



FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Alan F Taylor

At the March meeting we welcomed Geoff Hutchinson who came all the way from Rye to give us his power-point presentation on the pioneer of television John Logie Baird. Geoff started by telling us about the number of people who watch television and what they watch, he said that the most used phrase is "did you see."

John Logie Baird was born on 14th August 1888 in Helensburgh on the west coast of Scotland, the son of a clergyman. Dogged by ill health for most of his life, he nonetheless showed early signs of ingenuity, rigged up a telephone exchange to connect his bedroom to those of his friends across the street. His studies at Glasgow University were interrupted by the outbreak of World War One. Rejected as unfit for the forces, he served as superintendent engineer of the Clyde Valley Electrical Power Company. When the war ended he set himself up in business, with mixed results.

Geoff said he moved to Hastings in 1924 where he started his experimental work, but I think he started in Folkestone before moving to Hastings.

My late father, Fred Taylor was an apprentice electrician with T. C. Gilbert & Co Ltd. electrical & radio engineers. He started with the company in 1922 at 36 Cheriton Road. My father said they moved to 26 Guildhall Street in 1924 and that is when Baird was doing his early experimental work in the basement of their shop. However before the talk started Geoff said to me he thought Baird must have been in Folkestone in 1923, but I explained to him that T. C. Gilbert was not at 26 Guildhall Street in 1923. It is possible that Baird moved to Hastings at the tail end of 1924?

While working in Folkestone Baird stayed at 'Flordon House', 10 West Terrace, which was a boarding house run by Mrs Gilbert wife of F. Gilbert, T.C. Gilbert's brother.

A plaque was unveiled by his wife at 26 Guildhall Street, to commemorate his work on the premises.

Baird was the first person in the world to demonstrate a working television system. On January 26th 1926, a viable television system was demonstrated using mechanical picture scanning with electronic amplification at the transmitter and at the receiver. It could be sent by radio or over ordinary telephone lines, leading to the historic trans-Atlantic transmissions of television from London to New York in February, 1928.

Between 1933 and 1936 the most extensive television complex in Europe was located beneath the main concourse at the Crystal Palace in London, a fact even then unknown to most people. The instigator was John Logie Baird and his company could

claim with justification that no other organisation had the capability of providing from a single site live, high definition television broadcast transmitters, receivers, cathode ray tubes, microwave relay systems, photocells, magnetrons and telecine equipment.

On 4th February 1938, a demonstration of colour television was introduced as a surprise item at the Dominion Theatre, Tottenham Court Road, London. At the evening performance 3,000 people watched pictures from the Crystal Palace on a 12ft. by 9ft. screen. Although fully reported in the national and technical press at the time, few people seem to be aware of this achievement which represented a triple first for John Logie Baird. It was the first time that colour television had been transmitted by radio link or demonstrated to the public in a theatre and never before had any outside scenes been televised in colour.

He married Margaret Albu, a concert pianist, in 1931; they had two children. Baird continued his experimental work until his death at Bexhill, Sussex, on 14 June 1946. His body was taken back to his birthplace, Helensburgh to be buried. Fifty-four people attended the meeting three of whom were visitors.

At the April meeting we welcomed back guest speaker David Godden who spoke about his time in the Kent Police Force. David told us about some of the traffic incidents he experienced in Folkestone during the 1960's. When David did his 13 weeks training he thought he would go to Sandgate Police Training College, but no he was sent to Mill Meese which was formerly a naval base. David said there were thirty people in his class and they all had nick-names, his was "Flash."

After training David was posted to Chatham where he was on the beat, he told us about his experiences there, some quite funny. He was then transferred to traffic riding a motor cycle, once again David told us about the incidents he experienced. Moving on David became a driving instructor before moving to the Kent Force Headquarters. He finished his time as an instructor at Sandgate Police Training School and Shorncliffe. From joining the police force David went from Constable to Chief Inspector in five years.

Seventy-two people attended the meeting of whom four were visitors.

At the May meeting we welcomed member speaker and author Vince Williams who gave us his latest power-point presentation. Vince said he wanted to do something different from the normal illustrated talks and use period descriptions to accompany the pictures shown, so he came up with the idea of...

Fictional Folkestone (by A. Taylor & V. Williams, ©2012)

Vince spoke about some of the authors who lived in Folkestone & the surrounding area or wrote about the area. He also talked about films and television programmes that had parts shot here or contained references to the area. He showed clips from various films shot in the area and he also read quotes from some of the books.

The first author Vince mentioned was **Odo** who was born in Kent in the 1180s became Rector at St. Martins Church Cheriton c1210 after having been a student at the University of Paris c1200. Between 1219-1225 he produced 3 volumes of sermons and later in 1235 he produced a confessional handbook for priests. Sometime after 1225 he produced his most famous work which was a set of Fables – a collection of moral tales featuring wolves, foxes, cats and hares. And although none mentioned local places; one tale is 'A Certain Bird of Saint Martin' – St. Martin being the patron saint of Cheriton Church. He died in 1246 and is buried in Rochester Cathedral.

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 in Portsmouth and died aged 58 in Higham, Kent. He was already successful when he came to Folkestone and stayed at 3 Albion Villas

from 17th July – 15th October 1855 whilst working on the serial novel 'Little Dorrit.' Dickens wrote about Folkestone in two articles for Household Words called 'Out of Town' and 'Out of the Season,' of both of which Vince read parts describing the town.

Catherine Crowe, born in 1790 in Borough Green, Kent, settled for most of her life in Edinburgh after separating from her 1st husband. There she contributed to Edinburgh's greatest literary journal, 'Blackwood's Magazine.' Some of her other works included: 'Adventures of Susan Hopley', 'Men & Women', 'The Story of Lily Dawson', 'The Night-Side of Nature, or Ghosts & Ghost Seers'. She also contributed to Dickens' weekly journal 'Household Words.' After the death of her second husband she moved south, eventually to 22 Upper Sandgate Road, Folkestone, where she died aged 82 years. She is buried in Cheriton Road Cemetery.

Richard Harris Barham was born at Canterbury in 1788. He became a clergyman eventually becoming a curate and then cardinal at St Paul's Cathedral, dying in London in 1845. However under his nom-de-plume, Thomas Ingoldsby wrote what would become 3 volumes of the popular Ingoldsby Legends one of which is 'The Leech of Folkestone' which was written in 1840. (Leech being a slang term for Doctor.)

Edward Knatchbull Hugessen was born in 1829 in Mersham Hatch, Kent, & died in Smeeth in 1893. His great aunt was the author Jane Austen and he was responsible for publishing two volumes of her letters. He also wrote volumes of children's fairy tales such as 'Stories for my Children' & 'Higgledy Piggledy'. Of local note is his story 'The Pig of Cheriton' in 'Higgledy Piggledy' about a wise pig with the power of speech.

Frances Marsh of whom not much is known wrote a Napoleonic adventure entitled 'A Romance Of Old Folkestone' in 1906 which contains many quotes about Folkestone especially describing the Church Street area.

H. G. Wells was born in 1866 in Bromley, & came to live in Sandgate in 1898 at Beach Cottage. He then took a 3 year lease on Arnold House (20 Castle Road), & in 1901 he moved to Spade House which was designed and built for him. During his time in Sandgate he wrote 'Kipps,' 'The History of Mr Polly,' 'Tono Bungay,' and 'Ann Veronica.' Beset by scandals, Wells left Sandgate in 1909 for London. He died in 1946.

Joseph Smith Fletcher was born in 1863 in Halifax, West Yorkshire. He wrote over 200 books mainly of detective fiction. One of his later pieces, 'The Passenger to Folkestone' was published in 1927.

Noel Coward was born in 1899 in Teddington and died at his home in Jamaica in 1973. From 1927 – 1956 he lived at Goldenhurst Farm, Aldington overlooking Romney Marsh, and it is perhaps here that the play and film 'Blithe Spirit' is set. The dialogue mentions Folkestone and the Grand Hotel. Also his better known film 'Brief Encounter' name checks both Folkestone and Hythe too.

Another film, 'Lady Godiva Rides Again' was a British comedy released in 1951. Locations seen in the film include Folkestone West railway station, The Metropole and Grand Hotels and inside the Leas Cliff Hall. And the recent Michael Caine film 'Is Anybody There?' shows Seabrook seafront, Folkestone Central station & The Durlocks.

Wilfred Owen was born in 1893 in Oswestry in Shropshire. A famous WWI poet and like the majority of WWI soldiers he passed through Folkestone on his way to the Front. He mentions Folkestone twice in his letters home. He stayed at the Metropole on his way to the Front and then he mentions Folkestone's beach in September 1918 when he returned from France following treatment for shellshock. Within three months he was shot in the head and was killed just one week before the end of the war.

Samuel Beckett was an Irish author and playwright (1906-1989). He is probably best known for 'Waiting for Godot.' He worked on his play 'Happy Days' whilst staying in the Bristol Hotel on the Leas in 1961.

Henry Williamson was born in 1895 in Brockley, South East London. He joined the Territorial Army in 1914 and was quickly called up and sent to the Front. Surviving WWI he was sent from January to July 1919 to Folkestone's No. 3 Rest Camp on the Leas to assist with the administration and demobilization of troops. Whilst in Folkestone he brought a book which influenced him to become an author... and if not for this experience we may never have had such classics as 'Tarka the Otter.' Folkestone appears in two of his other novels 'The Dream of Fair Women' (1924) and 'A Test to Destruction' (1960). After WWI he mainly lived in Norfolk and North Devon passing away in 1977.

Jocelyn Brooke was born in 1908 at 22 Radnor Cliff, Sandgate, where he lived until he was 17 years of age. His family ran a wine merchants business in Sandgate Road since 1851 with a shop at 25 & 27 from 1864. In 1903 the business moved to 134 Sandgate Road now occupied by the Royal Bank of Scotland. He was a Poet, novelist, botanist and biographer. His novels are semi-autobiographical and draw on his nostalgia of his childhood and hence describe scenes around Seabrook, Shorncliffe, Sandgate, Folkestone and the Elham Valley. His key works that feature the local area are his 'Orchid Trilogy' and 'The Dog at Clambercrown.' He died of a heart attack in Ivy Cottage, Bishopsbourne in October 1966.

Elizabeth Bowen was born in Dublin in 1899 but her family moved to Hythe in 1906 where they stayed until 1912. Her first novel was published in 1927 but she will be best remembered for 'The Heat of the Day' which was published in 1949. After her husband died she moved back to Hythe in 1965 where she wrote her last novel, and in 1973 she died of lung cancer. Her novels aren't set locally but her autobiography published posthumously describes her childhood and in particular the Horn Street area.

Michael Bentine was born in 1922 in Watford but in 1923 the family moved to Folkestone on account of sea air being good for his father's asthma. He co-founded the Goon Show having many radio and TV successes including 'Potty Time' which ran from 1973-1980. Interested in the paranormal he wrote a number of novels of which 'Lord of the Levels' was set locally on Romney Marsh. He died in 1996.

Alfred Edgar Coppard was born 4th January 1878 in Folkestone. He became a full time writer in 1919 and became renowned for his short stories and poems although none is actually set in Folkestone. His first collection of stories was called 'Adam and Eve and Pinch Me,' & he was prolific between 1921 and 1951. He died of a heart attack in 1957.

I found this talk most interesting, informative and entertaining, for my part the best talk so far this year! Seventy-four people attended the meeting three of whom were visitors.

We have set up photographic exhibition on WWI for Step-Short in the Hub (Tourist Information Centre) Tram Road Car Park which will run indefinitely. Also seven members of the Society attended the Kent History Federation Conference this year, which was held at Headcorn on Saturday 12th May. Finally, we would like to welcome new members James & Sandra Willmott, Glenys Palfreyman, Edward Halle, Kevin Field, Sallie & Robert White, Nicholas Harding & Paul Higham.