

WEALTH OF SECRETS IN TIMBERED STREETS

The ancient waterside towns of Faversham and Sandwich in Kent have links with royalty, invaders and settlers

AS THE TIDE edges higher in Faversham Creek, a little egret probes the mud for invertebrates, and cattle graze the banks. Among the yachts lining the quayside are old Thames barges, their red sails furled around towering masts, while the church spire stands sentinel over the town behind. The landscape here is flat and stark, but atmospheric, particularly now in winter, when the few trees are silhouetted against big skies of scudding clouds.

Although the Romans settled in the vicinity following the invasion of Britain in AD43, the town of 'Fefresham' gets its first mention in a 9th century charter as 'the king's little town'. But it was from the 1400s to the turn of the 20th century that the market town of Faversham in Kent flourished, owing its prosperity to the creek and the industry that it spawned.

Faversham is situated 3 miles inland from The Swale, a channel that links the North Sea with the Thames Estuary. Two creeks then lead to the town and the neighbouring village of Oare. For 500 years, they were the scene of busy trading. Beer was brewed, gunpowder was milled, boats were built, oysters were harvested and bricks baked. Hops came in, wool and grain went out; all of it was shipped along this narrow waterway. >



Above:

Former warehouse Oyster Bay House, also known as 'The Big Building', in Faversham, Kent, built circa 1843. Top, left to right: Faversham Guildhall and the elaborate 1855 cowtail pump; Faversham's most modern listed building, The Royal Cinema; a corbel of Pan at the King's Arms, Sandwich; the door of Sandwich's 15th century The Old Drum house.

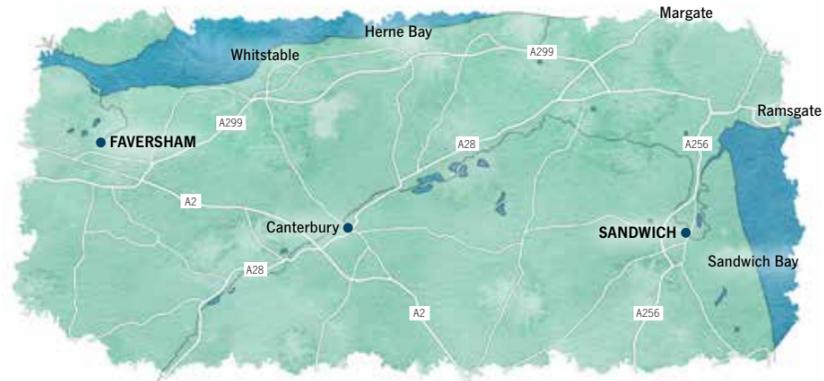
Maritime history

The oldest known of these enterprises was the oyster fishery, which is thought to have developed in the 12th century. By the 16th century, the fishery, controlled by the Company of Dredgers, employed 100 families. Shipbuilding was important from at least the 1700s. Flat-bottomed sailing barges, vital for London's trade, were being built until the 1950s, while Pollocks shipyard specialised in concrete sailing coasters until its closure in the 1970s.

"Faversham was first, second and last a port," says local historian John Owen. "That's where the money came from. By the end of the 19th century, Faversham had 1 mile of quays." The 20th century saw a period of industrial decline as the creek silted up, and business moved elsewhere. But, in recent years, Faversham has reinvented itself as a lively, commutable market town, with independent shops and a vibrant arts scene. Having largely escaped the developers' bulldozers of the 1960s, the past is still much in evidence in its wealth of historic buildings.

One surviving area of maritime activity is Standard Quay, where a 19th century former hop store and fertiliser warehouse, Oyster Bay House, dominates the skyline. Small-scale boat repairs and restorations are still carried out along this narrow stretch of waterway.

The run of old warehouses along the quayside, measuring 187ft (57m) in length



and known as Monks Granary, are thought to have been built in the period 1671-1734, using surviving parts of Faversham Abbey. Today, they house antiques and other retail outlets. Before the creek was straightened in the early 1800s to make it more navigable, these barns would have been at the water's edge.

An abbey dismantled

Faversham Abbey, which was founded by King Stephen and Queen Matilda in 1147, dominated this end of town until 1538, when Henry VIII ordered the Dissolution of the Monasteries. "It was approximately the size of Canterbury Cathedral and too big to be sold because anyone who bought it would have appeared higher than other lords," explains town guide Antony Millett. "It was also in a port close to his enemies, and Henry wouldn't have wanted it in the hands of anyone he didn't trust. So he had it dismantled, and it was taken, block by block, down the creek and across

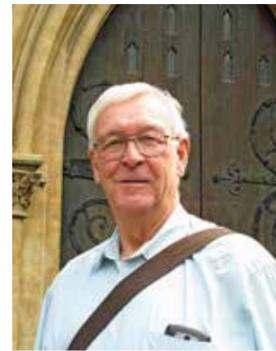
to Calais, the last bit of France that England owned. You can still see it as part of the town's foundations."

Around the corner from the quay is Abbey Street; a showcase of attractive houses, with tales to tell, dating back to the 1500s. Many of them are among the 400 Faversham buildings listed on the Historic England register and have been painstakingly restored. "The old houses in Abbey Street were saved by an enlightened town clerk in the 1950s, who worked up a scheme to improve them," says John Owen. "Then there was a very significant campaigner called Arthur Percival, who led the campaign to save other parts of Faversham in the 1960s and set up the Faversham Society." The society runs the Fleur de Lis heritage centre in Preston Street, once one of the town's many medieval inns.

Although the abbey is long gone, a few reminders remain. The most imposing building in Abbey Street is Arden's House, with its mossy, tiled roof and upper storeys jutting out over the pavement; a feature known as jetties.

Thomas Arden was the local customs comptroller and one-time mayor, who was fatally attacked at his home in 1551. His murder was the subject of a play, *Arden of Faversham*, which was first published in 1592 by an anonymous author and is still

Faversham town guide Antony Millett.



83 Abbey Street was originally part of a larger house and is typical of the street's gentrification during Georgian times.



The outer stone wall of Arden's House is all that is left of the 13th century abbey gatehouse.

performed today. It has been attributed by some to William Shakespeare, although Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd have also been cited as possible writers. Arden's wife, Alice, plotted the killing with her lover Thomas Mosby. Two former soldiers were hired to carry out the deed, evocatively named Black Will and Loosebag; the latter referred to as Shakebag in the play. They tried to dispose of his body in the snow, but their tracks led right back to the house. Alice was burned at the stake and Mosby hanged. Abbey Street is worth exploring in detail. Opposite Arden's is Globe House, with its many weathered beams. It is thought to have been the abbey steward's

residence. Appearing Georgian in style is number 83, which has the date 1598 and the initials H S over the front door. This was once the home of Henry Saker, a farmer. It also has carved wooden corbels under the porch that are believed to depict Stephen and Matilda, though no one can be sure. Mathematical tiles cover the original timber frame. The tiles were made to resemble bricks, but were cheaper and

easier to apply. They were used mainly in the south-east of England in the 18th and early 19th centuries. A detour through Abbey Place leads to school playing fields, where the abbey foundations can be seen as a raised mound in the grass. A path leads past Arden's back gate to Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School. It was founded in 1576, when Elizabeth I granted land for a school to



Old railway carriages, used for storage at a boatyard on Faversham Creek, with cottage-style gardens in front. The mast of an old Thames sailing barge rises above.

"Guilt is to danger, what fire is to gunpowder; a man need not fear to walk among many barrels of powder, if he have no fire about him"

John Flavel

CAPTURE OF JAMES II

In 1688, Faversham was the scene of a Royal house arrest, when a group of fishermen captured King James II and took him to the Queen's Arms in Market Place. From there, he was transferred to the home of the mayor at 18 Court Street, the original site of the Shepherd Neame brewery. James had been in the process of fleeing to France in a 'miserable fisher-boat' that had either stopped to load ballast or run aground. His Catholicism had led to conflict with the Protestant establishment, so his daughter Mary and her husband, William of Orange, had been invited to take the throne. "No doubt the fishermen hoped to get a nice reward until they found out he was the King," says town guide Antony Millett. "James was trying to ban parties and bring back all-day praying, so he was very unpopular. It's quite likely he wouldn't have got 100 yards if he'd been allowed out." James was held in the house for three days before being escorted back to London. He did eventually make it to France, where he continued to plot a return to power until his death in 1701.



An illustration, circa 1880, of the capture of James II by fishermen.

replace the one lost when the abbey was dissolved. Sixty tons of oak were used in its construction. The building has been owned by the Freemasons since 1887.

Landmark spire

Just past the old school is the church of St Mary of Charity. It is the largest parish church in Kent, a sign of the town's wealth. The 152ft (46m) crown spire was a replacement in 1797 for the previous, more squat, tower that was weakened by explosions at the town's gunpowder works.

Inside the church, its medieval origins become clearer. In the north transept, there is a colourfully painted stone column. A rare survivor, it depicts scenes from the Christian story and has been dated to 1306. In the choir stalls, 12 beautifully carved, 15th century

misericords, oak tip-up ledge seats, depict fantastical human and animal forms.

A plain stone tomb in the church's Trinity Chapel is said to be that of Stephen and Matilda, and their son Eustace, though the only inscription is a Victorian addition. "I think it is them, but I can't prove it," says Antony Millett. "Local legend is that when the soldiers came to take down the abbey, they melted down the sarcophagus to make musket balls, then threw the bones in the creek. People were supposedly so disgusted that they fished them out and had them reinterred in the church. There was enmity between the town and the abbey so I think it's more likely that the abbot asked the parish priest to utilise space in the church for them."

Once back at the junction of Abbey Street and Court Street, a short diversion



St Mary of Charity's crown spire, which became a navigation marker for sailors (above). A carving of monkeys with fruit on a misericord (top left). A painted pillar; a town treasure (left).

down Quay Lane leads to a medieval timbered and weather-boarded building, known as T S Hazard and used by the local Sea Cadets since 1945. It is named after the ship that Faversham supplied to fight the Armada in 1588. It was built as a private warehouse and dates back to 1475. It was inherited by merchant Henry Hatch, who donated it to the town. When he died in 1533, he left his fortune of £2,400, equivalent to £1 million today, for improvements to the town and church.

Centuries of brewing

This area, once the site of Town Quay, is now dominated by the processing plants of the Shepherd Neame brewery, and the smell of malt is often caught on the breeze. The head office, round the corner in cobbled Court Street, is a relatively recent

building, dating from the 1860s. The brewery originated nearly 300 years earlier next door at number 18.

In 1327, there were said to be 86 ale-wives in Faversham, who would have been brewing at home. What we know specifically as beer was introduced a while later. "The earliest reference to 'beer' in Faversham is 1396, when it is mentioned in terms of duty paid," says John Owen, the brewery archivist. "Whether it was made in Faversham or brought in by Flemings, one can't be certain. But increasing numbers of Flemings were coming over to the south-east. The basis of ale is barley, which has been malted: that is, roasted, ground and boiled. The Flemings added hops to give flavour and stability. The English had a go at making it, importing some hops until the 16th

century, when hop gardens developed."

Faversham was a good site for brewing because it had deep artesian wells for water. Although the official date for the start of the Shepherd Neame brewery is 1698, John Owen can trace a direct audit trail back to 1573, when John Castlock was listed as a brewer at No 18. The brewery continued under different owners until Samuel Shepherd took over in 1732. Percy Neame, a hop farmer, joined as a partner in 1864, and the brewery is owned by the Neame family today. It claims to be the oldest brewery in Britain and has 320 pubs in the south-east. "I have defined oldest as producing the same product on the same site with an unbroken line of families," says John.

For a time, Sheps, as it is known locally, had a rival: Rigden's brewery, >

EXPLOSIVE INDUSTRY

By the 1870s, Faversham had become the centre of the British explosives industry and later supplied munitions to First World War troops. The three main ingredients of gunpowder were charcoal, saltpetre and sulphur. The first could be made by burning alder growing on the marshes and the last two could be readily imported.

Gunpowder was first manufactured in the 1560s at what was known as Home Works. By the 1700s, the factory occupied a creekside site, a mile long. Stonebridge Pond was created as a water supply, and channels from it provided a safe transportation route into the creek. On the roads, sparks from iron wheels and horseshoes could cause explosions. One of the original water wheels can be seen at the Chart Gunpowder Mills visitor centre.

In the 1680s, just west of the town, the Oare Works was opened by Huguenots exiled from France, supplying gunpowder to the East India Company. In 1781, a massive explosion at Stonebridge Pond tore down part of Davington church, so in 1787, the Government built the Marsh Works outside the town. It was here, in 1846, that the world's first guncotton factory opened.

Guncotton was a high explosive that replaced gunpowder. Unsurprisingly, accidents were common. In 1916, the industry's worst disaster occurred in the factory at nearby Uplees, when 200 tons of TNT detonated, and 115 men and boys were killed. Production of explosives ceased in Faversham in 1933.



Ruins of jetties on The Swale, near Uplees, used for the loading of gunpowder (left).



A view over marshland towards Faversham from Oare. Local artist Joan MacKarell, who gains inspiration from the landscape, even in the bleak winter months, says she is "obsessed by reeds blowing in the wind".



Stained-glass windows at Shepherd Neame brewery, depicting historical scenes (top). Archivist John Owen next to the Victorian hop mouldings at the brewery entrance (above).

“He is not deserving of the name of Englishman who speaketh against ale, that is, good ale”

George Borrow, *Lavengro*

whose tall brick chimneys punctuate the skyline between Court Street and the church tower. Founded in the early 1700s, it closed in 1990, following various mergers and acquisitions.

Market hub

Court Street joins the Market Place at the Guildhall. A market has been held in Faversham for more than 900 years, and it claims to be the oldest street market in Kent, held three times a week. The gnarled but still monumental timber pillars at its base are what remain of the 1574 building’s open arcade. The upper storey burned down in 1814 and was rebuilt in a

Regency style, with an octagonal cupola.

“I always blame the Guildhall on Napoleon,” says Antony Millett. “When he was captured in 1814, and 20-odd years of war came to an end, Faversham, like the rest of England, decided to have a party. The town had two breweries, umpteen ale-wives and the gunpowder works, whose workers, no doubt, were able to make the odd firework. Something landed on the roof and it was burned down.”

Just behind the Guildhall, in Middle Row, is The Royal Cinema, which opened in 1936. As well as the expected Art Deco frontage, it has quirky stone corbels of topless women and a spire topped by a

weather vane of a projectionist.

The other medieval church of note in Faversham is at Davington, on the northern edge of the town. One way of getting there is via South Road, where there is a complex of almshouses, with a large central chapel. They stretch for almost 500ft (152m) and once housed the families of gunpowder workers. Built in the 1860s, they were paid for from a legacy left by a local solicitor, Henry Wreight.

At Stonebridge Pond, the tower of Davington Church peeps above the trees. The church is the oldest building in the Faversham area, founded in 1153 as part of Davington Priory. The priory ceased to function once the last nun died in 1535, and was sold off by Henry VIII. The nuns’ quarters became a private house, and the church was restored in the mid 1800s by Thomas Willement, a heraldic artist.



Grass-covered, rolling defensive ditches at Richborough fort. Huge stone walls mark the key site, which was used throughout the Roman occupation.

Tidal waterway

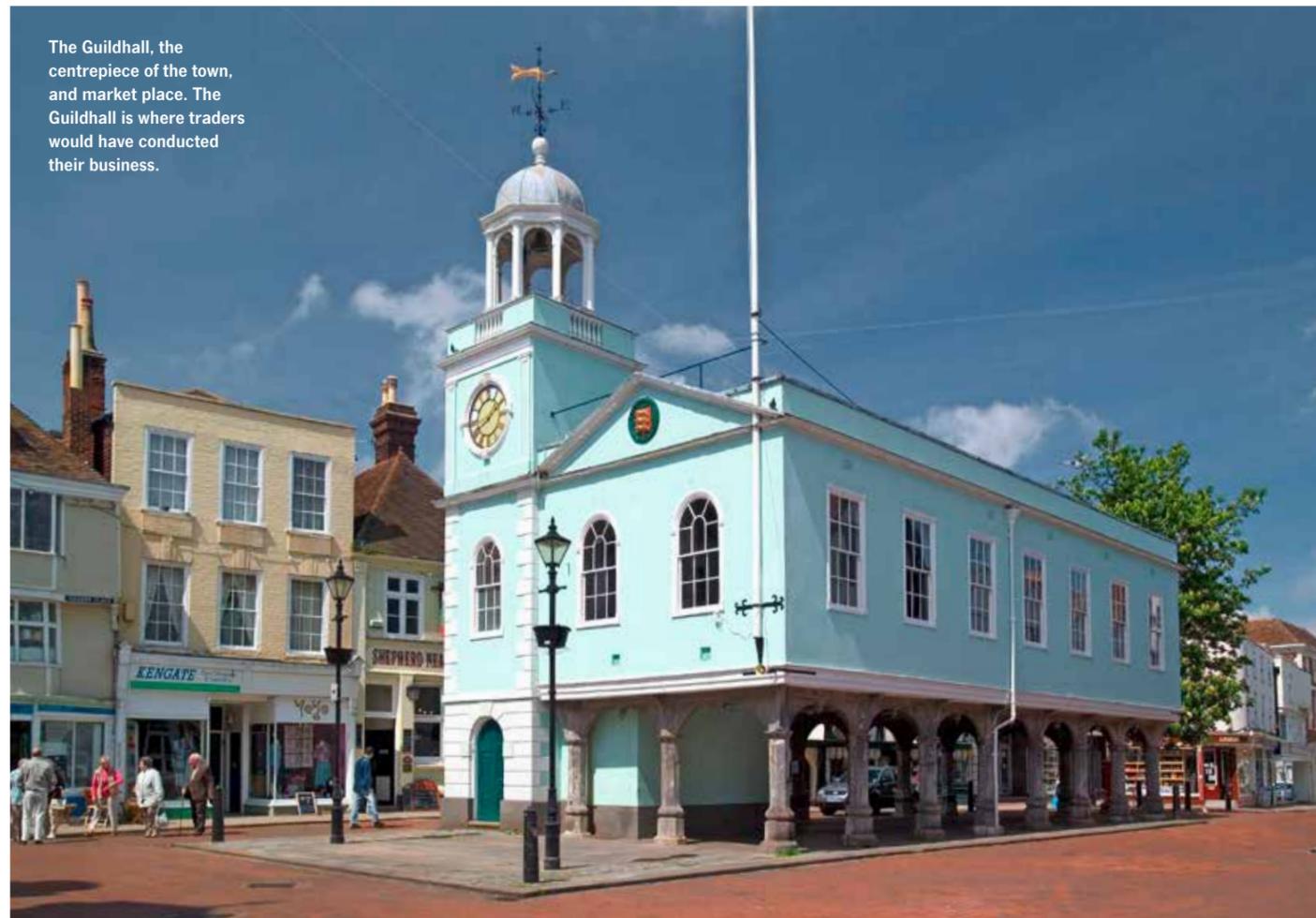
Heading back downhill to the creek, a 5-mile circular walk skirts the creekside to the Shipwright’s Arms pub, once the haunt of Dutch smugglers. This is the point at which Faversham and Oare creeks flow out into The Swale estuary. Enamel artist Joan MacKarell lives at the water’s edge in the town. “I like the tidal aspect of the creek,” she says. “The mud gets exposed, and patterns form, which has inspired me.”

As black-headed gulls squabble raucously overhead, it is hard now to imagine the hubbub, toil and grime of Faversham’s quayside in its heyday, but reminders of those times can be found all around this fascinating town.

Gateway town

Located 25 miles to the east, Sandwich is another well-preserved medieval town in Kent, whose strategic position as a port guaranteed a pivotal role in history. In the 1st century, the Roman fort at Richborough, 1 mile to the north of the present town, was a gateway into Britain. Rutupiae, as it was known, is where part of Claudius’ invading Roman army landed in AD43. The ditches they dug can still be seen at the site, now run by English Heritage. Surveys have shown that the complex covered 52 acres by the 2nd century and included an 80ft (24m) monumental archway.

Sandwich itself is thought to have originated as a Saxon settlement, first mentioned in the mid 7th century: its name means ‘sandy place’. But it was in medieval times that it thrived. It is a compact town of narrow streets, ➤



The Guildhall, the centrepiece of the town, and market place. The Guildhall is where traders would have conducted their business.



The 14th century Fisher Gate near the River Stour in Sandwich. The building’s lower portion is made mainly of squared flints, with bricks used in the upper part.

CINQUE PORTS

The Cinque Ports, pronounced ‘sink’ in this context, rather than ‘sank’, were a group of coastal towns in south-east England amalgamated by Edward the Confessor in the mid 11th century. Their role was to provide the monarch with ships and armies. In return, they were granted tax exemptions, free trading rights and judicial privileges. The ports capitalised liberally on these rights, and smuggling was rife. The original five harbours were Sandwich, Dover, Hythe, Romney and Hastings. Faversham was incorporated as a ‘limb’ of Dover in the 13th century. The towns played a pivotal role in conveying soldiers to war in Europe, but by the end of the 16th century, their importance had waned. Several of the ports had silted up, and the changing nature of warfare required a permanent national naval force.



The town coat of arms on the Guildhall door illustrates Sandwich’s Cinque Ports connection.



The Barbican and old toll bridge over the Stour (above left). The Old Dutch House's ornamental brickwork (top right). The jettied Sandwich Weavers (above right).

The White Mill Rural Heritage Centre, with its windmill, built in 1760 (far left).

Malt Shovel House in Delf Street, where the glass window panes are so bowed they appear poised to pop out. It is possible that this is due to overloading the top half of the house with replacement bricks in Georgian times (left).

"Independence is my happiness, and I view things as they are, without regard to place or person; my country is the world, and my religion is to do good"

Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*



Sandwich town guide Carol Adlam.

cobbled passageways and courtyard gardens, with names such as Holy Ghost Alley and No Name Street. Exposed oak timbers and wonky door frames abound, and the roofs ripple unevenly with reddish clay tiles, known as Kent pegs. French raids, Dutch immigrants and earthquakes have all shaped its past.

By the 11th century, Sandwich was the fourth largest port in England. In the Domesday Book of 1086, it is noted that the town had to pay £50 a year and 40,000 herrings to the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury, an indication of the success of the local fishing fleet.

The town was one of the original Cinque Ports and occupied a strategic position at the mouth of the Wantsum

Channel. The channel was up to 2 miles wide in places and separated the Isle of Thanet from the rest of Kent. It provided a shortcut from continental Europe to London, and a haven developed just west of the town. The last ship to use the channel was delivering church bells to Sandwich in 1672. Due to a combination of changing geological conditions and land drainage, the channel has effectively disappeared, and the town is now situated 2 miles inland.

Wall defences

In 1385, Richard II ordered that the town walls be reinforced to repel invaders, and the raised earth banks can still be walked today. They would have originally been

topped with wooden palisades. Entry to the town was through a series of gates, of which two survive. The Fisher Gate on the quay was the principal one. The upper section dates from 1581, when the 14th century gatehouse was enlarged. It would have been bustling here as imported wine, fruit and timber arrived by ship, wool was loaded for export, and laden carts and packhorses clattered through.

The gateway also witnessed more distinguished traffic. "I like to imagine all the people who would have walked through here," says local historian Mike Elmes. "Thomas Becket came through on his way to Canterbury in December 1170, just in time for his death. The stone footings are older than the main structure,

and we like to say his cloak would have brushed against them."

After Becket was canonised, it became the route taken by pilgrims on their way to Canterbury from the continent. Richard the Lionheart landed at Sandwich in 1194 on his return to England after being captured during the Crusades. Henry V embarked for battle at Agincourt in 1415, and his archers practised their skills in The Butts, a nearby open space.

The other surviving gateway is the Barbican, located a short distance along the quay by the town bridge. From 1759 to 1977, tolls were collected here from travellers who used the river crossing.

Despite the town's defences, skirmishes with the French were a fact of Sandwich life for centuries. The most famous raid

came in 1457, when 4,000 Frenchmen, chiefly from Honfleur, attacked. "It was just after the end of the Hundred Years War, and there was still bad feeling," says town guide Carol Adlam. "It was really a tit-for-tat raid because we had been over in Honfleur doing bad things. They retaliated in force and demolished half the town. They also killed the mayor, John Drury, and that's why our mayor wears black to this day." Hostilities have been patched up since, however. Sandwich is now twinned with Honfleur.

A right turn leads into Strand Street, which would originally have been at the river's edge. Two ancient pubs on the corner are the Admiral Owen and the Crispin Inn, both hostleries that would have been at the heart of medieval

quayside life. Strand Street is reckoned to have the longest uninterrupted stretch of timber-framed medieval buildings in England. The Sandwich Weavers building is a good example of the jettied design. The name is 20th century, but it was one of the buildings taken over by Dutch immigrants in the late 1500s. Prior to that it had been part of the Bull Inn.

Dutch influence

Records show that half the population of Sandwich was Dutch or Flemish in 1590. In the 1560s, Elizabeth I had granted settlement rights to Protestants fleeing religious persecution in the Spanish-ruled Low Countries. They were given the worst housing and called 'strangers', but they brought wealth and new ways to the town. "The Dutch were incredibly influential," says Mike Elmes. "They brought fine weaving and market gardening, and they converted the waterlogged land around the Wantsum Channel." Celery was one of the crops they introduced to Britain.

The influence of Dutch design can be seen all over the town. For example, Richborough House, in Bowling Street, was built for a Dutch settler in 1590. Inside, the owners have found hooks by the windows, where the Dutch weavers

FATHER OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

One of the most notable Sandwich residents was Thomas Paine, author of *The Rights of Man* and revered as a father of the American Revolution. He moved to Kent from Norfolk and set up a corset-making business in 1759 at 20 New Street. He was married that year in St Peter's Church, but left the town soon after, when his young wife died. He later emigrated to France and then America, where his pro-independence campaigns found favour.



James Gillray caricatured Thomas Paine tightening the corset of Britannia.



hung their cloth. In King Street, the Old Dutch House has a particularly distinctive brick decoration.

Sandwich has three medieval churches, though only one, St Clement's, is still used for worship. The number of churches is an indication of the town's importance. At the end of Strand Street is St Mary's. It is Norman in origin, but has been restored more than once, after damage in French raids. St Mary's is noticeably lacking a tower. That collapsed in 1667; the delayed result of a 'great and terrible' earthquake in 1580, which 'did shake and cleave' the church. More recently, the church was almost knocked down in order to widen the road, but was saved after town planners settled for a one-way system.



A Dutch-style gable on top of the vestry porch of St Peter's Church tower, showing the settlers' influence on the town (top). Holy Ghost Alley gave access to residents to obtain water from the Delf stream (left). The Guildhall courtroom, with its commemorative stained-glass window (above).

Delf stream

An unusual feature in the centre of the town is the presence under pavements and alongside houses of the Delf stream. It was constructed as a clean water supply by monks in the 13th century. Inevitably, it was used for all manner of unhygienic practices and became polluted. It was only at the end of the 19th century, when the mayor died of typhoid, that the town stopped using it for drinking water.

The Guildhall, which houses Sandwich Museum, is in nearby Cattle Market. "The Guildhall was built in 1579, including the courtroom, council chamber and mayor's parlour. There was an extension in 1906 that included putting a curtain wall around the building, to make it look more Tudor," says Madylene Beardmore, the museum manager. "The Victorians had a habit of making things look more 'authentic.'" The Elizabethan courtroom, with its panelled jury box, was where felons were sentenced to terrible punishments: hangings, drownings and live burials among them. Gallows Field, at the end of Strand Street, last saw hangings in the 1790s.

An Edwardian stained-glass window depicts the visit of Elizabeth I to Sandwich in 1573. She was given an elaborate welcome, including the gift of a gold-filled cup, in the hope that she would provide funds to dredge sediment from the river, which was hampering trade.

The archives record 'a banquet of 160 dishes on a table of 28 foot long' and that she was 'very merry'. But the navigability of the river remained a problem.

One of the artefacts on display in the museum is a weathered marble head of the Roman emperor Commodus, who ruled in the late 2nd century and was possibly once on top of the archway at Richborough Roman fort. "In the 1970s, two local boys were exploring at the site and came across this important-looking stone head," says Madylene. "They brought the head back, and he lay in one of their gardens, with snails for company, until 2017, when one of the boys, now a volunteer at the museum, gifted it to us. Key facial features identify it as being Emperor Commodus."

Curfew bell

St Peter's Church can be seen from outside the Guildhall. Visitors prepared to venture up the narrow, twisting staircase are afforded a bird's-eye view of the town from the top of the tower. The original tower fell

down after a small earthquake in 1661 and was rebuilt by Dutch refugees. The church was given to the Dutch for their use, and a fine example of a Dutch brickwork gable end adorns the south vestry porch.

Every evening, at 8pm, the curfew bell is rung at St Peter's. This tradition dates back to medieval times, when the town gates were closed. It was also a signal for people to put out their fires and release their animals into the street to clear up the rubbish. The 5am goose bell, which denoted that animals had to be rounded up, was a tradition that has not endured.

The parish church of St Clement's can be reached by taking a shortcut through the evocatively named Holy Ghost Alley opposite the old jail, now a private house, and along the immaculately kept historic High Street. The church has a Norman tower built of stone from Caen in France. Like the other Sandwich churches, it has intriguing features inside, including seven mysterious holes in the base of the choir stalls and in the walls above them. They

are thought to have once contained earthenware acoustic jars, an ingenious medieval means of amplifying sound.

In the 1861 edition of Bradshaw's railway handbook, it is written of Sandwich: 'The traveller... looks upon the streets and edifices of a bye-gone age... the gazer [is taken] back to the old monkish times when Sandwich was the theatre of more stirring and important historical events than perhaps any town or port of our island'. That description of the town could have been written today. The sleepy River Stour may not look as though it bore great kings to battle, but traces of ancient times can be found around every street corner, waiting to be revealed. ■

• Words: Caroline Rees

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Please note that in light of the current situation, restrictions should be observed, so please check before travelling.

HISTORIC VICTORY OVER THE FRENCH

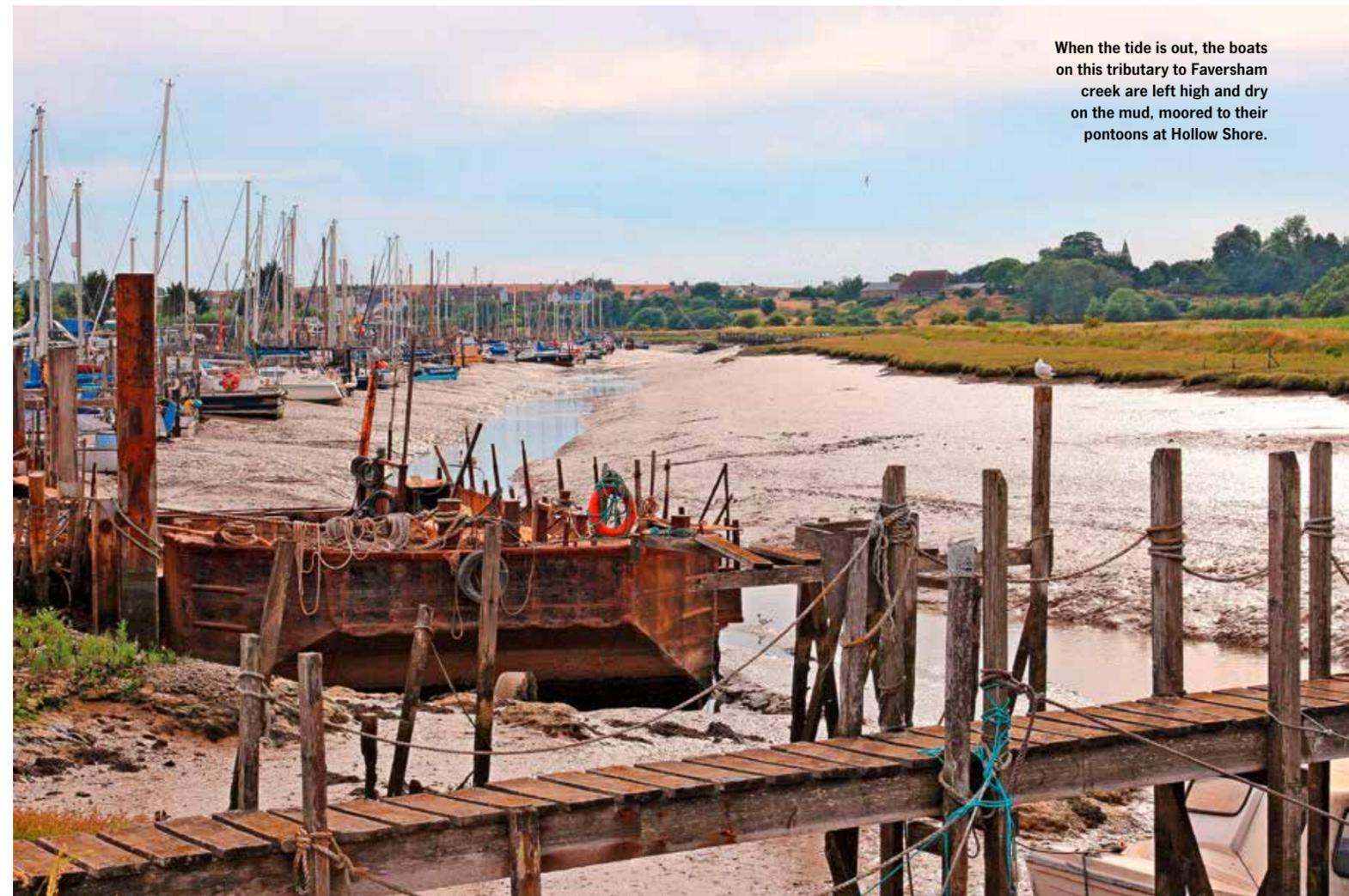
The English victory at the Battle of Sandwich in 1217 was one of the most important in British history. Without it, the country would have been ruled by a French king. The situation arose as a result of conflict between King John and England's ruling class of barons after John reneged on his Magna Carta commitment to afford them certain rights. The barons plotted with Louis, the son of the French king, to take the crown. But after John died in 1216, the majority of barons supported John's son Henry III, who was then only nine years old. However, Louis had arrived in London, and fighting continued as he awaited reinforcements. On August 24, St Bartholomew's Day, a

French fleet of 80 ships advanced on the Kent coast, led by a mercenary called Eustace the Monk and the military commander Robert de Courtenay. An English fleet was assembled, commanded by Hubert de Burgh, and sailed from Sandwich to meet the French. Despite being outnumbered two to one, the English ships used the wind to their advantage and overpowered the French with quicklime and arrows. Eustace was beheaded and de Courtenay captured. Louis renounced his claim, and England's independence was secured. Back in Sandwich, the victors paraded through the town with their spoils. Looted French money was used to build the Chapel of St Bartholomew and to support the pilgrims' hostel already on the site. The battle is commemorated today by local children, who race around the chapel for the prize of a bun, a symbol of hospitality.



The head of Eustace the Monk carried on a pole following the Battle of Sandwich.

Photography: Alamy; Caroline Rees; Geograph; iStock; Shutterstock; Illustration: Steven Hall



When the tide is out, the boats on this tributary to Faversham creek are left high and dry on the mud, moored to their pontoons at Hollow Shore.