

FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Alan F. Taylor

At the September meeting we welcomed guest speaker James Preston who gave us his illustrated talk on 'Short Bros'. James said an aero-club was formed in Kent which included the Short Brothers and the first aircraft built were partly financed by the club. The Short Brothers started their business at Leysdown and Eastchurch. At first, and as far back as 1904, their attention was directed to the construction of balloons, including captive balloons, then used by Government Departments. The member of Parliament for the City, Col. J.T.C. Moore-Brabazon, had for many years been interested and had taken an active part in flying. In 1909 he competed for, and won a *Daily Mail* prize, using an all-British machine designed and built by Short Brothers. In doing so he gained the first pilot's certificate granted by the Aero Club. In 1909, Shorts produced the first all-metal aeroplane to be constructed in Great Britain. It is believed that the first machine to alight on water in Great Britain was a Short Pusher type aeroplane of box-kite type. This was fitted with inflated air bags attached to the main skids, and one similar bag supporting the tail. In 1912, the firm produced the first successful seaplane of British design, and later produced the folding wing biplane which was used throughout the world. In 1913, Shorts' re-located to a barge building yard on the river Medway at Rochester. During the war of 1914-19 Shorts' seaplanes were adapted to carry bombs and torpedoes. These machines were sent up from the ship's deck at the Battle of Jutland. They built the Short-Rolls-Royce all-metal flying boat, *Singapore* in which Sir Alan Cobham started his journey in November 1927 from the River Medway for his flight survey around Africa, a distance of about twenty thousand miles. After the war the Air Ministry cut off all orders whilst Shorts' made small planes for flying clubs, canoes, ships lifeboats, aluminium bus bodies, paddle boats, flat-irons, cases for accumulator batteries and kids paddling pools. Shorts' were nationalised in 1943 and due to problems with the work force they moved to Belfast where they ceased operating in 1948. Shorts' then opened a training school at Rochester where they also refurbished WWII planes.

Forty nine people attended the meeting six of whom were visitors.

On Wednesday 10th September thirteen members gathered at the Langhorne Hotel for a coffee morning.

The October meeting and A.G.M. was attended by 55 members. Standing for election were: Chairman Alan Taylor, Vice-Chairman and Secretary Don Gregory, and Hon. Treasurer Shirley Gregory. There being no other nominations these officers were elected.

New committee members elected were: Chris Phillips and Vince Williams. The remaining committee members are Peter Bamford, Des Cornell and Eileen Frankland.

After refreshments there was an illustrated talk on 'Frontline Folkestone' by Charles Fair. Charles started by telling us he was a part time guide who took groups to the battlefields in France, particularly because his main interest is World War One. Charles said the regeneration of Folkestone could be through its heritage, as we have 2000 years of history including being in the frontline of Britain's

Maritime and Military History. He mentioned the Road of Remembrance and the thousands of troops who went down it on their way to the battle fields via Folkestone Harbour. Throughout the Great War, Folkestone Harbour Station had a canteen which provided free tea, cakes and buns to soldiers, sailors and members of the Red Cross. This canteen was staffed by local volunteers and amongst them were the devoted Misses Margaret Ann and Florence Augusta Jeffery. The sisters were both awarded the Order of the British Empire, the Queen Elizabeth Medal (Belgium) and the Medal of Gratitude (France). The location and entrance of this canteen can still be seen and could still be preserved. In the East Kent Archives Centre there are eight volumes of visitors books totalling 3,518 pages. They contain an estimate of 42,000 names of men who passed through Folkestone during the Great War. Charles went on to tell us about other towns and cities which have taken advantage of their heritage including Ellis Island in the United States, of which he gave us a breakdown of visitor numbers. Charles went on to tell us about his own family and that his great-grandfather Captain Frances 'Toby' Dodson was killed in July 1916, and that he has many letters that his great-grandfather wrote to his wife Marjorie. After Toby was killed, Marjorie had a whirl-wind romance and married Major Charles Fair.

November Meeting: 'Curious Kent' by John Vigor was the subject of this month's talk covering a variety of Kent Churches and allied buildings together with their particular stories and idiosyncrasies. The talk started with the church at Great Chart where, in the Middle Ages there was a house for sufferers of the plague. Next, a church at Merryworth where the Earl of Westmorland demolished the old house and church in the 18th century then built a new church using styles from London churches. Other churches included the one at Leybourne, Eastwell and Hythe with its famous crypt full of skulls. The church at Aylesford was mentioned since it contains bellows by John Reed who was the inventor of the stomach pump. These and other churches made for an interesting picture of what exists in some of the less prominent areas of Kent. Sixty eight people attended the meeting one of whom was a visitor.

Date for you diary: There will be a coffee morning at the Langhorne Hotel 14th January 2009 at 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: Mrs E. Peel, Mr S.W. Capon, Mrs S. Wilson, Mr C. Jinks & Mrs P. Perry

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

The following are extracts for a booklet of documents from the archives of Kent County Council and the Conseil General du Pas de Calais. Project undertaken by the above and the University of Greenwich.

Petition Addressed To Napoleon III By Some Leading Englishmen In Favour Of A Channel Tunnel

If the idea of joining Britain with the Continent had first been voiced by the French, it was in England that public opinion first showed itself in favour, despite hesitations and anxieties which surfaced from time to time. Thus in June 1868, some 170 distinguished British Members of Parliament and noblemen presented a petition to Napoleon III in the hope that he would give his support to the scheme for a submarine tunnel.

Request For A Lease For The Submarine Tunnel Scheme To Link France And England

From 1868 the idea of a Channel Tunnel was taken up by an Anglo-French committee chaired by Lord Richard Grosvenor and Michel Chevalier. This committee sought from both governments the necessary permissions to carry out the work by leasing a connecting line from one side of the Straits to the other. After 6 years of negotiation, the lease was granted for 99 years. The agreement stipulated that the grantees must commit themselves to carry out the research work to the value of at least 2 million francs. It also provided for the entrances to the tunnel to be fortified in case of any future wars.

Extract From The Recorded Minutes Of Discussions Of The Saint-Omer Chamber Of Commerce & Industry

In 1873 the French Ministry of Public Works announced the opening of an Inquiry in Pas-de-Calais into the Anglo-French committee's scheme. The Chambers of Commerce at Arras, Boulogne, Calais and Saint-Omer were all invited to attend. The opinions gathered were generally favourable. Conditions thus seemed set for a final agreement between the two governments.

**Letter From A. Adam To The Prefect Of Pas-De-Calais;
Notice Setting Out The Fares For The Channel Tunnel Railway**

After 1870 it seemed accepted that the only schemes for consideration were those for submarine tunnels. In December 1873 a Commission of Inquiry declared the tunnel scheme a useful public enterprise. In 1875 the French Channel Tunnel Company was established with Michel Chevalier as President, endowed with capital of some 2 million francs, three-quarters of which was underwritten by the Chemin du Fer du Nord and the Rothschild bank. The agreement worked out between Joseph the Minister of Public Works and this Company was ratified by the National Assembly on 2 August 1875. The very complex terms and conditions of this profit-making Company are illustrated by its attention to detail in the setting of fares, for passenger transport in 1st, 2nd and 3rd class, and for carrying animals and merchandise. A high-speed rate was also envisaged for a funeral carriage to carry coffins under the Channel.

Letter Of Sir Edward Watkin To Alderman Finnis Of Dover

The English Channel Company could not match the French initiatives of the 1870s owing to the lack of capital. But when Sir Edward Watkin, Chairman of the South-Eastern Railway Company, became involved, excavations began. Watkin entertained ambitions of linking Manchester and Paris by rail through a Channel Tunnel. He had a shaft sunk under the chalk cliff near Dover in 1880, and with the aid of Col. Frederick Beaumont's compressed-air boring machine, a heading was dug for three-quarters of a mile under the sea, before work was suspended in 1882.

Objections to his Tunnel plans on the part of those, especially Sir Garnet Wolseley, who feared it would provide foreign invaders with a route into England, and the Board of Trade, were frustrating Watkin at the time of this letter. But undaunted, he continued to argue for a purpose-built dock for Continental steam boats at Dover, adjacent to a rebuilt railway terminus that would be served both by his own railway company and the London, Chatham and Dover Company, and connect with the Channel Tunnel as well. This harbour would match the harbour works progressing at Calais and Boulogne.

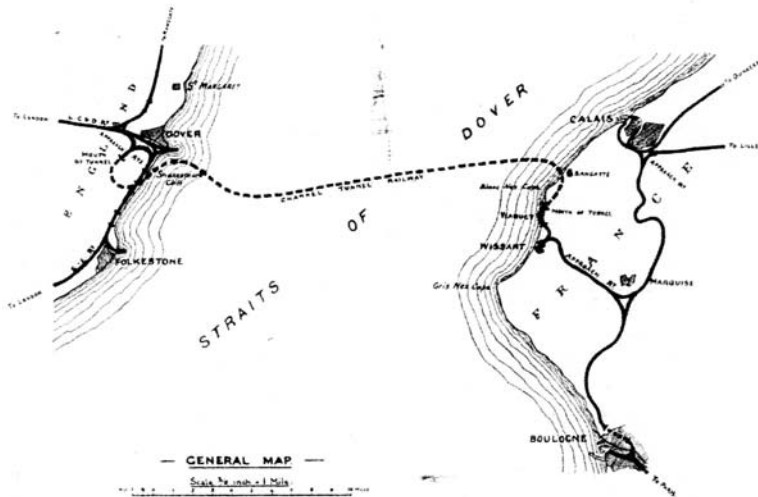
Booklet: The Channel Tunnel Company Ltd.

The first attempts to initiate the Channel Tunnel project began in 1875, and the following decades saw various companies becoming involved (and withdrawing) from the scheme. However, the Channel Tunnel Company had been reinforced in 1887 when it had merged with the Submarine Continental Tunnel Company – this new organisation was to be known as the Channel Tunnel Company Ltd. In December 1913, the Channel Tunnel Company Ltd published this volume of articles to submit to the Prime Minister. The booklet included details of the current scheme with special articles addressing the military, engineering and financial implications of a tunnel.

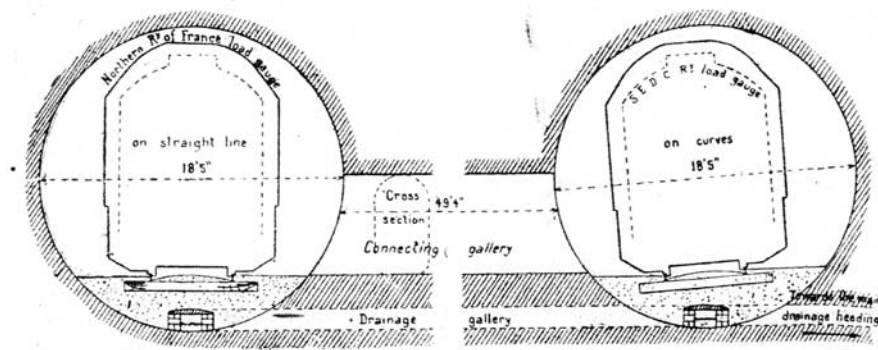
Articles by Lord Sydenham, Sir Robert Giffens and Major-General Sir Alfred Turner (to name but three), were to be found in the volume along with an article written by Albert-Henri Sartiaux (previously published in the *Revue de Deux Mondes* in October 1913). Gradually the British public was beginning to embrace the concept of the tunnel linking Britain to the Continent, and a number of national newspapers began to express support for the scheme. The British Prime Minister, Lord Asquith, commissioned reports from the War Office, Board of Trade and the Admiralty. The Committee of Imperial Defence would have the final say. In July 1914 the Committee advised the British Government not to proceed.

This extract is from the article entitled: "Franco-British Travel Union Congress: Full description of the present Channel Tunnel Scheme" by Baron Emil d'Erlanger and Sir Francis Fox. The text is accompanied by several maps and diagrams, such as this one showing the proposed location of the tunnels and approaches on both sides of the Channel.

THE CHANNEL TUNNEL.



Plan of the Tunnels and Approaches.



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