

"Sandgate"

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## SANDGATE

(out of print)

A GUIDE OF 1823 describes Sandgate as "One wide street running nearly due East and West on the very brink of the sea" and it was this bay which was used by invaders from the Continent—Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans. Yet the first building in the area was not until 1539 when the Castle was erected by Henry VIII, who feared a French invasion, and built three defence fortifications at Walmer, Deal and Sandgate. Workmen lived in tents on the beach and were paid at "The King's Pay House" where "The Fleur de Lis" now stands. Queen Elizabeth rested at the castle in 1573 during her journey from Greenwich to Dover, so mention of "The Queen's Room", "The Queen's Bed Hung with Tapestry" are found in old records. On an average nineteen men lived in The Castle, this number being increased to twenty six during the time of Oliver Cromwell, but it only ever housed one political prisoner, a minor official of The Court responsible for putting out playing cards and dice, and seeing that the King's Lodging was furnished with tables, chairs, stools and firing. In 1570 he fell under suspicion when he married Lady Mary Grey a sister of "The Nine Days Queen". In 1616 the building was severely damaged by the sea and the number of men guarding it gradually decreased, until in 1805 the "Old Castle" was partly demolished and rebuilt as a Martello type of building in keeping with a line of these from Dover to Rye when invasion was feared during The Napoleonic Wars. In 1822 we read that the garrison contained "two guns and four or five worn out artillery men", and by 1848 there was but a single keeper and no military establishment. From 1855 until 1857 it was used as a military prison for soldiers of The German Foreign Legion stationed at Shorncliffe in training for The Crimean War. As the war ended before their training was completed they were sent to colonize S. Africa. Queen Victoria and The Prince Consort passed through Sandgate on their way to inspect them. I quote an interesting extract from "The Folkestone Chronicle" 6th October 1855. "Last Sunday, being the day of public thanksgiving for the brilliant success of The Allied Armies in the East, the troops of "The German Legion" paraded for that purpose. Immediately afterwards the greater part of the officers of the force accompanied their gallant commander to the established church at Sandgate where they joined the English congregation in returning thanks for the victories gained". This celebrated the fall of Sebastopol and the end of The Crimean War.

Finally, after being undermined in 1866, flooded in 1875, and having all its protective piles swept away by the sea in 1877 The Castle was abandoned and bought by The S.E. Railway Company to be used as a station for a railway line running along the edge of the beach to Hythe. This never materialised and the remains which can best be seen from Castle Road, are now privately owned.

It was not until 1773 that the first houses were built in Sandgate and these were mostly of wood, to withstand the rigours of the sea and the gales, Kentish stone being considered too soft. They were built for the workmen of a Mr. Wilson, a ship-wright, who built boats on that part of the bay now called "The Parade". Examples of these houses can be seen at the foot of Sandgate Hill and in The High Street.

Sandgate rapidly expanded after 1794 when Shorncliffe Camp came into being, becoming a fashionable sea-side resort for visitors and the families of the soldiers. In Castle Road stands York Cottage, which was rented by Sir John Moore, a bachelor, for his mother and sister to use as a holiday home, whilst he was Commander at the Camp 1803—1805. A statue of him can be seen at the western end of The High Street, and another overlooks the plains at the Camp, where he trained his Light Infantry, making Military History in methods of warfare. Behind this statue and also overlooking the plains, is The Garrison Church, surely the only church to have been consecrated under an umbrella of Spitfires in 1939.

St. Paul's Church, which stands at the foot of Sandgate Hill to the East of The High Street, is comparatively modern, for the present building was erected in 1849, on the site of "A Chapel of Ease" given to the village in 1822 by Lord Darnley, who felt that the spiritual needs of the villagers were neglected. This chapel stood in the grounds of Lord Darnley's house called "Belle Vue" which he purchased in 1806. On his death in 1831 the property passed to his second son The Hon. John Duncan Bligh, who demolished "Belle Vue" in 1852. It was rebuilt and became known as Chichester House, the Countess of Chichester being John Bligh's daughter; in 1920 it was sold to The Star and Garter Home and is now leased to The Home Office being used as a Police Training Centre.

Many famous names of visitors and residents can be linked with Sandgate. H. G. Wells is one of these, for he built Spade House, in which he lived from 1901—1909 and in which he wrote thirteen of his books including "Kipps" and "The History of Mr. Polly."

Sir Squire Bancroft an actor manager and contemporary of Ellen Terry, (who owned a cottage in Winchelsea) laid the foundation stone of The Chichester Hall in The High Street.

Running parallel to The High Street is Gough Road named after John Gough 1817—1886, a native of Sandgate who became a Temperance Reformer and Lecturer in America. The son of a soldier, who became an outdoor servant on leaving the Army, and a mother, who was a teacher earning extra money by lace making, he was educated at Folkestone, becoming a juvenile teacher in charge of two classes at the age of ten. He was in great demand as a reader for the patrons of The Library earning 1d. per session. In 1829, when only twelve, his father paid £10, to a family emigrating to America for his passage and a promise to teach him a trade on arrival. The voyage to New York took 54 days, and, whilst sailing down The Channel from London, the ship was becalmed so near to Sandgate that his parents were able to row across the bay to say "Goodbye" to him once again. After many hardships he finally became a Temperance Reformer in 1842 and worked as a lecturer until his death in 1886. He re-visited Sandgate three times; in 1853 when he gave to Mrs. Beaulie the sum of £10, in part payment for milk and gingerbread which she had given to him when he emigrated as a child of twelve; again 1857—1860, and finally 1877—1879, when on Whit Monday 1879, he laid the foundation stone of "The Gough Coffee Tavern" now The Masonic Hall.

An interesting visitor in 1828 was Mary Shelley, the widow of Percy Bysshe Shelley, recovering from small-pox which made her "a monster to look at", for, as she wrote to a friend, "my physician told me that sea-bathing will diminish by at least a month the period of my ugliness—you would not know me".

Two residents of the village were Richard and William Jenner, who opened a chemist's shop at 37, High Street. Today this business is still in existence with an unbroken record as a pharmacy. Old letters and documents, dated 1850—1860, found in the attic, have enabled us to build up a fascinating picture of their work, so a few facts gained from these are included.

*An Account Book* tells us that H. G. Wells in July, August and September 1901 spent £2.14.2. The School in 1899 spent £4.4.4, on Syrup of Figs, Lint, Carbolic Soap etc., whilst on Monday mornings a child was sent for the ink.

*The Recipe Book* tells us that in 1858 William Jenner analysed salt water from the sea, keeping a careful record of the strength and direction of the wind; he made mushroom ketchup and raspberry vinegar for the housewives; he evaporated and analysed water from the pump in the bank, from Mr. Morris's drinking fountain and from the spring about to be added to Sandgate Water Supply. Most interesting of all is a list of medicines supplied to "The People's Dispensary" organised in 1844 by Dr. William Donnelly a retired naval medical officer, who was interested in treating patients from the marsh suffer-

ing from ague caused by dampness. This clinic, together with a Penny Savings Bank, was run by Richard John Fynmore who married Julia Jenner daughter of Richard the chemist. The building they used is now known as Forrester House and is directly opposite the chemist's shop. Two customers at the shop were Miss Octavia and Miss Lucy Papillon, who in 1858, started a canteen in Chapel Street (Now Wilberforce Road). After the Crimean War ended, the German troops at Shorncliffe were replaced by men to and from India, and also those returning from Russia. Much drunkenness and brawling resulted in the sisters opening a Soldier's Home consisting of a Mission Hall and five rooms including a library, reading room, amusement room and refreshment bar. Before Miss Lucy died in 1885 a similar home was opened at Lydd.

A close connection existed between the village and the Camp and from the many letters found amongst The Jenner Papers I quote the following:—

Sir,

Will you let my servant have a nice small piece of sponge, and make him wash it thoroughly at *your pump*, for there is no clean water up here. Who is the best surgeon in Sandgate, for I am inclined to consult a *Civil Practitioner* as my knee, from having (as I think) been unskillfully cupped, has two sores, and I can scarcely put my foot down, and any attempt at walking causes great pain. I have very little confidence in the *foreign* art of healing.

And oblige

Depot Adjt Cpt

Brigade German Legion

Feb 1856.

Until 1934 Sandgate was an autonomous borough with its own Mayor, Council, Water Works and Voluntary Fire Service. The Library of today is in the upper part of a building where the fire engine was kept. Many changes have altered the face of the one time village, now incorporated in The Borough of Folkestone, but the sea, which has played such a large part in its history, is unchanging and I conclude by quoting an extract from a letter written in 1845 by Thomas Hood to a small boy in Sandgate recuperating from shingles:—

"What a rattle the waves make with the stones; and sometimes you may hear the sound of a heavy sea, at a distance, like a giant snoring".

# *The Story of Sandgate*

*by Ann Nevill*



*Folkestone Local History Leaflet No.7*



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## THE STORY OF SANDGATE

First noted as a guard post in the thirteenth century, Sandgate's history really begins with the building of the castle in 1539 on the orders of Henry VIII. It formed part of a chain of defensive forts, together with Walmer, Deal and Sandown, constructed at a time of possible invasion by Spain. It had a keep, a gate-house and three towers connected by galleries, all enclosed within a stout wall. The complete building accounts in the British Museum recount that the workmen came from far and wide and were housed in tents. Stone was taken from the beach and the lately dismantled local priories, 147,000 bricks were used and the total cost was £5,544. It housed a captain and a garrison but was never attacked, save by the sea which has done much damage over the centuries. Queen Elizabeth visited it on a progress through Kent. Close by there was a Watch House which sheltered the excisemen in their age-long battle with the smugglers.

Jacob des Bouveries' estate map of 1697 showed an empty stretch of coast. In 1773 a boat-builder, Fabian Clayton Wilson, took leases of the beachy ground from Lord Radnor and put up some 30 cottages for his workmen, some still standing at the bottom of Sandgate Hill. The business flourished providing 7 28-gun frigates for the American Revolutionary War, launched from the beach, which was covered with timber and boats on the stocks. Other shipwrights followed and the trade continued for nearly 100 years, ending with the rowing boats made by Dick Graves in the old black boathouse (eastern end of the Riviera).

In 1794 during the war with France, the War Department bought 230 acres at Shorne Cliffe which was to become one of the foremost military establishments in the Kingdom. In 1803 there was a very real danger of invasion by Napoleon; 120,000 troops and 2,000 ships were rumoured to be massing in the Channel ports. The Royal Military Canal and the line of Martello towers were built, four on the heights above Sandgate. The Castle also was adapted to this pattern. Every able bodied man and every boat was listed and evacuation plans made. General Sir John Moore commanded the Light Infantry Brigade at Shorncliffe, training the men in tactics of mobility and speed which were to be so useful in Spain. Stout officers were made to run up the hill to the camp. The General rented Sir John Shaw's house while his mother and sister were in York Cottage (Castle Road). He went on to his command in Spain and a hero's death at Corunna. There is a memorial to him on the Esplanade. Napoleon's invasion plans were defeated by the Channel and the Camp land returned to pasture.

The village meanwhile was growing as a small and select resort attracting genteel visitors. Purday's Guide of 1823 enlarges on its advantages, the sheltered aspect, salubrious air, hot and cold sea water baths and numerous bathing machines. Thomas Purday started a business in 1799 which became the centre of the village's social life. It included a circulating library, fancy goods, a reading room and musical entertainment in the summer. Here the young John Gough used to read to customers. Son of the village schoolmistress and a former soldier, he later emigrated to America and became a well known temperance orator. He described the village in his autobiography, the daily coaches passing through on their way to London, the annual fair on the green featuring a pig-faced lady, donkey

races and merry-go-rounds. There was also a darker side to village life - the smuggling gang with their coded signals at night and two murders on the beach.

William Wilberforce came for several summers and Mrs Siddons enjoyed the sea bathing. Brick villas used as lodging houses were being built and also a resident gentry class emerging. Two substantial mansions were erected - Bellevue by Lord Darnley of Cobham Hall in 1806 and Encombe by Henry Dawkins in 1821 at the other end of the village, both having beautiful gardens planted with choice shrubs. In 1814 the first school started, 1d. per week was charged. At first housed in Chapel Street then in rented rooms by the Castle, a permanent home was provided by charitable funds (later the Artillery Drill Hall, now the Sea Cadets HQ). There were also private schools for young ladies and gentlemen such as Castle Glen, Farleigh House and Conamur, (site of Zarena Court) a progressive girls' school, which educated in the kindergarten Jocelyn Brooke and Sir Hugh Casson.

Wilberforce had lamented the lack of a church. In 1816 there was a Methodist chapel (site of White Court) and in 1822 Lord Darnley provided a handsome classical Chapel-of-Ease in his own grounds, designed by George Repton. The Congregational Chapel (1883) is now the Little Theatre (FHODS).

But there was no controlling authority and the village was not a healthy place, judging by the Rammell report produced in 1849 with the co-operation of the inhabitants. There was a small water company in Wilberforce Road, but many houses still used well water. The drains were appalling, many discharging on the beach, and 60 houses had



no drains at all. There was no rubbish collection to deal with the 23 dung hills and 16 piggeries. The main road was the responsibility of the Turnpike Trust which had a toll gate on Sandgate Hill till 1877, but the side roads were not made up and there was no street lighting. The 1840s were a time of reform and Sandgate was chosen as a model of what could be done. A Local Board of Health with nine members and powers to raise money and enact bylaws was elected. The minutes illustrate the process of reform - a new pure water supply from Honeywood Springs provided, water closets and drains installed and inspected, gas laid on, muddy yards paved and nuisances inspected. The Medical Officer of Health wrote an encouraging book "Sandgate as a Residence for Invalids" though unfortunately a year later the village suffered an outbreak of cholera causing 48 deaths. This was meticulously investigated and the new drains were found to be at fault, badly laid and jointed with clay.

The Rev. Sebastian Gambier was the first Chairman of the Local Board. Church activities were important; penny readings, a lending library and clothing club. The Chapel had become too small and was replaced by St. Paul's in 1849, designed by S.S. Teulon. The same architect was used by Sir John Bligh who had inherited Bellevue from his father and rebuilt it as Enbrook Lodge, a comfortable country house which he left to his daughter, the Countess of Chichester. James Morris, a wealthy Governor of the Bank of England and noted local philanthropist had bought Encombe. There was a Dispensary for the poor and the Sandgate Working Men's Institute provided opportunities for further education.

In 1855 the Government was recruiting mercenaries to serve in the

British German Legion for use in the Crimean War and 3,000 men were stationed at Shorncliffe in newly constructed wooden huts facing a wide parade ground. The villagers' welcome was warm at first, but cooled somewhat with frequent cases of theft, drunkenness and desertion. The men, who had been visited by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, were sent to the Crimea a few months before peace was declared. Their places were taken by British troops and the camp has been in use ever since. Later Royal visitors were the Kaiser, Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Dragoons and the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII. New buildings were put up in 1891. The names of the regiments stationed there would be a roll call of the British Army and it was invaluable in two world wars, both for training and for troops waiting to embark for the Continent.

The presence of so many men of course affected village life. Wives were billeted and the troops would come down in the evenings to relax in Sandgate's many pubs and beer-shops. Rigden's "Bricklayers Arms" was enlarged to become the popular "Alhambra Music Hall" with singers, dancers and performing dogs on the programme. It was later Maltby's "Mansion of Mirth" and then Sandgate's only cinema "The Rex" which closed in 1948. There was a house of refuge for prostitutes, the girls being mostly laundry workers from Cheriton. There were two places where the men could relax without the temptation of alcohol: Miss Lucy Papillon's Soldiers' Institute and the John Gough Coffee Tavern, ( the Masonic Hall ) opened by John Gough himself in 1879 on a visit from America amid scenes of tumultuous enthusiasm.

There was a volunteer Fire Brigade at least since 1859. This was reorganised in 1882 with ten men, two officers and a new fire engine,

the latter to be kept in the Fire Station, the distinctive building in the high street, erected through the generosity of the Misses Reilly, nieces and heirs of James Morris. Young men could also join the Artillery Volunteers, housed in the old school with smart uniforms, regular rifle drill and reviews at Woolwich and Dover. They were commanded by Capt. (later Col.) Fynmore.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Sandgate's population increased from 1,200 to 2,000. It had become a lively shopping centre as the journey into Folkestone in the jolting horse buses was uncomfortable and slow. There was now a great range of food shops, military tailors and boot makers, three linen drapers, five milliners, two chemists, a bank and a newspaper. Miss Purday went bankrupt and her stock was sold at auction.

Sandgate should have had its own railway line according to plans made by the South Eastern Railway in the 1870s which hoped to cut ten minutes from the London to Paris journey by building a branch line from Hythe to the harbour. This would have entailed crossing the Broadway (High St.), knocking down the Castle and running trains along the coast via the gardens of Radnor Cliff. The line was made as far as Seabrook but the rest proved too expensive. The Castle was saved and became a museum of the South African War - and an air raid shelter in World War II. The South Eastern made a horse tramway from Hythe to the bottom of Sandgate Hill in 1891 and alighting passengers could take the new water-powered lift to the top of the Leas. In summer there was the "toast rack", an open carriage. In World War I the horses were called up and their places taken by frequently rebellious mules. Neither lift nor tram survived competition from the motor buses.

The old school had become overcrowded and a new building designed by Philip Hardwick, was given by James Morris on land provided by Lord Radnor. The neo-Gothic building, now living accommodation, by David Oclee, still stands opposite St. Paul's Church. After the 1870 Education Act which eventually led to schooling for all children, Sandgate School remained Church of England. For some years it had the best attendance record in England and a notable headmaster in Arnold Ulyett who was keenly interested in scientific education. May Day was celebrated with a may-pole, a May Queen dressed in white, and Friar Tuck. During World War II the school closed and Mr and Mrs Neale, the joint heads, accompanied the children to Wales. After their return the Kent County Council took over financial control. There was little room for new pupils when the Golden Valley area was added and the school moved to new buildings in Coolinge Lane.

In 1894 the Local Board's functions were taken over by the Sandgate Urban District Council. By this time sanitary conditions were good and the death rate low. Folkestone now voted to extend its boundaries and annex Sandgate. The village resisted fiercely, instancing Folkestone's profligacy with a library and artisans' dwellings, but Sandgate itself was in financial trouble because of the cost of keeping up the sea wall, repeatedly damaged by floods. The wall supported the main road but the KCC refused to accept responsibility. Eventually after a long legal battle which went to the House of lords, Sandgate won and could recoup its costs, an important decision for other seaside towns. It stayed independent till 1934 when it was merged with the Folkestone Borough Council and is now part of Shepway.

In 1891 there was a dramatic rescue of 27 sailors at Seabrook from the wrecked ship the "Benvenue" on its way to Australia, by the



volunteer crew of the Sandgate lifeboat, which had been presented by Hannah Rothschild. The wreck was a danger to shipping till Trinity House decided to blow it up in spite of local protests. In 1893 the western end of Sandgate suffered a landslide after an abnormal amount of rain. 72 houses were destroyed or damaged, though there was no loss of life. This was a disaster for the village and loss of trade for the lodging houses. A national appeal raised £9,000 to be spent on repairs and a deep drainage scheme for the unstable area. The Vicar, the Rev. Russell Wakefield, did much to support the community at this time.

In 1891 a convalescent home for slum children was opened, the Beach Rocks. The clergyman who started it, the Rev. James Jones was accused of fraud and died a broken man. The Government bought the building (site of Riviera Court) and turned it into a home for soldiers wounded in the South African War.

Sandgate became a centre of literary life when H.G. Wells came in 1898 to recover his health, first to 2 Beach Cottages then to Arnold House, Castle Road. He decided to build himself a home, Spade House, designed by C.F. Voysey and built by William Dunk. He stayed for ten years, became a Borough Magistrate and wrote some of his best books there such as "Kipps" and "Tono Bungay". "The Sea Lady" describes the impact of a mermaid's arrival on a respectable Sandgate family. "Little Wars" sets out the rules of an elaborate war game played all over the house and garden with his two young sons. With his wife Jane, Wells entertained many literary and political figures - Henry James, Shaw, Conrad, the Webbs, Ford Maddox Ford and local MP Sir Edward Sassoon. Other literary residents were Florence Warden

and the flamboyant Mrs B.M. Croker, both popular novelists. Jocelyn Brooke (1908-1966) was a member of the Brooke family of local wine merchants. His three volumes of autobiography "The Orchid Trilogy", Proustian in flavour, describes his childhood in Radnor Cliff and botany excursions along the Lower Road, as well as life as an army private.

The Chichester Hall was opened in 1914 by the famous actor-manager and local resident Sir Squire Bancroft as a community centre. Encombe was rebuilt in Spanish style for Mrs Mabel Philipson, a former Gaiety girl, by Basil Ionides. Enbrook also was pulled down, except for the characteristic Teulon entrance, and rebuilt for a Star and Garter Home to the design of Sir Edwin Cooper in 1924. It later served as a Police Training College. The panelled room above the Fire Station served as the Council Chamber and from 1934 to 1982 it became the public library. In September 1914 Shorncliffe Camp took in 20,000 recruits destined to go to France. They were billeted all over the area and many had to sleep in tents, coming and going in quick succession. The Beach Rocks became the Bevan Nursing Home with an open air ward for septic wounds. Canadian accents were heard everywhere. 46 young men of Sandgate were killed including Lance/Cpl. Cotter who died in action and received the VC. One bomb fell on the site of the War Memorial in a raid that killed 60 in Folkestone.

World War II was very different. Though evacuees arrived during the deceptive peace of the phoney war, Sandgate became part of Britain's front line of defence when France fell. The beach was mined, there was barbed wire and machine gun posts in the cliffs. This, together

with the Home Guard, were to turn back the might of Hitler's troops, so near across the Channel. It was rumoured that the 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was to invade between Hythe and Sandgate to avoid the gun batteries at the harbour. Some three quarters of the population had left, shops and houses were deserted and the school closed. The Chichester Hall housed the ARP, Enbrook the Fire Service, and the Castle the Home Guard. There was damage from mines along the Esplanade, from bombs (Chichester Rd., Prospect Place, Coastguard Cottages) and shells (Star & Garter Home, school and church). Great relief was felt when the French coast was freed but then the V1s started, many being destroyed in the skies above Sandgate.

Life since the war, as everywhere, is very different. The old family houses are divided and blocks of flats stand along the sea front. The High Street is choked with traffic and the trade of the small shops has gone to the supermarket. Spade House is an old people's home and Encombe is a vacant site with a housing development in the grounds.

However, Sandgate has great advantages. Antique dealers have occupied the vacant shops with a turnover of several million pounds annually. The insurance and travel firm Saga has purchased Enbrook and a striking new office development, designed by award-winning architects Michael Hopkins and Partners, accommodates a thousand employees bringing new life and new employment. Two conservation areas have been designated to protect the character of the village. The old Fire Station was bought by the Heritage Trust in 1983 and the Sandgate Society with its collection of archives occupies the ground floor. There are many voluntary activities - Scouts, Sea Cadets,

the Rowing Club, FHODS and the Townswomen's Guild.

Residents and visitors alike still enjoy Sandgate's unique atmosphere, the mix of buildings old and new, the curve of the bay, the wooded backdrop and the shining sea.



Books, newspaper cuttings and photographs  
are available for consultation in the  
**Heritage Room, Folkestone Library**