



**FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

www.folkestonehistory.org

NEWSLETTER No. 50 – Spring 2012

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Alan F. Taylor

At the December meeting we welcomed guest speaker Mark Crittenden who gave us an illustrated talk on the 'History of Port Lympne.' He told us Howlett's and Port Lympne Wild Animal Park was both founded by John Aspinall. He, John and his brother-in-law James Osborne were big gamblers and they played a game called 'chemmy' and that's where he made his money to start Howlett's. It is through his gambling that eventually brought about the law change, that we can now play 'Bingo.' John's main interest was animals; he started with Capuchin monkeys and then Himalayan bears followed by a Bengal tiger called 'Tara.' He purchased Howlett's for £5,000 in 1957 off the back of a win on a horse. In 1973 he purchased Port Lympne which was built by Sir Phillip Sassoon, Sassoon had been private secretary to Field Marshall Hague. Mark spoke about the house at Port Lympne and the pool which was originally a swimming pool with a wave machine. Mark went on to say that Aspinall didn't believe in caged animals, but liked open enclosures, which had possibly added to the loss of five keepers. Mark then told us about the different animals they have at the park which includes; Elephants, Black Rhinos, Siberian Tigers. They now have two Bengal Tigers. Mark finished by talking about endangered animals including Western Lowland Gorillas. Sixty-eight people attended the meeting one of whom was a visitor.

The January meeting was an informal evening where members were able to view a variety of ephemera including postcards, prints, stereographs and viewer together with maps and newspapers.

Thirty seven members attended the meeting.

On a Wednesday evening at the start of February, cold enough to put off the average soul from venturing out, Holy Trinity Church Hall was still filled with the society's members eager for Chairman Alan's latest illustrated talk showing Folkestone's shops, buildings and businesses as they were, and as they are today.

Alan's style of delivery is understated, and in captivating his audience for just over an hour he doesn't need to resort to showmanship or any cheap jibes as does his warm-up act! He speaks, and we all listen! He is a man of substance over style - much to our benefit.

Members' were treated to many unusual views starting with the harbour area, such as an image of a paddle-steamer moored against the western side of the pier and showing the pier extension still under construction. And who remembers the hovercraft excursions from the shingle beach? Probably not many; but thankfully this short-lived

venture lasting just 6 weeks in 1966 was captured by photograph to be enjoyed by us in 2012.

The images showed a mixture of old photos with maps to help locate some of the streets that sadly have been demolished and built over – such as Little Fenchurch Street and Great Fenchurch Street. And for even earlier images engravings from the mid-1800s showed the newly built shops in Rendezvous Street, the Customs House, and the original wooden Swing-bridge in the harbour.

For me there were highlights which will rarely be seen. Many of us will have seen old postcards of the now demolished building known as Swiss Cottage at the bottom of the Slope (now 'Road of Remembrance'), but few if any of us would have seen the Slope Road with a toll-gate across the bottom. An early photo indeed as the toll-gate was abolished in 1877!

Tiffin's Booksellers and Library with a fountain in front similarly would be unrecognisable to anyone not already in the know. This building along with many others in its vicinity were among the casualties of bombing and redevelopment over the years in the harbour area, although ironically the latest Triennial has seen a new fountain in roughly the same spot as the one in front of Tiffin's shop.

Social events added variety to the presentation with the only known photograph of Maypole dancing on the Leas, taken c1900, and the blowing of the horn at the parish churchyard cross which called people to vote for the town mayor – in this case John Moncrieff on one of his two elections in the 1950s.

Architect Seaton Dahl's work also featured prominently with photographs showing the building of Barclays Bank, and also the fine art deco building of the Folkestone Gas & Coke Co. still recognisable if one looks above the signage of the Halifax! In fact the location of many of the shops may not have been instantly recognisable; and when shown a photo taken in the same spot more recently, it only goes to show how little attention we pay to most buildings above the ground floor! A case in point was the exquisite shop-front of Halksworth Wheeler at 125 Sandgate Road; now rather less attractive at ground floor level and occupied by Fell Reynolds and Barnardo's

Our photographic tour of Folkestone headed away from the town centre via the Black Bull pub and the somewhat salacious lingerie shop in Dover Road and effectively culminated with some, again rare, views of Folkestone's Smallpox hospital which was opened in 1877 on Dover Hill.

So, for all those who dared to venture out on a cold winter's night, I'm sure we'd like to thank Alan for his hours of painstaking research that he puts in to ensuring we all have not just an enjoyable evening but also an informative one. I certainly will be waiting what he has in store for us next year!

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

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We would like to welcome new member David Springett.

Clewer House in Coolinge Lane

I expect that many members of our Local History Society have been appalled to watch the demolition of Clewer House. This attractive Edwardian, "Arts and Crafts" style building in Coolinge Lane with its bow, bay and bulls-eye windows, its copper embellishments and decorative arches has been bulldozed into an ignominious pile of

rubble and is to be replaced (along with White Lodge) with 14 houses called "The Acers". May they have as interesting and long a history as the building we have known for so many years as "Clewer."

The history started with Bayham House School, run by Miss Burges in 1903 on the corner of Bouverie Road West opposite Kent House. In about 1911, Bayham House School moved into the new purpose built accommodation in Coolinge Lane where it remained until the First World War. How then did the building subsequently come to be known as Clewer?

Clewer in Buckinghamshire was where an order of Anglican nuns was established in 1852 known as the Sisterhood of St John Baptist, Clewer. They were dedicated to helping the poor, orphans, prostitutes and the outcasts of society. In 1864, a small group of the Clewer Sisters, the name by which they were affectionately known, came to live in Folkestone on the Bayle. They helped establish St Peter's and St Saviour's Churches; set up soup kitchens; built their own mission chapel, and worked amongst the poorest in the east part of Folkestone. One of their most outstanding achievements was the building of St Andrews (now flats), a convalescent home run by the nuns on the East Cliff, where beds were retained for the poor in need of sea air and nursing. The nuns had established a school, St Stephens College at Clewer in Buckinghamshire which required a larger site by 1919. It was perhaps natural to look to Folkestone where they had already established links, buying Pelham House school, on the escarpment in Coolinge Lane, which they renamed St Stephens College (now on the site of the Folkestone School for Girls). In addition, Bayham House, was acquired for the senior girls and was renamed Clewer and became an annexe of the school. Clewer House was therefore part of St Stephens College in the years between the two World Wars under the care of a Sister Superior and with Anglican nuns as the bulk of the teachers.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, St Stephens College was evacuated to Taplow and the buildings of St Stephens College including Clewer were requisitioned by the War Department along with the other schools in Coolinge Lane. St Stephens College never returned to Folkestone settling instead at Broadstairs and after the War the Coolinge Lane Schools came into Kent County Council's ownership with Clewer leased from the Radnor Estate.

A new phase in Clewer's history began in 1947 when with Eversley, St Stephens and Westbourne House; it became a centre for the training of teachers run by Kent County Council. Known as the Folkestone Training Centre, suitable war-service veterans went through a one year teacher training course at the Centre. This was helpful in meeting the number of teachers required to cope with the baby boom after the war.

In 1951, when no longer required for post war teacher training, Clewer became a boarding house for the County Grammar School for Girls whose main building was Penfold House. Clewer opened with 15 boarders, but numbers increased within 10 years to 40. A boarding house attached to a state grammar school was and is unusual. Clewer continued to thrive as a boarding house after the Girls Grammar School and the Girls' Technical School were merged to become the Folkestone School for Girls.

However, by 1991, there was a decline in boarding numbers and another use was found for the building, namely a centre providing residential courses for youngsters coming from France, Germany, Hungary, Russia and Turkey. Finally, from 1996 until 2010 Clewer was the centre for the administration of Folkestone School for Girls until the lease reverted to the Radnor Estate. Although, now, alas, no longer a landmark in Coolinge Lane, we can remember the part it played in the education of countless former pupils of the Coolinge Lane schools and its significant role in the training of teachers after the Second World War.

Hilary Tolputt: with thanks for help with research to Alan Taylor, Annie and Peter Bamford.

Also see "The Story of St Stephen's College", by Jenny Balston,

"A Joyous Service – The Clewer Sisters and their Work" by Valerie Bonham,

"Folkestone Training College, 1947-1950 A memorial volume"

"Glimpses of a Girls School- A short History of the Folkestone School for Girls 1905-20



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