

entrance the sea was less, but despite several attempts to find a suitable landing area the tug kept grounding. There was no alternative but to go right up the creek to the small boat yard near the Shipwrights pub on the junction of Faversham and Oare Creeks. Here landing was safe and we had to resort to modern transport in the form of a Landrover and a taxi to return us to the car park we had started from, thus ending a very enjoyable day somewhat later than anticipated. Thanks to Joan Liggett for once again organising an excellent day out. Members who require further information about sailing barges can apply to Sailing Barge Association, Docklands Business Centre, 10-16 Tiller Road, London E14 8PX.



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Visit to FORDWICH TOWN HALL

JUNE DYER

ON SATURDAY 11TH OCTOBER a small group from our Society joined up with a party from the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings (SPABS) for a visit to picturesque Fordwich, recorded in the Domesday Book and now described as "the smallest town in the country".

We assembled outside the tiny Guildhall, now the Town Hall, built in 1544 during the reign of Henry VIII. In Roman times an arm of the sea ran in as far as Canterbury and was navigable as far as Fordwich, which thus became the port for Canterbury. The crane house can be seen at the rear of the Town Hall on the bank of the now somewhat smaller

River Stour. Here stone from Caen in France was unloaded for the building of Canterbury Cathedral.

Inside the Town Hall we ascended steep wooden stairs to the panelled Court Room, where we were welcomed by Andrew Claque (former Inspector of Redundant Churches) who introduced our lecturer, Michael Beck, a Town Hall Trustee.

We heard how Fordwich, which became a corporate limb of the Cinque Port of Sandwich in about 1050, was self-governing and thus had such an important building as the Town Hall. We were shown the "Pleading Bar", where prisoners stood (hence "prisoner at the bar"). The judge or chief magistrate was the Mayor, with six Jurats each side, seated on the "bench". A very small Jury Room led off the Court Room.

We saw handcuffs (with screws – possibly this was the origin of the term "screw" for jailer), also a truncheon used by the last constable and a branding mark for convicted felons (thus "branded a thief"). The brand mark itself would have been "R" for Rex or Regina. A jailer would receive two shillings for branding. An ancient chest, believed to be over 800 years old and used for the storage of town documents, records, charters, etc., had been made from a large, rough piece of tree trunk, and from that came the use of "trunk" for a storage chest. The chest had three locks with three different keys, so that, for security reasons, three people had to be present each time the chest was opened.

On the main cross beam two drums were displayed, one decorated with the Mayor's coat of arms and the other with the arms of the Cinque Ports. These drums had been used to call the townsfolk to hear proclamations or for warning of danger – thus "drumming up volunteers".

In one corner of the Court Room hangs a list of Fordwich Mayors, from John Maynard in 1292 (Founder of Maynard's Hospital, Canterbury) to Charles James Fox in 1885, when the Town Hall lost its corporate status. Town Status was restored under the Local Government Act, 1972, and the property passed into the hands of a body of trustees. Mayor-making takes place annually in the church, where in past times the older and frailer people propped themselves against the wall – hence the expression "weak to the wall".

Originally the elected Mayor had to accept the post, otherwise he would be

fined or his house could be pulled down! In early times mayoral duties included checking measures used by bakers and brewers, etc. Fishing rights had originally been given to the town by King Canute. Fish were caught by net each night and the first catch of the night went to the Mayor.

As a 'limb' of the Cinque Port of Sandwich, Fordwich originally provided Sandwich with money for half a ship, ten men and one boy, but this was later commuted to money and each July this Ship Money (40 old pence) is paid to Sandwich. In fact, the same 40 old pence are used each year, when 17½ new pence are actually kept by Sandwich and the old pence handed back. This delightful ceremony involves sherry and a banquet!

It is recorded that the Town Hall was built in the twelfth century, repaired in 1474 and rebuilt in 1544 during the reign of Henry VIII. The 1996 inspection of the building showed it to be in good order but with a small amount of attention needed, including, for example, a cracked fillet to be repaired. We were shown some very interesting slides depicting how this particular repair had been carried out.

During our inspection of the outside of the building we were able to see the little jail, exercise yard and jailer's quarters, also in the opening through which the prisoners were fed we saw a very efficient arrangement of spikes which protected the jailer from attack. Felons could be kept in jail for up to a year and a day. Women judged to be scolds or gossips were subjected to the ducking stool, suspended on the town crane, and then dried out in the small area, more like a cupboard, above the Jury Room.

Lunch had been arranged for us in the Fordwich Arms, close by, and a leisurely meal was much enjoyed, before the afternoon visit to Fordwich church. By that time rain had set in but we shall certainly look forward to visiting delightful Fordwich again on a fine day. Grateful thanks to Joan Liggett for once again arranging an excellent visit.