

FAVERSHAM'S OPEN HOUSE SCHEME

BILL BREEZE

One interesting fact we learned from our visit to Faversham on 16 July was that King Stephen, who had a great liking for the place and founded an abbey there in 1147, would have liked to have brought the seat of government to the town. This never materialised.

We also found how active was the Faversham Society who were operating an "Open House Scheme" on three Saturdays in July. This enabled visitors to enter up to twenty-two places of historical and architectural interest without having to search around to find where they were situated.

The Society provided a very comprehensive programme for a tour of "Historic Properties on View", with a booklet containing extensive details of every building and a map on which every property was given a number linking it with the descriptive article. Also it gave the times during which the places could be viewed and possession of the programme gave the tourist authority of entry. Every possible assistance was given.

Unfortunately our trip to Faversham by coach was not well supported and our genial Social Secretary, Joan Liggett, was unable to come with us. However, she saw us off in Pencester Road and wished us a happy day. Sheila Cope was a very capable deputy and performed the necessary shepherding required by a party of tourists.

After arrival we sought a snack bar from a choice of pubs, then joined Sheila in Abbey Street, which led us to many of the places featured in the programme.

Having decided on seeing the most distant first, we made our way to Standard Quay in Faversham Creek to see the old sailing barges which still take part in the races for Thames barges. Many flew pennants to indicate their success in these contests.

Some of the more active and enterprising members of our party risked negotiating the vertical iron ladder which gave access to a barge on public view.

For two reasons one barge is special: she was the last wooden barge to be built (in 1931) and she is the only surviving powder barge, purpose built to collect cargoes of explosives from the Royal Gunpowder Factory at Waltham Abbey.

Adjoining Standard Quay are what are known as "The Old Buildings" and "Abbey Granaries". Detective work by above-ground archaeologists suggests the latter were not the Abbey granaries, but in any case the buildings are of interest for their extreme age, being dated somewhere between 1147 and 1538. These buildings were open on the afternoon of our visit and are still being used for commercial purposes.

We were fortunate in that our next place of interest was also open for three hours during July and that on the Saturday of our trip. This was Abbey Farmhouse. One side of this structure was of thirteenth century construction and the other side seventeenth century. The family now occupying the property allowed us access to all

parts and were extremely friendly. They showed no hesitation in responding to the many questions asked. Incidentally the main bedroom contained a bed of enormous proportions. 117

A feature of considerable notoriety in Faversham is Arden's House, the place next visited. Its fame derives from the fact that it was the scene of the brutal murder of Thomas Arden in 1551. The murder was dramatised in a play called "Arden of Feversham" in 1592, one of the earliest Elizabethan domestic tragedies.

Built in the early 13th century, the house is part of the outer gatehouse to Faversham Abbey. The old gabled house with overhanging upper storeys is now occupied by Mr and Mrs R. T. Pleasance, who acted as guides throughout the afternoon. Our guide, Mrs Pleasance, was steeped in the history of the house and pointed out many unusual architectural features that are connected with its considerable age.

The last place a few of us had time to see was the old Grammar School, now used as a Masonic Hall. It was erected at the time of Mayor Nicholas Upton, upon whom fell the responsibility of the town's provision of a ship, the *Hazard*, to join in the fight against the Spanish Armada.

The Guildhall in 1979



We were unable to go into the Guildhall, the best-known land-mark in Faversham, as repair work was being carried out to the interior. ◇

Two February Dates — not to be missed !

WINE & WISDOM, Monday 13 Feb

Tables of Six. £4.50 per person, including Ploughman's and Wine.

Quizmaster: Clive Taylor

Please book your places with Joan Liggett, Social Secretary, by Monday 6 February

BIGGIN HALL - 7.30 - 20 Feb '95

Address by MARK WATTS, M.E.P.

**EUROPE & DOVER IN THE
NEW MILLENNIUM**

*and Update on
Dover's Millennium Project*
