

Faversham Society Newsletter

February 2022

694



Campaigners against mass housing estates in Faversham take their protest to Duchy of Cornwall land near Brenley Corner See pages 8-9

Chairman's column

HAROLD GOODWIN

The wooden roller shutters have now been fitted to the new Visitor Information Centre at 12 Market Place and I hope you will agree that they are attractive. There is just a little painting and joinery needed to complete the work, and we hope that the new VIC will open in early February.

Work has already begun to create the new second-hand bookshop in the Fleur. The internal boarding, which blocked the side windows in what was the Long Gallery, has been removed and with the cabinets removed, it is a much bigger space. Shelving is being fitted there this

month. As the VIC moves out, the space will be fitted out for the second-hand bookshop and we hope that work will be completed by the end of March.

Helen Whately, the MP for Faversham, has agreed to meet the Faversham Society board to discuss the letter we sent in December, and we shall report on that in the next newsletter. We have now written to Michael Gove (*see pages 6-7*) asking a series of specific questions about housing targets, the standard method, the protection of greenfield land for agriculture and the risks which arise if Swale were not to plan to meet the targets set by central government.

There is no indication yet of when the Regulation 19 consultation – the final consultation by Swale on the emerging Local Plan – will take place. We will hold a members’ meeting when it is available.

chair@favershamsociety.org

A ‘new’ Arden of Faversham

CLIVE FOREMAN

A new edition of the play *Arden of Faversham* is due to be published on 24 February. This is in the Arden Early Modern Drama series, edited by Catherine Richardson, professor of early modern studies at the University of Kent. She lives locally and is familiar with the geographical location of the play, and of the original murder in 1551.

The most recent critical editions of the play date from 1973 (M. L. Wine) and 1990 (Martin White), and many of our readers will have one of these on their bookshelves, possibly both. Much research has been carried out on the play in the intervening years, particularly on the question of Shakespeare’s possible involvement in writing parts of it. Professor Richardson brings us up to date on this research, especially the use of digital databases and analysis tools. The conclusion is that a young Shakespeare was indeed involved, possibly in the role of an apprentice. The play is now included in the Shakespeare

canon, and is included in the 2016 edition of the *New Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*.

Professor Richardson, with her interest in the domestic life of the “middling sort” in the early modern period, adds colour to her interpretation of the play by considering such details as dress, furnishings and the use of language, each of which would have been instantly recognisable by the contemporary audience and which would have identified precisely the social status of the individual characters.

Of particular interest in this edition are the character studies of Thomas Arden and his wife Alice. Alice is a major presence on stage, with nearly 25% of the text to deliver. Arden is uncertain of his status in society, which is based on property wealth rather than birthright. In contrast, Alice is sure of what she wants – her lover, Mosby, a man of low status, rather than Arden – and is aware of the social position she will be losing.

Members of the Fleur de Lis museum team provided Professor Richardson with information from our archives, and this is acknowledged in the preface to the new edition. In searching through the museum catalogue, it was discovered that the museum has a puppet version of Alice, which was used for performances around the Swale area in the 1950s – and that provides the possibly of an interesting research project.

I would hope that this new edition will encourage further productions of the play. Perhaps we may see it performed once more in the garden of Arden’s House!

Marking the society’s 60th

The Faversham Society was founded in 1962, so this year we turn 60. We are keen

Museum closure

Our museum team in Preston Street had hoped to open after New Year but in the context of the highly infectious Omicron variant, has decided not to open. The museum remains shut for the foreseeable future.



Yuletide walk

LINDA IRELAND AND PAT ROSS

If you cast your mind back to Bank Holiday Monday, you may recall that the weather wasn't very nice. However, despite the rain, we set off on our walk past Abbey Fields to Nagden, and then along the creek, rather than across the marshes, where the solar farm is to be, to the nature reserve. We were unable to complete the full circular six-mile walk,

because of the wet conditions. So well done everyone who braved the elements.

We have now decided it is probably not sensible, given the fickle nature of our weather, to have a walk on or near Boxing Day, so we do not think we will be organising another one. We hope someone with fresh ideas will come forward to suggest something else in the future for the keen walkers among the membership.

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to mark our anniversary in several different ways – ideas are welcome.

Marion Ripley has suggested that we might encourage members and others, individually or in groups, to exhibit a collection of thimbles, corkscrews, bus tickets ... there are many possibilities.

Do you have a collection you would like to put together and exhibit? Contact chair@favershamsociety.org

A gift to us from the taxman

LEIGH ALLISON

There's not much in this life you can get for free, but under the government Gift Aid

scheme, we can claim 25p for every £1 you give us, at no cost to you!

For an older couple, that means that their £20 annual subscription becomes £25 for the society.

So, if you are a UK taxpayer then please be sure to tick the Gift Aid box on your membership renewal.

If you're not sure if you have included Gift Aid information in your membership details, please just contact me, either at membership@favershamsociety.org or leave me a message at the visitor centre. I can easily check what details we hold and send a short form to complete if necessary.

2022 calendar error

MARY RANSOM

It has been brought to our attention of a printer's error in the Faversham Society calendar for 2022 that went unnoticed.

31 August is a Wednesday and 1 September is also showing as Wednesday, throwing the rest of September out by a day. It is correct again from October.

We apologise for any confusion this may cause but fortunately it is only one month, which can be rectified by altering the days of the week at the top of the page so that Wednesday becomes Thursday and so on.

We hope you can forgive this oversight but with the past couple of years being what they were – who knows what day of the week it is anyway?!

Tommy the football singer

HAROLD GOODWIN

Joanne Randles, one of our members who now lives in Sevenoaks, wrote back in October but her letter has only recently reached me.

She has memories of Faversham Rec before the war with trains shunting on the sidings, and falling asleep in Park Road, listening to the chatter of the rooks in the trees on the Park Road side. Joanne mentions a big iron “open work” “that went over the sidings” [*surely the Long Bridge – Editor*]. Does anyone know more about this?

In July, the *Sevenoaks Chronicle* carried a story about Tommy Ratcliff, who organised and originated pre-match community singing. He was born in Faversham in 1874, married in 1909, and in about 1919 went to America where he encountered community singing at at sporting events.

Back in the UK, he was sponsored by the

Daily Express to conduct singing at football matches. He stood on a small platform at Wembley Stadium on FA Cup Final days to encourage the crowd to sing along before the match and at half-time. In 1927, King George V asked to meet him, and in 1937 he moved to Sevenoaks, where he became well known for always wearing a straw boater. Tommy died in Sevenoaks in 1952.

Tommy features in the journal *Popular Music* (2008) in an article by Dave Russell *Abiding Memories: The Community Singing Movement and English Social Life in the 1920s*.

If anyone knows more about Tommy please write a piece for the newsletter or send it to me at harold@haroldgoodwin.info

Do you know a young gem?

Faversham Children's and Youth Network launched its first Faversham Gems Awards this year, and the nomination process is now open for you to nominate children and young people, aged five to 19, whom you know who have made life brighter and sparkle for others.

You can nominate as many Gems as you like at favershamgems.org.

All those nominated will receive a certificate at an awards ceremony later this year and may also be a recipient of a Faversham Gems Outstanding Contribution Award.

If you know of children or young people who have gone that extra mile, please nominate them. You can contact the Faversham Children's and Youth Network through the Rev Daniel Corcoran, community and mission priest, Faversham Benefice (Faversham, Davington, Ospringe and Preston) at danchadc@gmail.com.

Well, minister, can you

An open Letter to Michael Gove, from Harold Goodwin, chairman of the Faversham Society
I am writing on behalf of the Faversham Society, which was founded in 1962. Today, the society's mission is to ensure that Faversham's outstanding heritage features are safeguarded for future generations and its unique sense of place maintained.

The town's relationship with its surrounding landscape is especially important since its history is entwined inextricably with its coastal location, the fertility of the Fruit Belt, its place on the fringe of the North Downs, and the archaeological heritage embedded in that landscape.

Those and other values are reflected faithfully in Swale's Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of 2019. Inevitably, large-scale development around the town will detract from that relationship and those attributes. As a result, the society, on behalf of its 700-plus members and in line with its charitable purpose, seeks to ensure that what development does take place addresses local needs as its top priority, in ways that are as sympathetic as possible to the town's natural, historical, architectural and cultural heritage.

There is some confusion among our members and in the town about the government's policy on building on greenfield land, and I write to request clarification.

At the Conservative Party conference, the prime minister said that his government sought "to build the homes that young families need in this country not on green fields, not just jammed in the southeast but beautiful homes on

brownfield sites in places where homes make sense". Many in Faversham applaud this aspiration for food security, environmental and aesthetic reasons. We note that the government is committed to protect 30% of UK land for nature by 2030 and that UK self-sufficiency has been declining for the past 30 years.

We applaud the government's adoption of the levelling-up agenda and hope that it might lead to the development of a regional policy that would reduce pressure on Kent and the southeast by encouraging development in the north.

Your department's standard method results in Swale having to grant planning permission for 1,048 houses a year. There is now a tiny amount of brownfield land left in Swale, with an area of natural beauty and large amounts of designated protected land and flood-prone marsh. In consequence, in the emerging local plan, Faversham is expected to accept 3,500 houses on about 175 hectares (430 acres) of greenfield land in the fruit belt.

Given that Swale also has to ensure delivery of the housing targets, it is in a very weak position when it seeks to require developers to build smaller units at higher density if the developers prefer to build predominantly three, four and five-bedroom houses. This is a particular issue in Faversham where the Housing Needs Surveys reveals a severe undersupply of one and two-bedroom housing units for starter homes, those downsizing and those needing bungalows.

We mention this because more houses could be built on less land if the National Planning Policy Framework gave more

save our green fields?

authority to local planning authorities.

Some in Faversham are arguing that Swale should simply reject the numbers delivered by the standard method to protect greenfield land from development.

Your housing minister, speaking in the Commons on 23 November, spelt out the danger: “We might say that, in the land of no plan, the local housing need number is king. If there is no set number in an up-to-date local plan, it is quite possible for developers to submit speculative development applications to local authorities.

“The local authorities may choose to turn them down, but if they have no number in their plan, the local housing need number is the default that the Planning Inspectorate will look at. It is entirely possible that the Planning Inspectorate will overturn refusals sent down by local authorities that do not have up-to-date plans or targets, and will instead look at the local housing need target.

“It is incumbent on local authorities that wish to protect their communities and avoid speculative development to get

up-to-date plans in place.”

I understand that Christopher Pincher, your housing minister, said recently replying to a question from Gordon Henderson, MP, that: “The housing need numbers, as calculated, are a starting point, not an endpoint. It is for local authorities to determine their building target for each year over the lifecycle of their plan, to be agreed with the planning inspectorate. Local authorities are able to identify constraints – such as green belts or areas of outstanding natural beauty – that allow them to land at a different number from that expressed in the local housing need calculations. It is very much for local authorities to determine the right number of homes that should be built in their community. As I say, we want more people to become involved in the formulation of those local plans.”

Clarity on the opportunities for local planning authorities to challenge the standard method is important. The risk of unwanted speculative development would have serious consequences for our town, its heritage and its relationship to the creek and the marsh. Please could you advise:

- ❖ Is the standard method to be revised?
- ❖ Has any local planning authority successfully challenged the standard method?
- ❖ Is greenfield land to be granted higher levels of protection?
- ❖ Is there any way we could avoid

unwanted and damaging speculative development if Swale decided not to meet the housing land supply targets which arise from the application of the standard method?



Go on, Mr Gove, you can help Faversham



Say no to Local Plan and halt the housing estates

WENDY CLARKE

When we look around and see housing developments appearing at an alarming rate on all edges of the town and our green fields fast disappearing I think we all begin to wonder what is happening to dear old Faversham - the increased traffic and queues, the pollution, the pressure on local services, the lack of adequate infrastructure, and the loss of our precious farmland.

Above all when will it end, isn't this already enough?

But then in the autumn we were presented with the public consultation – which promised another 3,500 homes in and around Faversham alone and all on prime agricultural land.

And some of us woke up and thought No! It has to stop. We can't just accept this devastation of our town.

So we got together and formed a protest group, Farms, fields, Fresh Air on Facebook to fight more mass developments.

The root of the problem is the government targets, the unrealistic housing numbers forced on every borough council – a diktat from central planning based on an algorithm of false outdated figures it seems, certainly not viable for our small community.

Councils then have to construct a local plan and decide where to allow the developments required. And all on agricultural land because there are very few brownfield sites left in Swale. This seems

intrinsically wrong, especially in the light of the recent Cop26 talks, the urgent need to protect our environment and the government mandate to reach carbon zero.

And do we even need these houses in this area? No we do not. These developer-led executive homes only encourage more Londoners to move down, pushing up prices and excluding locals even from the few “affordable” options. They in no way solve the Faversham housing problem.

So a local plan, opting for more mass development is something that none of us wants, not even Swale Borough Council. How then can we choose which option is best when they all mean disaster.

The answer is we can't. We responded that all proposed options were unacceptable, the town council said all were unsuitable and MP for Faversham Helen Whately branded the housing numbers unforgivable.

We have also sent many letters to the government, voiced our concerns to Helen

THINGS YOU CAN DO

- ❖ Join the protest walk, 22 January.
- ❖ Pressure your MP.
- ❖ Write to the government: correspondence@communities.gov.uk
- ❖ Write to the council: csc@swale.gov.uk
- ❖ Sign the national petition, with over 50,000 signatures it's nearly ready to go to parliament: www.change.org
- ❖ Oppose the Love Lane planning application, deadline 27 January. Write to: planningcomments@midkent.gov.uk



The campaign against extra housing took its protest to Market Place

Whately and other MPs, held a market stall to raise awareness, started a national petition, produced a protest song on YouTube (youtu.be/2Q8oiNMXcCU) and joined together in the countywide protest walks organised by Kent's Green Spaces.

And has any of this had an effect? Goodness knows – but we must keep on trying and just maybe the tide is turning:

Boris Johnson has said we must build homes not on green fields, not just jammed in the southeast. Michael Gove, we are told, is reviewing the planning policy and reducing numbers. And yet nothing happens.

MPs Sir Roger Gale and Gordon Henderson have both spoken out against the targets. The correspondence we have had with government officials has also been encouraging. They say that the figures are

flexible, that councils are allowed to push back if the housing numbers are not suitable. Christopher Pincher, the housing minister, said recently it was very much for councils to determine the right number of homes that should be built in their community. We want more people to become involved in the formulation of those local plans.

Swale Council, however, says this is not so: its hands are tied, the housing targets are key and that the planning inspector will enforce the law if it fails to meet them. And this has happened before. So, the council is very wary; it fears reprisals and must deliver an acceptable plan.

But surely the government needs to be held to account? We are all fed up with empty promises, we are all fed up with mass housing swamping the Kent countryside. It is time to fight and say: No more. So we are urging the council to join other councils to challenge the government. We all need to unite now. There is strength in huge numbers and that could change the law.

On 22 January we are marching to raise more support with a peaceful protest through the town centre, starting at the United Church, Preston Street at 11.30am. Please join us and tell your friends. We need to make an impact.

Regulation 19, the council's preferred option of the Local Plan, will be announced in a few weeks. If, as we fear, it proposes a further 3,500 houses in Faversham, we need to oppose the plan with as many people as possible to make our voices heard. And we need legal, planning and environmental experts to challenge every angle.

We need to act now to save our town and our rural heritage.



Historian and champion ...

DOROTHY PERCIVAL

Last month's newsletter included Chris Wootton's comprehensive account of Arthur Percival's archive legacy to the Faversham Society, outlining its huge scale and complexity. What members may not have realised is that the massive progress that has been made in getting it online, so modestly described, is actually extraordinary.

My daughter Helen and I have been kept informed all the way about what has been going on but even so we were astonished at the recent update to hear how much has been done. This is painstaking, intricate work and calls for time and dedication.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to the gallant band who have beavered away so valiantly. I was especially pleased that so many of Arthur's weekly Faversham News articles have already been skilfully digitalised.

They numbered many hundreds delivered promptly without fail for 10 years up to the two posthumous ones completed the day before he died. Each a well-researched, well-written little vignette on a topic of local history, I have always thought they were some of his best popularly accessible writings.

The whole archive exercise will take years but from now on all the material will be available on open access as it is added which is just what Arthur would have wanted. His bequest, together with so many others past and present who have recorded our beautiful town, will

surely make Faversham one of the best documented in the country. During last summer I decided that the last 40 lever arch files and two walls of books in Arthur's "study" here really must be sorted. As they weren't tripping me up or falling on my head they had rather lazily got left after the big exhausting clearance of 2014-16.

Helen and I weeded out personal correspondence, bills and letters telling Arthur how to get to Little Backwater in the Mire village hall for a talk – all that kind of thing. Then, with heart in mouth, I contacted Chris Wootton to break the scary news that there was More to Come.

He and Heather took this unwelcome fact on board with (scarcely) a murmur and nobly came round to carry off to the Fleur what I assured them really was the very last. Then the second-hand bookshop manager Wendy and her husband hauled about 200 books off as well. They were left when most of the dealers in east Kent had had their pickings from the collection that weren't suitable for the Fleur. but still perfectly saleable. So, finally, it is all done.

While going through the files it was impossible not to read some of the star letters. There were masses of detailed ones about planning applications, of course, but a huge range of other concerns that Arthur had, from the possible reuse of local lampposts and manhole covers to the poor quality of the modern Swan Vesta match for lighting pipes.

but not quite the abbot



Arthur campaigns in Court Street against a 1960s road ring road plan

What came across afresh to me from all the correspondence is how the mainspring and root of it all was the passion that he had for Faversham, for all things to do with a fairer society and for the demolition of corrupt use of power, privilege and money.

None of those qualities ever faltered or failed. There is a saying I recall to the effect that the heart without the head can be ineffectual and the head without the heart inhuman. When the passion comes from the heart and is then expressed through knowledge, dedication and fine use of language it truly is a combination with the potential to move mountains.

Arthur's prose and vocabulary, always balanced, to the point and well chosen, was a great weapon. Never impolite but leaving no doubt to any recipient scheming to inflict damage on Faversham that they had been well and truly rumbled. In the *Faversham News* of 30 December, 2021, I spotted a claim by a would-be developer of local farmland that "it will contribute in a positive way towards Faversham and its character."

I have a feeling Arthur would have picked up on that unsubstantiated claim and fired off a few salvos. In our newsletter during the next few months, I am planning to share a small selection of particular little gems from Arthur's letters which I hope you may enjoy.

They are just odd paragraphs which seem to leap off the page and will, I hope, stand alone without details of the whole letter.

To lighten the sombre times I will end with a taster from the end of a long 1991 letter about the decline of local postal services: "I must make clear, finally, that I have no complaint about local deliveries. The staff are efficient, friendly and often clairvoyant when it comes to delivering vaguely or insufficiently addressed mail.

"On one occasion, despite Faversham Abbey being dissolved in 1538, they divined – correctly – that a letter addressed to the Abbot was intended for me. In similar vein I have also received several letters addressed to Stone Chapel, which fell derelict in about 1530." 

FAVERSHAM SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



The Faversham Society Newsletter is edited by Stephen Rayner, who is independent of the board.

Contributions are welcomed, and should be received by midday on the 15th of the month before publication, preferably by email to favnewsletter@gmail.com. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Faversham Society or of the editor. All contributions will be edited and the editor's decision is final.

ADVERTISING

Clubs, societies, organisations and businesses are encouraged to advertise in the newsletter. The cost is £40 a page (discounts are available for block booking). The minimum boxed ad measures 59mm x 93mm (or equivalent) and costs £10. Cheques should be made payable to the Faversham Society and sent to Jan West at the address above. We also use BACS – ask for details.

DIGITAL EDITION

Please consider saving the society printing costs by receiving your newsletter by email. Contact membership@favershamsociety.org.

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FAVERSHAM SOCIETY OPENING



Fleur Museum - see page 2

The Fleur de Lis visitor information centre and book and gift shop are open 10am-1pm Sunday to Wednesday and 10am-4pm Thursday to Saturday. 01795 534542
info@favershamsociety.org

The Fleur de Lis second-hand bookshop at 1a Gatefield Lane is open 10am-3.30pm, Monday to Saturday, closed on Sundays. 01795 590621

Chart Gunpowder Mills in Nobel Court, off South Road, is open 2pm-5pm Saturday, Sunday and bank holidays from Easter to end of October, at other times by arrangement.

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www.favershamsociety.org