



## FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

### NEWSLETTER No. 30 – SPRING 2007

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

Our second donation last year of DVD's and books to Park Farm Primary School was made on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> December. It consisted of the DVD's: Memories of Folkestone 1900-1914 and Memories of Folkestone (2) 1914-1939, and the books: Folkestone in old picture postcards, by Martin Easdown and Linda Sage, and Images of England Folkestone Volume II by Alan F. Taylor, which altogether had a total value of £52.94.

At the December meeting we had an illustrated talk by Imogen Corrigan entitled 'Green Men in English Churches,' Imogen started by telling us green men are images carved in wood or masonry spitting out foliage and leaves from oak or hawthorne trees. The green men are usually found around windows, doors or on decorative ceilings. Some green men have their tongues sticking out these are called tongue pullers!

The first Green Men in English Churches appeared in the year 1170 and they peaked around the 1400s. It is interesting to note there are no female foliate heads.

Canterbury Cathedral has 70 green men.

There is no explanation as to why the green men are there but Imogen went on to explain her many theories.

Seventy-two people attended the meeting, twelve of whom were visitors.

On Friday 15<sup>th</sup> December thirty-three members and friends had Christmas lunch at the Indoor Bowls Club, Cheriton Road.

On Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> January twenty-four members gathered at the Langhorne Hotel for a coffee morning. I thought it was a very comfortable venue and I expect we will arrange another one there in the near future, unless anybody has any other ideas?

Dates for your diary: Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> July annual outing: **Hidden Essex & The Secret Canal.** Cost of Outing: Coach, Tour Guide and Gratuity £27.50 Per Person. To book see Tom Leftley.

The Leas Cliff Hall is celebrating its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. There are souvenir programmes available and there are two more to come during the year.

The Society has had some input with the programme in way of providing a potted history by June and Ken Paine and I provided the illustrations.

At the February meeting we welcomed back our guest speaker Brian Doorme who presented his illustrated talk on Kentish Windmills. Brian's interest in windmills started when he was a boy, the family moved to Willsborough where there is a windmill and he would spend hours of his

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time down by the mill. He said at one time there were 10,000 mills in England and the first mill in Kent was built in the year 1185 and the last at St. Margaret's -at- Cliff in 1929.

There are three different types of mills: smock mills, post mills and tower mills the differences of which were explained while Brian took us on a pictorial tour around the windmills starting at Stelling Minnis and finishing up at Cranbrook. The tour took in twenty-three mills including the only commercial working mill left in Kent that is Sarre smock mill. Brian also said that there are no tower mills in Kent with sweeps and only one mill with five sweeps, which is Sandhurst smock mill.

In about the last ten years £700,000 has been spent on restoring Kent mills.

This was a fascinating talk, supported by some very good illustrations, and was enjoyed by an audience of fifty-four people, three of whom were visitors.

We would like to welcome our new members: Candida Wright, Ruth Parkinson, Bert & Betty Burgess and Jean Hendry.

On a rather sad note I would like to announce the death of Phyllis Little. Phyllis has been a member for many years but latterly she has been housebound and not able to attend our meetings she died in a nursing home 1<sup>st</sup> February 2006 aged 92.

A.F.T.

### **Folkestone's Victorian Pillar-Box** by Eric Harrison



*The last Post Office bellman.*



*The Victorian pillar-box in, Sandgate Road.  
Photo taken 2/2/1990 by A.F.Taylor*

In Folkestone's tree-lined Sandgate Road, immediately opposite Holy Trinity Church, stands delightful Victorian pillar-box, which is one of the oldest boxes still in service in the country. Hexagonal in shape with a fluted "lid" topped by an acorn finial, this object blends well with its surroundings and is much admired in the locality.

Many people go out of their way to post correspondence in this box rather than in nearer and more modern ones!

It is certainly unique in Folkestone; there are other boxes bearing the "V.R." monogram, but no other has the same design. It is probable that there are very few like it in Kent, though the writer does not claim exhaustive knowledge of every place in the country. It is known that they are comparatively rare throughout the country and that there are apparently only two of them in

London. One is in Regent's Park and the other in Wellington Place. The Post Office are not able to say how many (or how few) are in existence, it would take a special census to determine such statistics.

The door to permit extraction of the letters is very well designed and occupies one complete face of the box together with two halves of two other of the six faces. The V.R. monogram mentioned above is at the centre of the door and is designed with the classical "curve of beauty" unlike later edition, which used the austere Roman lettering. The Royal Coat of Arms is mounted on the fascia below the overhanging top of the box.

Inside the box the bag, which catches the letters, is unusual in having a hexagonal frame to support it. In earlier days this bag was of leather, since it was customary to put coins in with the letters, the Postmaster's staff then placing the necessary stamps on the envelopes. (Victorian postmasters must have been trusting souls!)

Pillar-boxes in this country are not tremendously old; they are for instance younger than railways, and just about the same vintage as the art of photography. It is a fallacious belief that they were invented by the novelist Anthony Trollope the truth being that he, as a surveyor to the Post Office, was largely responsible for their introduction.

The first ones appeared in the Channel Islands in 1852, followed by six in London in the year 1855. The latter were described in the London Illustrated News as a "stove-like design" with a radiating pattern of palm leaves and a domed top.

Prior to that time, letters had been collected by a bellman, who walked round bearing a satchel and ringing a hand-bell to attract attention. One placed letters in his bag, coins in his hand, and away would go the human mobile post office. In 1846, a minor furor arose when the use of the bell was officially abolished, thus causing to disappear from the scene one of the "Cries of Old London" (in this case the jangling of a bell).

The year 1856 saw the introduction of a new design from the Department of Science and Art. This was a large tomb-like structure heavily encrusted with ribands, national emblems and classical leaves, in later years described as an absolute monstrosity!

The 1860s were to see a big improvement, and here this Folkestone pillar-box enters the story. Mr J.H. Penfold designed in 1865 this particular hexagonal pattern, which remains a standard one in the Post Office archives to this day. There was one difference; the finial was originally drawn as a crown, but on manufacture was altered to the present acorn or rosebud. The boxes were cast in a foundry at Dudley, Worcestershire, by the firm of Cochrane Grove & Co., the cost for each being a mere £7 18s 3d.

One wonders what price would be paid by a collector nowadays, or even what price would a twentieth century firm charge?

Official policy regarding preservation of this pattern of pillar-box is quite enlightened and sympathetic; so long as serviceability is maintained such boxes will be left in being, which perhaps explains why in these days of Societies for the Preservation-of-whatever-ought-to-be-preserved, one does not find pillar-boxes under this heading.

The two regular postmen on the "walk" which includes this Victorian box are as proud as anyone of its existence and will not hear a word against "Our Victorian Pillar-Boxes".

Long may this relic of "Sixty Glorious Years" continue to enhance the district; the organisers of the biennial Folkestone International Folklore Festival may feature this object in 1965, as it will then have attained its century!

Taken from Kent Life Vol.3 No.6 - June 1964

Alan F. Taylor's collection

Our Victorian pillar-box is looking a bit sorry for its self at the moment it needs a good clean and repainting!

Its interesting to note: a local philatelist Steve Boorn who collects thematics won the British National event under the auspice as the Association of British Philatelic Society. The competition was held at Torquay last year. The trophy being a silver replica of our Victorian pillar-box made by the jewellers Ocle & Son, 35 Sandgate Road in 1967.

### **The Golden Arrow** – brief history

The Southern Railway introduced an all Pullman boat train in 1924. It became known as the 'White Pullman'. It made connections at Calais with the Fleche d'Or Pullman for Paris and the Cote d'Azur bound for the Riviera.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> May 1929 the all first class 'Golden Arrow' service was introduced together with a specially allocated ship, the famous 'Canterbury'.

The introduction of the 'Golden Arrow', however, coincided with the depression of the early 1930's, and a decline in the demand of luxury travel resulted. In 1932, second class vehicles had been added to the train. In 1935, the northbound service was routed via Boulogne and Folkestone. In September 1939 the train ceased to run due to the outbreak of the second World War.

The 'Golden Arrow' was restored on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1946, a new feature being the Trianon bar car. As before it was a spectacular sight as it left No. 8 platform at Victoria. (Inscribed on the permanent arch over the gate was 'Golden Arrow'/Fleche d'Or).

The engines used were always kept in top condition in order that the reputation of the trains should never be tarnished.

(The City of Wells 34092 was a familiar engine).

From the 1960's the 'Golden Arrow' noticeably declined in appearance, as air travel reduced the timing between London and Paris. Eventually steam haulage gave way to electric and diesel and Pullman cars were reduced. In 1972 the 'Golden Arrow' made its last run. It had served the London to Paris route for 43 years.

### **Reflections of the 'Golden Arrow'**

On Saturday January 27<sup>th</sup> 2007, a bright sunny day heralded the final nostalgic appearance of a steam train in Folkestone. On the crowded Radnor Bridge, excitement built as a trace of blue smoke could be seen in the direction of the former Folkestone Junction Station. Then, even more smoke and that unmistakable sound of a steam engine approaching confirmed the 'Golden Arrow' (Tangmere) was underway. Suddenly the engine in full view, a spectacular sight as she glided past in a grand manner with a hiss of steam and the subdued sound of perfectly oiled coaches plus a flash of her gilded 6' arrows and her flags fluttering proudly under the smoke box arrow.

The crowds of enthusiasts recorded the moment of this never to be repeated scene on an incredible range of cameras. As the 'Golden Arrow' slipped under the bridge everyone dashed to the other side to record the scene of the train entering the station across the viaduct in the harbour, as if something less tangible than a train gone out of their lives.

Compiled by Don Gregory.



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