



## FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER No. 14 – Spring 2003

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

To begin with, I have to regrettably report the sad death of Reg Briggs, who passed away on 15<sup>th</sup> February.

Many of you will remember our dear old friend Reg, a founder member of the Society, who was also the yachting correspondent for the Folkestone Herald. Well a few years ago at one of our informal evenings Reg brought along the Folkestone Borough Council's register for licensed boats and boatmen dating from 1928 to 1974 (when the Council abolished the position of Beach Inspector who dealt with the licensing). I expressed my interest in this register and Reg said, "One day it will be yours." Well when Reg and his wife Betty had to give up their flat in Albion Villas and move into sheltered accommodation their daughters cleared the flat and stored some of the contents. On attending Betty's funeral on 3 April 2001 I asked Reg's daughter Barbara if she knew what had happened to this goodly register, she said, "Alan I am gradually going through my parents contents and if I find the register I will let you have it." Well just two months ago Barbara rang to say she had found the register and she would bring it round to me. I must say I am very pleased to have it! It is a fascinating unique record of the licensed boats and boatmen, recording the boatman's names and addresses, the name of the boat, whether it is a motor, rowing or sailing boat, and the length, breadth and depth of the vessel.

Another piece of sad news is that our Vice-Chairman Chris Phillips has resigned from the Committee. We would like to extend our grateful thanks to Chris for all the hard work he has put into the Society and we hope he will remain active. At present the committee have no plans to replace Chris and Don Gregory will make the announcements at our meetings. The Committee is currently in the process of putting together a video film of old Folkestone; with the suggested title at present *FASHIONABLE FOLKESTONE THE PLACE TO BE SEEN, The Story of a Famous Seaside Town in the Early 1900's*. Preliminary work has already started in way of selecting photographs and we may at a later date be asking for volunteers to dress-up in period costumes.

I like to end by extending a warm welcome to the following new members: Mrs M. Ostler, Mrs K. Huntley and Mr & Mrs Boyt.

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## MARJORIE SIDEY 1905-2002

An appreciation by June Paine

In the late autumn of 2002 that well-known Folkestone figure, Marjorie Sidey, passed away.

Marjorie lived in 'Rosewyn', one of the first houses built in Cherry Garden Avenue, and could recall the Chinese labour camp that was based underneath the hills during the First World War; the conflict which claimed the life of her only brother at the age of eighteen. By the time Marjorie was of school age the family had moved to Broadmead Manor, also in Cherry Garden Avenue, as her father was in the employ of Clerk of Works to Lord Radnor.

As time went by, Marjorie went to Kent College in Bouverie Road West, which has long been converted into flats called Kent House. Yet, school was never enjoyable for Marjorie, though she had an interest in cooking, the basics having been learnt from her mother Louise at home. She went on to train at the Marshall School of Cookery in London and aged 20 passed her diploma. Marjorie also went on to obtain the higher-grade diploma and for a short time stayed with a private family of means to do the catering. Four years on Marjorie joined her mother and two assistants at the Home Service Kitchen in Cheriton Place, where the trade was brisk. In the next few years the name was altered to Louise's Home Service Kitchen and when the adjoining property became available Marjorie and her mother opened it as a café able to seat 50 people with a larger staff and daily deliveries to private houses. The family moved out to Stelling Minnis, but the health of Marjorie's father deteriorated and he died. It was at this time she applied for a cook's position at the Royal Victoria Hospital; where she lived in and only visited home on a Sunday. During the war a shell hit the hospital and Marjorie and her staff had to cope with cooking without gas until repairs were made.

Once again Marjorie and her mother moved back to Folkestone, where following the war she was cook at the Tatler Restaurant in Church Street for about three years before undertaking the same position at Flowergate Nursing Home for a while. In 1965, following the death of her mother, Marjorie moved to a flat in Earls Avenue and took up an active social life by joining the Townswomen's Guild and a local choir and becoming a 'Man of Kent'. Holidays were also enjoyed in Jersey, Scotland and Germany. Later Marjorie became a member of Arthritis Care and met many people who had fond memories of Louise's Kitchen.

As time progressed, Marjorie was often to be seen at Kennedy's Garden Centre enjoying a cup of coffee and as she sat she would recall the time her grandparents lived at Ingles Farm, where the garden centre was situated. Once a week she would have a taxi into town to shop at Sainsbury's and have lunch with a friend. Towards the end of her life she was less mobile, but remained in her Earls Avenue flat. Marjorie really loved Folkestone and its history; I spent a good few hours in her company and she really was a pleasure to know.

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## FOOTSTEPS THROUGH TIME

The History of Walter's shoe shops by June Paine

During 1849 Daniel Walter opened his first shoe shop at 41 High Street, Hythe: the shop is still trading at these premises today though with the passing years it has been re-numbered No. 88.

In the early years every pair of shoes was made on the premises. A high standard of workmanship, along with the best quality materials, soon meant that Walter's shoes became well known even beyond Kent as visitors bought the shoes and took them home. Personal service was the watchword, and Daniel could not have envisaged how shoe fashions would change over the ensuing years, or how many different materials would be used to make them. In 1856 Daniel designed the 'Hythe Shingle Boot' for the School of Musketry, which became well used within the military and went all around the world with them. He was even given his own 'pass' into the barracks and much bespoke work for officers and their ladies came about. Further work was gained from Shomcliffe Camp and Daniel Walter became renowned for his line of gentlemen's boots, which were also strong enough for hunting and all kinds of country pursuits. The ladies were also catered for and a number of women outworkers made beautiful embroidered fabrics to be turned into ballroom slippers and ankle boots for the wealthier lady.

Daniel's son Harry was brought into the business and he introduced new ideas such as buying in ready-made shoes by K, Delta and Bective. By 1919 Harry had decided to expand the business and opened a shop in Folkestone at 29 Sandgate Road. This was furnished to up-to-date standards and was immediately popular with Folkestone's court circle that stayed at the Grand and Burlington hotels and ensured Walter's footwear gained a reputation for itself in London. By 1928 the family firm was well established and it was decided to undertake major refurbishment of the Hythe shop interior. Harry's son Gerald entered into the business and proved to be every bit as energetic as his father and grandfather. In 1933 he opened a new shop in Folkestone's West End at 108 Sandgate Road, where they were still trading until recently.

Walter's oversaw many innovations in shoe fashion have over the years. They were one of the earliest to fit shoes by x-ray and though many customers took advantage of this service, a few felt "all those rays couldn't be any good for you". By the 1930s the business was serving as many customers in a day as Daniel Walter was in a week.

During the Second World War both the Folkestone and Hythe businesses remained open, but due to the evacuation of many townfolk (and the introduction of clothing coupons) trade was slow and in addition the shops suffered war damage. To compensate for this, it was decided to open another branch in August 1940 at 12 High Street, Tunbridge Wells, which was less affected by the war.

Following the conflict's end, the success of the Tunbridge Wells shop encouraged Walter's to open further branches in Kent. In 1948 a shop was opened at 9 King Street, Dover, formerly the business of F.W. Gayne, though much restoration of the property was needed before it could be opened. Ashford acquired a branch at 73 High Street in 1953, followed by Deal at 16 Queen Street three years later. In 1959 a new 'shoe salon' was opened at Middle Row, Ashford following the conversion of damp and disused cellars. The official opening was performed by stage and screen actress Victoria Hopper, who was married to Gerald Walter's brother Peter; a member of Folkestone's Arthur Brough Players at the Leas Pavilion Theatre. The next town to benefit from a Walter's shop was Tenterden, when a branch was opened in an old oak beamed property at 44 High Street in 1964. The early 1970s saw both the Deal and Ashford branches move to bigger and more modern premises. Deal was relocated to 46-48 High Street in 1971 and Ashford a year later to 17 High Street, when two new shopfronts had to be installed and

two interior floors had to be fitted out. In 1974 the Tenterden shop was extended, once again taking care to maintain the character of what was a listed building.

The year 1975 proved to be one of celebration when Walter & Sons were awarded the Distributive Industry Training Board's National Award for staff training and service to the public. The same year saw the building of garages and unloading bays adjoining the Hythe workshop.

An eighth branch was opened at 148 High Street, Rochester, yet poor trading results in the 1990s saw the closure of this branch, as well as those at Ashford, Tunbridge Wells and Dover. Tenterden and Folkestone have sadly followed suit in recent years, though the branches at Deal and Hythe remain open, along with the repair shop at the rear of the Hythe premises. A sign of the old 'bespoke' days when shoes and boots were made of leather may still be seen there with the leather hang pulley surviving at the top of the building.

In 1999 the company was able to celebrate its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the fifth generation of the family is currently involved with the business with David Walter M. Hill the present Managing Director. Few family businesses have survived for as long as Walter & Son and their staff still manage to uphold the old standards of quality merchandise with good service and friendly professional advice. It is pleasing to see that in the year 2003 they are continuing to craft 'Footsteps through Time'.

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***Folkestone's Railways*** by Brian Hart, published by Wild Swan Publications, £14.99

As this book was published back to December, and has since been on sale at the Society's bookstall, most members are probably aware of its existence and have secured their copy. They would have discovered that this latest offering from the florid pen of Brian Hart is almost up to the excellent standard of his previous work. The modern town of Folkestone was created following the coming of the railway in 1843 and the SER's acquisition and revitalisation of the harbour, and its influence on the town is recalled in fine detail here. The book is profusely illustrated and printed to the usual superb standard of Wild Swan, though the lack of the usual hardback cover and length of time we've waited for the book to be published perhaps indicates it was not the top priority in the publisher's pecking order. Brian's narrative is as usual very expressive and readable, yet as he acknowledges himself the story rather tails off after World War II (which it does) and in addition occasionally goes off in a tangent describing Sunday afternoon excursions around the town. The book does not quite match up to Brian's superlative 'Hythe and Sandgate Railway' (which would be a hard act to follow) or his other Kent railway books, nevertheless it is a very interesting and well-written account on a new subject and a must for your local history collection.

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