



**FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**
www.folkestonehistory.org
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The December meeting was:

The Second Annual Christmas Local History Quiz by Vince Williams

Well, last year's festive, and not to be taken too serious, quiz seemed to be well received; so the society's committee decided to repeat the format and a fun evening was enjoyed with nuggets of Folkestone trivia enjoyed alongside the hot mince pies and sausage rolls.

If you weren't there and were worried that your knowledge of the locale is not say as extensive as our President Alan's, fear not! The 40 questions again were all multiple-choice and designed to be obscure and totally guessable by anyone. It is all about the taking part, as they say, so even the most knowledgeable historian would have little or no advantage over someone with only a passing interest and who just guessed. But well done to Kevin Harvey and his team who won. If members liked the society putting on a fun and not so serious quiz, do let us know and we can start researching questions for next year.

And for those who weren't there, you'll have missed such trivia as...

- The name of the Leas Cliff's Hall first cat
- How poor Folkestonians are at telling Geordie accents
- Which Education Secretary did Pent Valley teachers snub at their science block opening
- Which days of the week were the town's Carnival Days
- What unfortunate thing happened to Bagpuss in Folkestone
- The town's link with the TV show 'Are You Being Served?'
- Which local church has a carving of Satan in its chancel
- Royal visits during the First World War
- Folkestone Town's progress in football's F.A.Cup
- Our M.P. Damian Collins' infamous and unwanted expenses claim record
- When Folkestone held Tennis' Davis Cup
- The visit of a famous Polar explorer to the town
- Beauty Contests... and even the weight of tuna!

Fifty-five people attended the meeting eleven of whom were visitors

At the February meeting we welcomed Rosemary Selman who presented her talk entitled **South Foreland Lighthouse & the Knott Family.**

Rosemary started by saying that she and her husband were guides and that South Foreland Lighthouse is a Victorian lighthouse on the South Foreland at St. Margaret's Bay; and that it was used to warn ships approaching the nearby Goodwin Sands. Built in 1843, it went out of service in 1988 and is currently owned by the National Trust. It is notable as having been the first lighthouse to use an electric light, and was the site chosen by Guglielmo Marconi for his pioneering experiments in wireless radio transmissions.

The lighthouse was originally South Foreland Upper Lighthouse, one of a pair. The second lighthouse, South Foreland Lower Lighthouse was built at the same time further down the cliff, to the east, where it still stands. Decommissioned in 1904, it is now in private ownership. Prior to the current buildings there had been a pair of lighthouses at South Foreland since at least the 1630s. Even after the decommissioning of the Lower Lighthouse the pair continued to be used as leading marks, with Admiralty charts into the 20th century indicating that the 'Lighthouses in line lead south of the Goodwin Sands'. The dangers posed to shipping by the Goodwin Sands have long been recognised and the earliest record of a warning light being used on the Foreland relates to a Brother Nicholas de Legh, who hung a white light from cliffs near St Margaret-at-Cliffe a little to the north.

In 1730, William Knott began a period of service as lighthouse keeper at the Lower Lighthouse. Over the next 175 years five generations of the Knott family would serve as lighthouse keepers at South Foreland, making them 'probably the longest dynasty of keepers anywhere in the world'.

In the 1850s Michael Faraday, scientific adviser to Trinity House, was exploring the feasibility of electric light being used in lighthouses; several different solutions were proposed. In 1857 Frederick Hale Holmes demonstrated his magneto-electric apparatus to Faraday, proposing its use in conjunction with carbon arc lamps. The initial trial was conducted at South Foreland Upper Light, which thus became the first lighthouse to use electric light. The South Foreland trial began in December 1858.

In 1865 John Tyndall had succeeded Faraday as scientific adviser to Trinity House, remaining in post until 1883.

In 1871 Souter Lighthouse became the first to be designed and built for electric operation, and the following year South Foreland received its own permanent electric installation. A power station was built, mid-way between the two lighthouses, containing four magneto generators driven by a pair of steam engines with coke-fuelled boilers. The building also included additional accommodation for the attendants. At the same time, the two lighthouses were each provided with a medium-sized (third-order) catadioptric fixed optic designed by James Chance.

In 1876 Tyndall was again engaged to make a comparative study at South Foreland, this time of two different types of electric generator: the magneto and the dynamo. (In 1869 Holmes had speculatively constructed a pair of dynamos and suggested them for the permanent South Foreland installation, but at the time they were not considered sufficiently tried and tested.) The trial took place over the winter of 1876-77, and the dynamo was demonstrated to be both mechanically and electrically superior. A set of Siemens dynamos was shortly afterwards installed at Lizard Lighthouse when it was converted to electrical operation in 1878.

In 1898 South Foreland Lighthouse was used by Guglielmo Marconi during his work on radio waves, receiving the first ship-to-shore message from the East Goodwin lightship on Christmas Eve that year. The system was used over the following winter to avert several shipwrecks. In 1899, the first international transmission was made between the lighthouse and Wimereux in France.

In 1904 the Lower Lighthouse was taken out of commission; the tower was sold and the attached cottage demolished soon afterwards. At the same time a large (first-order) rotating optic was installed in the High Lighthouse (this optic had previously been installed in St. Catherine's Lighthouse). The lighthouse was connected to mains electricity in 1922, at the same time becoming the first to use an incandescent lightbulb as its light source. The Holmes generators, which had provided power for fifty years, were then disconnected.

In 1969 the light became fully automated and the keepers' cottages (being no longer required) were sold. In the mid-1980s it was decided that modern navigational aids had rendered the South Foreland light obsolete. It was decommissioned on 30th September 1988.

The lighthouse has been in the ownership of the National Trust since 1989. As such it is open to the public. However there is a lack of parking at the site due to local privately owned roads. Visitors are advised to walk either from Dover or from St Margaret's village, or else to use the nearby cycle route.

The lighthouse had remained unlit since 1988, but in June 2012 the light was reactivated to mark the Diamond Jubilee of Elizabeth II. (The clockwork mechanism which turns the optic was restored to working order in 2004 to mark the centenary of its installation).

Sixty people attended the meeting fourteen of whom were visitors.

A Brief History of Folkestone Co-Operative Society 1866–1967 by Sue Sheppard

The Folkestone Co-operative Society was a consumer co-operative which was founded in 1866. This was still the early phase of co-op movement, just 20 years or so after the Rochdale Pioneers, who in 1844 had taken over a rented shop to sell butter and corn - widely credited as being the start of the modern co-operative movement in Britain. These businesses were consumer co-operative which meant that the shop was owned and run democratically by its members who were the people who shopped there. The Folkestone "Pioneers", whose membership rose from 22 to 122 in its first year, quickly rented their first premises a shop at 19 Tontine Street and seemed to experience mixed early fortunes. In 1874 Mr Saunders, Manager of the Tontine Street store, tendered his resignation after undergoing the "third degree" from the committee who took the view that the decrease in profit was his fault.

In 1874, Mr Tolputt the landlord asked them to leave, so they moved first to 27 and then 67 Tontine Street. At this time they also had another client store in Denmark Street. By 1889, the FCS was also trading from 31 Canterbury Road. Although most food was sourced locally at least some of the potatoes were recorded as being bought from Boulogne. The sourcing of goods and provisions was solved when in 1892 the FCS joined the national movement the Co-operative Wholesale Society.

1892 Opening of the Dover Road Store

This marked a major step forward when on March 23rd 1892 the FCS moved into their Dover Road store, a premises previously used by a carriage builders. They were to become neighbours with Crouch's Plumbers for nearly 100 years. By 1899 their Balance sheet showed £7535 was received in cash at the Dover Road store, with £1413 from the Canterbury Road store, and £1363 9s 6d from the Cheriton Branch . Money was also being invested in other Co-operatives, in particular manufacturing in a Leicester hosiery factory, a Hinckley boot factory and Kettering footwear and clothing co-op factories.

In 1893 a branch had been opened in Hythe and by the onset of WW1 sales were £177000 and the membership 5000. For the FCS, the 1920's were seen by historians writing in the 1950's, as 'the heyday of the Co-operative' which was evident on the building when a new edifice was constructed on the Dover Road flagship store. If you looked up to the top of the red brick building just opposite the Health Centre, the year 1923 and FCS were inscribed. Leaner times happened in the 1930's and further decline set in when 1940 there was a partial evacuation of the town. In December 1942 the building was affected by war damage with nearly all its windows damaged plus the huge wooden door to the Society's Offices blasted off its hinges. By 1945, the end of the war membership stood at only 8000 and sales averaged 27000. As residents returned to the town, the Co-op once again revived and the big wooden door was reattached to its hinges. Mr Turrell the caretaker returned from the army and returned to stoke the store's boiler and take the weekly takings to the bank on a Monday. Co-op membership and turnover steadily increased so in 1963 the Co-op was able to boast that 14000 Folkestone Housewives know that 'Cash Dividend is Best' with £30000 being returned to members in that year.

In 1951 a major film starring Diana Dors and Dennis Price called 'Lady Godiva Rides Again' had a scene shot in the back of the building near the bike racks (later removed by managers of the Luxor Bingo Hall). The 1960's however were to mark the end for the Folkestone Co-operative Society. The last Secretary Mr Offer was headhunted from Swindon and took up his post in 1949. His daughter recalls he would drive every day in his black Humber car up Tontine Street and park in the rear entrance near the bike sheds. In the early 1960's it was decided to open a ladieswear store in Tontine Street. This was however to prove a bad decision financially, as the new store failed to attract shoppers, many of whom had migrated along with the existing shops to Sandgate Road. Among the staff of the FCS the store became known as the White Elephant. The end of the Folkestone Co-op

came in its one hundred and first year when it contacted its membership recommending that they approve a merger with the rival Dover Co-op Society; because, in their words, they could not offer a dividend. The Dover Co-op Society was more than twice as large and at the time was offering a lucrative dividend. The following year the Dover Road central stores was put on the market and the FCS stores were slashed in number as the Dover Society went about rationalising the Folkestone set-up. The Cheriton store was renovated into a new modern store whilst outlying stores, Co-op butcheries and the Hythe Co-op's were all sold off.

The End of an Era

This merger marked a rather sad end of an era in the history of Folkestone. Mr Offer the last secretary took things particularly badly and blamed himself for the demise of the FCS. He was, according to his daughter, shunned by the well-to-do with whom he mixed in Folkestone society. Unable to cope he moved out of the town to Bromley and left the co-op movement entirely. The central stores in Dover Road remained empty into the 1970's with the usual promises of it becoming a shopping parade coming to nothing. Eventually parts were let out as Sundowners night club, afterwards Tonites night club, then in the 1980's it was used as a bingo hall. The building became threatened with demolition when the owner Calvin Morgan who had inherited along it with his two siblings auctioned it off on July 23rd 2013 at a Clive Emson auction. In the listing for the auction, outline plans had been drawn up for thirty-two town flats and thirty-two car parking spaces. Sadly local papers in mentioning this sale did not mention the long history of the Co-op site with one newspaper erroneously describing it as being Crouch's former DIY store.

The *Folkestone Express* reported on 1st August 2013 that the properties had been sold and could be turned into flats or housing, with parking. New owners, the Roger de Haan Charitable Trust later obtained planning permission to demolish the buildings and build a multi-story Sports Park. Today, in 2020, Folkestone's new skate park is finally nearing completion on the site!



Finally we would like to welcome new members: Carol Russell and Helen Hampton.