



**FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT  
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**  
[www.folkestonehistory.org](http://www.folkestonehistory.org)

### **NEWSLETTER No. 61 – Winter 2014**

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

At the September meeting we welcomed a team from the Folkestone Camera Club: Arthur Bailey, (President), Melanie Chalk (Chairman), Bob Brisley, and Michael Chalk, who presented us with their Audio-Visuals on WW1. The titles being: 'In Flanders Fields', 'Forgotten Heroes', 'Glint in the Sky', 'Shorncliffe Military Cemetery', and A Soldier in the Great War.

Fifty-seven people attended the evening three of whom were visitors.

The October meeting started with the Annual General Meeting. Standing for election was: Chairman Alan Taylor, Hon. Secretary Peter Bamford, and Hon. Treasurer Paul Tatt. There being no other nominations these officers were duly elected. The Committee members are: Hilary Tolputt, Vince Williams and Brian Adams.

After a short break we welcomed speaker member James Willmott who presented us with his audio visual on Hythe. James started by telling us a bit about himself, where he had worked and his ancestors. He went on to say his main interests were sailing and photography, the later going back to his grandfather, all of which was supported by many splendid images. James followed on with his audio visual of Hythe which included past and present images.

Forty-four people attended the meeting.

At the November meeting we welcomed author and member Vince Williams who gave his illustrated talk entitled 'The Life and Times of Dr Syn'. Vince said he missed the hey-day years in the 1960s & 70s when the paperback editions of the Dr Syn books were very popular as he was too young but more recently most of the books have been reprinted.

Russell Thorndike author of "Dr. Syn" was born in Rochester in 1895, his father was a Canon at Rochester Cathedral – Russell Thorndike was also an actor of stage and screen – he died in 1972.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries smuggling was rife in England and no more so than on the Romney Marsh. The Rev. Christopher Syn is the smuggler hero of a series of novels by Russell Thorndike set in and around Dymchurch.

The first book, "Doctor Syn: A Smuggler's Tale of Romney Marsh" was published in 1915. The story idea comes from smuggling in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Romney Marsh, where brandy and tobacco

were brought in at night by boat from France to avoid high tax. Minor battles were fought between gangs of smugglers and the Revenue men. Posing as the respectable Vicar of St Peter and St. Paul church in Dymchurch in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Dr Syn is actually the retired pirate Captain Clegg. Clegg, believed hanged in Rye who is no longer being sought by the authorities. However, country life proves too tame for the good "Dr Syn", and his attention turns to smuggling.

Thorndike intended his first novel to be one-off, as the character of Syn had been killed off at the end of the book. However, it was so popular that Thorndike wrote six 'prequel' novels: 'Doctor Syn Returns', 'The Further Adventures of Dr Syn', 'The Amazing Quest of Dr. Syn', 'The Courageous Exploits of Dr Syn' and 'The Shadow of Dr Syn'.

Vince told us about most of the places mentioned in the Syn books: The City of London pub, St Peter & St Paul Church, Dungeness, Littlestone, Botolphs Bridge, The Royal Oak pub in Brookland; Hythe, Lydd, Lympne, The Mermaid Inn in Rye, St Mary's Bay, Dover Castle and The Ship Inn in Dymchurch.

Vince went on to talk about the Dr Syn plays and the operas including one at the Pleasure Gardens Theatre, Folkestone in 1927 that Russell Thorndike performed in; Sheet music - Smugglers of Romney Marsh; the Radio Plays on BBC Radio; and the recent reference books including The Book of Syn written by Keith Swallow. Vince finished with the enactment of Dr Syn which takes place every other year at Dymchurch.

Sixty-one people attended the meeting four of which were visitors.

On July 7<sup>th</sup> the Society set up an exhibition with Folkestone Camera Club and Step Short called 'Folkestone in the Great War' to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was held in the Sassoon Room, Folkestone Library, Grace Hill. There were over 300 photographs on display which were under ten headings: Rest Camps; Shorncliffe Camp; Other Camps and Training; Folkestone Harbour during the War; Occupied and Requisitioned Buildings; Recruitment in Folkestone; Remembering Those Who Served; Belgian Refugees, Espionage, and The Great Air Raid - 25<sup>th</sup> May 1917. There was a Time-Line in photographs and information covering 1913 to 1919. There were also eleven display cabinets containing memorabilia, artefacts, a mannequin wearing a fourth battalion of the Buffs East Kent regiment uniform (1914) and reproduced posters. An Audio Visual made by members of the camera club also ran for 35 minutes. The exhibition was very well received - when it finished on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> September; just fewer than 4,000 people had attended, including would you believe it Yoko Ono and TV star Nina Myskow.

**Notice to changes in the programme: 7<sup>th</sup> January 2015 the meeting will be held in the Church it will be a talk on "The Radnor Family" by Alec Perry followed by a film show.**

**The February meeting will be on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> back in the Hall. The changes are due to the hall being used on Wednesday nights for the Winter Shelter.**

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

We would like to welcome new members Keith and Jean Adams, Paul Harris, Candida Wright, Dr. Philip Charles and Rebecca Thorogood

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

## **Musgrave & Co of Folkestone: Drapers, Milliners and Costumer**

Joseph John Musgrave (1833-1917) began to learn his trade as a draper from when he was just 17 years old. His father Joseph Robinson Musgrave, who was also a Draper, died in 1836, leaving his wife Elizabeth Corke (1806-1876) to bring up their family of Joseph John and three sisters, Catherine Jane, Elizabeth Robinson and Mary Maria. Elizabeth was also from a family with a history of trade in Drapery and, in 1850, she arranged for Joseph John to spend time living and working with his uncle Henry Corke in Tonbridge Wells, where he operated a business as a Draper and Tailor.

Within just a few years, Joseph John Musgrave had set up in business as a Master Linen Draper in Maidstone. A sign of the early success of his business can be found in the 1861 census which shows that he was providing employment for his sisters Catherine Jane, as a Housekeeper and Mary Maria, as a Miler. He also employed an assistant Draper, John Geale and he was repaying the benefits of the training that he had received from his uncle by providing an apprenticeship for his cousin, Richard Edwin Corke. The business continued to expand and at some point after the census was taken, he met his first wife Grace Button, a dressmaker, and they were married in August 1862.

John Joseph and Grace had five children: Elizabeth Jane, Clara Maria, Louisa Margaret, William Robinson and Catherine Grace. The family moved to Folkestone c.1865 but sadly, Grace Button died in 1870, aged 32 years. Joseph John continued to operate his business and the 1871 census shows that again he was successful. At this time he was living at No.7 High Street which, as well as being the family home, was also the first location for the Musgrave Drapery business in Folkestone. Joseph John lived there with his five children and also resident were: his sister Mary Maria as Housekeeper, Arthur Marden, an apprentice Draper, Rebecca Brown, a Miller, Sarah Spencer, an apprentice Dressmaker, Hannah Fuller, a children's Nurse and Fanny Rye, a general servant.

In October 1871, Joseph John married his second wife, Sarah Anna Le Butt, who owned and ran a Lodging House at 3 Playdell Gardens in Folkestone. Sarah Anna moved into Joseph John's home at High Street and they later moved to 18 Sandgate Road where, over the next twenty years or so, they raised their family comprising Joseph John's five earlier children and his children with Sarah Anna: Florence Sarah, George Clark, Laura Francis, Joseph Leslie, Henry Paul and Mary Isabel. As with all their other addresses, No. 18 Sandgate Road was both a family home and the premises for their business. In the period up to 1891, residents were Joseph John, Sarah Anna, their children and a number of employees, including both tradesmen and women in the drapery business and domestic staff.

Although the business now employed a number of family members, Joseph John maintained the primary management role through most of the 1890s but he eventually retired in around 1898, at which time the structure of the business changed. By 1901, Joseph John and Sarah Anna Le Butt had moved to Gandor Gardens in Hampstead accompanied by their children: Florence, Laura and Mary (daughters), Joseph Leslie and Henry Paul (sons), together with Joseph Leslie's wife, Maud, and their son of eight months, Barrington Le Butt. At this time, the family home at No. 18 Sandgate Road was occupied by Elizabeth Jane and Louisa Margaret, together with five Drapery Assistants and two domestic staff. Clara Maria was a Drapers assistant but was living in Weston Super Mare as a boarder. George Clark was in America, where he was a war correspondent, recovering from wounds received in the Spanish-American War in Cuba and duty in South Africa. Catherine Grace (the only daughter who had married), was living in Kingston, Surrey with her husband and two sons, while William Robinson was living with his wife, Nellie Bradley and their son Reginald Bradley at No. 46 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone.

From the early 1900s, the business continued with a number of family members living in Folkestone employed in various positions, and managed through a formal partnership between William Robinson Musgrave and his sisters, Elizabeth Jane and Clara Maria Musgrave, who had returned to Folkestone. In 1911 William Robinson Musgrave – now a Master Draper – was living with his family at No. 5 Copthall Gardens, where his son Reginald Bradby, aged 16, was undertaking a Draper's apprenticeship. His three sisters, Elizabeth Jane, Clara Maria, and Louisa Margaret were all living at No. 18 Bouverie Place, which was also home to five Drapery saleswomen and two domestic staff.

In 1914 this partnership was dissolved by mutual agreement and William Robinson took over control on his own.

The business operated successfully and prospered along with post-war recovery and the growth of the town through the 1920s and 30s. No. 28 Sandgate Road was the location of the large high street drapery and millinery shop, No. 26 (formerly No. 18) became the Astoria cinema and it is likely that No. 30 was used a sewing centre or workshop, as well as a family home.

William Robinson Musgrave remained in control until he died in 1933, at which time his son Reginald Bradby Musgrave took over. He dissolved the existing company and renamed it as Musgrave and Company (Kent) Limited but otherwise it continued to operate with the same management style as his father and the business continued as a successful and profitable enterprise.



**Musgrave & Co., 26 Sandgate Road (formerly No18) c.1934**

In the 1960s though, the whole of the UK fashion, clothing and textile industry came under intense pressure from rapidly changing tastes, the onset of global trading and influx of cheaper fabrics from the new production centres rapidly springing up in Asia. The era of the traditional, local draper, milliner and costumier was over and, for the Musgrave business, the end soon came. The company was eventually wound up by Reginald's daughter, Sheila Anne Bradby Musgrave in August 1972, but the shops, Nos. 28 and 30 Sandgate Road were taken over by drapers Lyons & Lyons Ltd., in 1963.