



## FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

[www.folkestonehistory.org](http://www.folkestonehistory.org)

### NEWSLETTER No. 43 - Summer 2010

#### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Alan F. Taylor

At the March meeting we welcomed back guest speaker and author Bob Ogley who gave us a talk on 'Biggin on the Bump.' Bob said he was a journalist for 30 years until leaving the editorship of the Sevenoaks Chronicle in 1989 to become a full-time author and publisher. Bob's fame stemmed from the Hurricane of 1987. He lives at Brasted Chart, Westerham, Kent. His cottage is on one of the highest parts of Kent and during the night of the Hurricane 16<sup>th</sup> October 1987 his garden was devastated, all his trees including some large oaks were all blown down. This inspired him to write the book, 'In the Wake of the Hurricane', which became a national bestseller in two editions launching him into publishing in a most dramatic way. Bob went on to say Biggin Hill began in the summer of 1916 when two subalterns from the Wireless Testing Park At Joyce Green, Dartford were instructed to look for an alternative site. High on the North Downs between Westerham and Bromley they found a flat field of 75 acres which was the perfect site. He told us about the many pilots he interviewed before writing the book 'Biggin On The Bump'. One pilot told him when they were flying home from a mission the first thing they saw was a hill called *the bump*, the pilot's would say 'there's the bump' and they knew they were home. Biggin Hill started as a wireless testing station and in 1917 perfected communication between the ground and the aeroplane. Night flying was also perfected there, as were radar dishes. The parachute was also tested there and on the first jump the man was killed because his parachute didn't open. During a raid at Biggin Hill on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1940 Sergeant Joan Elizabeth Mortimer who was manning the switch board refused to leave her post, she continued to relay messages. As the raiders departed, but before the all Clear sounded, she walked around the airfield with a bundle of red flags. Where a bomb had not exploded she placed a flag. Biggin Hill was like a minefield and those aircraft, still airborne, needed to know where to land. A bomb exploded nearby, wounding her and for a while she could not walk. When she recovered she continued planting flags. For her courage she won the Military Medal, one of three to be awarded to WAAF's at Biggin Hill. The White Hart at Brasted was the second Mess for most of the squadrons. Kath Preston, who was 'mine host' throughout the war, still remembered the faces of those whose laughter filled the bar. The pilots and crews signed a blackout screen in the White Hart which was later framed and unveiled by Sailor Malan. The Royal Air Force said farewell to Biggin Hill in October 1992. A lone trumpeter played the Last Post which signalled the end of an association lasting 75 years. From Bob's publications he has raised £34,000 for the RAF benevolent fund.

Seventy – two people attended the meeting two of whom were visitors.

At the April meeting we welcomed back guest speaker Cyril Baldwin who gave us his talk on 'Thirty Years of Public Speaking.' Cyril said in 1948 his parents had got his exams results which

showed that he had failed English literature and English grammar, but at 19 he was writing for a tailoring magazine. He went on to say he had had eleven careers including Civil Engineering. He also ran a hotel in the West Country but his wife was unhappy there and wanted to leave and return to Kent. He then became an estate agent and auctioneer. He joined the Round Table at 36 years of age, from where he started his public speaking, but he had to retire after four years when he became 40. Cyril went on to speak about the various places he had visited telling us about some of the venues and the good and bad experiences he had had over the years. Sixty people attended the meeting seven of whom were visitors.

On Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> April members gathered at the Langhorne Hotel for a coffee morning.

At the May meeting our speaker Chris McCooey he was unable to attend. Fortunately his replacement was Bob Parsons who gave us an illustrated talk on 'The Remembrance Line and Regeneration of Folkestone.' Bob is a member of the Remembrance Line group who are trying to reopen the branch line to the harbour and harbour station. Bob started by saying an Act of Parliament was passed in 1807 to build a harbour. On the 30<sup>th</sup> April 1808 the foundation stone of the pier was laid. A harbour company was formed but failed financially and the harbour passed into the hands of the Lords of the Treasury. The engineer Thomas Telford built the first piers. In 1842 the harbour was put up for sale and in 1843 it was purchased by the South Eastern Railway Company for £18,000. Bob told us about the introduction of passenger ferries, building the harbour branch railway line and the introduction of boat trains. He told us about the number of troops passing through the port during WWI and Belgian Refugees arriving. He went on to tell us about the various harbour and station extensions over the years finishing up with the closing of the port for cross channel traffic. We then saw a short film with a steam train going up and down the branch line. It was made in 1993 to celebrate 150 years of cross channel traffic through Folkestone.

After our tea break Bob told us of the Remembrance Line group's ideas for the regeneration of the harbour branch line and station plus various ideas around the town. He said they are talking with Network Rail, Shepway Council, Folkestone Harbour Company, the Chamber of Commerce in Boulogne and two shipping company's.

Eighty-one people attended the meeting five of whom were visitors.

Seven members of the Society attended the Kent History Federation Conference this year, which was held at Tunbridge Wells on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> May.

### **Dates for you diary:**

#### **Annual Outing Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> July.**

This year we are going by coach to Broadstairs where we will stay for two hours before making our way to the Walpole Bay Hotel, Cliftonville, where we will have a three course lunch which will be followed by a guided tour of this historic building and museum. Cost including the coach, lunch and gratuities £26 per person. Please contact Shirley for details – telephone 01303 246682.

There will be a coffee morning at the Langhorne Hotel Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> September at 11am.

#### **Anniversary Dinner Friday 15<sup>th</sup> October.**

This year is the Societies 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and to celebrate we are having a three course dinner at the Indoor Bowls Club, Cheriton Road. The dinner will be followed with a presentation by Charles Whitney who was our first chairman. Charles has had a chain of office made to celebrate the occasion. We will then go down memory lane showing some pictures of our major events over the last 25 years. Please book early as this will be very popular – telephone 01303 246682.

We would like to welcome a new members: Mary Morrow, Linn Fitton, Martin Cronin, Richard Moffatt & Stephanie Fair.

On a rather sad note I would like to announce the death of former member John Kerridge who died in hospital on 30<sup>th</sup> March aged 91 years.

### **Dover Road County Secondary School Speech Day October 13<sup>th</sup> 1948**

Sir Eustace Missenden (Chairman of the British Railway Executive) said he was very honoured to have been asked to attend the Speech Day. He said that he was going to do all he could for his old school. First he was going to send two of the latest types of engines, a "Battle of Britain" class, and one of the new electric locomotives, to Folkestone for the boys of his school to visit. They would be given an essay to write about the engines and the writer of the best essay would receive a solid silver model of a 'Battle of Britain' class engine. For the other two essays, the winners would receive photographs of two engines autographed by him. He also said a new cross-channel steamer, the "Maid of Orleans" had been launched by his wife three weeks previously, and that it would be making its maiden trip from Southampton to Folkestone in the early spring. He said he would like the three best boys of the school, together with the Headmaster, to take that trip in the ship.

#### **The "Maid of Orleans"**

Four people fortified by a supply of sandwiches and a spirit of hope, met at Folkestone Central Station soon after mid-day, on Sunday, July 12<sup>th</sup>. The first stage of the round trip to Southampton and back began with an uneventful train journey to London.

As there were a couple of hours to spare in London, we took the opportunity of a quick walk past some of the well-known landmarks, seeing on the way some of the work being done on the site of the buildings which are to be erected for the Festival of Britain, in 1951. A rapid tour of Trafalgar Square, the Horse Guards, Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey, St. James's Park, and Charing Cross, brought us back to Waterloo Station for the second stage of the trip.

After a fast and pleasant train journey, during which we caught a glimpse of the Brooklands Motor Racing Track, and passed through some of the loveliest of the Surrey countryside, we arrived punctually at Southampton soon after six in the evening. Here we were met and driven to the docks, and in a matter of minutes were alongside the "Maid." Moored in the Cunard-White Star Dock, she was dwarfed by her big sister, the "Queen Mary," which was lying close by.

On the ship we were greeted by Captain Larkins and introduced to some of his officers. Then followed tea, a quick look round our vessel, and a walk on the dockside to see the "Queen Mary" at closer quarters. By dusk we were quite ready to retire to our luxurious cabins.

A steward with tea announced the arrival of morning and near approach of breakfast. Punctually at nine a tug began to fuss around us, and half an hour later we were on our way, past the Cunard giant and several of the smaller but more graceful Union-Castle liners.

During the journey there was ample time and opportunity to explore the ship from stem to stern. Compass adjustments were made and explained; we looked at complicated instruments designed to make the mariner's life safer, if not simpler. We marvelled at the wealth of invention and skill which had gone into the vessel, and realised dimly how the work of generations of mathematicians, physicists, engineers and designers had converged in this small but newest example of Britain's shipbuilding art. Who would have suspected that even a chemist was hidden on board? But there he was, with his testing apparatus, taking samples every quarter of an hour of the water feeding the boilers, and looking for minute traces of materials which should not be there.

The "Maid of Orleans" is a lovely ship. We who were privileged to represent the school on her journey to her base are also privileged to voice the thanks of the school to those who made the experience possible. Firstly, of course, our thanks go to Sir Eustace Missenden, who was responsible for setting the arrangements in motion. Busy as he is, he has constantly kept us in mind. Secondly, to Mr. Streatfield, a Public Relations Officer of British Railways, in whose hands were left the details. Lastly, to Captain Larkins, his officers and crew, who made it their especial care to see that our experience was pleasant and instructive.

### **Southampton to the Nab**

We left Southampton Dock at 9.33 a.m. being pulled by a tug-boat. At 9.45 we started under our own steam. Ten minutes later we passed the Netley Hospital. We were told that this should have been built in India, but the plans for two hospitals were mixed up and they were each built in the wrong country. It was not until 11.10 that we saw the large flying-boat based at Calshott, for we had spent an hour in Southampton Water adjusting compasses. After a further forty minutes we drew level with the Isle of Wight. Our next sea mark was the tall Nab Tower which we left behind at 12.10, having previously dropped our pilot.

C. Huntley, IVT.

### **Selsey Bill to Beachy Head**

We came opposite the long shingle bank of Selsey Bill at 12.20, by which time we were well out to sea. At 12.30, we went down to dinner. This was exceptionally good, and surprised all of us by the quantity of meat which was served. While we were still eating, we passed quite close to the Owers Lightship. The meal over, we went up to the bridge, but the coast was out of sight, so we looked at it on the radar set. By the time we reached Brighton it was just possible to see the coast, but we were too far out to see any familiar landmarks without using binoculars. We were travelling at a very good speed, and came in sight of the chalk cliffs of the South Downs, known as the Seven Sisters, at 2.10 p.m. When we came opposite Beachy Head, at 2.25, we borrowed the ship's binoculars to look at the lighthouse. We also saw the block of concrete at the top of the cliff from which the lighthouse was built in 1902.

A. May, V.

### **Beachy Head to Folkestone**

It was ten minutes to three when we passed the Royal Sovereign Lightship, seven miles off Eastbourne. Then we lost sight of the low land for a little while because of fog, but this soon cleared, and we were able to see the Fairlight Hills, at Hastings. The next landmark we passed was Dungeness, which we rounded at five minutes to four. It did not take long before we reached Folkestone. We docked at 4.30, and there was a fairly large number of people to greet us. Before we went ashore we had some photographs taken, and then we were invited to go below and have tea. So our grand day finished, but it had gone all too quickly.

D. Butler, IVT.

Sources:

Dover Road County Secondary School Magazine, Christmas, 1948 No. 1. Vol. 1

Dover Road County Secondary School Magazine, Summer, 1949 No.2. Vol. 1



**Maid of Orleans 1948 - 1975**

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