

Faversham Society Newsletter

February 2023

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Chairman's column

HAROLD GOODWIN

Our members' meeting about the Neighbourhood Plan, which has reached Reg 14 – the public consultation stage – attracted about 15 members.

The Faversham Society's president, Richard Oldfield, opened the meeting, and I explained that I was not chairing as I am a member of the Steering Group and there is a conflict of interest. Faversham town councillors John Irwin and Kris Barker joined me in answering members' questions.

Several members of the board were present, and they will discuss, in my

This superb action shot by Seamus Masters is featured in a photographic essay by Justin Croft in *Faversham Life*, the local online magazine.

It shows the finish of the 2017 Swale Match as *Ironsides* (with Alan Reeky on the bow) and *Repertor* race up the Swale.

We feature another of Seamus's images on page 5.

Consider subscribing to *Faversham Life* – it's free.

[favershamlife.org/
masters-of-the-swale/](http://favershamlife.org/masters-of-the-swale/)

absence because I have a conflict of interests, at their meeting on 31 January whether or not to make representations and what they will be.

The Neighbourhood Plan applies only to the area within the parish boundary. The Steering Group was asked to find sites for 218 houses, and the draft plan allows for that. If and when the Neighbourhood Plan passes the referendum, there should be no further housing development within the parish boundary.

With some assistance from other volunteers, I am delighted to see John Breeze's work to produce brief biographies of nearly 3,000 gunpowder workers reach the web where it is easily accessible. See if you have family there on favershamsociety.org/family-history-research. And see pages 6 and 7 in this newsletter.

Before Covid we were planning to launch Open Faversham. We are beginning work on this now – the plan is for a festival, for residents and visitors, of Faversham's natural, built and cultural heritage from 12 to 20 August. More details in the next newsletter.

chair@favershamsociety.org

A good year

HAROLD GOODWIN

The Faversham Society's Finance Committee has just reviewed our accounts and we have had a remarkably good year as we come out of Covid. Thank you, society members.

As you will see when the 2022 accounts have been audited and can be published, our membership is recovering from the impact of the pandemic and visitor numbers in the museum are increasing since we removed the entrance charges and

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The new Fleur

PETER QUINCE

When I first started volunteering in the Fleur Bookshop in the Dickensian premises in Gatefield Lane, it was just that – a bookshop. Now, in its Preston Street reincarnation it is much more than that. It is an institution.

Although the primary purpose remains, to sell donated books and provide funds for the Faversham Society's good works, it has become a trusted repository of volumes old and nearly new, a social hub, and a magnet that attracts bibliophiles, not to say eccentrics, from near and far.

My experiences in the Fleur have charmed and inspired me through the years, and rewarded my commitment to the shop. A few choice anecdotes may serve to show what a must-visit venue this is and convey the flavour of the place.

One time a man came into the bookshop, browsed a while, got chatting as people do, and said: "Would you like me to show you a few magic tricks?" At first we were doubtful ("This is a bookshop, sir!"), but then softened our attitude.

This gentleman regaled us with a scintillating magic show. He was brilliant! We gave him a round of applause at the end, after which he bought a few books (naturally), producing, as he, went a handkerchief from nowhere.

Another customer came in and asked: "Have you a volume of John Donne's poetry?" I knew we had; I'm a Donne fan. I led him straight to a rather nice

bookshop, a place of magic



paperback. He was delighted. He opened the volume and said, “Ah! My favourite Donne poem, *The Flea*,” and proceeded to declaim it in a dramatic voice.

There were other customers in the shop at the time. We appreciated this impromptu performance and clapped him vigorously; he bowed with wry theatricality.

A girl of about 14 came in once and sheepishly approached me: “Have you a copy of *Macbeth*, please?” I found one. She was delighted. A few moments later: “Have you a copy of *Twelfth Night*?” I found her a copy of that, too. (We’re big on Shakespeare.)

Then, curious, I asked: “Are you studying these plays for GCSE by any chance?” She looked a little superior. “Oh no,” she said. “I just like reading Shakespeare.” There’s hope yet for the younger generation!

One man used to come in and invariably bought a few books which may have totalled perhaps £5; but he always handed over a £10 note and said:

“Keep the change.” Always! We ended up calling him “Mr Ten Pound Note”, grateful for his generosity. Many who come in are generous.

But the man who really charmed us – and I’m sad to say died late last year – gloried in the name Stanley Frederick Sharp. Stanley was something of a philosopher, poet and raconteur. He came in without fail every Wednesday morning for years – until he didn’t come in any more.

He sat in his favourite chair in a corner and told stories of his life, an animated autobiography, after which he bought a few volumes of poetry or the classics. Stanley’s image is preserved on a wall of the current bookshop; he lives within us still and will long be remembered as a gentle, cultured fellow.

The Fleur Bookshop is a vital addition to the town, a unique venue that attracts such a variety of book-lovers into its atmosphere. It beats vigorously in the heart of Faversham and is regarded with great affection. Long may it thrive! 

▶▶▶ *From page 2*

the museum volunteers have staged more temporary exhibitions.

Income from our two shops – the Visitor Information Centre at 12 Market Place and the second-hand bookshop in Preston Street – is up, as is our income from donations, walks and events. The Open Gardens weekend in June raised more than £6,000 and the town was buzzing as people ambled between gardens.

The society relies on its volunteers and members for its income and on behalf of the board I thank you for your generous support in time, effort and membership fees. The society's accounts will be presented at our AGM.

Faversham's railway, Part 5

PETER LANDON

The opening of the East Kent Railway (EKR) in Faversham was marked by a dinner given for Lord Sondes and the railway's directors by the local authorities, and some of the inhabitants of Faversham, on Friday 29 January, 1858,

The *Kentish Gazette's* reporter was denied access to the dinner, at the Public Rooms (now known as the Assembly Rooms in Preston Street), but representatives of *The Times* and the *Morning Herald* – both London papers – were given access.

This meant that the *Kentish Gazette*, one of the newspapers then covering Faversham, could only inform its readers on Tuesday, 2 February, its day of publication. The *Gazette* was "quite unable to explain the cause of this extraordinary determination", but felt it was its duty to publish all the information given by its London contemporaries and did so.

It reported: "A special train took down

the chairman, directors, the principal officers and a number of friends in the afternoon of the 29th with the Right Hon the Lord Mayor of London and friends arriving at the newly built station.

"He was received by the mayor and corporation of the town when a very sumptuous dinner was laid before them. Mr R. Hilton, the Mayor, presided, and among those present were Lord Sondes, Sir Brook Bridges and Mr Deedes, members for East Kent, plus many other shareholders, Mr Finnegan (the general manager of the line) Mr C. Neame, Mr Crampton, Mr Magnus (deputy chairman of Sheerness Railway).

"There were speeches after the removal of the cloth, a toast was drunk three times three. Lord Sondes gave a short speech of thanks and invited someone to write the history of the EKR if anyone could be found to take the trouble and time to do it! He mentioned the need to finish the line to Strood and to construct a tramway down to the creek.

"He asked for continuing support from the public. They had still to build the line to Canterbury and next to Dover with an excellent terminus in the town. The Lord Mayor of London briefly returned thanks and referred to the South-Eastern [Railway] and suggested they might make peace without success (loud cheering).

"He congratulated the directors who had triumphantly fought against great difficulties and thanked them all for the honour they had conferred upon him and resumed his seat amidst loud and protracted cheering.

"More toasts were drunk during the evening and the company separated after spending a very pleasant evening."

To be continued



Here's another image from the 2017 Swale Match by Seamus Masters, featured in the current issue of the online magazine *Faversham Life*. *Ethel Alice*, an Essex smack, was rebuilt in 1995-96 by the Testers at Hollowshore (Dan and his father, Barry)

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Time for appraisal

Urban Vision Enterprise CIC was appointed in December 2022 by Swale Council to undertake the Faversham Conservation Area appraisal. The consultant team has been busy preparing over the past weeks for its site visits in early February.

The team is keen to work closely with the Faversham Society and will send some questions for us to respond to later in February to help inform the document. This will relate to issues we want to highlight, including potential harm.

Urban Vision has asked if we as a society can help the team with supporting evidence or advice reflecting changes in the area and setting the planning context in any

future development planned within the Conservation Area.

It is important that this work is undertaken to support the emerging Neighbourhood Plan.

You have until noon on 14 February to raise any concerns with the steering groups for the Neighbourhood Plan. This must be completed in writing either online or on a form which you can collect from the town hall at 12 Market Place. The Draft Plan and online questionnaire are available at favershamtowncouncil.gov.uk/neighbourhood-plan/regulation14/

All comments and questions will be published along with responses from the Steering Group.

Did one of your ancestors

LEIGH ALLISON

John Breeze is one of the unsung heroes of the Faversham Society. For years, he has been diligently researching the stories of the lives of hard-working families who worked in the town's gunpowder industry.

Assisted by his wife, Sheila, and Ashley Sayewell, John has accumulated information from many sources, including local newspapers which are not always included in paid-for family history websites such as Ancestry and Find My Past.

His work was published in three parts in 2007, the *Faversham Explosives Personnel Register 1841 to 1934*, Faversham Papers 103 to 105. In his introduction to part one, John said:

“Family history research is an interesting, intriguing and infectious affliction which I have had for many years. Voluntary work in the Chart Gunpowder Mills Museum made me think about all those people over the years who had worked and died nearby and I felt a project coming on.

“I was familiar with census and parish records, had indexed the Faversham cemetery burial records up to 1975 and was well aware of the many accidents which meant that groups of records were already close together.

“Dr Percival's booklet, *The Great Explosion at Faversham, 2 April, 1916*, the *Faversham Gunpowder Personnel Register 1573-1840* and the 1,200 or so family histories I had already compiled for the Chart Mills museum meant that another employees' register was a possibility.

“With gentle persuasion and active support from Dr Percival, this

Faversham Paper 103 is part 1 of an employee register from 1834 to the Faversham site closure in 1934. Many of the workers have survived and several are still alive today so the records do not end in 1934.”

John is still working on this, and this wonderful resource is now available online for you to search, FREE, to see what family secrets you can uncover!

From the parish registers, you can find many things. Birth registers (parents' names, location and father's occupation). Marriage records for both spouses, their ages, locations and the confirming of fathers' names and occupations. It also contains death information (age and location) and burial details where John can find them.

In addition, from the appropriate census (starting in 1841, then every 10 years) you can find the location, age, occupation and birthplace of all family members at the relevant address.

As an example, to show you how it works, and the sort of information you can expect to find, these are the details for a couple of my own relatives: John Ruck and his son, William.

The **1851** census shows John, 31, lived in Preston with his wife Mary, 27, and their two children, William, 5, and Mary Ann, 3. John was an agricultural labourer and born in Sturry.

In **1861** they were in London Road, Preston. Probably, they hadn't moved, but this census has more detail.

John, still an agricultural labourer, was now 41, Mary 39 (maths was not a strong point!), Mary Ann was 13. William, 15,

have an explosive career?



John Breeze's explosives industry archive is now online

0was now working and at a different address.

From the marriages section of the parish register, the details for William show that by 1868, John was the bailiff at Homestall Farm. It also includes the details of William's new wife. It looks like his younger sister Mary Ann was one of the witnesses.

The 1871 Census confirms that John was the bailiff and just he and Mary were living at Homestall Farm. William and his new wife, Harriet, were living in Graveney with their baby and Harriet's younger brother.

By 1881, William and Harriet's son was now 10 and had a sister, Harriet. Harriet's widowed mother was also living with them. In 1891 William was now working at the gunpowder works, but the family was living at the same house in St John's Road.

In 1901 William, 55, was a carter at the powder works.

If you have a paid subscription, you can probably get this information from the big family history sites. But John Breeze's recent work has also unveiled some fascinating gems from local newspapers, which would otherwise be very time-consuming to find.

Then, in 1931, we learn from the *Faversham and North East Kent News* that William had died, aged 85, three days after his 63rd wedding anniversary. His obituary said his work had involved driving a van containing explosives from the factories to the railways station.

I was amazed to find that my ancestor did such a dangerous job.

John, who is an expert in every aspect of the explosives works, tells me it would have been a very heavy load, with copper padlocks and special shoes for the horse to avoid sparks. I'm now keen to see if we have a photograph in the archives!

As you can see, these extra details really help to bring these family members to life.

Why not see what you can uncover? Please let us know of any interesting stories you find!

Check out the new Family History section on the website Family Research & History of the Faversham Society or directly via this the Gunpowder Workers Database on favershamsociety.org/gunpowder-workers-database/

If you don't have access to the internet, pop into the Visitor Information Centre where one of our volunteers will be happy to help you in your search, any morning Monday to Friday.

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 12 Market Place, Faversham. 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



The **Visitor Information Centre** and book and gift shop at 12 Market Place is open 10am-4pm Monday to Saturday and 10am-1pm Sunday (opening hours may vary).
info@favershamsociety.org

The **Fleur de Lis museum** at 10-13 Preston Street, Faversham, will open for half-term on Saturday, 11 February, then 15, 16, 17 and 18 February.

The **Fleur de Lis second-hand bookshop** in Preston Street is open 10am-3.30pm, Monday to Saturday.

The **Chart Gunpowder Mills** in Nobel Court, off South Road, are now shut for winter.

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www.favershamsociety.org