

# Faversham Society Newsletter

March 2024

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Jason deCaires Taylor, a sculptor working from Faversham, has just completed this protest work, *Sirens of Sewage*, installed on Whitstable beach See pages 6-7

## Chairman's column

HAROLD GOODWIN

There is not much good news this month. As I write this, the Swale Council officer's report on the battery energy storage system at the Cleve Hill solar installation at Graveney has just dropped into my inbox. The recommendation to the planning committee is to approve.

Those of you who have been following our representations – available on the society's policy blog on our website – will be familiar with our grave safety concerns about the battery system the developer

intends to deploy. The society's vice-chairman, David Melville, will be working with our barrister to send a further representation to all members of the Swale planning committee before their meeting on 28 February. David's academic training and expertise have been invaluable in our efforts to persuade the developer and Swale planners to adopt a safer battery storage system. Swale Council is under very considerable financial pressure. The £200,000 for the Faversham Creek Basin Regeneration, which was in the Swale budget for 2023-24, is not in the budget for

2024-25. We can only assume that Swale will not be able to make any contribution to a swing bridge over the creek.

There is some good news, however, on the proposed Duchy development – although we have not yet seen any details, and the society has not yet determined its view. Several Sunday newspapers and the BBC News website reported: “The estate further committed to building more than 400 social rent homes and a further 475 affordable dwellings on its new development of southeast Faversham.” This is welcome for those of us concerned about unmet housing needs in Faversham and who have family or friends struggling to find somewhere to live in our town.

One of the huge challenges facing the Faversham Society is to secure the town’s heritage for future generations. For heritage to pass from one generation to the next, it has to be actively inherited, a main reason for the creation of the Fleur de Lis Heritage Centre back in 1977.

The society seeks to protect and promote our built and natural heritage, and to communicate our history to the next generation. Should we fail to secure active inheritance in future generations, our efforts will have been in vain. This concern has come to the fore as John Breeze retires from his research on gunpowder and family history. John’s retirement leaves Rod Morley carrying the work of opening the Chart Mills and knowledge of our gunpowder history. I wrote a letter of appreciation to John back in December, a substantial part of which is reproduced on pages 5 and 7.

If you have an interest in our explosives heritage, please get in touch.

[chair@favershamsociety.org](mailto:chair@favershamsociety.org)

## We’re walking again

CATHERINE LEE

With the promise of spring just round the corner now, our thoughts turn eagerly to finer weather and outdoor activities. So this is the perfect time for a reminder that the 2024 season of the Faversham Society’s Walking with History guided walks start on Easter Monday, 1 April.

If you have ever thought that the guided walks are only for visitors to the town, think again! Even if you have lived here for years, there is often something new to discover. And if you have moved here only recently, what better way to discover more about your new home than to be guided by an experienced enthusiast?

Expecting guests over the summer? This is an ideal way to show them round. Let our guides do the hard work for you!

Don’t forget that if you are a Faversham Society member, these walks are free. Otherwise, they cost £5 for adults and £3 for accompanied children. As well as the regular Saturday morning walks, at 10.30, we have other walks on Bank Holiday Mondays and a series of summer evening strolls planned – see the website for full details or pick up a leaflet in the Visitor Information Centre at 12 Market Place.

If you are a group of 10 or more, we can offer a bespoke walk to suit your interests and needs. Email me, Catherine Lee, at the address below or call 07570 866391 for more information.

[favershamtownwalks@gmail.com](mailto:favershamtownwalks@gmail.com)

## Nine days in August

THE EDITOR

Open Faversham – an annual celebration of our built, cultural, natural and lived

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Last year, a garden in West Street yielded its ancient secrets

## Fancy unearthing history?

MIKE TILLMAN

The Faversham Society Archaeological Research Group has been carrying out small-scale excavations since 2005, working predominantly in gardens, with the aim of increasing the historic knowledge of our town.

Over the years we have undertaken projects such as *Hunting the Saxons*, *Understanding Ospringe*, *Davington Mysteries*, *Preston – A Most Peculiar Parish*, and many more.

Important evidence of our past has come to light. For example, in Ospringe, a tooth from an auroch (a large wild cow which, according to the Wildlife Trust, died out more than 3,500 years ago) was discovered, as was a collection of Bronze Age pottery. Nearly 2,000 worked flints were recovered from a small pit in a tiny garden in Water Lane, including finished tools dating to the Palaeolithic period.

In the Market Inn pub garden in 2018, the group discovered the largest

assemblage of Saxon material ever found in Faversham – except, that is, for the discovery of the cemetery during the building of railways in the late 1850s.

This year’s season is being planned, and we would love to hear from local people who may have found something interesting, unusual, or a complete mystery in their gardens that might be of further interest for investigation. This could be pottery, an artefact, flint tools, stonework, a feature in the ground, or just rumours from folklore.

If you haven’t already looked, please visit our website at the address below at to see the work that’s been carried out so far. If you have something you’d like looked at, or discussed, please contact Nick Wilkinson on 07518 039624, or email [archaeology@favershamsociety.org](mailto:archaeology@favershamsociety.org). We shall be arranging a drop-in day for people to bring items along to, so please don’t take items directly into the Fleur Museum until this has been set up.

[www.favershamcommunityarchaeology.org](http://www.favershamcommunityarchaeology.org)

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heritage – was a great success last year. This year it will be even bigger and better.

Open Faversham is being run by the Friends of St Mary of Charity, the Faversham Society and Faversham Town Council. We are just beginning to hear from local people and organisations planning events for the festival, which runs from 17 August to 25 August. We are keen to feature events for children and young people and on the creek.

This year, we are encouraging surrounding villages to become part of Open Faversham, which will be an umbrella for community talks, walks and performances among other events. Organisers of events will be responsible for their own finances and insurance. We, however, will provide a ticketing facility to avoid too many people turning up and having to be turned away.

There are some important anniversaries this year: the 80th anniversary of D-Day; the 60th anniversary of the Faversham Pools; the 460th anniversary of the birth of Shakespeare; the 350th anniversary of the death of the great English lutenist and song composer, John Wilson of Faversham; the 460th anniversary of the birth of Christopher Marlowe; and the 30th anniversary of the reopening of the Royal Cinema. We have plenty to celebrate!

[openfaversham.info/add-an-event](http://openfaversham.info/add-an-event)

## Thank you, John Breeze

HAROLD GOODWIN

**This is my letter of appreciation to John Breeze on his retirement as the society's gunpowder reseracher**

Now you have retired from working for the society and handed in your badge and the

keys to the Chart Gunpowder Mill, I wanted to write and express my sincere appreciation for all that you have done for the Faversham Society.

I have spoken with some of those who have worked with you most closely. A clear picture emerges: “focused”, “modest”, “one of the most focused people I have ever met” with a “very dry sense of humour”.

Reflecting on why I have not got to know you better, I realise that it is because of your quiet and focused work on gunpowder history and the people who made that history. You have been almost alone in the society in pursuing family history in a town with so many extended families who have been here for generations. You have been thorough in your work using such a wide range of reference sources and diligently pursuing and recording all the information you could find. I hear that you did similar work when you lived in Sittingbourne and that the biographies you produced are in the library there.

I understand that you retired from Shell in 1990 and that you were introduced to the Faversham Society by Sheila Doak when you moved to Faversham in 1996.

I am told that you joined the Faversham Society to be “useful”. You were asked to be the curator of the gunpowder mill, which you reluctantly took on and consequently took responsibility for the mill for 25 years. You organised fish and chip suppers, musical



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Remains of the Royal Abbey of St Saviour in the playing field of Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School were excavated by Brian Philp and his team in 1962

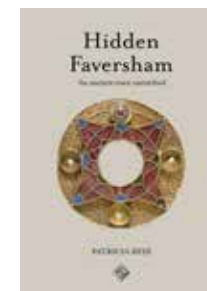
## Hidden town unearthed

LEIGH ALLISON

Dr Patricia Reid's new book, *Hidden Faversham*, was launched at Faversham Literary Festival last Sunday. It is now on sale at the Visitor Information Centre.

*Hidden Faversham* outlines some of the discoveries made underneath our town and the surrounding areas, and how they give us an insight into how our predecessors would have lived.

With newly discovered images of the 1963 excavation of the Faversham Abbey site, it also shows the “hidden building” Davington House, and Dr Reid takes us on a 300,000-year journey to discoveries made in Ospringe that show us glimpses of our pre-human ancestors. More recently, Pat discusses the huge haul of glassware dating from the 1700s found in the garden of the Furlongs pub in Preston Street and the search for Anglo-Saxon remains in the garden of the Market Inn.



Wherever you live in Faversham, there will be something to surprise you. So, if you're interested in local history, this is the book for you!

*Hidden Faversham* is now available from the Visitor Information Centre, priced at £9.99.

It is also available to buy via our online store, [favershamsociety.org/store](http://favershamsociety.org/store).

The literary festival launch, in which Dr Reid was interviewed by the journalist Christine Rayner, sold out straight away. So, we have arranged an additional talk where you can hear more about her fascinating book.

This will take place on Sunday 24 March at 2pm, in the Assembly Rooms, Preston Street. Entrance is free, but you must book.

You can do this either via the website, [favershamsociety.org/live-events](http://favershamsociety.org/live-events) or by registering at the Visitor Information Centre, 12 Market Place.

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evenings, and art competitions and memorable fireworks display to interest and engage local people. I recall that you kindly tried a drop-in session on family history in 2018.

Family history has been one of my failings while I have been chair of the society – I have tried several times to get people interested, but I have failed. As you are probably aware, I am retiring from the chair at the June AGM. I hope that my successor will have more success.

Your work on 2,500 gunpowder worker families is a real contribution to our knowledge about Faversham's history and is appreciated by the descendants of those who worked in the industry. Your work stimulated the society to place the biographies online and they were used in the recent educational programme with children at Davington School studying the 1916 explosion.

I hope that by putting your work online and, in the future, engaging young people to geotag the homes of the explosives workers, we will encourage young people in Faversham to explore and engage with their family roots and the broader history of the town. Your three volumes of Faversham explosives personnel and your Faversham Paper on the 1871 Census are useful contributions to our archive resources.

## RSPB's nature plan

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is extending its work on planning and biodiversity to Kent. If you are interested in helping, please contact Elizabeth Wison at the address below.

[kentplanningnetworkfornature@rspb.org.uk](mailto:kentplanningnetworkfornature@rspb.org.uk)



Sculptor  
Jason  
deCaires  
Taylor in his  
studio

## Sewage sculpture protest


Jason deCaires Taylor, an award-winning sculptor, environmentalist and underwater photographer working from Faverham, has just completed a protest sculpture, *Sirens of Sewage*, installed on Whitstable beach.

Taylor, a member of the Royal Society of Sculptors, has been creating underwater museums and sculpture parks beneath the waves, submerging more than 1,200 living artworks throughout the world's seas.

The *Sirens of Sewage* sculptures are lifecasts, portraying a small cross-section of the Whitstable community, a cold water swimmer, schoolchild,

kite-surfer, lifeboat volunteer and a fisherman. Each holds a profound connection to the sea and a shared resolve to combat water pollution.

The simultaneous installation of this new artwork and Southern Water's release of untreated sewage onto the surrounding coastal area for an appalling 89 hours in the same week underscores the urgency of the crisis. Sewage is still discharged frequently along this coastline and are often unseen activities that happen during the cover of darkness or through outlets that are concealed by the tides.

The statues are outside the Neptune pub. 



## Pictures of the past

LEIGH ALLISON

We are lucky to have so many unique images in our photographic archive – including this superb image of the guildhall, decorated in 1897 during Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee.

Chris Wootton and Ian Montague are part of our team of dedicated volunteers who spend their time cataloguing, digitising and looking after this treasure trove of old Faversham.

If you'd like to hear – and see – more about their work with the collection, join them for an illustrated talk at the Alexander Centre at 7pm on 4 April.

Places are strictly limited, so you will need to pre-book for this event.

You can do this either via [favershamsociety.org/live-events](https://favershamsociety.org/live-events) or collect a ticket at the Visitor Information Centre at 12 Market Place.

It is a free event for Faversham Society members, and £5 for non-members.

# Counter-tenor of Stuart age celebrated at church



## MATTHEW SPRING

This year is the 350th anniversary of the death of John Wilson of Faversham, one of the leading exponents of secular vocal music of the Early English Baroque.

As his 60-year working life was so long and varied there were few leading musicians or poets of his time that did not know or work with Wilson. He was born very near St Mary of Charity Church and was probably a boy singer there. (The house can be seen in 19th-century photographs and the site is marked with a plaque.)

It is therefore fitting that the anniversary will be celebrated at the church by the early music group Galliarda, who will perform a selection of his vocal and instrumental music alongside those of a few of his many

friends and colleagues, Tobias Hume, John Jenkins, Walter Porter, Nicholas Lanier, and Henry and William Lawes.

Wilson, born in 1595, was one of the most famous counter-tenor singers of the Stuart age: a man who was well-known and well-liked in the theatre, court, theatre, and the chapel royal.

Many of his 300-plus songs (some of them from famous staged productions by Shakespeare and Fletcher), resulted from his long service to the King's Men Company based at Blackfriars theatre.

He also performed and composed for the king and court and our concert, on 25 May, includes a few of his masque pieces. Wilson also wrote quasi-religious works in his *Psalterium Carolinum*, inspired by King Charles I, to whom he was devoted, and in



his elegy for his friend William Lawes after his death in the English Civil War.

In 1661 he returned to London to join the Chapel Royal to take the place of his friend Lawes. Wilson had several careers. After Faversham he worked his way into the city and the theatre. In 1608 he was apprenticed for eight years to the actor John Heminges, a freeman of the Grocers' Company, and started his long association with the stage and in particular the Blackfriars theatre in London.

He was composing for masques by 1614 as his comic setting of *Kawasha Comes in Majestee* composed for the *Masque of Flowers* was published in that year along with text of the masque.

Wilson was almost certainly the "Jacke Wilson" mentioned on page 107 of the

**John Wilson was born in a house near St Mary of Charity Parish Church (facing page) and was probably a boy singer at St Mary's. The image above is of the church as it would have been in the late 1700s – without the crown spire by which we know it today**

1623 Shakespeare folio edition of *Much Ado*. Certainly, by about 1615 Wilson was attached to the King's Men company, where he would have worked alongside Robert Johnson, taking over from him as composer and musician for the troupe from 1617.

Wilson provided music for a string of plays by John Fletcher, working at the theatre until the 1630s; though it is his early association with Shakespeare and the




original settings of the bard's songs that Wilson is probably best known. His second career was as a "London Waite": until the early 19th century, every town had a band of waites who played their instruments through the town at night, woke the townsfolk on dark winter mornings, welcomed royal visitors, and led the mayor's processions.

This was followed in 1635 by a royal appointment as musician for the lutes and voices to the king. In 1642 he followed Charles I to Oxford, taking a doctorate in music in 1644. His appointment as the university's music professor in 1656 – when Oliver Cromwell was Lord Protector – is somewhat surprising as Wilson was an ardent Royalist and the chancellor of the university then was Cromwell himself!

It was at this stage he put together much of his life's work in a couple of large publications (in 1657 and 1659) and a huge manuscript collection that he gave to the Bodleian Library in 1656. At the Restoration in 1660 he returned to London to become a gentleman of the Chapel Royal – a post Wilson retained until his

### The anniversary of Wilson's death will be celebrated with a concert by Galliarda in Faversham on 25 May

death in 1674. It is a measure of the high esteem that he held that he has a memorial slab in the East Walk of Little Cloister at Westminster Abbey where he is buried. It is from his large published and manuscript collections of the 1650s, made while Oxford professor of music, that we draw for many of the songs in the programme. Like Jenkins's ayres, his vocal pieces are often in a three-part texture with continuo bass that foreshadowed the trio sonata format that was to dominate at the Restoration.

We also include songs by his working associates Nicholas Lanier, the master of the king's music to Charles I and II, and by Robert Johnson whose job with Shakespeare's troupe Wilson stepped into about 1617; and solos for the lute by Wilson and for the lyra viol by Tobias Hume. In Oxford he heard Thomas Baltzar's wonderful division-making, of which we include an example. 

## Record museum visitors

JOHN CLARKSTONE

Last year the Fleur museum welcomed 4,900 visitors – an average of 25 each day it was open! Before Covid, the number of visitors each year varied between 2,000 and 3,000 annually – or between six and nine people each open day.

How have we done this?

- ◆ The museum is now free, but we ask for donations
- ◆ The numbers were also boosted by a publicity drive and a series of exhibitions and town events linked to the museum
- ◆ The eye-catching window displays attracting the attention of passers-by, encouraging them to come in.
- ◆ Most important, our amazing volunteers have been engaging with the visitors and sharing their knowledge of our unique town.

Our busiest time was during the Open Faversham week with an unprecedented 640 visitors! For this we had a new display of the Catherine Parr prayer book and the children's pirate activities.

Our busiest weekend was the Transport Festival with 340 visitors over two days. That was an exhausting but satisfying weekend for the volunteers.


The museum has now reopened for 2024 after the cleaning and refreshing of displays. We will be open, 11am to 3pm, Fridays and Saturdays every week, and the first Sunday of each month to coincide with the antiques market. We shall also open on Wednesdays in school holidays and most bank holidays. Check our website or Google Maps for any changes.

Our first special exhibition for 2024 is Lace Treasures, featured in February



Our museum window entices visitors

newsletter, and shows many excellent examples of historic lace from our collection of assorted styles and purpose. Just before Easter we will be hosting an exhibition from the Kent Archaeological Society: Lees Court Estate – Story of a Prehistoric Landscape. The scale of the several 1,000-year-old monuments dug into the chalk only a few miles south of Faversham, revealed by archaeology over the past six years, is amazing.

We would really like to be open to the public more days, but we can't do that without more volunteers. If you have a love of Faversham, enjoy meeting people and have time spare, why not join us? You don't need specific knowledge; we can help you with that. Email [volunteer@favershamsociety.org](mailto:volunteer@favershamsociety.org) or fill in a form at the Visitor Information Centre, or just drop into the museum. 

## 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](mailto:favnewsletter@gmail.com). Views expressed here 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](mailto:membership@favershamsociety.org).

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## FAVERSHAM SOCIETY OPENING



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

[info@favershamsociety.org](mailto:info@favershamsociety.org)

The **Fleur de Lis museum** at 10-13 Preston Street, Faversham, is open Fridays and Saturdays every week and the first Sunday of the month. Please see our website for additional opening days.

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

The **Chart Gunpowder Mills** in Nobel Court, off South Road, Faversham, are now closed for winter and will re-open in April.

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[www.favershamsociety.org](http://www.favershamsociety.org)