

Farthingloe – The Historic Valley of Legends and Outstanding Natural Beauty

Part I

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In September 2016 the Campaign to Protect Rural England (Kent) won an appeal against Dover District Council to save the beautiful, historic, Farthingloe valley from development. Below is the story.

Farthingloe is a dry, long valley with a gently sloping valley bottom on the west side of Dover. It runs parallel to the cliffs beyond which is the Channel and until the building of the A20 over the cliffs, Round Down Cliff was part of Farthingloe. Much of the valley is classed as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and in Roman times there was a settlement that centred on what became Farthingloe Manor (now Great Farthingloe farm). Numerous types of Roman pottery and tiles have been found along with a Roman cemetery comprising cremation burials.

Following the arrival of the Saxons, Farthingloe was given the name Venson Dane and Wellclose, names retained by the Normans and referred to as such in the Domesday Book of 1086. The name Farthingloe was first mentioned in connection with Matilda de ffarthinglo who held the manor in 1385. Nonetheless, according to legend, Lady de ffarthinglo lived in the valley during the 5-6th century when King Arthur defended Britain against the Saxon invaders.

The Lady of Farthingloe was reputed to have been a great beauty and one day, so the story goes, Sir Gawain was returning to Camelot from the Continent by way of Dover. He saw the beautiful Lady of Farthingloe, instantly fell in love and promised to come back and

marry her – his numerous amorous affairs and declarations of love were well known. She, however, believed him but it was not for another seven years that he returned and during that time she had probably contracted smallpox. By the time Sir Gawain did return, the once beautiful Lady of Farthingloe was 'cruelly pitted'. Albeit, when Sir Gawain saw her he declared that he still loved her, they married and lived in quiet seclusion in the Farthingloe valley.

Time passed and things started to go wrong in Camelot. Lady Guinevere, Arthur's wife, had fallen in love with Sir Lancelot and Sir Mordred, another knight of the Round Table, told Arthur. The distraught King laid a trap for the ill-fated couple and Guinevere was sentenced to the stake. At the last minute, Sir Lancelot saved the beleaguered queen but this led to civil war. Sir Gawain, always faithful to the King, gave chase to Sir Lancelot who had escaped to France. Arthur joined him, leaving the kingdom in the hands of Sir Mordred who immediately crowned himself king and planned to marry Guinevere. She, however, had fled to a convent. Arthur and Sir Gawain returned to England and met Sir Mordred at Barham Downs, between Dover and Canterbury, where a bloody battle ensued.

There, Sir Gawain was killed and the Lady of Farthingloe went to search for his body but only found his head. This she took to the Canons at St Martin-le-Grand in Dover. Peace negotiations followed and Arthur gave Kent to Sir Mordred and after his death, the rest of the kingdom. Sir Mordred, however, was not satisfied. Sir Gawain, the legend tell us,

appeared to the Lady of Farthingloe and she 'set forth for Camelot to warn the King of Sir Mordred's impending treachery.' There, because she was so disfigured no one would believe that she was Sir Gawain's wife and her entry was barred. Sir Mordred did see King Arthur, challenged him and both were killed.

On hearing this, the distraught Lady of Farthingloe joined Guinevere in the same convent. She also gave the Manor of Farthingloe to the Canons of St Martin's, where later the Prior's manor house was built. As for Sir Gawain's head, in William Caxton's (c.1415 - c.1492) preface to Sir Thomas Malory's (d.1471) *Le Morte d'Arthur*, he wrote, '... in the Castle of Dover ye may see Gawain's skull' It was believed that the skull was kept in St Mary de Castro Church at the Castle for several centuries. This and other legends/ghost stories of Dover can be read in *Haunted Dover* – History Press 2009.

Farthingloe Manor was held by the Canons of St Martin-le-Grand during the Saxon period and the Prior's residence was built there. Farthingloe, along with the remainder of the Canons' possessions, was transferred to Dover Priory following their demise in 1139. They held Farthingloe until the Dissolution of Monasteries that began in 1536. The Manor House, the valley and the cliff were, at that time given to the Archbishop of Canterbury and administered by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners until the twentieth century.

Farthingloe Manor and the lands were rented for farming in the early 17th century. It would appear that the Manor was the centre of Mastiff breeding at that time. Mastiffs are a large molosser breed of dogs known for their size and strength and in early 1625, Edward Dering (1598-1644) purchased one from Farthingloe. In June that year he bought two more to give to the

Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports (1625-1628), George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham (1592-1628) and a favourite of James I (1603-1625). The following year, on 25 October, another Farthingloe mastiff was sent by Dering to the Duke who was then in France.

Long before Edward Dering's time, the mists over Round Down Cliff lent it both to smuggling and another legend. When Kent historian, Edward Hasted (1732-1812) was writing, circa 1790, he noted that in the middle of Round Down cliff, 'are two large square rooms cut out of chalk, one within the other, they are called the Coining House, and have a very difficult way to come at them, the cliff here being upwards of four hundred feet high', called the Coining House caves, they were used to store smuggled goods and long before Hasted's time were said to be haunted by a ghostly voice calling out the name 'Susanne'. This, along with the precarious descent to the caves, served to keep anyone from prying.

English high quality wool had been sought after by Continental weavers for centuries and therefore export taxes were imposed. It was these that led to smuggling and by the 17th century customs officers used professional informers to help bring about prosecutions. The informers earned their living from the rewards paid on conviction. The story of Susanne goes back to the middle of that century, when one such informer was William Carter, a Kent clothier who between 1667 and 1689 was the foremost in the profession. He specialised in catching smugglers of un-manufactured wool and his eldest son, Richard, was equal to his father in proficiency.

In 1669, Richard came to Dover to investigate suspected smugglers operating between Dover and Hythe. While in the town, he was seduced and subsequently fell

in love with a girl from Hougham, of which Farthingloe is a hamlet. Her name was Susanne. One misty day he went to meet Susanne and while walking along the top of Round Down Cliff he stumbled over an iron bar that had been hammered into the cliff. Attached to the bar was a rope, which he recognised as belonging to the samphire gathers that precariously collected the plant that grows there on the cliff face.

At that moment, the mist cleared and Richard saw that the rope, instead of going all the way down the cliff face as it would for the samphire gathers, stopped after about 30 feet. From there was a path that appeared to zigzag its way down the cliff face. Richard went down to investigate and found the Coining House and inside were a large number of sacks containing un-manufactured wool. The full story and what happened next can be read in the book *Haunted Dover*. Suffice to say that it is Richard's ghost that haunts the cave. Not long after these events two Coastguard stations were built overlooking both Round Down Cliff face and Farthingloe Valley. Both stations had cottages for the coastguards.

By the end of the 18th century, a thatched chapel had been built in the valley when the lessee of Farthingloe Manor was a Nathaniel Walker. Although his widow held the lease at the time of the Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815), John Marsh occupied the Manor. During the Wars the number of buildings increased around the Manor and fortifications were built at Western Heights and along Round Down Cliff. Indeed, the latter was crowned with 27 guns! It was also a

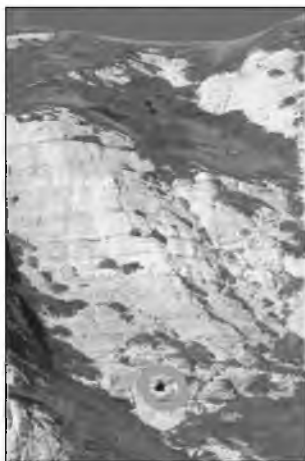
popular venue for the folks of Dover, such as diarist Thomas Pattenden, to watch the hostilities that took place at sea.

The Folkestone road, through Farthingloe, had opened in 1783 following the demise of the Old Folkestone Road as a toll road. As the Pier District of Dover developed in the 17th century, Snargate Street and Limekiln Street came into existence. From there the road to Folkestone was by way of Haycliffe, Round Down Cliff, Abbots Cliff, Capel and Folkestone. Turnpiked in 1763, gradually the name Haycliffe was changed to Aycliffe but due to cliff falls, the road was proving dangerous and costly to maintain. By Act of Parliament, the turnpike proceeds were used to lay a new Folkestone Road through the Farthingloe Valley and a tollhouse was built on the corner of the present Elms Vale Road. The road remained a turnpike until 1877.

During the Napoleonic Wars, the Georgian style Great Farthingloe farmhouse had been built and it would seem that the name change was due to Little Farthingloe farm, on the north side of the Folkestone Road, coming into existence. Features from the old

manor house were incorporated into the Great Farthingloe farmhouse and it is now listed as a Grade II building. The Marsh family continued to live there but by the early 1820's there were other farms in the valley. These farmers included Thomas and Robert Elve, William Carey and Edmund Greaves.

On 21 June 1836, the South Eastern Railway Company applied to Parliament to build a railway line from London to Dover and was soon after given Royal



Round Down Cliff Showing the Coining House Cave © Alan Sencicle



*Round Down Cliff Showing Exposed Cliff Following the 1843 Blast Below is the Channel Tunnel Ventilation Facility
© Alan Sencle 2014*

Assent. It was planned that from Folkestone, the railway line would run through the cliffs or along the beach to Dover. On 14 November 1837, Round Down Cliff and the beach below were transferred by Deed from the Archbishopric of Canterbury to the Railway Company.

By June 1842, the line from London had reached Folkestone. Although tunnels could be cut through the cliffs to Dover, Round Down Cliff, rising to a height of 375-feet above sea level, was considered too unstable to be tunnelled. On Thursday 26 January 1843 the Cliff was blasted out of the way bringing down an estimated 400,000 cubic yards of chalk on which the railway line runs today. Of note, the Coining House Cave was to the side of the blast so can still be seen.

Great Farthingloe Manor Farm was put to auction on 17 December 1846 at the Shakespeare Hotel, Dover, on behalf of the leaseholder, Richard Marsh. The auctioneer was a Mr Harrisson and the solicitor responsible was Edward Knocker of Dover. The estate included the 500 acres lands called Fants or Hants and comprised of arable pastureland with a substantial farmhouse, 3 cottages,

gardens, barns, stables and other buildings. The Church Commissioners administered the estate by a renewable lease that in 1846 still had 22 years to run. In March, the following year John and Benjamin Taylor of Langdon Court bought the lease for £6,640.

At this time, or shortly after, the Plough Inn was built on the corner of the Folkestone Road and the track leading to Church Hougham. Richard Constable and his wife Mary ran the pub and Richard also farmed 23 acres. Like a number of Dover pubs, inquests were held there and probably the body, or

bodies, were kept in the cellar for the inquest. At the end of January 1848, the inquest on the deaths of Thomas Chatwin, age 34, and Richard Betts, age 17, both seamen, was held at the pub. They had drowned below one of the Coastguard stations when their boat had capsized. The coroner was Thomas Delasaux and Daniel Tapley was the jury foreman. The only witness was mariner Thomas Baker, who had been in the boat with the deceased. A verdict of Accidental Death was returned.

A map dated 1866 showed orchards and a tree-enclosed lawn east of Great Farthingloe



Great Farthingloe Farm © Alan Sencle 2014

farm and to the west a network of farm lanes connecting to Folkestone Road. All the tithes were paid to the Rectory of St Laurence Church, Hougham. At about this time speculative builders had turned their sights on the Folkestone Road. At first building was slow, the 1868 Dover Directory list forty middle and upper class villas along with the Winchelsea Street estate. Soon after, semi-detached villas were built along the road and newly laid streets to the north. The Clarendon estate, behind the south side of the road was then built. Towards the end of the 19th century, housing had reached Maxton. Farthingloe, however, was in the hands of the Church Commissioners and they curtailed any more development.

In 1862, William Adcock of Nottingham came to Farthingloe to undertake work for the Church Commissioners. While in Dover, he met and married tailor's daughter, Elizabeth Mowle, and settled in the town. Adcock went on to set up what became a highly successful building business, was elected Mayor twice and was noted for both his buildings and for beneficial employment of those out of work in Dover. Sometime prior to 25 May 1870 John Brockwell was the lessee of Great Farthingloe Manor farm but on that day he was declared bankrupt. At the

time, besides the farm assets listed in 1846, there was a large pond to the west of the house. The other farmers in the valley included, Christopher Woollage age 56 with 14 acres and Henry Harbourn age 36 with 40 acres.

Although life in the valley carried on as normal, deep underground changes were taking place. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a Channel Tunnel was started at the foot of Shakespeare Cliff. Financed by Edward Watkin, the Chairman of the South Eastern Railway, a 22.55 metre shaft was sunk and a level heading driven for 792.68 metres. A second heading was driven for 1,944 metres under the sea. However, in July 1883, following advice from government, the project was abandoned. Across the Channel, near Calais, coal had been found so not long after the channel tunnel operations were suspended, a borehole was sunk at the bottom of the abandoned shaft. A second borehole was sunk at Great Farthingloe farm and together with a third bore hole, it was confirmed that there was coal of sufficient quantity and quality to be worth mining.

Under the supervision of Francis Brady, the Chief Engineer for the Railway Company, drilling was started to a depth of just over 300 metres from the beach. In 1896, Arthur Burr formed the Kent Coal Field Syndicate, bought the mineral rights and the first shaft, named after Francis Brady at the new Shakespeare Colliery, was started that year. The colliery was on the site of the blasted chalk from Round Down Cliff but from the outset it had troubles and proved unproductive. Nonetheless, the continual demand for coal encouraged other borings to be undertaken in and around the Dover area and 14 coal seams, stretching from Dover almost to Herne Bay, were eventually found.



Plough Inn Folkestone Road Farthingloe © Alan Sencicle 2014

The first bucketful of commercial East Kent coal was raised at Snowdown Colliery, north of Dover, on 19 November 1912. Shakespeare Colliery was closed in 1915.

By 1882 John Brooks was the landlord of the Plough but that year he was in trouble with the police for allowing skittles, the British form of nine-pins, to be played on his premises. Under the Gaming Act of 1854 skittles would have been allowed as long as there was no betting. At the Plough the loser(s) paid for the beer that they and the winners drank while the game was in progress – and that was illegal! Brooks had been cautioned twice before by the police, on this occasion he was fined £1 with costs. Albeit, the pub was a popular venue, particularly on fine days when its garden would be full of folk from Dover out for a stroll. In 1901 the Census recorded that John Tapley ran the 200-acre Little Farthingloe farm, on the same side of the road as the Plough, while William, Charles and Arthur Broadley had taken over the lease of Farthingloe Manor farm. On 19 January 1912, they dissolved the partnership.

The Ministry of War took over much of Farthingloe valley and Round Down Cliff during World War I (1914-1918) and erected defensive military structures such as pillboxes. An aerodrome was built at Capel and in 1916, the Admiralty laid a 6-inch stoneware drain from the Aerodrome to the Corporation's main drainage system at Manor Road, Maxton. It was laid along the main Folkestone Road as far as Little Farthingloe farm where it crossed the fields of Great Farthingloe farm to Manor Road. The farms, at that time, were short of labour due to the men going to the Front but in 1916, the Women's Land Army was formed and the women eased the problem. During and following the war concrete-slab sound mirrors were built along the cliffs including one at the adjacent Abbot's Cliff, which can

still be seen.

Following the war, Farthingloe was returned to the Church Commissioners but in 1921, the lessee of Little Farthingloe Farm, M Stuart, was declared bankrupt. Dover College founded in 1871, on the site of the old Dover Priory, was granted a Royal Charter in 1922. Part of the Little Farthingloe farmlands, at about this time, were rented by the college for a playing field. On 27 June 1929, the Prince of Wales (later Edward VIII) arrived at Marine Station and was met by the Seaforth Highlanders, of which he was Commander in Chief. From there, the Prince and an entourage of dignitaries wended their way in motor cars and carriages to the Dover College playing fields at Farthingloe.

Lining the route from the Dover College sports ground at Maxton to Farthingloe, were boys from Dover College. At the ground, the dignitaries were met by boys from the Duke of York's Military School, dressed in their brilliant red uniforms, who showed them to their seats. When this duty was accomplished the Dukies assembled into a band and marched away to their music during which time boys from the College replaced them to look after the dignitaries. The Seaforth Highlanders then undertook the Trooping of the Colour and were inspected by the Prince. The event finished with the salute and the kilted soldiers, against the rugged green background, were apparently quite awesome. In the afternoon, there was a programme of games organised for the Dover College boys.

In 1925, Dover College applied to have an extension of the main drain from the Dover sewerage system at their pavilion in Maxton to the sports fields at Farthingloe. The main drain laid by the Admiralty from Dover to Capel was sealed off at Manor Road in 1923 when the Admiralty surrendered all rights to it and Farthingloe was outside of the town

boundary. As Dover College was within the boundary the council agreed but when they looked at the old sewerage pipe, it was found to be in a poor state. Basic necessary repairs would cost £260, £390 if permanent repairs were undertaken or £640 to lay an entirely new sewer.

At the time, many of the former villas along the Folkestone road, recently classed as A259, were being converted into guesthouses and this was putting added pressure on the sewerage system. To cope with this plus repairing/relaying a sewer to Farthingloe was expected to cost a further £1,070 so the council went for the cheapest option and asked the tenants of the Farthingloe farms to contribute. In 1934, the boundary was redrawn and Farthingloe, up to the Plough inn, became part of Dover and the council ended up having to pay for the most expensive option!

The publican at the Plough Inn was in trouble in September 1925, this time for selling intoxicating liquor out of permitted hours. John Sayer was found to have five men on his premises drinking beer at 22.45hrs. He was fined 10 shillings and the drinkers were bound over for a year with one, John Green, being fined 5 shillings. Sayer left the pub and the new landlord, Mr. Bowll, a former Cadet Corps Instructor at Dover College, appears to have behaved himself. However, the pub became a target for thieves. In 1931 it was taken over by Albert Chapman and became a popular eating-house for motorists. In 1935, he was granted a licence to supply wine with the meals he served. That year Chapman carried out structural improvements and the pub became even more popular. Albert Chapman died in 1952, having retired three years earlier.

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