



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

NEWSLETTER No. 64 – Autumn 2015

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by Alan F Taylor

At the June meeting we welcomed member speaker Chris Phillips who presented us with his illustrated talk entitled 'Victorian Architecture in Folkestone.' It covered Folkestone's transformation from a fishing village to a popular seaside resort. During this period, the town was redesigned by the architect Sidney Smirke who designed a crisscross layout for the roads and left his mark with the then fashionable Stucco flat fronted buildings. During Victoria's reign building fashions changed with very distinct styles. After Stucco, Polychromatic brickwork became a new style. This in turn was followed by Queen Ann Revival with timbered fronts on buildings complete with decorative wooden balconies. Next came a bright red brick style and then terracotta finish. Terracotta, which is artificial stone usually amber in colour, started being made by Doulton of Lambeth in the 1890's.

These styles of building and the sheer amount of construction brought architects such as Messenger and Gardener as well as builders including Prebble, Castle and Sons and William Dunk to name but a few. Alderman Daniel Baker played a prominent role both as master plumber and designer with perhaps his main claim to fame being the Grand Hotel which he both designed and built. That it is still standing today is a testament to his ability as both builder and designer.

The talk highlighted the fact that while many buildings have gone, some still remain with such things as doorways, balconies and facades which if studied from the street, give an insight of what was originally there.

Sixty-six people attended the meeting eleven of whom were visitors.

At the July meeting we welcomed guest speaker Melanie Gibson-Barton who presented us with her power-point presentation entitled 'Wandering in Flanders Fields'.

Her talk presented the story of her Great Uncle George, a member of the 1914 British Expeditionary Force, who is buried just outside of Ypres and was one of the earliest winners of the Military Medal in 1916, in a personal account of the war with the story of the Belgians in the Flanders Fields, Belgium. The perspective of the fierce fighting of the Belgian soldiers after the German army marched into neutral Belgium on 4th August 1914 is distinctive yet often overlooked. Her talk featured both well-known and the lesser known sites of the Western Front in Belgium, giving the audience ideas for visits based on her personal knowledge of the area built up through her having split her time between living in Kent and living in Bruges, Belgium.

The beautiful city of Bruges is just an hour away from the War's Ypres Salient enabling opportunity to explore First World War sites away from the usual routes of 'war tourism' (as the Belgians describe it). Discovering Bruges twelve years ago and since acquiring a house there has allowed her to better understand the culture and history of Belgium and so produce a wide range of talks about Belgium. Her Wandering in Flanders Fields talk followed a themed format that provided something for everyone and gave ideas for sites to visit during the commemoration of the centenary of World War I.

The topic was very well researched, Melanie had good quality photographs and delivered her talk in a meaningful, well-spoken and poignant manner and each time you told us something new you then came again with an entirely different angle.

Melanie finished by saying that she had the privilege of giving her Flanders talk on Armistice Day when she was moved to see that all the audience members wore their poppies with pride.

Forty people attended the meeting one of whom was a visitor.

The August meeting was an open evening when members bring along items of local interest, but this time we started by showing video which has been converted to DVD entitled 'Folkestone History of a Town' by Eamonn Rooney from May 1992. After the DVD which lasted half an hour we had refreshments before viewing the items members had brought along. Margaret Care had some very interesting documents and album of photographs relating to the Stokes business, Chris Phillips brought along his postcards of Sandgate; Vince Williams his albums of photographs of Cheriton shop fronts past and present and I took three foolscap lever arch files. One contained Plans for the Development of Folkestone Town Centre, two Building the Conference Centre at the Leas Cliff Hall (2000-2002) and three plans and ephemera for the Lower Leas Coastal Park, Leas Lift etc. They were all compiled by the late June and Ken Paine. I also took a collection of postcards mainly Sandgate which were donated to the society by Bernard Sargeant from Australia with notes as to why he purchased them. Bernard's grandparents Mrs and Mrs Prescott lived at Prospect House, Sandgate Esplanade where Bernard and his brother Michael went for holidays, hence Bernard's interest in Sandgate!

Thirty-two people attended the meeting two of whom were visitors.

Date for your diary:

The annual dinner will be held on Friday 6th November at the Indoor Bowls Club, Cheriton Road, 7 p.m. for 7.30 p.m.

Menu:

(1) Vegetable Soup (2) Prawn Cocktail (3) Melon Caulis

Main Course:

(1) Lamb Shank (2) Chicken in white wine & mushroom sauce (3) Poached salmon

Sweet:

(1) Apple Crumble (2) Trifle (3) Lemon Meringue.

As you know the Folkestone & District Local History Society is a very successful and forward looking Society, both with its monthly meetings, talks & photographic displays. However, in order to continue in this vein we would like to take this opportunity to invite more members to participate in the management of the society by becoming committee members/officers.

The involvement required would be attendance at four committee meetings through the year and occasional assistance at monthly meetings. I know of your continued interest and support, therefore I hope you will consider the above.

The A.G.M. is on 7th October at 8 p.m. at Holy Trinity Church Hall. I look forward to hearing from you shortly.

Kind regards,

Alan F. Taylor

Folkestone's Fishing Industry – Past and Present

Folkestone was founded on its fishing industry, exemplified by the Town Emblem of three men on a fishing boat. The history of this enterprise extends back to pre-Roman times when shellfish were exported to Gaul (Northern France). It is a fundamental asset that has benefited the Town throughout the centuries as our natural heritage. Although both Town and Harbour developed in many different ways, fishing has always remained of significant importance, and in 1840's the railway made it a centre for fish.

Centuries ago it was a very harsh, dangerous life. Before the harbour was built, storms could take away unprotected boats on the shore and even the homes of the fishermen. Fishing methods included Kiddle nets, as in Biblical times, or dragged through the water shoulder deep. A wooden jetty was built, frequently destroyed by storms, and re-built, being replaced eventually by one of stone. It provided limited protection for the boats and homes and led eventually to the development of the harbour. A solution using Ruff rocks was considered. The foundation stone was laid in 1808 and prefaced a period where prosperity for the harbour and also Folkestone flourished. Silt made entrance difficult, except for small fishing smacks and herring luggers, and a further wall was suggested in 1828. With arrival of the railway, a branch line down the incline to the harbour was planned in 1843. Thus fish at Folkestone could be sent by rail to London and beyond. Folkestone became the hub for fish brought into Dover, Rye and local area.

When boats used sail propulsion, common methods of fishing involved long-lining and drift net fishing. Long line fishing needed more crew and bait, making it more costly, so it is not used today. Most fishermen then lived on the Stade, in East Street, Radnor Street, North Street or Dover Street, and many rarely went beyond the railway arches. Robert 'Jacko' Fagg saw Hawkinge for the first time in his life, only when taken for a country drive.

Current fishing practises use trawling, which requires more power than sails alone could provide, and monofilament nets, crab and lobster and whelk pots and scallop dredging. At the present time there are 10 vessels fishing from Folkestone netting, potting and trawling. Today all fishing is carried out within the 12 mile limit with 90% inside the 6 mile limit. The majority is actually in Hythe Bay. With the shore side: fish processors, drivers, fish merchants, net makers etc., upwards of eighty people rely on the fishing for their living. Unfortunately very little fish is sold locally other than by Folkestone Trawlers.

Over recent years there has been an abundance of Skate, Dover Sole, Plaice and Cod on the grounds; more than for many years. Things that sell on the Continent include small Dover Sole, and Plaice which go for processing into 'goujons' and the like. Small amounts of other fish are sold to fish merchants based in Herne Bay and Southampton.

The shellfish side of the industry is very important. Whelks are the main catch and Folkestone Whelks are renowned for their taste. Any surplus is exported to Northern Ireland to be processed for sale to South Korea! Scallops on the other hand are popular locally and very important to the fishermen in the winter months.

In recent times the amount of fish appearing far outstrips the quotas the government allows. If the quota system was scrapped the industry could grow back to something like previous times. Some of the old fishing families still working are the Sharps, Brickells, Reeds and Gales. This means that the tradition of Folkestone's original fishermen lives on in the family connections, and we should all be very proud of this.

Over the years there have been occasional fatalities in local fishing, and we share the sympathy of relatives of fishermen lost overboard, lost with their vessels, and even destroyed by war time mines. Many served their country in the wars and were involved in the Dunkirk evacuation. We should be grateful for their tenacity to this most hazardous profession, and their ability to continue to provide food for our tables.

Fishing, as currently practised, offers possibilities of an exciting and interesting career for young people with maturity, determination, and enthusiasm for hard work in difficult conditions.

Frank Bond and John Gale



Folkestone's fishing fleet in its hay-day; most of these sail luggers were built in the late 1890's and early 1900's in Cornish fishing villages of Porthleven, Penzance, Newlyn, Mevagissey or St. Ives.



The fishing fleet in the 1930's showing the old sailing luggers after being fitted with engines.

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