Faversham Society Newsletter

September 2026 745

From the chair

ANN FUREDI

It was lovely to see so many Faversham Society volunteers enjoying a modest celebration in the Fleur museum garden on Thursday, 30 July.

I know there are only so many times I can bang on about the value of volunteers, but the commitment of so many members is staggering.

At the AGM, I talked about how unique the society is in providing services as well as advocating for, and educating, about our heritage. I know that many who use the Visitor Information Centre in Market Place, and even the museum, believe them to be run by the town council – or at least funded by them.

In fact, it came as a shock to me to find that the VIC was our responsibility and that those behind the counter aren't salaried staff, but people who choose to give up their time to what has become the town hub for information. And it's not just information for visitors – maps, advice on town walks, opening times etc – but it's known as that place where kind people help with all manner of queries that are way outside their job remit.

The VIC is a striking example of how it's possible to have a service that is as professional as anyone could want but unpaid and voluntary, unqualified but expert. The same rigour and commitment are true of the organisation of the meetings and events. The operation of the bookshop, which raises more than £40,000 a year to

ECHOES FROM THE ARCHIVE

Two occasional features start this month: Echoes from the Archive on page 7 and Small Delights on page 2

support the museum is also a magnet for people in search of a chat – or to set the world to rights. It has its own virtuous spiral.

Because so many people in this town love books want them to be re-read and not binned, the donations flood in. Because the donations are so frequent and reflect their readers in eclecticism and eccentricity, there's a rapid turnover.

Because every item is donated, every worker is a volunteer and we own the property, everything can be sold at prices that people find shockingly reasonable. Even the 50p charged for children's books makes a profit. Browsers become buyers. Buyers support everything we do.

And, indeed, the museum itself has demonstrated how important a professional operation is. Elsewhere in this newsletter, you'll read about the importance of an Anglo-Saxon artefact – a metal die – that seems due to rewrite the history of the internationally famous Sutton Hoo helmet, indicating its origin may be Faversham. *See page* 5. That the Fleur de Lis Museum is to be given first refusal as its home could not have happened if the museum team had not applied themselves to the painstaking, often mind-numbingly tedious, process of meeting the requirements for formal accreditation.

SMALL DELIGHTS

The first in an occasional series (contributions welcome): Turning into Faversham station and seeing that one of the booking office windows is open and a battle with ticket machine has thus been avoided.

Chart Mills opening

Please note that Chart Mills will not be open on Saturday, 5 September, during the Hop Festival.

The mills, however, will be open 12 September and also via the guided walk on Sunday 13 September. It will then be open on the next two Saturdays, before it closes again until next spring. Don't miss your chance to see this special piece of Faversham history.

The balance between professionalism and volunteerism is a difficult one to strike: when you run a service you need to keep the doors open. A business manager once told me that his company had such trouble getting new employees to turn up on time that they had started a bonus scheme for regular on-timers, and he had been told to thank his team personally when they arrived at opening time. This, in a job, where the deal is you get paid for your work. Our volunteers may get the thanks, but never a pay packet. We turn up because the work needs doing, because we want to support what the society does for the town and because we don't want to let our teams down.

And then there's what goes on behind the scenes and the people (like our editor, Steve) who cut time from their commitments to apply the necessary specialist professional skills to make things happen. A newsletter needs an editor; bills need to be paid; buildings require maintenance ...

By now, it's obvious where I'm going

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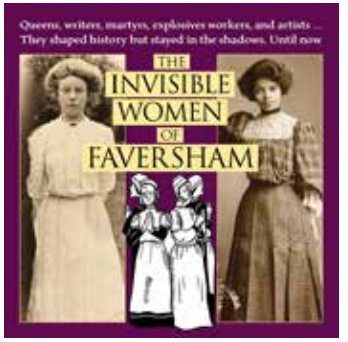
Griselda was inspired by the grave of Kate O'Brien. Far right: young mother Alice Post's tragic tale is also told

Women come into the light

A book revealing the lives of more than 50 Faversham women who made a contribution to town life is to be launched in October.

The Invisible Women of Faversham has been written and compiled by a small team of society members who took up the challenge to complete a book started by Griselda Mussett, who died in August, 2024.



Griselda wanted to bring into the limelight the lives of women who had played a significant part in Faversham life over the centuries, but who were largely forgotten after their deaths. Her inspiration for the project was finding the grave in Faversham Cemetery of the Irish critic, writer and rebel Kate O'Brien, who lived her final years in Boughton.

Also included are women who took over men's roles in the town explosives industry during the First World War, frequently working in life-threatening and uncomfortable conditions to ensure soldiers on the front line had sufficient ammunition.

Medieval queens, artists, musicians and performers all have their stories told, as well as women who broke barriers in politics. It's a significant book, bringing these strong characters to the fore and sharing their lives.

A few days before she died, Griselda asked Stephen Rayner to ensure the book would be finished. "It's been, to use an awful cliché, quite a journey and I'm pretty sure there will be a volume two," he said.

He and the other editors will join contributors at the book's launch at the Old Brewery Store in Conduit Street on Wednesday, 14 October when guests can hear Faversham Community Choir perform a song composed for the occasion, as well as readings from the book and folk songs from Helen North. Tickets will be available from 21 August from the address below.

favershamsociety.org/events

THE FAVERSHAM SOCIETY
Fleur de Lis Heritage Centre

AN EXCITING NEW SERIES OF TALKS FOR 2026-27

Discover fresh perspectives and intriguing stories with the Faversham Society's programme of talks

The other life of Mary English The story of Mary English, daughter of a Faversham dockworker, and Manuela Sáenz, who together changed the course of history	**10 September 2026** Glyn Harper 7.30pm
Empress Matilda and King Stephen Bestselling author Alison Weir discusses her book *Queens of the Conquest*, focusing on Matilda and Stephen's Faversham connections	**8 October 2026** Dr Alison Weir 7pm
Recent discoveries at an Anglo-Saxon Cemetery in east Kent The story behind an exceptionally well-preserved sixth-century sword, and archaeological excavations at the site	**12 November 2026** Dr Andrew Richardson 7.30pm
The gunpowder and explosives industry in Faversham Faversham was one of England's leading gunpowder centres. Discover the industry's history and its impact on Faversham and Kent	**14 January 2027** Ian and Tess Brown 7.30pm
George Roberts, Davington Priory and Faversham's LGBTQ+ history Discover the remarkable life of George Roberts, uncovering an interesting chapter of Faversham's LGBTQ+ history	**11 February 2027** Dr Declan Wiffen and Tina Hagger 7.30pm
Why write a play about Faversham in the 1590s? How was Faversham viewed in the Elizabethan period? Explore the history, reputation and enduring legacy of *Arden of Faversham*	**11 March 2027** Dr Sheila Sweetinburgh and Prof Catherine Richardson 7.30pm
Edwardian Faversham, a decade of change and hope The Edwardian years between 1901 and 1914 are vividly brought to life through the history of Faversham at a time of change	**8 April 2027** Mike Cosgrove 7.30pm
Hidden in plain sight: silk textiles, unexpected contexts Drawing on examples from Faversham, discover how textiles in historic documents reveal origins, makers and forgotten stories	**13 May 2027** Sue Lamberton 7.30pm
The real Jack Sparrow? The story of Faversham pirate John Ward Jack Ward was a 16th-century pirate who raided Spanish ships for their gold. Is Mr Ward the inspiration for Captain Jack Sparrow?	**10 June 2027** Dr Richard Blakemore 7.30pm

All take place at The Old Brewery Store, Conduit Street, Faversham, ME13 7DY

To book, please visit favershamsociety.org/events

Artisans to the ancient elite

LEIGH ALLISON

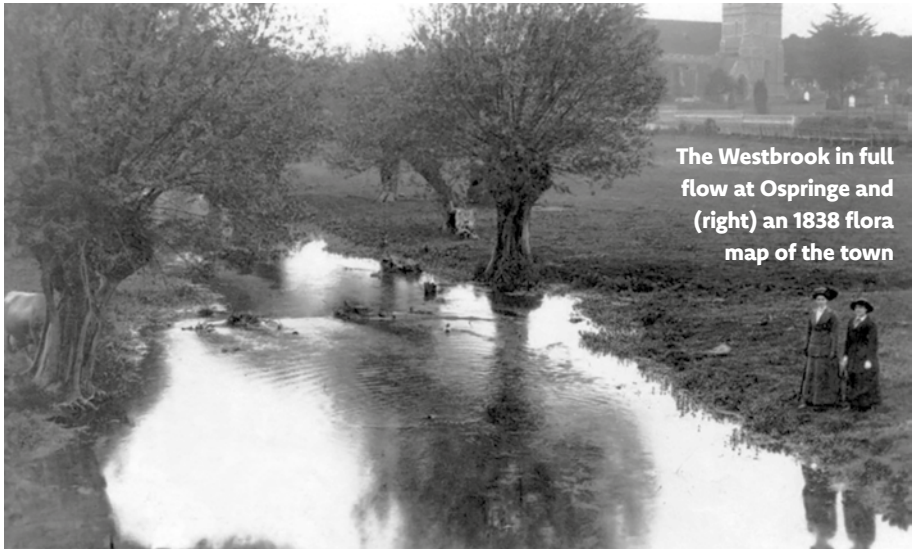
Dr Andrew Richardson delivered a fascinating talk (above) about the metalworking die, found at Lynsted. He explained the significance of the decorations on the helmets and the pagan beliefs of the people living here in the sixth and seventh centuries, despite the introduction of Christianity. The metalworking skills of the Faversham inhabitants were renowned throughout Kent and further afield.

It seems likely that high-status decorated helmets, such as those worn by kings of Kent and other elites, were made here.

Now that the die (inset) has been thoroughly researched, discussions have taken place with the British Museum, and we hope we will be able to buy it for display in the Fleur de Lis Museum. Andrew's announcement that he supported the die coming home to Faversham received a spontaneous cheer from the audience.

We hope to be able to make it the centrepiece of a display telling the story of these Faversham metalworkers in early medieval Britain.

Many thanks must go to the Fleur team who worked very hard on their accreditation again last year. Without that, we would not have been able to request such an important artefact.



The Westbrook in full flow at Ospringe and (right) an 1838 flora map of the town

Celebration of our heritage

HAROLD GOODWIN

OPEN FAVERSHAM

The Faversham Society is at the heart of this year's exhibition celebrating the contemporary, cultural, built, industrial and natural heritage of our waterway.

Our creek and the chalk streams that run through the town define its topography and account for the ancient settlements that grew into Faversham.

The route of the Westbrook, from Painters Forstal to Stonebridge Pond, Faversham Creek to the Swale will be displayed in maps alonh the central aisle of the church, provided by the Faversham Society, opposite Ben White's dioramas of the creek, seven of which will be on display.

Philippa Dickenson of Faversham Creek Trust has brought together many of the creek groups to exhibit and Matthew Hatchwell has brought together local, county and national natural heritage groups.

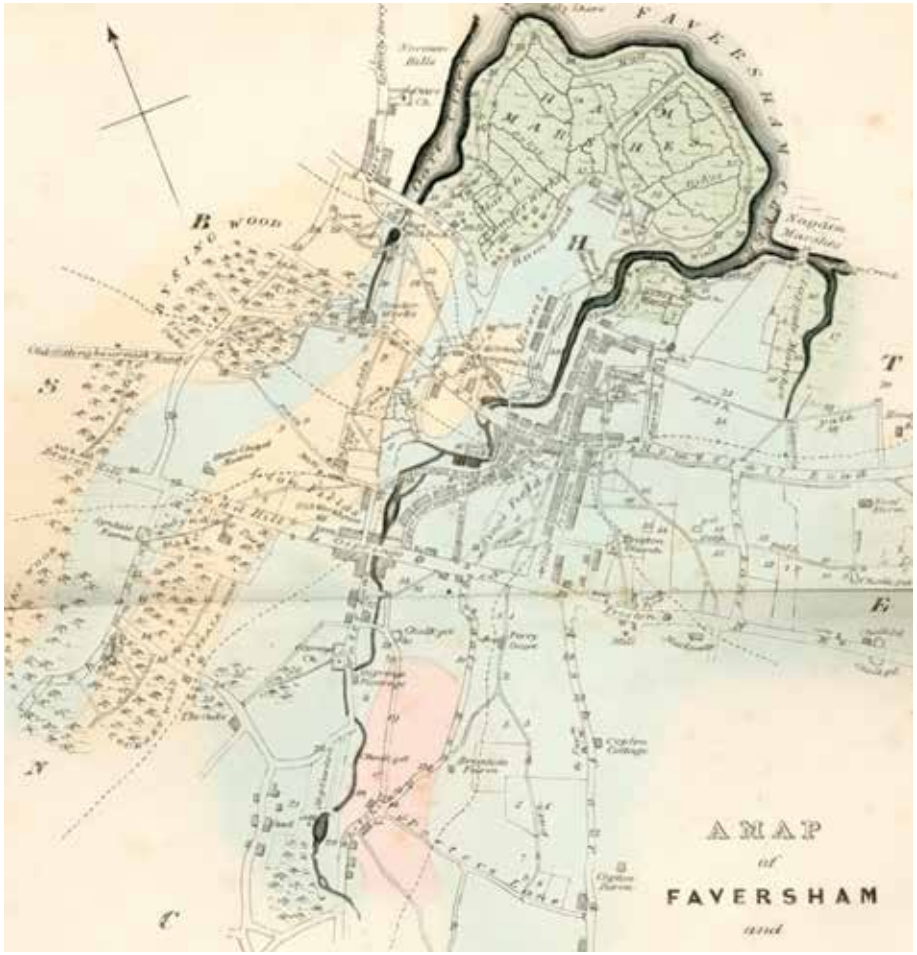
Groups all along the Westbrook, and the creek – too many to list here – are taking part in this exhibition. On the big screen at the front of the church we will be showing images and films of the sideways launches and the creek.

If you are new to the town there will be much to discover and if you a long-term resident of Faversham there will be much to rediscover and be reminded of.

We are grateful to the vicar of Faversham, the Rev Simon Rowlands, and the parochial church council for permission to use the church to bring the town together in this celebration of Faversham. I would like to give particular thanks to Kevin Swinney of the church who has done so much to make a success of Open Faversham and to the Faversham Society which has funded the foam boards on which many groups will be presenting their contribution to the exhibition.

***From the Source of the Westbrook to the Sea* runs in St Mary of Charity Parish Church from Wednesday, 16 September, to Saturday, 19 September, from 9am to 5pm each day and until 8.30pm on the Thursday. There is no entry charge. More details on the address below.**

Openfaversham.info



Harold Goodwin is a trustee of the Faversham Society and chairs Open Faversham

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with this. We really need more help – now of a more specific kind than in the past. There are quite a few of our systems that must improve to underpin our growth in number and the strength of mission.

- Our Finance Committee is particularly keen to recruit a couple of people who work in finance to bring additional advice and scrutiny.
- Our Planning Committee is in need of more knowledge about modern town planning and heritage building.
- Our work with Arden's House needs input about heritage project funding.

Please get in touch in you can help – and if, you do already, please don't ever think you're taken for granted.

The Regency Ball

You are cordially invited to join us for an evening of Regency music and dancing at the Faversham Assembly Rooms

Saturday 10 October from 7pm

Discounted tickets available to Faversham Society nembers

New season of talks

LEIGH ALLISON

Our varied talks programme for this season has something for everyone to enjoy. Thanks to Victoria for putting it all together: it was not an easy task! The full programme is on page 4.

We do hope that you will be able to make the most of your membership by coming along to at least one talk. Most of them are free to Faversham Society members. This year, we have some big names lined up for you. In October, the acclaimed historian Alison Weir will be discussing early medieval queens, including Matilda, the driving force behind the building of Faversham Abbey.

In June, Dr Richard Blakemore, lecturer in maritime social history, will be exploring the story of Faversham's most infamous pirate. From humble beginnings John Ward grew to become fabulously wealthy, as he commanded fleets of corsairs for the Ottoman Empire along the North African coast. These premium talks will cost £5 for members and £10 for non-members, I hope you agree, this is still a bargain.

All the talks will be hosted at the Old Brewery Store. Most begin at 7.30pm, but the doors open at 6.30 to allow you time for a drink beforehand. They all need to be booked online at the address below or at the Visitor Information Centre.

As reported last month, next on 10 September is the launch of G.D. Harper's newest book, all about the life of Mary English, another one of Faversham's extraordinary figures from the past.

As well as listening to Glyn discussing the publication, there will be the opportunity to buy the book on the night.

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Introducing ...

ECHOES
FROM THE ARCHIVE

TESSA KNOTT, CATHERINE LEE, AND JACQUELINE SPENCER

John Owen made an impassioned plea at the AGM this year for the Faversham Society's extensive archive holdings to be more widely recognised and used.

The newsletter, it was suggested, might be an appropriate vehicle. Never slow to pick up such a compelling gauntlet as this, a small working group was convened to make a response. And so we are pleased to introduce to you a new occasional column: Echoes from the Archive.

The society library and archive, housed at the Fleur museum, has been collected over many years, and comprises mainly donations by local people and society members. There isn't room here for a detailed description of the holdings, but one can be found at the society website. See the link below. Items reflect many diverse aspects of Faversham life over centuries – social, industrial, recreational, political, civic, etc.

Our aim in this column is to introduce the archive to our readers by demonstrating the richness, diversity and quirkiness of its holdings. All human Faversham life is here! We will do this by focusing on a single item each time, making our selection on the basis of what appeals and intrigues, and has potentially interesting stories to tell. We hope to discover items that are both of interest in themselves, those which are better understood placed in historical context, and those which might lead to further avenues of investigation.

The echoes in our title reflects the way that historical source materials create echoes from the past – a past that can only ever be partially known and understood. These materials also interact and interlink, sending the researcher off in different directions, creating a new wave of echoes.

We hope that, by raising the archive's profile in this way, our series will inform and entertain and – who knows? – encourage members to take a look for themselves sometime.

Watch this space.

favershamsociety.org/archives

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Tickets are booking up fast, so please don't delay if you'd like to come along.

Favershamsociety.org/events

All change for costumes

THE EDITOR

We want to extend our grateful thanks to Jennifer Shipman who has retired after volunteering for 18 years at the Fleur museum. Jennifer has taken such care of our costumes and linens over that time. We are fortunate to have such an extensive collection that she has taken such pride in. Jennifer has curated many exhibitions, including the ever-popular displays of locally worn wedding dresses.

Jennifer writes: Most of you will have seen my request in the July newsletter for help in the costume section. Here is the update on that.

I have been caring for this area of our museum for almost 18 years now, but the time has come for a change. We need a new look to our exhibitions, urgently need conservation work on a few items in our care and possibly more articles on many of the wonderful items stored either in Childs, the haberdashery shop on the first floor of the museum, or those stored in the attic. Some items never see the light of day.

We were pleasantly surprised by the number of interested members. Therefore, it has been decided that a team of five or six will be set up. Sue, who has worked with me for the past few years, will be part of that team. Interestingly, only women volunteered.

I have now moved on. I could list all the many things I am going to miss but would rather look forward to seeing the costumes that I loved through fresh eyes.

Booksense?

PETER QUINCE

Faversham is clearly a bookish town. The numbers of people who come into the Fleur Bookshop and buy books and are enthusiastic about discussing them, as well as writers, genres and literary connections with Kent, sometimes astonishes me.

I come across regulars who invariably inquire: "Have you any more Tolkien books?", "Any more Agatha Christie novels?" or "Anything on Second World War aircraft?"

What delights me more than anything is the number of customers who seem to know so much about particular writers or subjects and can quote them at times verbatim, often initiating vigorous discussions before making their purchases.

I have always been fascinated by the views of writers about the process of writing and the literary world in general. Often, they are enlightening, sometimes highly amusing, and occasionally damning with faint praise. It is worth not only reading the works of novelists, poets, historians, literary critics and so on, but also taking their comments to heart and reflecting on them. There is a great deal of wisdom and magic in the literary mind.

It never ceases to amaze me that despite living in an age of high tech, with its ubiquitous screens and instant communications, the humble book (which is not so humble when you think about it) is a time-honoured and irreplaceable object. We have found nothing better in many centuries of ideas and imaginative adventures committed to the page: all those black words on white paper work a kind of wonder in the receptive mind.

Or authors talking nonsense?

We marvel at handwritten documents and letters from past times. We are envious of the flowing lines, the elegant script, the dated and yet fascinating prose, and some of us still admire an age when daily correspondence was the way to keep in touch.

Michael Lynton, the English publisher, says: "The book is the greatest interactive medium of all time. You can underline it, write in the margins, fold down a page, skip ahead. And you can take it anywhere." I do all of these with the exception of folding down pages. (Some of my decades old, much treasured volumes even have tea and coffee stains in them.)

As for the banning of books, which has happened in the past for ethical, religious and ideological reasons, the English novelist and critic Rebecca West said in 1928: "God forbid that any book should be banned. The practice is as indefensible as infanticide."

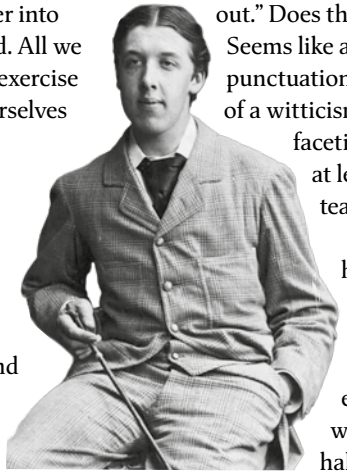
Reading undoubtedly enlarges our experience, encourages us to step through Alice's looking-glass and enter into worlds we never knew existed. All we need to accomplish this is to exercise our imaginations and give ourselves the time to sit back and relax and absorb the writer's own creation.

The novelist Julian Barnes in *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) tells us: "Books are where things are explained to you; life is where things aren't." And the American poet Amy Lowell, in her 1914 collection, *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed*, said: "All books are either dreams or swords. You can cut, or you can drug with words." It's true. Some books wound and some books enchant. The act of reading is often like a pleasant and life-enhancing medicine to some. But it can also be shattering and explosive.

When the great 20th-century novelist William Faulkner was composing his own epitaph – his "sum and history of my life", as he put it – he told a friend it should be: "He made the books and he died." And the US president Franklin D. Roosevelt offered: "Books cannot be killed by fire. People die, but books never die."

Oscar Wilde, of course, was a prolific writer of plays, poetry, essays and novels, as well as being one of the wittiest writers who ever put pen to paper. He once claimed that he had uncharacteristically spent all day writing (instead of regaling others with his wit) declaring: "In the morning I put a comma in; in the afternoon I took it out." Does that count as a day's writing? Seems like a wasted effort on a single punctuation mark to me, all for the sake of a witticism. I'm sure Wilde was being facetious: he must have written at least a whole sentence before tea.

One of the greatest humorists, P.G. Woodhouse, wrote: "To my daughter Leonora, without whose never-failing sympathy and encouragement this book would have been finished in half the time."



Oscar Wilde after a tough day slaving over commas

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.
info@favershamsociety.org

The **Fleur de Lis museum** at 10-13 Preston Street, Faversham, is open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 11am to 3pm during the school holidays, starting on 21 July. It is also open on the first Sunday of the month.

The **Fleur de Lis library** at 10-13 Preston Street opens from 11am to 1pm on Fridays.

The **Fleur de Lis second-hand bookshop** in Preston Street, Faversham, is open from 10am-3.30pm, Monday to Thursday and 10am-4pm Friday and Saturday.

The **Charts Mills**, off Nobel Court, are now open from 2-4pm on Saturdays, except the first Saturday of the month. You can join an explosive walking tour to the mills on the first Sunday.

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