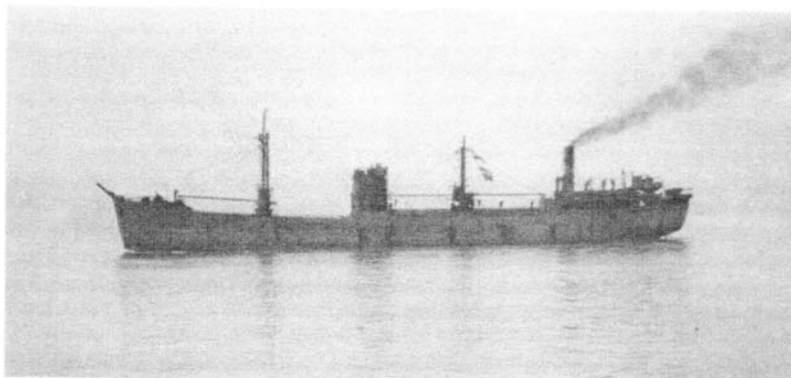
The Folkestone Herald reported that on Saturday 24th June 1944 there was heavy shelling from the German long-range guns on the French coast and that the big guns opened fire upon a convoy in the Channel. Merchant ship S.S. Gurden Gates, a merchant ship of 1,791 tons, was hit and casualties were brought into Folkestone Harbour but there was no mention of the Empire Lough. The Dover Express also reported that there was heavy shelling from the German guns but gave no mention of the Empire Lough.

But the Dover Express for 27th October 1944 reported: MERCHANT NAVY AWARDS: DOVER TUG MEN HONOURED: Officers and crews of Dover Harbour Board tugs. They were M.B.E. (Civil Division) William Henry Avery, Radio Officer, 6 North Street, Dover, B.E.M. George Edward Crake, Mate, 39 Hamilton Road, Dover, B.E.M. (Civil Division), Charles Henry Burville, Boatswain, 72 Manor Road, Dover. William Edward West, Able Seaman, 1 Kingswood Villa, Crabble, Dover. Junior Ordinary Seaman Victor Derek Brockman, 12 Chapel Place, Dover.

Dover Express for Friday 26th October 1945 reported: LLOYD'S WAR MEDEL AWARD. This was the award to Victor Brockman. When a ship was hit and set on fire by enemy shellfire between Dover and Folkestone -----.

I can remember diving from the remains of her during the summer of 1945 when she was beached on East Cliff Sands

AFT.



S.S. Empire Lough

MEMOIR'S OF A POLICE MESSENGER AT FOLKESTONE DURING WWII

Before I was old enough to join the RAF, my father suggested I contact the local police at Folkestone with a view to becoming a Police Auxiliary Messenger. I filled in a form and waited to see what would happen. I started with the police on Sunday 29th September 1940; my first job was to sound the air raid siren at a local laundry. I was there at night for three weeks (pulling the cord on the steam whistle) until working the siren was taken over by a fire watching party.

I have looked through my reference from the police, because the date I have given seems late to be writing about the proposed evacuation of Folkestone. After my time at the laundry I went to the police station to work. It must have been well into October when I became involved in the "Evacuation" scheme for Folkestone.

One Saturday morning, I started work at 8 am, I was told to contact another Messenger, Lionel Taylor (I was at school with him) and we were to report to the Food Office at Grace Hill at 1 pm. We were to warn our parents that we would be on police duty right through the weekend, but we must not tell them where we were going. Everything we did was highly secret and we must not tell anyone what it was all about.

At the Food Office we had to count the number of people in each house and each road. The numbers were found by counting ration books. We then started at the Central Station and counted out lots of 500 in each area. Families were to be kept together in each household. Each 500 persons were a trainload; Folkestone was worked out as being 20 trainloads. I have no idea what was intended to happen to other people at Dover, Hythe and surrounding country places. At the time it did not occur to me to think about it or how long it would take to evacuate the people of Folkestone. Some people were to stay behind, but I only found out about that later. As far as I can remember the final count was about 9,000, which would be 18 trainloads.

The people of Folkestone were told later which area they were in and to have one case packed to take with them. The RSPCA would have a place at the station to 'put their pets down'. I was to go with the police to Maidstone, I would not be going with my Mother and Father. I remember going to Marks and Spencers to buy a case priced five shillings, the largest I could find. (I still have the case in my loft). The people were told what to do by loudspeaker van. The school children had been moved to Wales in June 1940, other people had moved away on their own. I know that there were not many people left in our road.

Looking back this all seems a bit late to be making evacuation arrangements. I have given the subject a lot of thought but I can only go by my police reference showing when I started with them. I have read books about the war in the Folkestone area, but the contribution made by the police messengers is never mentioned or work carried out by the fire service messengers. The police messengers had a lot of work to do; we were trained to help at places where bombs had fallen. We had a field telephone operating from the scene to the nearest telephone point, it took two of us to man the telephone and pass all the messages to the Control Rom.

I cannot remember how long we were at the Food Office, where we slept or what food was supplied. It must have taken at least until the Sunday night. We had maps of Folkestone and put the number of people involved on each road. Lionel Taylor moved out of Folkestone after the war, and I cannot think of anyone else that I could contact for more information. The more I think about it, it all seems a bit late in the day, the middle of October 1940, but I suppose someone must have known a bit more about Hitler's plans than we did.

Where the terminus for the Channel Tunnel Railway is now, there was a nursery school, which was evacuated at some stage. At the time of the blitz on Canterbury in 1942 the school was used as quarters for the Canterbury police. Because of the bomb damage, both the Kent County Constabulary and the Canterbury City Force were out of action. The police travelled to and from Canterbury by bus, to be on duty for twelve-hour shifts. A lady working in the Folkestone Police Canteen was seconded to the school as cook. I along with other messengers also went to work in the canteen, to help with serving food to the off duty policemen.

PAUL MORETON.

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