

# Cream Teas & Gunpowder

## The Society's Outing on 30th June

This was a marvellously various and diverse day, with a visit to the ancient and historic town of Faversham, rich in architectural survivals from the middle ages and the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a tour of the majestic and expansive Edwardian gardens of Mount Ephraim, and a brief look at the Longmarket at Canterbury, powerfully evocative of Roman and Saxon times. Such an outing cannot be comprehensive, of course, but it affords opportunities for tantalising glimpses into what may be explored in more depth; one longs for visitors so that one may find an excuse for second and third visits.

On this morning we were taken first to the Fleur de Lys, an ancient house, once an inn, and now the headquarters of the Faversham Society, by whom we were warmly received and given coffee and biscuits. After an excellent short video of the town the party divided; some explored the admirable museum in the building, while others went forth into the streets to have a preliminary look at the town. Old Faversham has a large number of ancient houses, some timber-framed and brought up to date in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with tile or brick cladding, others exemplifying masterpieces of decorative plasterwork. Many of the shops keep their old-fashioned Victorian or Edwardian fronts. In the Market Place there was indeed a Market, crowded with shoppers and sightseers; the whole scene presented a most pleasing spectacle of animation and bustle. We sought our own lunches, many of us finding a pub that was pleasantly old-fashioned in comfort and hospitality. After lunch well-informed and enthusiastic guides took us on a tour of some parts of the town past the elegant Guildhall, half Tudor and half Regency, though the Market place with its elegant houses and their heavily decorated arcades, and then over the Creek by a swing-bridge and along delightful Westbrook Walk with its fascinating view of the backs of the medieval houses in Tanner Street to the Gunpowder Mills. These have been restored with great skill and devotion by the Faversham Society. We spent a happy hour here, and then it was time to move on to Mount Ephraim. No time today for the splendid parish church, or Abbey Street, but they are still there.

Time at the gardens had to be rather short in the interests of tea and getting to Canterbury. Not all of us saw everything, but there was much to see. I found the individual 'subjects' deeply rewarding, but felt that the gardens lost something in being so dispersed. There seemed to be a lot of grass. But there were lovely roses and fine trees (everyone went to look for the Wellingtonia) including splendid cedars, and a gorgeous herbaceous tree-mallow before which everyone paused with

pleasure. There was also very fine topiary, for those who enjoy such sights as a yew clipped into the shape of an elephant, complete with howdah. And here we had tea. Real cream, not the whipped polystyrene that one is so often fobbed off with, flavoured translucent home-made raspberry jam, and delicate scones!

Then we hurried off to Canterbury, to have a look at the excavations now being carried out at the Longmarket. We were taken up on to the gallery built around the site, and looked down upon the grey, pitted ground. The only Roman feature apparent to the ignorant eye was a series of pillars which were not, of course, Roman at all but the concrete piles which had been driven by the post-war builders. The woman who was our guide was an historian, and the account she gave us of the site was a model of how historical information should be imparted – distinction between fact and conjecture, what inferences might properly be drawn, clear and articulate expression. We learnt about the Roman villa and its bath-house, the abandonment of the site when the Romans left, how it became a clearing in the woods, and then how it was settled by the Saxons. We learnt about medieval occupation too – of disaster in the pottery when a whole trayful of beakers had to be thrown away, and of the shop of Theoric the Goldsmith and how one of his forges collapsed into a cesspit.

So our day started with one market, in a sense, and ended with another, from Faversham to Canterbury, from a modern market to a medieval one. It had been a lovely day, and we thank the organisers for their skill and efficiency.

HUGH BAX



The Guildhall at Faversham. Dover's Guildhall in the Market Square was similar.