



**FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**
www.folkestonehistory.org

NEWSLETTER No. 42 - SPRING 2010

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Alan F. Taylor

At the December meeting we welcomed guest speaker Bill Croydon who gave us his illustrated talk on 'Early Flyers'. Conscriptio took Bill into the Royal Air Force and after training as a pilot he decided to stay on a full career. He served in the Far East and in Germany on fighter squadrons and then served as a flying instructor on both basic and advanced aircraft. After Staff College he had tours in Germany and Belgium, moved to transport aircraft, including commanding RAF Brize Norton and served in the Ministry of Defence as Director of Air Support. During his service he was awarded the OBE and later became a CBE.

On retiring from the Royal Air Force in 1988 he was Chief Executive of Swale Borough Council for eight years and began to pursue the early history of aviation and in particular its links with the Isle of Sheppey, which lies within the Borough.

Bill started by naming the founding fathers of aviation who included Mr D.F. Andrews, Oswald Horace & Eustace Short, Frank McClean, Griffith Brewer, Frank Hedges Butler, Dr W.J.S. Lockyer, Warwick Wright, J.T.C. Moore-Brabazon, Wilbur & Orville Wright and Hon C.S. Rolls. He told us about the early hot air and gas balloons and a voyage over Paris in 1783 and that by 1804 balloons had risen as high as 23,000ft. The next to come were kites which had been around since they were invented by the Chinese in 400BC. Then came Hiram Maxim's steam plane. In 1900 the first Zeppelin airships flew in Britain. In 1901 the Aero Club of Great Britain was formed by the leading names in aviation mentioned earlier. Bill went on to speak about all the flying machines built down the years and the first home of the Aero Club at Muswell Manor, Shellbeach, Sheppey. In 1909 British aviation finally took off with help from the Isle of Sheppey. But at the end of 1909 the soggy nature of the turf and adjacent dykes at Leysdown proved too much and the Aero Club decided to move to Eastchurch, Sheppey. In March 1910 Moore-Brabazon was awarded the first Aero Club Pilots' certificate. During 1910 Frank McClean offered to loan aeroplanes to the Royal Navy to train officers in the art of flying. Association with the navy led Shorts to build a seaplane with floats. The first air race was in 1911 sponsored by the millionaire Gordon Bennett. Eastchurch Naval Flying School was established in October 1911, Samson became its first Commanding Officer. On 13th April 1912 the Royal Flying Corps was formed, the Aircraft factory at Farnborough was to be the sole source of aircraft whilst the Naval Wing HQ was established at Eastchurch. By 1913 the expansion of the seaplane works at Eastchurch had outgrown the site, so Shorts moved to Rochester. Oswald Short took charge and at the outbreak of the Great War many other firms were contracted to build seaplanes to Shorts designs. These included Fairey, Mann Egerton, Parnell, Saunders, Supermarine and Westlands, many of them had origins that could be traced back to Eastchurch. The first strategic bombing missions began in September 1914, with the bombing of the Zeppelin sheds at Dusseldorf and Cologne.

Bill finished by saying the only reminders of these days at Eastchurch are the stained glass window in the church in the village dedicated to the Hon C.S. Rolls and Cecil Grace and the impressive memorial to the aviation pioneers opposite.

At Leysdown Country Park there is a plaque near the location of the airfield recording the first flight by a Briton in Britain and Muswell Manor, the former Aero Club House, remains as a guesthouse in a holiday park.

Seventy people attended the meeting three of whom were visitors.

On Wednesday 16th December thirty members and friends enjoyed a Christmas dinner at the Indoor Bowls club, Cheriton Road.

Boxing Day Dip I would like to thank all those members who kindly sponsored me. I raised a grand total of £230. Half the money will go to the Folkestone Coast Watch, which was the charity of my choice. Apart from getting a medal and cup of mulled wine I also won for the third year running the cup for the oldest dipper.

Once again many thanks for your support.

On Wednesday 20th January thirty members gathered at the Langhorne Hotel for a coffee morning.

At the February meeting we welcomed back our guest speaker Colin Breed who gave us his illustrated talk on 'Royal Visits to Kent' (Part 2). Colin said when he retired from the Kent Police force he was a Detective Chief Inspector. He mentioned the IRA bombings in Kent and the security work of the police. He trained at Sandgate Police Training College in the 1960's and by the age of 21 he was a Rural Officer, stationed at Sturry. He was promoted to Sergeant and moved to Folkestone where he was promoted to Inspector. He told us that during his time at Folkestone he directed two lorries down the Old High Street blocking up the road. This incident made the front page of the Folkestone Herald, how embarrassing. Colin was involved in the enquiry for the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster spending months in Belgium. In 1992 he was promoted to Detective Chief Inspector and was in charge of security arrangements for Royal Visits. He worked with Robert Leigh-Pemberton, the former Lord Lieutenant of Kent who prepared the programmes for the royal visits. Colin said they had to give 24 hour protection to people like Sir Patrick Mayhew the Northern Ireland Secretary and Michael Howard. He then showed us a list containing 33 royals they had to give protection to. He went on to tell us about the protection they gave Princess Alexandra, Patron of Leeds Castle when she was there at a music concert. He told us about the security arrangements at Canterbury Cathedral when Archbishop George Carey was there with John Major, Neil Kinnock, Princess Margaret, and Princess Diana. Sometimes he would have to arrange a convoy to pick royalty up from a helicopter. This would involve a front car the royal car and a back up car plus motorcycles, forming their convoy. Colin also talked about the Queen and Prince Phillip's visit to Lord and Lady Brabourne, and their visit to Broadstairs for the naming ceremony of a new lifeboat. Finally Colin told us about the security arrangements for the Channel Tunnel which lasted for seven years.

Sixty-one people attended the meeting three of whom were visitors.

Dates for you diary: There will be a coffee morning at the Langhorne Hotel Wednesday 14th April at 11 am.

We would like to welcome a new member: Christine Smith

On a rather sad note I would like to announce the death of member Audrey White, who died in hospital on 22nd December aged 94 years. It is interesting to note that Audrey's grandfather William Marsh, who was on her mother's side of the family, ran the Millfield Mill at Folkestone. The mill was built for John Claringbould some time prior to 1821. It had three pairs of stones used for grinding corn. It did not remain very long in Claringbould's hands, for he had borrowed

£200 from his uncle Mr. Sutton, and being unable to pay it back, forfeited the mill; this was in 1827, and from this time until the mill was demolished in 1885 the mill had three tenants – Joseph Gardner, William Dawson and William Marsh. In 1885 it was bought by George Jarvis for £30, taken down and moved to Bethersden, where it commenced working again early in 1886. At Bethersden it was principally used for sawing, and superseded a little six sailed mill. It was finally pulled down in 1921.



Millfield Mill, Folkestone

Long standing member Ken Paine, died on Wednesday 3rd February aged 86 years and sadly his wife June passed away in the local hospice on Saturday night 6th February aged 73 years. Both Ken & June researched and produced many booklets for the society, they were also keen photographers and recorded much of Folkestone's history. June was also a former chairman. They will be sadly missed.

The Golden Age of Travel

by

Neville Bush & Joyce Barber

The Golden Age of Travel was the Titled train journey we recently enjoyed aboard the 'Orient Express' from London Victoria through the Kent countryside.

The Orient Express service started in 1883 and with the opening of Simplon Tunnel in 1906, whilst the Simplon-Orient-Express began on the Paris-Milan Venice route. Later on, sleeping carriages to Belgrade, Sofia, Athens and Constantinople were introduced. The Paris-Venice sector of this service became famous as the most luxurious train trip in the world, reaching its zenith in the 1920's and 30's.

During the 1950's, the increased availability and relative novelty of air travel reduced the numbers of Orient Express passengers. In the 1970's mass low cost air travel caused a further reduction. The service was finally discontinued in May 1977. In October of that year James Sherwood, Chairman of Orient Express Hotels, bought two Orient Express Sleepers built in 1920's at a Sotheby's sale in Monte Carlo.

Since then 35 historic first class carriages, Pullmans, sleepers and restaurant cars have been bought and restored at workshops in this country, Belgium and Germany. All the carriages are decorated in the authentic 1920's liveries of the Compagnie Internationale des Wagon-Lits et des Grande Express Europeens or the Pullman Car Company. This was the first step in the renaissance of the great train.

One of the world's greatest trains is now back on the inaugural run to Venice via Milan. The train now runs a regular scheduled service between the beautiful cities of Paris, Zurich, Innsbruck and Venice from early March through to mid November. Apart from these services, trains are also available for charter. Regular day and weekend excursions on the British Pullman are arranged to interesting destinations throughout the year with lunch and dinner provided. The train has been seen regularly over the years at Folkestone en route to the Continent – the Pullman coaches are individually named and passengers are provided with a leaflet illustrating the history relating to the restoration of each carriage.

The journey commenced at London Victoria at 11.55 hrs, our party of four returning at 16.30 having enjoyed the extremely comfortable upholstered armchairs in the cabin suite with its quality cutlery, glassware and Italian China. Within a few minutes of leaving we were offered champagne followed by bottles of both red and white wines – further champagne was offered during the afternoon. As we followed the route map through Kent service began of an excellent five course luncheon, served by professional and friendly attendants – everything was first class and most enjoyable. During the journey we were entertained by four 'actors' in costumes of yesteryear followed by an amusing chat about the past era. The actors were kept very busy as there were 210 passengers on the train.. On arrival at Whitstable we were greeted by a four piece jazz band, and a stall displaying local oysters which were handed out with lemon and appropriate sauce. Many passengers took part in a Jive and Charleston dance routine – lots of fun – with any shyness being overcome aided by the ongoing tipple.

Back on board after leaving Whitstable we were provided with our dessert and coffee making our homeward journey – very relaxed and enjoyable on the unforgettable Venice-Simplon-Orient-Express.

Footnote: For anyone interested in the train carriages I can recommend a book by Shirley Sherwood who was involved with Orient Express in all its stages, visiting restoration works and researching histories of the carriages. The 188 page hardback has 162 illustrations in colour and 54 black and white.



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