

**FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT  
Local History Society  
[www.folkestonehistory.org](http://www.folkestonehistory.org)**

**NEWSLETTER No. 75 – Summer 2018**

**CHAIRMAN'S REPORT** by Alan F Taylor

At the March meeting we welcomed guest speaker Denis Pepper who presented his talk entitled '**Folkestone, St. Botolph and St. Eanswythe**'. Denis has been researching the seventh century for the past ten years and is a recognised authority on the life of Saint Botolph (c.620-680) who was a contemporary of Folkestone's Saint Eanswythe. He pointed out that researching the seventh century is, to history, what keyhole surgery is to medicine - so much being hidden from our gaze as we peer back 1400 years through a 21st century keyhole.

His talk was in four parts. He started by outlining the life stories of St Eanswythe and St Botolph and then moved on to demonstrate that it is likely that their lives were intertwined. The third part covered Botolph's travels to Faremoutiers near Paris and his return to Britain nine years later in 647; he finished by offering his personal unsubstantiated solutions to two local mysteries concerning the saints.

Denis reminded us that Folkestone lies right in the middle of the busy corridor which has, from time immemorial, run between Britain and the centre of the continent. He portrayed the adoption of St Augustine's Christianity as being not only religiously desirable but, perhaps more importantly at the time, being *politically expedient* for Britain's kings and warlords. He noted that when Eanswythe's father Eadbald took the Kentish crown he rejected Canterbury's new religion. It was probably for this reason that he moved his base to Folkestone where his daughter subsequently founded the country's first nunnery. Such a foundation would have offered the king great business opportunities. When Eadbald died it was (unusually) his younger son Eorcenberht who became king rather than his older brother Eormenred who had left Kent at an early age - probably moving to Northumberland.

Denis cited the evidence for the existence of St Botolph's Chapel near the East Cliff.

When Eorcenberht became king it seems that he moved his base away from Folkestone (perhaps to Lyminge rather than Canterbury) and that he ruled East Kent from there. The evidence suggests that when the sub-king of West Kent died, Eormenred was called back to rule that half of Eorcenberht's fiefdom. Soon after he and his family's arrival, Eormenred's daughter Domne Eafe left for the West Country where she married King Merewalh of the Magonsaete tribe. They had four children of whom one was Mildrith - later to be Abbess of Minster-in-Thanel.

Eormenred and Eorcenberht died within a couple of years of each other and Eorcenberht's son Ecgberht became king of Kent although, being only 13, he ruled under the regency of his mother. His claim to the throne was weak however because of the existence of Eormenred's two sons Aethelberht and Aethelred. The two princes were sent to Eastry where they were murdered by one of Ecgberht's thanes.

When their sister Domne Eafe heard of the murders she claimed *weregild* (compensation) from Ecgberht with the result that she was given land on the Isle of Thanet where she resolved to build a monastery. Inconveniently, she had however just finished building a monastery at Much Wenlock in Shropshire to which she had intended to devote her life. Botolph, by this time, had been abbot of Icanho Abbey in Suffolk for sixteen years. The abbey had acquired a model reputation and was regularly visited by the good and the holy and had probably been visited by Domne Eafe herself. History tells us that it was to Botolph that she turned for advice.

Denis posed the question of "Why should an abbess of two monasteries - one in Kent and one in Shropshire - ask the advice of an abbot in Suffolk?" He suggested that this might have been because Botolph had for long been a wise and trusted friend of the Kentish Royal Family. There is further evidence for this.

Until recently King Eadbald's second wife Ymme had been thought to have been the daughter of the Frankish king Theudebert. Recent wisdom suggests that she was in fact the daughter of the mayor of the Frankish Neustrian palace, Erchinoald. This is lent strength by the Frankish prefixes to the names of her sons Eormenred and Eorcenberht. During his time in France, Botolph would have become well-acquainted with the French court and it is likely that he would have known both Erchinoald and his grand-daughter Liobsynde who was a companion to Queen Balthild. When the latter decided to re-found the monastery at Chelles she asked Liobsynde to become one of its first nuns.

Botolph's solution to Domne Eafe's problem (which she readily accepted) was to propose Liobsynde as abbess of Much Wenlock while he himself would regularly oversee the running of the Shropshire monastery thus allowing Domne Eafe freedom to look after her foundation in Thanet of which her daughter Mildrith famously later became abbess.

Denis explained that it is thought that the seventy or so churches which are dedicated to Saint Botolph mark (to a certain extent) the footsteps of the saint who, because of his travelling, became the patron saint of wayfarers. In southern England, besides our chapel in Folkestone, there are other 'Botolph Churches' in East Sussex and West Kent.

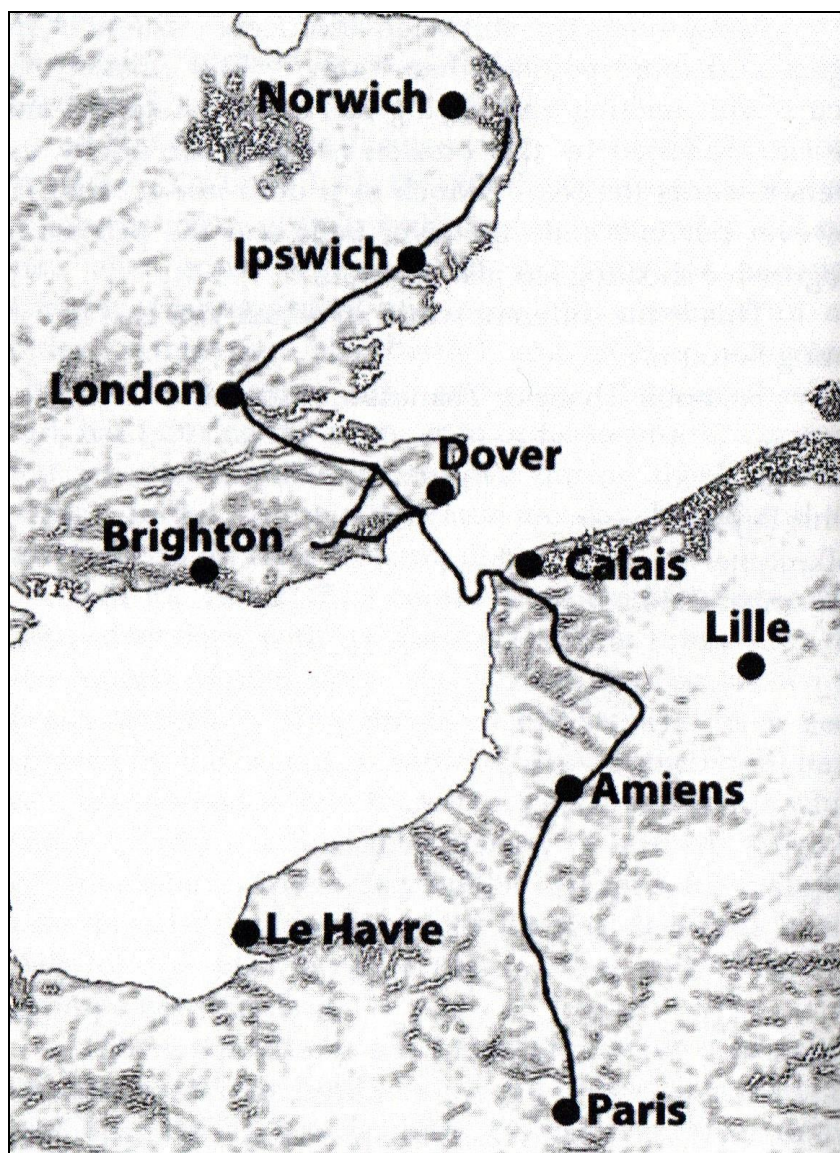
Botolph would have arrived back in England (perhaps landing at Bosham) seven years after Eanswythe died.

Admitting that his thoughts are based on fantasy rather than evidence, Denis wonders if, during his journey from the west towards Folkestone, Botolph found a churchless Christian community at Brenzett where he perhaps helped to build a wooden chapel which he dedicated to his old friend Eanswythe.

In 1287 we know that there was a violent storm which blocked the *Old Romney Gap* which until then had allowed the ebb and flow of the River Rother between Greatstone and Littlestone. Denis feels that it is likely that a *previous* storm was responsible for blocking a channel which had developed between an outer shingle spit and Romney Marsh proper. At that stage, before the *Old Romney Gap* had opened, vessels would have been able to gain access to Old Winchelsea from the Portus Lemanis area. It seems likely that it was when *that* channel became blocked that the *Old Romney Gap* opened in response.

Until that event the building of a bridge between West Hythe and Romney Marsh proper would not have been viable because the Portus Lemanis basin was open to the sea. Once it became blocked by a combination of storm, silting and longshore drift St Botolph's Bridge could be built. Was this why the bridge took Botolph's name? Did the storm occur in the seventh century as a happy coincidence which allowed him to construct a bridge to enable wood to be easily transported from the King's 'Salt Woods' in order to build the St Eanswythe Church at Brenzett?

Denis finished his talk by saying that Botolph would have found Folkestone much altered since his previous visit. Overseas visitors would have been intent on travelling to Lyminge. Rather than on the *south* bank where the nunnery was, their boats would have been pulled up on the *north* bank of the Pent River. They would then have taken the path across the hills toward the north-west - perhaps passing along the track we now know as Warren Road where 1200 years later the foundations of a chapel were found. Was the first chapel on this site built by Botolph himself and is this why he chose to build it here?



**The Extent of Botolph's Travels.**

Denis Pepper, Licata, Sicily. 16 May 2018.

Seventy-two people attended the meeting twenty-eight of whom were visitors.

At the April meeting we welcomed member speaker Hilary Tolputt who gave her talk on '**The Zeebrugge Raid**'. It was an appropriate subject as later in the month, on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2018, it would be the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this raid.

Bruges, a Belgian town occupied by the Germans in the First World War, was linked to Zeebrugge and Ostend by canals. German submarines used Bruges, six miles inland and a safe retreat for refitting and rearming, as their base. In the spring of 1918, morale was low in Britain as German submarine attacks on merchant shipping had caused food shortages, and there had been heavy casualties on the Western Front as a result of the German spring offensive.

The aim of the raid was to prevent U boats from using the submarine pens at Bruges by scuttling 3 old ships in the entrance of the canal at Zeebrugge and sinking 2 ships in the harbour at Ostend. To do this the guns on the mole protecting the harbour entrance needed to be silenced so the old block ships could get into the harbour.

Landing parties of sailors and marines on HMS Vindictive (a 5750 ton cruiser) and on 2 converted Mersey ferries, the Iris and the Daffodil were to attack the German machine guns on the mole, acting as a diversion and drawing the enemy fire. In addition, to prevent German reinforcements from shore helping those on the mole, a submarine was to be blown up under the viaduct connecting shore and mole. This part of the plan was successful.

Unfortunately, a change in the direction of the wind resulted in the smoke screen being ineffective and therefore many of the landing party from HMS Vindictive were killed or wounded before the attack could begin and many others once they landed on the mole. When the Iris eventually left the mole under heavy German fire, casualties were very high. Although the block ships got into the harbour it is debateable how far the canal entrance was really blocked while the attempt to block Ostend harbour that night was a complete failure. What was not in doubt was the bravery of those involved. The sheer panache and daring of the raid seems to have boosted civilian morale in Britain and government propaganda suggested this would be a turning point in the War.

There were many locals involved at Zeebrugge. Admiral Roger Keyes, the Commander of the Dover patrol, was well known in the area as his father had retired from the army to Sandgate. Marines came from Chatham, Portsmouth and Plymouth to make up the 700 strong 4<sup>th</sup> battalion of the Royal Marines. Their headquarters were at Deal and they trained on Free Down at Kingsdown, on a layout of the Zeebrugge mole.

Mrs Bradford, the mother of George Bradford who was posthumously awarded the VC for his bravery at Zeebrugge, lived in Folkestone after the war and presented a St George's flag in 1938 when the foundation stone was laid of St George's Hall (later St George's Church).

Lt. Commander Arthur Harrison, an old boy of Dover College and England rugby player, was also posthumously awarded a VC for his bravery on the mole. Another old boy of Dover College, Lt Commander Reginald Dallas Brooks, was awarded the Distinguished Service Order.

British casualties were very high with about 227 killed and over 350 wounded. At James' Cemetery, Dover, a mass funeral was held for 59 men who were killed on 23 April 1918 in the attack on Zeebrugge. Others were buried in their home towns. In Folkestone cemetery, Private Parks is buried and at Lydd Private Hart.

In 1925, Edwin Couchman, a stoker on Vindictive who survived the attack, raised funds for the unemployed and disabled Zeebrugge veterans so they could be taken over to Zeebrugge for the unveiling of a memorial there.

The bell which was on the mole at Zeebrugge and was rung by the Germans to warn of British attacks can be seen on Dover Town Hall. It was given to Admiral Roger Keyes after the war by the King of the Belgians. He in turn gave it to the people of Dover and it was subsequently hung on the town hall as a memorial to the courage of the men who fought at Zeebrugge. It is rung each year on St George's Day to honour those who took part in the raid and memorials wreaths are laid at the graves at St James' cemetery. Hilary showed photographs of the ships, of the men involved and the local memorials.

Sixty people attended the meeting ten of whom were visitors.





The *Vindictive*, was used to disembark troops on to the Zeebrugge Mole.

At the May meeting we welcomed speaker, member & author Vince Williams who presented his talk entitled 'Folkestone Churches - Part 3'. Vince said in this final talk on Folkestone's churches, some of Folkestone's more recent or more obscure churches and religious groups would be covered.

### **Folkestone's Churches (Part 3) – An Overview by Vincent Williams**

The first covered was the **First Church of Christ Scientist** which initially met above Lloyds Bank in 1921, before moving to Cave's Café. Their hall in Christchurch Road first appeared in the street directories in 1933, and they had ceased to exist by the 1990s or early 2000s.

Spiritualist movements were also popular in the late 19<sup>th</sup> & early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and what became the **Greater World Spiritualist Church** started in Folkestone as early as the late 1920s, starting in the town in Grace Hill and after several venue changes, since 1965 they have met in the Masonic Hall.

The **Jehovah Witnesses** started in the late 1930s over a shop in Dover Road, before moving to Foord Road and Grace Hill. From 1954 until 2000 they met in Morehall Avenue before moving to Kingdom Hall, Parkfield Road.



A church specific to Folkestone was the **Church of the New Khrist** which met in a tin hut at the Darlington Arch end of Guildhall Street. Run by Mr Goodyear, a former Baptist who had the pram shop next door, it is first recorded in 1936 and was remembered as having practised during the Second World War Second.

A more modern church, the **Kingdom Revival Church** came to the Churchill School, Hawkinge in 2008, with a prayer room at Cheriton's Shearway Road industrial estate. In 2018 this moved to the Motis Business Park at the end of Cheriton High Street. This building was formerly used by the **Christ Embassy Church** which had moved out in 2015 and relocated to the Three Hills Sports Park. Another new evangelical church, the **Redeemed Christian Church of God** has since 2015 operated out of the old Oddfellows Hall in St Michaels Street.

With the arrival of the railway to Folkestone in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, various city based religious missions expanded to help the poor and destitute of surrounding towns. The **London City Mission** set up in Earls Avenue between 1888 and 1924; and the **Railway Mission** set up locally in 1884 and erected their hall in St Johns Street in 1901 where they remained until 1932.

An interdenominational Christian holiday home, called **Carlisle Lodge**, with a chapel, operated out of 17 Grimston Avenue from 1957 until the late 1980s.

The **Theosophical Society**, a society that tries to link religion, philosophy and science, first visited Folkestone in 1891 and members were meeting regularly from 1906. In 1915 they acquired a house in Shorncliffe Road and were there at least until 1974 when the street directories ended. Their dissolution date locally is not known but by 1983 they were meeting at the Earlsfield Adult Education Centre.

The **Plymouth Brethren** came to Folkestone in about 1865 and in 1870 moved to the Harveian Institute on The Bayle. From the late 1880s they had a hall at 45 Foord Road which is now the Sunflower House. But other groups of Brethren may have met in Folkestone concurrently as a venue in Victoria Road is mentioned from 1895 to 1901. In 1937 the Plymouth Brethren built a hall at 330 Cheriton Road, remaining there until 2012. Other groups of Brethren have also met in the town, including a group that moved from the Masonic Hall in 1912 to the Victoria Gospel Hall at 32 Cheriton Road. They remained there until the early 1990s when it was taken over by the South Kent Community Church. Another more recent group of Brethren has taken over the former Jehovah. Witness Kingdom Hall in Morehall Avenue some time after 1999, and in 2013 another group has reopened the hall at 330 Cheriton Road.

The **Mormons** sent a mission to Folkestone in 1961 and hired the Co-operative Hall in Tontine Street. Evidence of Mormons in the town also appears in 1973, but their plans to build a chapel were unrealised.

In 1989 the local Bangladeshi community first met at the New Delhi restaurant and used the Southcliffe Hotel before setting up a **Mosque** in the early 1990s in Foord Road South.

The Vicar of St Mary & St Eanswyth's church, Matthew Woodward wanted to re-establish a nunnery in Folkestone, which was essentially realised in 1864/65 when the **Clewer Sisterhood** set up on The Bayle and also at Radnor Street. Commonly known as St Eanswyth's Sisterhood, they also ran missions at St Stephen's College in Cooling Lane and in the St Saviour's parish. As their number of nuns fell between the two world wars they scaled back operations and had left the town by 1940. The last place they ran was **St Andrews Convalescent Home**. Starting initially in 1875 in a building in Guildhall Street, their impressive building on the East Cliff was built and opened in 1884, with its chapel opening in 1889.



The **Quakers** are another of Folkestone's long standing religious groups and date back in Folkestone to 1655. The location of their first building is not known, but they moved to Dover Street, now Harbour Way in 1801 and remained there until 2003. They now meet in Sandgate Church hall.

The **Salvation Army** first came to Folkestone in 1882 and were unpopular with the more conservative elements of the town. A series of well-publicised riots in the 1880s and 1890s saw running battles and riots with 660 Salvationists wounded, some seriously, and some killed. The protagonist Skeleton Army that fought against the Salvationists was even sponsored by elements of the Church of England and Folkestone town officials. Their hall in Bradstone Road first appears in the 1887 street directory and was used until 2002 when they relocated to their new hall in Canterbury Road.



Other churches, ancient and modern were covered in Vincent Williams' talk, including: the Life Church, SKCC, Victoria Gospel Hall, The Grange School Chapel, St Botolph's, St Eanswythe's Chapel at Swetton, Cheriton Garden Gospel Hall and the British Israel World Federation. It is intended that over the next few years all the research from this series of talks on local churches will be published as a series of book. If anyone has any further information or images of any of Folkestone's religious groups and churches, please contact Vincent Williams at the Folkestone & District Local History Society or by email: halloweenvince@aol.com

Forty one people attended the meeting four of whom were visitors.

The Kent History Federation one day conference this year was held on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May and was hosted by Canterbury Christ Church University. The morning talks were mainly on Tudor and Stuart Canterbury. The Federation has 104 affiliated societies. Eighty delegates attended the conference ten of whom came from our society so we were well represented!

### **Forthcoming Events**

The Society's **Folkestone During The Great War** exhibition will be running in the Folkestone Museum, (Town Hall) from Monday June 4<sup>th</sup> to Saturday July 28<sup>th</sup>.

Hilary Tolputt will be giving her 'Folkestone In The Great War' talk in the education room Folkestone museum on Saturday June 23<sup>rd</sup> starting at 2 pm.

**DUE TO THE HOLY TRINITY CHURCH HALL BEING REFURBISHED THE AUGUST MEETING WILL BE HELD IN THE CHURCH ON TUESDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST. THE TALK WILL BE ON FOLKESTONE'S NEW MUSEUM BY TERRY BEGENT.**

We would like to welcome new members: Malcolm Keene, Frank Pendlebury, Denis Pepper and Mrs Johnson.

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