

FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER No. 41 – Winter 2009

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Alan F. Taylor

At the September meeting we welcomed guest speaker Bronwen Sadler who gave us her talk on The Great Flood of 1953. Bronwen started by saying there had been two earlier floods one in November 1925 when the Conway river burst its banks and washed away Balgowan drowning 20 people. The next being on 22nd August 1952 when 4 inches of rain fell on the moor which flooded Lynmouth in Devon. Then on 31st January 1953 a hurricane built up over the Irish sea and travelled round Scotland and continued down the North Sea. High tide was about 12 noon, it was one of the highest spring tides of the year and due to the build up of water and the fact that there was no ebb tide, the sea didn't go out. Bronwen then mentioned the British Rail Ferry *Princess Victoria* which sank in the Irish sea with the loss of 133 people during the same storm. She went on to say Lincolnshire took the brunt of the storm and at Immingham the sea rose 6 feet above its normal height and at Kings Lyn 8 feet. Bronwen then told us in detail her memories of living on Canvey Island, she was just ten years old at the time. She said 11,500 people were homeless on the island and the death toll was 307. But the eye of the storm went across the North sea to Holland where 3,000 people lost their lives.

Sixty-four people attended the meeting one of whom was a visitor.

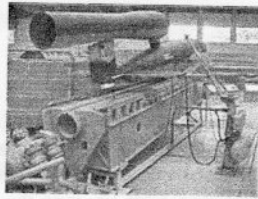
The October meeting and A.G.M. was attended by 60 members. Standing for election were: Chairman Alan Taylor, Vice-Chairman and Secretary Don Gregory, and Hon. Treasurer Shirley Gregory. There being no other nominations these officers were elected.

There were no nominations for the committee so the existing committee members will be still standing for another year. They are: Eileen Frankland, Vince Williams, Peter Bamford, Chris Phillips and Des Cornell.

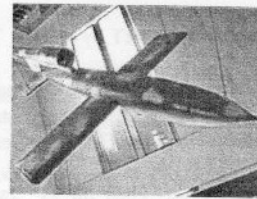
After refreshments there was an illustrated talk on Folkestone in the 1970s by author and member Eamonn Rooney. Eamonn took us on a tour round the town with slides which were taken by the late Daphne Heaver. Daphne was a founder member of the Society, a very keen photographer and member of the Folkestone Camera Club. Daphne has left a most interesting record of Folkestone in the 1970s which made a very pleasant end to the evening superbly presented by Eamonn. Many of us have very fond memories of Daphne and her enthusiasm for recording the history of Folkestone, she died on 24th March 2005 aged 89.

At the November meeting we welcomed back guest speaker Martin Lloyd who gave us an illustrated talk on Buzz Bombs & Bicycles. Martin started by saying his talk was in two parts. (1) how the German V1 was built and how it functioned, and part (2) a cycle tour round France to see the launch sites. He stated there were three new weapons the V1, V2 and V3, and that the V1 was

an aeroplane, the V2 a rocket and the V3 a gun, but he was going to talk about the V1 or doodlebug or buzz bomb whichever you wished to call it. Martin told us about the advantages of a pilotless plane, and he went into great detail talking about its construction, how it was launched and how it was navigated. He said there were 9,250 V1s fired but only 2,500 reached their target. After the break Martin showed us an illustration of the V1 and once again went into great detail showing us the various parts and their functions. He said the V1s were built in Germany and transported to the launch sites in Northern France by rail. He then showed us a series of slides taken on a cycle tour round northern France showing some of the launch sites. He said the sites were invariably in woods and those in the Pas-de-Calais area were aimed at London and those in the Cherbourg area were aimed at Portsmouth, Dartmouth and Bristol. The launch sites were called "ski sites" because of the shape of the storage sheds. Martin went to great detail telling us what the various sheds were for and how the launch pad worked. He also showed us a launching ramp which has been re-erected at Eperlecques Blockhouse – near Watten. He said these sites were continuously being bombed so the Germans eventually abandoned the sites and thereafter used light camouflaged ramps that could only be detected at the moment of firing. Eighty people attended the meeting one of whom was a visitor.



Rear view of V1 showing launch ramp



V1 on display at Musee de L'Armee

Date for your diary:

Christmas Dinner at the Indoor Bowls Club, Cheriton Road, Folkestone on Wednesday 16th December 7pm for 7.30 pm. It is still not too late to book ring Shirley Gregory on 246682.

There will be a coffee morning at the Langhorne Hotel Wednesday 20th January 2010 at 11 am.

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

We would like to welcome new members: Robert Preedy and Mrs. Carol Cunningham.

On a rather sad note I would like to announce the deaths of members: Mrs P. Philpott on 11th April and Bill Wilson on 23rd August 2009 respectively.

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

A BURIAL GROUND

Those that have noticed the burial ground perched high above Bradstone Road have enquired as to its origins. As there is a block of flats nearby named Quaker Court many people are under the mistaken impression that the burial ground belonged to that religious community. However the burial ground belongs to the Baptist community of Folkestone and was in use by them until 1855. The graveyard covers roughly one third of an acre and has a frontage to Bradstone Road of 55ft, and at the rear along Mount Pleasant Road about 59ft. How did the burial ground come to be in such an elevated position? A natural assumption would be that the

coming of the railway and the creation of the great embankment, from which William Cubitt's great Viaduct spans the valley, might have been the reason. Every engraving that I have seen (made after the coming of the railway) shows that the high ground, which was the ropewalk, was still on a level with the burial ground. Furthermore I have read the Mill Bay community's minutes from 1824 onward and there is no reference at all to the ground being dug away from around the site. The question was raised, in September 1861, as to whether it would be a good idea 'to put a fence around the ground'. The answer is perhaps contained in a report in the Folkestone Chronicle of 5th February 1881 concerning the extension of Bradstone Road. A letter was received by the Corporation from the Secretary of the South Eastern Railway Company, expressing concern about the extent of the excavation taking place. This involved altering the levels of the ground in the area of the burial ground. The engineer for the S.E.R. expressed the opinion that *"the levels of the Bradstone Road and the sewers would not suit the foundations of their viaduct. An excavation of 20ft in depth would be very likely to cause a settlement of the piers (of the viaduct). A road 8ft below the present path would expose the foundations of the piers"*. It is probably safe to assume that this excavation to join up Bradstone Road and Bradstone Avenue is what caused the cemetery to become perched high above the heads of passers-by. This raises the question of what happened to such a large volume of displaced soil.

The work to extend Bradstone Road finally took place in 1885 and Messrs William Fagg; John Clark; George Pope and John Fitness were served in February with a notice of apportionment as owners of premises in Bradstone Road described as 'a Graveyard and premises situate in the rear of Brooke House'. In December the same persons were served with a demand for payment of £45. 15s 11d. At a meeting of the Highways Committee an application was received from these gentlemen asking for the remission of such apportionment – it was resolved that the request be placed on the Agenda paper for consideration by the next full meeting of the Corporation. There is no record of such discussion having taken place; however an entry was found in the Borough Accountant's Debtors Ledger that the amount had been written off on 25th March 1892 – but on whose authority was never established.

What were the beginnings of Baptist history in Folkestone? Between 1643 and 1667 some Baptists from Folkestone and Hythe travelled to Dover to worship. It is thought that they then commenced to worship in Folkestone – but the location of their meeting is not known. It is recorded that in 1698 some people met at the house of a Mr Carr a miller. Then in 1701 a William Kennett gave notice that the eastern part of a house 'near the Bayle Sole (Bayle Pond) wherein Captain Jordan lately lived, is a meeting place appointed for religious worship by the dissenting Protestants called Anabaptists'. He once again gave notice in 1720 that 'the room over the hemp-dressers workshop was appointed as a meeting place'. About 1728, six people holding the Calvinistic doctrine began to travel to Canterbury. They were also meeting in the parlour of John Stace, who owned the Bradstone Water Mill and c1729/30 he gave them a piece of ground at Mill Bay on which to build a chapel. In 1729 they held their first meeting in the little building in Mill Bay. It was described as 'a queer little building much resembling a double cottage, with high pitched roof, chimneys, low square doorways and plain shuttered casements arranged in two tiers'.

At about the same date he is said to have given a piece of his garden for a burial ground. However it may have been earlier as it is recorded in the Minute Books of the Mill Bay Baptists, that following the start of national registration in 1837, a book containing the burial records from 1715-1854, was forwarded to London. Rather curiously the minute books give the date of the first entry in the volume sent to London as 1765, surely an error for 1715. I believe this error has led many a writer astray, when doing research on this subject. In fact the earliest stone predates 1765 and is that of Mary Stace, daughter of John Bennett Stace, who died in 1747, aged 29. The last burial was that of William Pledge who died in his 82nd year. In July 2000, an article in Bygone Kent posed the question that 'if early Baptists did not bury their dead at the Ropewalk ground before 1724, where did they bury them? Would that we could answer that. An order was issued on December 11th 1854 ordering that 'Burials should be discontinued in the Baptist Burial Ground at Folkestone from after September 1st 1855'. From then on all burials took place at Cheriton Road, where a nonconformist plot was provided. Today the old Baptist burial ground remains situated high above Bradstone Road, but to return to the question of how it came to be so we find

that after the work had taken place to extend Bradstone Road, it really was isolated – more so than today. In 1905 a Mr Thomas West wrote from Canada to the Highways committee of the old Borough Council complaining that he had relatives buried there but had been unable to visit their graves as there was no means of access to the burial ground. He offered to contribute £12 to £15 towards the cost of creating a means of access. The Town Clerk was instructed to reply that there was nothing the Corporation could do as it was a private matter. It was further resolved that Reverend Carlisle, the Baptist minister be informed that the Borough Engineer could carry out the work if so desired upon the usual conditions of the Baptist community paying the estimated cost prior to commencement of the work. By June 1907 nothing had been done to create the access, prompting Mr West to write again from Toronto. One interesting point in his letter is his reference to 'an entrance being made in to the cemetery in place of the one that had been removed when doing away with the old rope-walk'. The exact location of the ropewalk had been somewhat uncertain so we can take it from his reference that it was on the line of the current Bradstone Road. Mr West wrote to say that if the Council could consider the work he would be willing to pay the total. Whether the Corporation or the Baptists carried out the work is not known, but eventually it was and we can see that access today which is by means of a doorway in the retaining wall in Bradstone Road

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Sources:

Transcripts of the Mill Bay Baptists and various other manuscripts at the Peter Davies Heritage Room. Grace Hill, Folkestone.

Bygone Kent. Vol. 21, No.7 July 2000.

Various early local newspapers at the Peter Davies Heritage Room. Grace Hill, Folkestone.



The Baptist Burial ground from the backs of the houses in Mount Pleasant Road