Faversham Society Newsletter

October 2024

724

A view from a snowy Market Place towards the Royal Cinema and Middle Row is featured on the Faversham Society's new Christmas cards *Page 7*

From the chair

ANN FUREDI

I'd like to suggest two excellent reasons that you might look in your diary. The first is to write in the details of an event that I hope you will want to attend.

At 7pm on Monday, 28 October, in the Assembly Rooms, we will be having the first, of what I hope will be many, members' meetings. This get-together is for us to consider views on the impact of the local housing developments and how we might best address housing needs and protect the unique heritage and environment of Faversham.

We will hear from several speakers with different views and then I'll chair a session for Q&A and comment.

Speakers who have accepted are: Cllr Julian Speed (Swale Council), Cllr Josh

DEATH OF CAMPAIGNER GRISELDA PAGE 8

Rowlands (Mayor of Faversham), Harold Goodwin (Faversham Community Land Trust), and Carol Goatham (Farms, Fields & Fresh Air campaign). Helen Wakeley MP has been invited and is juggling diary commitments to try to come.

This is an important occasion to find out more information, perhaps more balanced information than is reported, to ask questions, explain what you think, and hear to other views. It's also an opportunity to inform the board of trustees how you think the society should respond to consultations.

Meetings like this are increasingly rare because these days it's common for platforms of speakers to reflect just one side of argument – and to prevent some views from being heard at all. What is often called "cancel culture" is not something we have adopted. We believe our members are quite capable of weighing up nuanced and reasoned points from various perspectives, and drawing their own conclusions. I am hopeful this will be a chance to reflect on a very antiquated truth: that it is perfectly possible to disagree with someone about one thing and yet agree with that very same person about another thing. So, in organising the meeting we anticipate, indeed hope, there will be a lively but friendly discussion.

The meeting will be open only to Faversham Society members. So, if you've been discussing the future of Faversham with friends and neighbours who have not joined the society, this is a good time to chivvy them to sign up so they can come along and join in this and other meetings. If they love this town they belong in our extended Faversham family.

To page 7 ▶▶▶

Our take on Shakespeare's seven ages

JENNFIER SHIPMAN

It seems fairly certain now that a young William Shakespeare once walked the streets of Faversham. But did he and his band of actors and players perform *As You Like It*?

The play is perhaps most famous for the "All the world's a stage" speech by Jaques, which refers to the Seven Ages of Man. We at the Fleur museum's costume section have been inspired by those lines – and opened a few more boxes, drawers and costume bags to show what we have hidden in the archives.

Our new exhibition has little to nothing from the time of Shakespeare, just the odd shoe found up a chimney or under a floorboard, hidden there for luck.

Instead, our interpretation of the Seven Ages of Man, from crying babe (*"Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms"*) through schoolboy (*"creeping like snail unwillingly to school"*) to blaspheming soldier (*"full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard"*) will show how men, and women, have changed since the time of the Bard.

For a start, we live longer and more active lives. Though perhaps tracksuit bottoms are our "pantaloons" of Shakespeare's sixth age. See for yourselves before you, too, reach the the seventh age: "Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything"!

Clockwise from top left: first age, babies' gowns; second age, school uniform; and fourth age, military and naval uniform

Our magnificent church's history is given an update

PATRICIA REID

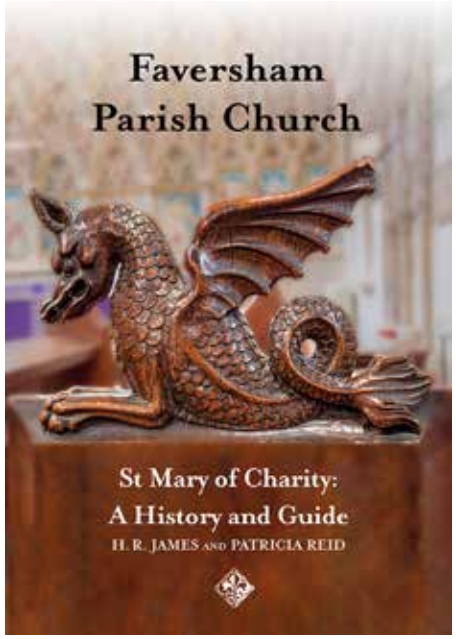
Faversham Parish Church catches everyone's eye – its graceful tower, its handsome body, its large stained-glass windows, its vast interior, the bells frequently ringing and events often happening inside.

It is surrounded by graves, some gravestones dating from the 1700s. St Mary of Charity, it is called, said to be named after the Benedictine Order founding place in France and therefore linked to the great royal abbey that existed next door and lasted until the Reformation in 1534.

Yet dating this building is not simple at all. Look more closely at the north wall and you will see stonework up to a height of about 6-8 feet, then giving way to flint work.

A picture in a revised history and guide to the church, just published by the Faversham Society, shows this clearly. This was once a wholly stone-built grand church. It had a large central tower, built over the junction of the nave, the two huge transepts and the altar area. Between 1755 and 1757 most of the church, originally built *c.* 1100, was demolished and rebuilt. The elegant bell tower was added in the 1790s.

Some remnants of the earlier church have survived. Most striking is the painted column in the north transept, a beautiful and moving series of medieval portrayals. A fascinating mural showing St Edmund welcoming pilgrims still exists but is nowadays behind the organ. Carved decorations on the misericords in the chancel near the high altar are most intriguing, and thought to have been saved



from the demolition of the abbey in the 1530s. Some tombs and brasses from late Medieval times still survive at the altar end of the church.

Yet the most socially significant change of all concerns the name of this huge church. Until the early 1700s this was Our Blessed Lady of Faversham. There was no link to the abbey next door – instead this church was supposedly in the domain of St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury, 10 miles away. St Augustine's was the only religious body in England that answered solely to the Pope, and not to the King of England.

The events that arose from this ownership show the bitter resentment of the Faversham people over St Augustine's claim to their church. Even King John was drawn into this sometimes violent row.

Faversham Parish Church: St Mary of Charity: a History and Guide, takes you through this often-turbulent history of an impressive church. It was compiled by H. R. James and originally published in 1990. I have revised and updated it, and Stephen Rayner edited and designed it beautifully.

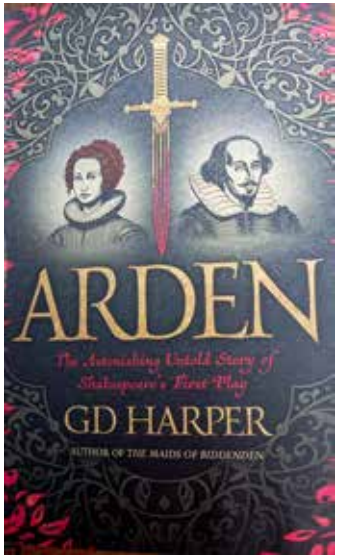
What if Alice was innocent?

THE LITERARY EDITOR

A former mayor of Faversham is murdered by his wife and her lover … and the story is heard by William Shakespeare when he visits the town. You've heard the story before in the pages of this newsletter. Now a book based on the tale goes on sale from 3 October.

The blurb for *Arden: the Astonishing Untold Story of Shakespeare's First Play* announces: "This is a story of two people – one reviled, one revered – whose fates become linked in a tale of corruption, collusion and conspiracy. It's certainly going to be controversial!"

The author, Glyn Harper, is writing a trilogy that takes little-known pieces of Kent history and brings them to life in novels. The second of the trilogy is based around the 16th-century – the murder of Arden and Shakespeare's visits to the town.



Glyn visited Canterbury in October 2021, as part of the research for his previous novel about Kent's 12th-century conjoined twins, *The Maids of Biddenden*. He came across the Chaucer Bookshop and discovered a copy of *Thomas Arden: The Man Behind the Myth*, by Patricia Hyde, the first full-scale study of the Faversham mayor.

A two-year search of documents in the Doddington Parochial Library, now held at Faversham Town Hall, and the British Library in London, followed.

The more research Glyn undertook, the more he began to question whether Alice Arden, who was burnt at the stake for her crimes, was really the one responsible, and also began to realise perhaps why *Arden of Faversham*, which he argues is Shakespeare's first play, does not bear his name.

The result is the two conspiracy theories at the heart of an engrossing story set in Faversham, London and Stratford-upon-Avon unveiling little-known information about the murder and revealing a new theory about Shakespeare's early years.

The book is available in the Visitor Information Centre bookshop at 12 Market Place. Glyn will also be signing copies of his book at autumn market at the Alexander Centre in Preston Street on 19 October. Copies may also be bought at the address below.

tinyurl.com/ArdenFav

FRIGHTFUL FAVERSHAM

As the shadows lengthen, the ghosts walk …

GRAHAM SAMPLE

As the days shorten and the evenings turn chilly the Faversham Society's guided history walks take a seasonal rest. Fear not, there is an alternative: the Frightful Faversham Walks.

These walks are a mixture of stories about Faversham's ghosts and some of its dark history. Real history and stories from real people, living and dead.

The gentle walk lasting about 90 minutes starts at the Visitor Information Centre at 12 Market Place. The cost is being held at the less than horrific price of £5, with all proceeds going to the Faversham Society.

The planned timetable is:
Thurday 31 October, 7pm
Wednesday 6 November, 6pm
Monday 11 November, 7pm
Friday 22 November, 6pm
Tuesday 26 November, 7pm

Booking can be made online at favershamsociety.org or in the Visitor Information Centre.

▶▶▶ From page 2

And this leads to the second reason to look in your diary …

An extraordinary number of members volunteer in all manner of activities, but we are always in need of more, because the society can only carry out the functions that volunteers make possible. While some of our volunteers employ special and specialist skills (think for a moment what it must take to administer the museum and develop its exhibitions), we also need people who are happy to be part of team greeting visitors and allowing our premises to open. For example, the museum is unable to open more than four hours a day, three days a week, simply because there are too few of us who will 'staff' it.

So this is a shout out to anyone who has a regular spare morning or afternoon. Make yourself known at the Visitor Information Centre at 12 Market Place or the bookshop in Preston Street: leave a note with your contact details and how you might like to be involved. Don't ever worry that you don't know enough – many of our volunteers are new to the town and sense this is a good way to meet people … which, of course it is!

Witches: the evidence

LEIGH ALLISON

Don't forget that there is a free talk for Faversham Society members, *Witchcraft In Kent: The Archaeological Evidence*, to be held in the Assembly Rooms, Preston Street, at 7.30pm on Saturday, 28 September. You can book online at the address below or at the Visitor Information Centre at 12 Market Place.

If you live in an old house, have you found any witch bottles or other items buried under the floor? Or have you spotted ritual protection marks or graffiti carved into the beams of your home?

If so, please bring along photos (or the real thing) and our expert, Wayne Perkins, will be able to share his knowledge with you after the talk.

At 1.30pm on Sunday, 29 September, a gathering will take place at the stone plaque near Faversham Guildhall, to commemorate the anniversary of the execution of Joane Williford, Joan Caridan and Jane Holt as witches in 1645. Wayne

Christmas cards on sale

MARY RANSOM

Christmas cards are now available in the Visitor Information Centre. There is a choice of two designs, this year – the snowy Market Place featured on the front page and the wintry view of West Street, above.

A pack of five cards, size A6, cost £3.50, or 75p each. The snowy Market Place is also available in A5 size, £1 each.

Farewell, Griselda

Griselda Cann Mussett, the writer, activist, campaigner, and enthusiastic networker, has died. Her influence and enthusiasm will be sorely missed by society members and the town as a whole.

Griselda and her husband Andrew, a musician and former BBC producer, lived in Abbey Street. She was working on a book, *The Invisible Women of Faversham*, when she died and a few days earlier was in contact our newsletter editor, Stephen Rayner, and society trustee Dr Jane Secker, to ensure it would be finished.

A full tribute will appear next month.

will give a short introduction to this terrible piece of history.

favershamsociety.org/live-events

Put your garden on show

LEIGH ALLISON

We want your garden! Planning has started for next year's Open Gardens and we are hoping for it to be bigger and better than ever in 2025.

It will be running as part of the National Gardens Scheme raising money for many charities, including the Faversham Society and the Abbey Physic Garden.

Members of the committee have been out and about the town delivering leaflets, but we can't peek at everyone's garden!

So, if you love your garden and there is access to it other than through your house, please think about joining in with this lovely day.

Get in touch with us at this address for a chat: *favershamopengardens@gmail.com*.

See facing page

Why not open your garden for Faversham Open Gardens & Garden Market Day 2025?

Faversham Open Gardens is a very popular community open gardens event that has been running for many years. In 2025 it will be on 29 June as part of the National Garden Scheme, who raise money for charities such as Macmillan Cancer Support, Marie Curie and Hospice UK. A proportion of the money raised will also be donated to the Faversham Society and local Faversham charities.

You will need access to your garden from the street, and not through your home, for insurance reasons. You'd probably like to ask questions before deciding, so do get in touch with us on favershamopengardens@gmail.com. If you'd like one of the committee to pop round, just let us know. And if any of your neighbours are also garden lovers and would be interested in opening their gardens please tell them to get in touch.

favershamopengardens@gmail.com

Faversham Open Gardens & Garden Market Day committee:

Sue (07768 231058), Alexandra, Jane, Amanda, Leigh, Julie, and Jane

Literary faves and fighters

PETER QUINCE

One of the many great things about working in the Fleur Bookshop, apart of course from the prime purpose of selling books, is what I would call an "exchange of ideas", and what the more prosaic among us may describe as "interesting conversations". I offer a few examples.

One day a man entered the bookshop and asked me if we had any volumes of the collected poems of John Donne. He was clearly an academic, as I could guess from his manner and his speech.

I replied: "Yes, sir, I believe we do. Let me show you where our extensive classics section is. Poetry is just alongside it." I was able to assist in finding this learned gentleman a selection, if not the collected works, of John Donne. He came around to the desk, clutching the volume, careful to keep it open at a certain page.

Three or four browsers were at the front of the shop as well as three volunteers. The academic gent opened the volume of Donne's poetry and proceeded to declaim in a rich, resonant voice The Flea, one of Donne's most celebrated poems and, he said, his favourite.

Of course, he revelled in the luxury of a captive audience. When he had finished his recitation we all applauded spontaneously and, grinning broadly, the gentleman entered into the spirit of things and took a deep, theatrical bow. Doubtless to say he bought the Donne book as well as several others. I loved his impromptu performance.

As a long-time fan of Donne, I told this gentleman of a little anecdote I had gleaned from my massive hardback biography of him. Donne fell in love with a lady by the name of Anne, but her parents disapproved of this young, rakish poet (who years later, improbably, became Dean of St Paul's Cathedral) and said so in no uncertain terms that there could be no wedding. In a subsequent letter, after the marriage, Donne wrote to a friend: "John Donne, Anne Donne, Undone."

Another day, a lady came to the desk and placed upon it two volumes that she wanted to buy. One was a biography of John Keats, my favourite Romantic poet, and one was a novel by Thomas Hardy, also a favourite. I couldn't help but comment on each of them, telling the customer that they were two of my most revered writers. She told me she lived in Hampstead, close to Keats's House. I asked her if she had ever visited Hardy's birthplace, a lovely thatched cottage at Higher Bockhampton in Dorset, and the Hardy family grave in nearby Stinsford churchyard. She had not but expressed great interest

join my 'ideas exchange'

It's a Hurricane. You can tell by the wing shape. Left: Donne and Hardy

in making such a literary pilgrimage.

I then told her of an unlikely connection between Keats and Hardy: "Well, in 1821 Keats was at Lulworth Cove in Dorset which inspired a sonnet which became famous. It begins, 'Bright star, were I stedfast as thou art'. Keats left England shortly after, never to return. He died in Rome at the age of 25.

Exactly 100 years later, in 1921, Hardy stood on more or less the same spot in Lulworth Cove and composed a poem, Lulworth Cove a Century Back, to the memory of Keats. The lady in the bookshop who bought those two volumes expressed great delight at the connection and left happy, I believe, in that knowledge.

Another customer, an elderly gent, often asked us for books on the RAF's involvement in the Seconds World War. He seemed knowledgeable and particularly enthusiastic talking about the Battle of Britain. I told him that I, too, had a long-time interest in the battle, particularly because much of it took place over the Kent. On this day, I recall, I told the gent that I had seen a Spitfire flying low over my house. I love the design of the Supermarine Spitfire and always dash into the garden to catch a glimpse. I told him how thrilled I was to see and hear one that day. The man looked at me rather seriously. "Oh no," he said, "what you saw today was not a Spitfire, but a Hurricane. A different engine note. Different profile, too." I was happy to be put in my place.

Anyway, this customer, mature in years but clearly young in spirit, went away with a book on the air battles of the Second World War. I'm only glad that I'd seen an RAF Hawker Hurricane and not a Messerschmitt 109!

These three bibliophiles all underline that even in an age of remote communication, there is no substitute for face-to-face interactions.

FAVERSHAM SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Contributions to the Faversham Society Newsletter are welcomed, and should be received by midday on the 15th of the month before publication, by email to *favnewsletter@gmail.com*.

The newsletter is edited by Stephen Rayner, who is independent of the board. 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.

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, Faversham, 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, is open Wednesdays, 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 open 2pm-5pm on Saturdays.

The Faversham Society is registered charity No1135262 and a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales No 7112241.
www.favershamsociety.org