## Folkestone Library: historical snippets

**Curious but true…. Comments and quotations**

November 1909 relief parties in Folkestone were up to their necks in water after floods across parts of Kent.

‘Folkestone is reading more and better books, and this is gratifying because it must make an incalculable contribution to the cultural, social, and recreative life of the Borough.’ Borough of Folkestone.   
*Report of the Public Libraries, Museum & Art Gallery Committee for the year ending March 31st 1938.*

At the suggestion of a Folkestone resident the library was offered – but refused! – a copy of Aylmer Maude’s *The Life of Dr Marie Stopes*. Article points out the book includes no details of birth control.   
*Cutting from Folkestone Herald 13 November 1926.*

**MP E. Watkins, speech on the opening of the library in 1888**

‘I believe it will be good for the better classes of the people, I believe it will be good for the working classes of the people, and I believe, by mingling together within these walls, in the reading room, and meeting on other occasions in this noble building, that some of the asperities which exist between class and class may be rubbed off, that mutual respect may be promoted, and in addition to improving the minds of many by giving them the current opinions of the day, it will give them also the opportunities of political education with respect to that most important question, the greater union of class with class.’

**Reading and literature**

‘Many a time have I noticed some errand boy in a secluded spot devouring literature of this kind: Jack Sheppard, Sweeney Todd the Demon Barber of Fleet Street, Dick Turpin or the Knight of the Road, &c; and one had the awful title “The Finger of Fate, or the Death’s Head and No Eyes”.’   
*7 December 1887.*

‘Literature on the Lees on Sunday afternoon obtaineth as follows: - “East Lynne”, “Mr Barnes of New York”, “The Mystery of the Hansom Cab” and sundry others of the latest from Mudie’s. Some of the fair transgressors are very artful and seek to hide the tell-tale wrappers by brown paper covers; others art*less* do not. This is how we happen to know all about it. Moral to young ladies – cover up your books and label “Holy Bible”.’   
*15 August 1888.*

‘we can never make too much of the favour with which Charles Dickens looked upon the advantages and attractions of our town in his day’ Article quotes extensively from ‘Pavilionstone’ and identifies hotel landlord as Mr Breach. 29 April 1891. nb The library holds a copy of *Pavilionstone* – important because this was the name given by the Pavilion hotel to a collection of Dickens’s writings. The article itself was called ‘Out of Town’, so they are very much cashing in.   
*9 October 1889*

**Reading circles**

This idea was popular in late 19C but a proposal to set one up in the library never came off.

‘I should very much like to see formed in Folkestone, what might be called a “Home Reading Circle”. A number of friends meet together, say once a month, and have a chat over some book, which it has been previously announced, shall be discussed. Let there be no set debate but simply a kind of “table talk”. Let each give his opinions concerning the work, and bring forward any difficulties he has come across. In this way one’s own private reading may be greatly helped.’ Arnold H. Ullyett, Sandgate School of Science.’   
*Holbein’s 23 January 1889.*

Ullyett later wrote to the *Folkestone Herald*, [‘About a year ago it was proposed to start a Home Reading Circle, and after the notice had remained three weeks in the entrance hall of the [library] reading room, one name had been put down.’](https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000776/18911121/082/0013)

**Museum opening ceremony 1889**

Letter read on behalf of Canon Jenkins: ‘let me appeal to all present for every aid they can give, both to the Library and the Museum, by filling the shelves of the one with books of permanent interest and value. Above all with books on history, geography, local and general antiquities, scientific works, in short with every kind of work which may advance the cause of that of [sic] higher education to which public libraries are designed to minister. At present we have but a skeleton of a library, and empty shelves are appealing to all who have books to give, or money to procure them, to fill them with the good and wholesome food of a pure literature.’

Rev W. Hall ‘proceeded to comment upon the Free Library taking advantage of the opportunity to launch out into a wholesome tirade against what he termed “highly spiced” novels which he held tended to debauch the minds of the ratepayers’ children. From Sir Walter Scott to George Eliott [sic] were all well and good, but he objected to modern works of fiction and would never be a party to support a voluntary rate to supply the Library with them (applause).   
*Holbein’s 26 June 1889.*

**Fund raising and financial arrangements**

Friends of the free library have put on a concert to raise money for new books. ‘Most of the books are utterly worn out and it is necessary that these should be replaced, while it is also most desirable that certain new books should be procured. … Mr Hills, the acting librarian, took an immense amount of trouble with the arrangements, indeed without his aid there would have been no concert at all. Mr Surrey lent the Harveian Institute, free of charge and gas included: Mr William Glanfield had charge of the musical arrangements…’   
*Holbein’s 20 March 1889.*

Re Mr Binyon’s £5 expenses in connection with his report on the new wooden floor – Councillor Prebble had a go at him for charging, and he replied that the committee was ‘ready to throw money away to outsiders, but were uncommonly close fisted when it came to expenditure nearer home.’ Discussion as to a lady who paid rates to landlord but had been refused a book. Alderman Sherwood argued in her favour and also for visitors, some of whom stayed for 3-4 months and paid enough through the owners of the houses where they stayed.   
*Holbein’s 17 April 1889.*

‘A friend’ has sent £17 9s to the library as the balance needed to buy an Encyclopaedia Britannica. Library has followed the writer’s suggestion and put plainly printed cards over the collecting boxes, placing them in conspicuous positions. 5/4 put in last week, 5/8 this week as a result. A lady ‘who had appreciated the benefits of the Reading Room’ sent in a postal order for 5/. About 40 vols received from Dr Bateman, Mr King and others.   
*Holbein’s 7 August 1889.*

Annie L. Dorman, a teacher in ‘the Science and Art Department’ [not sure where] to give lectures on botany in aid of the library.   
*Holbein’s 31 August 1889.*

**Administration**

Councillor Sanderson complains about a Folkestone paper that accused him and Councillor Thompson of smuggling matters through Library Committee and of stating that there was no need of more money. ‘The Library and Museum were a great attraction, and they hoped for the support of visitors, but if such statements appeared in the public Press people would have an excuse for buttoning up their pockets and giving nothing, as they were only too ready to do.’ Thompson called the article ‘an attempt to damn an institution which had already proved a great attraction to the town’.   
*Holbein’s 28 August 1889.*

About 120 new books ordered for £10 to replace same number of old ones worn out. £80 voluntary rate collected. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* now bound in pigskin at a cost of £26 5s and available for use. Further request from Mr Ashtell for a pay rise was turned down. *Holbein’s* 20 November 1889.

**Borrowers**

1890 new borrowers include one verger, two bathchairmen.

‘It is gratifying to find that the Free Library Committee has at last awakened to a sense of its responsibilities, and that a long-desired and too long-delayed privilege to the young people of this town has at last been conceded. I think it will generally be conceded that the *List* has pegged away to some purpose. Quite some six years ago it was pointed out in these columns what a hardship was entailed on shop assistants and others – who, although not ratepayers in the ordinary sense of the word, yet contributed indirectly to the revenue of the town – through not allowing them to obtain books from the Free Library. It is an agreeable sign of awakening intelligence that on Friday last a resolution in favour of the concession was carried unanimously. [advice from librarian Stuart Hills] If you will take my advice you will place yourself unreservedly in his hands. You will find him a splendid adviser. Just tell him what kind of book you require, and I’ll warrant he’ll save you a lot of searching, and give you satisfaction into the bargain. I speak within *my* book, for at the present moment I am reading a volume Mr Hills recommended, and with such keen enjoyment that it has to be taken from me by main force or I should get no meals.’   
*Holbein’s 8 February 1893.*

‘Of course it would be ridiculous to contend that a public institution, kept up by the ratepayers of all classes, should be kept exclusively for the poor, and we are glad to think that the leisured classes, who form such a large portion of the population of our town, as well as what are known as the middle classes, avail themselves of the opportunity for mental improvement.’   
*Holbein’s 21 March 1894.*

‘The alteration in the rule with regard to the borrowing of books from Free Library, which was passed at the last meeting of the Committee, was one that will be heartily welcomed. The rule now is, ‘”Any ratepayer of the Borough of Folkestone shall be entitled to borrow books upon his or her personal responsibility, subject to the condition of a guarantee voucher being given by the borrower upon a form to be obtained of the librarian, and any resident (above the age of fifteen years) who is not a ratepayer of the Borough of Folkestone shall also be entitled to borrow books upon the condition of the borrower and one ratepayer, as surety, signing a form of guarantee voucher, to be obtained on application to the Librarian.” It will be seen that the Committee is trying to make the Library even more popular than it is by removing all unnecessary restrictions in regard to obtaining books.

We are glad to say the Reading Room is now open to the public. This will be good news for visitors who hardly know what to do with themselves on a wet day. We have never held the opinion that free libraries were intended for the well-to-do class of people who chiefly frequent them, and who could easily provide themselves with the daily papers they wish to read. However, it is clear that all those who pay the rates have a perfect right to use the Reading Room if they choose to, and for visitors it is a great boon.’   
*Holbein’s 22 August 1894*

Proposed Sunday opening: some opposition on religious grounds and one argument that working class could now afford to buy cheap books and papers to read at home. Councillor Jones as representative of the largest society of working men in the town said that ‘It might or might not be in accord with the wishes of the workers, but no one had troubled to find out. … they should not make the working classes a stalking horse.’ Mayor gave a casting vote against the resolution.   
*Holbein’s 2 January 1895.*

**Library rules 1890**

Rule 11: ‘No borrower shall be allowed to have more than one work at the same time … and no book can be renewed more than once if required by another borrower.’ Recommendation readers allowed 2 tickets, one especially for fiction. ‘In the discussion which followed Mr Blandford said he thought it was very proper that a check should be taken on the works of fiction issued.’

Rule 13: ‘Any book in the lending library, except works of fiction, may be obtained for use in the Reference Library, but they must be given up if required for lending out.’ Recommended expunging ‘except works of fiction’.

New rule adopted that no newspaper detained for more than 10 mins after being requested or for more than 20 mins at all.

New rule from March 1893 is that non ratepayers can borrow books. Finding list for fiction now in the lending dept.

**Women**

[On the subject of young women without access to the library because they work but are not rate payers].   
‘We repeat again that it is a matter of the supremest importance from an educational and mind-expanding, let alone a healthy recreative point of view, that the young people of this town should have free access to the books of the Free Library. The volumes may be neither too numerous nor too varied, but such as they are, don’t let us keep them on the shelves unread when those to whom their perusal will give considerable pleasure are asking for what will do nobody harm and themselves an infinite deal of good.’   
*Holbein’s* *20 June 1888.*

‘The plaint of certain young ladies in business who appealed to us some time since is still awaiting consideration. … We say it is unjust and unfair to deprive a large portion of the community not blessed, if we may be pardoned for saying so, with an over abundance of cash to expend on the purchase of books or subscriptions to lending libraries, of a privilege which all other cities and towns are only too pleased to grant, knowing full well that it is such young people to whom books are most acceptable and valuable.’   
*Holbein’s 17 April 1889.*

**11th annual report. 1892-93.**

Assistant to librarian = Ethel Hills. Miss Condy has helped with the alphabetical card catalogue, including principal articles in magazines.

**14th annual report. 1895-96.** May Handisyde Assistant to librarian.

Senior Assistant Mabel Ryall appointed new librarian in 1926. Resolution taken to appoint a female library assistant of 25-35 years of age, starting salary of £150 going up by £10 pa. G. C. S. Hill currently working across library and museum, moving over to museum. Folkestone, Hythe, Sandgate and Cheriton Herald. 10 July 1926.

[Mabel Ryall left in 1928 when she married].

Main source:   
*Folkestone Visitors’ List and Society Journal*   
(renamed *Holbein Visitors’ List and Court Directory* 1887;   
*Holbein Visitors’ List and Folkestone Journal* 1887-91)