



**FOLKESTONE & DISTRICT
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**
www.folkestonehistory.org

NEWSLETTER No. 65 – Winter 2015

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Alan F Taylor

At the September meeting we welcomed guest speaker Ian Gordon who presented his talk entitled 'A Potted History of the Bayle'. Ian asked if people in the audience had walked along the newly opened Harbour Arm. He said if you do, walk to the end and turn round and look at the marvellous views of the town, the Viaduct, line of the Pent Stream and the Bayle which is 120 feet above sea level. He went on to talk about the geology of Folkestone and that it was mostly made up of green sand to the east until it merged with the chalk.

Ian continued with a tour of the Bayle. He talked about St Mary and St Eanswythe church and earlier churches, a nunnery run by St Eanswythe and her remains being in the church.

The town Cross first mentioned in 1595, but probably existed earlier and in the past it was where the Mayor was elected. The original Cross disappeared between 1680 and 1710, but the medieval steps remain. The restoration was by Matthew Woodward, Vicar from 1851-1898. The restored cross, dedicated in September 1897, was designed by Sylvester Slingsby Stalwood.

The priory is the former home of the Prior of Folkestone albeit in much altered form. In 1535 it was described by King Henry V111's Commissioners as being 'a neat well kept little house'. It was home of Thomas Pearce, Vicar 1818-1851. Parson Pearce as he was known kept a school for young gentlemen. One of his pupils was the son of the famous artist John Constable. Later it was residence of Mrs Napier Sturt who was one of the three ladies who ran the Mole café at Folkestone Harbour during World War One.

The British Lion has a sign declaring 'Ale House since 1460'. The origin of this is uncertain as no old deeds have been found for the house. An inspection by Canterbury Archaeological Trust concluded that the building was erected not later than 1500.

The Dance Easy formerly the Priory Hall had earlier been the site of Gironimo's bakery.

According to legend, the Bayle Pond originated in 630AD, with the Saxon princess Eanswythe, daughter of Eadbald King of Kent. The legend relates how the saint brought water uphill from a spring under the hills around the town to fill the pond to supply her nunnery. The pond has been supplied from the town mains since 1954 at which time it was reduced in extent.

A Medieval house erected prior to 1400 as a town house, was demolished in 1916. The site in later years was occupied by the offices of the Folkestone Herald which were demolished in 1989. In 1991 The Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit supervised by Peter Keller discovered a well preserved skeleton of a large prehistoric mammal on the site, probably a hippopotamus. The site is now occupied by a complex of retirement flats built by McCarthy and Stone called 'Glendale Court'.

The Globe public house designed by noted architect Sydney Smirke opened on 10th November 1849. Eileen Lewis who had for many years assisted her mother Maud in running the Guildhall Tavern which closed in 1984 took over the Globe and in 1986 she re-named it 'Guildhall' in memory of her late mother.

The Folkestone Arms formerly known as the White Hart was at the junction of the High Street, George Lane and Bayle Street. The White Hart first mentioned in 1717 was so named after the heraldic symbol of Richard II. It became a favoured inn for wealthier residents, who particularly enjoyed cock-fighting. The name changed to Folkestone Arms on 15th September 1778.

Seventy people attended the meeting ten 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 the screening of a DVD on Folkestone's fishing industry took place. The film included the fishing lugger Three Brothers (FE93) restored as a sailing lugger; Jack Hargraves on a fishing trip to the Ridge Sand Bank (Colbert) off Folkestone to catch turbot onboard Opportunity, in the winter of 1960; and the restored fishing lugger Happy Return (FE5) visiting Folkestone for her 100th anniversary in 2005.

Thirty – three members attended the meeting.

At the November meeting we welcomed member speaker Terry Begent who presented us with his presentation on the History of the Leas Lift. Terry started by showing four images of various types of lifts called "Cableways." He said that Saltburn now possesses the oldest working water balance lift, beating Folkestone by just one year. He followed with various images of Folkestone saying that sea bathing started to become popular in the 1700's so people started to come to the coast. Following the arrival in 1843, of the South Eastern Railway, the pace of growth quickened year by year, not only

spreading inland along the Foord valley, spanned by Sir William Cubit's viaduct, but over the wide expanse westward towards Sandgate where it was laid out with imposing hotels and large villas along tree-lined avenues and squares - so there was a need for easy access to the beach from the Leas.

The Folkestone Pier & Lift Company Ltd., with a capital of £40,000, presented its Bill before Parliament on the 22nd December 1883 in which it proposed to construct an 800 ft long pier and 'water-balance cliff tramway'. The Pier was formerly opened on 21st July 1888, but the lift, however, was constructed by a separate company from that of the pier, and followed the same principle of operation as England's first water-balance lift, which opened in Scarborough in 1874. The Folkestone Lift Company was floated locally early in 1885 with a nominal capital of £3,000 by issuing 600 shares at £5 each. The promoters of the company comprised John Sherwood JP, who was a local estate agent, William Fowle and A. Moat Esq., both accountants, W. J. Jeffearson JP, Mr. Edmund Kingsford, and two well-known hoteliers Mr. C.W. Wedderburn and Mr. George Hart. The drawings were drawn by local architect Reginald Pope. Once the company's solicitors had secured the lease of the land from Lord Radnor, the contract for its construction was awarded to Messrs. Waygood & Company from London and the lift opened on 21st September 1885.

It operates using water and gravity. It is controlled from a small cabin at the top of the cliffs. To start the lift, the brakeman moves a lever that allows water to flow into a tank under the carriage at the top. As soon as this carriage exceeds the weight of the lower one and starts to move, he shuts off the water to it, moderating the speed of its descent with the application of the brake and the balance wheel. The carriages are attached by cables that pass round the balance wheel, with the heavier descending carriage pulling up the lower one. As the ascending carriage moves into place the operator applies the brake. If the bottom carriage has no passengers, then the weight of those in the top one means that no water is required to move the lift. After the Council took over in 1967 a mid-track braking system was added, engaging the ascending car and bringing it and the descending car to an immediate halt should an emergency occur.



The Leas Lift with one pair of cars c1888

In 1890, a second pair of cars were added these were stepped so being because of the angle of the cliff; also the pump house and storage tanks were built. Two gas operated single-reciprocating pumps were installed. Water could then be pumped to replenish storage tanks at the top. The original pump still exists, though now operated by electricity. Terry spoke about remarkable engineering that has carried some 50 million people since it opened.

In 1985, the lifts' centenary year, the 1885 lift was refurbished and the step-cars were removed, one being burnt on the beach and the other going initially to the Dover Transport museum. In 1967 Folkestone Borough Council took over the running of the lift from the lift company and Shepway District Council closed it in 2009. After much campaigning The Folkestone Leas Lift Community Interest Company was set up to run the lift and it re-opened in July 2010. Terry finished by talking about future development and observations they had made since taking over, which included possible fortifications being on the site prior to the construction of the lift and of the lift being haunted!

Fifty-eight people attended the meeting nine of whom were visitors.



We would like to welcome new members Bobbie Allen & Zoe Varian.

On a rather sad note I would like to announce the deaths of members, Des Cornell and Joyce Bush.

May I join the officers and committee in wishing all members a Happy Christmas and Prosperous New Year.

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

Registered Charity No. 295994