

**FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**
www.folkestonehistory.org
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NEWSLETTER No. 85 – Spring 2021

Dear Member,

I hope you are all keeping safe and well. At the present time we are unable to say when we will be able to resume our meetings. We will have to wait for the government to announce when lock-down restrictions will be eased. Even then it will probably be some time after that that we will be able to hold meetings!

In the meantime we are keeping in touch with a larger newsletter with some articles which I hope you will find of some interest.

Alan Taylor

Kate Nancy White and Eversley School by Hilary Tolputt

The Society had a query from a relative of Elsie Wingrove who had attended Eversley School asking about Miss Kate Nancy White, the Head, and the ethos of the school. This is the reply that was sent.

The Folkestone Herald of 2nd January 1891 recorded the sale of 5 Earls Avenue to Miss White and this was the start of Eversley school in Folkestone which was to become one of the town's most exclusive and prominent girls' schools. Subsequently the directories for Folkestone record Eversley, a Ladies School, with the Head, Miss Kate Nancy White at three buildings in Earls Avenue. By 1901 the census records that the school occupied numbers 11, 13 and 45/47 in Earls Avenue which appears to have been a boarding house for the younger girls. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a large estate owned by a family called Catchpool was put on the market and Kate White acquired a parcel of land in Coolinge Lane on which a purpose-built school building was erected in 1905/6 to which the pupils at the Earls Avenue site were moved. The school had grown in numbers and reputation and Kate White was able to commission the architect William Dunn to design the new building.

What do we know of Kate White? She was born on 17th March 1859, the daughter of Richard White who was variously described as a warehouseman or cloth merchant. Her mother Harriet Jane, nee Thirkell, died when Kate White was 10 and her father married again. Kate had a brother, Herbert Thirkell White, who was later knighted and became Lieutenant Governor of Burma, and a younger sister Florence. In addition, she had half brothers and sisters including Ethel Rose White, born 1874, who was a teacher at Eversley.

Kate's father, Richard White, seems to have had an interest in education and philanthropy being one of the founders of the Royal Russell School at Croydon. Miss Kate White's school in Folkestone offered the daughters of gentlemen a conventional middle-class, genteel education, with the expectation that the majority would marry, and there is little evidence of high academic pretensions. That said, at approximately the same time that Elsie Wingrove attended Eversley, three sisters, the daughters of a Gravesend dental surgeon, were at the school. They were

aged 15, 12 and 11 at the time of the 1901 census, and the eldest, Mary Frances Keene, nee Lucas, (1885-1977) was to become the first woman appointed to a Chair of Anatomy in the UK. She had studied and lectured at the Royal Free Hospital.

Kate Nancy White instilled a strong social sense in her pupils who were encouraged to do their best for others less fortunate than themselves. In the early days of the school's foundation in the 1890s the pupils subscribed to a cot at the London Hospital and this work grew into the founding of a convalescent home, called Eversley, for juvenile patients recovering from surgery. Originally in Hythe, this building was found to be unsuitable and the girls raised funds for another home this time in Horn Street which was opened in 1907. The cost of upkeep and the employment of two qualified nurses was provided each year by the girls. Could it be that the association with the London Hospital had inspired Mary Lucas?

Information from old girls suggests that Kate White wore enormous hats and the pupils suspected she slept in them! The school prospered at the Coolinge Lane site in the 1920's but after Miss White's retirement in 1933, the pupils and staff were moved in 1935 from Folkestone to a school in Lymington in Hampshire. Kate Nancy White died in October 1945 aged 86.



Copy of a postcard of Eversley in Earls Avenue from the collection of Peter and Annie Bamford. (Please do not use this without permission)





Eversley School in Cooling Lane from the collection of Alan Taylor (please do not use these photos without permission).

The History of our House by Steven Short



34 Kingsnorth Gardens has been, among other things, the birthplace of Churchill's private secretary (father of Justin Welby the Archbishop of Canterbury), a dental practice, a hospital for injured birds and the home of a drug dealer.

First appearing on maps in 1899, number 34 – 'a manor house in miniature' – was the last in the street to be built, for the princely sum of £700. Number 34's first owners were a Mrs and Miss Humphreys, who lived here between 1900 and 1913. Rather wonderfully Miss Humphreys was a 'therapeutic gymnast and masseuse – Swedish system' (she also gave classes in 'feminine hygiene' from the living room).

Mansfeldt Henry Mills and Mrs Emily Frances Nightingale Mills, a well-to-do couple in their 50s, bought the house in

1914 but, perhaps because of the war and the arrival in Folkestone of tens of thousands of soldiers, continued to live a few miles away in St Margaret's at Cliff, and to maintain a sprawling, dilapidated manor house in Bedfordshire until 1918.

Charles was a highly respected buildings surveyor responsible for the Chicago exhibition and overseeing the expansion of Dover harbour. Emily came from serious money – her great grandfather (Director of the Honourable East India Company) left a probate valued at an almost unimaginable £2,500,000 in 1800! Sadly, for Emily, he left everything to his cousin.

Charles Nightingale Mills – son of Mansfeldt and Emily – was killed three months after joining up and moving to the front line from South Africa, where he had been working as a diamond mine surveyor. Mansfeldt died in 1921 leaving Emily as the only registered occupant in a 20+ room house for the next 16 years.

The park opposite – previously a clay pit, then an orchard and then allotments – opened in 1926. Although Council minutes show the park was built following complaints that the allotments were ‘little more than a rubbish dump’, it’s also on record that some prominent local people objected to the sight of disfigured soldiers who had been given free use of the land to grow vegetables. Emily was not on the guest list for the opening ceremony of the park despite coming from a well-to-do, titled family and living just yards from the entrance.

In 1939, at the beginning of the Second World War, Albert Earnest Grace bought number 34 and moved in with his wife Muriel and nine-year-old son, Richard Dennis Grace.

Albert Grace seems to have a quirky sense of design; the skewwhiff, jelly-mould ceiling roses and arched doorways in the upstairs flats are almost certainly his work. Bizarrely he also made a model of the park opposite in the garden of number 34. From the Kent Herald 1956: ‘*Mr and Mrs Grace faithfully reproduced the gardens in miniature, complete to the smallest detail, including tiny trees, curving paths, fences, gates, lawns and even tiny fountains which actually play music*’. (See pic)

In 1960, the house is recorded as occupied by Mr Albert Grace ‘retired dentist’ and ‘The Crusade Against Cruelty to Animals’. Albert, at 56, is described as ‘CACA Company Secretary’.

Albert divided the house into three flats in 1963. Strangely he had the staircase banisters, newel posts, handrails, part of the bedroom fireplace buried intact inside the new walls.

In the 1980s Richard Grace, Albert’s son, converted the ground floor flat into a hospital for injured birds. Many local people remember bringing injured seagulls here.

While remodelling the garden we found traces of Mr Grace’s replica of Kingsnorth Gardens, buried about three feet down.



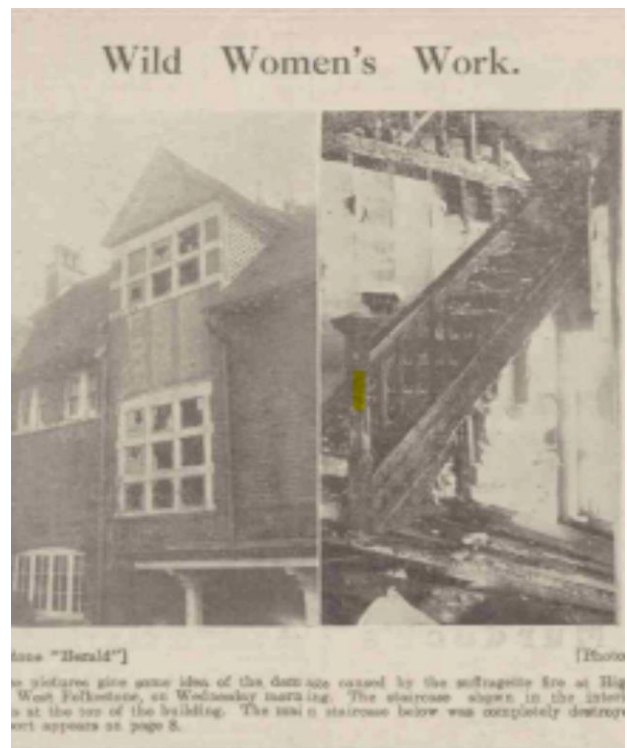
St Christophers by Hilary Tolputt

Perched on the escarpment, on the left, just before the main entrance of the Folkestone School for Girls in Coolinge Lane, the building known as St Christophers has been looking forlorn and neglected, surrounded by impenetrable fencing and with most windows boarded up for the last few years. St Christophers began life as "Highlands" in the early part of the twentieth century and with its neighbours, Coolinge Lodge, Swanscombe and White Lodge (demolished and replaced by the Acers) made a wonderful quartet of early twentieth century architecture. Latterly trees have been cleared prior to St Christophers being put on the market, and looking from Sandgate Road and Radnor Cliff Crescent, it is clear what a prominent position these houses have with wonderful views over the bay of Sandgate.

Highlands is shown on the 1907 Ordnance Survey map, and the 1911 census lists it as being occupied by Charles Edgington, his wife, their three children and six others including servants. Edgington was the Headmaster of Pelham House Preparatory School, which was a little further down the escarpment to the west of Highlands. The buildings of Pelham House School are still at the end of St Stephens Way off Coolinge Lane although much enlarged and now part of the Folkestone School for Girls, and generally known as St Stephens. It was the beginning of a long tradition of St Christophers being associated with education.

In December 1912, Charles Edgington left Highlands and Pelham House School, and Highlands was unoccupied for a few months while renovations were being undertaken by Hayward and Paramor in preparation for the new tenant, Mr. Mark Judge. He was a well-known Sandgate resident who had played a prominent role in the erection of the Sir John Moore memorial. In May 1913, the unoccupied property was subjected in the evening to an arson attack, probably the work of militant Suffragettes. It took three hours for the Sandgate Fire Brigade to bring the fire under control and there was considerable damage as indicated in the photograph from the Folkestone, Hythe, Sandgate and Cheriton Herald of 17 May 1913. The top rooms, staircase and roof were severely affected both by fire and water and the local paper estimated the repairs would be between £500 and £600. The militant suffragettes were blamed as postcards addressed to the Dishonourable Prime Minister and Dishonourable Home Secretary with quotations from famous writers lamenting the unfairness of the female lot were found in the garden.

After restoration, the property was occupied by Mark Judge and his family. Pelham House School was evacuated from Folkestone following the Gotha raid in May 1917 and never returned. The buildings were acquired by the Anglican nuns of St John Baptist, Clewer for their school, St Stephens College which was in somewhat cramped buildings in Clewer. St Stephens became one of Folkestone's most successful girls' boarding schools and in 1920 the nuns acquired another Coolinge Lane school, Bayham House School, which they renamed "Clewer" and used as the Senior Girls House. This lovely Arts and Crafts building was demolished in 2011 to make way for the Acers. Expanding still further, in 1931, "Highlands" was bought by the Clewer nuns and became the Junior Girls House of St Stephens College. It was renamed St Christophers and was known affectionately as St Kitts. It is tantalizing to wonder whether the girls were aware of the part that their Junior House had played in the history of the Female Suffrage movement.





The Junior House of St Stephens College from the collection of Vince Williams (please do not use this photo without permission).

St Christophers is shown on the 1938 Ordnance Survey map and a comparison with the 1911 map indicates there may have been an addition built on the east side. However, the scale is small, and this is only suggested tentatively as a possibility. St Stephens College left Folkestone during World War 2 and the military took over all the Cooling Lane Schools.

After the War, Kent County Council acquired St Stephens, Clewer and St Christophers in addition to Westbourne House School and Eversley. The desperate shortage of teachers in the post war years meant more teacher training colleges were required and from 1947 to 1950 these buildings were used as the Folkestone Training Centre, a teacher training college for mainly ex-forces personnel. It is possible that St Christophers played its part in providing accommodation for staff as the 1949 Kelly's directory lists three flats there. This continued to be the case until about ten years ago. In 1974 a Michael A. Leahy is listed as a tenant. Presumably, he had some connection with the wooden board in the garden recording a Capt. Leahy, R.A.M.C. 19 Field Ambulance, Taiping, Malaysia.

St Christophers has played a part in the Female Suffrage movement, provided a Junior House for the St Stephens College girls and accommodation for teachers down the years. From the time when it was built, it has continued to stand out on the ridge above St Stephens Way. May we hope it will be restored to its former glory and will not suffer the fate of Clewer or Westbourne House.

We have recently heard good news that it is the intention of the new owner to restore the house with additions as a family home. Does anyone have past photos of the front of the building which will form a key part of the refurbishment?

Maestrani's Café Restaurant by Alan Taylor



Carlo Maestrani opened a restaurant in South Street in 1876 calling it the *Café Royal*. He had a new restaurant built for him at Nos. 24 & 26 Sandgate Road in 1889 calling it the *Central Cafe Restaurant*. It was staffed by Italian émigrés, including Francesco Ronco who worked there for over 50 years and became its proprietor. It was a very popular venue and had a small mandolin orchestra which provided a continental atmosphere for patrons enjoying luncheons, teas, dinners and suppers. The building was sold in 1932 and it was announced in 1934 the building along with the next property and six houses in Oxford Terrace would be pulled down to build the Astoria Cinema. The Astoria opened on Easter Saturday 20th April 1935. On Saturday 1st June 1940 the *Folkestone Herald* announced the renaming of the Astoria, whilst the new Odeon cinema and restaurant was refurbished. The last films screen was a double James Bond bill – *Diamonds Are Forever* coupled with *Russia with Love*. The last complete performance was at 6.10 p.m. on Saturday 26th January 1974, and there was no warning, no prior announcement, no farewells and no celebration. The Odeon was pulled down in 1974 to build Boots the Chemists.



Francesco Ronco is seated 4th from the left in the front row.

Francesco Ronco lived at 160 Sandgate Road, he was the Italian Consular Agent and the house was also his office. You could always tell which house it was when passed because he had the Italian flag flying on his roof. After he died in 1965 his wife Mrs M. Ronco took over as consular agent.



The Astoria Cinema (left) and later when renamed the Odeon (below)



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