



FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER No. 18 – Spring 2004

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Alan F. Taylor

I would like to thank the Committee for agreeing to the Society sponsoring me for the charity Boxing Day Dip, run by the Folkestone Lions Club. I managed to raise £250 for local charities.

Now that the Christmas and New Year festivities are behind us, we can look forward the remainder of this year's programme. I thought that the December meeting, which was an illustrated talk on the Kent and East Sussex Railway by Doug Lindsey, was exceptionally good. Doug, who started with the railway as a volunteer some 30 years ago, gave a most interesting and informative insight into the railway's history and its present day running.

The February meeting was a talk on *Aspects of Cheriton's History* by Maureen Criddle. Maureen works in the Heritage Room at Grace Hill Library and brought along for us many documents and maps relating to Cheriton. Maureen talked about the wealth of material available in the Heritage Room and East Kent Archives that can be used for researching Cheriton's history. She also told us about the growth of Cheriton and its industries i.e. the laundry businesses. It was a most interesting and informative talk enjoyed by 90 people, and, if my memory serves me correctly, the first talk we have had on Cheriton.

I would like to sincerely thank David Fundrey for running the bookstall for the past four years, which has now been handed over to Ronald Dutt.

The Society's video film *Memories of Folkestone 1900-1914* is still selling well. The sales are now mainly coming by word of mouth, and I should think it would have sold out by the end of this year.

On a rather more sombre note I would like to mention the death of Arthur Gains, who was an avid postcard collector of the Folkestone area and former member of the Society. Arthur died after a short illness on Sunday 4th January aged 75. Up until about three months before his death, he was still working part time for Sainsburys at their in-town store. Some of you probably remember him as the short polite man who collected the trolleys and baskets.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to the following new members: Martin Whybrow, Ian Ward and Ted Friend.

THE 75th BIRTHDAY OF KINGSNORTH GARDENS JUNE 1928 – JUNE 2003

The name of Kingsnorth Gardens comes from John Kingsnorth, the one time tenant of Ingles Farm. Born in Ospringe in Kent, he farmed 270 acres at Ingles Farm and employed fourteen labourers. He also excavated the Kingsnorth Gardens site for 'brickearth' as he was both farmer and brickmaker in the town. Brick kilns stood close to the Cheriton Arch site, now the arch spanning Cheriton Road. After the 'brickearth' had been removed the area was used as allotments and for rubbish tipping. The site presented an untidy appearance and many complaints were received by the Council.

Kingsnorth Gardens was on land given to the Borough by the 7th Earl of Radnor, William, and it was at first thought that it might be used to erect a Town Hall or Municipal Offices. However, the expenditure for such building was considered

too great at that time, and a suggestion was put forward to use the area as an ornamental garden for the use of residents living in nearby houses, and for the pleasure of the many visitors to the town. This suggestion was readily accepted and the Parks Committee was instructed to proceed with the work.

The whole of the planning and work was carried out by Mr G E Roden, the Parks Superintendent of the time. Work commenced in 1926 with the drawing of plans by Mr Roden. At the top of the garden would be a shelter and terrace reached by a pathway through a rose garden. A pergola in front of the shelter would provide shade. Two large ponds with fountains, along with circular ponds and further fountains, would be in the centre section of the garden with an ornamental 'weeping tree'.

The first section of the garden was to consist of four lawns with small flower gardens at each corner, and a long narrow border beneath a wall leading to the centre section. Around the edge of the whole garden would be a wide herbaceous border, and the top of the garden would have a shrubbery and tree walk.

Mr Roden was the only professional person involved in the planning and work, and he was given only unemployed men of the town to carry out his instructions. The use of these men meant hard work for him, but the cost of the gardens was £3,500 - most of this cost was for labour as the Parks Department provided many of the plants, shrubs and trees.

Mr Roden and his workforce were fully occupied with the building and laying out of the gardens from December 1926 until the opening day in June 1928. This day dawned with wind and rain, and although this passed the day remained overcast. Earl Radnor, referred to as Lord Folkestone in the newspaper articles, came with his wife, Lady Folkestone, to open the new Kingsnorth Gardens. They had come from their home in Salisbury to London and then motored down to Folkestone. Both thought the gardens a true delight, and Lady Folkestone was heard to remark that she wished her own small garden looked half as nice. She complimented Mr Roden on all his planning and work, and said she opened the gardens with much pleasure. She then received a gift of a replica spade in silver gilt with Folkestone Borough Arms and the inscription 'Presented to Viscountess Folkestone on the occasion of declaring open Kingsnorth Gardens and planting a tree thereon'. Mr Roden's young son presented Lady Folkestone with a bouquet of roses and carnations. Councillor Walter Moncrieff gave a vote of thanks to Lord and Lady Folkestone.

A tour of the gardens was then taken in order to appreciate the clean lines with which it was laid out, and to pause at the splendid ponds to admire the brightly coloured water lilies and the many goldfish. Lord Folkestone particularly liked

the manner in which Mr Roden had used a weeping Ash tree as the central feature. This tree had flourished prior to 1923 in the garden of the Head Post Office in Sandgate Road (now the site of Kentucky Fried Chicken) for over thirty years. It was then moved from that garden to the site of Hudson's Grocers in Sandgate Road (now a Coffee Shop), and thence to Kingsnorth Gardens where it still flourishes with seating arranged beneath it.

The herbaceous borders contained almost 500 groups of plants in clumps of twelve. The rose garden had over 2,000 roses, the perfume of which hung over the whole garden. Numerous teak seats meant the visitor could rest whenever required. Bathchairs could be wheeled into the garden down and along sloping paths but it was unfortunate that to see the shrubbery and tree walk the bathchair had to exit on to Shorncliffe Road and enter again at the entrance on the corner of Kingsnorth Gardens and Shorncliffe Road. The Mayor, Alderman R G Wood thought this 'a small inconvenience for so beautiful a sight as these lovely gardens five acres in size'.

The top end of the garden has a statue of 'Pan' near to the pergola. It is still there today although vandalised by paint. Close by the recess in the centre area is another statue, that of Sir Jeffrey Hudson, an English dwarf born in 1619 who became Court Dwarf to King Charles 1st and Queen Henrietta Maria. Later he served as Captain of Horse in the English Civil War. He was the son of a butcher in Oakham, and grew to a height of only 3ft 9ins. In 1679 he was imprisoned as a Catholic over the Popish Plot. He is believed to have died in 1681 or 1682, but there is no entry in a burial register, no headstone, and where he is buried is not known.

Why his statue should have been put in the gardens no one seems to know. Prior to June 1928 his statue had stood within a brickwork arch in the Municipal Offices in Church Street. Sir Jeffrey's statue is still in Kingsnorth Gardens but is very delapidated and wishes for a replica have been put forward.

On opening day in June 1928 tea was provided for all the guests and dignitaries by Gironimo's catering establishment in Sandgate Road. The tea was followed by a concert given by the Folkestone Municipal Orchestra under the direction of Mr Eldridge Newman. Popular music of the day was played, including songs by Romberg and Gilbert & Sullivan. These were followed by pieces by Arthur Wood and Edward German. The day had been a magnificent success and Folkestone now had gardens to rival any in the country.

Over the years the gardens have gone from strength to strength, with floodlighting having been added for wonderful effect. The fish stock was sadly depleted in 1969, when someone opened the sluice gates and the fish were carried into the

drainage system and out to sea. A giant Elm tree at the corner of Shorncliffe Road and Kingsnorth Gardens was lost from the gardens during gales in the 1960's. As reported on opening day "Our England is a garden and such gardens are not made by singing 'How beautiful' and sitting in the shade".

Kingsnorth Gardens had been laid out regardless of expense, but with a minimum of cost. The unemployed men who had laboured had been able to feed, clothe and house their families once again without the need of Parish relief or benefits. It is to be hoped that a new Town Hall will never be built on the site of the gardens. 1998 saw new paving around the central garden which has greatly improved its appearance. The Council also commissioned new gates designed to include intertwined leaves hiding a butterfly, a spider and a snail for youngsters to find. The gates are finished with pineapple finials. They were very appropriate presents for its 70th birthday.

However, in November 1998 a Beech tree bordering the shrubbery and tree walk had to be felled as diseased roots made it unstable. For over 70 years the tree had overlooked the gardens and many people were very sad to see it go.

This year (2003) is the Kingsnorth Gardens seventy-fifth birthday. Requests for a replica Sir Jeffrey Hudson have been made by a number of town residents, and promises were made to look into the cost to see if this could be budgeted for by Mr Stephen Cardale of Shepway Council. The birthday is now only a few months away and nothing has been heard on this matter.

Photocopies of another replica of Sir Jeffrey were forwarded to the Civic Centre by June and Ken Paine of the Folkestone History Society during August 2002. This replica is now in the garden of Roy and Joan Walton who reside in The Dwarfs Cottage in Rutland. They commissioned it to celebrate their Golden Wedding

We do hope to see a replica soon in our own Kingsnorth Gardens.

Researched and compiled by June and Ken Paine. 2003.

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